

**TWO AUTHORIAL RHETORICS OF LI YU'S (1611-1680) WORKS:
INVERSION AND AUTO-COMMUNICATION**

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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in the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT
TWO AUTHORIAL RHETORICS OF LI YU'S (1611-1680) WORKS:
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The prologue explores Li Yu's mode of innovation. A comparison is drawn between Tao Qian's giving birth to Chinese autobiography and Li Yu's decisive impact on shaping subjective and self-reflexive mode of writing in both fiction and drama. Li Yu's mode of innovation is described as establishing a dialectical relationship with the tradition, by rejecting it and at the same time renewing it.

The first chapter examines Li Yu's view on literary creativity. Li Yu's literary principle is characterized as "to create but not transmit"—a reversal of the Confucian creed "to transmit but not create." The significance of this principle is addressed and its historical perspective is probed. Li Yu's theory of creativity is reconstructed from three aspects: his understanding of creative personality, his discussion of the process of literary creation, and the self-conscious authorial voice he projected in his works.

The second chapter conducts a concrete literary analysis of the thematic inversions (or *fan'an wenzhang*) appearing in both Li Yu's fictional and dramatic writings. The concept of *fan'an wenzhang* is defined in Chinese

cultural context and is compared to the Western notion of parody. Li Yu's thematic *fan'an* is found in three major staples of Chinese literature: love, morality, and retribution. Metamorphosis, role switching, and duplicity in characterization are identified as the literary devices that produce these thematic inversions.

The third chapter deals with the issue of auto-communication. The concept of metafiction is brought up in discussing Chen Chen's *Shuihu houzhuan*, Dong Yue's *Xiyou bu* and Jin Shengtan's version of *Xixiang ji*. The integration of narrative text and critical text, the interaction between the two, and the dual role of author-cum-critic played by the writer in these three literary pieces are found even more prominently pronounced in all three genres of Li Yu's literary writing.

The epilogue looks into the impact of Li Yu's innovation. In light of Western modern and post-modern theories of parody, Li Yu's works are considered instrumental in moving Chinese narrative toward a metanarrative art.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Prologue	1
The mode of Innovation	
Chapter One	13
Creating Vs. Transmitting	
The Antithesis of the Confucian Creed: To Create but not Transmit Self-Assertion, Self-Presentation, and Self-Authorization: A Historical Perspective Two Creative Agents: Zaowu and the Literary Genius Two Creative Principles: Emphasizing Construction and Seeking Novelty Two Authorial Rhetorics: Inversion and Auto-Communication	
Chapter Two	87
Generating New from Old	
Fan'an wenzhang vs. Parody The Thematic Fan'an of Li Yu's works The Paradox of Love The Ambivalence of Morality The Absurdity of Karma The Making of Inversions Metamorphosis Role Switching Duplicity in Characterization	
Chapter Three	171
From Narrative toward Meta-Narrative	
The Self-Critical Texts of the Seventeenth Century The Self-Referentiality of Li Yu's Two Novels Sex as a Metaphor for Fiction: <i>The Carnal Prayer Mat</i> Palindrome as a Model of Narrative: <i>The Story about a Palindrome</i> The Direct Intrusion of the Author in Li Yu's Short Stories The Dramatized Authorial Voice in Li Yu's Plays	
Epilogue	259
The Fruit of Innovation	
Bibliography	277

PROLOGUE

THE MODE OF INNOVATION

I claim this merit—I haven't copied the ancients.
I hold that books, once read, are fit for the fire.
Since people's hearts are as varied as their faces,
Why in our writing must we all be the same?
So as *Independent Words* I name my book,
And hope that none will every copy me.

惟有寸長不襲古，
自謂讀過書堪焚。
人心不同有如貌，
何必為文定求肖。
著書自號一家言，
不望後來人則效。¹

Innovation was to Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680) the most important artistic accomplishment throughout his whole literary career. Among the noted literati of the Ming-Qing period, Li Yu should probably be considered the most fervent advocate of the new. Not only did he constantly express the urge to break away from tradition and seek originality but he also did his utmost to refresh the reader's eyes and ears.

It seems, however, that Li Yu's self-proclaimed originality has been questioned or even down-played by modern scholars. Patrick Hanan asserts that "Li Yu was not as original as he claimed to be or even as he supposed; that when he was original, he was original in conventional ways and in conventional

¹Li Yu, "Yiren zhiji xing, zeng Tong Bimei shijun," *Li Yu quanji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992), Vol. 2, p. 79. The English Translation is Patrick Hanan's from his *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1988), p. 44.

areas, taking vast fields of inquiry for granted; and that, in any case, his protestations were designed mainly for comic effect.”² One interesting point raised by Hanan is that Li Yu, a writer whose innovation and daring knew no bounds, was still overshadowed by tradition.

The question then is that: is being original in the sense of doing something completely and absolutely new ever possible in the Chinese cultural context or indeed in any cultural context? An often-quoted aphorism from *Ecclesiastes* states that “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be: and there is no new thing under the sun.” (*Ecclesiastes* 1:19) Celebrating the classical model was considered fitting even for Renaissance writers.

The enormous prestige of Classical literature, and the similar prestige of Petrarch, encouraged, when it did not oblige, sixteenth century writers to return incessantly to the same sources. Not only allusions to Classical mythology and so on, but actual imitations of Classical (or Petrarchan) models were the rule rather than the exception in poetry, drama, satire and other ancient genres. Originality in the sense of doing something completely new, and sincerity, in a simple biographical sense, are irrelevant concepts for most of the literature under discussion. Variations on a theme and the ability to express emotion within the strict conventions of style are the Renaissance norms.³

If this comment is particularly relevant to the Renaissance in Europe, the same standards apply to Chinese literature up into the twentieth century. Compared to the West, Chinese literature is even more overburdened by tradition. “There

²Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, p. 45.

³A. J. Krailsheimer, ed. *The Continental Renaissance 1500-1600* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 15.

is no more bookish civilization than China's, no civilization more prone to revere its ancient writings and to seek for guidance in its daily affairs within the pages of its traditional and even modern literature."⁴ "The mode of creativity in China was innovation within tradition...within the confines of such a mode, genuine creativity was not the creation of something out of nothing, but a continuous transformation of what was already there, a conformation to and variation on pre-exist, latent models."⁵ Thus, in China, as well as in the premodern West, literary innovation has never been a disconnection from or discontinuation of the past. On the contrary, it has always been a matter of revitalizing the tradition and rewriting prominent literary models. Literary creation is a process in which writers build new structures on the ruins of the old.

If artistic newness can be seen as a fruit growing out of tradition, then when it comes to evaluating Li Yu's originality, the question remains in what way did he revitalize the tradition and open up new possibilities for the artist? Before exploring this question in depth in the following chapters, I want to first draw a comparison between Tao Qian's 陶潛 (365-427) novel position as the one of the earliest Chinese autobiographers and Li Yu's originality as a fiction writer

⁴Donald Holzman, "Confucius and Ancient Chinese Literary Criticism," *Chinese Approaches to Literature*, ed. Adele Austin Rickett (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), p. 21.

⁵Hua Laura Wu, "Jin Shengtian (1608-1661): Founder of A Chinese Theory of the Novel," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1993, p. 22.

and playwright.

Although Chinese biography was established as early as the Han dynasty, first appearing in Sima Qian's (c.145-c.85 B.C.) *Shiji* 史記 (*Record of the Grand Historian*), the Chinese autobiography arrived rather late. According to Peiyi Wu, the golden age of Chinese autobiography was so slow in coming that it was only witnessed in sixteenth-century China.⁶ One of the earliest Chinese autobiographical pieces, entitled *Wuliu xiansheng zhuan* 五柳先生傳 (*Biography of Master Five Willows*), was written by Tao Qian, the famous poet of the Six Dynasties. It reads as follows:

The origins of the Master are not known, nor are his family and given names. There were five willow trees by his house, hence he acquired this appellation. Quiet and reticent, he did not covet glory or profit. He liked to read, but never sought a thorough comprehension; every time he found coincidence of his ideas with those in the books, he was so pleased that he would forget food. He was addicted to wine, but being poor he was not always able to obtain it. His relatives and old friends, knowing his desires, often acquired wine and invited him. Every time he went he always drank to the last drop, hoping for inebriation. After he became inebriated he left without lingering. His house was empty: the bare four walls could hardly shield him from the wind and the sun. His short and rough clothes were full of holes and patches; his food basket and drinking ladle were frequently empty. But such things never bothered him. He often found amusement in writing, in which he fully expressed himself. He was indifferent to losses and

⁶Autobiography was first treated as a separate genre in Chinese literature by the Confucian scholar Liu Zhiji in the "Xuzhuan" section of his *Shitong*. Liu traced the beginning of this genre to Qu Yuan's long narrative poem *Li sao* which began by giving the names of the poet's ancestors. The best-known of the early autobiographical *zhuan* are those of Sima Qian and Tao Qian. Sima Qian's postface to his *Shiji* was the first autobiographical account in this form, which places more emphasis on the author's intellectual growth than on the intimate details of his life. See William H. Nienhauser ed. *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 842.

gains, and wished to end his days in this way.

Eulogy: The wife of Ch'ien Lou [Qian Lou] said [of her husband]: "He did not lament his poverty or low station, nor did he crave wealth and high position." Do these words not fit the likes of the Master? Finding self-satisfaction in drinking and composing poetry, was he not a citizen of the reigns of Wu Huai Shih [Wu Huai Shi] and Ko T'ien Shih [Ge Tian Shi]?

先生不知何許人也，亦不詳其姓字。宅邊有五柳樹，因以為號焉。閑靜少言，不慕榮利。好讀書，不求甚解；每有會意，便欣然忘食。性嗜酒，家貧不能常得。親舊知其如此，或置酒而招之，造飲輒盡，期在必醉；既醉而退，曾不吝情去留。環堵蕭然，不蔽風日。短褐穿結，簞瓢屢空。晏如也。常著文章自娛，頗示己志。忘懷得失，以此自終。贊曰：黔婁之妻有言：“不戚戚於貧賤，不汲汲於富貴。”極其言茲若人之儔乎？酣觴賦詩，以樂其志，無懷氏之民歟？葛天氏之民歟？⁷

Written in biographical mode, this is actually a parody of its parent genre *zhuan* 傳 or *liezhuan* 列傳. Although it breaks no new ground as a narrative in the *zhuan* style, it does upset the norms that biography established over its long period of development.

Etymologically speaking, the word *zhuan* has both verbal and nominal forms that entail different semantic meanings. Whereas in its verbal form the word *zhuan* is pronounced as *chuan*, meaning "to transmit," in its nominal form it denotes a commentary on or exegesis of a canonical text which had appeared before Sima Qian's time. These two meanings of the word actually set up some important conventions for the two textual parts of Chinese biography—the biography proper and a final comment at the end.

Chinese biography, first of all, should be a vehicle that transmits to

⁷Tao Qian, *Tao Yuanming ji* (Taipei: Liren Shuju, 1980), p. 175. The English translation is Pei-yi Wu's from his *The Confucian's Progress* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), p. 15.

posterity certain aspects of a life. According to Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721), a critic of historical writing in the Tang dynasty, *zhuan* records historical figures “whose names and behaviors are worthy of praise” (名行可崇). Recording the lives of role models and demonstrating the moral principles they represent should be the essential task of biography. This didactic function contributes to the highly selective processing of the type and quantity of incidents considered appropriate to biography. An individual is usually selected because of his excellent statesmanship or high moral conduct. Someone “who is obscure while he is alive and dies without doing anything remarkable” (生無令聞，死無異蹟) certainly does not deserve a *zhuan*. Chinese biography also identifies its subject by his social background (family name, the place and period the person lived) and his particular social role. On the contrary, anything that reflects the subject’s personality is left out.⁸

If biography is a vehicle of transmission, then the historian who writes it must take on the role of transmitter. As a transmitter, the historian not only has to draw on earlier and written sources and select materials that are considered to be truthful and credible, he also ought to act as an impartial, invisible, and unobtrusive narrator, even if he knows the subjects personally. In his *Shitong* 史通 (*Generalities of History*), Liu Zhiji identified four basic narrative techniques: describing a man’s qualities directly; letting his actions

⁸See Liu Zhiji, “Liezhuan,” *Shitong tongshi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), pp. 46-52.

speak for themselves; letting the facts be known through direct speech, and expounding them in supplementary essays or assessments.⁹ A Qing historiographer Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801), also drew a line between *shi* (history) and *wen* (belles-lettres), indicating that the former should be public and objective, and the latter private and subjective. He says,

When the man of letters writes, he strives for originality, while the historian's greatest concern is to avoid having himself as the authority for anything he writes. The two proceed from entirely different principles. The proper thing for the historian to do is to recount, not to originate. If he himself is the authority for any statement, then that statement is without evidence. A statement without evidence will not be credible to posterity.¹⁰

Therefore, besides the didactic function, the pursuit of objectivity is another of the conventions in Chinese biography.

To attach a historian's comment to the biography proper has also become conventional since Sima Qian's *Shiji*. This special section, either marked by headings such as "the Grand Historian says" (太史公曰) or "in appraisal we say" (贊曰) is the only place where the voice of the biographer should be heard. "If biographers want to judge people's good and evil and present their praise-and-blame comments, they all utilize this section" (懲觀人之善惡，史之褒貶，蓋無假

⁹See William H. Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 577.

¹⁰Zhang Xuecheng, *Zhangshi yishu* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1930), 2:20. The English Translation is Pei-yi Wu's, in *The Confucian's Progress* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), p. 6.

於此).¹¹ Originally, the form was used by the commentators of the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals*) to make comments about the political and ethical meaning of *Chunqiu* entries. Later on Sima Qian turned this mode into a rhetorical device that directly offered the historian's personal and subjective opinions.

Returning to Tao Qian's autobiography, we can clearly see how he crosses the boundary between a historian and a man of letters, shifting from a public and objective mode to a private and subjective one. Tao's use of the term *zhuan* in his title places his autobiography in the tradition of biography, yet he undermines almost all the conventions established in *zhuan* genre.

First of all, Tao Qian intentionally violates the didactic convention. He refuses to identify himself by his social background. Instead of giving his real name and the record of his ancestors, he uses a whimsical nickname, "Master Five Willows." By omitting his place of birth, he does not associate himself with any locality that entails social relationships. Tao Qian's autobiography is a characterization of a man through a description of his manner of life rather than his accomplishment. The author's way of reading and life style also suggest his detachment from history and tradition.

Secondly, although he puts on a disguise and pretends to be objective, Tao actually creates an alter ego—a self-persona called "Master Five Willows," behind whom a version of his self emerged. The author's inner world—his

¹¹Liu Zhiji, *Shitong tongshi*, p. 82.

personal feelings and moral beliefs—are still excluded from the biography proper, but they find an outlet in the final comment section, where the author’s behavior is explained as eremitism—an alternative to the life of government service. Ironically though, Tao’s self-image is still overshadowed by tradition—his reference to Qian Lou (a disciple of Confucius), and Wu Huai Shi and Ge Tian Shi (legendary rulers of high antiquity) in the *zan* section indicates his attempt at self-elevation and self-legitimization. His life style is significant to the writing of a *zhuan* because he shares attributes, values, and aspirations with these ancient behavioral models.

It is also important for us to know that Tao Qian not only formally imitated the *zhuan* genre, but that he also owed much of his tone, content, and format to the *Gaoshi zhuan* 高士傳 (*Biographies of Lofty Recluses*), a work attributed to Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215-282) of the third century. “By the fourth century eremitism was already such a well established alternative to the life of government service that literature and history abounded in exemplary stories of resistance to worldly gains and glories. It is, then, almost inevitable that every detail of Master Five Willows’ portrait can be traced to a precedent and that most phrasings in the short piece appear to be echoes of earlier writings.”¹² Nevertheless, Tao Qian’s imitation was not the kind of slavish imitation or even variation within traditional conventions. His self-account in the *zhuan* style not only created a critical difference between his writing and that of his

¹²Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress*, p. 16.

predecessors, it actually gave birth to a new genre—Chinese autobiography.

The impact of Tao Qian's innovation can be seen in several aspects. As one of the earliest Chinese autobiographies, the *Biography of Master Five Willows* set out a new route—self-expression in Chinese narrative. The rules of transmission and objectivity dominated Chinese historiography exclusively before Tao Qian and continued to overshadow both historical and fictional writings for a very long time after him. But Tao's work opened up a new path, a subjective orientation, although the impact of this was only felt after the sixteenth century when both autobiography and autobiographical fiction gradually matured.

The way Tao Qian shifted from an objective mode to a subjective one, which resulted in the birth of a new genre, was not through creating something completely new. On the contrary, his text enjoys a playful relationship with the *zhuan* genre, by both belonging to it and not belonging to it. Writing an autobiography in the form and style of a biography, he integrates the subjective content—personal affairs and feelings—into an objective narrative mode, thereby creating an incongruity between the message and the form. This dichotomy of imitation and incongruity actually signaled a rhetoric of parody or in a Chinese term *fan'an wenzhang* 翻案文章—a rhetorical device that also was not to become pronounced until the sixteenth and seventh centuries.

Despite the autobiographical content of *Five Willows*, the author's voice remains impersonal, appearing to be that of a third person and suppressing any

personal expressions. In order to secure a place from which to express the inner workings of his mind, Tao Qian takes over the authorial mode of comment from Sima Qian while still keeping it distinct from the autobiography proper. The preservation of this final comment section was evidently necessitated by the genre of autobiographical writing, since it is the only place for the autobiographer to express his personal feelings and moral beliefs. It also set a pattern for later autobiographers and fiction writers to follow and it certainly provided the model for Li Yu's, Chen Chen's, and Dong Yue's own self-made post-chapter commentaries on their own fictional writings.

In examining Li Yu's literary principles and creative activities, I found some striking similarities between his innovations in Chinese fiction and drama and those of Tao Qian in his *Wuliu xiansheng zhuan*.

Echoing with Tao Qian but much more theoretically and systematically, Li Yu challenged the ever cherished Confucian doctrine "to transmit but not create" (述而不作). To Li Yu, the predominant canons of didacticism and objectivity in Chinese literary tradition should be superseded by a subjective and expressive mode of presentation. Promoting the idea of "to create but not transmit" (作而不述), a reversal of the Confucian creed, he explored the path for self-expression and went in quest of individuality and originality.

Li Yu's undertaking to pursue individuality and originality is also reflected in his effort to move away from the "objective" and "impersonal" mode of narration or presentation. Writing in the fictional and dramatic

genres, Li Yu adopted two authorial rhetorics that were both self-reflexive and personal. Like Tao Qian, in holding up mirror of irony toward tradition, he employed the rhetoric of *fan'an wenzhang*, a rhetoric remarkably close to the concept of Western parody¹³, establishing an ambivalent relationship with the literary models of the past—rejecting and at the same time renewing them. While shaking off the non-reflective way of presentation, he and some of his contemporaries such as Chen Chen, Dong Yue, and Jin Shengtian created the self-critical texts that integrate the author's critical comment with the narrative proper, endowing their literary narratives with the nature of auto-communication. If Tao Qian's innovation in the fourth-century gave the birth to Chinese autobiography, Li Yu's enterprise shaped the emergence of self-conscious art in both Chinese fiction and drama.

¹³By the term "rhetoric" I adopted the notion used by Andrew Plaks in his book *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* and that is "the entire range of devices that define and modulate the relationship of the author to his reader" and the "controlled use of language," whereby attention is focused on the way the narrative is being developed.

CHAPTER ONE

CREATING VS. TRANSMITTING

Li Yu 李漁(1611-1680), originally named Xianlü 仙侶, *zi* (style name) Zhefan 謫凡, Lihong 笠鴻, is better known by his *hao* (courtesy name) Liweng 笠翁. He was one of the most versatile, prolific, and controversial literati in the late Ming and early Qing. He wrote two collections of vernacular short stories, titled *Wusheng xi* 無聲戲 (*Silent Operas*) and *Shi'er lou* 十二樓 (*Twelve Structures*). He was the putative author of two novels, *Rouputuan* 肉蒲團 (*The Carnal Prayer Mat*) and *He jin huiwen zhuan* 合錦回文傳 (*The Story about a Palindrome*). His anthology *Liweng yijia yan* 笠翁一家言 (*Liweng's Independent Words*) includes six volumes of essays, three volumes of poetry, one volume of *ci* lyric, and the six-volume *Xianqing ouji* 閑情偶寄 (*Casual Expressions of Idle Feeling*), a collection of miscellaneous writings which includes his famous dramatic criticism. He also composed ten *chuanqi* plays and edited several other books.

An examination of the criticisms on Li Yu as a writer uncovers two unbalanced trends. First, whereas Li Yu has been well received and highly praised by Japanese and Western scholars, he has been almost overlooked or even mistreated by Chinese literary historians and critics. Second, the attentions paid to Li Yu's dramatic work and his fiction by modern Chinese scholars have also been uneven, with a tendency to value the former but downplay the latter.

Since 1897 when the Japanese scholar Sasagawa Taneō (1870-1949) wrote

the first general history of Chinese fiction and drama in any language, *Shina Shōsetsu gikyoku shōshi* (*A Brief History of Chinese Fiction and Drama*), Li Yu has been considered by Japanese scholars as one of the great literary figures in Chinese history, great enough not only to deserve a special place in literary history but also to be compared with immortal writers such as Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1715?-1763?) and Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓 (1701-1754).

Li Yu has also been recognized in Western literary circles. The earliest translation of Li Yu's literary works into a Western language was an English translation of one of Li Yu's short stories in the *Shi'er lou* in 1815. *Rouputuan*, the putative novel of Li Yu, is actually considered one of the most broadly disseminated Chinese literary pieces in the West, and it has been translated into English, German, and French. Two modern Western scholars, Helmut Martin and Patrick Hanan, devoted themselves to compiling, translating, and criticizing Li Yu's works, and their research has contributed greatly to the study Li Yu's work.

Compared to the response in the West, Li Yu has been treated rather unjustly in China. Up to the late 1970s, we can only find a handful of scholarly research done on Li Yu by Chinese literary theoreticians; most literary histories or critical works paid no serious attention to Li Yu's works, least of all his fiction. Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936), for instance, in his influential pioneer work on the history of Chinese fiction, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略 (*A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*), made no mention of Li Yu's short stories, and his

only remark about Li Yu as a fictionist was that he might be the author of *Rouputuan*. Among the few serious Chinese studies on Li Yu's fiction and drama before the 1980s, Sun Kaidi's 孫楷第 (1898-1986) study of Li Yu's life and works, published in 1935, entitled "Li Liweng yu Shi'er lou," 李笠翁與十二樓 (Li liweng and Twelve Towers) is probably the most comprehensive one that grants Li Yu's works positive recognition. Appreciation of Li Yu has only slowly begun to appear since the 1980s in China. An anthology of Li Yu's work *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 was published by Zhejiang Guji press in 1992. Very recently, critics such as Ye Lang 葉朗, Wang Rumei 王汝梅, Du Shuying 杜書瀛, and Cui Zi'en 崔子恩 also have started to examine Li Yu as an important writer .

This long delayed appreciation of Li Yu in China, on the one hand provides a testimony to the domination of the didactic and pragmatic view in Chinese literature; on the other hand, it attests to Li Yu's nonconformity to and deviation from this tradition. A Qing critic, Zhu Yan 朱琰, in his *Jinhua shilu* 金華詩錄, mentioned Li Yu and Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), the famous Ming thinker, in the same breath: "In the late Ming, Li Zhuowu and Chen Zhongchun were considered the most renowned, and including Liweng, they were the three [most celebrated ones of that period]."¹ A modern scholar, Zhu Xiang 朱湘 wrote "People of our time only know that there was a Jin Shengtan

¹Zhu wrote a brief biography for Li Yu in *Jinhua shilu* 金華詩錄. The biography has been included in the recently published *Li Yu quanji* . For a detailed discussion, see *Li Yu quanji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992), Vol. 19, p. 313.

in the preceding dynasty, but they don't know that there was still a Li Liweng at that time."² It is appropriate that these two scholars put Li Yu in the category of the leading literati of his time. Li Yu's unconventional thinking and nonconformist attitude toward orthodoxy matches Li Zhi's, and his theoretical views and endeavors are also no less significant than those of Jin Shengtan. Like these two literary giants, Li Yu was also instrumental in promoting the irreversible movement of Ming individualism. This chapter will focus on a fundamental issue—Li Yu's view of literary creativity, a key that will help us to understand what kind of a theoretician and critic, as well as a writer, Li Yu was.

THE ANTITHESIS OF THE CONFUCIAN CREED: "TO TRANSMIT BUT NOT CREATE"

Described as a writer who "personified a type of nonconformity that represented a cultural and intellectual trend in the late Ming era,"³ Li Yu was among a few of those in Chinese literary history who were bold and iconoclastic enough to openly challenge the sacred Confucian doctrine. His anti-orthodox approach to literature is not only reflected in his unconstrained style of writing but is also embodied in his view of literature. Li Yu's literary principle can be

²Quoted from Zhu Xiang's article "Piping jia Li Liweng," originally published on *Yu Si* in 1925, now is also included in *Li Yu quanji*. See *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 19, p. 339.

³Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsue-lun Chang, *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century China :Society, Culture, and Modernity in Li Yü's World* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 162.

epitomized by his expression of “to create but not transmit” 作而不述—a reversal of the Confucian creed “to transmit but not create” 述而不作.

Li Yu wrote a remarkable essay entitled “Lun Tang Taizong yi gongshi jianwu yu zhidao” 論唐太宗以弓矢建屋喻治道 in his *Li Yu lun gu* 李漁論古 (*Discussion of the Past*) to elucidate this idea. In this essay, Li Yu praised Tang Taizong (the second emperor of the Tang dynasty), Li Shimin 李世民, and his minister, Wei Zheng 魏徵, for valuing creation over transmission. First, he compares Tang Taizong with other rulers after the Three Dynasties (*Xia* 夏, *Shang* 商, *Zhou* 周), saying that:

Rulers who can talk about how to manage state affairs can be found in any dynasty. But their ideas all come from the *Book of Poetry* and the *Book of Documents*, and their words also repeat what others have already said; however none of the words said by Taizong has been recorded in the *Book of Poetry* and the *Book of Documents*. Every single word of his comes from his emotion and personal nature. He not only does not echo the conventional views but also regards chiming in with the *Book of Poetry* and the *Book of Documents* as a disgrace. He is really a rare talent among the emperors.

蓋人主能言治道者，無代不有，然皆本於《詩》，《書》，得之聞見，皆言人所既言者也；若太宗之言，皆《詩》，《書》所不載，聞見所未經，字字從性靈中發出，不但不與世俗雷同，亦且恥與《詩》《書》附合，真帝王中間出之才也！⁴

Li Yu, then, aside from applauding Wei Zheng’s similar effort, ridicules the idea of “to transmit but not create.” According to him, the truth in this world is infinite, but the expositions of sages are limited. If the truthfulness in everything comes from the mouths of the sages, there must be thousands and

⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 1, p. 442. Emphasis added.

thousands of sages making comments on all things on earth, and later generations would repeat the sages' words like children reciting words from a book or actors memorizing lines from a script. Li Yu thinks this is really absurd. In concluding, he even suggests that "to create but not transmit," an expression that is the reverse of Confucius's original words, should be the principle that men of letters follow:

No single word of Duke Wei Zheng imitates the Confucian classics. But all of his writings focus on political counsel, imperial mandates, decrees, and government plans. [his words] and what Tang Taizong has said are all the expressions what we call "to create but not transmit." The emperor and the minister followed the same path and brought out the best in each other. This is really one of the best periods through the ages. I really cannot help but admiring them!

魏鄭公之言，無一字仿聖賢經傳，無一語非訓誥典謨，與唐太宗所言，皆所謂作而不述者也。君臣道合，相得益彰，真千古一時哉！吾正不能不神往耳！⁵

Vehemently rejecting the ever cherished Confucian doctrine, Li Yu actually called for an expressive and creative theory of literature.

The predominant Chinese aesthetics, from the very outset, developed a persistent conception that "artistic structure derived from the artist's recognition of cosmic patterns. The artist was considered to be a transmitter between the Cosmos and the world of man and his work was viewed as a transformation of

⁵Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 1, pp. 441-443. Emphasis added.

natural process into the language of his art.”⁶ This belief is crystallized in the Confucian dictum “to transmit but not create.”

In the *Analects* (論語), Confucius said, “I transmit but do not create. I believe in and love the ancients. I venture to compare myself to our old Peng” (述而不作，信而好古，竊比於我老彭).⁷ According to Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200), the famous Neo-Confucian philosopher of the Song dynasty, “to transmit is simply to hand down the old; whereas to create is to originate the new. Thus, to create is something that only sages are capable of, whereas to transmit is a task that a virtuous person can accomplish” (述，傳舊而已。作，則創始也。故作非聖人不能，而述則賢者可及).⁸ In another passage from the *Analects*, Confucius also said “There are those who write without knowing [what is right]. But I am not one of them. To hear much and select what is good and follow it, to see much and recognize it, is the second type of knowledge” (蓋有不知而作者，我無是也。多聞

⁶Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, “Seventeenth-Century Chinese Theory of Narrative: A Reconstruction of Its System and Concepts,” *Poetics East and West*, ed. Milena Doleželová-Velingerová (Monograph Series of Toronto Semiotic Circle, 1988-1989), p. 138. Also see Susan Bush, “Introduction” in Susan Bush and Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), xxv.

⁷Cheng Shude, ed. *Lunyu jishi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), Vol. 2, p. 431. The English translation is Wing-tsit Chan’s, in *Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 31.

⁸Cheng Shude, *Lunyu jishi*, Vol. 2, p. 435.

，擇其善而從之。多見而識之。知之次也)。⁹

The same idea was later articulated by Liu Xie 劉勰 (465-522), a famous literary theoretician from the Six Dynasties, as “The Tao [Dao], through the sages, perpetuates literature, and the sages, by means of literature, manifest the Tao, so that it can prevail everywhere without hindrance and be used daily without destitution.”¹⁰

The fundamental assumption of this concept is that literature is a manifestation of the underlying principle of the universe or the Dao. The writer can only apprehend the Dao through the sages or “knowing” the outer world; then he can manifest it in his writings. Following this line of thinking, on the one hand, the role of the artist in the process of literary creation is seen as one of a passive “transmitter” or “mediator” whose creative power and activity are not accentuated and who follows the model of sages in his writings; on the other hand, objectivity and impersonality are sanctioned by the canon of literature, which leaves very little room for the artist’s self-expression and self-presentation.

However, like many other Confucian teachings, this literary tenet was repeatedly and consistently bolstered and reinforced by so many prominent

⁹Cheng Shude, *Lunyu jishi*, Vol. 2, p. 490.

¹⁰Fan Wenlan, ed. *Wenxin diaolong zhu* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958), p. 2. The English translation is James Liu’s from his *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 24.

Chinese theoreticians that it simply became a sacrosanct dogma which led Chinese literature in a pragmatic, anti-individualistic, and imitative direction. The impact of this Confucian view of literature is so profound that its influence can even be found in the writings of some so-called anti-Confucian theoreticians.

Yan Yu 嚴羽 (ca.1180-ca.1235), for instance, in his *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話 (*Canglang's Remarks on Poetry*), turns to the Buddhist Chan 禪 metaphor and the heterodox jargon of Chan to find some authority for poetics. He also sees poetry to be a closed world: it has its own history independent of the larger phases of the human world. He even denies that poetry has anything to do with book knowledge and natural principle and emphasizes that perfect poetry depends upon spontaneity. He says,

Poetry involves a distinct material that has nothing to do with books. Poetry involves a distinct interest that has nothing to do with natural principle. Still, if you don't read extensively and learn all there is to know about natural principle, you can't reach the highest level. But the very best involves what is known as "not getting onto the road of natural principle" and "not falling into the trap of words."

夫詩有別材，非關書也。詩有別趣，非關理也。然非多讀書，多窮理，則不能極其至。所謂不涉理路，不落言筌者。¹¹

Ironically, it was also he who established the so-called proper/ improper, the High Tang/non-High Tang, and orthodox/heterodox dichotomies and set

¹¹Yan Yu, *Canglang shihua*, annotated and translated by Stephen Owen in his *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 405.

the poetry of the High Tang as the sole standard of excellence. In so doing, he actually turned to ancient writers rather than the active and intrinsically self-sufficient mind for the secrets of literary creation.

In Li Yu's time, the Confucian view of literature continued to exert a powerful influence. The archaist movement which centered around the Former and Latter Seven Masters represented such an orientation. It is characterized by a dictum attributed to Li Mengyang (1475-1529) that "prose must be like that of the Qin or Han, and poetry must be like that of the High Tang" (文必秦漢，詩必盛唐). The archaists strictly adhered to the Qin-Han and High Tang models. They advocated the theory of imitation and emphasized the so-called *zhengbian* 正變 (innovation within the bounds of orthodoxy). In other words, they believed learning poetry from without—"from identifying with and then transcending a tradition"¹²—rather than from within—"from liberating the natural powers of perceptions, feelings and articulation that are inherent in each individual."¹³ These all reflect the Confucian idea of "to transmit but not create."

Li Yu obviously opposed the basic ideas promoted by the archaists. He believed in the primacy of originality and individuality in literary art and hence held that imitation and conventionalism had no place in literature. Not only

¹²Richard John Lynn, "Alternate Routes to Self-Realization in Ming Theories of Poetry," *Theories of the Arts in China*, eds. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 320.

¹³Ibid.

did he repeatedly attack and discredit the theory of imitation during his life, he also explored the path for self-fulfillment or self-expression and went in quest of *weiwo* 為我 (literally meaning “being myself”) or individuality. In the preface to his anthology *Liweng yijia yan*, he says,

[I am] neither imitating the ancients, nor conforming to the generation of the present age, nor expecting to be followed by future generations. I form my own style of writing, and I write only what I want to write— just like the seasonal insects and night watchdogs which sing or bark according to their natural instincts, with no intention of imitating anyone or expecting to gain anything for their singing and barking. Imitation demands workmanship; expectation of success leads to all sorts of artificial designs for covering up shortcomings. I am afraid that if one places too much attention on skill and too little on character, then one shall lose his individuality.

上不取法於古，中不求肖於今，下不覬傳於後，不過自為一家，云所欲云而止。如候虫宵犬，有觸即鳴，非有摹仿、希冀於其中也。摹仿則必求工，希冀之念一生，勢必千妍萬態，以求免於拙；竊慮工多拙少之後，盡喪其為我矣。¹⁴

Evidently, Li Yu was seeking a different literary route, a route deviating from the age-old Confucian belief, and heading towards individualism and expressionism. Li Yu’s above mentioned essay and his antithesis of the Confucian creed was a call for an expressive and creative theory of literature. By this effort, Li Yu joined the forces of the Ming individualist and expressive movement. Before a detailed discussion of Li Yu’s literary views, we shall take a brief look at the literary milieu of Li Yu’s time.

¹⁴Li Yu, “Yijia yan shiyi,” *Lu Yu quanji*, Vol. 1, p. 4. The English translation is Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsue-lun Chang’s, in *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century China*, p. 169.

SELF-ASSERTION, SELF-PRESENTATION, AND SELF-AUTHORIZATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In contrast to the archaists, there was another major movement in Ming criticism and literary practice—an individualistic and expressive movement that was represented by prominent Ming literati such as Li Zhi, Jin Shengtan 金聖歎(1608-1661), Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), Ye Xie 葉燮 (1627-1730), and culminated around Li Yu's life-time.

Expressionism as a literary view actually had a very long development that paralleled the Confucian tradition, which can be traced back to the primitivistic concept of poetry in ancient China. The famous statements of *shi yan zhi* 詩言志 and *shi yuan qing* 詩緣情, meaning "Poetry expresses in words the intent of the heart [or mind]" and "Poetry originates from emotion," are the best embodiments of this inclination. The substantial difference of this trend from the Confucian theory lies in its orientation toward the artist and the promotion of spontaneous self-expression. However, by the Ming dynasty, this expressive theory of literature remained underdeveloped both because of its confinement to the poetic genre, and its failure to emphasize the "creative character of the imagination" and the mental capacity of the artist. It was not until the late Ming and early Qing, a period described as "the most creative and stimulating period in the history of Chinese thought" and a time of "lively controversy and intellectual diversity,"¹⁵ that the assertion of individualism

¹⁵Martin W. Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 1.

became possible and a symbiotic literary theory—an expressive and creative theory of art— “received uncompromising advocacy and formed the basis of a ‘movement.’”¹⁶

The Ming-Qing individualistic and expressive movement had a solid philosophical foundation. Wang Yangming’s 王陽明 (1472-1528) internalization or subjectivization of sagehood and the concept of innate knowledge “opened up almost unlimited possibilities for individual development and self-expression” and had a decisive impact on the development of expressive literary theory.¹⁷ How can the signs of sagehood be recognized? According to Wang Yangming, “If one clearly perceives one’s own innate knowledge, then one recognizes that the signs of sagehood do not exist in the sage but in oneself.”¹⁸ In Wang’s philosophy, the power of innate knowledge and the individual mind

¹⁶James Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, p. 78.

Similar view is expressed by several prominent modern scholars. For instance, Wm. Theodore de Bary indicates that it was particularly in the Ming period, that the question of individualism became a lively, and indeed crucial issue, which came closer than at any other time, past or present, to the kinds of questions asked more recently about the nature and the role of the individual in the modern West. See his “Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought,” *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 146. Jaroslav Prušek also describes the characteristics of the late Ming and early Qing Chinese literature as “subjectivism and individualism.” See his “Subjectivism and Individualism in Modern Chinese Literature,” *The Lyrical and The Epic*, ed. Leo Ou-fan Lee (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 1.

¹⁷Wm. Theodore de Bary, “Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought,” p. 150.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

was so emphasized that one could stop relying on external standards and “become completely identified with the principle of Nature (or Heaven) within oneself and thus become self-sustaining.”¹⁹

Based on Wang’s notions of innate knowledge and self-sustaining mind, Li Zhi, an eccentric and iconoclastic thinker and a member of Wang Yangming’s school of Idealist philosophy, developed the idea of “childlike heart.” By using the metaphor of the “new born child,” Li Zhi further highlighted the pure, natural, original qualities of mind that cast off the falseness gained from external influences. To him, “all the best literature of the world has always come from the childlike heart,” whereas the works in the Confucian canon do not represent the true words of the sages but provide only “pretexts for the moralist and gathering places for false men.”²⁰ Two underlying conceptions in Li Zhi’s theory of “childlike heart” are too important to ignore. First, he sees that the “childlike heart,” the pristine state of psychological and mental being of a person, is the sole source of all great literature. Second, rejection of tradition, for him, was the very means to assert a “self”—an independent being that had always been dissolved in the collective intelligence and overshadowed by the orthodox tradition.

Following the same path, with a greater strength and impetus, the three Yuan brothers continued the mission of asserting the self. The leader of the

¹⁹Wm. Theodore de Bary, “Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought,” p. 151.

²⁰James Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, p. 78.

Gong'an school, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道, advocated the idea of “*du shu xingling, bu ju gediao*” 獨抒性靈，不拘格調, meaning “uniquely express [one’s] personality and innate sensibility without being restrained by convention and form.” Yuan Hongdao believed that a good poem should reveal the poet’s personality and inner feeling. The “I” in the poem was what made the work unique and special. “Holding views derived from oneself without reliance on the ancients” is the central theme in the literary theory of the Gong’an school.²¹ In striving to obtain “self,” Yuan Hongdao introduced the notion of “*qu*” 趣 (gusto):

What is rarest in people is “gusto,” which is like color on mountains, flavor in water, light on flowers, or airs of women...Now, what gusto owes to Nature is profound, but what it owes to learning is superficial.

世人所難得者唯趣，趣如山上之色，水中之味，花中之光，女中之態
.....夫趣得之自然者深，得之學問者淺。²²

Evidently, like Li Zhi’s metaphor of “childlike heart,” the concept of “gusto” can also be seen as a dimension of “personal nature” and a psychophysiological peculiarity that distinguishes the self from others.

A more extensive and systematic discussion of the artist’s mental capacity was delivered by one of Li Yu’s contemporaries, Ye Xie 葉燮 (1627-1703), in his remarkable treatise on poetry *Yuan Shi* 原詩 (*The Origins of Poetry*). As he

²¹For more detailed discussion, see Chih-p’ing Chou, *Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 46.

²²Yuan Hongdao, *Yuan Zhonglang quanji* (Taipei: Weiwen tushu chubanshe, 1976), Vol. 1, pp. 173-174. The English translation is James Liu’s from his *Chinese Theories of Literature*, p. 81.

stated, the foundation of poetry is the poet's mental capacity, which can be divided into four qualities: "talent, courage, judgment, and force" (才·膽·識·力).

These [four qualities] are adequate to encompass the spiritual illumination of a particular mind. Each shape and color, sound and appearance depends on these four qualities to become bright and manifest. All four of these are spoken of as being present in the self, and there is not one that comes forth except through the particular mind.

此四言者所以窮盡此心之神明，凡形形色色，音聲狀貌，無不待於此而為之發宣昭著。此舉在我者而為言，而無一不如此心以出之者也。²³

As I see it, there are at least three aspects in which Ye Xie deviated from orthodox literary criticism and which marked him as an expressive theoretician. First, he was intensely interested in "the role of the mind in writing" or "the psychological aspect of literary creation" that was somewhat neglected in traditional literary criticism. Second, he saw the individual mind as playing an active role rather than only being a passive transmitter or mediator in responding to the universe and expressing its response. Third, he emphasized the power or capacity of the mind which is the spring of various literary images.²⁴

²³Ye Xie, *Yuan Shi*, annotated and translated by Stephen Owen in his *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 512.

²⁴The emphasis on individuality and individualism is also well known from the study of art history, especially as the theory was articulated by Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636). Dong's concept of *bian* (creative transformation)—often explicated by the phrase "not alike, and yet alike" (*buhe er he*)—had a profound effect on the seventeenth-century individualistic and expressive movement.

The two dichotomies that the Ming-Qing expressionists established were the present self versus the past others, and the inner and innate creativity versus the outer authority and postnatal learning. In establishing these dichotomies and emphasizing “the present self” and “the inner and innate creativity,” theoreticians such as Li Zhi, the three Yuans, and Ye Xie elevated the literary self-consciousness to such a degree that an antithesis of Confucian tradition was called for, which, as we have already pointed out, was best crystallized in Li Yu’s expression “to create but not transmit.” This strong sense of self-assertion, when realized in literature, resulted in two literary trends: an orientation towards self-presentation in all literary genres, and a conscious endeavor of self-authorization.

If the Yuan brothers and Ye Xie emphasized self-expression in the tradition of poetry that had always been the genre for expressing individual feelings, Li Zhi and Li Yu went one step further in advocating self-presentation in other genres such as historical and fictional writings. The expressive aspect of fictional writing was first explicitly addressed by Li Zhi when he associated the theory of “one takes to writing to express one’s anger” (*fafen zhushu* 發憤著書), an idea formulated by China’s most famous historian, Sima Qian 司馬遷, with the writing of the fictional masterpiece *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳, or *The Water*

Margin:

Sima Qian once said: “*The Difficulty of Persuasion [Shuonan] and A Loner’s Anger [Gufen]* were works written by a virtuous man who wanted to express his anger.” Thus we may say that the men of virtue in ancient times could not have written those wonderful

works had they not experienced great sufferings and frustrations. Had they written them without suffering, hardship, and frustrations at first, they would have acted like someone who groaned when he was not sick or who trembled when he was not cold. Even if he did write something, what would be the value? *The Water Margin* is a work written as a result of great anger.”

太史公曰：“《說難》，《孤憤》，賢聖發憤之所作也。”由此觀之，古之賢聖，不憤則不作矣。不憤而作，譬如不寒而顫，不病而呻吟也，雖作何觀乎？《水滸傳》者，發憤之作也。²⁵

From that time, to consider the author's personal crisis and emotional urges as the motivation of writing fiction became such an influential theory in fictional criticism that many novelists and theoreticians adapted it in interpreting their own works or the fiction they commented on. Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 (1670-1698), for instance, interpreted the novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (*The Golden Lotus*) as a work that showed the writer's "bitterness and filial piety" (苦孝). He "even read one character as the author's self-metaphor."²⁶ In his preface to his collection of short stories, Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) also claimed that, like Han Fei 韓非 writing his *Gufen* 孤憤 (*A Loner's Anger*), he relieved his uncontrollable anger by writing ghost and fox stories. Jin Shengtan was probably the only one who openly opposed the idea of associating this

²⁵Li Zhi, "Zhongyi Shuihu zhuan xu," *Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo lunzhu xuan*, eds. Huang Lin & Han Tongwen (Jiangxi: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1985), p. 142. The English translation is Martin W. Huang's from his *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 18.

²⁶See Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 17. Huang thinks that Zhang Zhupo's remarks in the essay "Kuxiao shuo" attached to his commentary on the *Jin Ping Mei* provide the novel with an "autobiographical" dimension.

expression to writing fiction. However, Jin Shengtan was also an advocate of self-expression himself; it is only that what he attributed to the author's motivation and what he thought should be expressed in the novel were the intellectual rather than emotional aspects of the writer's personality.

Self-presentation was also prevalent in other genres of the late Ming and early Qing period. As we have already indicated, Li Yu advocated a change in non-art writings when he praised the founder of Tang dynasty Taizong 太宗, saying "every single word of his comes from his emotion and personal nature." Moreover, in his *Discussion of the Past*, when commenting on official history Li Yu even totally discarded the exegetic tradition and judged historical events and figures only by his own opinions as Li Zhi did in his *Cangshu* (藏書).

In his recent study of autobiographical writings in traditional China, Peiyi Wu asserts that the late Ming and early Qing (1565-1680) witnessed a flourishing of autobiography; he calls this period the golden age of Chinese autobiography. According to Wu, because of the lack of a suitable literary form and the strong inhibition against self-disclosure and self-presentation in Chinese tradition, many Ming literati wrote their autobiographies by using the form of biography.²⁷ In a related study, Martin W. Huang also points out that the extant Ming autobiographical writings indulged in the authors' self-accounts of their personal experiences and their "unapologetic obsession with the individual self." When this golden age of Chinese autobiography came to a sudden end

²⁷For detailed discussion, see Pei-yi Wu's book *The Confucian's Progress*.

because of the drastic dynastic transition and the changed intellectual atmosphere a century later, Huang further indicates, the autobiographical orientation shifted to fictional genre and thus gave birth to the Chinese autobiographical novel or “the Novel of the Literati.”²⁸

A more interesting phenomenon of this period was the conscious effort of self-authorization made by the seventeenth-century literati. The “author consciousness” or an interest directed toward the “maker” of artistic work among men of letters could be felt in every field of literature in the seventeenth-century, but it was most pronounced in the newly elevated genre of fiction. Partially because of the “literati-ization” or canonization of the novel, but more because of their urge to exhibit their talents and seek cultural immortality through writing (*liyan* 立言), many seventeenth-century writers were overly proud of claiming credit for their fictional works. Not only did few of the novelists retain anonymity, but some of them, such as Li Yu and Chen Chen 陳忱 (1613-?), were even bold and ambitious enough to put their work on par with Confucian classics in a self-claimed fashion by adapting the famous Confucian saying “It is the *Spring and Autumn Annals* which will make men know me. It is the *Spring and Autumn Annals* which will make men condemn

²⁸For detailed discussion, see Martin W. Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*.

me” (知我者其惟《春秋》乎？罪我者其惟《春秋》乎？).²⁹

The fiction criticism at the time also showed an intense interest in the writer or the editor—whoever was responsible for the fictional creation. Jin Shengtan 金聖歎, for instance, forged a “Shi Nai’an Preface” in order to establish a personality for the author of *Shuihu zhuan*. According to Jin’s depiction, Shi Nai’an 施耐庵 was a man who enjoyed friendship and convivial drinking, who lived in difficult times, who worried about immortality, and who wrote the novel with immortality on his mind.³⁰ Interestingly enough, Jin went into detail to recount the writing process and the peculiar writing style that Shi Nai’an employed: writing all alone in odd places with an attitude free from emotional preoccupation and personal resentment. He was one of *Shuihu zhuan* editors himself, so Jin Shengtan’s actions might have some self-serving purpose. The portrait he drew of Shi Nai’an may be better interpreted as his self-portrait. More significantly, in editing and commenting on *Shuihu zhuan*, Jin reconstructed and projected a consistent authorial presence and a strong authorial personality in such a way that he himself actually became the

²⁹According to Martin W. Huang, although throughout the history of traditional China many literati authors had employed this famous saying to emphasize how much they had invested in their works and how seriously the reader should take them, Chen Chen was one of the earliest novelists to refer to a novel in this way in order to put his work on a par with a Confucian classic. See Huang’s book, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 16. Li Yu made the same effort in commenting on his own work *Rouputuan* (*The Carnal Prayer Mat*).

³⁰For more detailed discussion, see Ellen Widmer, *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 100.

“implied author” of his truncated version of *Shuihu zhuan*, although he never openly claimed the authorship. As Ellen Widmer has pointed out,

Chin [Jin] was led to create an “author” whose shape was identical with his own. Chin may or may not have believed his own words—that his ‘Shih’ was the real Shih, or that the techniques he analyzed had really been consciously employed. In any event, *Shuihu*, as revised, made a good forum for the theories that he wanted to advance.³¹

Jin Shengtian did almost the same thing when he revised and commented on Wang Shifu’s *Xixiang ji*. If Jin Shengtian, in reconstructing a consistent authorial presence, changed his role from that of a critic to that of an implied author, what Li Yu, Chen Chen, and a few other writers did was exactly the opposite. As fiction writers themselves, they all wrote post-chapter commentaries for their own works. Whereas Chen Chen employed a certain extent of disguise in commenting on his *Shuihu houzhuan* 水滸後傳 (*The Margins of Utopia*), Li Yu simply used the third person’s voice to criticize his own *Rouputuan* (*The Carnal Prayer Mat*). It seems that the authorial presence was so significant to these writers and the authorial voice so needed to be heard that they had to make special room for it in their own novels. We will come

³¹Ellen Widmer, *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyatism*, p. 101. Hua Laura Wu, further proposed the theory of “reconstructionist tradition.” According to her, this tradition treats the artist of a work of art as the controlling agent whose actions account for the existence of that work. Moreover, this controlling agent is, in essence, a hypothetical construct, inferred or ‘postulated’ by the reader from the text’s inscription. Jin Shengtian was a follower of this tradition. His image of Shi Nai’an, is a good example of his practice of the reconstructionist tradition. See Hua Laura Wu, “The Reconstructionist Tradition,” in her *Jin Shengtian (1608-1661): Founder of A Chinese Theory of the Novel*, pp. 76-81.

back to this issue when we specifically discuss Li Yu's post-chapter commentaries on *Rouputuan* and *Hejin huiwen zhuan*.

