

“What Eyes May Light upon My Sleeping Form?”:
Tang Xianzu’s Transformation of His Sources, with a
Translation of “Du Liniang Craves Sex and
Returns to Life”

By Scene 24, “The Portrait Recovered” (“Shihua” 拾畫), of Tang Xianzu’s 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudanting* 牡丹亭; 1588 or 1598), Bridal Du (Du Liniang 杜麗娘) has been dead and buried for three years, and Liu Mengmei 柳夢梅 finally has made his way from Guangzhou to Nan’an. Rescued after falling into a brook by Du Liniang’s former tutor Chen Zuiliang 陳最良, he is recovering from his travails in the Apricot Shrine, dedicated to Bridal’s memory. Following immediately on the elaborate “Infernal Judgment” (“Mingpan” 冥判) of Scene 23, “The Portrait Recovered” is only a minor and transitory scene in the play as a whole, even though it has a crucial function in the plot as Liu Mengmei discovers Bridal’s self-portrait and takes it with him to his room.¹ Here, however, I would like to draw attention to another aspect of the scene: its extensive description of the abandoned garden to which Liu Mengmei is directed by Sister Stone, the caretaker of Apricot Shrine:

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¹ In the traditional *kunqu* 昆曲 repertoire of the 19th c., this scene, combined with Scene 26, “Examining the Painting” (“Wanzhen” 玩真), was a popular *zhezixi* 折子戲. It regained popularity with *kunqu* performers in the 1930s. The *zhezixi* followed Feng Menglong’s 馮夢龍 adaptation of *Mudanting* in omitting the role of Sister Stone, turning it into a demanding forty-minute solo act for the *sheng* 生. An extended discussion of this *zhezixi* based on late-19th-c. manuscripts is provided by Catherine C. Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage: Four Centuries in the Career of a Chinese Drama* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002), pp. 141–49.

LIU: My health has been mending recently and now I grow weary of sitting about. This Apricot Shrine is such a sizable place, it must surely have a garden where one might amuse oneself?

SISTER STONE: There is a garden to the rear, and although the pavilions and kiosks are in poor repair there are plenty of flowers to brighten it up. You may while away some hours there, but be careful to avoid grieving.

LIU: What would I find to grieve about?

SISTER STONE (*sighs*): What indeed! No matter, if you go on your own. Follow the west gallery past the painted wall. After a hundred paces you will come to a wicket gate. Enter this and you will find pools and teahouses for a mile around. ...

(*Exit*)

LIU: Now that I know of this garden, let me take a leisurely stroll there. (*He mimes the act of strolling.*) Here is the western gallery. (*Strolls further.*) How overgrown is this wicket gate, and half of it collapsed. (*He sighs.*) ... (*He mimes the act of arrival.*) Ha, what a grand garden!

(*Haoshijin* 好事近)

How silently the splendor has eroded.
One stretch of painted wall still stands,
the next slants all awry.

(*He stumbles.*)

Slipping on mosses,
stumbling by broken banks
to a gate shaped as butterfly wings
bolted for no good reason.

There must have been many visitors in times gone by, to judge from the names cut into the bamboo stems.

Guests came
and as months and years drew on
a thousand emerald tablets bore inscriptions.

But already
wildflowers invade the steps
and weeds form thickets.

Strange! How would nuns like these of this Apricot Shrine have built such a magnificent garden? There is something very curious in this. See where the stream winds its way:

(*Finchando* 錦纏道)

Is it the true Peach Blossom Spring
 behind bolted gate?
 So fair a spot, in such disarray!
 Amid drifts of mist
 lakeside pavilion leans askew,
 painted boat lies on its side,
 girl's sash dangles from motionless swing.
 No pillaging of armed men
 wrought these ravages
 but surely some grieving owner absent far
 fills this place with sorrowful memories;
 try as you may to forget,
 each turn of path by mound or pool
 captures your thought again.²

In contrast to this extended description of the overgrown garden, the subsequent discovery by Liu Mengmei of Du Liniang's self-portrait in a crevice of a Taihu rock is dealt with in a rather cursory fashion.