Living in a literary milieu that nurtured "expressive and creative theory of art" and promoting a concept of "to create but not transmit," Li Yu had some serious concerns and discussions about the issue of literary creativity. Li Yu's discussions in this respect are scattered throughout different types of writings. However, his viewpoints are very consistent. His concept of creativity can be ascertained from his understanding of creative personality, his systematic discussion of the process of literary creation, and the self-conscious authorial voice he projected in all his works.

TWO CREATIVE AGENTS: ZAOWU AND THE LITERARY GENIUS

It has been argued by some modern scholars that Chinese theories of arts and literature, because of the absence of a creation myth and "the concept of an anthropomorphic deity as the Creator of the world," seldom emphasize "the psychological aspect of literary creation" and "the creative individual."³² As a result, not only is the notion of author-cum-creator missing in the Chinese cultural context, the poetic imagination, "an instrument to achieve unity within

³²James Liu and Marián Gálík hold a similar view on this issue. See James Liu's book *Chinese Theories of Literature*, p. 73 and p. 87. Also see Marián Gálík's article "The Concept of Creative Personality in Traditional Chinese Literary Criticism," *Oriens Extremus* 27(1980): 183-202.

the universe, to bring disparate elements together in a coherent shape,"³³ which is a very valid concept for Western aesthetics, "would be impossible in the traditional Chinese world of literature and art."³⁴

Recently, this view has been challenged by some modern scholars. They believe that it is not a creation myth but rather the Judeo-Christian version of it that is absent in Chinese mythology. The Chinese ontological view of the continuity of being, although it cannot entertain the conception of creation *ex nihilo* by the hand of God, does not hinder the formulation of the Chinese conception of creation, seeing the process as a continuous transformation of all things. "The human being is an immanent part in, and a result of, the permanent cosmic transformation, yet at the same time he also possesses the creative power to assist the cosmic transformation and bring 'the cosmic transformation to its fruition.' He is transformed and also the transformer all at once."³⁵ In her meticulous study of Jin Shengtān, Hua Laura Wu indicates that two different types of creation myth exist in Chinese written records. One is recorded in the Han text *Huainan zi* 淮南子 with no creator but only an initiator, *Dao* or the Way, responsible for the cosmic creation. Another one is the

³³Jonathan Chaves, "The Expression of Self in the Kung-an School: Non-Romantic Individualism," *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*, eds. Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 139.

³⁴Marián Gálik, "The Concept of Creative Personality in Traditional Chinese Literary Criticism," p. 201.

³⁵Hua Laura Wu, "Jin Shengtān," p. 95.

renowned Pangu 盤古 myth, which relates the creation of the universe to an anthropomorphic creator who is immanent but not alien to the process of genesis.³⁶ Tu Weiming also contends that ancient Chinese thinkers were intensely interested in the creation of the world. “The real issue is not the presence or absence of creation myths, but the underlying assumption of the cosmos: whether it is continuous or discontinuous with its creator.”³⁷

I am convinced by Tu and Wu’s theory. The obsession of individual creativity of the late Ming and early Qing, especially Li Yu’s view of literary creation cannot be better explained otherwise. If we take a more careful look at the Chinese theoretical writings on creative personality, it is not difficult to see that not only did Chinese theoreticians address this issue, but that it actually became one of the major themes during the period of late Ming and early Qing individualism.

The notion of author-cum-creator may be weak in early Chinese aesthetics, but it is by no means nonexistent. It is sufficient to cite one example here. As early as the Six Dynasties, in his *Wenfu* 文賦 (The Poetic Expression on Literature), a beautifully written work that is both a literary and critical work, Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) had already placed the poet on par with the Creator. At one place, Lu Ji specifically regarded the poet in the process of writing as the

³⁶Hua Laura Wu, “Jin Shengtan,” pp. 81-97.

³⁷Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood As Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 35.

counterpart of *Taiyi* 太一, the deified principle of “Ultimate Unity.” He writes,

罄澄心以凝思，
 眇眾慮以為言。
籠天地於形內，
 措萬物於筆端。

He empties the limpid mind, fixes his thoughts,
 Fuses all his concerns together and makes words.
He cages Heaven and Earth in fixed shape,
 Crushes all things beneath the brush’s tip.³⁸

Since Lu Ji used the allusion “Ultimate Unity encompasses [engages] Heaven and Earth” 太一者，牢籠天地也 from *Huainanzi* 淮南子 to describe the poet’s quasi-divine power in his literary creation, the poet actually “becomes equivalent to the forces of Ongoing Creation (*Tsao-hua*).”³⁹

In analyzing this passage, Stephen Owen says,

...this notion of the poet as *Tsao-hua* [zaohua] is much closer to the Western notion of literary “creation.” The similarity can, however, be deceptive. The stress here is not on voluntary creation *ex nihilo*, but on a comprehensive and animate whole in which the operations of a poet’s mind reenact the animate totality of Nature. The work is a heretocism, “another world” or “second nature”; but it is one of the ultimate realism, reenacting the principles that inform this world. The poet’s quasi-divine power lies in his capacity to carry out these complex processes, not in invention. The central difference between his vision and the Western’s concept of literary “creation” lies in the Western concept of free will and its relation to creative divinity...⁴⁰

The role of the poet in Chinese literary thought as well as in Lu Ji’s

³⁸Lu Ji, *Wenfu*, annotated and translated by Stephen Owen in his *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 110. Emphasis added.

³⁹Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 111.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 111.

description, according to what Owen has characterized, is to “reenact the animate totality of Nature” but not the free creation *ex nihilo*. Actually, the Chinese notion of author-cum-creator is precisely defined in this way because, to Lu Ji and the Chinese literary theoreticians, the creation of the universe itself—the ultimate model of creativity—is an all-embracing dynamic process of growth and transformation; nothing is external to it, not even an almighty Creator. Thus, both the Creator and the poet are seen as immanent and interdependent to this single unfolding process, but more importantly, they also play the role of initiator or transformer who sets in motion and governs this transformation.

In the seventeenth-century, as we have already indicated, the theoreticians’ interest in the artist was so pronounced that it became one of the major themes in literary criticism of the early Ming and late Qing. One commonly used term for the artist in this period is *zuozhe* 作者 or “maker.” Jin Shengtan, for instance, referred to the author of *Shuihu zhuan* as *zuowen zhe* 作文者, maker of the text; Li Yu addressed the playwright as *zuochuanqi zhe* 作傳奇者, maker of the drama. A similar term was also used by Ye Xie in his *Yuan Shi* (*The Origin of Poetry*). As Hua Laura Wu has pointed out, this term not only puts the writer in direct opposition to the transmitter defined by the *Shu er bu zuo* 述而不作 (to transmit but not create) tradition but also endows the writer with a new ontological status—the full responsibility for, and proprietary rights

to, a literary work.⁴¹

“ *Zaowu is the number one literary genius at all times, nothing else.*”

Li Yu, more often than any other Chinese writer, refers to *zaowu* 造物, the Creator, whenever he discusses an artistic or literary creation. In his terminology, although *zaowu* is still an impersonal power that covers a whole spectrum of meanings such as Nature, Tao 道, Pangu, the sage kings, or Heaven, it nevertheless personifies and always is parallel to human creativity.

In his writings, one common analogy for creativity is that of *zaowu* giving form to a human body 造物賦形. In his *Xianqing ouji*, (閑情偶寄), when discussing the structuring of a play, he describes in detail how *zaowu* creates a human body and compares it with a creation by a human—a craftsman builds a house and sets forth the models for literary creation. He says,

As for “structuring” (*jiegou*), this refers to the time before one composes the melodies and is just beginning to choose the rhyme and put down his brush on paper. It is like the *zaowu* giving form to a human body: before the foetus has taken complete shape, it first plans the whole form, so that this drop of blood will develop to the five organs and the hundred bones. If it had no such overall scheme at the beginning, then the human body would have innumerable marks of disjunctures and junctures, and the flow of blood and vital force would be blocked. It is the same with a craftsman building a house: when the foundation has been laid out before the frame has been put up, he must first calculate where to build a hall, where to open a door, what type of lumber he needs for the beams and what type for the rafters. He always waits until the layout is perfectly clear before ever holding up an axe;.....Therefore, the maker of *chuanqi* should not rush to write before he is ready. He must first fold his arms during preparation

⁴¹Hua Laura Wu, “Jin Shengtan,” p. 98.

then he can write fast later. Only when one has a fantastic story to tell, can he write a remarkable piece of work. There is no such thing as one not setting the subject right and still being able to write something which reflects his sophisticated thinking and spreads the beautiful art of language.

至於結構二字，則在引商刻羽之先，拈韻抽豪之始。如造物之賦形，當其精血初凝，胞胎未就，先為制定全形，使點血而就五官百骸之勢。倘先無成局，而由頂及踵，逐段滋生則人之一身，當有無數斷續之痕，而血氣為之中阻矣。工師之建宅亦然：基址初平，間架未立，先籌何處建廳，何方開戶，棟需何木，梁用何材，必俟成局了然，始可揮斤運斧；……故作傳奇者，不亦卒急拈毫，袖手於前，始能疾書於後。有奇事，方有奇文，未有命題不佳，而能出其錦心，揚為鑷口者也。⁴²

Here, the two models Li Yu set for literary creation are the formation of a human body and the construction of a house—one is natural, the other artificial. To him, these two creative activities belong to the same category and set forth the same pattern. Rather than “mechanical production,” Li Yu suggests that the two kinds of creation both involve careful, premeditated planning and holistic organization, a structuring process that literary creation also should have. Then who is the ordainer of the construction? Li Yu specifically points out that *zaowu* is responsible for the formation of a human body, the craftsman for the construction of a house, and the playwright for writing a play. By paralleling the creation in Nature and human creation, Li Yu actually puts *zaowu*, the craftsman, and the playwright in the same category—the category of creative agent—meaning that *zaowu* is analogous to a craftsman or a playwright in terms of having disposing power and control over the creative activity.

Li Yu’s concept of *zaowu*, although still ambiguous and not referring to a

⁴²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 4. Emphasis added.

specific personal deity, is anthropomorphized to a certain degree. One who reads Li Yu's writings carefully enough cannot fail to notice that Li often endows the Creator with some human qualities. Sometimes, *zaowu* is praised for creating things which are beneficial to human beings:

Our lives would be so filled with toil and worry as to leave no room for pleasure—had not the Sage who separated Heaven from Earth created in us the desire for sexual intercourse to alleviate our toil and worry and save us from despair.

人生在世，朝朝勞苦，事事愁煩，沒有一毫受用處。還虧那太古之世，開天闢地的聖人，制一件男女交媾之情，與人息息勞苦，解解愁煩，不至十分憔悴。⁴³

Other times, the Creator is blamed for what He has created mistakenly.

For instance, on one occasion, Li Yu blames the Creator for giving us mouths and stomachs, the cause of our insatiable desires:

After calculating the matter from every angle, I must place the blame squarely on the Creator. I am well aware that he has ever since regretted his error, but because an institution is hard to change once it has been established, he has had to go on and on compounding his mistake. This just goes to show how careful we must be in initiating new patterns and how dangerous it is to be hasty in setting up new institutions."

吾反復推詳，不能不於造物是咎。亦知造物於此，未嘗不自悔其非，但以制定難移，只得終遂其過。甚矣！作法慎初，不可草草定制。⁴⁴

Li Yu was also amused by *zaowu*'s whimsy in inverting things and wrote

⁴³Li Yu, *Rouputuan* (Japan: Seishinkaku, 1705), p. 1. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), p. 4.

⁴⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 234. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 55.

some of his plays and short stories based on this kind of inversion:

The Creator often reverses the appearance and heart of a couple. The one who is beautiful inside must be ugly outside, or the one who is fair without must be mean within. This is what I wrote about in *You Can't Do Anything about Fate*."

造物於人之伉儷，往往顛倒其形與情而後合之，妍於內者媿於外，或丰其表者嗇其中，此予《奈何天》傳奇所作也。⁴⁵

From the foregoing examples, we can see that not only does Li Yu grant some human traits to the so-called *zaowu*, he even uses *zaowu* as a laughing stock of his comedy. As Patrick Hanan has indicated, *zaowu* is "a figment suited to Li Yu's comic cast of thought rather than a figure to whom religious awe is due. He may be anthropomorphic in conception, but the conception is an intellectual one, a rational support for Li Yu's generally comic interpretation of the world as well as for his own creative approach to life."⁴⁶

Li Yu's conception of cosmic creation, evidently, is closer to the Chinese ontological view that relates the creation of the universe to an anthropomorphic creator who is immanent but not alien to the process of genesis. First of all, to him, *zaowu* is a kind of "ordainer" who has disposing power in "planning the whole form" and "setting up new institutions" in the cosmic creation, but the creation certainly is not the result of the Creator's free will because "an institution is hard to change once it has been established."

⁴⁵Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 1, p. 116.

⁴⁶ Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 55.

Also, the metaphor Li Yu uses in perceiving the creation in Nature, like other traditional Chinese thinkers and theoreticians, is a biological one (his recurrent analogy for cosmic creation is that of *zaowu* 's giving form to human body), and that implies the creation in Nature is a dynamic process of growth and a manifestation of holism in which everything is interdependent and continuously transformational.

For Li Yu, cosmogony is certainly a powerful model for understanding the genesis of literary text. His concept of *zaowu* as a projective and creative agent and his notion of the writer as a counterpart of *zaowu* suggest a strong belief that the author is a creator. His interpretation of the relationship between the Creator and the author is best revealed in the following passage:

Not until Master Li⁴⁷ traveled all over the world for almost forty years and saw six or seven out of ten famous mountains and big rivers throughout the country did he start to realize that: Zaowu is the number one literary genius of all times, nothing else. Where can he perceive this? He says: he has seen it from the mountains and rivers that he has visited. Before opening the world, it is a dense and huge object. Which places are suitable for mountains? Which locations are appropriate for rivers and seas? Where to find places for fine currents? Where to settle big valleys? To locate mountains high but not dried-up, rivers low but not overflowing is already difficult, let alone making them like a poem written by the greatest poet without extra trouble, or conveniently creating them like a picture painted by the greatest painter, and causing men of letters from all times to sing, chant, draw, and imitate them but never exhaust what Nature contains! Thus, talents and sentiments are the mountains and rivers of the human heart; mountains and rivers are literary talents of heaven and earth. If mountains and rivers and literary talents are not related at all, how can it be that Sima Zichang could get inspiration from famous

⁴⁷Li Yu often refers to himself as Master Li in his essays. Obviously, this is one of the cases.

mountains and big rivers, broaden his literary train of thought and make his historical writings more eloquent?

李子遨遊天下幾四十年，海內名山大川十經六七，始知造物非他，乃古今第一才人也。於何見之？曰：見於所歷之山水。洪濛未闢之初，蠢然一巨物耳。何處宜山，何處宜江宜海，何處當安細流，何處當成巨壑，求其高不干枯，卑不泛濫，亦已難亦，矧能隨意成詩、而且為詩之祖，信手入畫、而更為畫之師，使古今來一切文人墨客歌之、詠之、繪之、肖之，而終不能窮其所蘊乎哉！故之才情者，人心之山水；山水者，天地之才情。使山水與才情判然無涉，則司馬子長何所取於名山大川，而能擴其文思、雄其史筆也哉？⁴⁸

Here, not only does Li Yu once again draw an equation between *zaowu* (he seems to refer to *zaowu* as Pangu here) and the artist, he also brings up the concept of “literary genius—a concept which was not recognized and encouraged in the Confucian tradition but was certainly acknowledged or even promoted by some of the prominent Ming theoreticians. Surely, artistic genius was superfluous or even destructive in the Confucian tradition, because “everything positive, creative has been codified by ancient Sages; their descendants had to be mere commentators of what had already been said, adjusters of old teachings to new conditions, indicators of the transformation of the Way in new works.”⁴⁹ However, the idea Li Yu presented in the above passage was obviously an opposite one: he worshipped and idealized the literary talent in such a way that the best definition of *zaowu* could be nothing but “number one genius of all times”. It is true that Li Yu’s vision of literary

⁴⁸Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 1, p. 105. Emphasis added.

⁴⁹Marián Gálik, “The Concept of Creative Personality in Traditional Chinese Literary Criticism,” p. 201.

creation also gives equal weight to the external world in all its multiplicity. But this is not contradictory to his idea of personal creativeness. This is because to him, the creation of *zawu* serves as a model as well as an external source for literary creation, from which a literary genius such as Sima Qian, gets inspiration and finds inexhaustible subjects to write about.

“The talent for play writing is something one must be born with.”

Marián Gálik, in his article “The Concept of Creative Personality in Traditional Chinese Literary Criticism,” claims that “the concept of genius, of a literary and artistic genius, was unknown in traditional China. A concept common to both ancient Chinese and Greco-Roman aesthetics was that of *ts'ai* [cai] talent and *ingenium*.”⁵⁰ “The role of poets in old Chinese society never was one of exercising the function of the highest judges, prophets, of a social-political avant-garde, or its prominent component.” In other words, in Chinese literary tradition, the role of an individual artist, even a prominent writer, was reduced to such a degree that he was a “mere vignette, a label of the written work” and nothing more.⁵¹ This strong assertion becomes problematic when we encounter the concept of *caizi* 才子, literary genius, used by Li Yu and some

⁵⁰Marián Gálik, “The Concept of Creative Personality in Traditional Chinese Literary Criticism,” p. 187.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 188.

other prominent Ming theoreticians.

As we know, one of the most popular terms for addressing the eminent men of letters in Ming dynasty was *caizi* 才子, or literary genius. Jin Shengtan, for instance, devised a list of “books by geniuses” (*Caizi shu* 才子書), including the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 by Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (369?-286? B.C.); the *Li sao* 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow) by Qu Yuan 屈原 (340?-278? B.C.); the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian) by Sima Qian (b. 145 B.C.); the poetry of Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) the *Shuihu zhuan* (The Water Margin) by Shi Nai’an and the *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (Romance of the Western Chamber) by Wang Shifu 王實甫. Ye Xie was also interested in the leading writers of the past. In *The Origins of Poetry*, he writes,

I have considered men of talent in the past—men like Tso Ch’iu-ming, Ssu-ma Ch’en, Chia Yi, Li Po, Tu Fu, Han Yu, and Su Shih—and regardless of whether they worked in poetry or prose, all the things of Heaven and Earth were brought into being in succession on the tips of their brushes: there was nothing they could not bring up; there was nothing they could not master; there need have been no antecedents before them for them to carry on, nor did there need to be anyone after them to continue what they did; each had his own delight.

吾嘗觀古之才人，合詩與文論之。如左邱明，司馬遷，賈宜，李白，杜甫，韓愈，蘇軾之徒，天地萬物劫遞開闢於筆端。無有不可舉，無有不能勝。前不必有所承，後不必有所繼。而各有其愉快。⁵²

Li Yu obviously acknowledged the same concept of genius by referring to the artist as *caizi*, *cai ren* 才人, *ren zhong zhi yicai* 人中之異才 “the unusual genius among human beings”, or *chuanqi zhongzi* 傳奇種子 “the seed for play

⁵²Ye Xie, *Yuan Shi*, annotated and translated by Stephen Owen in his *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 521.

writing". To Li Yu, artists can be divided into two kinds: "the ones who can become Buddha" (能成佛作祖的) and "the ones who convert late in life" (半路出家的). The former ones are born to be innovators, in contrast to the latter ones who become so later in life.

In writing his critical discourse on dramaturgy, Li Yu delivered a discussion on the subject of literary talent. He said,

I also propose that the talent for play writing is something one must be born with. If one does not have this gift in his nature, he cannot write well even if he exerts his utmost strength. Someone asked me how can you identify if one has the talent or not? I answered: This is not difficult. You can know it by observing how a person talks and how he writes. If he does not express pedantic ideas, there must be one or two unconventional expressions out of ten sentences; and if his writing is not hackneyed, there must be one or two paragraphs which can be considered unprecedented and inspired in one piece of work, then this is the person who can write a play. Otherwise, he is better doing something else, and should not waste his energy on something that will not bring any benefit. Alas! The expression "to be born with" can be used in all creative works, not only suitable for writing a play. Things like writing poetry and prose, doing calligraphy and painting, drinking wine, playing chess, and all sorts of arts and crafts have deep roots in the artist's nature, and all of these are given from heaven. The ones who make effort and then manage to do artist work, like a person who becomes a monk or nun late in life, can only practice abstinence from meat, but never can become a Buddha.

予又謂填詞種子，要在性中帶來，性中無此，做殺不佳。人問性之有無，何處辨識？予曰：不難，觀其說話行文，即知之矣。說話不迂腐，十句之中定有一二句超脫，行文不板，一篇之內但有一兩段空靈，此即可以填詞之人也。不則另尋別計，不當以有用精神，費之無益之地。噫！“性中帶來”一語，事事皆然，不獨填詞一節。凡作詩文書畫、飲酒鬥棋與百工技藝之事，無一不具夙根，無一不本天授，強而後能者，畢竟是半路出家，只可冒齋飯吃，不能成佛作祖也。⁵³

The idea that "*cai*, or artistic or literary talent is something one must be

⁵³Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 21.

born with" is not unprecedented. It can be traced back to some of the expressive theorists from the Six Dynasties. For instance, Cao Pi 曹丕, in his "Discourse in Literature", emphasized how *qi* 氣, redefined as individual talent based on the writer's temperament, becomes the source of individual's thought and knowledge.⁵⁴ Another prominent literary theorist, Liu Xie, agreed with Cao Pi and believed that talent differs from one writer to another, being part of each individual's nature. In *Wenxin diaolong* Liu postulated the expressive concept of literature at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Tixing" 體性 "Style and Personality", believing *qing* 情 is the basic source of literary creation. It is only when the *qing* is stirred that language can give it external form; only when inherent principle (*li* 理) comes forth, are patterns (*wen* 文) manifested.⁵⁵ Here, *qing*, according to James Liu, is really synonymous with *xing* 性, the personal nature or personality of the writer.⁵⁶ Thus, the resultant theory of literature for both Cao Pi and Liu Xie "placed more emphasis on individual personality than universal human emotions" which is called "the rise of individualism" by modern critics.⁵⁷

However, Cao Pi and Liu Xie's concept of *cai* was explained as a Heaven-

⁵⁴James Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, p. 70.

⁵⁵Liu Xie, *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*, annotated and translated by Stephen Owen in his *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 211.

⁵⁶James Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*, p. 74.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 70-77.

given potential or capacity that needed to be developed by learning : “Talent is endowed by Heaven; but in learning, we must take care in early practice: as in carving *tsz* wood or dyeing silk, success resides in the initial transformation (*hua*).⁵⁸ When a vessel is formed or a color is set, it is hard to alter or reverse it” (夫才有天資，學慎始習。斲梓染絲，功在初化。器成綵定，難可翻移)。 As Stephen Owen indicated, in Liu Xie’s terminology, “talent” *cai* 才 is essentially the same word as ‘material’ or ‘timber,’ *cai* 材 and this potential or capacity needs to be enlightened by proper education.⁵⁹

Li Yu’s notion of *caizi*, or literary genius, placed more emphasis on the innate endowment of the artist, so much so that innate endowment is held to be not only a sufficient but a necessary condition for the achievement of the great writer. His view is reminiscent of the Western concept of “natural geniuses”, as Addison puts it; natural geniuses, a class comprising Homer, Pindar, the Old Testament poets, and Shakespeare, are “the prodigies of mankind, who by the mere strength of natural parts, and without any assistance of art or learning, have produced works that were the delight of their own times, and the wonder of posterity.”⁶⁰

So, why did Li Yu value a writer’s innate talent over his postnatal

⁵⁸Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Thought*, p. 217.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁶⁰M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 187.

learning? There seems to be two reasons for him doing so. First, like the early as well as the Ming-Qing period expressive theorists, Li Yu tried to emphasize the personality or individuality of the writer, seeing him as a distinct individual whose innate talent was the major source of his creativity. Li Yu did not totally deny that literary creation also involves training and technical sophistication. In fact, he wrote a treatise on dramaturgy to explore that subject. He also appreciated the fact that the writer's talent can be nurtured by the external world, especially by Nature. Second, like the iconoclastic critic Li Zhi and the three Yuan brothers, Li Yu also believed that the best literature of the world has always resulted from the individual writer's creativity and spontaneity rather than from a collective knowledge and an imitation of the past. He refers again and again with comic approval to the Qin emperor's burning of the books. To him, book learning has very little to do with creativity; on the contrary, it can only make people talk pedantic ideas and write stiffly.

“The author's mind would resemble the Creator's.”

Another related aspect is imagination as the artist's creative device. Unlike the belief of some modern scholars that this psychological category is totally absent in Chinese aesthetics, we find that Li Yu placed a great emphasis on this subject. When discussing the process of creation, whereas some of his predecessors such as Liu Xie and Cao Pi emphasized both the concept of *qi* 氣 as individuality based on temperament and how *qi* affects the writer's perception

and expression, Li Yu focused more on the originality and wild imagination shared by both *zaowu* (the Creator) and the literary genius. The parallels between “the talent of the Creator” (造物之才) and “the unusual talent among human beings” (人中之異才) and between “the mind of the Creator” (造物之心) and “the mind of the author” (作者之心) are frequently drawn by him. For instance, in commenting on *Rouputuan*, Li Yu likens the author’s mind to the Creator’s and praises his ability to create the remarkable (奇) and imaginary (幻):

Who would ever have imagined that the author’s mind would so resemble the Creator’s in disposing independently of people and events and confounding all our expectations? The author has taken the woman easiest to seduce and placed her after the ones hardest to seduce, which is remarkable and fantastic in the extreme! How unpredictable is the authorial mind.

作者之心與造物之心無異，別有一種安排，決不由人計較，以最易得之人，反出最難人之後，亦可謂奇之極，幻之極，何文心不測乃爾。⁶¹

Qi 奇 and *huan* 幻 are terms often used by Ming and Qing literary critics.

Zhang Wujiu 張無咎 talked about fictional writers “writing fantasy as remarkable” (以幻為奇)⁶², Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580-1644) advocated writing “the anomalies and marvels in front of our eyes and ears” (耳目前之怪怪奇奇)⁶³, and Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (fl.1660) praised *The Romance of the Three*

⁶¹ Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 588. The English translation is Patrick Hanan’s, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 250.

⁶²Zhang Wujiu, “Piping beisong sansui xin pingyao zhuan xu,” *Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo lunzhu xuan*, Vol. 1, p. 234.

⁶³Jikongguan zhuren, “Pai’an jingqi xu,” *Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo lunzhu xuan*, Vol. 1, p. 256.

Kingdoms as “a big remarkable political game of contending for the realm” (古今爭天下之一大奇局).⁶⁴ Although these critics referred to totally different things, from fantasy to ordinary life to historical event, when speaking of *qi*, they shared at least one common thread; that is, they all were concerned with the subject matter of writing fiction, nothing else. Li Yu is different from these critics concerning the concept of *qi* in that he sees *qi* as a literary effect that comes from the author’s originality and powerful imagination. According to him, the talented writer (人中之異才) often has a mind which resembles the mind of the Creator (造物之心), bringing out all of the surprises and unpredictability of life, and this will make the literary piece remarkable! In Li Yu’s vocabulary, *zaowuzhixin* 造物之心, *zuozhezixin* 作者之心, *wenxin* 文心, all mean the same thing: an inner creative source from which the imagination springs. In order to explain how the author’s mind imagines things and creates literary characters and images, Li Yu puts forward a concept of *lixin* 立心, thinking in the character’s place, or empathy :

Language is an expression of the mind, and if you want to speak in the place of someone else, you must first think in his place. What else does ‘putting yourself in a character’s place’ mean but dream and spirit journeys? For an upright character, of course, one must put oneself in his place and think upright thoughts; but in the case of an evil character, one must abandon morality for expediency and for the time being think evil thoughts.

言者，心之聲也。欲代此一人立言，先宜代此一人立心。若非夢游神往，何謂設身處地。無論立心端正者，我當設身處地，代生端正之想，即

⁶⁴See Mao’s forged Jin Renrui “Sanguo yanyi xu” *Zhongguo Lidai xiaoshuo lunwen xuan*, Vol. 1, p. 330.

遇立心邪辟者，我亦當舍經從權，暫為邪辟之思。⁶⁵

Jin Shengtān also used the concept of empathy (qin dong xin 親動心) when dealing with the issue of characterization. In discussing the characterization of *Shuihu zhuan*, Jin used Zhao Songxue's 趙松雪 example of painting horses, and postulated that the author would get an empathic insight in the course of characterization by which he would experience an imaginative identification. This, in turn, would lead the author, the empirical and experiencing subject, towards the character or literary image, the experienced object:

It is said that Zhao Songxue was fond of painting horses. In his latter years, his technique became even more penetrating. Whenever he wished to meditate on how to paint a new picture, he would loosen his clothes in a secluded room and crouch on the floor. He would learn first how to be a horse and then order a brush. One day Lady Guan [Zhao's wife] came upon him in this process, and Zhao even appeared to be a horse.

傳聞趙松雪好畫馬，晚更入妙。每欲構思，便於密室解衣踞地，先學為馬，然後命筆，一日管夫人來，見趙宛然馬也。⁶⁶

Like different tunes rendered with equal skill, Li Yu and Jin Shengtān share the same view in terms of emphasizing the necessity of empathic

⁶⁵ Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 47. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Invention of Li Yu*, pp. 56-57.

⁶⁶ Jin Shengtān, interlinear commentary in chapter twenty-two, *Diwu caizi shu Shi Nai'an Shuihu zhuan* (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1985), Vol. 1, p. 370. The English translation is John C.Y. Wang's from his *Chin Sheng-t'an* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 79. For detailed discussion, see Hua Laura Wu, "Jin Shengtān (1608-1661): Founder of a Chinese Theory of the Novel" pp. 117-118.

experience in the course of characterization and seeing the experience as a result of the author's imagination. Being a brilliant writer himself, Li Yu was fully aware of the power of protective empathy: "If I want to be an official, then in a flash I attain honor and rank. If I want to retire from office, then in the twinkling of an eye I am among the mountains and forests. If I want to be a genius among men, then I become the incarnation of Du Fu or Li Bai."⁶⁷

Empathy, or "sympathetic imagination" is a notion that was first developed by Western eighteenth-century associationists primarily as an ethical concept, and then it was extended to explain how a poet is able to put himself in the place of the character he wishes to represent. Coleridge praised Shakespeare and Chaucer for their having this faculty of transforming themselves at will into whatever they chose.⁶⁸ Jones Very also proposed a theory that Shakespeare is to be identified with Hamlet.⁶⁹ We can see that as early as the seventeenth century, the two leading Chinese theoreticians had already touched upon the issue of empathy or the so-called "sympathetic imagination" whereas their western counterparts only developed the same concept a century later. Thus it is proved that the concept of imagination does exist in Chinese aesthetics, although it is given much more systematic treatment in Western criticism than

⁶⁷Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 47. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's from his *The Invention of Li Yu*, p. 36.

⁶⁸M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, p. 245.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 247.

Chinese theoreticians would grant it.

Jonathan Chaves, when comparing the individualism of the Gong'an school with the Romanticism in the West, suggests that the "esemplastic" (as in Coleridge's words "to bring disparate elements together in a coherent shape") and "manipulative" (as in Shelley's words : "poetry...makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar") functions of imagination are the two most important creative devices emphasized in Western Romanticism that he found missing in the mainstream Chinese conception of creativity.⁷⁰ It may be true that Chinese theoreticians never defined imagination as clear as their western counterparts did, but this does not mean that they were not aware of such artistic devices. Actually, in his critical discourse on dramaturgy, Li Yu not only noted that the writer should arrange the components of a literary work in his mind before actually writing them down, he also explained in detail the way a writer can "bring disparate elements together in a coherent shape" and "make familiar objects as if they were not familiar," and this leads to his two creative principles: emphasizing construction and seeking novelty.

TWO CREATIVE PRINCIPLES: EMPHASIZING CONSTRUCTION AND SEEKING NOVELTY

Li Yu's discourse on dramaturgy is included in his *Xianqing ouji* (*Casual Expressions of Idle Feeling*), a collection of essays written in 1671. This treatise

⁷⁰See Jonathan Chaves, "The Expression of Self in the Kung-an School: Non-Romantic Individualism," pp. 123-150.

of Li Yu's, distinguished for its focus on artistic technique and its attention to a play's construction, is considered the most significant and systematic treatise on the subject in premodern times. It is an extensive discussion dealing with all aspects of theatrical art, including the play itself (*ciqu* 詞曲);⁷¹ problems of staging (*yanxi* 演習); and the principle of breaking free from conventions (*tuotao* 脫套). In the first part of *Ciqu bu* 詞曲部, under the title of "Structuring" (*jiegou diyi* 結構第一), Li Yu discusses the methods and techniques of writing a play, and demonstrates his two important underlying principles of creation: emphasizing construction and seeking novelty.

"In writing a play, a playwright's first priority is temperament, but I alone place construction as my first concern....."

As we have already indicated, Li Yu's concept of *zaowu* more often relates to an individual's responsible and premeditated construction than a totally self-generating process of creation. He also believed that in the process of creation, before the actual making activity took place, there must be a stage of planning or structuring done by the creative agent and the structuring plays a key role in determining whether an artistic creation can be successful.

Li Yu talks about structuring at two different levels. On the macro-level, he suggests a holistic approach involving the activities of choosing literary mode, constructing plot, and selecting subject. On the micro-level, he further

⁷¹*ciqu* literally means arias of operas, but here Li Yu actually refers to the whole play script. Under this heading, he discusses issues such as subject selection, plot construction, and device of innovation etc.

elaborates on the techniques of plot construction by setting forth three principles: “setting up the controlling conception and feature” (*li zhunao* 立主腦), “fine stitching” (*mi zhenxian* 密針線), and “cutting down threads” (*jian touxu* 剪頭緒).

In calling the writer’s attention to the overall structure of a *chuanqi* play, Li Yu proposed a “one-character-one-plot” formula:

Apart from the protagonist who is the primary concern of the playwright, all other characters are secondary. All the partings and unions, joys and sorrows that befall the protagonist are there to illuminate the significance of one major plot to him. This one-character-one-plot formula constitutes the “brain” of the play.

本戲中有無數人名，究竟俱屬陪賓，原其初心，止為一人而設；即此一人之身，自始至終，離合悲歡，中俱無限情由，無窮關目，究竟俱屬衍文，原其初心，又止為一事而設；此一人一事，即作傳奇之主腦也。⁷²

In Li Yu’s terminology, the concept of *zhunao*, “brain” or “controlling conception or feature”, referring to both the plot structure of a play and the taking of central characters as the backbone of a drama, contains two underlying assumptions about plot construction. First, it requires “a unitary focus at the very inception of the creative process,”⁷³ and second, it has the mechanism of generating subplots, which leads to a dynamic process of text production.

According to Andrew Plaks, the expression *zhunao* is employed more or

⁷²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3. p. 8. The English translation is Nathan Mao’s from his *Li Yu* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1977), pp. 122-123.

⁷³Andrew Plaks, “Terminology and Central Concepts,” *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, ed. David L Rolston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 88.

less interchangeably with the other commonly used terms such as *guanmu* 關目, *guanjian* 關鍵, *tigang* 提綱, *da guan suo chu* 大關索處, *dazhi* 大旨, *zongzhi* 宗旨, *gangniu* 綱紐, *dagang* 大綱, etc. which all can be translated as “key” in English. These various terms also carry the same implication of “at least a sufficient degree of overall structural (or thematic) unity to allow such ‘keys’ to be meaningful.”⁷⁴

Although the concept was widely used by Ming-Qing scholars, Li Yu seems to be the one who was most conscious about the dynamic function of the *zhunao*. To him, the *zhunao* was not merely a “key” to integrate the separate parts of a play into a coherent and meaningful whole, it was also a “trigger” or a “fuse” that led to successive dramatic plots or a chain of events. Thus, it has the dynamic function of initiating and growing. The following passage shows us how Li Yu thinks *zhunao* works:

The whole *Xixiang ji* only has one central character, that is Zhang Junrui. And there is only one plot in the play—the plot of “Rescuing Yingying at Baima Temple”—which is significant to him. The rest of the minor events [lit.branches and knots] are all generated from this plot. [For instance], Madame Cui’s promise of marriage; Mr. Zhang’s longing for marrying Yingying; Hongniang’s courageous act as a go-between; Yingying’s dare to lose her virginity; and Zheng Heng’s vain fight for insisting on the previous betrothal; all of these come from the same plot. Thus, the four characters “*Baima jiewei*,” (Rescuing Yingying at Baima Temple), sum up the controlling plot of *Xixiang ji*.

一部西廂止為張君瑞一人，而張君瑞一人又止為“白馬解圍”一事，其
余枝節皆從此一事而生，夫人之許婚，張生之望配，紅娘之勇於作合，
鶯鶯之敢於失身，與鄭恆之力爭原配而不得皆由於此，是“白馬解圍”

⁷⁴Andrew Plaks, “Terminology and Central Concepts,” pp. 87-88.

四字，即作《西廂記》之主腦也。⁷⁵

In addition to establishing the “controlling conception or feature” of a play, Li Yu also suggests two contrasting but also complementary principles “cutting down threads” and “fine stitching”. On the one hand, in order to set forth the plot, the writer should reduce multiple threads to a single thread in the play; on the other hand, in order to provide a tight texture for the play, the writer should also make a well-constructed and well-knit piece with no signs of disjointedness. To Li Yu, a dramatic composition is similar to a fine piece of needlework:

Writing plays is something like the tailoring of clothing. In the beginning one cuts up whole cloth into pieces, and then one proceeds to piece together the cut fragments. Cutting something up into fragments is easy; it is piecing these back together that is difficult. The artistry of piecing together lies completely in the fineness of the stitching: if a given section happens to be too loosely connected, then holes in the composition [lit. “split seams”] will appear throughout the piece.

編戲有如縫衣，其初則以完全者剪碎，其後又以剪碎者湊成。剪碎易，湊成難，湊成之工全在針線緊密。一節偶疏，全篇之破綻出矣。⁷⁶

Notably, Li Yu made a distinction between the well-structured events presented in the play and the unpatterned events before writing. He identified two successive phases in a process of literary creation, the pre-aesthetic and the aesthetic, by vividly illustrating the “act of subdividing and rearranging human

⁷⁵Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 9.

⁷⁶Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 10. The English translation is Andrew Plaks' from his “Terminology and Central Concepts,” p. 88.

experience into meaningful patterns of sequence.”⁷⁷ In so doing Li Yu actually set forth a dichotomy of “fable” (*fabula*) versus “plot” (*sjuzhet*), a pair of terms used by Russian Formalists.

In Formalist’s parlance, “the ‘fable’ (*fabula*) stands for the basic story stuff, the sum-total of events to be related in the work of fiction; in a word, the ‘material for narrative construction’. Conversely, ‘plot’ (*sjuzhet*) means the story as actually told or the way in which the events are linked together. In order to become part of aesthetic structure the raw materials of the ‘fable’ (*fabula*) have to be built into the ‘plot’(*sjuzhet*).”⁷⁸

Although Li Yu was aware of the distinction between “fable” and “plot”, he did not work out a pair of terms for it. The person who had accomplished this task was actually his senior, the precursor of Chinese fictional theory in the seventeenth century, Jin Shengtan. Jin developed a *wen/shi* 文/事 dichotomy in his critical discourse on *Shuihu zhuan* (水滸傳). In his chapter discussion for chapter twenty-eight, in commenting on the episode of Wu Song beating Jiang Menshen, Jin says,

All of these [enumerated so far] compose the *wen* of this chapter, but not its *shi*. If [the author’s] intention is all on the *shi*, [he] can simply follow [the historian] Song Zijing’s example and write down only one sentence, ‘Shi En accompanies Wu Song to fight Jiang Menshen, on route [Wu] has thirty-five or thirty-six bowls of wine.’ Why then did Shi Nai’an take pains to create such a text?

⁷⁷Andrew Plaks, “Terminology and Central Concepts,” p. 88.

⁷⁸Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (The Hague, Paris, and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1954), p. 240.

凡若此者，是皆此篇之文也，並非此篇之事也。如以事而已矣，則施恩領卻武松去打蔣門神，一路吃了三十五六碗酒，只依宋子京例，大書一行足矣，何為又煩耐庵傳此一篇也哉？⁷⁹

We can see that Jin Shengtan's *shi* is analogous to the fable, and his *wen* is equivalent to the Formalist plot. *Shi* is the pre-verbal material and *wen* is the constructed text presenting the sequence of events and character portrayal in a specific way.⁸⁰

The similarities between the two seventeenth-century Chinese literary critics and modern Western theorists of literature are also reflected in their conceptual thinking. They all assign similar dominant features to these contrasting concepts. Moreover, they all believed that events presented in a literary text were the product of the writer's imagination and not something that has already happened.

"The most difficult thing in writing a play is to avoid cliché; the most inferior tactics in writing a play is to copy conventional patterns."

Li Yu's other underlying principle for literary creation is the principle of seeking novelty, which is mainly reflected in his discussion on selecting a subject.

Under the sub-titles of "Breaking away from clichés" (*tuo kejiu* 脫窠臼),

⁷⁹Jin Shengtan, pre-chapter discussion to chapter twenty-eight, *Diwu caizi shu Shi Nai'an Shuihu zhuan*, Vol. 1, p. 470. The English translation is Hua Laura Wu's from her "Jin Shengtan," p. 99.

⁸⁰For more detailed discussion, see Hua Laura Wu's "Jin Shengtan."

“Avoiding absurdity” (*jie huangtang* 誠荒唐), and “Distinguishing fiction from fact” (*shen xushi* 審虛實), Li Yu presented three pairs of dichotomies: the dichotomy of oldness versus newness; ordinary versus unusual; and fictional versus factual. He discusses the dialectical relationships between them and emphasizes that using new subjects and seeking novelty are of importance to literature, especially to drama.

One of the key concepts developed by Li Yu in promoting newness in literature is the concept of “breaking away from cliches”. Li Yu believes that newness is the most crucial factor in realizing artistic effect, and “breaking away from cliches” is the very device to achieve that effect. As he puts it,

In people one seeks only the old, in things the new. Newness is a term of approbation for everything in the world, but doubly so for literature. This is what the statement “striving to rid one’s writing of cliches -oh, how hard it is!” refers to. And in the art of drama, newness is twice as valuable again as in the other literary genres. Not only is the work of past authors now obsolete, there is a gulf even in my own writing between what I write yesterday and what I am writing today. Yesterday’s work has appeared, while today’s has not, and if we regard what has not yet appeared as new, we must accept what has already appeared as old.

“人惟求舊，物惟求新。”新也者，天下事物之美稱也。而文章一道，較之他物，尤加倍焉。戛戛乎陳言務去，求新之謂也。至於填詞一道，較之詩賦古文，又加倍焉。非特前人所作，於今為舊，即出我一人之手，今之視昨亦有間焉。⁸¹

Then, what is novelty? Li Yu thinks that novelty does not mean something whimsical. A playwright should search for inspiration in normal human situations and not have to enter the realm of fantasy. Li Yu reasons: All

⁸¹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 9. The English translation is Patrick Hanan’s from his *The Invention of Li Yu*, p. 45.

plays which expound on human feelings and on natural laws will be appreciated from one generation to the next, while those which are frivolous, incredible, ridiculous, and strange will be forgotten within the lifetime of the playwright.⁸²

The best way of seeking novelty, according to Li Yu, is to make the familiar unfamiliar. As for the lack of usable material, Li Yu explains:

Any material unused by writers of the past can be used. Even familiar stories already used by them may not have been fully exploited. If we put ourselves in the shoes of earlier writers and, by entering into their stories, comprehend the subtleties of the human emotions and the niceties of the human actions they describe, the deceased authors would inspire us with a lively pen, enabling us to write plays in a fresh and exquisite language. Then the audience will be so absorbed by the craft of the playwright as to forget that the story is an old and familiar one!

前人未見之事，後人見之，可備填詞制曲之用者也。即前人已見之事，盡有摹寫未盡之情，描畫不全之態，若能設身處地，伐隱攻微，彼泉下之人自能效靈於我，授以生花之筆，假以蘊繡之腸，制為雜劇，但使人賞極新極豔之詞，而竟忘其為極腐極陳之事者。⁸³

Furthermore, Li claims that a playwright can use familiar themes and yet produce surprisingly new results:

It was said that the day-to-day happenings have been exhausted by writers of the past and that even the most minute and extremely obscure incidents have been fully explored. That is why contemporary writers are looking for what is strange and bizarre. But I think this is not true. Not many extraordinary events happen in a humdrum world. But the principles governing human emotions are infinite. As long as the relationships between rulers and officials, fathers and sons exist for one day, there will always be feelings and concepts of loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and

⁸²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, pp. 8-16.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 14.

righteousness. Human nature manifests itself in novel ways with the passing of time. There are certainly events of the past left for writers of a later generation to explore and to describe more sensitively, thus improving on what has been done by one's predecessors.

人謂家常日用之事，已被前人做盡，窮微極隱，纖芥無遺，非好奇也，求為平而不可得也。予曰不然。世間奇事無多，常事為多，物理易盡，人情難盡，有一日之君臣父子，即有一日之忠孝節義，性之所發，愈出愈奇，盡有前人未作之事，留之以待後人，後人猛發之心，較之勝於先輩者。⁸⁴

In the preface to his first collection of vernacular stories, *Pai'an jingqi* 拍案惊奇 (*Slapping the Table in Amazement*), Ling Mengchu also deplors the belief that the only remarkable things are thought to be phantasms and the like, and advocates depicting "the wonders inside the range of our eyes and ears." Taken literally, Li Yu's interpretation of *qi* (remarkable, amazing, or extraordinary) seems to resemble Ling Mengchu's. Both demonstrate that ordinary experience is far more extraordinary than is commonly recognized, and both define *qi* exclusively in ethical human terms. The two men approached the issue from different epistemological aspects, however. Ling indicates that since common knowledge (*changli* 常理) of human beings is limited, one can always find extraordinary things in daily life, whereas Li suggests that the writer can make the ordinary things extraordinary, or familiar things unfamiliar, by writing the same old thing in a new guise. Using the term of his marginal commentator Wang Anjie 王安節, Li Yu prefers the technique of *fan'an jianqi* 翻案見奇 (Revealing extraordinariness by reconditioning), which actually becomes

⁸⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 14.

one of the dominant authorial rhetorics of Li Yu's works.⁸⁵ We will come back to this in the following section.

Li Yu's principle of seeking novelty, especially his conceptions of "breaking away from cliché" and making the familiar unfamiliar, will seem oddly familiar to a reader who has encountered the western conception of "defamiliarization" or "estrangement". According to the theories of some English Romantic poets and of Russian Formalism, "defamiliarization" is an artistic device which draws the reader's attention to the "literariness" of the literary work. Viktor Shklovsky, one of the leading Russian Formalists, extensively discussed the concept of "defamiliarization" in his influential essay "Art as Device." The purpose of art, he says, is to force us to notice the artifices. Since perception is usually too automatic, art develops a variety of techniques to impede perception or, at least, to call attention to itself. Thus "art" is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object. Defamiliarization, as the chief technique or principle, promotes such awareness. It is a process that endows an object or image with "strangeness" by "removing" it from the network of conventional, formulaic, stereotypical perceptions and linguistic expressions. Moreover, the theoretical statement of the Russian formalist concept of parody is based on the principle of "defamiliarization." For the Formalists, "parody develops out of the realization of the literary inadequacies of a certain convention. Not merely an unmasking of a non-functioning system, it is also a

⁸⁵Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 14.

necessary and creative process by which new forms appear to revitalize the tradition and open up new possibilities to the artist.”⁸⁶

We can detect a striking similarity between Li Yu and the Formalist in their theoretical thinking in terms of how literature works and the dialectical relationship between familiar and unfamiliar. First of all, they all think that novelty should be the major effect achieved by literary works, disrupting our habitual perception of the world, and enabling us to “see” things afresh. Even the terms they employed were alike: the Formalist used the term “strangeness” referring to this literary effect, while Li Yu utilized the word “newness” with a further explanation “newness is the alternative name for strangeness (or marvels)”. Second, they all suggest the literary device of making the familiar unfamiliar, seeing it as a way of establishing new and revitalizing old. The principle of “defamiliarization” is the theoretical basis for the Formalist’s concept of parody. I will argue later that a similar conceptual thinking also provided a fundamental motivation for Li Yu’s parodic mode of literary writing.

Although Li Yu shares common grounds with the Russian Formalists as we have indicated above, profound differences exist between them. One of the most fundamental differences between them is that they define strangeness differently. For the Formalists, “defamiliarization” means promoting formal difficulty. As Shklovesky puts it “the technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of

⁸⁶Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (New York & London: Methuen, Inc., 1985), p. 50.

perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.” Based on this kind of definition, the Formalists set out to identify the observable “devices” by which literary texts foreground their own language, or change point of views.⁸⁷

In discussing the problem of making the familiar unfamiliar, Li Yu, on the contrary, emphasizes a newness or strangeness of the theme. To him, “breaking away from cliches” is more like finding new variants of the traditional theme than creating formal difficulties.

TWO AUTHORIAL RHETORICS: INVERSION AND AUTO-COMMUNICATION

Having reviewed Li Yu’s concept of creativity and his principles of literary creation, we now come to the question: how did Li Yu demonstrate his originality and individuality as an author?

In his book *The Invention of Li Yu*, Patrick Hanan indicated:

To an extraordinary degree, Li Yu is a visible and audible presence in all his writing. His constant self-reference, playful though it usually is, may strike the reader as unnecessary and even obsessive, but it cannot be dismissed; the conspectus of selves or personae that he insists on presenting to us forms an essential element of his

⁸⁷For a detailed discussion on the technique of estrangement, see Viktor Shklovsky’s article “Art as Device.” In Viktor Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), pp. 1-14. The examples that are relevant to the point I am raising here are the devices used by Tolstoy. According to Shklovsky, Tolstoy estranges his material by using basically two means: language and point of view. For instance, Tolstoy describes an incident as if it were perceived for the first time. Or, as in *Kholstomer*, the story is told from the point of view of a horse, etc.

art.⁸⁸

As Hanan has pointed out, Li Yu's works, no matter whether they are literary or non-literary, all have a strong authorial voice, presenting to the reader a self-conscious and auto-communicative persona.

Due to the domination of the Confucian pragmatic theory and the emphasis on the social function of literature, Chinese literary tradition has always valued the "objective" or "impersonal" mode of narration or presentation over any mode that allows for direct appearances of the author. In Chinese official historiography, the narrator is "a committee rather than an individual,"⁸⁹ who conveys "a certain quality of omniscience"⁹⁰ and a sense of "an essentially impersonal, unmediated setting forth of the facts as they actually happened."⁹¹ This objective narratorial rhetoric, although not used exclusively, remains a constant model for the other narrative genres, which include not only unofficial historiography and classical fiction (*zhiguai* 志怪, *chuanqi* 傳奇), but vernacular fiction and story as well.

If it is the norm for unofficial historiography and classical fiction to directly adopt the historian's narrative method, it is not the case for vernacular

⁸⁸Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, p. 31.

⁸⁹Andrew Plaks, "Toward a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative," *Chinese Narrative*, ed. Andrew Plaks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 325.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 326.

works. The conventional narrative stance of the Ming and Qing vernacular works, according to Patrick Hanan, is an imitation of the oral storytelling situation, or “simulated context.” Therefore, the voice of narrator in vernacular works, especially in the early stages of their development, resembles the oral narrator who uses a lot of ready-made rhetorical devices. However, what is interesting is that even the rhetoric of the “stock narrator” is impersonalized or objectivized. Because, “in many works the aesthetic effect of maintaining this pose lies in creating the illusion of a public airing of private matters, thus directing the readers’ attention away from the linear sequentiality and mimetic specificity of the narrated details, and towards the sort of broader issues of human existence which are usually associated with historical writing.”⁹² It is true that the seventeenth century saw a gradual emergence of the authorial persona in vernacular literature, especially in the *huaben* 話本 genre, but this individualization did not come to a full realization until Li Yu’s time.

Li Yu was probably the first writer who elaborated the individual voice of his narrator to such a degree that one can draw an equation between the persona adopted by Li Yu the writer and Li Yu the man.⁹³ In order to move away from tradition and the predominant trend, Li Yu deliberately chose a narrative mode

⁹²Andrew Plaks, “Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative,” p. 327.

⁹³Li Yu’s predecessors in the genre of vernacular story such as Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu worked out a compromise between the author’s individual persona and the stock narrator. For detailed discussion, see Chapters 4 to 7 of Patrick Hanan’s book *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

or authorial voice which was self-reflexive and personal. An examination of rhetorical devices in Li Yu's writings uncovers two strong characteristics, respectively working at two different levels: For the narrative level or textual level, he employed the rhetoric of *fan'an wenzhang* 翻案文章 or the rhetoric of inversion. For the meta-textual level, he utilized the mode of comment in such a way that his narratives revealed a trait of auto-communication.

The Rhetoric of Inversion (*fan'an wenzhang*)

In his treatise on dramaturgy, Li Yu dedicated a whole section to deal with the problem of choosing literary mode, and he tried to make the writer be more conscious about the self-referential nature of literature.

Under the sub-title "Jie fengci" 誠諷刺, Li Yu criticizes some of his contemporary playwrights' tendency to use satirical drama as a weapon to express their personal grievances or to get even with others. In so doing, they gave the reader or the spectator the wrong assumption that there existed a referential relationship between literature and its object. To him, to explain *Pi ba ji* 琵琶記 as a satire to attack a certain Wang Si 王四 simply because there are four Wang characters in the title is totally absurd. For this reason, Li Yu feels obligated to declare that his work has neither allegorical meaning nor the intention to attack someone by innuendo. But Li Yu's statement on avoiding satire goes beyond clearing himself of the suspicion of personal attack. He says,

Whenever I put a drama in print, I always write a proclamation at the beginning of the script. It basically says, when I praise the male

and female leading roles in the play, it does not mean that I try to show my gratitude to someone by using the character. When I ridicule the minor role and the clown, it is also merely for the purpose of creating laughter. All of these are ornamentations of stage effect that merely intend to prevent dullness. We should realize that among the seven kinds of human feelings exist everywhere; as do the six conjunctions. If we fictionalize an event, it may have the coincidences expected of an event. If we give a role a name, there may be coincidences regarding this name. Thus, [if one always thinks a literary creation is referential], one may actually regard a castle in the air as reality [lit. a real bottlegourd].

予向梓傳奇，嘗列誓詞於首，其略云：加生旦以美名，原非市恩於有托；抹淨丑以花面，亦屬調笑於無心；凡以點綴詞場，使不岑寂而已。但慮七情之內，無境不生，六合之中，何所不有，幻設一事，即有一事之偶同；喬命一名，即有一名之巧合；焉知不以無基之樓閣，認為有樣之葫蘆。⁹⁴

Besides claiming his “innocence” in attacking other people, Li Yu takes pains to elucidate three points: First, his work, although full of mockery and ridicule, does not belong to the allegorical or satirical. Second, literature does not necessarily always take the objective world as its object. Literature can be “a castle in the air.” Its nature is fictional rather than referential. Third, instead of moral meaning, it is the artistic quality of a literary work which is his main concern.

In the preceding passage, Li Yu made it very clear that the conventional modes of allegory, satire, and didacticism played very little part in his works. Seeking to distance himself from the tradition and predominant trends, Li Yu employed the rhetoric of *fan'an wenzhang*, or the rhetoric of inversion in almost all his creative writings, including his fiction, drama, and essays.

⁹⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 7.

Fan'an wenzhang, literally meaning an essay to reverse a previous verdict, is remarkably close to the western concept of parody, which usually involves two texts: a previous historical story or a legend and a later rewriting that undermines or totally reverses the previous text.

From the late Ming onwards, the notion of *fan'an wenzhang* became very popular and began to be used as a rhetorical device in both writing and judging literature. Zhang Zhupo, for instance, in commenting on *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (*The Golden Lotus*), frequently refers to the term *fan'an* when he describes certain passages of the novel. The famous Ming literatus, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-90), exercised the technique of inversion in his essay "Lin Xiangru wan bi gui Zhao lun" 藺相如完璧歸趙論. Li Zhi, too, is thought of as one of the most outstanding practitioners of this mode of writing. For instance, in his *Cangshu* 藏書 (*A Book to be Hidden Away*), a collection of historical biographies selected from official histories and other extant historical writings, Li Zhi employed the device of *fan'an* by repudiating the existing judgments of the previous historical texts. It is sufficient to cite one example here. Under the category of "Subjects of Relatives" (親臣傳), Li Zhi includes a biography of Lady Yang, the most favorite imperial concubine of Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 with an attached biography of her notorious brother Yang Guozhong 楊國忠. Like all official historical writings, the biography blames Yang for the political turmoil and the fall of Xuanzong's regime. But Li Zhi completely reversed the conventional view and held Xuanzong responsible for the collapse of his government. He

says,

What do we condemn Yang Guozhong for? [It was Xuanzong] himself who suppressed the Empress Wei's disturbance of [the imperial court], but he also lost control when faced with a woman's charm. The father and sons [of his royal family] used to worry about death and destruction day and night, but he again followed the same old disastrous road. Even the death penalty can not punish Xuanzong enough for the crime he committed!

國忠何罪之有？親平韋氏，身見色荒。父子兄弟，日夕憂危，而旋自蹈之。玄宗之罪，可勝誅哉？⁹⁵

Li Yu's whole collection of essays on historical events and figures, *Li Yu lungu*, (*Discussions of the Past*), which he completed in 1664, can be seen as a collection of *fan'an wenzhang*. In Hanan's words, it "was a genre that gave the writer of iconoclastic temper the opportunity to *fan'an*, that is, to overturn an accepted historical judgment."⁹⁶ The book contains 133 historical anecdotes which are mostly drawn from Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130-1200) *Zizhi tongjian gangmu*, 資治通鑑綱目 with the attachment of traditional comments. Li Yu always first cites an anecdote along with its interpretation from Zhu's historical writing, and then makes his own comments on this quotation. With his uninhibited sophistry and shocking opinions, Li Yu transposes the arguments presented in the quotations in such a way that they are totally undermined. For instance, in "Lun Yao rang tianxia yu Xu You, Tang rang tianxia yu Bian Sui, Wu Guang" 論堯讓天下於許由，湯讓天下於卞隨，務光, Li Yu presents an anecdote from Zhu's

⁹⁵Li Zhi, "Tang Shouwangfei yangshi," *Cangshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), Vol. 2, p. 1055.

⁹⁶Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, p. 26.

previous text which describes how Yao abdicated his throne to Xu You and Tang abdicated his to Bian Sui and Wu Guang. In commenting on this quotation, Li Yu not only suspects the authenticity of the record, but also ridicules the previous text, saying that it treats abdication so perfunctorily that it cannot even compare to the way a child values his meat pie.⁹⁷ Another good example is Li Yu's inversion of Jie Zitui's 介子推 story. In the essay titled "Lun Jin Wengong shang congwang zhe er bu ji Jie Zitui" 論晉文公賞從亡者而不及介子推, Jie Zitui, who was described as a loyal subject of Duke Wen of the Jin state in the official history, is characterized by Li Yu as a person who had selfish motives and sought rewards for himself.⁹⁸ Most amusing, in "Lun Xiang Yu bu du Wujiang," 論項羽不渡烏江 Li Yu mocks Xiang Yu's stereotyped heroism, turning his heroic act of "not crossing the Wu river" (不渡烏江) into a cowardly and paranoid decision.⁹⁹ Li Yu even dedicated a whole essay to comparing rulers reversing their political policies to writers employing the rhetoric of inversion (or *fan'an wenzhang*); he says:

Liweng says, what the first emperor and the emperor Guangwu of the Han dynasty did respectively in abolishing the tyrannies of the Qin dynasty as well as Wang Mang's regime were nothing extraordinary, but exactly like the writer's rhetoric of inversion. Inversion is a method that everyone knows how to use, but one tends to either exceed the limits or become disorganized when

⁹⁷Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 1, p. 310.

⁹⁸Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 313-315.

⁹⁹Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 334-335.

using it improperly. Only the first emperor and the emperor Guangwu of the Han dynasty were good at reversing political policies, thus they avoided these two mistakes and were appreciated by others. What is the key to this method? I will say, it simply can be epitomized in two words: *ruqing* (getting into the feeling/spirit of the matter). If one is getting into the feeling/spirit of writing, he can invert all the established cases in history, and nobody on earth thinks he is wrong. The same thing can be said about seizing political power. [If one is getting into the feeling/spirit of politics,] he can even abolish all the old systems and everyone in the world will feel happy but not startled.

When the Qin ruler annexed the other six states and Wang Mang usurped the throne, the governments of these regimes were declining and their legal systems were weak. Thus, the first emperor of the Qin dynasty and Wang Mang used strict policy, which can be regarded as a reverse. No different from their former rulers, the first emperor and the emperor Guangwu of the Han dynasty again did a further inversion. However, the inversions of the Qin ruler and Wang Mang turned the regular into irregular; whereas the first emperor and emperor Guangwu of the Han dynasty changed the irregular into regular. The former can only temporarily strike us as new and eventually will be detested and rejected by people; whereas the latter remains new with time passing. Therefore, whether a regime is able to continue can be judged from whether a writer is able to circulate his works.

笠翁曰：高祖除秦苛法，光武除莽苛政，此皆無甚奇特，即文章家翻案法耳。此法是人皆知，是人能行；但行之不得其法，非失之矯強，即失之支離。惟高祖，光武善作翻案文字，去此二病，故能見賞於人耳。然則翻案之法謂何？曰：其言不繁，只得二字，謂之“入情”而已。文字入情，即翻儘古來成案，天下不以為非，而且以為是。取天下者亦用此法，即革儘從前舊制，天下不見其可驚，而但見其可喜。

秦取天下於六國，莽取天下於孺子嬰，皆值政衰法弛之際，故皆以苛取之，此亦翻案法也。高祖、光武又從而翻之，同一轍耳。但秦、莽之翻案，反正為奇者也；高祖、光武之翻案，反奇為正者也。反正為奇者，但能取新於一時，久之則覺其可厭；反奇為正者，傳之愈久而愈覺其新。觀於文章家可傳不可傳之別，則知取天下之道可久不可久之分矣。¹⁰⁰

In Li Yu's scheme, employing the rhetoric of inversion resembles

¹⁰⁰Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 1, p. 374.

reconditioning political policies. To him, anything written in the past can be reversed as long as the writer is able to get into the feeling/spirit of writing. *Qing* 情 denotes the social and literary codes needed in inversion and *ruqing* 入情 can be interpreted as conforming to these codes. If the writer uses the rhetoric inverting the regular patterns into irregular, which is not in conformity with *qing*, he is seeking a newness that cannot last long. On the contrary, if the writer employs the technique that makes the irregular reverse into regular, which agrees with *qing*, he can write a masterpiece. As Zhang Zhongmou 張仲謀 has indicated in his commentary, although Li Yu's book is named "Discussions of the Past", it actually tries to broaden the writers' views and urge them to get rid of hackneyed and stereotyped expressions.¹⁰¹ The technique of inversion is more pronounced in Li Yu's literary writings, but we will deal with that later.

The Auto-Communicative Authorial Voice

Aside from using the rhetoric of inversion, Li Yu's authorial persona also reveals a characteristic of auto-communication. If we use the word "rhetoric" as Wayne Booth uses in his *Rhetoric of Fiction*, to denote the mediating activities of the author, then the "rhetoric of auto-communication" refers to the entire range of devices that define and modulate the relationship of the author/critic, not to his reader, but to the implied author and the literary work itself. Specifically, this means the use of the modes of commentary both

¹⁰¹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 1, p. 375.

inside and outside of the narrative, whereby the author/critic directly intrudes into the narrative to install his personal voice or vision and to add layers of meaning to the text. The “rhetoric of auto-communication”, obviously, is a rhetoric that uses meta-language and the very existence of such rhetoric reflects the self-reflexive nature of the narrative.

The concept of auto-communication is posed by Yuri Lotman in his *Universe of the Mind*. According to him, there are two possible directions in the transmission of a message. The most typical situation is the ‘I-s/he’ direction in which the ‘I’ is the subject of the communication, the possessor of the information, while the ‘s/he’ is the object, the addressee. In this instance it is assumed that before the act of communication there was a message known to ‘me’ and not known to ‘him/her’. The predominance of communications of this type in the culture we are used to overshadows the other direction in the transmission of information, that is the ‘I-I’ direction. In this case, the subject transmits a message to him/herself. Thus the transmission appears paradoxical. In the ‘I-s/he’ system the framing elements of the model are variables in which the addresser could be replaced by addressee, while code and message are invariable. In the ‘I-I’ system, the bearer of the information remains the same but the message is reformulated and acquires new meaning during the communication process. This is the result of introducing a supplementary second code; the original message is recorded into elements of its structure and thereby acquires features of a new message. Different kinds of formal structures such as architectural ensembles (spatial objects) and music (temporal objects) as

well as linguistic and ironic rhetoric can function as such codes. Lotman further indicates that the 'I-I' text has a tendency to build up individual meanings and to take on the function of organizing the disordered associations which accumulate in the individual consciousness. It reorganizes the personality who engages in auto-communication.¹⁰²

One problem with applying Lotman's schema to the comments in Chinese vernacular fiction generally, and to the authorial voice of Li Yu's work specifically, is immediately apparent: we cannot assume an auto-communication is engaged in the narrative unless we can prove that the author and the commentator or critic of the work are one and the same entity. In other words, in order to justify the concept of auto-communication as authorial rhetoric, we have to ask the question: is there such a notion of author-cum-critic in Chinese literary tradition? If there is, how and why is it pronounced in Li Yu's works?¹⁰³

In pondering these questions, the first thing that comes to mind is the fact that there was actually no clear-cut division between literary work/artist and critical work/critic in Chinese literary tradition. On the one hand, the literary voice—poet, historian, narrator, story-teller, fiction writer—usually was also the commentator or the critic. On the other hand, beginning perhaps in the late

¹⁰²Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, trans. Ann Shukman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1990), pp. 20-35.

¹⁰³I would like to thank Hua Laura Wu for her discussion on the issue of auto-communication which provides some insightful ideas to this section.

Ming, some commentators not only took on editorial responsibilities, but also sat down and extensively rewrote sections of the texts they commented on.

Chinese historiography, from the *Zuo zhuan*'s *左傳 junzi yue* 君子曰 and *Shiji's taishigong yue* 太史公曰 to later works of *shichen yue* 史臣曰, *ping yue* 評曰, placed a "consistent emphasis on judgment over pure narration."¹⁰⁴ Although it was the norm for historical writings to handle and present materials objectively, the historian had no problem "stepping back from his pose of journalistic objectivity and into the role of commentator or judge."¹⁰⁵

In the genre of fiction, the author in both classical and vernacular works often simultaneously played the role of commentator. From classical fiction, an early example can be found in Tang *chuanqi* 傳奇. In the eminent government scholar, Yuan Zhen's 元稹 "Yingying zhuan" 鶯鶯傳, the story begins with a third-person narrator but ends with a moralizing commentator who is identified with the author himself. The best example from a later period is the authorial remarks of *yishi shi* 異史氏曰 in the *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 stories, which also emphasizes a sense of judgment and subjectivity going hand-in-hand with the mimetic presentation of events. In the case of the vernacular story, "the mode of commentary is even more explicit in that it is clearly

¹⁰⁴Andrew Plaks, "Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative," p. 326.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 326.

marked by what modern scholars sometime call 'story-teller phrases,'"¹⁰⁶ which includes the introductory remarks or prologue, the comments both in verse and prose, and the occasional pretended altercations with the audience, etc.¹⁰⁷

If we look at this issue from the other side of the same coin, a more interesting phenomenon appeared probably in the late Ming period; that is, many commentators made substantial editorial changes or extensively rewrote the texts that they commented on. In the disguise of "earlier edition" (*guben* 古本), Jin Shengtian reconstructed and re-maneuvered the previous text of *Shuihu zhuan* to such a degree that his name was permanently stamped on the book and many readers of later generations did not even know that a one hundred-and-twenty chapter version existed. Another respected Ming literary figure, Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), also changed the text of a Du Mu 杜牧 (803-825) poem to suit his own ideas of how it should read, asserting that the popular editions (*suben* 俗本) were wrong. Later on, some Qing commentators such as Cai Ao 蔡昉 and Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907) did not even bother anymore to use the ruse of having discovered an old edition justifying the changes they made to the original texts. "The commentators were often quite proud of their work in this connection, calling attention to the changes with fatherly pride, even as they

¹⁰⁶Patrick Hanan, "The Early Chinese Short Story: A Critical Theory in Outline," *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres*, ed. Cyril Birch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 305.

¹⁰⁷Patrick Hanan, "The Early Chinese Short Story: A Critical Theory in Outline," p. 173.

energetically denied their paternity.”¹⁰⁸

There are perhaps several factors that contributed to this unique phenomenon. First, contrary as they are, both the urge to preach and the need to express the self provided the motives for changing literary voice into that of the commentator, and both could easily find aesthetic bases (文以載道 and 詩言志) in Chinese literary tradition. Second, because of the Chinese hermeneutic tradition, from Confucius on, critics/commentators were never looked down upon. The concept of critic as parasite, as in the West, never existed in Chinese tradition. Some of the early commentaries on *Chunqiu* 春秋 (The Spring and Autumn Annals) such as *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 (The Gongyang Commentary), the *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 (The Guliang Commentary), and the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (The Zuo Commentary) actually gained the status of Confucian classics themselves and became the subject matter of other commentaries. Thus, equating critic and author becomes natural, logical, and easier in Chinese tradition than it does in the West. Third, in Chinese literary tradition, especially in the late Ming period, re-creation of past work was valued as creation. For instance, Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105), a famous Song poet, advocated the artistic technique of *tuotai huangu* 脫胎換骨 (grows out of the old pattern), which means to produce new poetry by starting out with and transforming the works of the famous poets. Zhang Zhupo, also “saw the composition of a work

¹⁰⁸David L. Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 53.

of fiction and the writing of a detailed commentary on that work to be a roughly equivalent activity in terms of difficulty and importance."¹⁰⁹ Moreover, in the seventeenth century and after, the concept of re-creation being in no way second to creation also encouraged the growth of sequel fiction—a genre that develops new works out of the masterpieces of past.

All of the above attest to the fact that it is a common practice in Chinese literary tradition for one writer, within a single text, to play the dual role of author and critic simultaneously. In this line of thinking, we feel safe to assume that auto-communication can be engaged within a narrative by one double-role writer.

By scrutinizing Li Yu's works in this mode of interpretation, we have found strong characteristics of auto-communication, which are reflected in the large portion of discourses presented in his narratives and the post-chapter commentaries incorporated in *Rouputuan* and *Hejin huiwen zhuan*, the two books attributed to him.

In analyzing *Rouputuan*, Patrick Hanan identifies the various forms of discourse presented in it:

Discourse takes several forms in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*. One is comment by the narrator-author—there is no pretence that any distance remains between author and narrator—in prologue, digression, explanation, and chapter epilogue; another is a character's monologue or mental soliloquy, or a dialogue or debate between two characters; yet another consists of quoted documents, such as the erotic album or playing cards or the notes *Vesperus*

¹⁰⁹David L. Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, p. 71.

takes on the women he has observed.¹¹⁰

These various forms of discourse could serve different rhetorical functions in Li Yu's works—functions such as providing a summary, molding the beliefs of the reader, generalizing the significance of the whole book, manipulating mood, and of course, directly commenting on the work itself—all of those indicated by Wayne Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. But the one we are interested in here, and the one that makes Li Yu unique is the very last rhetorical function on the list, his direct comments on the work itself.

The authorial reflexive comments on the work are present in both Li Yu's fictional and dramatic writings. In his fiction, the authorial criticism can be heard at both textual and metatextual levels. In the former case, the comment is always smoothly delivered in prologue, epilogue, and other discursive discourses inserted into the text proper. While outside of the narrative, it is presented as a form of post-chapter critique, interactively communicating with the text proper to build a coherent literary universe.

One of the tasks of Li Yu's fiction is to "displace, energize, and re-embodiment its criticism—to literally unite it with our experience of the text."¹¹¹ To move the preface into the prologue of his narrative is a clear manifestation of such a displacement, energization and re-embodiment. In *Rouputuan*, for instance, the prologue discusses the author's purpose in writing the novel, an issue

¹¹⁰Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, p. 128.

¹¹¹Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980), p. 144.

traditionally and previously dealt with in the preface, outside of the narrative proper. The prologue's essay style and its concentration on the subject of fiction-making strongly suggests the prologue registers on an entirely different mode—a mode of criticism instead of mode of narrative. To displace or move the preface into the domain of fictional text not only makes the novel's own criticism a part of the story but also activates an auto-communication between the narrative and the critical text, adding layers of meaning to the narrative and creating ironic discrepancy between the two. The prologue of the story "Wenguo lou" (聞過樓 "Corrigibility House", *Shi'er lou*, 12) is also a case in point. The story is concerned with the recluse, a popular theme in Chinese literature. However, the story is not introduced by a conventional prologue in a form of a mini-story or discursive discussion on relevant issues. Rather unusually, the story is preceded by a memoir by the author about his personal experiences in the countryside during the civil war. This kind of information is also traditionally found in the preface. By moving the author's account of his personal, inner feelings into the prologue, the memoir implants an element of subjectivity into the story, and thus the fictional hero becomes the author's self projection.

Like what Sima Qian did in turning the exegetical commentary into a mode of subjective and reflexive comment for his historical writing, Li Yu and others also changed the fictional criticism of "pingdian" into an outer plane to install the author's voice. Both Li Yu's novels possess post-chapter critiques,

one of the forms of “pingdian” commentary, but delivered by no other than Li Yu himself. In the case of *Rouputuan*, for example, except for Chapter Eleven, all of the twenty chapters attach a post-commentary at the end. Based on the functions that these commentaries serve and the ways in which they relate to the text proper, they can be classified into five categories: (1) discussing the fiction-making process; (2) explaining the implied author’s intention; (3) making remarks about the author-narrator’s comments; (4) interacting with the implied reader; (5) commenting on the characters and development of the plot. More importantly, with its self-conscious nature, the post-chapter commentary communicates with the narrative and brings the parodies, inversions, and the formal and rhetorical novelties of Li Yu’s work to the fore.

In Li Yu’s plays, the way of auto-communication is quite different from what presented in his fiction. On stage, the form of self-commentary has to be changed because a performing art has its own rules. Realizing the generic difference between the fictional and dramatic genres, Li Yu dramatized the authorial voice in his plays. The reflexive comments about the work are often spelled out by his characters, especially by the minor roles. The background singing usually found in the opening and closing part of the drama is another channel of Li Yu’s personal opinions and artistic concerns. We will come back to this issue in Chapter Three, so I will not go further here.

CHAPTER TWO

GENERATING NEW FROM OLD

In one of Li Yu's finest stories "He gui lou" 鶴歸樓 ("Homing Crane Lodge," *Shi'er lou*, 9), the talented young hero Duan Yuchu 段玉初 is sent by the emperor to deliver tribute to the Jin for stopping military harassment. Imprisoned by the Jin and with little hope of returning home soon, Duan writes a poem to his beautiful and longing wife:

Your weaving showed a wife's affection;
But away with love—it's only wise!
All our passions end in parting;
Alone, I'll see suspicion rise.

文回錦織倒妻思，
斷絕恩情不學痴：
云雨賽歡終有別，
分時怒向任猜疑。¹

Ironically, his wife is irritated by Duan's callous attitude and believes him to be the most cold-hearted man in history. She reads the poem as a letter of separation, a reasonable response one would think. Yet, surprisingly, when he is reunited with his wife eight years later, Duan claims to be the most loving husband in the world, and invokes the very same poem as testimony to his love. As Duan puts it, the poem acts as a "magic charm" for his lonely wife, protecting her from the torment of separation. He shows her that, reading the poem backwards completely reverses the meaning. The new version reads,

¹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992), Vol. 9, p. 223. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *A Tower for the Summer Heat* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 204.

Suspicion and doubt I caused to rise,
 But our love I'll renew once I'm home.
 Cold-hearted, I spurned your affection,
 But with love I now weave a palindrome.

疑猜任向怒時分，
 別有終歡賽雨云；
 痴學不情思絕斷，
 思妻倒織錦回文。²

In an instant we see the poem turn from a negation of passion to an assurance of love; the wife's misunderstanding becomes a perfect appreciation, transforming an anti-romantic hero into a sensitive and loving character.

This reversal does not only take place on the linguistic level. As we know this story is a transposed version of the famous Su Huiniang 蘇惠娘 story. In the original story, the gifted Su Huiniang weaves a five-color brocade of palindrome to express her feelings for her estranged husband in an attempt to win him back. It is a story of rekindled passion: the brocade of the palindrome, although it can be decoded into two hundred individual poems, sends only a single message—the message of love and wanting of love. But in Li Yu's story, by switching the roles of husband and wife and by encoding contradictory meanings—both the negation and assurance of love—into the palindrome, he brings out the irony of love and longing. This critical attitude toward romantic love takes the reader to a further reversal—the upsetting of the thematic convention of romanticism in Chinese literature.

The rhetoric of inversion then threatens hierarchy and direction,

²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 232. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *A Tower for the Summer Heat*, p. 216.

reconfigures our way of thinking and perception, and brings out the self-reflexive nature of communication. Like the palindrome, a magic charm made by the witty young man for his wife, Li Yu creates a magic charm for his reader—the charm of inversion.

Inversion as a literary device is not new in Chinese literature. What makes Li Yu special is that he uses this rhetoric as a mechanism of generating new from old, unfamiliar from familiar, idiosyncrasy from stereotype, and self from other.

FAN'AN WENZHANG VS. PARODY

In her book *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*, Susan Stewart indicates that in any culture there are basically two different kinds of domains: the domain of common sense and the domain of nonsense. “While sense is sensory, tangible, real, nonsense is ‘a game of vaporous,’ unrealizable, a temporary illusion. While sense is ‘common’ and ‘down to earth,’ nonsense is ‘perfect,’ ‘pure,’ an untouched surface of meaning whose every gesture is reflexive.”³ In other words, nonsense is the domain of art and literature, a realm that anticipates play and manipulation.

Among the several ways of making nonsense, inversion is frequently used in both Western and Chinese culture. If we see culture as a way of classifying and organizing experience, establishing norms and boundaries, then

³Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 4.

inversion is the negation, cancellation, and reformation of that process. Inversion may be seen to be inherently ironic because it produces both a doubling and a contradiction. The ambivalent and paradoxical nature of inversion then provides a metamessage that splits itself in a reflexive gesture, transforming and reorganizing the boundaries of its own discourse. Here we come to the common ground of *fan'an wenzhang* and parody.

Fan'an wenzhang, a term popularized in the late Ming and Early Qing dynasties, takes inversion as its formal operative. The inversion can be internal, within the boundaries of the narrative or literary text, as well as "trans-contextual," engaging two texts at the same time. The internal type was widely used as a writing technique inverting the expected narrative action or pattern, such as a "reversal of fortune," indicated by Zhang Zhupo in his commentary of the *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (*The Golden Lotus*):

There are two characters in the *Chin P'ing Mei* [*Jin Ping Mei*] to whom the author devotes special attention and whose final fates are also noteworthy: Ch'un-mei [Chunmei] and Tai-an [Dai'an]. While she is still only one of the maidservants, the author indicates in numerous passages that Ch'un-mei possesses a sense of self-esteem and ambition that sets her apart from the others. While he is still only one among the many menservants, Tai-an is described by the author in passage after passage as being adept at pleasing people in everything he does. Why does the author insist on having Ch'un-mei become a lady of rank and Tai-an a man of wealth and position at the end of the book? In order that his novel on the theme of "heat and cold" should illustrate the reversal of fortunes.

《金瓶》內，有兩個人為特特用意寫之，其結果亦皆可觀：如春梅與玳安是也。於同作丫環時，必用幾遍筆墨，描寫春梅心高志大，氣象不同。於眾小廝內，必用層層筆墨，描寫玳安色色可人。後文春梅作夫人，

玳安作員外，作者必欲其如此何哉？見得一部炎涼書中翻案故也。⁴

By pinpointing the “reversal of fortunes,” Zhang Zhupo reveals the irony of the *Jin Ping Mei*, which, according to him, is the paradox of heat and cold.

Another example of internal inversion Zhang Zhupo identifies in the *Jin Ping Mei* is the reversal of plot. Chapter Eleven begins with the harmonious relationship between Ximen Qing’s 西門慶 Third Lady Meng Yulou 孟玉樓 and his Fifth Lady Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, but suddenly a terrible fight erupts between Pan Jinlian and Ximen’s Fourth Lady Sun Xue’e 孫雪鵲, ending in Ximen Qing 西門慶 beating Sun. According to Zhang Zhupo, the former part of the narrative, focusing on Meng Yulou’s tolerant and self-restrained behavior, is a nice inversion of the latter part delineating Pan Jinlian’s jealous and bullying conduct.⁵

This device has been also identified by other late Ming and early Qing theoreticians, although they may have used different terms in referring to it. In their critical discourse “How to read *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*,” Mao Zonggang and Mao Lun list 40 sudden reversals of narrative actions employed in the *Sanguo zhi yanyi* with a sort of formulaic fashion. Instead of using

⁴Zhang Zhupo, “Piping diyi qishu *Jin ping mei* dufa,” *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian*, eds. Hou Zhongyi and Wang Rumei (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1986), p. 27. The English translation is David T. Roy’s from David L. Rolston ed. *How to Read the Chinese Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 209.

⁵See Zhang Zhupo’s post-chapter commentary to chapter 11 of *Jin Ping Mei* in *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian*, p. 76.

fan'an, they preferred the terms that are much more general but rather vague, such as *bian* 變 and *xing yi dou zhuan yu fu feng fan* 星移斗轉雨覆風翻, meaning “having the stars move, the Plough turn, the rain deluge and the wind overturn .”

However, judging from the examples provided by the Maos, there is no doubt that it is the ironic inversion rather than the general suspension which is the Maos' main focus here, as they put it,

At first Ho Chin plots to eliminate the eunuchs, but in the end the eunuchs kill Ho Chin, which is a reversal. At first Lü Pu is an adherent of Ting Yüan, but in the end Lü Pu kills Ting Yüan, which is a reversal. At first Tung Cho attracts Lü Pu into his service, but in the end Lü Pu kills Tung Cho, which is a reversal.....

本是何進謀誅宦官，卻弄出宦官殺何進，則一變；本是呂布助丁原，卻弄出呂布殺丁原，則一變；本是董卓結呂布，卻弄出呂布殺董卓，則一變.....⁶

The function of the internal inversion, obviously, is to project the ironic discrepancy and ambivalent meaning of the narrative, a rhetoric prominent in late Ming and early Qing literati novels. The pragmatic purpose of this particular device has been antecedently noticed by Andrew Plaks. In his influential *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, Plaks pays special attention to the various rhetorical devices which generate irony. Among them, the internal inversion is identified as a major mechanism for creating irony. He says,

⁶Mao Zonggang, “Du Sanguo zhi fa,” *Sanguo yanyi huiping ben* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1986) Vol. 1, p. 12. The English translation is David T. Roy's from David L. Rolston ed. *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, p. 174.

Although the specific nature of the historical sources of *San-guo* leaves less room here than in the other three novels for manipulating such details as proper names and chronology, the author still manages to employ a wide range of devices to reinforce his ironic perspective—from the placement of single loaded words to the insertion of larger units such as quoted speeches and documents...However...many of these ironies are generated by figural reflection and plot reverse within the text itself—principally through the creation of ironic resonances among recurrent figures in the narrative.⁷

If an ironic vision is superimposed onto the narrative itself by internal inversion, then in the trans-contextual version of *fan'an wenzhang*, a critical distance is added between a pre-existing text and a new incorporating work. This distance also signals irony, but here it is a product of bitextual synthesis.

Again, the *Jin Ping Mei* possesses trans-contextual inversions in abundance. For instance, the first chapter of the novel that relates Ximen Qing's taking an oath of brotherhood with his "buddies" is actually an ingenious ironic reversal of the first chapter of the *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (*The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) which narrates Liu Bei's 劉備 becoming the sworn brother of Guan Yu 關羽 and Zhang Fei 張飛. In the *Sanguo* story, Liu, Guan, and Zhang are bounded by mutual faith and aspiration. Although from different backgrounds, they all respond to the recruitment of the imperial court to pacify the Yellow Scarves' uprising. "To cultivate the friendship of the boldest spirits of the empire" (好交遊天下豪杰) and "to have great ambition" (素懷大志) are the shared qualities of the three heroes. These characters are clearly

⁷Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 404. Emphasis added.

revealed from their pledge:

We three, though of separate ancestry, join in brotherhood here, combining strength and purpose, to relieve the present crisis. We will perform our duty to the Emperor and protect the common folk of the land. We are not hoping to be together always but hereby vow to die the selfsame day. Let shining Heaven above and the fruitful land below bear witness to our resolve. May Heaven and man scourge whoever fails this vow.

念劉備、關羽、張飛雖然異姓，結為兄弟，同心協力，救困扶危，上報國家，下安黎庶，不求同年同月同日生，只愿同年同月同日死。皇天後土，以鑒此心。背義忘恩，天人同戮。⁸

It takes one hero to recognize another (英雄識英雄). The author romanticizes the joining in brotherhood of Liu, Guan, and Zhang in such a way that it actually becomes a much-told legend and a stock theme, even a part of the “hero code” in the novels of military romance such as the *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (*The Water Margin*).

In the story of Ximen Qing taking an oath of brotherhood with his “buddies,” everything is once again turned upside down. First of all, Ximen Qing and his nine “buddies,” in contrast to true heroes like Liu, Guan, and Zhang, are a bunch of hacks and rascals. Second, the reason they join in brotherhood has nothing to do with lofty aspirations such as “performing duty to the Emperor” and “protecting the common folk of the land.” Ximen Qing wants the brotherhood to support him in his personal and family affairs, (ironically, however, all of Ximen’s “brothers” are to betray him as soon as he

⁸*Sanguo yanyi huiping ben*, Vol. 1, p. 6. The English translation is Moss Roberts', in *Three Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 9.

dies). The ten local ruffians and rascals are tied together by nothing but money and power. Yet, they claim to follow the model of Liu, Guan, and Zhang:

IN THE EMPIRE OF THE GREAT SUNG, THE PROVINCE OF SHAN-TUNG,
PREFECTURE OF TUNG-P'ING AND DISTRICT OF CH'ING HO

The faithful, Hsi-men Ch'ing, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Hua Tzŭ-hsü, Sun T'ien-hua, Chu Shih-nien, Yün Li-shou, Wu Tien-en, Ch'ang Chih-chieh and Pai Lai-Kuang, here assembled, do wash their hands and burn incense to ask a blessing. The oath of fidelity sworn within the Peach Orchard is the model of all loyalty; with humble hearts we seek to take it as our example, and strive to emulate the spirit that inspired it. The love of Pao and Kuan was as the depth of the ocean, and animated by the same spirit, we hope to imitate their solemn purpose. The peoples of the four oceans may yet be as brethren and they of different names as of the same blood. *Therefore*, in this period of Cheng Ho—Year—Month—Day, devoutly offering meat offerings of pig and sheep before the phoenix chariot, we humbly bow before this holy altar and make our supplications. We make our obeisance unto the Highest Heaven, where in a golden palace dwell the Jade King, the Guardian Angels of the Five Directions, the deities of City and Village, and all the spirits who come and go. We beseech them to accept the incense of our sincerity. May they deign to protect us in all our doings. We, Ch'ing, etc...though born each at a different hour, pray that death may find us united. May the bond between us remain ever unbroken. Our pleasures will we take together, and in time of need will we succor one another. The memory of our friendship shall be ever green, and in our wealth will we remember the unfortunate. Thus, at the last, shall our confidence be confirmed: thus, coming with the sun and going with the moon, shall our fellowship be established as high as the heavens and as firm as the earth. Henceforth, from this our solemn act of friendship, may our love be eternal and our peace unending. May each of us enjoy length of days, and his household unceasing felicity. In Heaven alone do we place our trust, until our lives' end. In token whereof, we diligently set this down.

維大宋國山東東平府清河縣信士西門慶、應伯爵、謝希大、花子虛、孫天化、祝實念、云理守、吳典恩、常峙節、白賚光等，是日沐手焚香情旨。伏為桃園義重，眾心仰慕而敢效其風；管鮑情深，各姓追維而欲同其志。況四海皆可弟兄，豈異姓不如骨肉？是以涓今政和年月日，營備豬羊牲禮，鸞馭金資，專叩齋壇，虔誠請禱，拜投昊天金闕玉皇上帝，

五方值日功曹，本縣城隍社令，過往一切神祇，仗此真香，普同鑒察。伏念慶等生雖異日，死冀同時，欺盟言之永固；安樂與共，顛沛相扶，思締結以常新。必富貴常念貧窮，乃始終有所依倚。情共日往以月來，誼若天高而地厚。伏愿自盟以後，相好無憂，更祈人人增有永之年，戶戶慶無疆之福。凡在時中，全叨覆庇，謹疏。⁹

This pledge, apparently, imitates the pledge made by Liu, Guan, and Zhang. In fact the whole story is an imitation, but one with a critical ironic distance. By using trans-contextual inversion, or *fan'an*, the author of the *Jin Ping Mei*, not only caricatures the stock theme of “joining in brotherhood,” but allows the author to combine sober criticism with sour nostalgia. A similar task is attempted by Li Yu in his *Rouputuan*, in which the protagonist takes an oath of brotherhood with a thief in order to make a sexual conquest.

What is interesting is that the plot of “joining in brotherhood” is neither in the earlier edition or *cihua* 詞話 edition of the *Jin Ping Mei*, but instead was incorporated into the Chongzhen's (1628-44) 崇禎 edition as well as Zhang Zhupo's edition. If the *cihua* edition did appear earlier than the Chongzhen edition, the incorporation of the “joining in brotherhood” plot probably represents an intentional strategy by the editor or compiler to employ the rhetoric of *fan'an wenzhang*.

Chen Chen concludes his novel *Shuihu houzhuan* 水滸後傳 (*The Sequel of Shuihu*) with mass marriages, sarcastically employing the cliché of “scholar-beauty romance”. He also intends to undercut both the background text as well

⁹Xinke xiuxiang piping *Jin Ping Mei*, in Li Yu quanji, Vol. 12, p. 15. The English translation is Clement Egerton's, in *The Golden Lotus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1957) Vol. 1, pp. 18-19.

as his own. The remote target of his irony, doubtlessly, is the misogyny of the *haohan* 好漢 stereotype underscored in the *Shuihu zhuan*. Resisting sexual temptation is part of the “heroic code” that almost all the *Shuihu* heroes follow. Either the conjugal relationship is totally neglected or becomes an obstacle to the heroes’ great cause; women’s charm is represented as a negative and disastrous force. Beautiful women, if not themselves willing to conduct adultery (in the cases of Pan Jinlian, Pan Qiaoyun 潘巧云, and Yan Poxi 閻婆惜), invite calamity for the heroes (in the case of Lin Chong’s 林沖 wife). So Li Kui 李逵 cannot bear the sight of a beautiful girl; Yang Xiong 楊雄 and Lu Junyi 盧俊義 are indifferent to their wives’ sexual demands; Wu Song 武松 and Lu Zhishen 魯智深 simply join the monkhood, showing a complete detachment toward women. While this sexual hostility is praised and honored, an attachment to the opposite sex, or even an attraction to women, is ridiculed. Thus the only lecher among the one hundred and eight heroes, Wang Ying 王英, is portrayed as less heroic and is constantly scorned by his comrade-in-arms.

This misogynistic pattern is intentionally reversed in *Shuihu houzhuan* where Chen Chen presents us with plots such as Hua Fengchun 花逢春, the son of a *Shuihu* hero Hua Rong 花榮 and one of the central heroes himself in *Houzhuan*, marries into the royal family of Siam in Chapter Thirty Nine. The treatment of these scenes in *Houzhuan*, as opposed to the stereotypical slaughtering of the adulterous women in *Shuihu*, reminds us of some of the clichés of “scholar-beauty romance” (within the text, one of the central couples,

Hua Fengchun and Princess Yuzhi 玉枝 are actually referred to as *caizi jiaren* “beauty and scholar”). And this anti-heroism or inversion of misogynous heroes is not only spelled out in the novel but also concludes in a series of mass marriages, so that all the single chieftains and soldiers are properly matched and tie the knot.

To readers who are familiar with *Shuihu* and the generic rules of military romance, the double irony Chen Chen encodes in this trans-contextual inversion is not too difficult to detect: whereas the misogyny of the *haohan* (好漢) stereotype demonstrated in *Shuihu* is undermined by the inversion of mass marriages, the seemingly happy ending—*Houzhuan* heroes’ willingness to retain sovereignty over Siam and their humble domestic settlement (compared to *Shuihu* heroes’ lofty ambitions of taking over China)—may also be the target of the author’s mockery.

We could go on listing more examples of trans-contextual inversions employed in late Ming and early Qing literati literature, but it is Li Yu who really became the major practitioner and master in this mode of writing, whom we wish to concentrate on. However, before beginning a detailed examination of his works, we still need to make a “detour”: to further define the term of *fan’an wenzhang* from a comparative perspective.

The preceding analysis of trans-contextual inversions may ring a familiar bell to Western readers acquaint with parody, a prevalent rhetorical device and literary genre in Western literature. In many ways, the trans-contextual *fan’an*

wenzhang is so reminiscent of parody that many Western scholars have adopted the term when describing certain Chinese literary works. But there has been little effort to define the term in a Chinese context. Here, we will lay out the common ground between *fan'an wenzhang* and parody in the hope of serving two purposes : to define the terms and to categorize Li Yu's works more accurately.

Rooted in classical European literature, parody has a long history. Depending heavily on existing literary models and on historical context, parody cannot be defined in transhistorical terms. However, certain common denominators for parody can still be identified in all ages and contexts. In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon defines parody as follows,

Parody is repetition, but repetition that includes differences: it is imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways. Ironic versions of "trans-contextualization" and inversion are its major formal operatives, and the range of pragmatic ethos is from scornful ridicule to reverential homage.¹⁰

Working with this definition and with other theories of parody, four common denominators can be recognized in terms of its rhetorical strategy, pragmatic purpose, readership, and referentiality. The rhetorical strategy of parody, first of all, is antiphrasis, that is, the creation of a critical ironic distance, or the establishing of a discrepancy between the surface and implied meaning of a text. Its pragmatic purpose can be either pejorative or laudatory, or somewhere in between. As a sophisticated literary mode, parody needs a reading public which

¹⁰Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (New York and London: Methuen, Inc., 1985), p. 37.

has absorbed the knowledge necessary to understand it. Most important of all, parody is, by nature, self-reflexive. As a parasitic literary genre, parody imitates, but instead of imitating the objective world of reality, it holds a mirror up to art. Therefore, the target of parody is intramural rather than extramural.

The trans-contextual version of *fan'an wenzhang* possesses all four of these characteristics of parody. First of all, like parody, the rhetorical strategy of the trans-contextual *fan'an wenzhang* demands irony. In the Chinese cultural context, although irony has never been as prominent as it has been in the Western tradition, the applications of *qubi* 曲筆 (oblique diction), *shibi* 史筆 (the rhetoric of historian), and *chunqiu bifa* 春秋筆法 (the rhetoric of *The Spring and Autumn Annals*) are canonized in Chinese historiography in order to introduce a discrepancy between the surface and the implied meanings of historical texts. Because of the strong influence that Chinese historiography had to bear on Chinese fiction, this rhetoric was adopted in fictional writing and criticism in the late Ming and early Qing period, which were partially responsible for the thick overlay of irony in the so-called literati novels. So when the notion of *fan'an wenzhang* was popularized, the concept of irony became almost as sophisticated as in its Western counterpart.

Second, as far as the pragmatic purpose is concerned, the trans-contextual *fan'an* also coincides with the function of parody. Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody is based on a modern version rather than a traditional conception. She explains that this modern form of parody does not always permit one of the

texts (either the parodic foreground or the parodied background) to fare any better or worse than the others. Modern parody then can cut both ways; it can be playful as well as belittling, constructive as well as destructive. Thus what characterizes modern parody is actually a “combination of respectful homage and an ironically thumbed nose.”¹¹ The irony of the trans-contextual *fan'an wenzhang*, as we indicated before, can also be double-directed, possibly targeting both the background and foreground text. But as a major practitioner in the mode of *fan'an wenzhang*, Li Yu's attitude towards the original text or the pre-existing text tends more to ridicule than to respectful homage.

Third, in the transitional period between the late Ming and early Qing, Chinese culture displays a self-consciousness in almost all its art forms. A so-called literati literature and a highly educated readership were established within non-canonical genres such as drama and fiction. As with sixteenth-century Europe, this period saw the rise of ideological instability and challenges to the status quo. The conscious endeavor made by the literati of the time is to reconstruct their relationships with the great models of the past. The literary milieu of the late Ming and early Qing certainly prepared its readers for appreciating the sophisticated rhetoric of *fan'an wenzhang*. And this may help explain why Li Yu's work was appreciated more in his lifetime than in the later Qing period when this critical attitude towards the literary tradition completely disappeared.

¹¹For detailed discussion, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, pp. 30-50.

Finally, a major difference occurs between the internal and trans-contextual *fan'an wenzhang* : the latter involves imitation, of a kind that recontextualizes, synthesizes, and reworks the imitated text and its conventions. With this kind of imitation, narrative is presented as only narrative, as its own reality—that is, as artifice. Like parody, the trans-contextual *fan'an* works as an internal self-reflecting mirror that points to the literariness of the text and awakens the reader's consciousness of the art.

The trans-contextual version of *fan'an wenzhang* then exhibits many affinities to Western parody. The similarities between the two are so striking that we do not hesitate to say that the parodic mode of writing (as a rhetorical concept as well as a kind of literary praxis) does exist in the Chinese literary system, although it is only a minor and deviant part of this system.

The emergence of this parodic mode of writing, of course, has its own specific context. It can only happen in the late Ming and early Qing periods, because "much of the cultural activity of this period reveals a struggle to define the relationship of the latter-day artist to his ancient heritage."¹² Moreover, under the influence of sixteenth-century Neo-Confucian thought, the literati literature had been preoccupied with self-cultivation, which led to "the exploration of the boundaries and substance of the self."¹³ It is only natural that against this cultural background, a parodic mode of writing, (as a self-conscious

¹²Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, p. 51.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 52.

and self-critical art with its aesthetic opponent contained within its own rhetorical structure) come to be born. But the art of *fan'an wenzhang* did not reach its apex until its master Li Yu arrived.

THE THEMATIC FAN'AN OF LI YU'S WORKS

As one of the most versatile and prolific writers of his time, Li Yu left us two collections of vernacular short stories, two novels, and ten plays. Like his contemporary Jin Shengtan, Li Yu believes that fiction and drama enjoy a very close relationship, bearing similarities in terms of both artistic technique and literary function. In this respect, Li Yu not only named one of his collections of short stories *Wusheng xi* (literally means "drama without sound), but also adapted four of his short stories into plays. To him, "fiction is the blueprint of drama" (稗官是傳奇藍本).¹⁴

Li Yu's fiction and drama basically share the same set of themes: the proper role of sexual love, domestic moral issues, and the doctrine of karmic cause and effect—the themes that are popular in *chuanqi* drama, *huaben xiaoshuo*, and *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo* (the scholar and the beauty novels). But Li Yu deliberately reverses or reconstructs these stock themes so that they totally subvert the conventions and norms they were used to uphold in earlier texts. He adds supernatural elements as well as military and political dimensions to his plays, although these remain in the background to serve the convention of

¹⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 326.

comedy and never stand out as the main themes. To avoid redundancy, I am going to examine Li Yu's thematic *fan'an* in different genres under one heading.

The Paradox of Love

Romantic love, an age-old stock theme originated in the Tang tales, took on different variations in the late Ming and early Qing period. On the one hand, first in *chuanqi* drama (represented by Tang Xianzu's 湯顯祖 *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭) and later on in other literary genres, the spiritual force of *qing* was eulogized. Sexual love was sublimated to a transcendent dimension, becoming fascinating and powerful subject that inspired so many great writers, including the greatest master Cao Xueqin, the author of the eighteenth-century masterpiece *Hong lou Meng*. On the other hand, in *huaben xiaoshuo* (represented by Feng Menglong's *The Pearl Shirt*) a more mundane sexual love as a natural and powerful element of life was emphasized. This daring and frank appreciation of sensuality, balanced with a presentation of true passion, moved Chinese literature in the direction of a convincing realism. Moreover, the cliché of ideal match between the talented and the beautiful was further conventionalized in both *chuanqi* drama and *huaben xiaoshuo* and became eventually polarized in the *caizi jiaren* genre. Here, sexual love becomes stylized as a destiny made in heaven: if one is an unfeigned *caizi*, he will be given a true *jiaren* by Heaven. This is the inviolable divine law. As a result of this "divine law," sexual fulfillment becomes a quest story that tests the hero or

heroine's both mental and physical endowments. All of these popular themes appeared in Li Yu's works, but he played freely and endlessly with the various polarizations of love—love and lust, puritanism and libertinism, asceticism and sensuality, romanticism and rationalism—so that all the thematic norms and conventions established in these three genres were transposed into something else.