ABANDONED GARDENS AND OVERGROWN CASTLES

Gardens and castles evoke at first thought quite different localities. In literature, however, both the garden and the castle may well function as a setting for luxurious living, or, as the case may be, as a site of former glory. Personally, I always have been struck by the correspondence between *Peony Pavilion's* description of the abandoned garden and the evocation of the overgrown castle in "Dornröschen," one of the best-known fairy tales in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* of Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859):

Soon a hedge of briars began to grow all around the castle. Every year it grew higher until one day it surrounded that entire place. It had grown so thick that that you could not even see the banner on the turret of the castle. Throughout the land, stories circulated about the beautiful Briar Rose, for that was the name given to the slumbering princess. From time tot time a prince would try to force his way through the hedge to get to the castle. But no one ever succeeded, because the briars clasped each other as if they

² Cyril Birch, trans., *The Peony Pavilion, Mudanting*, by Tang Xianzu, 2d edn. (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 2002), pp. 136–37. Birch consistently translates *mei* 梅 (which is usually rendered as "plum") by "apricot." For the Chinese text see Tang Xianzu, *Mudanting*, ed. Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 and Yang Xiaomei 楊笑梅 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), pp. 133–34.

were holding hands, and the young men who tried got caught in them and couldn't pry themselves loose. They died an agonizing death.

After many, many years had passed, another prince appeared in the land. He heard an old man talking about a briar hedge that was said to conceal a castle, where a wondrously beautiful princess named Briar Rose had been sleeping for a hundred years, and with her the king, the queen, and the entire court. ... The young man said: "... I am going to find the castle. ..." The kind old man did his best to discourage the prince, but he refused to listen.

It so happened that the term of one hundred years had just ended, and the day on which Briar Rose was to awaken had arrived. When the prince approached the briar hedge, he found nothing but big, beautiful flowers.³

Once one is alerted to the correspondence between the two texts, similarities abound: both Bridal and Briar Rose are their parents' sole child; both enter a forbidden space where they have a first intimation of sexuality; while Briar Rose immediately enters into a hundred-year sleep, Bridal soon pines away and dies; and eventually both are resurrected by the love of a young man.⁴

If the image of the overgrown castle symbolizes an adolescent girl's initial abhorrence of her own sexuality, one would expect that this image would have occupied a prominent place in Sleeping Beauty tales from their earliest beginnings.⁵ This, however, is not the case. The

³ "Briar Rose," in Maria Tatar, ed., *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004), pp. 236-38. The Grimm brothers continued to revise the texts of their fairytales from their first manuscript version in 1810 to their final edition in 1857. In the 1810 manuscript version this passage simply reads: "And around the castle a thorn hedge grew up, hiding it completely from view."

⁴ For a brief summary of the development of the Sleeping Beauty tale, see Jack Zipes, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales: The Western Fairy Tale Tradition from Medieval to Modern* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2000), pp. 467, 476. Also see Jan de Vries, "Dornröschen," *Fabula* 2 (1958), pp. 110-21. An extensive bibliography of retellings of the Sleeping Beauty tale (including modern feminist ones) and of studies on the subject is provided in Carolina Fernández, *La Bella Durmiente a través de la historia* (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo Servicio de Publicaciones, 2001), pp. 217-43. As I do not read Spanish I have not been able to benefit in other ways from this monograph. The same lack of linguistic skills kept Givanna Franci and Ester Zago, *La bella addormentata: Genesi e metamorfosi di una fiaba* (Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 1984) a closed book for me, except for its extensive selection of historical illustrations of Sleeping Beauty. Modern scholarship agrees in stressing that the Sleeping Beauty tale is exceptional among fairy tales in that it is primarily a literary tale and does not have an oral counterpart.

⁵ In the Sleeping Beauty tales, the princess' hurting herself while spinning usually is interpreted as the onset of menstruation. See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 232-33, who points out that menstruation is often referred to as "the curse." The red color of the flower spirit's gown and the repeated references to scattered petals in Scene 10, "The Interrupted

Grimm brothers' version of the tale of Sleeping Beauty is indirectly and directly derived from "La belle au bois dormant" in *Les contes de ma mère l'Oie* (1697) by Charles Perrault (1628–1703), in which the overgrown castle is mentioned, but less conspicuously:

... within a quarter of an hour there grew up all around [the castle] such a number of big and little trees, brambles and tangled thorns, that neither man nor beast could have passed through. Nothing but the tops of the towers could be seen, and then only from a considerable distance.⁶

Perrault most likely derived his tale from "Sole, Luna, e Talia" in *Lo Cunto de li Cunti* (also known as *Il Pentamerone*, published in 1636) by Giambattista Basile (1575–1632). This latter tale only informs us that the palace in which the comatose princess Talia is left is situated in the middle of a wood:

The stricken father ... left the dead Talia seated on a velvet chair under an embroidered canopy in the palace, which was in the middle of a wood. Then he locked the door and left for ever the house which had brought him such evil fortune, so that he might entirely obliterate the memory of his sorrow and suffering.⁷

And in the story of Troylus and Zellandine in the anonymous fourteenth-century French prose romance *Le roman de Perceforest* of around 1320–1340, which is generally considered the earliest preserved version of the Sleeping Beauty tale, the unfortunate princess Zellandine, who has fallen into a death-like sleep after hurting herself while spinning, is placed by her father in the top room of a high tower of which all doors and windows are walled in (with the exception of one window facing east); moreover, the tower is surrounded by a treacherous moat.⁸

Dream" ("Jingmeng" 驚夢), would suggest metaphorically that Bridal also experiences the onset of menstruation during her dreamed defloration (Swatek, *Peony Pavilion*, pp. 74–75, links the red petals to the blood shed during defloration, "despite the fact that the consummation is only imagined"). Bettelheim argues that the onset of menstruation is often followed by a long period of sexual inactivity. Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 220, argues that this period of inactivity may rather stand for the period when the new bride is still completely under the control of her mother-in-law.

⁶ "The Sleeping Beauty," from Charles Perrault, *Fairy Tales*, translated from the French by Geoffrey Brereton (London: Penguin Classics, 1957), p. 10; also reprinted in P. L. Travers, *About the Sleeping Beauty* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), p. 77.

⁷ "Sole, Luna, e Talia," from *The Pentamerone of Giambattista Basile*, trans. N. M. Penzer (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1932), p. 130; this translation rpt. in Travers, *About the Sleeping Beauty*, p. 86.

⁸ E. Zago, "Some Medieval Versions of Sleeping Beauty: Variations on a Theme," *Studi Francesi* 69 (1979), p. 418. The story of Troylus and Zellandine is found in chapters 46, 48,

From this short survey it is clear that the image of the overgrown castle is only a later development of the impenetrable castle, and that it was continuously developed from one rewriting to the next.⁹ The increasing importance of the symbolic elements in the various premodern versions of the Sleeping Beauty tale is mirrored by the disappearance of explicit descriptions of sexual activity. In the earliest versions of the tale, the Sleeping Beauty is not brought back to life by a loving kiss, but continues to sleep even while she is raped by her prince, only to wake up when her child is born (in the story of Troylus and Zellandine), or when one of her children, mistaking one of her fingers for a nipple, sucks out the splinter of flax that is causing the death-like sleep (“Sole, Luna e Talia”). It is only in Perrault’s version, written under the influence of the courtly culture of late seventeenth-century Paris, that the Sleeping Beauty is awakened by a kiss and that a proper marriage precedes any further sexual intimacies.

A comparable development of the symbolic may be noted in the Chinese case. The elaboration of the description of the overgrown garden is but one of the many changes Tang Xianzu made in adapting the vernacular story “Du Liniang muse huanhun” 杜麗娘慕色還魂 (“Bridal Du Craves Sex and Returns to Life”), a full translation of which is appended to this article. When describing Liu Mengmei’s discovery of Bridal Du’s self-portrait, the text limits itself to the following laconic description: “While cleaning up the back room, this Liu Mengmei happened to find a small painting amidst a tangle of grasses and tares.” Here we find no extended description of a visit to a long neglected garden, full of ruined buildings and overgrown by weeds and tares, in combination with an evocation of its former glory.¹⁰ But even while Tang Xianzu developed the symbolic elements of the story in his dramatic version, he did not tone down the more explicit references to sex, and his play easily qualifies as China’s most daring exploration of female sexuality in dramatic form.

and 50 of the Third Part of the sprawling work, which claims to recount the history of the pre-Christian kings of Britain on the basis of a Greek manuscript.

⁹ From there the theme was taken up by illustrators. In my memory at least, the Dutch translation of Grimm’s fairy tales I read as a child and which included illustrations by Anton Pieck, featured a drawing of a castle hidden behind a hedge; in this hedge the brambles were intertwined with the skulls and skeletons of the princes who had failed to reach their goal.