The Devaluation of "Qing"

The obsession with *qing* in late Ming Chinese literature began with Tang Xianzu, one of the best playwrights in China. His masterpiece *Mudan ting* (*The Peony Pavilion*) is a play about sexual-awakening of a young maiden, Du Liniang 杜麗娘. In a dream, she falls in love with a young man she has never met, then dies for this unfulfilled love only to come back to life again when her "disembodied wandering soul" (遊魂) finds her dream-lover. Du Liniang is sentimental and passionate—a romantic soul (*duoqing zhong* 多情種). Her sexual desire is awakened by reading a love poem from *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Book of Poetry*) and intensified by viewing and experiencing the beauty of spring. "The spring a rippling thread of gossamer gleaming sinuous in the sun borne idly across the court" (曩晴絲吹來閑庭院，搖蕩春如線).¹⁵ Like the unbroken spring sunlight, she thinks of love ceaselessly and penetratingly, transforming it

¹⁵ Tang Xianzu, "Mudan ting" *Tang Xianzu xiqu ji* (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1981), p. 267.

into an obsessive and transcendent passion. Liniang's love is so powerful that it not only unifies her and her lover in the never-never land of dream, then in the twilight zone between human and ghost, but also eventually brings her back to the human world for her lover, Liu Mengmei 柳夢梅.

Central to this theme is the power of love as a spiritual and transcendent force. Liniang's romantic obsession is, obviously, eulogized and celebrated by the author. As Tang Xianzu puts it in his preface to *Mudan Ting*:

Love is of origins unknown, yet it runs deep. The living can die for it, and through it the dead can come back to life. That which the living cannot die for, or which cannot resurrect the dead, is not love [*ch'ing*] at its most supreme. Love in a dream: why can't it be real? As if there is any dearth in this world of dreaming ones [or figures one dreams up]! Those for whom love is fulfilled only with service on the pillow, those who have time for intimacy only upon leaving public office—they are squarely in the realm of form and body...Alas! Events of the human world cannot be contained by the span of the human life. I am not one of those who have attained final understanding, who can constantly use reason [*li*] to apprehend all things! How little it is known that that which cannot be in the realm of reason simply has to be in the realm of love!

情不知所起，一往而深。生者可以死，死可以生。生而不可與死，死而不可復生者，皆非情之至也。夢中之情，何必非真？天下豈少夢中之人耶？必因薦枕而成親，待挂冠而為密者，皆形骸之論也...嗟夫！人世之事，非人世所可盡。自非通人，恆以理相格耳！第云理之所必無，安知情之所必有耶！¹⁶

In this preface as well as in the play itself, Tang grants *qing* the supremacy of sexual love and distinguishes it from, on the one hand, the cold rationalism of

¹⁶Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting* (Xianggang: Zhonghua shuju xianggang fenju, 1975) p. 1. The English translation is Wai-yee Li's from her *Enchantment and Disenchantment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 50.

li 理; and on the other, its opposite, pure carnal desire.

Since love goes beyond both metaphysical and physical worlds of reality, it becomes a mysterious, powerful, and surmountable agency that is in some ways independent of the object of desire. In the *Mudan ting*, Du Liniang first meets her lover in a dream. The object of her desire, Liu Mengmei, is dream like to her, comes from nowhere, and is even without an identity. In a sense, he is a lover in abstraction. In the play, this independent quality of *qing* is also borne out by the characterization of Liu Mengmei. As Wai-yee Li points out in her book *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, Liu is “a conventional and relatively bland figure,” but the intensity of Liniang’s passion “is not determined by the character of Liu. She wants to die for love and would have it so. Whether Liu can rise to the occasion and be a deserving partner is a moot point.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, there is something about Liu Mengmei that attracts Liniang, and that is his tenderness and affection. She confesses to him: “I love you because you are young and full of affection, which causes me sleepless [at night]” (是看上你年少多情，迤逗俺睡魂難貼).¹⁸

A similar depiction of *qing* can be found in Ling Mengchu’s short story “The Elder Sister’s Disembodied Wandering Soul Fulfills Her Love Desire; the Younger Sister Recovers from Sickness and Continues the Previous Marriage” (大姊遊魂完宿願；小姨病起續前緣, *Pai an jing qi*, 23). In this stor,

¹⁷Wai-yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 53.

¹⁸Tang Xianzu, “*Mudan ting*” *Tang Xianzu xiqu ji*, p. 377.

heroine Xingniang 興娘 is also a “disembodied wandering soul,” her love for the hero is realized not by coming back to life herself, but by attaching her soul onto her younger sister’s body in order to consummate sexual union with her lover. As the agent of love as well as the object of desire for the hero, Xingniang’s existence is mysterious and intangible. But this is not important, all that matters is the existence of *qing*; as the author puts it, “in this human world, only *qing* is eternal”(人生只有這個情字是不泯的).¹⁹

This kind of celebration of *qing*, from the late Ming onwards, has become one of the central themes of Chinese literature. Volumes of literary pieces contribute to this subject. Feng Menglong even compiled a collection entitled *Qingshi* 情史 (*Anatomy of Love*) to survey the causes, manifestations, and consequences of different forms of love. But the popularization of this theme, of course, also signaled its conventionalization. Li Yu was the first writer to break away from this convention. In his play *Shen luan jiao* 慎鸞交 (*Be Careful about Love*) and a similar short story “He gui lou” he devalues the transcendent power of *qing* and the obsessive romanticism hallowed by Tang Xianzu in favor of a more rational, practical, preserved, and controlled kind of love.

Like *Mudan ting*, “He gui lou” is also a story where love “brings the dying back to life” (起死回生), but it perfectly inverts Du Liniang’s tale. In Li Yu’s story, true love does not cause death, it preserves life. As early as the opening poem of

¹⁹Ling Mengchu, *Pai an jingqi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), p. 403.

the story, the author questions the transcendent power of *qing*: “Have you never seen two lovers part in death? Their rosy youth once gone, they come no more” (不見人間死別離·朱顏一去難再歸).²⁰ Moreover, Li Yu’s story tells us, *qing* as an obsessive passion can be destructive and subversive! Therefore, to avoid calamity, true lovers should be prudent about their blessings and restrain their passions.

This story delineates two friends’ opposing attitudes toward love. Duan Yuchu 段玉初 (a pun for “severing one’s desires at the initial stage” 斷慾初), a cool-headed and sensible young man, treats love with prudence and rationality. Living in wartime, when separations between husbands and wives are common, Duan believes that ardent passions cannot last long; as the old saying goes “a loving marriage doesn’t last into old age” (恩愛夫妻不到頭).²¹ Thus, despite marrying the most beautiful girl in the capital, he makes sure their bedchamber passion during their honeymoon is not too exuberant; after being forced to part with his wife and head for enemy country, he behaves almost heartlessly, refusing to show any tenderness and attachment toward his wife and even enraging her by refusing to carry the clothing she made for him and hanging a board inscribed “Homing Crane Lodge” (an allusion to Ding Lingwei’s 丁令威 flying back home in the form of a crane after he dies) in the upper room in which they live—indicating that he will not be returning alive. Even the

²⁰Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 204.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 212.

poem that he sends his wife from enemy country appears to be a letter of separation (that it is actually a palindrome containing a completely opposite meaning hidden in it, is only revealed after the couple's reunion). This seemingly callous behavior is a way of protecting his delicate wife from endless and painful longing. After being accused of being cold-hearted by his friend, Duan reasons:

You must surely be the most naive person in the world! No wonder you kept and suffered all that extra hardship! What young women fear most in life is loneliness, and what they love best is excitement—except when the husband dies and the wife, with no one to long for, resigns herself to widowhood. If I had wantonly left her pining for me, she'd inevitably have suffered for a few years and then died of grief. Ours was a very loving marriage, but we were forced to part. If I'd shown her something of what I felt and caused her to miss me so badly that she dreamt about our lovemaking, my departure would have been a draft of poison consigning her to an early grave. If I managed to return and wanted to resume our marriage, I couldn't do so. Far better to pick a quarrel, pretend I didn't care for her, and leave in a huff. Naturally her desires will cool, she won't hanker after the pleasure we enjoyed, and she'll find her loneliness easier to bear. As the ancients said, 'Condemn them to death and they'll survive.' The misery I inflicted on her was designed precisely to save her life.

這等看來，你是個老實到底之人，怪不得留戀妻孥，多受了許多磨折。但凡少年女子，最怕的是淒涼，最喜的是鬧熱，只除非丈夫死了，沒得思量，方才情願守寡。若叫她沒緣沒故做個熬孤守寡之人，少不得熬上几年定要郁郁而死。我和她兩個平日甚是綢繆，不得已而相別，若還在臨行之際又做些情態出來，使她念念不忘，把顛倒鸞鳳之情形諸夢寐，這分明是一劑毒藥，要逼她早赴黃泉。萬一有個生還之日，要與她重做夫妻也不能夠了。不若尋些事故，與她爭鬧一場，假做無情，悻悻而別，她自然冷了念頭，不想從前的好處，那些淒涼日子就容易過了。古人云：“置死地而後生。”我頓挫她的去處，正為要全活她。²²

Expecting the worst, the couple's fortune turn out for the best: after eight years of

²²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 227. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *A Tower for the Summer Heat*, p. 209. Emphasis added.

torment in a foreign country, Duan returns to his resentful but healthy wife. His eloquent explanation turns his wife's bitterness into joy and their regained nuptial happiness is beyond words.

In contrast to Duan, his best friend Yu Zichang 郁自昌 (a pun for self-emanating desires 愁自昌) is the incarnation of *qing*. He has all the qualities of a romantic hero—gentleness, attentiveness, and passion; he is devoted to his beautiful wife in any possible way; yet he cannot save her from dying of grief, a depression caused by pining for him. After suffering the same eight years of torment as Duan in foreign lands and battlefields, constantly yearning and in anguish, Yu loses his youthfulness, and his wife, her life. The irony of this story works like this: the anti-romantic hero Duan Yuchu's cold rationalism preserves both his and his wife's lives so that they can enjoy a life-long happy marriage, while the stereotypical romantic hero Yu Zichang's ardent passion actually forfeits his love. The one who seemingly lacks *qing* regains love, while the one who is full of *qing* loses love.

This really is an ingenious story, with multi-type inversions at work simultaneously at different levels. On the linguistic level, as we have already mentioned, the palindrome is a graphic display of irony—speaking in two contradictory voices at once; on the textual level, the story is a reversal of fate—a perfect internal *fan'an* that brings out the paradoxical qualities of romanticism and rationalism; at an even higher level, the story represents a trans-contextual inversion that targets and devalues the conventions of *qing*. As Li Yu's

commentator Du Jun 杜濬 puts it: “The purpose behind this work is exceedingly profound and its course extremely convoluted, for it is a variant on the age-old romance” (此一樓也，用意最深，取徑最曲，是千古鍾情之變體).²³

More fascinating still, the story “He gui lou” is itself inverted in Li Yu’s own play *Shen luan jiao*. *Shen luan jiao* loosely reworks “He gui lou” story, in that the paradox of romanticism and rationalism once again appears as the main theme personified by a pair of heroes: the anti-romantic character Hua Zhonglang 華中郎 and his stereotypical romantic double Hou Jun 侯俊. But unlike Duan Yuchu and Yu Zichang, who are the initiators of love in “He gui lou,” Hua and Hou take on the role of being the “object of desire” in the play. Therefore the subject is inverted from “who gets love” into “who deserves love.” As what we might expect, Li Yu still favors the anti-romantic hero over the romantic stereotype, but he presents the story in the way that totally cancels the conventional self-generating and independent quality of *qing*.

The play tells the story of two beautiful courtesans who are searching for their ideal mates, to whom they plan to marry for life. After seeing through many fake “affectionate and dashing” 風流 lovers and experiencing uncountable short-term passionate affairs, Wang Youqiang 王又嬙 sets her sights on the cold-faced but warm hearted Hua Zhonglang, believing that Hua’s prudence and self-control will bring her long-term happiness. Wang’s view is not shared by her friend Deng Huijuan 鄧蕙娟, who holds conventional opinions about the

²³Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 233.

idealist lover and thus falls in love with the romantic Mr. Hou. The plot development and denouement of the play are pretty predictable and obvious once we are familiar with Li Yu's principle of inversion, thus there is no need for me to relate them here. What is worth mentioning though is one single scene, in which we will see that, for Li Yu's heroine, love is exactly about finding the desirable lover and that her feelings of love is determined by the "object of desires."

In Scene Nine "Xin gui" 心歸 ("Heart Returning"), Wang Youqiang first meets Hua, whom seems to be everything but romantic. What attracts Wang to Hua is neatly laid out by the author step by step. First, to Wang's gaze, Hua appears handsome and cultured. But, more importantly, he is very self-controlled: he is not interested in the silly games other young libertines play with prostitutes. Behaving prudently, he also avoids Wang Youqiang's passionate gaze. The next thing that Wang notices about Hua is his literary talent. A small contest initiated by Wang proves that Hua is the most talented of all the scholars and well versed in poetry. Up until now, Hua has been keeping his identity hidden. But knowing his identity is too important to her, Wang uses the excuse of borrowing his fan to find out what his name really is. When Hua finally withdraws himself from the party and returns home alone, Wang picks no one else as her sexual partner that night. Hua is now the only man who arouses her passion as well as being the only one deserving of her love.

Two other of Li Yu's works can be considered perfect parodies of the *qing* theme. In *Lian xiang ban* 憐香伴 (*Women in Love*), a play about lesbian love, Li Yu writes about the romantic obsession between two women who attempt to imitate the idealist *qing* portrayed in *Mudan ting*. The play opens with an unexpected meeting between two equally beautiful and talented young ladies. It traces the unconventional love shared by both women through a succession of events such as courting, parting, longing, and reunion under disguise, and finally ends with the two lesbian lovers marrying the same man. Many romantic clichés and stereotypes are brilliantly parodied. For example, the best place for the lovers to meet is a temple; a nun acts as their go-between; the lovers take an oath of marriage in their next life; one lover disguises herself in order to meet another in her household; and so on. In Scene 21 "Jianchou" 緘愁 ("Silent Longing"), the conversation between one of the two young ladies, Cao Yuhua 曹語花, and her maid best reveals the author's parodic intention:

- Maid: Mistress Fan is a woman, and she has everything you have and nothing you haven't..
- Cao: Stupid girl, you know only the cause of lovesickness; you don't grasp the difference between love and lust. From the viewpoint of the heart it is love, but from the viewpoint of the bedchamber it is lust. Only if you set your mind on the illicit passion of the bedchamber will you suffer from lovesickness, and even if you die of it, you'll be no romantic lover, just a lustful ghost. In all history, only Du Liniang is entitled to speak of love...
- Maid: Du Liniang may never have set eyes on her lover, but at least she had a romantic dream. You've not had any dream, Mistress. How do you account for that?
- Cao: If you want to talk of dreams, I've enjoyed more than Liniang ever had. I've dreamt of her every night since

we parted, she in her scholar's cap and gown, exactly
as on the day we took out vows.

(Singing)

In my dreams I walk beside her,
Hand clasping hand,
Her scholar's cap still on her head,
And we two in love like any husband and wife,
Though she is more romantic than any man.
Liniang's sweet dream may be hard to repeat,
But it is not so loving as mine, night after night.

貼旦： 那范大娘是個女人，她有的，你也有，你沒有的，她也沒有…

小旦： 呆丫頭，你只曉得“相思”二字的由來，卻不曉得“情慾”二字的分辨。從肝隔上起見的叫做情，從衽席上起見的叫做慾。若定為衽席私情才害相思，就害死了也只叫做個慾鬼，叫不得個情痴。從來只有杜麗娘才說得個“情”字…

貼旦： 杜麗娘雖不曾見男子，還做了個風流夢。小姐，你連夢也不曾做一個，甚麼來由？

小旦： 你若說起夢來，我比杜麗娘還覺受用。自從別她之後，哪一夜不夢見她？戴了方巾，穿了長領衣服，就象那日拜堂的光景。

【太師引】 俺和她夢中遊，常攜手，俏儒冠何曾去頭！
似夫妻一般恩愛，比男兒更覺風流。麗娘好夢難得又，爭似我夜夜綢繆！²⁴

Li Yu smoothly and effortlessly constructs an internal self-reflexive mirror for his work: on the one hand, by through the voice of Mistress Cao, he clearly indicates that his play is a mocking echo of Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*; while on the other hand, through the maid's speech, he lays bare the absurdities of the obsessive *qing* embodied by Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei and sharply ridicules them. This is actually a very good example of Li Yu's other authorial

²⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 4, pp. 69-70. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's from his *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard UP, 1988), pp. 142-143.

rhetoric—auto-communication—which will be examined fully in my final chapter.

A variation of the *qing* theme developed in the *huaben* genre is the extravagant love or fanatic devotion expressed by a humble suitor for his beautiful and elegant lady. The representative work is Feng Menglong's short story "The Oil Vendor" (賣油郎獨占花魁, *Xing shi hengyan*, 3), a typical tale of a good-hearted singsong girl. In Li Yu's short story "A Client Patronizes a Prostitute, and a Miserable 'Ghost' tells of Brothel Injustice" (人宿妓窮鬼訴嫖冤 *Wusheng xi*, 7) both the conventions surrounding the gallant attitude and the clichè of the good-hearted singsong girl are parodied.

"The Oil Vendor" tells of a handsome but poor young man who falls in love with the most famous courtesan of the town and wins her heart with his sterling quality and gallant attitude. The heroine, the Flower Queen (花魁娘子), is beautiful, sophisticated, forced into prostitution, and smart enough to save a good sum of money in order to redeem herself. She puts up with the skin-selling business solely because, for her, it is the only way to find a good man to marry. After she marries, she turns into a model wife and a capable helper who brings prosperity to the household. As a stereotypical character, the Flower Queen is not only reminiscent of her classic model Li Wa 李娃 from the Tang tale,²⁵ but also parallels Du Shiniang 杜十娘 and Zhao Chun'er 趙春兒 from

²⁵Li Wa is the heroine in the Tang tale "Li Wa zhuan."

Feng's other two stories.²⁶ The only thing distinguishing her from other singsong girls is that the Flower Queen chooses a poor oil vendor as her ideal lover and future husband, which is obviously of more appeal to the readers of the vernacular story.

However, the hero's success in pursuing the Flower Queen and the couple's ultimately happy marriage are mainly due to certain qualities peculiar to the hero himself. Qin Zhong (秦鍾), the male protagonist, is a young man who, despite his lower social position and poor education, really knows the meaning of romantic love and the way of gallantry (風流). In order to spend one night with the Flower Queen he does not hesitate to pay out all the money he has saved for more than one year and patiently waits about one month for his turn. When his day finally comes, he refuses to become annoyed by the drunken Flower Queen's tardiness. On the contrary, he untiringly waits for her all night. Because of his consideration and kindness, Qin Zhong wins the love and wealth of the Flower Queen at the end of the story.

In parodying this story, Li Yu not only reverses the events, but also displays to the reader the conflict existing between the worlds of fiction and reality. Li Yu's story takes its surface plot features from "The Oil Vendor" while actually ridiculing them, then inverts the original in all respects: a romantic love story becomes an anti-romantic comedy; the good-hearted singsong girl

²⁶Du Shiniang and Zhao Chun'er are the female protagonists in Feng's paired stories "Du Shiniang nu chen baibao xiang" 杜十娘怒沉百寶箱 and "Zhao Chun'er chong wang Caojiazhuang" 趙春兒重旺曹家庄 from *Jing shi tongyan*.

becomes the calculated cheater; the gallant and successful pursuer becomes the clumsy and pathetic victim of a fraud.

Li Yu's hero, Wang Si (王四), a humble hairdresser, wishes to duplicate the good fortune of the oil vendor. But everything he does in imitating Qin Zhong turns out against his wishes. After seeing the play "The Oil Vendor" he is seized with a sudden romantic impulse. Confident about his ability to attract women, he decides to try his own luck. He works out an arrangement with Sister Snow (雪娘), a prostitute, and her madam. Both would be paid a sum of money over a period of years to redeem Sister Snow from the brothel. In addition, he would dress Sister Snow's hair every day and perform other chores around the house. In five years' time, after he has fulfilled all the agreed-upon conditions, the madam and Sister Snow both deny ever having made any agreement with him and insist that the money he has spent must be considered as the usual expenses incurred in visiting the brothel. He not only ends up losing all the money he had earned for five years, but is also mocked as "the half cuckold" (王半八).

Li Yu's anti-romantic reworking of Feng's text has a two-fold effect. By completely inverting Feng Menglong's story, Li Yu's text brings out the irony of the conventional themes of *qing* and the good-hearted singsong girl. As Li Yu's story shows, they are literary illusions and worn-out themes that can be easily destroyed and derided. Wang Si, the "impersonator" and parodic product of Qin Zhong also adds an ironic twist to the romantic hero of Feng's story. His

absurdity and misfortune is a distorted version of Qin Zhong's romantic sentiment and conduct. When Wang Si's "romanticism" is mocked, Qin Zhong is also put on the stage of ridicule.

In writing this story, Li Yu also used the structure of a fiction (or play)-within-the fiction. This has the function of distinguishing the fictional nature of the work offered to the reader from the objective world by providing a mirror to this fiction. Wang Si, the protagonist of Li Yu's story, is a spectator/reader of "The Oil Vendor" story himself. His tragedy is caused mainly by his confusing of the boundary between the fictional world and reality. He is unable to distinguish between the two worlds, and consequently cannot cope with either. This character is actually an ironic portrait of the naive reader whom Li Yu treats in his parody as both artistic object and target of criticism.

The Cancellation of Realism

Discussing the love stories of the *huaben xiaoshuo*, C.T. Hsia argues that,

With the rise of a popular vernacular literature, of course, the stirring of the instinctive self were gradually given more prominent attention. If we compare the love tales in *San-yen* collections with the more idealistic and self-consciously romantic love tales of the Tang's period, we notice in the former a franked appreciation of sensuality, a more forthright affirmation of the sanctity of impulse, of unreflective, all-consuming passion.²⁷

This tendency to focus on sensuality, as the antithesis of *qing*, reveals itself in

²⁷C.T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 311.

two different ways, Hsia explains: “just as the romantic tales of young love assure us of the delights of sexual fulfillment, the melodramatic tales of darker passion invite us to examine the horror of sexual indulgence.”²⁸ However whether sensuality is celebrated or condemned in the *huaben xiaoshuo* and in *Sanyan Erpai* 三言二拍 specifically, it always has to be balanced with its opposite force—either true affection or social acceptance—or sometimes a combination of the two. The tension or the reconciliation of the opposing forces in the presentation of sensuality, preventing either idealization or exaggeration, sheds realistic light on the vernacular love stories.

In one of the best stories of the *Sanyan* collection, “The Pearl-Sewn Shirt” 蔣興哥重會珍珠衫 (*Yu shi mingyan*, 1), instinctive sexual desire and the fulfillment of such desire are described as natural and human not only because they are related in circumstantial and realistic detail, but also because they are nicely balanced with true affection. The story relates a young married woman Fortune’s (三巧兒) illicit love affair with a merchant, which consequently destroys her marriage, and her unusual reconciliation with her husband because of the continuous and mutual affection that exists between the couple. Fortune’s sexual arousal and her surrender to seduction are only natural, according to the story, because her passionate feelings and sexual desire are repressed after her husband’s extended absence for business. The repression is intensified by a sharp contrast between the conjugal love shared by the couple

²⁸C.T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*, p. 314.

during their three years of uninterrupted married life and the loneliness and desolation Fortune experiences when she is alone. Affectionate by nature and only having tasted the sweet part of life, she becomes defenseless and is almost thrilled when the cunning go-between and seducer offer her their companionship under the circumstance. Even though she is duped by her illicit lover Chen Dalang 陳大郎, she accepts his love and returns it wholeheartedly because he too treats her with genuine affection, dying on the road to rejoin her later. But the most appealing part of the story is that although the illicit affair has made Fortune stray from her marital bonds, her love for her husband survives. At the end of the story, she saves him from a disastrous situation not out of guilt but for love. The scene in which the couple finally meets after the husband's lawsuit is settled is very touching: "They [the couple] neither salute nor speak to each other, only embrace tightly and cry out loudly."²⁹

In focusing on sensuality, Confucian morality or social acceptance is another element that provides a tension and a realistic balance for the love stories. For instance, stories like "Prefect Kuang Judges the Case of a Dead Infant" (況太守斷死孩兒, *Jing shi tongyan*, 35) and "Ran San Consummates His Destined Love at Idle-Cloud Nunnery" (閑云庵阮三償冤債, *Yu shing mingyan*, 4) pardon the heroines' impulsive sexual behavior because they eventually comply with contemporary values and moral standards. There are also some stories which condemn the excessive sexual indulgence and frenzy for bringing

²⁹Feng Menglong, *Yu shi mingyan* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1989), p. 38.

nothing but catastrophe. Here the moral overtone is always prevalent; the didacticism clear.

This realistic presentation of sensuality, or the didactic and aesthetic conventions of *huaben xiaoshuo* embodied in this stock theme, are totally canceled or undermined in Li Yu's works. Like the tales in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Li Yu approaches sensuality with a pure comic spirit. To him, sensuality is something amusing, to be laughed at or satirized rather than celebrated or condemned. For Li Yu's young lovers, no matter what kind of relationship they are involved in—lawful or illicit, heterosexual or homosexual—the emotional satisfaction of *qing* and the claims of honor and religion seem to be appear irrelevant. Sexual fulfillment brings mutual delight for the young lovers, so it should be dealt with gusto and humor.

“Cui ya lou” 翠雅樓 (“House of Gathered Refinements” , *Shi'er lou* , 6) is a story about homosexual love, the brutality of corrupt officials, and a young man's revenge. At the beginning of the story, Quan Ruxiu 權汝修, a young man whose physical beauty rivals fair ladies and whose refined tastes and techniques on art and decoration are renowned in the capital, enjoys love affairs as well as business partnerships with two other young men. Their happiness is interrupted by the corrupt official Yan Shifan 嚴世蕃 who takes a liking to Quan himself but, after being spurned by Quan several times, schemes a plot to castrate Quan and force him to become an eunuch so that he can get what he wants from him. Employed as a servant in Yan's house, Quan suffers all kinds

of humiliation. But finally Quan gets his revenge by reporting Yan's betrayal to the emperor.

In describing the three young men's homosexual love, Li Yu's language is full of humor:

Jin and Liu [Quan's two lovers] had wives who lived elsewhere, while Quan, who was single, lived in the shop as wife to both men, who stayed with him on alternate nights, nominally to look after the shop but actually to enjoy the pleasures of the rear courtyard. By day they made their money, by night they took their pleasure. Where else in the world would you find two such heavenly immortals? There was not a single young man in the capital who did not admire and envy them—admire the serenity of their lives, envy their rare delights.

金、劉二人各有家小，都另在一處。獨有權汝修未娶，常宿店中，當了兩人的家小，各人輪伴一夜，名為守店，實是賞玩後庭花。日間趁錢，夜間行樂。你說普天之下哪有這兩位神仙？合京師的少年，沒有一個不慕，沒有一個不妒。慕者慕其清福，妒者妒其奇歡。³⁰

Here, obviously, we cannot find the serious concern with sensuality underscored in the *Sanyan Erpai* collection. With his comic spirit and hedonistic philosophy, Li Yu finds the three men's indulgence of their sensualities and their homosexual behavior amusing and delightful.

Moreover, in many areas which usually require emotional or moral responses from the characters, we find only Li Yu's parodic treatments of *qing* and morality. For instance, when Quan's two lovers overhear that Yan wants to take sexual advantage of Quan, they comment:

But this old man is different from others; he's bold and ruthless, and if he likes what he sees, he won't be content to scratch the itch

³⁰Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 131. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *A Tower for the Summer Heat*, p. 87.

through his boot, he'll do his damndest to fool around with the lad. We may not be jealous of each other, but we'll certainly be jealous of an outsider!

此老不比別個，最是敢作敢為，他若看得中意，不是“隔靴搔痒”、“夾被摩疼”就可以了事的，畢竟要認真舞弄。難道我們兩個家醋不吃，連野醋也不吃不成！³¹

Chicu 吃醋 (literally meaning “to eat vinegar”) is a figurative expression that usually refers to women’s jealousy over a love affair. When it is used to describe homosexual love as Li Yu does, it produces a parodic effect. Similarly, Quan, reacting to Yan’s aggressive sexual demand, says: “If a virtuous woman won’t take a second husband, how can a chaste man take a third lover? Except for you two, I shall never consort with anyone else” (烈女不更二夫，貞男豈易三主。除你二位以外，決不去濫交一人).³² It is obvious that the stereotype of the “chaste woman” is parodied in Li Yu’s “chaste man.”

Li Yu’s cancellation of realism when presenting sensuality is also displayed in *Rouputuan*, a novel delineating a young libertine’s sexual adventures and his ultimate spiritual purgation and Buddhist enlightenment. This novel, as Hanan has pointed out, takes its place within a lively tradition of erotic fiction existing in sixteenth and seventeenth century China. But it exhibits many of the qualities usually found in outstanding works of fiction, such as dramatic organization, sharp and penetrating characterization, subtle

³¹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 134. The English translation is Patrick Hanan’s, in *A Tower for the Summer Hear*, p. 91.

³²*Ibid.*, Vol. 9, p. 138.

psychology, and the high intellectual level of the dialogue. Moreover, as a brilliant parodic work, no event or character in *Rouputuan* can be trusted to remain as they initially appear. Nothing that is said—even by the narrator—can be taken at face value. The way in which the hero's sexual and spiritual odysseys unfold provides a constant challenge to the reader's wit and sense of parody.

In *Rouputuan*, the metonym used to describe the hero Weiyang Sheng 未央生 or Vesperus' obsessive sensualism and his sexual prowess is the “dog penile implant”—an outrageous idea even in an erotic novel. In Chapter Seven, having discovered the inadequacy of his sexual organ, Vesperus decides to implant a dog's member into his body in order to achieve his ambition of subjugating many beautiful women. This episode is a symbolic presentation of Vesperus sensualism that illustrates the bestial nature of his subsequent sexual behaviors and activities.

Everything relating to Vesperus' sexuality is actually dehumanized. For instance, in Chapter eight, after the operation, Vesperus makes a show of his new equipment to his friend, the thief San Kunlun 賽昆崙 or the Knave. In the Knave's eyes, it resembles a “donkey member.” In Chapter Ten, when Vesperus has his first intercourse with a woman after the operation, it causes the woman tremendous pain and she squeals like “a slaughtered pig.” Vesperus' endless lust and his unusual sexual prowess is represented as inhuman, belonging to a dog rather than a man. Quite often, in the middle of intercourse, the dog parts

“flare up and begin to grow,” and thereby increasing Vesperus’ vigor “a hundredfold.”

The inhumanity of the hero’s sexuality is evident not only from his bestial behavior after the operation, but also from the hero’s violation of the Confucian conception of sexuality. Two of the three drawbacks of the implant, as pointed out by the Taoist adept, are that Vesperus cannot marry a virgin, and that he is unable to have children. Not marrying a virgin implies only adulterous conduct, violating one of the key Confucian moral teachings. Not having children, especially sons, is also considered as the most irresponsible and unfilial behavior in Confucian morality. The implant metonymically implies the denial of ethical and social relations which are inevitably reflected in human sexuality, and therefore suggests the reversal of nature. The surgical implant of a dog’s member into a human being, as Li Yu indicates in his post-chapter commentary, is “a palpable absurdity,” that caricatures and satirizes the hero’s obsessive sensualism.

The Capsizing of “caizi jiaren” Cliche

Following the rules of Tang romantic tales, another convention of the love theme further developed by the *huaben* genre is the “*caizi jiaren*” cliché or the “perfect match” stereotype, later polarized in the *caizi jiaren* novel. Whereas the comparable theme is only embodied in a few stories such as “Wang Jiaoluan’s Eternal Regret” 王蛟鸞百年長恨 (*Jing shi tongyan*, 34) and

“Zhang Shunmei Encounters the Pretty Girl in the Night of the Lantern Festival” 張舜美燈宵得麗女 (*Yu shi mingyan*, 23) in the *Sanyan* collection, the whole group belonging to “the scholar and the beauty novel” fits into this conventional category.

If the celebration of *qing* is a romanticization of love, and both the positive and the negative presentations of sensuality reflect a realistic depiction of sexual desire, the canonization of the *caizi jiaren* cliché exhibits a tendency of formulization—a quality usually belonging to fairy-tales. This tendency is best crystallized in the formula: if one is an unfeigned *caizi*, he will be given a true *jiaren* by Heaven.

The *caizi jiaren* mode requires certain necessary ingredients. In “the scholar and the beauty novel,” for instance, the prerequisite of both *caizi* and *jiaren* is dashing beauty and peerless talent. The match of *caizi* and *jiaren* is described as a destiny made in heaven, but the quest to obtain the most enviable match involves a succession of tests—tests that prove the hero’s or heroine’s literary talents (such as composing poems, or, in the case of the hero, passing the civil examination) as well as his chivalry and her resourcefulness in overcoming the obstacles to holy matrimony. These conventions became worn out and were formulaic and hackneyed by the end of the seventeenth century in *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo*, and are therefore held in low esteem by later critics.

In Li Yu’s paired stories “An Ugly Husband Fears a Pretty Wife But Marries A Beautiful One” 丑郎君怕嬌偏得豔 (*Wusheng xi*, 1) and “A Handsome

Youth Tries to Avoid Suspicion But Arouses It Instead” 美男子避惑反生疑 (*Wusheng xi*, 2), the idea of a beautiful woman marrying an ugly husband becomes standard. In contrast a perfect match between the brilliant and the beautiful becomes a deviation. In the first story, all three of the fair ladies cannot evade marrying a monstrous husband; while in the second, the brilliant youth ends up with the beautiful girl, only because she has been married to and rejected by an ugly and stupid man.

Li Yu adds a further twist to this cliché in *Rouputuan*, where the talented young scholar turns into a hunter of carnal desire while the beautiful women turn out to be unchaste sluts. In *Rouputuan*, the “divine law” of the perfect match is foregrounded in the words of the male protagonist Vesperus. In chapter two, in refusing the Buddhist priest Lone Peak’s attempt to persuade him to joining the monkhood, Vesperus says:

The two terms *beautiful girl* and *brilliant poet* have always been inseparable. For every brilliant poet there has to be a beautiful girl somewhere to form a pair, and vice versa. But so far I have never seen a truly outstanding beauty. All the women with any claims to attractiveness are already married to the ugliest of men and cannot help but secretly regret it. Now, my poetic gifts go without saying, but my looks are flawless too. I often gaze at myself in the mirror, and if Pan An and Wei Jie were alive today, I would not concede very much to them. Since Heaven has given birth to someone like me, it must also have given birth to a girl fit to be my mate. If there’s no such girl alive today, that is too bad. But if she does exist, your disciple will be the one to seek her hand in marriage.

從古以來，佳人才子四個字，再分不開。有了才子，定該有佳人作對。有了佳人，定該有才子成雙。今弟子的才華，且不必說。就是相貌也不差。時常引鏡自照，就是潘安衛玠生在今時，弟子也不肯多讓。天既生我為才子，豈不生一個女子相配。如今世上若沒有佳人則已，倘若有之

· 求佳偶者，非弟子而誰。³³

By thrusting the convention to the fore, Li Yu plays with it in various ways. First of all, the irony of this cliché is brought out by Vesperus' own words, because "all the women with any claims to attractiveness are already married to the ugliest of men." Moreover, the absurdity of this "divine law" is further revealed by the priest Lone Peak,

Layman, because of your looks, and because you are a brilliant poet, you wish to seek out the most beautiful girl. Whether you find a beauty or not is one thing, but supposing you do, I don't imagine that she'll have NUMBER ONE on her temples, and when you see someone better, you'll want to change your mind. But the second one, supposing she shares your nature, will be very particular about whom she marries and want to wait for the most brilliant poet. Will you be able to obtain her as a concubine? And what if she already has a husband, how will you deal with that?

居士，因你的相貌，是第一個才子，就要去尋一位佳人。無論佳人可得不可得，就使得了一位，只恐這位佳人額角上不曾注寫第一的兩個字。若再見了強似她的，又要翻起轉來那好的。這一位佳人，若與居士一般生性，不肯輕易嫁人，要等第一個才子，居士還好娶來作妾，萬一有了良人，居士何以處之？³⁴

More importantly, the formalities of the *caizi jiaren* are caricatured and mocked in the narrative, so that the novel actually becomes a brilliant parody of the *caizi jiaren* mode. For instance, in *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo*, the hero and heroine are usually the paragons of Confucian teachings, always managing to marry their

³³Li Yu, *Rouputuan* (Japan: Seishinkaku, 1705), Vol. 1, p. 19. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), p. 25.

³⁴Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 1 pp. 20-21. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 26.

ideal lover without sacrificing one iota of their good names. *Caizi* and *Jiaren* attract each other by looks as well as literary talent. The courtship between them always involves various ways of testing their literary talents. In *Rouputuan*, however, those formalities take different directions: exactly as Lone Peak predicted, Vesperus' search for the most beautiful woman in the world takes the form of a series of liaisons; the attraction between Vesperus and his paramours lies in their sexual endowment and stamina rather than in their beauty and intelligence; and the test of literary talent becomes a judgment of their bedroom art. In Chapter Six, the Knave, a thief and Vesperus' sworn brother, acts as Vesperus's mentor in the art of seduction. All they talk about is how to debauch other men's wives. Not only Vesperus himself, according to his confession to the Knave, prefers a licentious woman rather than a prudish one as his sexual partner; his potential paramours too, the Knave tells Vesperus, can only be impressed by the size of his sexual organ and prowess. Because when it comes to the matter of seduction, intelligence and looks are only the sweeteners of medicine, it is sexual vitality which is the truly effective medicine. As the Knave humorously puts it, "What is the use of looks and brain in the bedroom, anyway, are you going to look at her face under the quilt and write poems on her pelvis (難道在被窩裡相面，肚子上作詩不成)?³⁵ The parodic alternation of the *cai* 才 (talent) and *mao* 貌 (physical attractiveness) formula is also foregrounded by the opening poem of Chapter Six:

³⁵Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 2, p. 17.

If you lack great talent for the bedroom art,
Tempt not with lesser skills the womb of woe.
In the darkness Pan An's looks will go unseen;
What use are Cao Zhi's rhymes before the foe?

不是房中作幹材，
休將末技惹愁胎。
暗中誰見潘安貌，
陣上難施子建才。³⁶

Funniest of all, instead of showing off Vesperus' literary talent as conventionally would occur, the knave inspects Vesperus' penis. It is not only judged by size and by the number of thrusts it can perform, but also compared with his potential rivals' (his paramours' husbands) organs and stamina. Although Vesperus' natural endowment is inferior to his competitors', his implant equipment (a dog genital) is far more superior than theirs. Thus, in Chapter Ten, when facing a test of bedroom art conducted by one of his paramours, the oversexed Yan Fang 艷芳, he totally subjugates her.

Using poetry as a way of expressing love or testing literary talent is an often-used motif in the "the scholar-beauty romance." But in *Rouputuan*, although claiming a *caizi*, Vesperus never composes any poem himself; the only poem he uses to woo his second paramour Xiang Yun 香云 is actually one of the Tang famous poet Li Bai's 李白 poems. Similar treatments can also be found in other Li Yu's works. In his play *Fengzheng wu*, 風箏誤 (*The Mistake with the Kite*), the hero mistakes the heroine's ugly sister for the heroine herself

³⁶Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 2, p. 1. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 88.

during a secret rendezvous. In the dark, he asks the hideous and stupid girl to compose a poem to match the one he has written for the heroine. But the ugly sister recites a poem from an anthology instead. When the hero recognizes the poem and insists on asking her to recite the poem she has composed herself, she responds: "A time like this is worth a thousand pieces of gold. There is no time to recite poems! Let's finish the serious business (meaning making love) first. Then we can recite poems later" (這是一刻千金的時節，哪有工夫念詩？我和你且把正經事做完了，再念也未遲).³⁷ Miss. Cao, the female protagonist from Li Yu's other play *Qiao Tuanyuan*, 巧團圓 (*The Ingenious Finale*), openly criticizes the cliché of "poetry-writing" and declares her intention of breaking away from it. She soliloquizes: "In books, I always see that men and women use poems to express their love. It actually becomes a cliché, which is really disgusting. Today, I am going to break this cliché, and only copy several lines of the first poem from *The Book of Poetry*" (我見書本之上，男女傳情，個個都用詩句，竟成一個惡套，甚為可鄙。我如今要脫去窠臼，只把《詩經》第一篇寫上几句)...³⁸ What she actually does, instead of creating her own love poem, is to shift two words in the poem she selects from *The Book of Poetry*, totally inverting its meaning. The original poem runs like this,

關關雎鳩，
在河之洲。
窈窕淑女，

³⁷Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 4, p. 149.

³⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 336.

君子好逑。

Hark! from the islet in the stream the voice
Of the fish hawks that o'er their nest rejoice!
From them our thoughts to that young lady go,
Modest and virtuous, loth herself to show.
Where could be found, to share our prince's state
So fair, so virtuous, and so fit a mate?

Miss. Cao's inversion reads,

關關雎鳩，
在河之洲。
窈窕君子，
淑女好逑。³⁹

The inversion transforms the voice of a male suitor into a female one and reveals the playfulness of Li Yu's reworking and refreshing the stereotypical motif of "poem-making."

The beautiful and talented female protagonist contrives tricks and schemes to protect herself from the villain's hot pursuit and finally subdues him is another cliché of *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo*. In *Hao qiu zhuan* 好逑傳 (*Fortunate Union*), the heroine Shui Bingxin 水冰心 escapes from her evil-minded pursuer three times by hoaxing him. When finally confronted by the Imperial Roving Censor, who has been persuaded by the villain to force her into the unacceptable marriage, her impeccable genius turns her liability to her advantage, not only in managing to avoid the marriage but also in rebuking the Censor's wrongdoing. The female strategist of *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo* often reminds us of the ingenious and invincible Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 of *Romance of*

³⁹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 336. The English translation is James Legge's, in *The Book of Poetry* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corporation, 1967), p. 1.

the Three Kingdoms or Chen Ping 陳平, another famous counselor in Chinese history.

Two of Li Yu's short stories can be considered as parodies of this built-in formula. In "The Female Chen Ping Saves Her Life with Seven Ruses," 女陳平計生七出 (*Wusheng xi*, 5) the female strategist is an illiterate peasant woman who uses her natural intelligence to save her life and reputation. Geng Erniang 耿二娘 or Secunda, unlike the formalized heroine of *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo*, is an attractive peasant woman who has never had any formal education, but whose sharp wit rivals the most famous strategist Chen Ping. When rebels descend upon her village and carry away all of its women, she is captured by the young chieftain who wants to keep her as his female companion. Using her female charm and, taking advantage of the chieftain's gullibility, she plots seven ruses that not only save herself from a deadly situation and rape but also dupe the chieftain, gets his money and eventually has him killed. But most ingenious of all, she plans the execution so that the chieftain is forced to prove her chastity in front of her husband and other villagers. The narrator praises her in superlative terms: "even though Chen Ping brought off only six amazing ruses, she managed seven" (陳平的奇計只得六出，她倒有七出).⁴⁰ In commenting on this story, Du Jun 杜濬 applauds Li Yu's ridding himself of banalities: "[Geng Erniang] doesn't know how to read, this is [Li Yu's way of] ridding himself of banalities. Nowadays, fiction frequently follows the banality of women's verse-

⁴⁰Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 105.

making, it is really disgusting” (不讀書，不識字，便脫套了。近來小說，動不動就是女子吟詩，甚覺可厭).⁴¹

Li Yu makes similar parodic effort in his short story “A Widow Hatches a Plot to Receive a Bridegroom, and Beautiful Women Unite to Seize a Brilliant Poet,” 妒婦設計贅新郎，眾美齊心奪才子 (*Lian cheng bi*, 9) from a different angle. In this story, the target of the heroine is not the black villain who is in hot pursuit of her but her rival in love—another female suitor for a brilliant and handsome young man. The story later was adapted into a play, named *Huang qiu feng* 風求鳳 (*Woman in Pursuit of Man*).

Another hackneyed antic which can be classified in this convention is the stereotypical maid as assistant and accomplice in her mistress' love affair. The prototype is the cunning maid Hongniang 紅娘 in the famous Tang tale “Yingying zhuan” 鶯鶯傳 (“The Story of Yingying”). Li Yu's short story “The Cloud-Scraper” 拂云樓 (*Shi'er lou*, 7) depicts a self-interested maid, Nenghong 能紅 (meaning more capable than Hongniang) who parodies the stereotype of the cunning maid. In helping to arrange her mistress' marriage, she becomes the chief plotter of a polygamous marriage and turns the admirer of her mistress into her own future husband.

The Ambivalence of Morality

In both the *chuanqi* genre and *huaben* genre, a fairly large number of

⁴¹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 94.

stories deal with moral issues. The two genres are divided into stories that reflect Confucian values on the relationship between the individual and the state, and tales that emphasize Confucian ethics within the family. Li Yu's works, basically speaking, leave the first category untouched. His reversal of the moral theme focuses on conventional treatment of women's chastity, jealousy, filial piety and servant's loyalty.

Women's widowhood and chastity, in the *Sanyan Erpai*, is often delineated along the same pattern: a widow, after many years of living up to the social ideal of chastity, is seduced by a servant. When she realizes that she has lost her chastity and good reputation, she takes her own life out of shame ("Prefect Kuang's Judges the Case of a Dead Infant" 況太守斷死孩兒 *Jing shi tongyan*, 35). Or, a virgin is violated by bandits, and commits suicide right after she completes her revenge ("Cai Ruihong Endures Humiliation In Order to Carry Out Revenge" 蔡瑞虹忍辱報仇 *Xing shi hengyan*, 36). Within the conventions of this theme, the remarriage of widows is condemned ("Percussing the Earthenware, Zhuan Zixiu Join the Order" 庄子休鼓盆成大道 *Jing shi tongyan*, 2), while the idea that women should "marry one man until death" (*cong yi er zhong* 從一而終) is glorified ("Chen Duoshou's Life and Death Marriage" 陳多壽生死夫妻 *Xing shi hengyan*, 9).

Several of Li Yu's stories invert this "chaste woman" theme. "The Female Chen Ping Saves Her Life with Seven Ruses" (*Wusheng xi*, 5) alters the old and formulaic theme by compromising minor points to prevent a rape.

When Geng Erniang or Secunda is captured by the rebel chieftain, she pretends to cooperate with him in his sexual demands, but staves off actual sexual intercourse by using pretexts and letting him be intimate with her in other ways:

All of Secunda's ruses and ploys were devoted to preserving her 'insignia of rank' which she refused to yield to anyone. Everything else she possessed—rosy lips, crimson tongue, soft breasts, tiny feet and jadelike fingers—she looked upon as inanimate things external to her, and she let him clip, suck, fondle and pinch them as if unaware of what he was doing.

二娘千方百計，只保全這件名器，不肯假人。其餘的朱唇絳舌，嫩乳酥胸，金蓮玉指，都視為土木形骸，任他含啞摩捏，只當不知。⁴²

Her way of preserving chastity is described as "saving root and trunk at the expense of branches and leaves." As Li Yu points out in the text, "her case cannot be regarded as the norm."

In the "Tower of Ancestral Worship" 奉先樓 (*Shier lou*, 10), the chastity theme is also deliberately undercut by Li Yu. He puts his two protagonists into the social milieu of wartime, where they are faced with an impossible choice, that between preserving the wife's chastity and saving the only heir of the family. Ironically, although the wife insists on preserving her virtue, the husband, his clansmen, even the spirit of the family ancestors all wish her to protect the son at all costs. The wife finally gives in, and after paying obeisance to the ancestors four times, vows: "I shall never talk about 'virtue' any more in this life." Although the wife loses her chastity, she is saved from an attempted suicide and returned to her husband by her captor at the end of the story. Thus

⁴² Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 101. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, p. 90.

the wife's loss of chastity is not only pardoned but also regarded as a virtuous deed by the author.

A different kind of parody of the "chaste woman" theme is represented by Li Yu's other two stories, in which, instead of taking the virtuous or immoral wife or concubine as the subject, Li Yu makes use of the "chaste maidservant" and a "male Mencius mother." The distortion of the genre's conventions in "The Abandoned Wife and the Concubine Remarry and the Maidservant Becomes the Child's Mother" 妻妾報琵琶梅香守節 (*Wusheng xi*, 12) is basically revealed by the role reversal undergone by the three female characters. When the husband is mistakenly believed to have died in a distant land, his wife and concubine, who swore to his face that they would remain widows, hurry into a second marriage; while Bilian 碧蓮, the supposedly inferior and disloyal maidservant, actually takes on the role of the "virtuous wife and mother" in raising the only son of the family.

Li Yu's most notable parody in this category is "A Male Mencius Mother Raises Her Son Properly By Moving House Three Times" 男孟母教合三遷 (*Wusheng xi*, 6) which transfers the stereotyped loyal love that exists between the heterosexual couple and the conventional chastity of widowhood to a homosexual love affair. The title alone reveals how Li Yu is consciously parodying the "chaste widow" or "model mother" theme. There is an attempt at making a travesty of the biographical text on the Mencius mother in Liu Xiang's 劉向 *Lie nü zhuan* 烈女傳 (*The Biographies of Eminent Women*).

In eulogizing the virtue of Mencius mother, Liu Xiang's text records her strategy for educating Mencius—by choosing a better environment for Mencius to grow up in. In order to find a place where Mencius can receive good moral influence, she moves their home three times: from a place near a graveyard, to a neighborhood close to a market, until finally settling down in a house beside a school. As we all know, this famous anecdote makes the mother of Mencius the archetype in Chinese tradition for the woman who devotes her life to her son's moral education.

In Li Yu's "Male Mencius Mother," the famous story of "moving three times" takes on a new contorted form: the "chaste wife" and "devoted mother" is actually a young man who enjoys a homosexual marriage; and the reason he moves his residence three times is to protect the child of his deceased lover from the advances of homosexuals. Li Yu's mockery of Liu Xiang's original text and the cliches of the "chaste woman" and "model mother" themes in the *huaben xiaoshuo* is achieved mainly by exaggerating the conventions of chastity to an absurd degree. For instance, Xu Jifang 許季芳, the older partner, has some quite unusual views about women. In explaining why the sight of women repels him, he gives seven features which make women objectionable:

- "One. They hide the truth with powder and rouge.
- "Two. They employ artifice by binding their feet and piercing their ears.
- "Three. Their breasts are superfluous appendages.
- "Four. They are confined to the house, tied up like a calabash.
- "Five. They have no freedom, fettered by their own children.
- "Six. They stain their bed mat and clothes during menstruation.
- "Seven. After they've given birth, they're as vast as the open sea.

涂指抹粉，以假為真，一可厭也：
 纏腳鑽耳，矯揉造作，二可厭也：
 乳峰突起，贅若懸瘤，三可厭也：
 出門不得，係若匏瓜，四可厭也：
 兒纏女縛，不得自由，五可厭也：
 月經來後，濡席沾裳，六可厭也：
 生育之餘，茫無畔岸，七可厭也。⁴³

Ironically, although Jifang dislikes women's physical features and social position, his male lover ends up dressing as a woman, adopting female mannerisms, staying at home, learning needlework, caring for his son, and disguising his real sex until death. What is even more absurd is that Jifang, as unconventional as he is, asks the young partner to preserve his chastity for him and raise his only child according to strict Confucian teaching. By exaggerating literary conventions, Li Yu, the parodist, actually places the model text or the original in conflict with the reality of his own fictional world. His unconventional love story has the most conventional chastity theme. The co-existence of two text-worlds or the juxtaposition of two moral codes renders his story ambivalent, the parodied ridiculous. In so doing, Li Yu destroys the original text and conventions and refashions them for a new audience.

Other moral themes parodied in Li Yu's works include women's jealousy, filial piety, and servants' loyalty. "The Spirits Astonish by Switching Wife and Concubine" 移妻換妾鬼神奇 (*Wusheng xi*, 10) specifically refers to the flouting of the jealousy theme in the *huaben* genre, a staple subject of comedy in

⁴³ Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 110. The English translation is Gopal Sukhu Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, p. 103.

seventeenth-century literature. Women's jealousy is usually treated as something bad, causing conflict and discord within the family. Li Yu, instead of deploring jealousy, defends it as good and as necessary as vinegar; both add spice to life. He also inverts the stock theme by writing a "new jealousy" in that the concubine is jealous of the wife, rather than the "old jealousy" of a wife toward the concubine.

"A Son and a Grandson Abandon the Ancestral Corpse and the Servant Arranges the Burial" 兒孫棄骸骨僮仆奔喪 (*Wusheng xi*, 11) parodies both the themes of filial son and loyal servant in one story. The story has two separate plots. The first emphasizes children's filial infidelity and the second the loyalty of a servant. In the *huaben* genre filial piety is so valued that one is brought up to sacrifice one's life for it ("The Filial Son Refuses to Do Autopsy on His Father's Corpse; the Chaste Wife Sacrifices Her Own Life for Her Husband" 行孝子到底不簡屍·殉節婦留待雙出柩 *Er ke pai an jing qi*, 31). By contrast, Li Yu writes of heartless children and the absence of "filial piety." By allowing greed to prevail over all other considerations, including filial piety, the son and grandson in Li Yu's story desert their dying father (or grandfather) in a strange land. Instead it is the servant who rushes to his master and attends his needs. He also escorts the master's coffin home and buries it properly. Whereas the father's own "flesh and blood" abandons him, his servant actually carries out the "filial duty." "When servants are really loyal, they can be regarded as children and grandchildren; when children and grandchildren are heartless,

they are even worse than the most sordid lackeys” (奴仆好的，也當得子孫，子孫不好的，尚不如奴仆).⁴⁴—this is the new meaning that Li Yu constructs in parodying the old theme of “filial children.” This story, according to Hanan, can also be considered as a parody of Langxian’s story “Old Retainer” in *Xing shi hengyan*, as it shows the loyal servant inheriting the family property.⁴⁵ Stock themes are again discarded in favor of new forms.

The Absurdity of Karma

The doctrine of karmic cause and effect and the law of retribution are the principal themes throughout all kinds of literary genres. The *Sanyan Erpai* collections lay a special stress upon predestination and the heavenly principle. According to Hanan, the heavenly principle in Ling Mengchu’s stories is

a popular notion yet still connected with the principle of the neo-Confucian philosophers. It is a force imminent in nature which, by subtle means, marshalling coincidences, brings injustice to light and punishes crime. The principle is the agent of perfect law, the sublime enforcer of society’s moral code. Like predestination, it is a useful fictional device that allows an author to explain his coincidences simply. Most important of all, it provides the clear, simple standards of objective justice that Ling Mengchu the satirist needed.⁴⁶

The doctrine of predetermination and the heavenly principle in the *Sanyan*

⁴⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 221.

⁴⁵Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 172.

⁴⁶Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, p. 154.

Erpai share some common grounds. The standard code is that a character's fate or the outcome of an event is generally predetermined and due to sheer luck. It is useless to try to shape one's own fate. The protagonists of the *Sanyan Erpai* usually accept their destinies and do not strive unduly to achieve their ambition. The typical example is Ling Mengchu's "The Tangerines and the Tortoise shell" 轉運漢遇巧洞庭紅，波斯胡指破龜龍殼 (*Chu ke pai an jing qi*, 1). In this story, at each stage the efforts of the young man—such as his ingenious but slightly dishonest attempt to create a vogue for autographed fans in Peking—come to nothing, while his unpremeditated actions bring him a fortune. Two Li Yu stories consciously subvert this convention of predestination. Both stories are about fortune-telling. In "Loss of Fortune, the Fruit of Disaster, Turns out to be the Root of Happiness" 失千金福因禍至 (*Wusheng xi*, 4), Li Yu attacks the convention of destiny by describing two young men who gain a fortune, one through hard work and the other through fate. Qin Shiliang 秦世良 and his double Qin Shifang 秦世芳 are not only look-alikes, but they also share the same last and middle names. Strangely, they are told by the moneylender, an expert in physiognomy, that their physiognomic features are different and they will have totally opposing fortunes in the world of trade. Although the moneylender's prediction for Shiliang turns out to be true, his warnings for Shifang turn out not to be confirmed. Shifang changes his fate by being honest and hardworking. In creating the character of Shifang, a person who tries to shape his own fate, Li Yu breaks the doctrine of predestination that

Ling Mengchu realized in his works. As the double of Shiliang—the stereotypical character in this theme, Shifang also parodies him. These paired characters actually symbolize the relationship between Li Yu's text and the target of his parody. His story not only shares superficial similarities with the ridiculed convention but also displays a critical difference from it.

In “With the Change of His Horoscope, the Misery of a Yamen Runner Ends and His Happiness Begins” 改八字苦盡甘來 (*Wusheng xi*, 3), the convention of predestination is mocked through the use of man-made coincidence. The *yamen* runner cannot endure his bad luck and has his horoscope changed. By coincidence, his fake horoscope is exactly same as the magistrate's. Wondering how two people born at the same hour on the same day in the same month and year could have such different fortunes, the magistrate decides to befriend the runner. The magistrate friendship is, of course, the turning point in the runner's life. The hero's uninterrupted misfortune is replaced by a new way of life. Here again Li Yu underlines the farcical nature of horoscope reading and reveals the irony of conventional predestination. If the argument in the former story is that similar appearances do not bring the same fate, the irony of this story is that man-made coincidence rather than a predetermined horoscope will change the hero's life. Whereas Ling Mengchu uses the convention of predestination as standard objective justice, Li Yu utilizes contrived coincidence to undermine the predetermination principle and produce the fictional and self-reflective mirror common to the

parodist.

Retribution is a moral theme that illustrates the working of the punishment principle, by which each person is punished or rewarded according to his just deserts, in this life or the next. On the other hand, it is also a convenient narrative device, because retribution necessitates a balancing of fates and a symmetrical reversal of character roles. The primary tension in the text of *The Carnal Prayer Mat* lies in the retribution plot adopted by Li Yu from Chinese literary tradition, but it is twisted in a way that it totally loses its function of moral judgment.

The overall design of *Prayer Mat* shows a definite pattern of retribution. As with most of the seventeenth-century Chinese fiction, the novel begins with a prologue. However, unconventionally, the author devotes the prologue to a discussion of the function of a novel of this kind and offers his own views on sex, instead of setting out the narrative theme through a story or verse.

The novel has two separate plots: the sexual adventures of Vesperus and the revenge of Quan Laoshi 權老實 or Honest Quan. Although the two plots appear independent of one another, they are connected through the retribution principle. In chapter two, the Buddhist priest Lone Peak outlines this principle in clichéd terms: “If I don’t defile others’ wives, my wife won’t be defiled by others...no one has ever seduced another man’s wife or daughter and failed to receive retribution for it” (我不淫人妻，人不淫我妻…淫人妻女，妻女亦為人所淫

).⁴⁷ As a prolepsis, Lone Peak's words forecast what will happen to Vesperus; the retribution principle itself then generates the main episodes and provides the code in which the remainder of the story is told.

Vesperus' sexual adventures are extended from chapter two to chapter twenty, and are divided into three parts. The first, from chapter two to chapter seven, relates how, obsessed by his lust, Vesperus ignores the warning of the priest Lone Peak, takes an oath of brotherhood with the thief Knave, and sets out on his sexual conquest. The second part, from chapter eight to chapter eighteen, recounts Vesperus' operation—to implant a dog's sexual organ into his body—and his subsequently successful adulteries with five married women. The last two chapters describe Vesperus' awakening from his sexual frenzy because of his wife's suicide and his ultimate return to the Buddhist order.

Honest Quan's story is paralleled with Vesperus' from chapter eight to the end, but is mainly described in chapters thirteen, fourteen, and eighteen, in which the narrator tells us how Honest Quan uses a scheme to enter Vesperus' household, seduces his wife, elopes with her, and eventually sells her to a brothel.

The relationship between the two plots is both linear and parallel. The link between the two is linear because each of the plots functions as narrative causation for the other. For instance, Vesperus' seducing Fragrance causes Honest to lose his wife and family and motivates his revenge; Honest's seducing

⁴⁷Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 1, p. 22.

Scent and selling her to a brothel allows the couple to meet by coincidence at the brothel, Scent to take her life out of shame, and thus becomes the turning point for Vesperus' redemption. The two plots in turn move the narrative forward and create a coherent text based on the principle of retribution.

Meanwhile, the reader recognizes the underlying parallelism of the two plots, which is also determined by the retribution principle. For example, since Vesperus cuckolds Honest, he is cuckolded in turn by Honest; Vesperus wants to elope with Honest's wife, his wife elopes with Honest; he purchases Fragrance from Honest as his concubine, his wife is sold by Honest to a brothel as a prostitute. Even the husbands of the young women whom Vesperus has seduced also take unwitting revenge on him by sleeping with his wife in the brothel. The parallelism between the two plots not only actualizes the cliché given by Lone Peak at the beginning of the narrative, but also provides a perfect balance between opposing forces and the tensions they create.

Although the narrative structure is well-contrived within the frame of retribution, this reader hesitates to take it at face value. The novel only pays lip service to the principle of moral judgment. This intentional undercutting is revealed by Li Yu's treatment of the two heroines' fates. Scent and Fragrance, the two women who marry Vesperus, share similar characteristics and fates. They both suffer sexual repression in different stages of their lives, and participate in adultery when their husbands are absent. For Vesperus' wife, Scent, the repression stems from a strict family and a moralistic father, but for the hero's concubine, Fragrance, repression stems from her unawareness of her

own hidden sexual desires. They both become pregnant by their lovers, and both propose elopement. Scent has a miscarriage in the midst of eloping; Fragrance gives birth to twin daughters, who die after Vesperus joins the Buddhist order. Scent takes her own life, out of shame and regret, while Fragrance is killed by Knave for her betrayal of Vesperus. The mechanical symmetry in the manner of retribution should not be read as an artistic flaw, but instead should actually be taken as a deliberate twist on the principle of retribution. The two women are actually made to pay for the evils committed by their husband. In degradation and death, they become the unwitting agents of Vesperus' moral salvation. On the contrary, the two male adulterers—Vesperus and Honest Quan—are left untouched by the law of retribution. Compared with novels which have a similar theme, such as *Jin Ping Mei*, or *Golden Lotus* and "The Pearl-Sewn Shirt," where the male adulterers all eventually pay with their lives for their violation of other men's wives, this is obviously a distortion of retribution by the author. As Professor Hanan has pointed out:

...the author erects the retribution principle into a general principle by which an adulterer's wives and daughters are condemned to "redeem" his sins with their own—a characteristic Li Yu twist to an old idea.⁴⁸

THE MAKING OF INVERSIONS

In his essay "Laughter" Henri Bergson writes, "Picture to yourself certain

⁴⁸Patrick Hanan, "Introduction" *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, pp. viii-ix.

characters in certain situations: if you reverse the situation and invert the roles, you obtain a comic scene."⁴⁹ In revealing the secrets of comedy, Bergson actually foregrounds a major mechanism for producing inversion—the dislocation of classes, which involves a deliberate play with the established boundaries, manhood, gender, social hierarchy,—all the possible domains constituting culture and human society. Dislocation of classes often causes a disequilibrium in the old order that ambivalently produces both subversive and constructive effects: the breakdown of the social order in certain areas will trigger a reframing or reconfiguration of the literary order, so that the strange and bizarre images of displacement will turn into laughter.

Dislocation of classes as subject fascinated many late Ming and early Qing writers. Pu Songling, for example, writes all kinds of fantastic things in his *Liaozhai zhiyi*—men metamorphose into animals and vice versa, men and women swap sex, the narrative moves from the real world into dream land, or from the human world to a supernatural realm constantly. These subjects also frequently appear in the Ming-Qing notation books (*biji xiaoshuo* 筆記小說). The Qing writer Wang Shizhen's 王士禛 *Chi bei ou tan* 池北偶談 (*Occasional Chats North of the Pond*) includes seven volumes of entries about anomaly and many of them belong to the category of class-dislocation. Unlike some antecedent writings in earlier dynasties, the dislocation of classes, in the hands of Ming-Qing writers, is no longer seen as a manifestation of profound disorder

⁴⁹Henri Bergson, "Laughter," *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 121.

in the public realm ,⁵⁰ on the contrary, it has been redefined by and accommodated to Confucian teachings and contemporary values.

What distinguishes Li Yu from writers like Pu Songling is that Li Yu is not so much interested in writing about the “dislocation of classes” as using it as a literary device. As we have already mentioned in the preceding chapter, Li Yu is inclined to choose the “day-to-day happenings” as his subjects and very much objects to shocking the reader with grotesque and bizarre incidents. In the context of Li Yu’s works, the various categorical inversions, displacements, and crisscrossing enact the reshaping and reconfiguration of literary norms and conventions, demonstrated in three forms: metamorphosis, role switching, and duplicity in characterization.

Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis is a universal subject that belongs to myth and literature. The most overt and conventional type of metamorphosis is the transformation of human beings into lower forms of life, which is usually brought about by a person’s thoughts and actions. In this case the transformation becomes a summary judgment on a person’s life, provides the poetic justice for the literary work. In Western literature, metamorphosis hinges on a sense of clashing opposites. As Wai-yee Li indicates:

From Ovid to Kafka the note of anguish and horror often looms

⁵⁰Judith Zeitlin, *History of the Strange* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 108.

large over the dislocation between the interior and the exterior, the threatened dissipation of the human essence in a nonhuman form. Informing this sense of anxiety is an implicit subject-object axis postulating mind and matter, the ideal and the real, as incommensurable.⁵¹

In Ming-Qing literature, as presented in Pu Songling's classical tales, metamorphosis emphasizes a continuum between states of being, which facilitates the assimilation of the nonhuman into the human realm. Animalhood is not necessarily experienced as a disability or as insuperable alienation.⁵²

Despite the differences between metamorphosis in Western and Chinese literature, both cultures traditionally treat it as a fantastic subject that takes empathy as its aesthetic end. In opposition to this conventional treatment, Li Yu treats metamorphosis not as a subject but as a device to create an effect of alienation. By "alienation effect" I mean a critical detachment by the reader toward the literary work. In Li Yu's texts metamorphosis promotes estrangement by altering the reader's mood from empathic to critical.

For example, in *Rouputuan* as we have seen the hero Vesperus undergoes a surgical transplant in order to satisfy his obsessive sensuality. The idea itself is too absurd to be taken at face value: the metamorphosis is a well-planned artificial operation that partially transforms the hero into an animal. One of the elements of estrangement in this episode is the intervention of

⁵¹Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 103.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 100-102.

human being. Unlike conventional metamorphoses, which are usually initiated either by the hero's unconscious thought or action or through the intervention of supernatural beings, the transformation of Vesperus' sexual organ is a result of a calculated decision on his part. The Taoist adept, acting more like an expert or a doctor rather than a sorceress, explains to Vesperus in technical detail how the transplant will be done and what the drawbacks will be.

“By a Strange Bargain a Bodhisattva Transforms a Daughter into a Son” 變女為男菩薩巧 (*Wusheng xi*, 9) recounts the story of Bodhisattva answering a childless merchant's prayer for an heir. As a bargaining tool and as a punishment for the merchant's lack of commitment in philanthropy, the Bodhisattva first lets the merchant's concubine give birth to a baby who possesses both sex organs. Only after the merchant finally fulfills the terms of their agreement (the merchant donates seventy to eighty percent of his money to the poor), does the Bodhisattva transform the infant into a full-fledged son.

The fantasy of a family without sons gaining an heir through the sudden miraculous transformation of a daughter is a popular theme in the Ming-Qing period, from Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* to many Ming and Qing notation books. As Charlotte Furth notes, “The narratives constructed around these events show a common set of themes...There are rejected brides; but families gain a son. There is a new, auspicious name, and a happy ending, especially if the stock theme of heirless parents figures in. The event is not explained or

described, but presented as a rebirth mediated by some extraordinary power.”⁵³ The metamorphosis of a woman into a man, as Judith Zeitlin observes, is “no longer a manifestation of profound disorder” as in earlier writings. On the contrary, it is redefined as “an essentially filial act within the private confines of the family.”⁵⁴

Given this context, Li Yu’s story can be read as a parody of this particular theme. Moreover, Li Yu’s metamorphosis motif turns the moral didacticism and the belief in karmic cause and effect of the earlier tradition into a ridiculous joke—a trick played by the Bodhisattva. The “alienation effect” is also achieved by heightening the absurdity of the episode and arousing the reader’s critical consciousness. The infant’s biological hermaphroditism is treated as a game or joke played by the whimsical Bodhisattva. This defamiliarized treatment shifts the reader’s attention from the fantastic event itself to the strangeness of the literary work. This transformation takes place at the actual moment of the metamorphosis of the merchant’s heir.

A similar treatment of the theme can be found in two other of Li Yu’s plays, *Bimu yu* 比目魚 (*The Sole Mate*) and *Naihe tian* 奈何天 (*You Can’t Do Anything about Fate*). Both of the plays are adapted from Li Yu’s earlier short stories. The motif of metamorphosis, in both cases, is absent in the original

⁵³See Charlotte Furth, “Androgynous Men and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century China,” *Late Imperial China* 9.2 (Dec. 1988): 1-31.

⁵⁴Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p. 109.

story but added to the plot of play. In *The Sole Mate*, two lovers are transformed into a pair of flounders after both of them commit suicide for love. Supposedly the metamorphosis is a symbolic treatment of *qing*, that invokes the reader's empathy, but Li Yu directs the reader's transition of consciousness by defamiliarizing the motif. The symbolic meaning of romanticism is undercut by the fisherwoman's vulgar comments on seeing the founders:

Fisherman: (carrying fishes on the shore and taking a look) It turns out to be a pair of flounders.

Fisherwoman: (giggling), this pair of flounders merge into each other. They are doing it. Look, their heads turn together, tails swing jointly, showing off their amorous attitudes in front of others. This really makes me jealous!...

Fisherwoman: (showing the flounders to her husband and saying to him) Useless cuckold, take a good look of them! (Sings) Shame on you! Who likes you, even under the same quilt, staying far apart from me like separated by river. Avoiding lovemaking, you intentionally turn your body away from me.

末： (抬上岸，看介) 原來是一對比目魚。

丑： 嘻！兩個並在一處，正好幹那把戲，你看頭兒同搖，尾兒同擺，在人前賣弄風流。叫奴家看了，好不眼熱也呵！...

丑： (指魚對末介) 沒用的王八，你看看樣子！羞顏，誰似你合被同衾相河漢，還要避歡娛故意把身兒翻。⁵⁵

This treatment can also be called erotic estrangement and is one of the major devices employed by Li Yu in creating the alienation effect.

⁵⁵Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 169.

In *You Can't Do Anything about Fate*, the monstrously ugly hero metamorphoses into handsome man after unwittingly donating a great amount of money to equip the government army and burning the bills that his tenants are not be able to pay during war time (a parody of Feng Huan's 馮驩 story from the Warring States period). The metamorphosis, although seemingly designated as a reward for the hero's good deed, actually triggers a plot reversal: the hero's three beautiful wives completely reverse their attitudes toward him—from hiding in the family hall to competing with each other in their love for him.

Role Switching

The concept of role switching is probably best illustrated by the cartoon “comic strip” mentioned by Susan Stewart in her interesting research on intertextuality in folklore and literature entitled *Nonsense*. In her words,

The cartoon depicts the breakdown of an old social order—lions are happily playing checkers with gazelles, wolves are protectively watching goats, and a cat is tending a flock of geese, but turning “natural enemies” into social allies, and in the case of the first picture, the disequilibrium between the lion and gazelle is transformed into the initial equilibrium characteristic of the game—the impending disequilibrium brought about by the checkers match will be determined by a game order rather than a natural order.⁵⁶

We have noticed that two factors are crucial in the process of role switching: a consequent effect of strangeness and a rule change for regaining the new order.

⁵⁶Susan Stewart, *Nonsense*, p. 66.

Thus, like metamorphosis, role switching can also be used as a device to create defamiliarization. The difference between them is that while metamorphosis only involves physical transformations between human and nonhuman, the device of role switching concerns the misplacement of gender and social hierarchy. Numerous examples of this kind appear in Li Yu's works.

Homosexuality and the transcendence of gender boundaries are popular subjects in Ming-Qing vernacular fiction. Zui xihu xinyue zhuren's 醉西湖心月主人 *Bian er chai* 弁而釵 (*Cap-cum-Hairpin*), for instance, is a twenty-chapter collection of novellas containing four independent homosexual stories which emphasize four different aspects of homosexual love respectively. There are also a few gay tales scattered in different anthologies. Langxian's 浪仙 *Shi dian tou* 石點頭 (*The Rocks Nod Their Heads*) includes one tale of a passionate attachment between two young men who ultimately devote their lives to their love. Descriptions of homosexual affairs can be found in abundance in other contemporary works.

The eulogization of the unconventional *qing* and *bao* (報) is the prevalent trend in these tales. Each of the four stories in *Cap-cum-Hairpin*, for example, uses the title that inserts the character *qing*, but, more importantly, the stories in this collection are presented in a way that complies with all the aesthetic and moral codes of the *qing* and *bao* themes; no effect of strangeness and rule changes engendered from them.

"Qing Qi Ji" 情奇紀 (*The Wonder of Love*) is one of the novellas in *Cap-*

cum-Hairpin telling of a young man's horrible life experience and his rare and self-sacrificial love for another man. Li Youxian 李又仙, the hero of the story, sells himself for a hundred taels of silver to bail his father out of jail. He does not realize that his buyer is a pimp who forces teenage boys to work as male prostitutes. In the *nanyuan* 南院 (literally meaning "south courtyard", but *nan* is a pun for "man" 男, so it actually means "male brothel") horrible physical torment and psychological suffering make Li Youxian's life so unbearable that he almost forgets how to smile. All of this comes to an end when a courageous and chivalrous young man, Kuang Shi 匡時, comes to his rescue. In order to repay Kuang's kindness, Li lives with Kuang for three years masquerading as Kuang's female concubine. When the term is almost over and Li is about to return home rejoining his parents, Kuang and his wife are suddenly imprisoned by their family enemy's scheme. Protecting Kuang's only son from the revenge of his enemy, Li retreats to a Taoist temple under the guise of a female Taoist priest. There he becomes a "she" who mothers and educates Kuang's son until the boy grows up, successfully passes the official examination and finally finds his parents. While Li himself, with all his indebted *qing* and kindness to Kuang repaid, truly withdraws from the secular world and joins the Taoist religious order.

Seemingly switching to the female role, one still sees a great deal of manliness in Li Youxian. His filial and heroic act in saving his father and his sincerity and loyalty in treating his lover is in accord with what he believes a

*dazhangfu*大丈夫 (a real man) would do. Except for physical appearance, the author's language in describing him is also masculinized. There are two details which best reveal Li Youxian's repressed masculinity. From the age of twenty to thirty-five, Li Youxian lives a life as a woman in order to take care of Kuang's son. One can imagine how hard this would be for a young man. Li has to pull out all his whiskers to look like a woman. When he does that he secretly sobs and says to himself: "I am born as a man but doing what a woman is suppose to do. Others must look down upon me. The reason I endure this humiliation is to protect Kuang's heir" (我本男子，乃行女人之事，人世所極鄙薄輕踐者，我不惜一身任之恥，孰甚焉？但志在存孤).⁵⁷ When Kuang's whole family finally reunites and Kuang wants to rekindle his love affair with Li, Li refuses him and lays claim again to his manhood. What he denies is not his love for Kuang, but the notion of voluntarily giving up his manhood. His love for Kuang is still a man's love—a love that is full of masculine pride and sentiment.

If we read Susan Stewart's description of the cartoon "comic strip" more carefully, we see why the "role switching" in the story in question fails to engender an "alienation effect." Stewart says that the "lions are happily playing checkers with gazelles, wolves are protectively watching goats..." The underlying adverbs reveal the establishment of a new equilibrium or order that completely reverses the old system. This new equilibrium, obviously, cannot be

⁵⁷Zui xihu xinyue zhuren, "Qingqi ji," *Bian er chai* (Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1990), Chapter 4, p. 4.

found in the story of Li Youxian, because he is, in a way, suffering from and denying the involuntary role-switching.

In contrast, in Li Yu's three homosexual stories, the role-switching is always voluntary. In the story "Mencius Mother Raises Her Son Properly By Moving House Three Times," a double parody targets both the conventional theme of chaste woman and Li Youxian's story;⁵⁸ the hero-turned-heroine changes his role completely from a man to a woman by voluntary castration. Contrary to Li Youxian's mishap that traps him in male prostitution and womanhood, You Ruilang's 尤瑞郎 homosexual love goes through a whole process of courtship—marriage—widowhood, and, in the course of it, he is expected by others and himself to take on a woman's role. At home, Ruilang's father treats him as an unmarried maiden. Like some poor parents who happen to have a beautiful daughter, the father expects to marry his son off for a good dowry. He restricts Ruilang to the inside of the house to avoid sexual attention from other men. Because the narrator tells us,

There is something else you [means the reader] must understand: the Southern Mode [gay affair] in Fujian drew a sharp distinction between first and second marriages, just as in heterosexual matrimony. If the partner was a virgin, people were prepared to pay a large bride-price and go through all the formalities of a first marriage. But if, due to lax supervision, the first fruits had already been sampled, the boy would become known as a fallen flower. Although he would not be jettisoned, and could still expect to

⁵⁸No date is available in the Taipei tianyi chubanshe's edition. But according to *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao*, *Bian er chai* is dated earlier than *Rouputuan*, which should be published around Li Yu's time. Therefore, it is very possible Li Yu intentionally parodied *Bian er chai* when he wrote his homosexual stories.

acquire an owner, he would have to follow where he was led, surrendering any chance to choose his own husband. That was why You Shihuan [Ruiliang's father] warded off all trespassers— "to keep the pearl secure in its case until a buyer was found".

又要曉得福建的南風，與女子一般，也要分個初婚再醮。若是處子原身，就有人肯出重聘，三茶不缺，六禮兼行，一樣的明婚正娶。若還拘管不嚴，被人嘗了新去，就叫做敗柳殘花。雖然不是棄物，一般也有售主，但只好隨風逐浪。棄娶由人，就開不得雀屏，選不得佳婿了。所以侍寢不廢防閑，也是待沽之意。⁵⁹

All the underlined words have a feminine connotation, pointing to Ruiliang's role-switching. After Ruiliang is formally married to another man, Xu Jifang, they "form the closest and most loving of couples; one could scarcely do justice to the tender feelings they have for each other." (如魚得水，似漆投膠，說不盡綢繆之意).⁶⁰ And again, Ruiliang takes the role of wife. But his manhood cannot be completely denied while he still has a man's body that potentially endangers the newly established harmony. Xu expresses his fear thus: "'This thing here,' he said, pointing to Ruiliang's organ, 'is my nemesis. When we part, this will be the root cause.'⁶¹ In order to secure his role as Xu's life companion, Ruiliang gives up his manhood voluntarily and completely by castrating himself. The castration motif generates an alienation effect symbolizing the breakdown of the old social order. So the impending disequilibrium brought

⁵⁹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 115. The English translation is Gopal Sukhu and Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, p. 111. Emphasis added.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 119. The English translation is Gopal Sukhu and Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, p. 116.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 120. The English translation is Gopal Sukhu and Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, p. 118.

about by the castration will be determined by an artistic order, more specifically the order of parody.

In another of Li Yu's gay stories, "House of Gathered Refinements," the hero's manhood is also denied by castration. But this is brought about by the hero's enemy rather than being a voluntary action. However, under Li Yu's pen, the hero's appearance, behavior, and mentality are consistently projected as a woman, so that the castration, although it comes unexpectedly and cruelly, is actually a matter of formality.

Using the same technique but reversing the roles, Li Yu also writes about a woman becoming a man. The best example that can be given is Li Yu's play *Woman in Love*—a play about lesbian love. Interestingly that the two heroines' feelings for each other go beyond friendship is signaled by one of them taking the man's role. For both social and biological reasons, crossing the gender boundary for women is even harder, so it has to be accomplished by illusionary projections such as masquerade, dreaming, and imagination. In Scene Ten of the play, the two heroines, Cui Jianyun 崔箋云 and Cao Yuhua 曹語花, after falling in love with each other at first sight, secretly arrange their second meeting at a temple. Strongly attracted to each other, both of them struggle to identify their feelings. The older and more experienced Cui Jianyun suggests that they should take an oath to be husband and wife in their next lives, which is immediately echoed by Cao Yuhua. Then Cui wears a man's hat and clothing to proceed with the ceremony. The reaction from Cao signals the breakdown of

the old order and the establishment of the new equilibrium:

Cao: (turns and says to herself) Look! when dressed in man's clothing, she/he really is a Pan An on the cart and a Song Yu on the wall. Where can you find a man as beautiful as she/he? If I have to die to marry such a husband, I will have no regret.

.....

Cao: [says to Cui]: anything in the world can be regarded as a game but the relation between husband and wife. A virtuous woman won't take a second husband. Today you and I take a wedding ceremony for the next life. Later if I marry another man, although it won't be considered immoral, it will still not be proper. Moreover, we have such deep feelings for each other, how can we endure the separation?

(小旦背介) 你看她這等妝扮起來，分明是車上的潘安，牆上的宋玉。世上哪有這標致男子？我若嫁得這樣一個丈夫，就死也甘心。

...

小旦：我想天下事件件都兒戲得，只有個夫妻兒戲不得。烈女不更二夫，我今日既與你拜了堂，若後來再與別人拜堂，雖於大節無傷，行蹟上卻去不得了。況我們交情至此怎生拆得開？⁶²

Again, the underlined words clearly show how the masquerade creates the illusion of Cui's manhood and how Cao Yuhua's mentality is projected by the illusion. If the masquerade is only playful, then Cao's reaction does not make sense. Instead, the voluntary role-switching is made clear by Cao's immediate proposal of marriage.

Another type of role-switching in Li Yu's works is the overturning of the social hierarchy through the misplacement of the social functions and moral

⁶²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 4, pp. 33-34. Emphasis added.

obligations existing between master/mistress and servant/maidservant, father and son, superior and inferior. Again, most of the stories in this category, though they challenge the strict social hierarchy and family order of Chinese system, aims at the aesthetic value of the work.

One of Li Yu's stories from *Shi'er lou* "Sheng wo lou" 生我樓 (*Nativity Room, Shi'er lou*, 11) exchanges the roles of father and son by having the son adopt the father. Blessed with financial prosperity and good health, Yin Xiaolou 尹小樓 has lost his son many years before. In his declining year, one would expect him to adopt a son to secure his remaining years and eventually give him a decent burial. But what he does is exactly the opposite. He sells himself for only ten teals of silver to be a potential adopted father to a young man who, he later finds out, is no other but his lost son. The strangeness of this behavior, as might be expected, causes a strong reaction from others. His placard reads:

OLD MAN WITH NO SON WILLING TO SELL HIMSELF AS FATHER.
ASKING PRICE ONLY TEN TEALS. SAME-DAY CLOSING. LIFELONG
COMMITMENT.

年老無兒，自賣與人作父，止取身價十兩。愿者即日成交，並無後悔。

Then we are told by the narrator,

Whenever he came to a new place, he would parade up and down the streets with the placard held in front of him. Sometimes, when he grew tired, he would sit cross-legged on the ground with the placard dangling from his neck, like a priest begging for alms. When people saw him like that, they would laugh and jeer fit to burst, assuming he had gone out of his mind.

每到一處，就捏在手中，在街上走來走去。有時走得腳酸，就盤膝坐下，把招牌挂在胸前，與和尚募緣的相似。眾人見了，笑個不住，罵個不

了，都說是喪心病狂的人。⁶³

But the father and son role-switching cannot be one-sided. The son, who was abducted when only three years old and did not know his own natural father, coincidentally meets the father and decides to adopt him. He says to bystanders:

You can tell from his face he's a man of quality. My only worry is that some relative of his might turn up and claim him and he wouldn't want to stay with me the rest of his life. If he does want to, well, I'm an orphan myself and I'd be willing to pay his price and adopt him. Why, it would be wonderful to leave a name behind as someone who had succored the weak!

看他這個相貌，不是沒有結果的人，只怕他賣身之後，又有親人來認了去，不肯隨我終身。若肯隨我終身，我原是沒爺沒娘的人，就拼了十兩銀子，買他作個養父，也使百年以後傳一個憐孤恤寡之名，有甚麼不好！⁶⁴

In contrast to the father and son's attitude, the bystanders' viewpoint is a reflection of the reader's own opinion. The difference, however, is that the bystanders ridicule the strange behavior of the father and son (in Li Yu's later play *Qiao Tuanyuan*, a local rascal even parodies the son by pretending to adopt the same old man), while the reader, sensing the strangeness of Li Yu's treatment, sees the worn-out theme of "filial son" in a fresh light.

Mistaken identity is a variation on the theme of role-switching that can be considered as covert or situational role-switching. Character A is wrongly

⁶³Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 254. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *A Tower for the Summer Heart*, p. 228.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 256. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *A Tower for the Summer Heat*, p. 230.

identified as character B, so A has to, though sometimes unwittingly, put himself or herself into B's shoes and play B's role. The mistaken reversal of roles often creates narrative suspension, awkward situations, and a comic effect. It is one of the trademarks of romantic comedy. Li Yu is also very skillful in applying this technique.

One of the often-used forms of mistaken identities in Li Yu's plays and stories is "the scheme of change the contents of the bag" (調包計). This is the plot Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳 uses to make Xue Baochai 薛寶釵 marry Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 under Lin Daiyu's (林黛玉) name in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Li Yu employed this technique numerous times, but the best example can be seen in his play *Mistake with the Kite*, which involves multiple mistaken identities. The hero Han Shixun 韓世勛 writes a poem on a kite for his friend Qi. The kite accidentally lands in the heroine Shujuan's 淑娟 courtyard and Shujuan also writes a poem on the kite. Attracted by Shujuan's talent and having heard of her unrivaled beauty, Han makes another kite and this time writes a love poem on it, hoping the kite will be the perfect go-between for him. Unfortunately the kite drops in Shujuan's amorous and ugly sister Aijuan's 愛娟 compound. This leads to a double scheme of "change the content of bag." During the tryst, both of them pretend to be somebody else: Aijuan pretends to be the beautiful Shujuan, Han goes under the name of his rich friend Qi. As one can expect, the rendezvous scene is full of awkward situations and comic effects. In a dark room, assuming the girl he is with is the talented Shujuan, Han asks to play the

game of verse-making with her first,

- Han: Miss. Have you written a poem in responding to the clumsy poem that I wrote for you later?
 Aijuan: Yes. I have already written a poem in responding to your clumsy poem.
 Han: (startled) If that is so, can you recite your fine work for me?
 Aijuan: I momentarily forgot the fine poem I wrote.
 Han: (startled again) Since you wrote the poem yourself, how can you forget it only half day later? Please try to recall it.
 Aijuan: Because I think of you wholeheartedly, I even forgot the poem. Let me recall it.

- 生：小姐，小生後來一首拙作，可曾賜和麼？
 丑：你那首拙作，我已賜和過了。
 生：（惊介）這等，小姐的佳篇，請念一念。
 丑：我的佳篇一時忘了。
 生：（又惊介）自己做的詩，只隔得半日，怎麼就忘了？還求記一記。
 丑：一心想著你，把詩都忘了。待我想來。⁶⁵

Then Aijuan recites a poem from an anthology pretending the poem is hers. But the learned Han recognizes it. So,

- Han: (even more startled) This is a poem from an anthology, how come you claim it is yours?
 Aijuan: (panic), Oh, that, that...that surely enough is a poem from an anthology. I recited it to test your knowledge. You really can recall it after all. Judging from this, you are a true scholar!
 Han: I really want to hear your original poem!
 Aijuan: A time like this is worth a thousand pieces of gold. There is no time to recite poems! let's finish the serious business [making love] first!

- 生：（大惊介）這是一首《千家詩》，怎麼說是小姐做的？
 丑：（慌介）這…這…這果然是一首《千家詩》，我故意念來試你學問的。你必竟記得，這等是個真才子了。
 生：小姐的真本，必竟要領教。
 丑：這是千金一刻的時節，哪有工夫念詩。我和你且把正經事

⁶⁵Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 4, p. 148.

做完了，再念也不遲。66

Here, the technique of mistaken identities creates a covert role-switching: the talented young man is dating an ugly and stupid girl but he remains in dark. Therefore when he plays the verse-making game with her, everything goes wrong. The code of verse-making means nothing to her and her unintelligent answers shock him. The alienation effect, then, is naturally generated from the awkwardness of the situation and the double talk of the characters. However, unlike the overt role-switching, the effect of covert role-switching will disappear when the truth comes out. This is why Li Yu intentionally puts his hero in the dark until the end of the play—at his wedding night he finally sees Shujuan in person, and realizes that all along he misidentified Aijuan as Shujuan. Li Yu's treatment of the tryst scene, as we can see, is a brilliant parody of the verse-making cliché contained in the "scholar-beauty romance."

Duplicity in Characterization

Parodic inversions in Li Yu's works are also generated by a duplicity in characterization. Li Yu creates many pairs of double characters. For each pair, one character has a corresponding, contrasting and cross-reflection relationships with his/her double.

This artistic technique is certainly not new in Chinese literature. Andrew Plaks, for instance, finds that the "use of ribald double" is very common in the

⁶⁶Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 4, p. 149.

four Ming masterworks. It is a fine device for bringing out irony because it can set up “a network of cross-reflections between linked characters and actions,”⁶⁷ The best example of character duplication in *Shuihu zhuan* is “black whirlwind” Li Kui 李魁, and his double Li Gui 李鬼, whose name and attributes mark him as a reflection of the savage side of Li’s character. In *Jin Ping Mei*, the amorous slave girl Song Huilian 宋蕙蓮 mirrors the notorious heroine Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, and Song’s sex battles with Ximen Qing and sudden suicide also point at Pan’s sex life and fate. Even the magnificent monkey king Sun Wukong 孫悟空, who can be transformed into seventy-two different forms, has his own double—a macaque who symbolizes the allegorical meaning of “double-mind” (二心) or “the straying of the mind” (迷心).

In employing the device of duplicity in his characterization, Li Yu emphasizes the oppositions rather than the similarities between the paired characters. So the talented and beautiful always pair with the foolish and ugly; the genuine person’s double is a fake; the romantic and passionate matches the anti-romantic and rational. Li Yu’s doubling of characters, with their contrasting qualities underscored, not only set up a network of cross-reflection between the linked characters and actions but also sets out a pattern of plot inversion.

The use of a ribald double is a common device in both Li Yu’s stories and plays. In his play *Mistake with the Kite* both the hero and heroine possess ribald

⁶⁷Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, p. 321.

shadows: the talented but poor hero Han Shixun is paired with the half-witted but rich Qi Shi 戚施; the beautiful and elegant Shujuan with her ugly and vulgar half sister Aijuan. Whereas the talented and beautiful figures represent stereotypical characters, their ugly and stupid doubles act as parodic repetitions. "The example of the refined characters throws into relief whatever is stupid or crass in the behavior of their doubles; but the spontaneousness of the ugly characters is equally efficacious in revealing whatever is strained, or inflated in the behavior of the refined characters."⁶⁸ The ribald doubles in this play are also crucial to the plot structure. Both Qi Youxian and Aijuan play a major role in setting up the plot inversion. The two funniest scenes parody two essential situations in romantic drama—the tryst scene and the dream scene, both of which could not take place without Aijuan.

The tryst scene, as we have already discussed, parodies the verse-making cliché of the "scholar and beauty romance". Later, in Scene Sixteen "Menghai" (夢駭), the dream scene, cleverly inverts the scene of "Jingmeng" (驚夢) from *The Peony Pavilion*. The scene opens with the hero feeling bored with his studying, obsessed as he is with restless sexual desire, eventually culminating in a dream. The surface plot structure is exactly like the one in *The Peony Pavilion*, only in Li Yu's play the dreamer changes from a female to a male. However, whereas the romantic and passionate Du Liniang meets her lover and fulfills her sexual desire in the dream, the equally romantic and passionate Han Shixun only

⁶⁸Eric Henry, *Chinese Amusement* (Hamden: The Shoe String Press, Inc., 1980), p. 97.

experiences a nightmare in which Aijuan not only tries to force him to have sex with her but also falsely accuses him of rape before a magistrate. Her vulgar language shocks the seemingly self-restrained Han: "He tore my drawers open! He tore my drawers open! I was gravely wounded and couldn't bear the pain, so I yelled like thunder." "It is the confrontation with the strident vulgarity of Aijuan that most strikingly deflates the seriousness of Han Shixun's romanticism."⁶⁹

Other variations on the theme of the double in Li Yu's works are the pairing of genuine with fake and romantic with rational. The former can be seen in his play *Yizhong yuan* 意中緣 *Ideal Love-matches*, in which a lecherous monk shadows the famous Ming painter Dong Qichang, while the latter can be found in Li Yu's short story "The Hall of Homing Crane," as indicated in our earlier discussion.

⁶⁹Eric Henry, *Chinese Amusement*, p. 97.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM NARRATIVE TOWARD META-NARRATIVE

THE SELF-CRITICAL TEXTS OF THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY

Wayne Booth, in his influential book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, sees the novel as an art of communication, using the rhetorical resources available to an author intent on making his reader create a valid fictional universe.¹ When the author takes the role of the critic or the reader, providing self-critical comments for his own work, the communication becomes auto-communicative and self-informing; the illusion of an objective and realistic representation of life is constantly destroyed by the author's intrusive presentation of his own artistic and moral values and beliefs. The reader is forced to acknowledge that what he is reading is fictional. Moreover, when a literary narrative represents both outside reality and its own creative process, it is not only self-conscious about its own linguistic and narrative structures but also implicates the reader in the act of creating. This rhetoric of auto-communication, referred to as metanarrative by modern critics, is an important and useful term for discussing Li Yu's work.

¹There are two notions of rhetoric running throughout Booth's book: the rhetoric in fiction, as overt and recognizable appeal (the most extreme form being authorial commentary), and fiction as rhetoric in "the larger sense, an aspect of the whole work viewed as a total act of communication." Based on the second notion of rhetoric, Booth believes that "a pure fiction is impossible." Every author has a rhetoric, whether or not he writes with his reader specifically in mind; his only choice is in what kind he will use. So, every word or sentence the author writes will always guide the reader's reading and imagination, contributing to making the reader create a valid fictional universe and bring the "novel itself" to perfection. For more detailed discussion, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 109-116, pp. 415-417.

Metanarrative is defined by Gerald Prince as “a particular narrative that may refer to itself and to those elements by which it is constituted and communicated.”² The concept is used by modern Western scholars such as Robert Alter, Margaret A. Rose, and Linda Hutcheon to describe the self-consciousness of contemporary fiction and its implications for the theory of the novel. According to these scholars, although metanarrative is a modern concept (it was not until the 1970s that it received serious attention) auto-representation can be traced back to Greek narrative, where it was “the epic practice of having a character relate part of his own tale in order to give the illusion of taking attention away from the Homeric voice.”³ Modern Western metafiction, however, really begins with Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* in Spain and Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* in England. According to Hutcheon, “this critical awareness or self-consciousness has been more and more structurally internalized, moving from the Preface into the content, and finally into the structure of the novel itself.”⁴

Metafiction has, as Linda Hutcheon indicates, two major focuses: “the first is on its linguistic and narrative structures, and the second is the role of the

²Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), p. 115.

³Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier UP, 1980), p. 40.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 40.

reader.”⁵ While the first focus is made explicit by the narrative, in the second, the boundary between the author and the reader becomes blurred. Diegetical self-awareness and linguistic self-reflectiveness are signalled by metanarrative signs that “illuminate any aspect of the constituent signs of a narrative.”⁶ To be more specific, the metanarrative signs are a series of codes that are explicitly laid bare within the text by the narrator himself, (instead of being explained by the critic from outside the text,) indicating the linguistic, narrative, sociocultural, symbolic and other organizational and interpretative aspects of the narrative.

Self-conscious literary narrative appears to be a universal phenomenon, although its formations vary in different cultural contexts. As we have indicated in Chapter One, Chinese narrative also experienced its own diachronic progression of self-consciousness, which can be traced back to Sima Qian’s *Shiji*, where the “Grand Historian” himself writes commentaries for his own work. In the seventeenth century, an age that can be characterized as self-conscious in all its art forms, the self-reflexive nature of Chinese narrative reached its apex, a development which can be witnessed in both fictional and theatrical genres.

In fiction, for instance, several writers experimented with self critical texts, fiction that constitutes its own first critical commentary written by no other than the author himself. The two novels attributed to Li Yu both belong to this category, while two of his contemporaries—Chen Chen (1613-?) and

⁵Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 6.

⁶See Gerald Prince, *Narratology*, pp. 123-124.

Dong Yue (1620-1686)—are also believed to have written auto-representational novels that supply their own self-critical apparatus.

In both her book *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalism* and the article “The Self Critical Text: Fiction and Fiction-Criticism in a Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel,” Ellen Widmer not only argues convincingly that *Shuihu houzhuan* was both written and commented on by Chen Chen, but also reveals the metafictional nature of this novel. According to Widmer, Chen Chen wrote three Prefaces (one under his name and two more as a commentator), forty post-chapter critiques and several hundred marginal commentaries for his own novel, thereby creating two spheres: the authorial sphere and the fictional sphere. Emphasizing narrative structure over plot, installing a vision of the author within the text, and emphasizing one rhetorical line over the others implicit in the text, allows the authorial sphere to interact with the fictional one, whereby constructing a higher level of meaning. Although formally speaking, the commentaries are separable from the text (in modern times, the book has circulated without any of this paraphernalia), Widmer convinces us that the commentaries have an internal relation with the text proper; they should then be considered as an integral part of the novel. As she puts it,

...the Li Chun [Li Jun] story is the sequel’s main attraction but...because it cannot tell itself, it needs the help of the authorial interventions to provide plausible explanations for its origins and a context in which its organization make sense. Obviously, these functions are far better satisfied when commentary is brought into the picture because of the many times that commentary addresses

such issues directly.⁷

Moreover, within the text proper, the author also discusses “the fictional nature of the fiction: the problem of choosing subjects, of putting them in comprehensible order, even the number of chapters that have elapsed so far...”⁸ These direct and intrusive addresses, when inserted into a dialogue with the metatextual commentaries, prove the novel to be a highly self-conscious construction.

Similarly, the interdependent and interactive relationship in Dong Yue’s *Xiyou bu* between the commentary and the story proper helps us to understand the crucial role played by the critical commentary in understanding the meaning as well as the narrative and linguistic structure of the novel. In the earliest edition of *Xiyou bu* (the Chongzhen edition, 1641), two kinds of commentaries believed to have been written by the author exist. One is a preliminary essay entitled “*Xiyou bu dawen*” (“Replies to Questions on the *Xiyou bu*”) and the other are the post-chapter critiques attached to the end of each chapter. Judging from the contents of both commentaries and their internal relationships with the text proper, I believe that the “Dawen” and the post-chapter critiques are all products of Dong Yue. The functions of these commentaries are both

⁷Ellen Widmer, “The Self Critical Text: Fiction and Fiction-Criticism in a Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel,” *Berkshire Review* (1984): 128. Also see her book *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1987), Chapter 5.

⁸Ellen Widmer, “The Self Critical Text: Fiction and Fiction-Criticism in a Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel,” p. 123.

interpretive and organizational; on the one hand, they guide the reading by installing the author's voice within and without the text; on the other, they make the reader conscious about the fictional status of the novel by constantly foregrounding this status.

Xiyou bu should be considered a rather complex and challenging piece of work, not only because of its philosophical, psychological, and socio-political aspects but also due to its relationship with the original *Xiyou ji*. Whereas early interpretations, such as Yiru Jushi's 巖如居士 (Layman Yiru), offer a Buddhist reading of the novel, modern scholars are inclined to emphasize the psychological and social-political significance of the novel.

However, when the text and commentary are read against one another, the novel's highly self-conscious nature can be seen to allow for its own possible interpretation. Unlike the original *Xiyou ji*, the fictional world of *Xiyou bu* is a dream world, in which Monkey undergoes a series of weird and bizarre experiences which perplex him. But, as Frederick P. Brandauer indicates, nowhere does the narrator tell the reader explicitly that Monkey is entering a dream world, although in the first and last chapter he offers clues to suggest that what follows and precedes is a dream. In the short prologue to the first chapter, the reader is told that Monkey will see that the sources of "worldly desires are about floating clouds and dreamy illusions." This anticipates the subheading of the last chapter, "The Elder of the Void Rouses Monkey from His Dream."⁹ But

⁹See Frederick P. Brandauer, *Tung Yüeh* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 75.

that Monkey suffers an extended illusory experience is clearly indicated in Dong Yue's commentary. In "Dawen", Dong Yue first asks a question regarding the time of Monkey's story as if he were a reader of his own text, and then gives us his explanation:

Q: In your novel the world of the Ancients is concerned with the past. The world of the Future is concerned with the future. But how in the days of early Tang can you have the soul of the Sung Prime Minister Qin Kuai being punished?

A: *The Tower of Myriad Mirrors* is a dream of desire. If, for example, on the third of the first month, you see in a dream that you will be in a fight and receive wounds to your hands and feet on the third of the third month, and when the third of the third month arrives and you are, in fact, in a fight, what your eyes see is no different from what you dreamed. The third of the first month is not the third month. Rather, what you dreamed and saw is an indication that there is no place the heart cannot reach. And since there is no place the heart cannot reach, it cannot really be left to stray.

問： 古人世界，是過去之說矣；未來世界，是未來之說矣。雖然，初唐之日，又安得宋丞相秦檜之魂魄而治之？

曰： 《西遊補》，情夢也。譬如正月初三日夢見三月初三與人爭鬥，手足格傷，及至三月初三果有爭鬥，目之所見與夢無異。夫正月初三非三月初三也，而夢之見之者，心無所不至也；心無所不至，故不可放。¹⁰

Here, Dong Yue makes very clear that the novel creates a dream world and the temporal structure of the narrative makes sense only when one reads the novel as a dream.

The allegorical framework set up by the text is also illuminated by treating the author's commentary as an internal part of the novel. The central theme of

¹⁰Dong Yue, "Xiyou bu dawen," *Xiyou bu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), pp. 1-2. The English translation is Shuen-fu Lin and Larry Schulz's, in *Tower of Myriad Mirrors* (Berkeley : Lancaster-Miller Publishers, 1978), p. 6.

the *Xiyou bu*, that demons are products of the mind is a concept that relates to the “philosophy of mind” of the Ming period, which is referred to by the three central teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, and Neo-Confucianism.¹¹ Dong Yue’s undertaking, though, is primarily a Buddhist and Neo-Confucian examination of allegory. The Buddhist vision, that all things in the universe are the manifestations of mind and therefore illusory and impermanent, and the Neo-Confucian concept of the “cultivation of the mind” are not only central to some of the key episodes of the novel, but also highlighted by Dong Yue in both his “Dawen” and post-chapter critiques. At the beginning of “Dawen,” Dong Yue explains the main theme of the novel and the relation between the novel and the original *Xiyou ji*:

Q: *Journey to the West* is not incomplete; why a supplement?

A: *The Tower of Myriad Mirrors* comes after the episode of the “Flaming Mountain and the Banana-leaf Fan” (Chapter 61) and before that of “Cleansing the Heart and Sweeping the Pagoda” (Chapter 62). The Great Sage devised a scheme to obtain the Banana-leaf Fan and cool the flames. In this he merely used his physical strength. The forty-eight-thousand years are the amassed roots of desire. To become enlightened and open to the Great Way, one must first empty and destroy the roots of desire. To empty and destroy the roots of desire one must first go inside desire. After going inside desire and seeing the emptiness of the root of the world’s desire, one can then go outside of desire and realize the reality of the root of the Way. *The Tower of Myriad Mirrors* deals with the Demon of Desire, and the Demon of Desire is the Ch’ing Fish Spirit.

問：《西遊》不缺，何以補也？

答：《西遊》之補，蓋在火焰芭蕉之後，洗心掃塔之先也。大聖計調

¹¹See Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), p. 241.

芭蕉，清涼火焰，力竭之而已矣。四萬八千年俱是情根團結，悟通大道，必先空破情根；空破情根，必先走入情內；走入情內，見得世界情根之虛，然後走出情外，認得道根之實。《西遊補》者，情妖也；情妖者，鱗魚精也。¹²

Monkey, who is bewitched under the Qing fish spell, represents the allegorical figure for the unenlightened state of mind or a “strayed mind” and that his journey in the dream world symbolizes a trial of illumination is quite obvious. But several episodes are contrived by the author as allegorical exemplars of the Buddhist or Neo-Confucian concepts of mind cultivation. The first episode occurs in Chapter One: after killing fifty boys and girls who block the way, Monkey suddenly becomes remorseful and writes a eulogy for them. Right after this episode, he loses his way and enters the dream world. Monkey’s loss of inner calm betrays his emotional attachment or *qing* 情 (desire), and this is the reason he is bewitched by “demons of desire.” The significance of this episode is brought out into the open by the author in his post-chapter commentary, where he says “Monkey’s breaking the wall of boys and girls is a method of cutting the root of desire. Unfortunately, one thought of pity gives rise to many false thoughts.” (行者打破男女城，是斬絕情根手段。惜哉！一念悲憐，惹起許多妄想).¹³

In Chapter Two Monkey meets the imperial palace maid in the world of New Tang. Complaining about the Emperor’s self-indulgent life-style, she

¹²Dong Yue, “*Xiyou bu dawen*,” p. 1. The English translation is Shuen-fu Lin and Larry Schulz’s, in *Tower of Myriad Mirrors*, pp. 191-192.

¹³Dong Yue, *Xiyou bu*, p. 5. The English translation is Shuen-fu Lin and Larry Schulz’s, in *Tower of Myriad Mirrors*, p. 32.

mentions the former Emperor's Pearl-Rain Tower, a place of pleasure-seeking and a symbol for worldly joy. But with the passing of time, the beauty, elegance, and glamour of the Tower have all disappeared. What is left is a ruined, neglected, and empty building. "Seeing this sort of thing," the maid comments, "You know that emperor and commoner all return to nothing; courtesan and village girl alike become dust." (天子庶人，同歸無有；皇妃村女，共化青塵)。¹⁴ Here, the maid takes on the role of the narrator, overlaying Buddhist vision onto the story—a vision that sees worldly reality as unreal, illusive, and impermanent. Again, this key episode is further illuminated in the post-chapter commentary, where it is considered as "the main idea of the whole book" (一部大旨).

Another important idea discussed by Dong Yue in his commentary concerns the Neo-Confucian notion of "lost mind" (放心 *fang xin*). In Chapter Eleven, Monkey gets lost in the Sixty-Four Hexagram Palace. He plucks a bunch of hairs from his body and changes them into hair-Monkeys, ordering them to search the Palace. Then the narrator tells us,

Monkey stopped and stood still. He saw a hair-Monkey drunkenly climbing the hill from the southwest, Monkey asked, "Where did you go?"

The hair-Monkey said, "I was walking close to a tower where there was a girl of just sixteen with a face like peach blossoms. When she saw me outside her window she grabbed me and pulled me in. We sat shoulder-to-shoulder and she poured wine in my mouth till I was drunk as mud."

Monkey was enraged. He clenched his fist in front of the

¹⁴Dong Yue, *Xiyou, bu*, p. 9. The English translation is Shuen-fu Lin and Larry Schulz's, in *Tower of Myriad Mirrors*, p. 41.

hair-Monkey and beat and scolded him wildly. He said, "You Dog! I let you go for a minute and you get tangled up with the Demon of desire!"

The hair-Monkey wailed and wept, and could do nothing but jump onto Monkey's body. Having gathered all his hairs, Monkey descended the Hill of Grief.

行者方才立定。

只見西南上一個毫毛行者沉醉上山，行者問他到哪里去來。毫毛行者道：“我走到一個樓邊，樓中一個女子，年方二八，面似桃花，見我在她窗外，一把扯進窗里，并肩坐了，灌得我爛醉如泥。”行者大惱，捏了拳頭，望着毫毛行者亂打亂罵，道：“你這狗才！略略放你走動，便去纏住情妖麼？”那毫毛行者哀哀啼哭，也只得跳上身來。當時行者收盡毫毛，走下愁峰。¹⁵

Allowing his hair-Monkeys (part of his mind) to stray results in getting one hair-Monkey tangled up with sexual desire. And Monkey's remedy is to gather his strayed hair. This is without doubt an allegorical treatment of the Neo-Confucian concept of mind cultivation. Once more, authorial intention is laid bare in the author's commentary. Right after narrating this episode, Dong Yue comments: "Gathering in the strayed heart is the main idea of this book. It is disclosed here"(收、放心一部大主意，卻露在此處).¹⁶ Coupled with this is the author's answer to one of his self-raised questions in "Dawen":

- Q: The original text of *Journey to the West* has a million monsters. All they want to do is to butcher the T'ang Priest and eat his flesh. In your *The Tower of Myriad Mirrors*, the Ch'ing Fish only enchants the Great Sage. Why is this?
- A: Mencius said, "There is no other way of learning than just to seek your strayed heart."

¹⁵Dong Yue, *Xiyou bu*, p. 52. The English translation is Shuen-fu Lin and Larry Schulz's, in *Tower of Myriad Mirrors*, pp. 137-138.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 52. The English translation is Shuen-fu Lin and Larry Schulz's, in *Tower of Myriad Mirrors*, p. 138.

問：《西遊》舊本，妖魔百萬，不過慾剖唐僧而俎其肉；子補
 《西遊》，而鯖魚獨迷大聖，何也？
 曰：孟子曰“學問之道無他，求其放心而已矣”。¹⁷

Interestingly, Dong Yue repeatedly emphasizes the difference between the old version of *Xiyou ji* and his own text. He argues that where the original work focuses on describing the external demons and obstacles that bar the way of the pilgrim group, his novel takes up the theme of “demons of desire” and the cultivation of mind based on Buddhist and Neo-Confucian philosophies. The *guben* 古本 or *jiuben* 舊本 (old version) of *Xiyou ji* mentioned in Dong Yue’s “Dawen,” should be the extant antecedents of a much later Ming version—the hundred-chapter *Xiyou ji*. Because the philosophical concept of the “cultivation of mind” can be found not only in this Ming literati reworking of the novel, it also provides a major allegorical framework for the whole narrative. This new philosophical focus, coupled with the allegorical framework is, according to Andrew Plaks, the original contribution of this sixteenth-century author, rather than merely the reworking of all other extant antecedents.¹⁸ Dong Yue’s comments seem to prove Plaks’ theory. What Dong Yue was trying to do in his *Xiyou bu* evidently coincided with the intention of the author of the hundred-chapter *Xiyou ji*.

If Chen Chen and Dong Yue take on the role of critic in accommodating

¹⁷Dong Yue, “*Xiyou bu dawen*,” *Xiyou bu*, p. 1. The English translation is Shuen-fu Lin and Larry Schulz’s, in *Tower of Myriad Mirrors*, p. 192.

¹⁸Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, p. 227.

their critical commentaries within the structure of the novel, Jin Shengtan does the opposite in reworking and criticizing two masterpieces *Shuihu zhuan* and *Xixiang ji*. Jin's reworking of the original texts and his highly auto-communicative commentaries make his versions of *Shuihu zhuan* and *Xixiang ji* a model for the kind of self-critical texts under examination here.

Jin Shengtan, as we know, is famous for his critical work on *Shuihu zhuan* (1641) where he formulated the principal concepts of the Chinese theory of fiction; however, only little research has been done about his work on *Xixiang ji* (1656).¹⁹ But in his theatrical treatise *Xianqing ouji*, Li Yu not only dedicated a whole section for Jin's critical discourse on *Xixiang ji*, he also gave Jin his most enthusiastic applause, saying:

To read Jin Shengtan's commentary on *Xixiang ji* will make all the talented writers of all time give up their hopes [of rewriting commentary on *Xixiang ji*]. Up until now, *Xixiang ji* has come out for four hundred years. [During this period], those who praised *Xixiang* as the best play of all were countless. However, Jin Shengtan was the only one that could really point out why it is the best.

讀金聖歎所評《西廂記》，能令千古才人心死……自有《西廂》以迄于今，四百餘載，推《西廂》為填詞第一者，不知几千几萬人，而能曆指其所以為第一之故者，獨出一金聖歎。²⁰

More importantly, Li Yu himself also did something very similar to what

¹⁹A modern Chinese scholar Zhang Guoguang has written two research articles on Jin's reworking of *Xixiang ji* in his book *Shuihu yu Jin Shengtan yanjiu* (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shuhua chubanshe, 1981). A Western scholar Sally Church also wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on the same subject.

²⁰Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 64.

Jin did with *Xixiang ji*. He rewrote several plays while adding commentaries to at least one of his own versions. Moreover, he was also a co-critic for one of his ten plays. It seems that the similarities between Li Yu and Jin Shengtān are by no means incidental; on the contrary, it resonated with what was happening in the fictional texts under discussion and signaled a new period of self-consciousness in the development of Chinese narrative.

The most interesting and significant element of Jin Shengtān's version of *Xixiang ji* is its highly intrusive nature, which changes the authorship of the entire text. In his "How to read the sixth genius book *Xixiang ji*" Jin openly claims that: "The *Xixiang ji* commented by Shengtān is Shengtān's writing, not the writing of the [original] *Xixiang ji*" (聖歎批《西廂記》是聖歎文字，不是《西廂記》文字).²¹ Jin Shengtān's unconventional practice totally transformed the text into something else, something stamped with Jin Shengtān's name forever. Furthermore, he crossed the border from being a mere critic to that of being a creative artist. He was not only commenting on the play but actually rewriting it himself. As a result, the fate of other versions of *Xixiang ji* was just like that of the old version of *Shuihu zhuan*, they were all swept away by Jin's new edition. The modern Chinese scholar Zhang Guoguang 張國光 has this to say about the dual role Jin Shengtān played in reworking and commenting on *Xixiang ji*: "Jin Shengtān is not only the commentator of *Xixiang ji*, but also the editor who revised it and the author who was responsible for its finalization" (

²¹Jin Shengtān, *Jin Shengtān piben Xixiang ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), p. 21.

金聖歎不僅是《西廂》的評論家，而且是它的刪訂者，是《西廂》最後定型時負責定稿的作者).²²

If we see Jin Shengtān as the author who finalized *Xixiang ji*, or at least his own version of it, then it is quite logical to consider his revised text as both self-critical and auto-communicative. Actually, in his “Dufa”, Jin Shengtān himself comments upon the self-reflexive nature of his text and the role assigned to the reader in the act of reading. He says:

When I was young, I hated to read the line ‘I will show you the mandarin duck after embroidering it, but I will not share with you the secret of my needle skill’...If the [embroiderer] really does have the secret of needle skill, why not show me a little? Today, in reading *Xixiang ji*, we can see not only the mandarin duck has been embroidered, the secret of needle skill has also been completely demonstrated.”

仆幼年最恨“鴛鴦繡出從君看，不把金針度與君之二句…若果知得金針，何妨與我略度？今日見《西廂記》，鴛鴦既繡出，金針亦盡度。²³

Here, Jin Shengtān makes it clear that, in his version of *Xixiang ji*, not only the artistic product but also the making of that product are treated as objects of representation. Moreover, he urges the reader to engage in the process of creation. For Jin Shengtān, reading is re-writing, and the boundary between the reader and the writer is not insurmountable. He suggests that the reader should no longer be a mere consumer, but also the producer of the text, as he indicates in his “Dufa”: “The *Xixiang ji* commented by Shengtān read by the talented

²²Zhang Guoguang, “Jiechu de gudian xiju pinglunjia Jin Shengtān,” *Shuihu yu Jin Shengtān yanjiu* (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shuhua chubanshe, 1981), p. 291.

²³Jin Shengtān, *Jin Shengtān piben Xixiang ji*, p. 15.

people through the ages is their own writing, not Shengtan's writing any more" (天下萬世錦繡才子讀聖歎所批《西廂記》，是天下萬世才子文字，不是聖歎文字).²⁴ Jin Shengtan's remark about the role of the reader is reminiscent of French scholar Roland Barthes' theory of the "writerly text" in his influential book *S/Z*.

Discussing the way in which novels participate in the production of meaning, Barthes classifies a text as either a "writerly" or "readerly" text. The readerly is defined as a product consumed by the reader; the writerly is a process of production in which the reader becomes a producer: it is "ourselves writing." The readerly text is constrained by considerations of representation: it is irreversible, "natural", decidable, continuous, totalizable, and unified into a coherent whole based on the tyranny of the signified. The writerly is infinitely plural and open to the free play of signifiers and of difference, unconstrained by representative considerations, and transgressive of any desire for a decidable, unified, totalized meaning. Barthes emphasizes that interpretation is a question of asserting the very existence of plurality. The more readerly a work is, the less plural it is; consequently the more writerly a text is, the more plural it is. Barthes also draws an outline of a hierarchy of texts: At the apex stands the "multivalent text," which is completely and integrally plural and therefore "reversible" and "frankly indeterminable"; Barthes also calls this "modern writing." Next comes the "polysemous texts," which are "classical readerly works in which various structures of meaning may be traced." Its plurality is

²⁴Jin Shengtan, *Jin Shengtan piben Xixiang ji*, p. 21.

proportionally incomplete. Finally, there exist univocal texts, those in which language is used practically, as an instrument of communication.²⁵

Declaring that “the writerly is our value” in *S/Z*, Barthes takes up a readerly short story—Balzac’s “Sarrasine.” But instead of exposing predictability, Barthes’ analysis opens the story up, presenting it as an astute and resourceful reflection upon its own codes and the signifying mechanisms of nineteenth century French culture.

Interestingly, there are other striking similarities between Jin’s undertaking in *Xixiang ji* and Barthes’ reading of “Sarrasine.” Both choose a classical text, but then map alternative meanings; both approach the texts intrusively, arbitrarily breaking them up into pieces and inserting their comments between the lines. Even the forms of their discourses are alike: both utilize interlinear as well as chapter commentaries to deliver their views. The theoretical similarities and differences between Jin Shengtian and Roland Barthes are worthy of their own research project, but this is not a place to elaborate this topic further. However, it seems to me, that whereas Jin Shengtian revised *Xixiang ji* himself, Barthes left Balzac’s “Sarrasine” untouched. Barthes sees himself as a “writerly reader” whose reading is not so much to impose meaning as to appreciate what plural constitutes it. He recommends a textual analysis which seeks to multiply a single text by treating each of its elements as the point of departure for an infinite “drift” of meanings. Jin Shengtian, on the

²⁵See Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

other hand, more or less regards himself as a critic turned co-author. Although he also suggests that his potential readers should and will have their own interpretations and participate in their own further creation, he is more interested in telling them what his *Xixiang ji* is about and how its language works. He tries to install an authorial vision in his text that will guide the reader to appreciate his re-creation or, to use Barthes's phrase, his "writerly reading."

Jin Shengtan's *Xixiang* is a completely different text from that of Wang Shifu's, a fact recognized by literary critics ever since its appearance. The distinctiveness of Jin's version is due not only to his innovative revision of Wang Shifu's text, but also to his ingenious commentaries. Two major differences exist between Jin Shengtan and Wang Shifu: first, the story has been completely changed in Jin's version; second, Jin's text is self-reflexive and self-critical where Wang Shifu's is not.

Jin Shengtan made a number of stylistic and structural changes in order to lay claim to the story. He created the impression that *Xixiang ji* is critical of Yingying, its romantic heroine, and of typical *jiaren* 佳人 from a gentry family. He also effected several major changes to the plot, in order not only to make the story more consistent, but also to enhance its artistic effect. The revisions to the lyrics and to the dialogue are numerous. But most importantly, he was the writer who finally and successfully altered the denouement of the play, transforming a comic story that ends in a "happy reunion" into a tragic drama

that concludes with a horrifying dream.

Jin Shengtān was not the first critic to feel that Part Five was inconsistent with the rest of the play. The hypothesis that “the fifth part and the previous four parts are not written by one person” existed before Jin and was repeatedly discussed by other critics around his time. For instance, in his *Qu Zao* 曲藻, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590) suspected that Part Five of the play might have been added by another Yuan playwright, Guan Hanqing 關漢卿.²⁶ But no one had such a decisive impact on the ending of the play as Jin Shengtān did. He not only presented the reader with another interpretation, but told a completely different story through both his textual revisions and highly tendentious commentaries.

What Jin Shengtān did formally in cutting off the fifth part was merely to add the word “*xu*” (續, sequel) to the title of the fifth part so that the “happy reunion” was physically separated from the previous four parts. This treatment ends by Zhang Sheng’s horrifying dream (Yingying has been taken away from him by bandits) on his way to take civil service examination rather the conventional “happy end” denouement. In order to justify this truncation, Jin made some crucial modifications that disconnect Part Five, both in terms of plot development and characterization. Most of those modifications relate to two story lines: first, Zhang Sheng’s success in passing the civil service examination

²⁶See Zhang Guoguang, “You bijiao cai you jianbie,” *Shuihu yu Jin Shengtān yanjiu*, pp. 274-289. Also see his “Xixiang ji zaju diwu ben xi Wang Shifu yuanzuo bian,” in *Jin Shengtān piben Xixiang ji*, pp. 324-328.

and his formal wedding ceremony with Yingying after he got an official post; second, Yingying's original engagement with Zheng Heng. He completely deleted the foreshadowing of the happy reunion and of Yingying's initial engagement with Zheng Heng, significantly altering the story.

When Jin Shengtan, the author, rewrites the text in order to literally change the story; Jin Shengtan, the critic, tells the reader how the story should be told and why the events happen as they do. This second-part of his mission takes place within the critical discourse he attaches to the revised play script. This apparatus consists of three prefaces (one of them is his "How to Read the Sixth Genius Book *Xixiang ji*"), pre-scene commentaries, and interlinear commentaries. Compared to Chen Chen and Dong Yue, Jin Shengtan worked out a more systematic way to introduce the authorial and critical view at a metatextual level, although Chen and Dong's metanarratives seem to be more internalized. However, one thing shared by all their texts is the interaction between the text proper and the commentary.

Jin Shengtan's revisions to the original text's ending are so subtle that a negligent reader might have completely missed them had he not provided a critical commentary. If the reader reads the story as a tragedy rather than a comedy, it is because Jin Shengtan tells him to do so. In his "Dufa," attached to the beginning of the book, Jin Shengtan first suggests the idea of a "four-part" play by referring to *Xixiang ji* as a sixteen-scene play (there are actually twenty scenes in Wang's version), and also by emphasizing the unnecessary nature of the plot of Zheng Heng's fight to get Yingying back. Moreover, his interlinear

commentary at the end of the Part Four and pre-scene commentary to Part Five interact with his revised text in such a coherent and authoritative manner that it makes his story quite convincing and self-revealing. His alternations, according to Jin, are artistically preferable, because it makes the reader ponder over the ending. As he nicely puts it,

There used to be an unrestrained scholar who inscribed [a few lines] on a painting named “Half-length portrait of beauty.” The last line says: “The wonderfulness of [the beauty] is not revealed.” Not only this is a rascal’s frivolous words, he also doesn’t understand what this sentence means. Actually, the artistic expression that “not to reveal the wonderfulness [of the art]” is exactly the phrase that conveys it. [The artist] gazes at [his object] for a long time and grasps the magnificence [of it], capturing it immediately by using his pen. He [must] use thousands of words to write it tortuously. When getting to the most intriguing part, he only uses one or two words suddenly approaching it. Yet, we have to say “the wonderfulness is beyond words,” meaning [the artist] exhausts his words only for this most intriguing part, and he has to stop as soon as he gets there. The place where I stop is where I am proud of myself. If people of later generations want to find the place I am proud of myself, they should look for the place where I stop. The added four scenes of this play, seem to me, simply intend to convey the wonderfulness of the whole play. This is really like only painting out the beauty’s lower half body. It really deserves a snort of contempt.

嘗有狂生題《半身美人圖》，其末句云：“妙處不傳。”此不直無賴惡薄語，彼殆亦不解此語為云何也。夫所謂“妙處不傳”云者，正是獨傳妙處之言也。停目良久睇之，睇此妙處；振筆迅疾取之，取此妙處；累百千萬言曲曲寫之，曲曲寫至於妙處；只用一二言門然直逼之，便逼此妙處。然而又必云“不傳”者，蓋言費卻無數筆墨，止為妙處。乃既至妙處，即筆墨都停。夫筆墨都停處，此正是我得意處。人慾尋我得意處，則必須於我筆墨都停處也。今相續之四篇，便似意慾獨傳妙處。夫意慾獨傳妙處，則是只畫下半截美人也。亦大可嗤已！²⁷

It is obvious that Jin Shengtān not only considers his revised *Xixiang ji* a

²⁷Jin Shengtān, *Jin Shengtān piben Xixiang ji*, p. 275. Emphasis added.

completely new creation that he can claim as his own (he explicitly says “I” in referring to the revised version), but that he also feels obliged to show how his creation improves upon the original. The principle of “writing tortuously from afar and stopping at the most intriguing spot,” according to him, is not only the underlying artistic principle of the play, but also the recurrent pattern that occurs at every level of the narrative, from its overall plot structure and development, to smaller units of narrative such as the scenes, events, and the specific characters in the text.

In discussing the overall plot structure and development of the play in his “Dufa,” Jin points out that:

What is the most wonderful of all in literary writing is to have a focus but does not begin there. On the contrary, [the writer] starts off from afar and tortuously writes to the focus and then stops. Then, and again, he goes back, changing his starting point, and approaches his focus in the same tortuous manner but stops once more when he is almost there. Repeatedly changing his starting points, the writer reiterates the same pattern, but never reveals what he is focusing on, intending to make the reader grasp it himself. *Xixiang ji* employs this technique extremely well, as do *Zuo zhuan* and *Shiji*.

文章最妙是目注此處，卻不便寫，卻去遠遠發來，迤邐寫到將至時，便且住；卻重去遠遠處更端再發來，再迤邐又寫到將至時，便又且住。如是更端數番，皆去遠遠處發來，迤邐寫到將至時，即便住，更不復寫出目所注處，使人自於文外瞥然親見。《西廂記》純是此一寫法，《左傳》、《史記》亦純是此一寫法。²⁸

This artistic device or structuring pattern he calls “lion rolls ball” (獅子滾球). In much smaller structure units of the play, Jin uses terms like *lianglai* (兩來 coming twice), *sanjian* (三漸 advancing three times), or *erjin* (二近

²⁸Jin Shengtian, *Jin Shengtian piben Xixiang ji*, p. 13.

approaching twice) *sanzong* (三縱 releasing three times) to describe the same technique. As he did with the denouement concerning the play's macro-structure, at the micro level, Jin Shengtan again emphasizes two procedures: first he made a number of changes to the smaller narrative units and developments, and second, in his critical commentaries, he lays bare recurrent patterns such as *lianglai*, *sanjian* or *erjin*, *sanzong*.

The best example is Zhang Sheng's three meetings with Yingying in Jin's revised version, which Jin thinks reflects the technique of *sanjian*. In Wang Shifu's original text, Yingying is described as having "romantic feelings" (有願盼之意) toward Zhang Sheng after the first time she meets him. The love between Zhang Sheng and Yingying is a stereotypical example of "love at first sight." But Jin Shengtan revises the script so that the romantic love between the hero and heroine is gradually developed and intensified. The three encounters between the two in the temple is also motivated by this device of "writing tortuously from afar and stopping at the most intriguing part": Zhang Sheng gets only a glimpse of Yingying at their first meeting, sees her from a remote distance at the second time, only meets her face to face in their third encounter. Again, the task of telling the new version of the story and laying bare the artistic technique are achieved through the interaction of the narrative and the critical commentary.

The preceding discussion provides us with the background showing the development of self-consciousness in both seventeenth-century fiction and theater. Against this background, in a way that resonated with his

contemporaries, Li Yu made conscious endeavors to integrate critical commentary into his fictional and dramatic works. All of Li Yu's literary works in three different genres—novel, short story, and drama—exhibit the characteristic of auto-communication, which is manifested in different ways.

THE SELF-REFERENTIALITY OF LI YU'S TWO NOVELS

The two novels that are attributed to Li Yu, *Rouputuan* 肉蒲團 (*The Carnal Prayer Mat*) and *Hejin huiwen zhuan* 合錦回文傳 (*The Story about a Palindrome*), although distinguished by their artistic qualities, share several common formal characteristics and problems.

The first problem faced is the uncertainty of the date of publication and even authorship of both novels. *Rouputuan* is dated either 1633 or 1657 and published under the pseudonyms Qingchi fanzheng Daoren 情痴反正道人 (Taoist Qingchi fanzheng) and Qingyin Xiansheng 情隱先生 (Mr. Qingyin) respectively in the two earliest extant editions.²⁹ A early Qing critic, Liu Tingji 劉廷璣, who lived during the Kangxi 康熙 period (1622-1722), first credited Li Yu for writing *Rouputuan*. This attribution was later accepted by many Chinese as well as

²⁹In *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo zong mu tiyao*, Xiao Xiangkai dates the earliest edition of *Rouputuan* as 1633 according to Ruru Jushi's (Layman Ruru) preface. Shan Jinheng in his "Li Yu nianpu" (*A Chronicle of Li Yu's Life*) mentions that in one Japanese edition published around Edo period, the same preface written by Ruru Jushi is dated as 1657.

Modern Western scholars³⁰ basically for two reasons. First, Liu Tingji lived at a time that was very close to Li Yu's, his record is considered reliable;³¹ second, the artistic style and aesthetic savor of *Rouputuan* exhibit a striking similarity with Li Yu's other works. Although there still exist critics who express doubts about Li Yu's authorship of *Rouputuan*, I strongly believe that it takes a witty writer like Li Yu to produce a piece of work simultaneously artful and controversial, sophisticated and ribald. The preceding chapters of this study have provided more evidence for this viewpoint. For instance, *Rouputuan* combines the two creative principles advocated by Li Yu in his treatise on dramaturgy. But more importantly, the two authorial rhetorics—*fan'an wenzhang* and auto-communication—identified in Li Yu's other works also prove to be *Rouputuan's* main artistic devices. Chapter Two of this study has already demonstrated how the rhetoric of *fan'an wenzhang* is employed in *Rouputuan*. This chapter will further illustrate the novel's self-reflexive nature generated by the rhetoric of auto-communication.

³⁰Modern Chinese scholars such as Sun Kaidi and Lu Xun and Western scholars such as Franz Kuhn, Helmut Martin and Patrick Hanan all believe *Rouputuan* was written by Li Yu. See Sun Kaidi "Li Liweng yu *Shi'er lou*" in *Li Yu quanji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992), Vol. 20, p. 43. Also see Lu Xun "Ming zhi renqing xiaoshuo," in his *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1979), p. 265. Discussion about Kuhn's acceptance of Li Yu's authorship can be seen in *Jou P'u T'uan (Prayer Mat of Flesh)* trans. Richard Martin from Franz Kuhn's German version (New York, 1963), pp. 358-76. For Helmut Martin's discussion on *Rouputuan's* authorship, see William H. Nienhauser ed. *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986), p. 556. Also see Patrick Hanan *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge & London: Harvard UP, 1988), Chapter 6.

³¹See Sun Kaidi, "Li Liweng yu *Shi'er lou*," *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 20, p. 43.

The claim of Li Yu's authorship to *Hejin huiwen zhuan* is less convincing, judging from the extant record. The earliest edition of *Hejin huiwen zhuan* dates from the third year of Jiaqing 嘉慶 (1789), more than one hundred years after Li Yu died. The Daoguang 道光 edition, meanwhile, was published in the sixth year of Daoguang (1826). Both editions attribute Li Yu as the original author, and a certain Tiehua Shanren 鐵華山人 (Mountaineer Tiehua) as a later compiler. Unlike *Rouputuan*, so far we have been unable to find any record close to Li Yu's time besides these two editions. Moreover, for those scholars who suspect Li Yu's authorship, the artistic style of *Hejin huiwen zhuan* is also different from that of Li Yu's other works. As Shi Changyu 石昌渝 has indicated, "judging from its theme, plot structure, and language, [it] is totally different from Li Yu's style" (從題旨，結構和語言來看，與李漁的風格迥然有別).³²

Nevertheless, the possibility that Li Yu originally wrote this novel, or at least had a certain relation to it, cannot be discarded completely for a number of reasons. First, despite the fact that the earliest extant edition of the novel was published a century after Li Yu's death, it is possible that the original was written much earlier. Second, although I agree with some modern scholars' opinion that *Hejin huiwen zhuan* is artistically inferior to *Rouputuan* and Li Yu's other works, some of its important literary devices are similar to those of Li Yu. For instance, one of Li Yu's most often-quoted lines, "fiction is the blueprint of

³²Shi Changyu, "Li Yu," *Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo baike quanshu* (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe, 1993), p. 272.

drama" (稗官是傳奇藍本), actually comes from *Hejin huiwen zhuan*, appearing in the post-chapter commentary to Chapter Two. Third, like *Rouputuan*, *Hejin huiwen zhuan* can be considered metafictional, some of its artistic principles and techniques resemble those of Li Yu's, including both of his authorial rhetorics.

A popular hypothesis dates the completion of the novel as after the publication of another Qing novel, *Wuse shi* 五色石 (*The Stone of Five Colors*), a novel attributed to Xu Shukui 徐述夔.³³ Because the latter is mentioned in the post-chapter commentary to Chapter Thirteen of *Hejin huiwen zhuan*. Xu lived about a hundred years later than Li Yu's time, this dating would rule out the possibility of Li Yu's authorship. But this hypothesis is hardly tenable, because even the authorship and publication date of *Wuse shi* are mere guesswork. Even if they were to be accurately proved, it is still possible that the comment was added by the later editor, Tiehua Shanren. However, as much as we cannot eliminate the possibility of Li Yu's authorship, we also cannot definitely prove anything by judging solely from the existing record. To support the argument that Li Yu probably has a certain relation with *Hejin huiwen zhuan*, it is necessary to undergo a more detailed textual analysis. As my following two sections will show, a close textual study suggests that despite the

³³Xu Shukui's living period is also uncertain but is believed to start from the middle of Kangxi period (1662-1723) and end at the beginning of Qianlong period (1736-1795). For detailed discussion on Xu's life and literary activity, see Chen Xianghua "Wuse shi," in *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao* (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe gongsi, 1990), p. 481.

artistic and stylistic differences between them, the two novels in question can both be considered metafictional texts that are auto-referential. The similarities of their auto-communicative approach are demonstrated at two different levels: at the textual level, the two narratives all have internalized or self-serving devices which reveal their self-referentiality; and at the metatextual level, they both provide self-written post-commentaries that actualize the narrative structures and break down the illusion of fiction at the same time.

Sex as a Metaphor for Fiction: *The Carnal Prayer Mat*

In her book *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Linda Hutcheon determines two forms of metafiction: the overt and the covert. Each of them is further divided into two modes: the diegetic mode and the linguistic mode. According to Hutcheon, in the overt form, the narrative is self-conscious at both diegetic and linguistic levels. For the diegetic mode, the text displays itself as narrative, while the reader is made aware of the fact that he is actively creating a fictional universe. Often a parodic, background narrative code will guide his awareness of this fact. In the case of the linguistic mode, however, the text actually shows its linguistic structures. In the covert form, meanwhile, the self-reflection is implicit. It is structured and internalized within the text. As a result, it is not necessarily self-conscious. On the diegetic level, there are many models or paradigms that become discernible: the detective story, the fantasy novel, game structure, and the erotic. On the linguistic level, the generative models are riddles, jokes, puns, and anagrams—the language forms that can

both convey and conceal meaning.³⁴

Hutcheon's topology is clear cut and theoretically sound for modern European metafiction. But when applied to Chinese metafictional texts or the "self-critical texts" dealt with in this study, two problems emerge. First, the overt and covert classification does not work for certain metafictional texts which possess both forms or characteristics. For instance, an erotic metafiction is considered as a covert form, but it can also be parodic, identified by Hutcheon as "one important means" of overt metafiction. Li Yu's *Rouputuan* is one such case. Second, since all the Chinese metafictional texts dealt with in this study have self-constructed post-chapter commentaries (a device created by the author at the metatextual level for self-critical purposes), none of them can be categorized as covert forms. Because no matter which type the narrative belongs to, the post-chapter commentaries will always overtly focus on the issue of fiction making—breaking down the illusion of fictional reality and making the reader aware of the diegetic and linguistic makeup of the narrative. For instance, three Chinese metafictional texts, Dong Yue's *Xiyou bu* (fantasy) and Li Yu's two novels *Rouputuan* (the erotic) and *Hejin huiwen zhuan* (game structure), can be considered as models in that the narrative self-reflection is structured and internalized within the text. But this structurization and internalization is also made explicit in the post-chapter commentaries, so that the narratives are simultaneously self-reflective and self-conscious. With this

³⁴For a detailed discussion, see Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, pp. 17-35.

clarification in mind, we can now turn to *Rouputuan* or *The Carnal Prayer Mat* examining closely its status as a metafictional text and how the authorial rhetoric of auto-communication works.

As an erotic novel relating the hero Vesperus' sexual conquest and the spiritual enlightenment after his fall from grace, *Rouputuan* possesses all the stereotypical expectations and genre conventions common to the erotic novel. However it is much more than this. As several scholars have already pointed out, and as this study argued in Chapter Two, the novel stands also in Chinese literary history as a masterpiece of parody. The *caizi jiaren* cliché, the demands for the erotic novel such as the stress on the sex organ and the outrageous description of sexual activities, the retribution frame, the didacticism, the use of prologue, the order of introducing the characters—these are only a few of the conventions parodied. The way Li Yu relates the reader to his parodic text reminds us of Alfred Appel's comment about Nabokov's novel *Ada*:

Through parody and self-parody, he exorcises the trite terms inherent in each story he chooses to tell, and by parodying the reader's conception of 'story'—his stereotyped expectations and preoccupation with 'plot' machinations—Nabokov frees him to experience a fiction intellectually, aesthetically, ecstatically.³⁵

In addition to using parody to point to the diegetic, fictive, and literary elements of his work, Li Yu also internalizes the self-reflectiveness of the novel in such a way that sex actually serves as a metaphor for both the novel and the fictional reality it creates. This means that the relationship between the reader

³⁵Alfred Apple, "Ada Described," *Tri-Quarterly* 17(Winter 1970): 174.

and the writer becomes erotic; the author lures, tantalizes, and seduces the reader into his fictional world. "Only by forcing the act of reading to become one of imaginative possession, analogous in degree of involvement and active participation to the sexual act, can literature bring itself to life."³⁶ But Li Yu's self-made post-chapter commentary proves the most instrumental for forcing a recognition of the parodied code and internalized structuring device. The most important function of Li Yu's post-chapter commentary is to guide reading—so much so that the act of reading becomes a decoding process for his parody and actualizing textual structures.

The Authorial /Critical Voice Within the Text

In Li Yu's fictional writings in general, and in *Rouputuan* in particular, the traditional "implicit duality of narrator and author is replaced by an explicit duality of author-narrator and critic."³⁷ The tone of Li Yu's narrator, witty, convincing, and skillful as he can be in presenting his materials, always acts finally as a critic who frequently calls the reader's attention to the fact that what he is reading is just a story. The presence of an authorial/critical voice demands the recognition of a subsequent narrative distance. Moreover, the direct intrusion of the author/critic, because of the changing code, results in adding layers of meaning to the narrative. The narrative proper is either bolstered and

³⁶Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 86.

³⁷Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1988), p. 134.

reinforced or distorted and subverted by the intruding voice. Thus, the message Li Yu's fiction delivers is always paradoxical, ambiguous, and double-voiced.

The presence of the author/critic's voice is simply too conspicuous to miss in the prologue of *Rouputuan*. The prologue itself is quite unique on several accounts: first, its length is very unusual, because the prologue itself extends to a whole chapter. Second, the prologue is a well-written essay which offers a common-sense reading of sexual enjoyment. Structurally speaking, it has a much looser relationship with the narrative proper than do more conventional prologues. It would not be too much out of place if it were to appear in the section on sex in Li Yu's *Xianqing ouji*. Third, and most importantly, it is a built-in preface that elaborately explains the author's purpose in writing the novel. According to the author/critic, his intention is "to persuade people to suppress their desires, not indulge them" by using the method of "fighting fire with fire" and "channelling current trends into a safe direction." Seemingly, this conventional didacticism is the main theme of the novel as well as the sole motive urging the author to write such an erotic fiction. Even the detailed and sometimes outrageous descriptions of sexual intercourse and bedroom pleasures in the novel are formally legitimized beforehand. However, as the story unfolds, the reader encounters something which proves quite contradictory to the prologue. For instance, the two principle attitudes towards sex in the story proper, the protagonist Vesperus' indulging in sexual pleasures and the old priest, Lone Peak's severe asceticism, contradict the author's own view of sex within the family as pleasurable and

tonic in the prologue. Besides, with superficial retribution as its frame (in which none of the evil doers are really punished), and the half-hearted conversion of the protagonist (who ends up castrating himself because of his inability to restrain from lustful desire) as its denouement, the novel can hardly be called the moralizing tale its author claims it to be. The prologue serves as an inner critique of the novel that actually creates a certain degree of discrepancy between the narrative voice and the voice of the author/critic, thus highlighting the comic and ironic effects of the narrative. It would appear that the author's straight-faced didacticism is nothing more but a parody of a worn out convention.

If didacticism is a convention that the author parodies and plays with, he does so to make the reader aware of the seductiveness of the fictional world. Nothing compares to the erotic story for displaying the empathic and seductive effect of fiction. As Li Yu writes in the prologue:

People these days are reluctant to read the canonical texts, but they love fiction. Not all fiction, mind you, for they are sick of exemplary themes and far prefer the obscene and the fantastic...if you write a moral tract exhorting people to virtue, not only will you get no one to buy it; even if you were to print it and bind it and distribute it free along with a complimentary card, the way philanthropists bestow Buddhist scriptures on the public, people would just tear the book apart for use in covering their wine pots or in lighting their pipes and refuse to bestow a single glance upon its contents. A far better solution is to captivate your readers with erotic material and then wait for some moment of absorbing interest before suddenly dropping in an admonitory remark or two to make them grow fearful...

近日的人情，怕讀聖經賢傳，喜看稗官野史。就是稗官野史裡面，又厭聞忠孝節義之事，喜看淫邪誕妄之書...若還著一部道學之書，勸人為善

。莫說要使世上人將銀買了去看；就如好善之家，施捨經藏的刊刻成書，裝釘成套，賠了帖子送他，他不是拆了塞甕，就是扯了吃煙。哪裡肯把眼睛去看一看。不如就把色欲之事去歆動他。等他看到津津有味之時，忽然下几句針貶之語，使他瞿然...³⁸

Here, fiction-making as a potential mode of control is linked to the fictional world of sexual seduction and possession. The very special relationship between reader and writer becomes erotic by nature. Actually, the author is very explicit about his intention to seduce the reader. Again from the prologue:

Its descriptions of copulation, of the pleasures of the bed chamber, do indeed come close to indecency, but they are all designed to lure people into reading on until they reach the denouement, at which point they will understand the meaning of retribution and take heed. Without these passages the book would be nothing but an olive that, for all its aftertaste, would be too sour for anyone to chew and hence useless.

其中形容交媾之情，摹寫房闌之樂，不無近於淫褻，總是要引人看到收場處才知結果，識警戒。不然就是一部橄欖書，後來縱有回味，其如入口酸齏，人不肯咀嚼何？³⁹

Projected by this authorial voice in the prologue, the erotic or sexual metaphor works to guide the act of reading (of interpreting, ordering, imagining); the hero's double quest (the quest of flesh and the quest for spiritual enlightenment) parallels the reader's imaginative journey to be lured into the fictional world but eventually to be enlightened by illusion. The erotic metaphor, as an internal self-reflective device, provides many metaphorical references between sex and the novel, the reader and the characters. For instance, the whole novel

³⁸Li Yu, *Rouputuan* (Japan: Seishinkaku, 1705), Vol. 1, pp. 5-6. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 8.

³⁹Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 1, p. 9. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 11.

is based on the hero Vesperus' obsession with sex, metaphorically referring to the reader's obsession with erotic fiction. The hero Vesperus and his wife Scent are described as being sexually turned on by erotic novels, mirroring the reader's reaction to the seductiveness of fictional reality; the hero's sexuality is also artificialized by his dog implant organ, which reflects the artistic status of the novel.

Indeed, the fictionality of fiction is dramatized in the novel. In Chapter Fourteen, Scent reads erotic novels to relieve her sexual thirst and she is surprised by the exaggerated depiction of male sexual organs and the stamina they contain. She expresses her doubts in reflection: "As the old saying goes, 'better to have no books at all than to believe everything you read.' These absurdities must have been concocted by the authors! Such marvels don't exist!" Chapter Sixteen of the novel which relates how Vesperus' sexual orgy with three of his paramours—Cloud 香云, Lucky Pearl 瑞珠, and Lucky Jade 瑞玉—is interrupted by Flora's intrusion, opens with a love poem. It reads,

Her suffering heart belies the spring,
As she works the silk with another thread,
The needle breaks at the lovebird scene—
And the joy in her picture is also dead.

芳心忍負春情日，
小閨添絲繡碧羅，
繡到鴛鴦針忽斷，
畫中好事也多磨。⁴⁰

The poem has at least two functions. On the one hand, the sorrowful

⁴⁰Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 4, p. 1. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 238.

sentiment of the heartbroken young lady whose love has been broken off in the poem is parodied by the interruption of sexual orgy in the narrative. On the other hand, it identifies the story as “needle work”, “picture”, representations that reveal the fictionality of the novel.

The Self-Made Post-Chapter Commentary

Like Dong Yue’s *Xiyou bu* and Chen Chen’s *Shuihu houzhuan*, Li Yu’s *Rouputuan* also provides post-chapter commentaries, believed to be written by the author himself. Patrick Hanan makes the following assertion in his book *The Invention of Li Yu*,

In *Prayer Mat* I believe that Li Yu wrote all, or almost all, of the commentary himself. The evidence lies in the defensive tone it adopts toward complaints, real and anticipated; in its insider’s knowledge of the novel; in its use of some of Li Yu’s favorite verbal gambits; and in its astringency, which is remote from the bland appreciation we find in his friend’s comments on his other work.⁴¹

My study will further prove that, although they “add an extra level of privileged commentary to the novel,” the post-chapter commentaries have pretty much the same functions and focuses as the intra-textual comments made by Li Yu.

Except for Chapter Eleven, each chapter of *Rouputuan* has a critique attached to the text proper. Read apart from the narrative, the critiques seem to be unsystematic and fragmentary, randomly choosing episodes upon which to comment. However, when treated as a self-reflective rhetorical device,

⁴¹Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, pp. 133-134.

everything mentioned in the critiques coincides with the points emphasized by Li Yu in the narrative proper.

These critiques, like Li Yu's authorial voice within the text, point self-consciously to the artistic status of the novel and its empathic effect on the potential reader. The prologue's anticipatory tone, confidently predicts the novel's guaranteed popularity: "How enticing this novel sounds! I am sure that when it is finished, the entire reading public will buy it and read it" (這部小說惹看極矣。吾知書成之後，普天之下，無一人不買，無一人不讀).⁴² The author's anticipations of completing the fiction-making process and of the reaction from the reading public certainly make the artistic status of the text explicit from the beginning. Another important comment made by the author on the fictionality of the novel form is in the critique to Chapter Eight, where he explicitly explains:

Fiction is parable and, as such, its content is obviously not factual. I hope that readers will not distort the author's intention by focusing on his literal meaning. The surgical implant of a dog's member into a human being, as related in this chapter, is a palpable absurdity, which implies that Vesperus's actions are going to be bestial in nature.

小說，寓言也。言即曰寓，則非實事可知。吾願讀是編者，萬勿以辭害志。此回剖狗腎補人腎，非有是理，蓋言未央生將來所行之事，盡狗彘之事也。⁴³

⁴²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 571. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 12.

⁴³Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 2, pp. 50-51. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 131.

Bringing the parodies, inversions, and the formal and rhetorical novelties of the novel to the fore is the function of Li Yu's post-chapter commentaries, which again echo and reinforce the authorial voice heard in the narrative proper. For instance, the commentary to Chapter Fifteen points out a two-fold *fan'an* that inverts both the conventional theme of women's jealousy and sworn sisterhood, as the author indicates by having Cloud share the man she loves with her sworn sisters. The critique to Chapter Sixteen hints at another inversion that reverses the order of affairs Vesperus had with the aunt Flora 花晨 and her nieces, playing with conventional plot foreshadowing and subverting the reader's expectations at the same time. To introduce a minor role (the priest Lone Peak) before the leading one (Vesperus), as the commentary to Chapter Two indicates, is "a variant technique in fiction, an instance of the author's complete rejection of conventional practice"(此從來小說變體，乃作者闢儘窠臼處).⁴⁴ In critiques to both Chapters Four and Five, Li Yu even makes comments about the witty and discursive discourses delivered by the author-narrator in the text proper, in an attempt to keep the reader alert to the novel's various authorial voices and rhetorical techniques.

Some of the inversions that the author points out in the post-chapter commentaries could otherwise be missed. The critique to Chapter Thirteen, for instance, reveals a double parody in characterization: Honest Quan's seduction of the hero's wife Scent parodies the romantic exploit of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如;

⁴⁴Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 1, p. 27.

while Master Iron Door transposes Zhuo Wenjun's 卓文君 protective father Zhuo Wangsun 卓王孫. As the author-critic puts it,

One marvelous feature of this chapter is the way the straightforward, rough-and-ready Honest Quan manages by devious, convoluted means to work his way inside the "iron door," thus reenacting the romantic exploit of Sima Xiangru. And a second marvelous thing is the way Master Iron Door who has worried over every possible contingency and taken every conceivable precaution, falls right into Honest Quan's trap like a latter-day Zhuo Wangsun. The thought and imagination that have gone into *The Carnal Prayer Mat* also deserve to be called convoluted in the ultimate degree!

妙在以粗笨直率之權老實，而能委曲詭譎，鑽入鐵扉之中，為司馬相如之韻事；又妙在鐵扉道人于將來之事，節節慮到，着着預防，竟中權老實之計，為卓王孫後身。文心思路，造到《肉蒲團》，亦可謂奇之極、曲之至矣。⁴⁵

The episode where the supposedly most honest character Honest Quan plots a cunning scheme and the most protective and overcautious father falls into the scheme itself is already ironic and paradoxical; the parodic reading provided by the commentary establishes a self-reflecting mirror held up to the old literary legend of Sima Xiangru and Zhuo Wenjun.

Another good instance of this sort is the author's comment to Chapter Nine, which is concerned with Fragrance's scheme to take Vesperus as her lover. Licentious but shrewd at the same time, Fragrance asks her neighbor, an ugly woman who is also turned on by Vesperus' good looks and charm, to test Vesperus out by sleeping with him first. If Vesperus' sexual stamina is not satisfying, Fragrance would rather preserve her chastity and good name than

⁴⁵Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 3, p. 52. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 204.

take him as a lover. The story is so funny and the narration so clever that it is only natural for the reader to be totally taken in and miss the intended parody.

The post-chapter commentary, however, arouses the reader's parodic awareness:

Fragrance's plan for taking a lover is absolutely masterly, a variation on the principle that it's a wise subject who knows how to choose the right lord and master. How different she is from some passive observer with no purpose in mind! What a pity she met the adulterer at this stage, for the meeting will lead her to a career of good works! If Vesperus had acted three months earlier than he did, the neighbor's loss of her chastity would have coincided with Fragrance's preservation of hers. If there are any enlightened officials about who are interested in erecting a commemorative arch or shrine, I have an honorand to propose whose name is as fragrant and glorious as that of the chaste maid of "I Want to Get Married." She opened up a convenient new route within Confucian morality, and for a thousand years to come all those women who, despite their disloyal thoughts, manage to avoid taking another husband will be able to look up to her as a pioneer.

豔芳偷漢之法，極其老到，乃良臣擇木之變體，與胸無主意，漫為觀望者不同，惜乎遇奸人於此際，使其為善不終。倘未央生是舉在三月以前，則鄰婦失身之時，即此女完節之日，倘有賢明有司欲為建坊立祠者，吾必舉一配饗之人，俾與‘奴要嫁’之貞女同烈比芳，為名教中開一方便法門，千載以後，凡有心怪異志，幸免二夭者，皆奉為鼻祖可也。⁴⁶

Here we have a perfect example of how Li Yu's critiques interact with the narrative proper. The story of "I Want to Get Married" mentioned by Li Yu in the comment is actually described by one of the novel's characters, Flora, eight chapters later, in Chapter Seventeen. The correspondence between Fragrance and the chaste maid of "I Want to Get Married" highlighted in the commentary allows the reader to appreciate the parodic intention. It is necessary for us to

⁴⁶Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, pp. 581-582. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 142.

give a thorough quotation of the story here. The story reads,

“There was once a beautiful girl who lived next door to a handsome student. The student fell sick because of his love for the girl and asked someone to go to her and give her the following message: ‘If I could meet you just once, I’d die content. I wouldn’t dream of doing anything improper.’

“The girl was so affected by his pathetic plea that she felt obliged to consent. When they met, she sat on his lap and let him hug, fondle, and kiss her to his heart’s content; but she would not let him have sex. When he asked, she told him, ‘I want to get married, so it’s out of the question.’ The student, who was by now in a state of intolerable frustration, knelt down and begged her, but she still refused, repeating the words, ‘I want to get married,’ and adding, ‘The reason you wished to meet me was that I’m pretty and you wanted to fulfill your deepest desire by being close to me and touching me. Now that I’m sitting on your lap letting you fondle me all over, you can fulfill your desire. Why do you have to ruin me? I want to keep my maidenhead and become a bride one day. It may not matter now if I lose it, but when I get married, should my husband notice, I’ll never be able to hold up my head again as long as I live. It’s out of the question.’

“But when a man has intercourse with a woman,’ said the student, ‘this three-inch thing has to go in there for it to count as love. Otherwise they’re nothing more than strangers. No matter how close our bodies are, no matter how we touch, my heart’s desire will never be fulfilled.’ This time he knelt down and refused to get up.

Unable to withstand his pleas, the girl hung her head in thought and came up with a stopgap solution. ‘I want to get married,’ she said, ‘and so I definitely cannot let you do this. But what would you say if I found something else for you?’ ‘What else is there, apart from this?’ ‘You’ll have to try the back instead of the front and satisfy your heart’s desire by putting your three-inch thing in there. That’s my last word on the subject!’

“Daunted by her firm tone, the student could protest no more, but accepted the stopgap solution...

當初有個標致閨女與一個俊俏書生，隔牆居住。書生為想這閨女不得到手，害起相思病來。央人到閨女面前致意，說只要見得一面，就死也甘心。不敢做非禮之事。那閨女見他說得可憐，只得應允。及至相會的時

節，坐在書生懷里，隨他要摟就摟，要摸就摸，要親嘴就親嘴。只不與他幹事。等他要幹就回覆道：奴家要嫁人，此事不可為。書生急不過，跪在地下哀求。她到底不允。只把‘奴要嫁’三字回他說，你求見之心不過因我生得標致，要靠一靠身體，粘一粘皮肉。我今坐在你懷里，把渾身皮肉隨你摩弄，你的心事也可以完了。何須定要壞我原身？我若壞了原身，明日嫁去時節，被丈夫識破此事，我一世做不得人了。這怎麼使得？書生道：男女相交，定要將這三寸東西放入皮肉，方算得有情。不然，終久是一對陌路之人。隨你身體相摩，皮肉相粘，總了不得心事。只是跪在地下哀求，不肯起來。閨女被他哀求不過，只得低頭暗想，想出權宜之法。就對他道：我是要嫁的人，這件東西斷許你不得。我如今別尋一物，贈你何如？書生道：除了此物，哪里還有一物？閨女道：除非舍前而取後。等你把你三寸東西一般進了皮肉，了卻這樁心事。再沒得說了。書生見她說得真切。也就不好再強，竟依這個權宜之法。⁴⁷

Knowing this story, we can see that the girl of “I Want to Get Married” proves to be anything but a “chaste maid.” The way she and Fragrance preserve their bodies and reputations ridicules Confucian morality and parodies the stereotype of the chaste woman in literature. Both of the so-called “chaste women” remind us of Geng Er'niang or Secunda in Li Yu's story “Female Chen Ping Saves Her Life with Seven Ruses,” whose way of preserving chastity is described as “saving root and trunk at the expense of branches and leaves.”⁴⁸

Interestingly, as Hanan indicates, “there is a mocking interplay between the two voices”—the voice of the narrator-author in the text proper and the voice of the author-critic in the post-chapter commentary—at the end of the novel. Here, parody works at two different levels: the critique to Chapter Twenty responds to a parodic comment at the textual level to bring out another

⁴⁷Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 4, pp. 30-32. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, pp. 265-266.

⁴⁸Li Yu, *Silent Operas*, ed. Patrick Hanan (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1990), p. 90.

parody at the meta-textual level. The internal authorial voice takes an ironic turn from the prologue to the epilogue when the author-narrator's praise of Confucius suddenly changes to blame:

In a more general sense it is all due to the meddling of the Sage who separated Heaven and Earth. He should never have created woman or instituted money, reducing man to his present sorry state. Let me now sum up the case against the Sage with a quotation from the *Four Books*: "Was it not the Sage himself who invented burial images?"

總是開天辟地的聖人多事，不該生女子設錢財，把人限到這種地步。如今把兩句《四書》定他的罪道：“始作俑者，其惟聖人乎？”⁴⁹

The last sentence is itself actually a parody of Confucius' quotation from the *Mencius*. The original line goes like this: "Did the inventor of burial images not have any progeny?" (始作俑者，其無後乎?) Confucius was condemning the use of burial images in human form—a vestige of human sacrifice. As Hanan has explained, here, "invented burial images" means "initiated the evil." By parodying Confucius's words, Li Yu, the narrator-author, not only ridicules the Sage but also holds him responsible for initiating the evil desire for wealth and sex. However, at the meta-textual level, Li Yu, the critic-author, goes even one step further. The critique reads,

Whereas at the beginning of the book he [the author-narrator] was grateful to the Sage, at its close, he berates him. That worthy cannot be feeling either too pleased or too vexed about it. This truly is a book that mocks everything. Let me come to the Sage's defense with yet another quotation from the *Four Books*: "Those who understand me will do so through *The Carnal Prayer Mat*; those who condemn me will also do so because of *The Carnal*

⁴⁹Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 4, pp. 85-86. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 316.

Prayer Mat."⁵⁰

開手處是感激聖人，收場處又埋怨聖人，使聖人歡喜不得，煩惱不得，真玩世之書也。仍以《四書》二句為聖人解嘲，曰：“知我者其惟《肉蒲團》乎？罪我者其惟《肉蒲團》乎？”⁵¹

By parodying another famous line from Confucius, he creates another additional and self-parodic inversion that ends the novel with a “double quip.”

Palindrome as a Model of Narrative: *The Story about a Palindrome*

If the *Prayer Mat* attempts to seduce the reader into the fictional world it creates, *Hejin huiwen zhuan*, or *The Story about a Palindrome* can be considered as metafiction that searches for its soul mate—the reader who understands its code so as to be able to bring the fictive world into play.

Thematically, *Palindrome* can be seen as a twin piece to Li Yu's short story “He gui lou” (“Homing Crane Lodge” *Shi'er lou*, 9). Both are the transposed versions of the famous Su Huiniang Story. However, whereas “Homing Crane Lodge” brings out the irony of passion and romantic love, *Palindrome* inverts another sub-theme of the original story—jealousy of love and polygamy.

At the beginning of the novel, the parodied text—the tale of Su Huiniang—is used as a prologue and retold by the narrator. Around the Dong jin 東晉 period, Su Huiniang, a fair lady with a superb talent, is happily married to an

⁵⁰The Confucian original line is: 知我者其惟《春秋》乎？罪我者其惟《春秋》乎？

⁵¹Li Yu, *Rouputuan*, Vol. 4, p. 86. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 316.

equally gifted young man Dou Tao 竇濤, from a distinguished family. The marriage falls apart when Dou takes a beautiful dancer Zhao Yangtai 趙陽台 as his concubine and dotes on her. Huiniang's jealousy of Yangtai and her resentment towards Dou eventually cause the couple's separation—Dou takes Yangtai to his new official post and leaves Huiniang behind. After years of estrangement, remorseful and lonely, Huiniang weaves a five-color brocade of palindrome for Dou Tao, the only person who could decipher all of the two hundred love poems hidden in it, in an attempt to rekindle their love. Living up to her expectations, the palindrome reunites Huiniang and Dou Tao who, touched by Huiniang's affection and amazed by her rare talent, leaves Yangtai for good.

This seemingly conventional mini-story prologue actually serves as a parodic code to point to the thematic inversion of the *Palindrome*—a search for a soul mate initiated by a hero instead of a heroine, and ending with a happy polygamous marriage. The hero of the novel, Liang Dongcai 梁棟材, is a child prodigy who is recognized by his special ability to unravel the concealed poems on the upper-half palindrome his father bought by chance. Like most of Li Yu's heroes who have not set their hearts on a political career, Liang's only wish is to find his soul mate—a talented female companion who can also appreciate the literary art of the palindrome. But the "Su Huiniang reborn" that he is searching for turns out to be a pair instead of only one—two cousins with equally beautiful looks and talent. Unlike his parodied double Dou Tao, whose

heart chops and changes, Liang Dongcai devotes his love only to Sang Menglan 桑夢蘭, the elder of the two, who happens to have the lower-half of the palindrome. But Menglan traps Liang into marrying her cousin Liu Menghui 劉夢蕙 as a way of showing her unselfish love for Liang and Menghui, a reversal of the envious Su Huiniang's actions in the original story.

The idea that a woman should share the man she loves with another woman or women, reverses literary convention of women's jealousy, and repeatedly appears in Li Yu's works: in "The Tower of Matrimonial Contest," twin sisters marry one young man; in "The Cloud-Scraper," mistress and maid share the same husband; in "The Pavilion of Combined Reflections," both the bride and the match maker's daughter tie the knots with the lucky bridegroom; in *Prayer Mat*, three sworn sisters enjoy one sexual partner together. But the most humorous treatment of all occurs in Li Yu's play *Women in Love*, where polygamous marriage becomes a way out for two lesbian lovers.

Evidently, the *Palindrome* confirms a thematic treatment consistent with Li Yu's other works: the rhetoric of inversion. This consistency suggests a very close relationship between the *Palindrome* and Li Yu's other works.

Next, we will examine the *Palindrome* which manifests an auto-communication that also befits Li Yu's narrative interests.

The Puzzle of the Palindrome: the Narrative Structure of the Novel

Although the *Palindrome* can be regarded merely as a romantic story

parodying the worn-out theme of jealousy, as far as its diegetical self-awareness is concerned, it also fits into the category of “game structure.” In using a game model, the narrative “calls attention to a free creative activity within self-evolving rules.” Thus “the reader must either learn the code (that is, create it) or be unable to bring the fictive world into play.”⁵²

With all its hidden inversions and turns, the narrative structure of the *Palindrome* is organized so that it itself resembles a palindrome. The whole narrative is framed by Su Huiniang’s legendary tale—beginning with the narrator telling the tale and ending with the deciphering game played by the three main characters. Its plot construction is also patterned according to the rules of a palindrome—to be able running back. However, the narrative is self-informative in that it instructs the reader in its rules; the task of setting out the game image and foregrounding the internalized structural devices are accomplished by the authorial commentaries at both the textual and meta-textual levels.

The entire novel theme itself based on the structure of the palindrome: the hero searches his soul mate, and the author seeks the ideal reader for his novel. The relationship between the author and the reader, like that of the hero and his ideal match, is based on the common bond of understanding the code of the palindrome. In the fictional universe, a perfect marriage is conditioned by the compatible talents of the characters in decoding; while in the sphere of

⁵²Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 82.

fictional creation, the actualization of the narrative structure also depends upon the reader's understanding of the rules of the palindrome, or the principle of inversion.

The parallel quests of the author and of his hero (his metaphorical self) and the connection between the two are not only set forth at the very beginning of the novel but also made explicit by the author in his commentaries. In Chapter One, right after narrating Su Huiniang's story, the novel relates the reappearance of Su's original work after the turmoil of the Tang dynasty. The first appearance of the palindrome is not only mysterious but also incomplete: the brocade is cut into two pieces and the upper-half is sold to Liang Dongcai's father by an anonymous soldier, but the whereabouts of the lower-half remains unknown. Liang's father, a prosaic scholar, although he knows the artistic value of the palindrome, cannot really understand it. When the author writes the line "A true art waits for its appreciator 至文留與知音賞,"⁵³ in a poem, not only does he allow the reader to understand the way the story will unfold—that an appreciator of the palindrome will come along—he also draws an analogy between the fate of the palindrome and that of his narrative: that is, like the palindrome, the narrative also awaits its real reader. This analogy is brought up repeatedly by the author in his post-chapter commentaries to both the first and the last chapter of the novel. At the end of Chapter One, the author says,

This chapter is the key of the whole novel. Therefore the author first clearly and seriously narrates the "Tale of the Palindrome."

⁵³Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 306.

When he gets into the main body of the story, he unfolds it easily. However, since the development of the characters and changes of events of the sixteen chapters are all foreshadowed in this chapter, we find no digression and surplusage here.

此卷乃全部提綱。故入手處，先將《璇璣圖》敘得分明，說得鄭重。及入本傳，看他閑閑敘去，而十六卷之人情事變，胥於此卷中伏筆，便覺枝不橫生，花無漫發。⁵⁴

The same message is delivered at the end of Chapter Sixteen, but in a much more emphatic form: "This sixteen-chapter book starts with the palindrome and ends with it. The beginning and the ending is like a circle, weaving into one piece. The novel can also be considered as a palindrome"(一部十六卷書，以回文起，以回文結。首尾回環，織成一片，亦謂之一幅璇璣圖可也).⁵⁵

Like the *Prayer Mat*, the authorial voice of the *Palindrome* can also be heard on two different levels: the inner level which consists of various rhetorical devices including prologue, epilogue, poems, lyrics, and the narrator's discursive discourses within the text; and the outer level made up of the post-chapter commentaries. Whereas the authorial persona of the *Prayer Mat* is parodic and paradoxical, the authorial voice of the *Palindrome* is more instructive and straight forward. He always warns and enlightens the reader about the artistry or "game" status of the narrative, and explains and rechecks the rules in order to stimulate the reader's co-creative participation—to bring

⁵⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 312.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. 9, p. 559.

the fictive world into play by complying with the code of the palindrome. Thus, under the guidance of the authorial comments, the reading of the novel becomes a process of decoding an extended palindrome.

Reversibility may be considered the main characteristic of this novel. When the author makes an analogy between his fictional text and the palindrome, he actually treats both of them as “structures of communication” that are reciprocal and reversible. One significant leitmotif of the novel is the mysterious comings and goings of the palindrome. At the beginning of the novel both the upper and lower-half of the brocade are held respectively by the male and female protagonists coming from the unknown world; it is taken away from and returned to the two main characters in Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen by supernatural beings; and at the very end of the narrative it “flies up into thin air” (飛入空中) and disappears in the void. This leitmotif implies the fictionality of the novel and its reversibility. The fictive events of the novel, like the palindrome and like any other “structure of communication,” can be both taken back and reversed back to zero. The novel as a fictional creation has indeed been taken back by the author when he declares “a rare treasure cannot remain in this world; a remarkable piece of writing eventually returns to the void” (異寶不留人世，奇文終還太虛).⁵⁶ What is even more interesting is that, after describing the sudden disappearance of the palindrome, the author immediately takes his statement back by saying “this is a later-day hearsay, I

⁵⁶Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 558.

don't know whether it is a fact" (此是後來傳聞的話，未知有無).⁵⁷

Structural reversibility is another characteristic of the *Palindrome*. On the macro-level, centered on the separation and reuniting of both the palindrome and the characters, the narrative events between the chapters exhibit a pattern of inversion: the story moves forward from the separation of both the palindrome and the characters in Chapter One to their first encounter in Chapter Four when Liang Dongcai and Sang Menglan get engaged and exchange the two parts of the brocade as a token of their love; then the story suddenly reverses in Chapter Five where, a new separation occurs—caused by the villains who intend to get the woman as well as the treasure. The second inversion happens in Chapter Nine, right after Liang Dongcai and Menglan consummate their marriage: Liang Dongcai parts from Menglan because of his official duty, but the temporary parting takes on the form of an eternal separation when Liang is misinformed that Menglan has been murdered. The final reversal of the plot unfolds in Chapter Twelve, where Menglan's false death develops into a fake "soul return"(還魂) in order to trap Liang Dongcai into marrying Liu Menghui. The second marriage again unites Liang and his two wives.

On the micro-level, the narrative structure within the chapters also consists of many hidden inversions, repeatedly pointed out by both the inside and outside authorial commentaries. The critique to Chapter Eight, for instance,

⁵⁷Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 558.

reveals that the plot inversions revolve round three story lines: the episode where Liang's mentor, Liu Taishou 柳太守, is cheated is reversed when he turns the tables and tricks others; second, the servant-turned-officer Aitong 愛童 meeting with his old master Liang Dongcai, where he saves him from a plight, is contrasted with his encounter with Liang's perpetrator; third, Liang Dongcai's recognition of his adopted sister Fang Yingpo 房瑩波, who pretends to be a total stranger, is paralleled by the hero's servant Liang Zhong's mistaking Aitong for someone he doesn't know.

In Chapters Ten and Eleven, the motif of taking another's place by assuming his name recurs consistently. But these reappearances are multiple inversions instead of simple repetitions. As the author puts it in the critique to Chapter Ten:

In the previous chapter, the villain pretends to be the hero, but in this chapter the hero takes the villain's place by assuming his name. Not only that, the villain is palmed off by another villain. For instance, under the wall of Xingyuan city, there appears a fake Yang Dong, then another copycat who claims to be Yang Dong shows up in the Fengxiang prefecture, accompanied by a phony Yang Zi.

前卷既有小人假君子之事，此卷忽有君子假小人之事，又忽有小人假小人之事。如興元城下有一假楊棟，鳳翔府中又添一個假楊棟，再貼一個假楊梓是也。58

The critique to Chapter Eleven also indicates,

Fang Yingpo pretends to be Mrs. Yang and Mrs. Liang [Sang Menglan] by turns; Sang Menglan disguises herself as Miss Liu [柳] today and Miss Liu [劉] tomorrow; And Liu [劉] Menghui goes

⁵⁸Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 463.

under the name of Miss Sang first and Miss Liu [柳] next. The plots seems to be repetitious, actually they are not.

房瑩波忽楊、忽梁，桑夢蘭忽柳、忽劉，劉夢蕙忽桑、忽柳，寫來直是一樣，卻又斷斷不是一樣。⁵⁹

In the *Palindrome*, a clear division of labor exists between the comments made by the author inside and outside of the narrative. Whereas the post-chapter commentaries are content to point out the overall structural patterns and plot constructions for each chapter, the internal comments are much more intrusive, focusing on smaller structural reversals and providing explanations about narrative events and characters. The narrator often make his discursive comments from two opposite positions—from the narrator/author's position as in the phrase "Listen, the honorable reader" (看官聽說), and from the position of the reader, addressing the narrator as "story teller" (說話的). Since the narrator/author constantly switches roles, from a narrator or an implied author to a reader or critic, the interactions between these different roles are highly auto-communicative. It is sufficient to cite one example here. In Chapter Four, Sang Menglan's father dies on his way to his new official post. In order to avoid encountering military rebellions, Menglan stays temporarily at the town where Liang Dongcai happens to reside. This predestined couple live a short distance away, and yet don't know of each other's existence. When Liang's cousin Lai Benchu 賴本初 hears that the beautiful Menglan possesses the lower-half of the palindrome, he doesn't inform Liang about Menglan, as he is obsessed with

⁵⁹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 481.

greed. On the contrary, he helps the local ruffian Luan Yun 樂雲 to trap Menglan into a bizarre marriage. Here, in the middle of narration, we find a dialogue carried on between the narrator and the narrator-turned-reader:

Listen, Honorable reader: Liang household preserves a half part of the palindrome, but no one blows this news into Miss. Sang's ears; While Sang residence also upholds a half part of the palindrome, again nobody delivers the message to Liang Yongzhi. In the past, they are separated by mountains and rivers, thus it is not a surprise. Now they live a short distance from each other and yet are poles apart. No one passes on a message for them. Talking about the person who should inform Mr. Liang, the first one ought to be Lai Benchu. Contrarily, not only does he hide the fact from Liang, he also tries to be a go-between for some else instead.

看官聽說：梁家藏着半錦，既沒人把這話吹到桑小姐耳朵里去：桑家藏着半錦，又沒人把這話吹到梁用之那里來。一向山川杳隔，故音問不通，誠無足怪。如今恰好兩人聚在一處，卻又咫尺各天，無人通信。若論應該通信與梁生的，第一個便當是賴本初了。他卻偏瞞着梁生，反要替別人說合。

Story teller, do you mean to say that if Lai Benchu doesn't pass on a message to Liang, there will be no one to inform him?"

說話的，難道賴本初不來通信與梁生，便沒一個人來通信了？

The beautiful and the talented who are predestined as a couple are not separable after all. Naturally, someone is bound to appear and act as the messenger. Guess who that messenger will be?

天生佳人才子，到底隔他不斷，自然又撞出一個通信的來。你道那通信的是誰？⁶⁰

This kind of a narratorial situation in vernacular Chinese fiction is referred to by Patrick Hanan as a "simulated context." The writer "simulating the storyteller addressing his audience" is "a common procedure in the early stages of a vernacular literature," Hanan points out. "What is remarkable about

⁶⁰Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 351.

Chinese fiction is merely the persistence of the simulation.”⁶¹ To me, the persistence of the simulation has a reason. These ready-made rhetorics, like other equally long-lasting forms that connect to the oral tradition of storytelling, are utilized by Chinese fiction writers as a device similar to Brecht’s alienation effect—to prevent the reader identifying with any character and narrative event, and thus to distance him from the fictional reality so that he becomes more aware of the artistry of the work.

The Game of the Words: Language as the Object of the Novel

In the genre of the vernacular Chinese novel, poems, lyrics, and quotations from and allusions to other works of literature, usually have both narrative or critical functions. By repeating certain motifs and portraying certain characters’ traits, they foreshadow and advance the development of narrative plots, provide meaningful commentary on specific events and characters, or, in the case of so-called “literati novels,” carry much of the burden of the allegory, or even create an ironic discrepancy between the surface meaning and the underlying intent.

The *Palindrome* possesses these kinds of rhetorical devices in abundance. The opening poem of each chapter, for instance, predicts and summarizes the main narrative event or story line that is about to unfold. In Chapter Five, predicting the newly engaged couple Liang Dongcai and Sang Menglan’s sudden

⁶¹Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1981), p. 20.

separation, the poem reads:

The course of true love always makes wrong turns in the middle,
The colorful phoenix has to be apart from the mate of his soul,
If they are united in the first place,
How can this romantic tale be so remarkable!

從來好事每中離，
彩鳳文鸞路兩歧。
若使當年便相合，
風流佳話不為奇。⁶²

This poem not only serves to summarize plot development, it also functions as “commentary,” indicating the necessity for such a development in the making of a good story.

The *Palindrome* also contains many incidental verses, uniformly following the phrase of “precisely” (正是), to provide meaningful commentary on specific events and characters. One good example occurs in Chapter Two. At the end of the chapter, where Lai Benchu suggests to Liang Dongcai that he should present the palindrome to the evil imperial eunuch Yang Fugong 楊復恭 as a gift, a suggestion that produces vehement objection from Liang, we find the following verse:

One is upright while one is wicked,
Their natures are revealed when they start to talk;
From here the foreshadowing is laid,
Which hints what moves they are going to make.

一正一邪，
開口便見。
後日所為，

⁶²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 356.

於斯伏線 · 63

However, aside from these conventional rhetorical devices, there are also a number of elaborated doggerels, classical essays, or character games that support the narrative text in a very loose and discursive manner. In most of the cases, these different rhetorical devices criticize or ridicule certain social customs of the time or provide a humorous portrait for certain types of people whom the author attempts to belittle. Instead of advancing the plot development, these devices usually break up and retard the narrative movement. The author seems less concerned about the relevance of these writings to the main storyline, instead he is content to enjoy their artfulness. Here we observe another self-conscious strategy in the *Palindrome*, where language itself becomes the object of presentation.

Linda Hutcheon, in her book *Narcissistic Narrative*, argues that metafiction helps the reader move away from empirical reality and toward the creation of “heterocosm”—a self-contained universe that is its own validity. As she states:

What happens is that the referents of the novelistic language gradually accumulate during the act of reading, gradually construct a “heterocosm,” that is, another cosmos, an ordered and harmonious system. This fictional universe is not an object of perception, but an effect to be experienced by the reader, an effect to be *created* by him and in him.⁶⁴

Hutcheon further indicates that as well as being ordered and fictional, “the

⁶³Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 316.

⁶⁴Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 88.

heterocosm is constructed in and through language, and both author and reader share the responsibility for this work.”⁶⁵ The discursive writings within the *Palindrome* provide a way in which the narrative can be self-conscious about its existence as language and as a “heterocosm.” Because “they call the reader’s attention to the fact that this text is made up of words, words which are not only delightfully fertile in creative suggestiveness,”⁶⁶ but also play with infinity.

Chapter Three of the *Palindrome* relates Lai Benchu’s entering Luan Yun, a despotic gentry’s household, as a literary hack. The author then presents an elaborate doggerel to emphasize the buffooneries of literary hacks. The doggerel is a chain of twenty-four sentences that all end with the Chinese character “tou” (頭, head). It reads,

For the hack who wants to be rushing busy,
 first should find someone richy.
 Start with the sundry duties, end up with planning strategy.
 Mouth drooling with greedy, his scheme for getting free food tricky.
 Shrink from responsibility, he takes his cue from the patron’s eyelid(s).
 When talking about something risky, his tongue becomes shorty.
 At the banquet, he keeps his patron company;
 Swallowing some good food, his face looks happy.
 In prompting the patron for the drinking game, he becomes quite handy;
 When the patron is made to drink as a forfeit,
 he substitutes him to get tipsy.
 Playing finger-guessing with the patron, he pretenses to be stupid.
 After dinner, he gets candles; sleeping over, he borrows bed sheets.
 Taking a walk with the patron, he lags behind him one feet.
 Playing chess with the patron, he intentionally losses couple of pieces.
 When the patron gambles, he conveniently gains something petty.
 When the patron makes a trade, he acts as a middleman busy.

⁶⁵Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 90.

⁶⁶See Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 101.

Being entrusted buying things or exchanging money, he cheats;
 Being asked to make out the bills with the servants,
 he shelters their evil deeds.
 He always hangs on the rich and the powerful in their heyday of life;
 If his patron becomes poor, even passing from the front gate,
 he will not even turn his head for one minute.

幫閑的要走通腳頭，先要尋個荐頭。初時伺候門頭，後來出入齋頭。設事要來騙飯吃，討個由頭。扛着兩個肩頭，看着人的眉頭；說話到忌諱處，縮了舌頭。酒席上慣坐橫頭；吃下飯，只略動些和頭。大老官忘了酒令，他便提頭；大老官有罰酒，他便做個寄酒戶頭；與大老官猜枚，詐輸幾個拳頭。席散要去討個蠟燭頭。若要住夜，趁別人的被頭。陪大老官閑走，他隨在後頭。與大老官下棋，讓幾着棋頭。大老官賭錢，捉個飛來頭。大老官成交易，做個中人頭。託他買東西，落些厘錢頭。託他兌銀子，落些天平頭。託他與家人算賬，大家侵匿些賬頭。總之，只幫得個興頭。若是大老官窮了，他便在門前走過，也不回頭。⁶⁷

Reading this doggerel, the reader cannot help but be distracted momentarily from the development of the story, lost in admiring the author's playfulness and cleverness. As a result, the reader's attention is drawn to the language itself and to the infinite possibilities opened up by the repetition of one word in different sentences and expressions.

Another example occurs in Chapter Six, where the author presents a long ballad that actually is a "character splitting" game. The ballad is about the hardship of farming at the end of the Tang Dynasty. The author uses 53 different characters that either include the character "field" (田) or are a part of it, to create a meaningful and coherent verse. For instance, the second line of the ballad reads, "people feed their mouths by farming, so the character 'field' has four 'mouths' leaning on each other; people regard food as heaven, so the character 'field' is like two 'suns' turning side by side (民以田為食，故田如四口之

⁶⁷Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, pp. 328-329.

相倚：人以食為天・故田如兩日之并行)。”⁶⁸; the sixth line of the ballad runs “in the past, having ‘field’ is the basis for ‘rich’, one cannot produce anything without ‘field’; now people believe ‘field’ is the chief burden, which easily brings wrongful accusations to them (昔認田為富字足，無田不成生業；今信田為累字首，有田易犯罪名)。”⁶⁹ This long ballad goes on for two whole pages of the text, the author seems unconcerned about developing his story.

As much as the palindrome is used as a model for the narrative structure of the novel, we can see that it is also the paradigm for its linguistic structure. Like the poems hidden in the palindrome, there is also a two-way pull of contradictory impulses when regarding the language of this novel—for both writer and reader. “There is the impulse to communicate and so to treat language as a means, and there is also the impulse to make an artifact out of the linguistic materials and so to treat the medium as an end.”⁷⁰

THE DIRECT INTRUSION OF THE AUTHOR IN LI YU’S SHORT STORIES

This section examines Li Yu’s auto-communicative rhetoric as employed in his vernacular short stories. Although it is believed that Li Yu might also be responsible for the marginal commentaries and critiques attached to his short

⁶⁸Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 384.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 117.

stories,⁷¹ I want to concentrate only on his reflexive comments within the narrative proper. This is not only because the marginal commentaries and the critiques are usually attributed to another commentator, Du Jun, but also because it seems to me that they are not inherently connected to the narrative proper in any way.

The concept of what constitutes a story underwent a radical change in the seventeenth century. One of the most important changes, was the individualization of the narrator's voice, best embodied in Li Yu's short stories.⁷² The highly individualized authorial persona who appears in Li Yu's short stories, although it can be attributed to many factors, is mainly created by his direct, unmediated commentary within the narrative text. At the narratorial level, Li Yu's judgment is always present; all narrator comments can be subsumed under the author's own name. Moreover, as with Li Yu's fiction, the reader's attention is constantly directed to the literary work itself and to the matter of fiction-making by the intrusive authorial voice, so that whatever illusions we may have constructed within the fictional world are soon shattered. What remains is Li Yu's fictionalized self-persona, whose presence is felt every step of the way.

Although possessing varying subject-matter, vernacular short stories,

⁷¹Patrick Hanan believes that some of the critiques and notes that are attached to Li Yu's stories are written by Li Yu himself. See Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, p. 134.

⁷²See Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, p. 27.

especially the stories written by Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu share some similar literary conventions. They usually have a rather generalized narrator who provides us with the storyteller's stock-in-trade, rather than with his personal experience. The stories present a comparatively realistic depiction of life. They expressly take a didactic, even moralizing stance toward their readers. Comedy and satire are the important literary devices in these stories. These rules of fiction-making become the overt subject matter of Li Yu's metafictional works.

In his stories Li Yu, often directs the reader's attention to certain literary conventions of the *huaben* genre by imitating and parodying them, foregrounding the author's manipulating presence. For instance, in the story "An Ugly Husband Fears A Pretty Wife But Marries A Beautiful One" (*Wusheng xi*, 1), Li Yu parodies the moralistic attitude of the conventional narrator. After telling the amusing story of three beautiful ladies marrying an ugly man, the narrator starts to deliver this advice "I hope that beautiful girls will keep this story on their desk and turn to it as soon as they feel upset, telling themselves..."⁷³ Having given a long "didactic" talk, he suddenly changes his tone, saying "Having given you my secret formula for the elixir of life, I shall pack up my medicine bag and leave. You may heed me or not —it's no concern of mine."⁷⁴ Here, the narrator's self-mockery and the voice of his raillery, while

⁷³Li Yu, *Silent Operas*, P. 39.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, P. 40.

drawing the reader's attention to the conventional moral admonition, completely undermine it.

A similar treatment can be found in the story "A Handsome Youth Tries to Avoid Suspicion But Arouses It Instead" (*Wusheng xi*, 2). In parodying the admonitory and satirical conventions of the *huaben* genre, Li Yu summarizes the purposes of writing his story:

This story of mine was written for several purposes: firstly, to urge judges to keep this case before them as a warning and not to order the ankle-press except in cases of murder and armed robbery; secondly, to persuade people not to gossip about other men's womenfolk as Zhao Yuwu did, or they will suffer retribution; and thirdly, to expose this slur on the people of Sichuan.⁷⁵ If I have fulfilled all three purposes at a single stroke, don't ever say that fiction does not do good to society.

我這回小說，一來勸做官的，非人命強盜，不可輕動夾足之刑，常把這樁姦情做個殷鑒；二來教人不可像趙玉吾輕嘴薄舌，談人閨闈之事，後來終有報應；三來又為四川人暴白老鼠之名，一舉而三善備焉，莫道野史無益於世。⁷⁶

What makes Li Yu's comments both funny and original is his third claim, which has nothing to do with moral teaching. Juxtaposing it against his other two claims, the narrator betrays his mocking attitude and his parodic awareness of the convention of moral admonition.

⁷⁵As Patrick Hanan has indicated, here, Li Yu is being facetious. According to Li Yu, the people of Sichuan are known as "Sichuan rats." There is also a preposterous hearsay saying that when a Sichuanese marries, his father claims first rights, like a rat making its hole. Li Yu claims that his story can clean the name of Sichuan people and prove that Sichuan is a highly moral region which has never known such an evil custom.

⁷⁶Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 54. The English translation is Eva Hung and Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, p. 74. Emphasis added.

Since verisimilitude, factuality, and realistic depiction are all valued in the *huaben* genre, these conventions are naturally ridiculed in Li Yu's works. A good example is the story "An Ugly Husband Fears A Pretty Wife But Marries A Beautiful One" (*Wushen xi*, 1). In the prologue, the narrator first tells a story about King Yama's punishment. Then, he directly comments on the verisimilitude of this story: "I shall now take a true incident and develop it into my main story. It is not an unsubstantiated ghost tale like the last one, told by some dead man who returns to life and claims to be reporting what King Yama said to his demon attendant" (我如今再把一樁實事演作正文，不像以前的話出於閻王之口，入於判官之耳，死去的病人還魂說鬼，沒有見証的).⁷⁷ Obviously the rules regarding realistic depiction, which become the subject matter rather than formal rules are no longer to be taken seriously by Li Yu. On the contrary, the fictionality of art is actually addressed in the language itself.

Another kind of overt diegetic self-consciousness can be found in some other of Li Yu's stories which recount the problems and progress of their own structuring principles. How does the author connect the prologue with the main story? How does he create an enigma? When, where, and why use suspense and digression? Li Yu's stories directly address these questions. "A Tower for the Summer Heat" 夏宜樓 (*Shi'er lou*, 4) is one of the finest stories in this regard. The story's prologue, unlike a conventional prologue, does not purport to illustrate a theme. Instead it sets out to introduce the skinny-dipping

⁷⁷Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 7. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, p. 6.

episode with which the story proper begins. The story also uses the lotus to symbolize the beautiful girls who are bathing naked in the pond. In starting the main story, the narrator explains how the prologue connects with it: "I shall now tell a remarkable story, and because I started off talking about lotus-picking, I shall take that subject as my lead-in, to avoid the danger of picking the wrong tree and finding that the graft doesn't take" (如今敘說一篇奇話，因為從採蓮而起，所以就把採蓮一事做了引頭，省得在樹外尋根，到這移花接木的去處，兩邊合不荀也).⁷⁸ The novel prologue and the direct discussion of the story's structure reflect the self-conscious manner of this story.

Indeed, Li Yu goes further, drawing the reader's attention to the problems of creating an enigma, using digression, and heightening suspense. At the beginning of the story, the narrator asks the reader to put aside all other concerns and focus on the question of how the hero knew what was going on in the Zhan household. When parodying the digression convention of the *huaben* genre, Li Yu does not use it to provide background information for the main story but instead humorously remarks on the frivolous and lewd behavior instead. In the end of Chapter Two, the narrator talks about the problem of heightening suspense. Here is the passage:

He [Qu Jiren, the hero] copied it [a poem] out on special notepaper, handed it to the matchmaker, and told her to take it to Serena immediately; the slightest delay would be disastrous. But quick though the messenger may be, the author insists on a delay at this point, so that he can start a new chapter. Like Serena's poem,

⁷⁸Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 75. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *A Tower for the Summer Heat* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 6.

which was broken off before it was completed, the story will be far more interesting than if it were told all in one piece.

寫入花箋，就交付媒婆，叫她急急的送去，一步也不可遲緩。怎奈走路人倒急，做小說者偏要故意遲遲，分做一回另說。猶如詹小姐做詩，被人隔了一隔，然後聯續起來，比一口做成的又好看多少。⁷⁹

The comparison Li Yu made between the heroine's process in writing a poem and the author's process in writing the story further proves that the act of narration is central to the structural, as well as the thematic, unity of Li Yu's work.

One important signal of parody, according to Margaret Rose, is "direct statements" made by the parodist, including "comments on the parodied texts," "comments on the world of the reader," and "comments on the parody as a whole text." These rhetorical devices used in a parody reflect the parodist's dialectical relationship with the two texts-as reader, critic, decoder to the pre-text, and author, the encoder of his own text.⁸⁰ The dual role of the parodist as a reader as well as an author is particularly evident in Li Yu's short stories, which distinguish the narrator not only from the old narrator of the *huaben* genre, but also the semi-personalized narrator of *Sanyan erpai*.

In Li Yu's stories, the author-narrator often directly indicates his parodic intention. For instance, in "A Male Mencius's Mother," the author-narrator states that he is going to tell a story about a homosexual couple who not only

⁷⁹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, p. 88. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *A Tower for the Summer Heat*, p. 26.

⁸⁰See Margaret A. Rose, *Parody//Meta-Fiction* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1979), p. 25.

lived together as husband and wife but also did many of the things that faithful husbands and chaste wives do. He tells this story as “a variant form of the Three Obligations, and intercalary point in the Five Relations, a strange incident that history may overlook but that romance cannot afford to neglect” (這是三綱的變體，五倫的閏位，正史可以不載，野史不可不載的異聞).⁸¹ This statement explicitly shows traditional moral themes to be the target of the parody.

Another difference separating Li Yu as narrator from the old narrator and the narrator of *Sanyan erpai*, is that not only does he imitate the process of narration in the oral storytelling tradition, he himself is also a critical reader who constantly makes comments on the parodied text, his own text, and the world of the reader. For instance, the story “A Client Patronizes a Prostitute” parodies Feng Menglong’s story “The Oil Vendor.” The hero of the story is portrayed as a naive spectator/reader who takes fiction as reality. In this heavily ironic story, the narrator/critical reader unmask the parodied text’s fictional world and criticizes the naive reader of the parodied text. Here are his comments:

Later on, there was a talented scholar who wrote the story of “The Oil Vendor”. Then came another distinguished playwright who wrote a romantic comedy based on this story. After reading the story, the vendors who delivered green onions and sold vegetables on the street all dreamed of getting romantically involved with a singsong girl. Everyday, they saved enough money to buy some trifle like a pair of straw sandals; every night, they dreamed of patronizing the most beautiful singsong girl just like the Flower Queen. Their savings having accumulated, they certainly would go round and visit the ladies. But they never expected that not

⁸¹Li Yu, *Silent Operas*, p. 102.

only would they not become the "oil vendor", but also have all the bad luck of a Jia Zhicheng. No one would call them romantic lovers to their faces, and, once their backs were turned everyone called them beggars. What a shame that such hard-earned money should be put to such waste!

後來有個才士，做一回《賣油郎獨佔花魁》的小說，又有個才士，將來編做戲文，那些挑蔥賣菜的看了，都想做起風流事來。每日要省一雙草鞋錢，每夜要做一個花魁夢。攢積幾時，定要到婦人家走走，誰想賣油郎不曾做得，個個都做一出賈志誠了回來。當面不叫有情郎，背後還罵叫化子，那些血汗錢豈不費得可惜！⁸²

Li Yu attacks naive concepts of reflection and imitation by contrasting fiction and reality and caricatures those naive readers who cannot distinguish between the two.

As a parodist, Li Yu is very conscious of his reader's response not only toward the parodied text but also to the unexpected effect created by his parody. His mirrors reflect in at least two directions at once—back to the target and forward to the author. In the story "A Male Mencius's Mother," Li Yu comments on the shocking and humorous effects of his own work:

General reader, please attend to what I am about to say. Xu Jifang was the No.1 romantic among devotees of the Southern Mode and You Ruiliang the No.1 chaste wife among catamites. By rights they ought to have enjoyed eternal fame. But when people today read their story, they will put their hands over their mouths and laugh, as if ridiculing them. Why should that be?

看官，你聽我道：這許季芳是好南風的第一個情種，尤瑞郎是做龍陽的第一個節婦，論理就該流芳百世了；如今的人，看到這回小說，個個都掩口而笑，就像鄙薄他的一般。這是甚麼原故？⁸³

⁸²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 137.

⁸³Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 130. The English translation is Gopal Sukhu and Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, p. 133.

As Milena Doleželová has pointed out, by commenting on his own parodic text, “Li Yu created a fictionalized self-persona in order to engage it into witty dialogue between the author and the critic who not only comments on narrative methods and imagery, but also takes pleasure in mocking the author’s craft.”⁸⁴

THE DRAMATIZED AUTHORIAL VOICE IN LI YU’S PLAYS

My hypothesis has been that Li Yu made a conscious endeavor to integrate narrative and critical text in his fiction. One would then expect to find a similar effort in his dramatic writings if my hypothesis is a valid one. It is hardly surprising then that at least two of the dramatic pieces either written by Li Yu or revised by him possess the same structure as his two novels—namely that the plays provide their own critical texts. Like Jin Shengtian’s revision of Wang Shifu’s *Xixiang ji*, Li Yu reworked Zhu Suchen’s (朱素臣) play *Qinlou yue* 秦樓月 (*The Moon of Qinlou*), adding two new scenes to the original, and providing marginal commentaries for his revised version. It is also thought that Li Yu was one of two commentators for his own play *Qiao tuanyuan* 巧團圓 (*The Ingenious Finale*). In the latter case, despite the use of a different pseudonym (Mochou diaoke 莫愁釣客), Li Yu’s participation in the writing of the commentaries is actually quite obvious. In the opening lyric of the play, for

⁸⁴Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, “Traditional Chinese Theories of Drama and the Novel,” *Archív Orientální* 59.2 (1991): 136.

instance, the author describes himself as a self-conscious writer who constantly reads and criticizes his own works. As he puts it,

Unrestrainedly disseminating eight plays [that I wrote],
 I have gained undeserved fame.
Reading and criticizing my own plays in my leisure time.
 I don't dare to face the mirror, feeling ashamed.
 Being unworthy of the admiration of the appreciative readers,
 How dare I hide the clumsiness of my workmanship?
 Once more "imitating the graceful demeanor of a beauty"
 for my admirers,
 My later work seems to be improved.

浪播傳奇八種，
 賺來一派虛名。
閑時自閱自批評，
 愧殺無鹽（顏）對鏡。
 既辱知音謬賞，
 敢因丑盡藏形。
 再為悅己效娉婷，
 似覺後來差勝。⁸⁵

The lyric not only attests to the fact that Li Yu indeed commented on his own works, but also creates the author's self-critical persona, making the theory that Li Yu is a co-commentator on his own play a convincing one.

More importantly, the literary principle revealed in the marginal commentaries of this play confirms Li Yu's belief in the importance of originality. The first item in Scene One, for example, states that the ingenuity of the playwright lies in "revealing extraordinary from ordinary by reversal" (從家常情事里翻出新奇). One comment in Scene Six indicates that the most outmoded convention in fiction is "to frequently recite poems between lovers" (陋在亂輒吟詩). In Scenes One, Two, and Eight, the commentators also pinpoint

⁸⁵Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 321. Emphasis added.

Li Yu's other artistic innovations that can be considered as "breaking away from clichés" (脱窠臼).

However, if Li Yu was indeed one of the commentators on the *Qiao Tuanyuan*, his marginal commentaries (he never provided pre or post-scene commentaries) are not as impressive and systematic as Jin Shengtan's in *Xixiang ji*. The textual difference between Li Yu's "self-critical texts" and those of Jin Shengtan's actually reflects one fundamental distinction between them—how they see drama as a literary art. The question revolves around whether the play should be treated as a text for the reader, or as a performance for an audience. In Li Yu's own words, "Jin Shengtan's commentary [on *Xixiang ji*] is an appreciation of a scholar, not a connoisseurship of an actor. Jin had mastered the secrets of writing and reading a text, yet he had not cultivated the knack of the play actor" (聖歎所評，乃文人把玩《西廂》，非優人搬弄之《西廂》也。文字之三昧，聖歎以得之；優人搬弄之三昧，聖歎猶有待焉).⁸⁶ As a playwright, stage director, as well as theoretician of drama, Li Yu obviously is more concerned with the play as a performance.⁸⁷ This perspective makes the self-consciousness

⁸⁶Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 65.

⁸⁷In Chinese literary history, a distinction is often drawn between performable plays (*changshang*: "on stage plays") and closet dramas (*antou*: "desktop dramas"). According to Li Yu, for performable play, the language should be easy to understand, terse and lively; the plot construction should conform to the principle of *yiren yishi* (one-character-one-plot); moreover, speaking also ought to be emphasized on the stage. Some playwrights and theoreticians in Li Yu's time (most of them are well educated and versed in classical language), including Jin Shengtan, see writing play as similar to write poetry, lyric, historical text, and fiction—as texts meant to be read, thus tend to overlook the dramatic conventions that Li Yu

of his dramatic texts more internalized. To be more specific, his authorial voice or persona is dramatized, put into the characters' mouths, so the characters spell out what the implied author/critic wants to say about the work.

Character as Dramatized Narrator

In explaining the relationship between Li Yu's fiction and drama in *The Invention of Li Yu*, Patrick Hanan indicates that, besides the thematic similarities between the two, Li Yu's plays also exploit two rhetorical devices employed in his fiction: narratorial comment, and reflexive comment.⁸⁸

The most overt narrative mode in *chuanqi* drama is called "narrative scene." As Hanan explains, "narrative scene" is an old theatrical component of Southern drama (南戲), "in which a character, major, or minor, recounts, explains, or reflects upon the action."⁸⁹ In employing this mode, Li Yu basically followed the conventions, although his minor characters tend to narrate more frequently than the major ones. However, it seems that in *Chuanqi* drama, minor characters, since there is neither much to tell about themselves nor much action for them to perform, more often than not act as a surrogate narrator who comes on stage from time to time, telling stories and making comments.

indicates in his *Xianqing ouji*.

⁸⁸See Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, pp. 138-139.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 138.

What distinguished Li Yu from other playwrights was the way he transformed his expository, discursive and lengthy narratorial comment into his characters' lively dialogues, debates, and soliloquies. In Li Yu's fiction, narratorial comment is either put into the prologues or inserted between story lines. The comment usually takes the form of witty, playful, and sometime provocative essays concerning "the various moral and philosophical issues the story raises and also with its development and progress, stimulating and teasing the reader" as the narrative progresses.⁹⁰ As a masterful essayist and fiction writer, Li Yu exhibits an ability to pick the right moment to digress from the narrative and indulge in lengthy narratorial comment without the reader feeling bored. Actually, Li Yu himself was aware of this and was proud of his accomplishments. As he comments in *Rouputuan*,

Fiction writers always confine themselves to narrative as distinct from discourse. Or, if they do write discourse, they develop a piece to serve as prologue to the narrative and then, after reaching the *transitio*, quickly wind it up, evidently fearing a hopeless confusion. How can they conduct a philosophical discussion while poised for the fray? The author of this book is the only one who can display calm amid the panic and cool amid the heat. Into every tense passage of narrative he inserts a piece of leisurely discourse, posing and answering his questions in such an orderly fashion that the reader, far from finding it a distraction, is loath to see it end. When the author has finished his discourse and takes up the narration again, he is able to make it dovetail perfectly with what has gone before. A true master of the art! Ever since he invented this mode, he has been the only one capable of practicing it. Those who imitate his technique merely earn the reader's boredom.

從來小說家，止有敘事，並無議論；即有議論，旁在本事未敘之先，敷衍一段做個冒頭，一到入題之後，即忙忙說去，猶恐散亂難收，豈能於

⁹⁰Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, p. 77.

交鋒對壘之時，作揮塵談玄之事。為此書者，獨能於忙中馳暇，熱發冷賣，每在緊急敘事中閒，夾一段舒徐議論，自問自答，井井有條，使觀者不僅不厭其煩，亦且惟恐其儘；及至說完之後，接敘前事，又觀筋肌相聯，毫無間隔，真神手也。此法自此公創之，亦惟此公能之。他人學用此法，徒取厭倦而已。⁹¹

If conducting a narratorial comment in fiction takes a skillful writer, it is even more difficult to make the commentary as part of the entertainment before an audience. However, Li Yu's dramatization of narratorial comment successfully accomplished this task. A comparison will demonstrate how Li Yu has done.

Li Yu adapts his short story "An Ugly Husband Fears A Pretty Wife, But Marries A Beautiful One" for his play *Naihe tian* (*You Can't Do Anything about Fate*). Both story and play share the same theme—a parodic treatment of the "talented-scholar and beautiful-woman" cliché. Born with deformed facial features and an overpowering body odor, the ugly but rich Que Lihou 關里侯 first marries two stunning beauties—Miss Zou, famous for her talent, and the exceptionally beautiful Miss He. Que fares poorly with his first and second wives, so he decides to find an ordinary woman for his third marriage, but fatefully ends up with Mistress Wu, a woman whose talent and looks are superior even to his first and second wives. The three wives refuse to accept their sorry fates at the beginning—all of them run away in succession to the seclusion of his library—until the more practical Mistress Wu ends her resistance and persuades the other two wives to join her in serving Que. The end of the play diverges from the story by telling of Que Lihou's

⁹¹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 9, pp. 576-577. The English translation is Patrick Hanan's, in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, p. 87.

metamorphosis. With the help of three spirits, Que is transformed into a handsome man by God as reward for his philanthropy. The play ends with Que's wives all running back to him and vying for the privilege of being chief wife. In inverting the outmoded theme that "for every brilliant poet there has to be a beautiful girl somewhere to form a pair, and vice versa," Li Yu suggests a reversed norm, the new formula of "ugly-man and beautiful-woman."

In the story, the narrator elaborately comments upon the old proverb "pretty face, sorry fate" (*hongyan baoming* 紅顏薄命) in the prologue. After telling a mini-story about King Yama sentencing the most evil person to be reborn as a strikingly beautiful woman, marrying an extremely ugly man and living a hundred years, thereby condemned to a life of suffering, the narrator comments,

Gentle reader, from what King Yama said, a pretty face is the cause of a sorry fate and a sorry fate the result of a pretty face. Naturally "the dumb person's sorrow" cannot be gotten rid of, any more than "the lifelong ailment" can be cured. But I myself have a method for ridding people of this sorrow and curing them of this ailment, a method that I am going to pass along to the beautiful women of the world in the hope that they will keep it firmly in mind. It takes the expression "pretty face, sorry fate" and turns it into a formula for the elixir of life. When a girl reaches the age of eleven or twelve, she should consult her mirror. If her eyes are too big, her brows too thick, her hair too brown or her complexion too dark, these are the most auspicious of signs; they mean that she can be sure of a perfect handsome husband and need not fortune told. If she is not *unattractive*, she can expect a fairly handsome husband. If she is quite attractive, her best hope is for a husband not too ugly. But if she should chance to be very attractive, and intelligent and talented as well, she should realize that she is born to suffer and prepare herself for marriage to the ugliest and stupidest of husbands, keeping that thought constantly in mind. When she sets eyes on someone who is both handsome and intelligent, she should realize

that he is not for her, and that there is no point in her stealing any sly glances at him or entertaining any wild hopes. If she disciplines herself like this in advance, when she does come to marry that ugliest and stupidest of husbands, she will be as contented as if she were rejoining a former lord and master, and naturally she won't suffer King Yama's ultimate punishment. If, by some stroke of luck, she marries only the third or fourth ugliest and stupidest husband, it will come as a pleasant surprise, and she'll be happy rather than resentful. If all women used this method, they would naturally live contented and harmonious lives, suffering neither "the dumb person's sorrow" nor "the lifelong ailment," and the door to life would be open to them.

看官，照閻王這等說來，紅顏果是薄命的根由，薄命定是紅顏的結果，那啞子愁自然是消不去、終身病自然是醫不好的了？我如今又有個消啞子愁、醫終身病的法子，傳與世上佳人，大家都要緊記。這個法子不用別的東西，就用“紅顏薄命”這一句話做個四字金丹。但凡婦人家生到十二三歲的時節，自己把鏡子照一照，若還眼大眉粗，發黃肌黑，這就是第一種恭喜之兆了。將來決有十全的丈夫，不消去占卜；若有二三分姿色，還有七八分的丈夫可求；若有五六分的姿色，就只好三四分的丈夫了；萬一姿色到了七分八分、九分十分，又有些聰明才技，就要曉得是個薄命之坯，只管打點去嫁第一等、第一名的愚丑丈夫，時時刻刻以此為念。看見才貌俱全的男子，曉得不是自己的對頭，眼睛不消偷覷，心上不消妄想，預先這等磨煉起來。及至嫁到第一等、第一名的愚丑丈夫，只當逢其故主，自然貼意安心，那閻羅王的極刑自然受不着了。若還僥幸嫁着第二三等、第四五名的愚丑丈夫，就是出於望外，不但不怨恨，還要歡喜起來了。人人都用這個法子，自然心安意遂，宜室宜家，啞子愁也不生，終身病也不害，沒有死路，只有生門，這“紅顏薄命”的一句話豈不是四字金丹？做這回小說的人，就是婦人科的國手了。奉勸世間不曾出閣的閨秀，服藥於未病之先；已歸金屋的阿嬌，收功於暝眩之後，莫待病入膏肓，才悔逢醫不早。⁹²

The narrator makes three points here. First he reverses the conventional wisdom "pretty face, sorry fate." This is summed up in the ironical proverb "does not mean that a woman receives a sorry fate *because* she has a pretty face, but that if she deserves a sorry fate she will be condemned to have a pretty face." Second, as a result of this karmic punishment, it is not only not unusual but

⁹²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 8, pp. 6-7. The English translation is Chu Chiyu and Patrick Hanan's, in *Silent Operas*, pp. 5-6.

inevitable that a beautiful and talented woman will marry an ugly and stupid man. And third, for the “pretty face,” the only way to avoid suffering is to accept her fate and make the best of a less-than-ideal situation.

All of these three points are taken up in Li Yu’s play *Naihe tian*, but they are delegated to several different characters and repeatedly delivered from different angles. In Scene 23, Que Lihou’s third wife Mistress Wu, a former concubine of the handsome and successful official Lord Yuan, is sold to Que by Yuan’s jealous first wife. She tries to escape from Que’s household and returns to her former husband. But when she finally meets her former husband, to her surprise, he not only refuses to take her back but also lectures her on the wisdom of submission and contentment, urging her to return with Que. Lord Yuan says to Mistress Wu,

Come here, listen to my sincere advise. As the old saying goes: “Beautiful woman often has a sorry fate. A woman like you is doomed to marry a man like Que Lihou; if you spend your whole life in my household, this old saying will be not accurate anymore. Now you ought to quietly return to Que and peacefully and contentedly make a life with him. Maybe you will bear children for him and be rewarded for that in your old age.

你走過來，听我說几句好話。俗語道得好，紅顏婦人多薄命。你這樣女子，正該配這樣男人；若在我家過世，這句舊話就不驗了。你如今好好跟他回去，安心貼意做人家，或者還會生兒育女，討些下半世的便宜。⁹³

Having this dialogue, the spectator might not realize that the character Lord Yuan is actually making a narratorial comment, but it certainly produces a direct effect on other characters in the play. Its effect on Mistress Wu is evident.

⁹³Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 76.

Having lost her last hope of escaping her sorry fate, Mistress Wu finally gives up the thought of further resistance. Now, it is her turn to represent the narrator's view on the fate of a beautiful woman and the attitude she should have. Mistress Wu turns to the female members of the audience and addresses them in a soliloquy,

What can I do? I still want to make some schemes [to get out of this situation], but Lord Yuan's words cut off my last resource. What can I do? [I guess] I have to go along with him. (Sighs) General audience, for those of you who have talents and pretty faces but cannot find good husbands should take the three ladies in this play as examples. As far as talent is concerned, you might match Miss Zou; talking about beautiful appearance, you can hardly equal Miss He; as for having both talent and beauty, it is hard for you to surpass me. But all of us marry a man like Que. No matter how you make clever schemes, you just cannot fly to heaven or make a way through the underground. Therefore the four characters "pretty face, sorry fate" is the karma of beautiful women. Besides, even if your husbands are ugly, they cannot be uglier than this person (meaning Que Lihou). Why don't you follow my example and live contentedly the rest of your lives!

這怎麼處？我還要弄出些圈套出來，當不得袁郎那几句话，把我的路頭都塞斷了。沒奈何，只得從他。（歎介）你們看戲的里面，凡是有才貌的佳人，嫁不着好丈夫的，都請來看樣。就作才思極高，不過像鄒小姐罷了；就作容貌極美，不過像何小姐罷了，就作才貌兼全，也不過像我吳氏罷了，都嫁了這樣男人，任你使乖弄巧，也不曾飛得上天，鑽得入地。可見“紅顏薄命”四個字，是婦人跳不出的關頭。況且你們的丈夫就生得極丑，也丑不到此人的地步。大家像我一般，都安心樂意過了一世罷！⁹⁴

This same message is repeated in Scene 27 by the three spirits discussing the metamorphosis they are going to grant to Que for his good deeds.

It is obvious that the narrator in Li Yu's fiction and his counterpart in Li Yu's drama are two different types, and that their commentaries, though

⁹⁴Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 77.

similar, produce different effects. In Li Yu's fiction, the reader encounters a narrator who identifies himself as an "I," a mediating entity whose views on the story come between the reader and the event, whereas in Li Yu's drama, the narrator is dramatized by the characters. In the novels, since the narrator is highly individualized and intrusive, the effect of his comments on the reader is both direct and impersonal; while in the plays, since the narrator is not an actual presence in the text, the reaction of the spectator towards his comment is quite different. "Our admiration or affection or sympathy or fascination or awe...is more intense just because it has been made personal..."⁹⁵

However, the narratorial comment does not necessarily detail what the play is truly about, and why it is so. As a master of *fan'an wenzhang*, Li Yu's narrator is always unreliable and cannot be taken at face value. The spectator knows that because he or she also hears the author's voice in the play—a voice that, in Li Yu's case, more often than not contradicts what the dramatized narrator presents in the play and reveals the true meaning of the work.

The Reflexive Comment within Li Yu's Plays

In Li Yu's drama, the most recognizable authorial rhetoric is the authorial commentary, or in Hanan's term "reflexive comment," that criticizes the literary work itself or comments on the implied author. Reflexive comment is found in two different forms: it is always delivered in the opening and closing

⁹⁵Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 212.

lyrics, and also frequently put into the characters' mouths.

Chuanqi drama is usually introduced by a prologue (*jiamen* 家門) of two *ci* stanzas, giving a generalized statement about the theme or incident central to the play. It seems that, to many Ming playwrights, the function of the first *ci* stanza, or the opening lyric, was unclear or insignificant, so in Li Yu's time it was not unusual to see some irrelevant and meaningless lines inserted in the very first lyric of the play. Some of the play actors cut off this part when they performed on stage, beginning with the second stanza. This was not Li Yu's case. In discussing the function of the opening lyric, Li Yu has this to say in his *Xianqing ouji*,

Before the prologue, there is an opening lyric using tune patterns such as *the moon of western river* or *butterfly loves flower*. There are no rules for selecting the tune patterns, it is the choice of the playwright. Usually the lyrics are mere stereotypical expressions persuading people to drink wine and forget about worries or to join in the fun on occasion. However, I think the opening lyric is the part that is called "cropping up" in classical essays and "breaking open the topic" in the eight-legged essay. [At this point], it is important for the playwright to go straight to the point. He should not borrow someone else's hat to cover his head. What he should do is to summarize the fundamental idea of the play in the opening lyric, which corresponds to the second stanza in the prologue. Whereas the first stanza implies the main idea of the play, the second one makes it explicit. "To imply the main idea" is like to "break open the topic"; while "to make it explicit" is similar to what is called "carrying forward the topic." Only if one structures his play this way, can his writing be considered as well presented.

未說家門，先有一上場小曲，如【西江月】、【蝶戀花】之類，總無成格，听人拈取。此曲向來不切本題，止是勸人對酒忘憂、逢場作戲諸套語。予謂詞曲中開場一折，即古文之冒頭，時文之破題，務使開門見山，不當借帽覆頂。即將本傳中立言大意，包括成文，與後所說家門一詞相為表里。前是暗說，後是明說，暗說似破題，明說似承題，如此立格

· 始為有根有據之文。⁹⁶

To Li Yu, the opening and closing lyrics are the crucial components of the play, not only because they outline the central theme, but also because they are the very devices needed to deliver the author's point of view—what his intention is in writing of a particular subject, and how he wants the reader or spectator to understand it. In Li Yu's plays, this mode of reflexive comment is vital and instrumental, without it, the reader or spectator would get a completely different story.

As we have discussed in the previous section, Li Yu's play *Naihe tian* seemingly condemns beautiful women and lectures them on submitting to their fate. However, to accept this reading would be to misjudge Li Yu's work. Instead, the reader or spectator must pay close attention to the opening and closing lyrics of his play. The opening lyrics are as follows,

The creator has no taste for female beauty;
Crushing and killing lovely ladies, he exerts all the force of
his destructive, chilling blast.
Numberless tears pay court to the sea until rivers and oceans overflow,
But these are of no more concern to the Lord of Heaven
than are the morning and evening tides.
That pink-cheeked damsels have slender fortunes is an established rule;
One needn't fear that the retiring sex will sprout four wings.
Even if they should hatch a hundred schemes, how could they move
the will of heaven?
In the end they would find it can't be altered.

How many playwrights could revise the foregoing lyrics!
Snatching up a heroine and delivering her to the handsome hero,
they would stage a play of young romance.
And comely women therefore grow to hate what suits them,

⁹⁶Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 61.

And in pell-mell profusion do disgraceful things, and hasten out
to secret rendezvous.

This time, though, I break completely with established
drama convention:

A clown and a beauty joined in marriage is truly not
what you would expect.

But surely you must realize this sort of thing is very common;
It is no rare or monstrous wrong, so don't cry out against it.

【蝶戀玉樓春】【蝶戀花頭】造物從來不好色，磨滅佳人，使盡罡風力。
萬淚朝宗江海溢，天公只當潮和汐。【玉樓春尾】紅顏薄命有成律，不怕
閨人生四翼。饒伊百計奈何天，究竟奈何天不得。

【前詞】多少詞人能改革，奪旦還生，演作風流劇。美婦因而仇所適，
紛紛邪行從斯出。此番破盡傳奇格，丑、旦聯姻真叵測。須知此理極平
常，不是奇冤休叫屈。⁹⁷

There is a clear division of labor at work between the two *ci* stanzas. The first one summarizes the central theme, while the second discusses the author's intention in writing such a play. Although the author affects a preaching tone, the end of the play is evidently an artistic one: to "completely break away with established drama convention."

The *chuanqi* conventions, including both script writing and stage direction were pretty much established in Li Yu's time. They demanded that

the *mo* introduces the prologue, but the *sheng* formally enters on stage first. The opening remarks should outline the story of the whole play. The *sheng* is going to trigger the unfolding of the plot as soon as he is on stage...whereas the beginning of the play should be quite rather than noisy, the ending ought to avoid cold but heat. The *sheng* and *dan* should unite as a couple, while *wai* and *laodan* ought to become either father and mother, or father-in-law and mother-in-law...

⁹⁷Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 7. The English translation is Eric P. Henry's in his *Chinese Amusement: The Lively Plays of Li Yu* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980), p. 130. Emphasis added.

開場用末，沖場用生；開場數語，包括通篇。沖場一出，蘊釀全部…開手宜靜不宜喧，終場忌冷不忌熱，生旦合為夫婦，外與老旦非充父母，即作翁姑…⁹⁸

Li Yu broke several conventions: the play unites a clown and three beauties in marriage; a clown instead of a scholar takes the role of romantic lead; and the clown is the one who first enters the stage and triggers the unfolding of the plot. For Li Yu, moral ends were sacrificed to artistic ones. Yet it would be an injustice to read him as either insensitive or misogynistic. This can be seen in the closing lyric, where he once more reassures the reader or spectator about his purposes in writing the play.

What did I have in mind when I began to write this play?
 One fact alone: romantic plays are far too numerous.
 To rank with the undying classics and escape mere cheap applause,
 You first must heave a massive boulder so it blocks the stream of love.

…
 填詞本意待如何？
 只為風流劇太多。
 欲往名山逃口業，
 先拋頑石砥情波。
 …⁹⁹

Paying careful attention to Li Yu's opening and closing lyrics, we notice that his plays self-reflexively comment upon the writer's general principles in creating and judging *chuanqi* plays. Several of his opening or closing lyrics, like the ones in *Naihe tian*, betray Li Yu's antagonism toward the romantic convention of *chuanqi* drama and his constant effort to break away from it. Each time Li Yu

⁹⁸Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 59.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 102. The English translation is Eric P. Henry's, in *Chinese Amusement*, p. 129.

declares his unconventionality, he specifies what exactly makes his plays so untraditional. This self-reflexive comment can be found in *Lianxiang ban* (*Woman in Love*), *Bimu yu* (*Sole Mates*) and *Shen luanjiao* (*Be Careful about Love*). Here, for example, is the closing song for *Shen luanjiao*:

I have read all the sorts of books that people write,
 and they all belong to one of two kinds.
 What is called "romance" and what is called "morality"
 eternally go separate ways.
 If a person is "romantic," he probably fails to be a true gentleman,
 But if person is "moralistic," how can he avoid being
 an inflexible pedant?

We must combine these traits if we wish to avoid
 their mutual absence,
 Work them into a linked and woven chain, like a necklace
 inlaid with pearls.
 Upon examination, this play proves to have no other merit
 than this,
 In one word, it is exactly because it possesses both
 "romance" and "morality."

讀盡人間兩樣書，
 風流道學久殊途。
 風流未必稱端士，
 道學誰能不腐儒。
 兼二有，戒雙無，
 合當串作演連珠。
 細觀此曲無他善，
 一字批評妙在都。 100

The closing lyric of *Fengzheng wu*, tells us that to write true comedy and to make the audience laugh are Li Yu's artistic ends:

Plays originally were things devised to banish sorrow;
 When your drinking funds are all spent, come on and sing a stanza.

¹⁰⁰Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 528. I used Eric P. Henry's translation but thought the last line of this lyric should be interpreted differently. Thus I changed the last line of his translation. See Henry's *Chinese Amusement*, p. 107.

What's the use of spending cash to buy the sound of weeping?
It will only change your happy mood to one of doleful sobs.

Only I refrain from selling sadness when I measure out my verses;
A single fellow not laughing—that fills me with concern.
Only when all the world's folk have changed to laughing Buddhas,
And my brush is bald from saving souls, will I consent to throw it down.

傳奇原為消愁設，
費盡杖頭歌一闕；
何事將錢買哭聲？
反令變喜成悲咽。

惟我填詞不賣愁，
一夫不笑是我憂；
舉世盡成彌勒佛，
度人秃筆始堪投。¹⁰¹

Normally such comments are confined to a writer's preface, but here Li Yu makes it an inherent part of the drama.

Self-reflexive comments are also frequently offered by the characters. Differing from Li Yu's opening and closing lyrics which deal with bigger issues such as the play's theme, the characters' comments often involve more detailed and specific issues, such as the author's innovative techniques.

One good example occurs in *Sole Mates*, where the male protagonist Tan Chuyu 譚楚玉, a play actor, marries his sweetheart Liu Miaogu 劉藐姑, also a play actress. The wedding ceremony is quite different from the conventional wedding scene in the *chuanqi* play, which is usually considered as a hot scene, full of stereotypical formalities such as "to fetch the bride," (迎親) "to congratulate both bride and bridegroom's parents," (拜堂), and "to send the

¹⁰¹Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 4, p. 203. The English translation is Eric Henry's, in *Chinese Amusement*, p. 100.

couple to the bridal chamber” (送入洞房). Very often, the wedding is also paralleled with the bridegroom’s success in officialdom. As a pair of famous couplets have it: “Bridal chamber lit by festive candles, golden plastered walls inscribed with the characters of your name” (洞房花燭夜，金榜題名時). However, in the wedding scene in *Sole Mates* the newly wed couple is congratulated and blessed by a fisherman, a woodcutter, a farmer, a gardener, and a shepherd boy. This departure from tradition is self-consciously pointed out and praised by Li Yu’s characters.

In the middle of the wedding, the fisherman says to Tan,

Mr. Tan, you always play wedding scenes on the stage. But those scenes are full of outmoded conventions. Nothing is like this: fisherman, woodcutter, farmer, and gardener send you gifts and shepherd boy says the lucky words. Although it is a bit rustic, it has another kind of appeal. Don’t you think it refreshes our eyes and ears?

譚兄，你們在戲台上終日做親，都是些陳規舊套，不曾有這個法子：漁、樵、農、圃送親，牧童贊禮。雖然村俗些，卻有一種別趣，難道不叫做“耳目一新”？

(Tan responds:)

Yes, this is not only novel, but also elegant...

不但極新，又且極雅...

(They sing together:)

The play has been transposed, our eyes and ears have been refreshed; If one wants to catch the elegant writer’s style, the least thing he should do is to copy from the old writings!

文章變，耳目新，要竊附雅人高韻。怕得是剿襲從來舊套文！¹⁰²

Li Yu is very skillful in allowing the authorial voice to be spoken through the characters. The shift from a character's voice to the authorial voice is always very smooth and traceless. For example, at the end of *Shen luanjiao*, the hero of the play Huaxiu 華秀 reunites with his long time lover, a former prostitute, 王又嬌, whose true love and loyalty for Hua finally wins the approval of Hua's father. The father not only grants his consent for the marriage, he actually takes the bride to Hua himself by boat. When the family is about to have a family banquet to celebrate the reunion, servants report that a messenger wants to see Mr. Hua. Hua responds, "This is only the message to inform me and my father our promotions. Tell the messenger that Lord Hua [his father] just arrived and we are going to have a family banquet, therefore we have no time to see the report. Tell him to come tomorrow" (止不過是報我父子二人加升官職。你去對他講，說太老爺方才進門，正有家晏，沒工夫看報，叫他明日再來).¹⁰³ Then he sings: "It is the conventional happy ending—every problem is resolved and the hero is bound to be promoted—that I try to avoid. Wouldn't be much better to have some remarkable dramatic events that are unforeseen and unpredictable"(怕得是戲到團圓諸事了，非晉爵即加封誥，卻不道勝事留些餘地好).¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, Hua's

¹⁰²Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, Vol. 5. p. 175.

¹⁰³Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 527.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 527.

response to the servants actually has two voices working at the same time—the voice of the character who directly gives a reply to the servants' call, and the voice of the author who ridicules the conventional ending of the *chuanqi* play and intentionally acts against it. When Hua starts to sing the last line of the scene, the voice of the character diminishes, and the author's voice completely takes over.

EPILOGUE

THE FRUIT OF INNOVATION

Now we have to deal with the questions raised in the prologue: where did Li Yu stand in Chinese literature and in what way did he revitalize the tradition and open up new possibilities for the artist?

In the preceding chapters, we have already demonstrated that the two predominant authorial rhetorics in Li Yu's works are the rhetoric of *fan'an wenzhang* and the rhetoric of auto-communication. If these two rhetorics contribute to the merit of Li Yu's works, they are even more significant in announcing a big forward movement of self-conscious literature. Both of them can be considered as self-critical mechanisms of literature: whereas the rhetoric of *fan'an wenzhang* challenges the literary norms established in the past, the rhetoric of auto-communication arouses critical consciousness of the author's own creation. Examining Chinese and Western literary histories, we find that this type of "meta-critique" played an important role in the development of literary forms and the refunctioning of inadequate conventions.

The modern and post-modern interpretations of parody provide some important insights for us to evaluate the functions of Li Yu's two rhetorics. Despite the long-lasting existence of parody in Western literary history, the important function of this literary phenomenon had not been seriously scrutinized until the beginning of this century. The classical rhetoricians such as Aristotle and Quintilian define parody as a "device of comic quotation,"

which has misled many literary historians into seeing parody as merely a mockery of other texts or a trivial exercise and to condemning it on moral grounds. Parody remained a marginal literary genre—one of the curiosities and oddities of literature—and only moved to a central position, becoming an exemplary genre in the Western literary system at the beginning of the twentieth-century due to the Russian Formalist's influential studies of literary parodies.

One of the important functions emphasized by modern theoreticians, in redefining parody, is its role in facilitating literary evolution. Discussing *Tristram Shandy*, in his *Theory of Prose*, Viktor Shklovesky declares the parodic novel to be “the most typical novel in world literature,” because it effects the changes in a given tradition by dismantling and recycling prominent literary models. Redefining the novels of Fedor Dostoevski as parodic works, Jurij Tynianov sees literary evolution itself is a matter of literary self-reflection, and the subversive force of parody is equivalent to its constructive force.¹ The ideas of the Russian Formalists are further developed by Mikhail Bakhtin in his theories of dialogism. For Bakhtin, parody itself is a manifestation of what he calls “polyglossia” or “hetero-glossia”—the conflict of multiple languages in a single text. Therefore, parody provides a possible way to react against the coherent perspective and world-view of traditional monological texts such as the epic. By extending his research of the function of parody in generic change,

¹See Joseph A. Dane, *Parody* (Norman & London: University of Oklahoma, 1988), p. 8.

seeing parody as a dynamic rhetoric or mechanism in literary evolution, he suggests that the novel itself is a product of parody. The novel parodies other genres. Within the language system of the novel, "parody" is a method of introducing and quoting earlier texts, of in fact starting a dialogue with older or foreign ways of seeing things."² The very idea of dialogism and double-voicedness in the novel language not only places a further emphasis on the parodic rhetoric that rejects, recycles, and refunctions the old models or the literary tradition, but also leads us to the post-modernist interpretation of parody—parody as a literary form of meta-language.

Meta-language, meta-fiction, and meta-critique are popular terms used to redefine parody nowadays. Margaret Rose has dedicated a whole book to the meta-fictional function of parody, Linda Hutcheon and others have also referred to postmodern novels, which frequently use techniques to foreground the process of writing, "narcissistic narrative," or metafiction. Their researches place an emphasis on the autoreferential perspective of parody, seeing parody as a meta-fictional device used by parodists not only to criticize unreflective literary traditions, but also to analyze the problem of mimesis, the relationship of fiction and reality in their own work. By indicating that autoreferentiality can be traced back to the epic practice of having a character relate part of his own tale, Hutcheon suggests that "a concept of mimesis of process is a constant in literature, and not just a new critical need. The modern diegetic preoccupation

²See Martin Kuester, *Framing Truths* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 23.

may only differ in its explicitness and theoretical self-consciousness within the novels themselves.”³ The fact is that the aesthetics of the post-modernist novel, characterized as meta-fictional in terms of the imitation of creative process, is perceived against a projection of so-called realist norms just as Realism was to Romanticism. Therefore, it is a rejection but at the same time a revival or continuation of the literary tradition.

The modern and post-modern interpretations of parody best reflect the dialectical relationship between new literature and tradition: any new literary phenomenon in a given culture always violates traditional norms but at the same time continues the tradition it transgresses. The redefinitions of parody in the twentieth-century also reveal the rhetoric of modern literature—a rhetoric that “reflects a universal principle both of the individual consciousness and of the collective consciousness.”⁴ As Gerard Genette has indicated “Modern literature has its own rhetoric, which is precisely a rejection of rhetoric.”⁵

In a culture where the tradition of rhetoric has accumulated, becoming part of the inertia of reader-expectation, the rhetoric becomes worn-out and ceases to be perceived rhetorically. The rejection of the worn-out rhetoric itself

³Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980), p. 40.

⁴Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, trans. Ann Shukman (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 48.

⁵Gerard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), p. 59.

becomes a new rhetoric. In the past one hundred years, the modern imagination and the modern sensibility of Western literature have been formed in the primary mode of expression which violates traditional modes. As Genette has pointed out:

What can be retained of the old rhetoric is not, therefore, its content, but its example, its form, its paradoxical idea of literature as an order based on the ambiguity of signs, on the tiny, but vertiginous space that opens up between two words having the same meaning, two meanings of the same word: two languages (*langages*) in the same language (*langage*).⁶

It is only natural that against this cultural background, parody, as a self-conscious and self-critical art with its aesthetic opponent in its own rhetorical structure, has been credited as a canonical mode, where the true dynamics of literary system are expressed.

In light of modern Western criticism and examining the evolution of Chinese literature, we detect the same dialectical pattern of rejection and continuation. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly, witnessed a process of literary development that can be characterized as parodic mode. In this period the universal principle of both individual and collective consciousness reveal "a struggle to define the relationship of the latter-day artist to his ancient heritage."⁷ This feature of self-consciousness in relating to the past is not only apparent in various art forms of that period, such as literati

⁶Gerard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, p. 59.

⁷Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 51.

painting, novel, and drama, but is also reflected in literary criticism, especially in contemporary theories of the novel.

According to Milena Doleželová, in the seventeenth-century, Jin Shengtan, Mao Zonggang, Mao Lun (b.c. 1610), and Zhang Zhupo's respective theoretical works on *Shuihu zhuan*, *Sanguo zhi yanyi*, and *Jin Ping Mei* "led to the emergence of a general theory of the novel." In these scholars' theoretical discourses, under the influence of sixteenth-century Neo-Confucian thought, "the process of reading was interpreted as a cognitive process which should lead the reader to self-cultivation." These scholars also tried to forge new relationships with the great models of the past. Their efforts to rework the original texts and their respective critical works in their own revised editions were actually "altered into auto-communicative discourses."⁸

What role did Li Yu play in the formation of parodic and matenarrative modes of writing? And what impact did his works have on the development of the Chinese narrative? As I suggested in the prologue, what Li Yu contributed to Chinese fiction and drama can be placed on par with what Tao Qian did in forwarding Chinese autobiography. By parodying *zhuan* genre, Tao Qian gave birth to Chinese autobiography; by employing the two authorial rhetorics, Li Yu set Chinese narrative on a path toward its new stage of transformation—becoming an autoreferential and metanarrative art. After Li Yu, the ever cherished "objective" or "unreflective" mode of narration or

⁸See Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, "Traditional Chinese Theories of Drama and the Novel," *Archív Orentální* 59.2 (1991): 132-139.

presentation in both Chinese fiction and drama was gradually superseded by “subjective” and “self-reflexive” narratorial rhetorics. This change not only contributed a rise of what has been called “subjectivism” in many literary works in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century, it also signaled the emergence of the parodic and matenarrative modes of writing—the forms usually considered as the products of modernist episteme and aesthetics.

In the *huanben* genre, for instance, Aina’s 艾衲 *Idle Talk under the Bean Arbor* (*Doupeng xianhua* 豆棚閑話) can be considered as both parodic and matefictional. Two Chinese scholars, Hu Shiyong 胡士瑩 and Cui Zi’en think that some of the stories in the *Bean Arbor* should be categorized as *fan’an wenzhang*.⁹ Patrick Hanan also indicates that much of the material in this work is myth in the sense of sanctified legend, but the author subjects myth to satirical treatment. “Among contemporary works, his [Aina] satirical use of myth may be likened to that of Dong Yue’s *Supplement to the Western Journey* (*Xiyou bu*).”¹⁰

Another interesting point brought to light by Hanan is that the “satirical treatment of historical and legendary figures” employed in the *Bean Arbor* can also be found in seventeenth-century drama. According to him, at least one of

⁹See Hu Shiyong, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), p. 478. And also see Cui Zi’en, *Li Yu xiaoshuo lun gao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1990), p. 122.

¹⁰Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard UP, 1981), p. 196.

Aina's legendary stories, that of the beautiful Xishi 西施 had been subject to "satirical treatment in the drama before the time of Aina's book, and three of his stories were soon to be adapted."¹¹ Although the verb "to satirize" here is a bit confusing (the target of satire is usually a real object instead of a previous text), Hanan's characterization of the self-conscious nature of late Ming and early Qing drama is accurate. Andrew Plaks, too, describes the aspect of *chuanqi* drama that contributes to the rise of the Ming novel as "poking fun at stodgy Neo-Confucian stereotypes or lascivious Buddhist and Taoist figures, even parodying texts of classical learning."¹² Besides the parodic treatment of the subject matter, use of marginal characters to comment on the main events—a rhetorical device of auto-communication found in Li Yu's plays, also became a common practice in drama. The best example can be seen in Kong Shangren's 孔尚任 *Peach Blossom Fan* (*Taohua shan* 桃花扇), in which the peripheral characters provide crucial overviews of the dramatic action at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the play.

In the case of classical tales, Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* reflects its subjectiveness and self-reflexiveness at two different levels. His preface and the commentaries attached to the stories uncover "the author's attempt to control or influence the reading of his book by fashioning himself into a lens through

¹¹Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, p. 196

¹²Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, p. 43.

which the book would be refracted for his readers.”¹³ At the narrative level, some of Pu’s pieces exhibit a kind of ironic reflectiveness on the author’s own literary creation. “The Dream of Fox Spirits” (狐夢) is a case in point. In this story, a fox spirit, the heroine of the romantic tale, requires her lover, the hero (a good friend of the author) to entreat the author to write her story. The story ends with the author’s account of the hero’s actual process of telling the story and the author’s decision and action of writing it.

The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century vernacular novel, without exception, also headed towards an orientation of subjectivism and autoreferentiality. The epitome of such orientation is Cao Xueqin’s masterpiece *Honglou meng*—a crystallization of various art forms and different aesthetic ideas. It’s encyclopedic representation is too difficult to handle here, but a glimpse of its prologue already reveals the autoreferential nature of the work.

The extended prologue of *Honglou meng*, most readers will agree, contains the first five chapters. These five chapters form a coherent whole which not only foreshadows the story to unfold in the following chapters but also informs the reader how to read the book. The first chapter, for instance, includes two meta-discourses that are traditionally put outside of the narrative proper: one is an internal preface, another a “dawen” (replies to questions) style of self-critique.

The preface concerns some important issues about the making of this

¹³Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), p.

novel and its artistic status. The novel, as the author indicates, is fictional: “I have lived through a series of illusions and dreams. I therefore conceal the real events and, through the idea of the Precious Jade of Numinous Essence, create this book, *The Story of the Stone*” (因曾歷過一番夢幻之後，故將真事隱去，而借“通靈”之說，撰此《石頭記》一書也).¹⁴ The author creates such a fictional illusion because he experienced “a series of illusions and dreams” in his life. Therefore, the novel is also autobiographical. Although the author then claims that he is going to write a series of biographies of the many girls he has encountered in his life, “this biography of others (female) is, however, said to be related to the ‘shortcomings’ of the ‘I’”—“an implicit autobiographical agenda” is embedded in the novel despite its explicit claim to be a biographical project about others.¹⁵ Some scholars believe that the preface should be attributed to Cao Tangcun 曹棠村, Cao Xueqin’s cousin or brother, and that it is included by mistake as part of the text proper in the Jiayu 甲戌 (1754) and the Jiachen 甲辰 (1784) manuscripts.¹⁶ But others such as Wai-yee Li maintains that “the deep affinity between the preface and the work shows through the persistence of the

¹⁴Cao Xueqin & Gao E, *Honglou Meng* (Beijing: Beijing renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1982), Vol. 1, p. 1. The English translation is Wai-yee Li’s, in *Enchantment and Disenchantment* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), p. 164.

¹⁵See Martin W. Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 77.

¹⁶See Wai-yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 164.

same concern.”¹⁷ To me, the integration of critical and narrative text itself is significant, because it changes the mode of narration entirely. Once the preface is included into the text proper, it will be treated as an internal part of the novel. Whoever the author of the preface might be hardly matters, he has already participated in the creation of the novel. The hypothesis that the preface is included in the text proper “by mistake” is not very convincing. The editors of the *jiaxu* and *jiachen* versions might have done it intentionally. Because in Li Yu’s *Rouputuan* the preface already moved into the content of the narrative. The preface allows the author or co-author of *Honglou meng* to intrude directly into the narrative and this direct intrusion sets a self-reflexive mode for the whole novel.

Coupled with the preface is another piece of meta-discourse dramatized in the same chapter, in which the reader is informed that the novel intends to break away from the non-functioning conventions of three fictional genres: historical romance, erotic novel, and the scholar and the beauty romance. Right after the preface, the novel narrates the creation myth of *The Story of the Stone*: a magic stone was rejected by the goddess Nüwa to repair heaven so was carried by a Buddhist monk to the world of the mortals, where it lived out the life of a man, finally attained nirvana and subsequently returned to the other shore. The narrator tells the reader countless aeons went by. A certain Taoist called Vanitas was passing below the Greensickness Peak and caught sight of a large

¹⁷ Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 164.

stone standing there, on which the experience of the stone in the man's world is inscribed. The Taoist noticed that all the story lacked was "the authentication of a dynasty and date." Then a conversation is conducted between the Taoist and the stone. The Taoist Vanitas says to the stone:

Brother Stone, according to what you yourself seem to imply in these verses, this story of yours contains matter of sufficient interest to merit publication and has been carved here with that end in view. But as far as I can see (a) it has no discoverable dynastic period, and (b) it contains no examples of moral grandeur among its characters—statesmanship, a number of females, conspicuous, if at all, only for their passion or folly or for some trifling talent or insignificant virtue. Even if I were to copy all this out, I cannot see that it would make a very remarkable book.

石兄，你這一段故事，據你自己說有些趣味，故編寫在此，意慾問世傳奇。據我看來，第一件，無朝代年紀可考；第二件，并無大賢大忠理朝廷治風俗的善政，其中只不過幾個異樣女子，或情或痴，或小才微善，亦無班姑、蔡女之德能。我縱抄去，恐世人不愛看呢。

Obviously, the Taoist is a dramatized reader and critic who judges the novel according to the historiographical convention of earlier novels. His criticism is contended by the stone:

Come, your reverence...must you be so obtuse? All the romances ever written have an artificial period setting—Han or Tang for the most part. In refusing to make use of that stable old convention and telling my *Story of the Stone* exactly as it occurred, it seems to me that, far from *depriving* it of anything, I have given it a freshness these other books do not have.

Your so-called "historical romances", consisting, as they do, of scandalous anecdotes about statesmen and emperors of begone days and scabrous attacks on the reputations of long-dead gentlewomen, contain more wickedness and immorality than I care to mention. Still worse is the "erotic novel", by whose filthy obscenities our young folk are too easily corrupted. And the "boudoir romances", those dreary stereotypes with their volume after volume all pitched on the same note and their different characters undistinguishable except by name (all those ideally beautiful young ladies and ideally eligible young bachelors)—even

they seem unable to avoid descending sooner or later into indecency.

The trouble with this last kind of romance is that it only gets written in the first place because the author requires a framework in which to show off his love-poems. He goes about constructing this framework quite mechanically, beginning with the names of his pair of young lovers and invariably adding a third character, a servant or the like, to make mischief between them, like the *chou* in a comedy.

What makes these romances even more detestable is the stilted, bombastic language—inanities dressed in pompous rhetoric, remote like from nature and common sense an teeming with the grossest absurdities.

我師何太痴耶！若云無朝代可考，今我師竟假漢唐等年紀添綴，又有何難？但我想，歷來野史，皆蹈一轍，莫如我這不借此套者，反倒新奇別致，不過只取其事體情理罷了，又何必拘拘於朝代年紀哉！再者，市井俗人喜看理治之書者少，愛適趣閑文者特多。歷來野史，或訕謗君相，或貶人妻女，姦淫凶惡，不可勝數。更有一種風月筆墨，其淫穢污臭，屠毒筆墨，壞人子弟，又不可勝數。至若才子佳人等書，則又千部共出一套，且其中終不能不涉於淫濫，以致滿紙潘安、子建、西子、文君，不過作者要寫出自己那兩首情詩豔賦來，故假借男女二人名姓，又必旁出一小人其間撥亂，亦如劇中之小丑然。且鬻婢開口即者也之乎，非文即理。故逐一去看去，奚皆自相矛盾…¹⁸

This long, elaborate discussion of the three fictional genres and how the novel in question distinguishes from them actually is a systematic literary criticism. It is also usually treated as an appendix put either before or after the text proper as in the case of the Dong Yue's "Replies to Questions on the *Xiyoubu*." Dramatized as a conversation between two characters and inserted into the text proper, the artistic issues dealt with by this critical discourse—the unmasking of dead conventions and the establishing of new literary code—become very important subjects in the structural, as well as in the

¹⁸Cao Xueqin & Gao E, *Honglou meng*, Vol. 1, p. 4-6. The English translation is David Hawkes's, in *The Story of the Stone* (Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 49-51.

thematic, unity of *Honglou meng*. Thus the novel adds a new dimension—a metafictional dimension that not only reflects tradition but also holds up a mirror to the novel itself. The contesting attitude of the stone towards didacticism, objectivity, and stereotypical treatments of erotic and romantic fiction and its artistic self-consciousness are reminiscent of both Tao Qian and Li Yu. Even some of the wording used by the stone sound like that of Tao and Li. Tao Qian's ironic assertion of obscurity and his detachment from history and tradition are obviously echoed by the stone, a dramatized persona of Cao Xueqin. So are Li Yu's attacks on didactic convention and the clichés of *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo*. One thing shared by the three of them is the laying bare of the worn-out conventions and an effort to break away from them—a parodic mode of writing.

The auto-referentiality of *Honglou meng* is also revealed by its mythic-fantastic structure. In fantasy, the fictionality of the narrative is axiomatic, because “the time and space of such narratives need not correspond to those of the reader's experience.”¹⁹ The extended prologue creates two mythic-fantastic worlds in front of the reader: the creation myth of *The Story of the Stone* in Chapter One and the Illusory Realm of Great Void (太虛幻境) in Chapter Five. The former is a metaphorical treatment of the novel's production, while the latter frames the fictional world of the novel with an illusoriness. The fictiveness of the novel is made self-evident by the creation myth of *The Story*

¹⁹Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 40.

of the Stone: the magic figures such as goddess Nüwa, magic stone, Buddhist monk and the Taoist Vanitas; the time of “countless of aeons” and the place name like “the Incredible Crags of the Great Fable Mountains” (大荒山無稽涯); plus the claim of the story’s lacking of “the authentication of a dynasty and date,” all point to the fictive ontological status of the text. In making the creation myth of *The Story of the Stone*, the author is actually telling the reader an artistic truth: the story he is about to tell is a fiction based on his own experience and personal feelings.

The myth of *The Story of the Stone* is connected to Baoyu’s 寶玉 (the male protagonist of the novel) dream of “illusory realm of Great Void” by two rhetorical figures: Zhen Shiyin 甄士隱 (a pun for concealing the truth 真事隱) and Jia Yucun 賈雨村 (a pun for fictional and rustic words 假語村言). When Zhen Shiyin loses all he has and finally finds refuge in renunciation of the world and the promise of Taoist enlightenment, a foreshadowing of Baoyu’s fate and probably a metaphorical ego of the author, Jia Yucun starts to introduce all of the main characters of the novel: in Chapter Two, he and Leng Zixing 冷子興 discuss about the Jia family, providing background information for the whole novel; in Chapter Three, he accompanies Daiyu 黛玉, one of the female protagonists, to the Jias, thus bringing out the hero Baoyu and some other important characters of the novel; and in Chapter Four, he handles a murder case committed by Xue Ban 薛蟠, who leads to another heroine of the novel Xue Baochai 薛寶釵, the younger sister of Xue Ban. The author’s structural design is

self-informing and clever. When Zhen Shiyin leaves the world and Jia Yucun comes into the picture, the narrative enters the fictional realm where the author tries to free the reader's imagination from the bondage of empirical fact despite of its surface realistic effect.

In Chapter Five, the mimetic surface of narrative is interrupted again by Baoyu's dream of the Illusory Realm of Great Void. As indicated by Wai-ye Li, here the play of illusion (*zhenjia* 真假) and reality (*youwu* 有無) "is much more bound up with the paradox of art and the paradox of love, both being the most real and at the same time the most illusory."²⁰ These paradoxes are embodied by the supernatural being Disenchantment's principle of "disenchantment through enchantment"; by the couplet at the entrance of the illusory realm, saying "Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true; Real becomes not-real when the unreal's real" (假作真時真亦假，無為有處有為無);²¹ and also by what Baoyu sees and experiences in this land of illusion, which all turn out to be a dream.

The dream of the hero has the double function of foreshadowing the development of the novel's plot and of self-consciously pointing to the fictionality of the work. All of the clues offered by Disenchantment such as sexual experience, philosophical talk, and the destiny registers and songs hint at

²⁰Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 190.

²¹Cao Xueqin & Gao E, *Honglou meng*, Vol. 1, p. 75.

the illusory nature of the fictional world.²² However, like Li Yu's hero of *Rouputuan* who has to be enlightened through sex, Baoyu also has to be enlightened through love. Baoyu's quest for love, then, is paralleled by the reader's act of reading, involving not only the interpretation of clues and the construction of an ordered plot but also the very act of imagining the world. "of giving shape to the referents of the words that go to make up the whole of the world that is the 'concretized' text being read."²³

In conclusion, as I have discussed above, we can see in the eighteenth-century, Chinese narrative became very sophisticated in the parodic and metafictional mode of writing. In the extended prologue of *Honglou meng*, a combination of various authorial rhetorics has been used in narration. Besides the direct authorial intrusion in the preface and the dramatization of "dawen" dialogue between the reader (the Taoist) and the author (the stone), the novel also uses the mythic-fantastic frame as its internalized structuring device to point out the self-referentiality of the text. This kind of artistic maturation and generic evolution springs from the self-conscious literary narratives of the seventeenth-century written by writers such as Li Yu, Dong Yue, Chen Chen, and Jin Shengtan. Among them, Li Yu should be considered as the most instrumental in rejecting the norm and an unreflective literary tradition and

²²In *Illusory Realm of Great Void*, Disenchantment shows Baoyu the destiny registers that predict Baoyu's fate and the fate of the women he is going to encounter in his life. These predictions are also composed into songs and performed for Baoyu. But Baoyu remains unenlightened.

²³Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 76.

starting out the path towards the art of auto-representation. As a leading parodist in Chinese literary history, Li Yu's art and originality signalled an era of self-consciousness in Chinese narrative with an impact strongly felt in the eighteenth century. If Tao Qian and Li Yu share the same mode of innovation, from Li Yu to Cao Xueqin, we can see a process in which such innovation comes to fruition.

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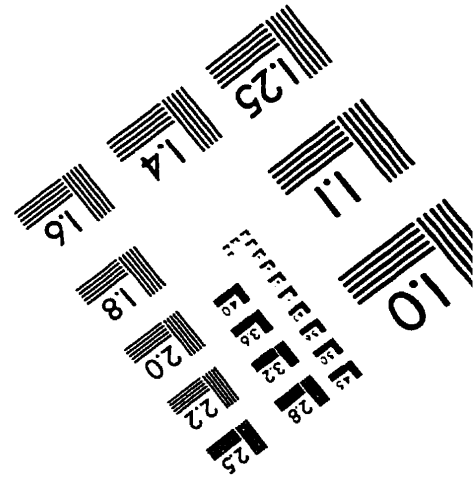
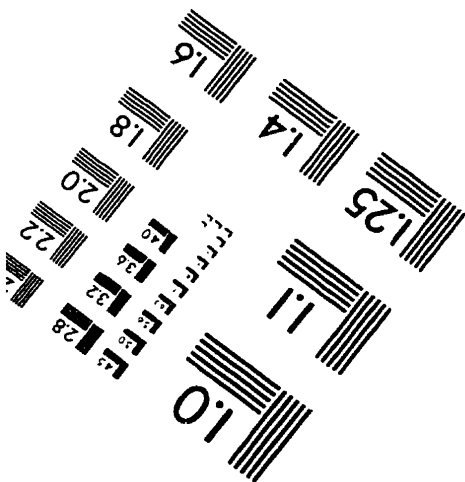
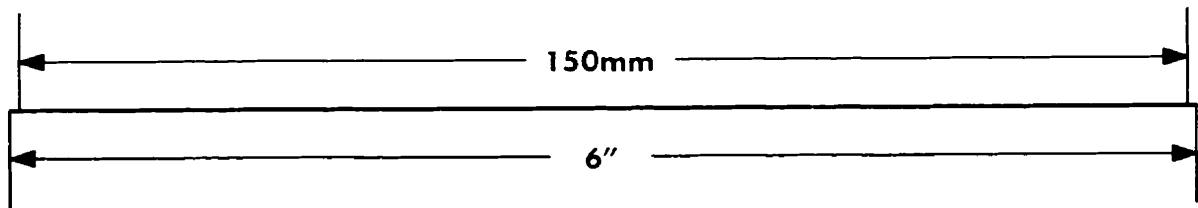
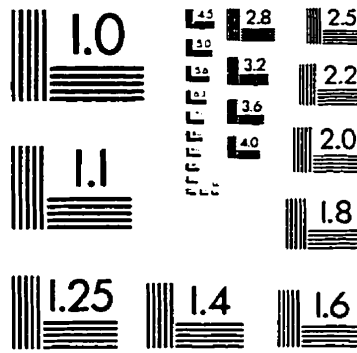
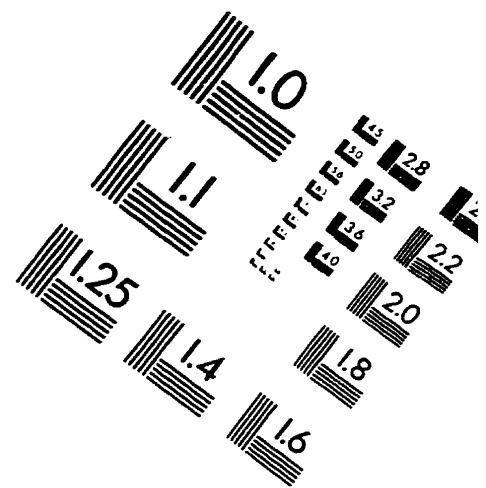
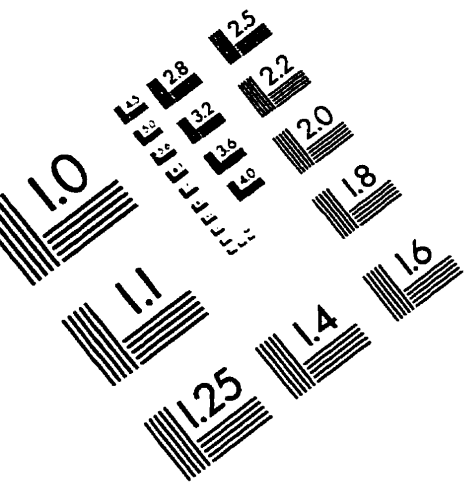
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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