¹⁰ Wu Zhensheng 吳震生 and Cheng Qiong 程瓊, in their *Caizi Mudanting* 才子牡丹亭, in line with their idiosyncratic interpretation of the play as one long description of the sexual act, explain the “mosses” and “weeds” of Scene 24 as so many metaphors for a girl’s pubic hair (her “bush”): 蒼苔喻毫, 荒草喻毫; *Caizi Mudanting*, ed. Jiang Jurong 江巨榮 and Hua Wei 華瑋 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2004), p. 354.

In the following pages, I hope to have a closer look at the vernacular story that served as Tang Xianzu's main source. While drawing comparisons between the story and the play, I will also draw comparisons between the vernacular story and the various versions of the fairytale of the Sleeping Beauty type. In making these comparisons I do in no way intend to belittle the importance of contemporary political and philosophical issues in the play.¹¹ However, important as such issues may be in and of themselves, they rarely provide a persuasive argument for the enduring popularity of a given work. As a play about love, death, and resurrection, *Mudanting* is extremely enjoyable also without a detailed understanding of late-Ming literati culture, as is shown, for instance, by the enthusiastic reaction to the play of American undergraduate students.¹² It is my hope that highlighting some fairytale elements of the play may help to provide some additional elements towards and explanation of its complexity and enduring popularity, inside and outside China.¹³

SELF-ABSORPTION AND RESOCIALIZATION

For a long time the direct source of *Peony Pavilion* was unknown. It was only in 1958 that Tan Zhengbi 譚正璧 explicitly put forward the hypothesis that the vernacular story *Du Liniang ji* 杜麗娘記, listed in Chao Li's 晁璪 *Baowentang shumu* 寶文堂書目, might have been Tang Xianzu's source.¹⁴ This title has been identified with the vernacular

¹¹ There is a rich literature on Tang Xianzu's intellectual position within the philosophical discussion of his time. For the essential information, see C. T. Hsia. "Time and the Human Condition in the Plays of Tang Hsien-tsu," in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1970), pp. 249-51.

¹² Hsia, "Time and the Human Condition," p. 274, points out the play's "comic exuberance" as one of the causes of the enduring popularity of *Mudanting*, but does not develop his argument.

¹³ Comparative studies of *Peony Pavilion* so far overwhelmingly have used *Romeo and Juliet* as the analogue; and Tang Xianzu has often been compared to Shakespeare (to C. T. Hsia's disgust: "Tang Hsien-tsu is hardly to be ranked with Shakespeare"; "Time and the Human Condition," p. 252). Tina Lu's interpretation of the *Peony Pavilion* in *Persons, Roles, and Minds: Identity in Peony Pavilion and Peach Blossom Fan* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2001) is very much indebted to her reading of Shakespeare's *The Winter Tale* (pp. 291-317). Recently, *Peony Pavilion* also has been compared to Gluck's opera *Orpheus und Euridice* (Chi Jie 池潔, "Liangbu weiqing huanhun de kuangshi jiezuo, Tang Xianzu Mudanting yu Geluke Aofei'ou yu Youlidxi zhi bijiao" 兩部爲情還魂的曠世杰作湯顯祖牡丹亭與格魯克奧菲歐與尤麗狄西之比較, *Shanghai shifan xuebao* 上海師範學報 (Shehui kexueban 社會科學版) 31.3 (2002), pp. 68-73, and to Victor Hugo's romantic verse-drama *Hernani* (Xu Shunsheng 徐順生, "Zhongxi langmanzhuyi xiju zhongde qing yu li, Mudanting yu Ounani bijiao" 中西浪漫主義戲劇中的情與里牡丹亭與歐拿尼比較, *Xueshu yanjiu* 學術研究 1998.9, pp. 96-100.

¹⁴ It is not clear when *Baowentang shumu* was completed. Chao Li is said to have been a *jinshi* of 1541.

story *Du Liniang muse huanhun*, which has been preserved in a number of late-Ming miscellanea. The thesis that this story served as source for Tang Xianzu, even though its earliest known printings postdate the completion of *Peony Pavilion*, is supported by the large number of exact textual parallels between the story and the play.¹⁵ The story describes Du Liniang's dream-meeting with a mysterious lover and her subsequent death, her ghostly love affair with Liu Mengmei, and her eventual resurrection and formal marriage to Liu.

As Tang Xianzu himself points out in his preface (*tici* 題詞) to *Peony Pavilion*, his source story is much indebted to the earlier classical tales of Li Zhongwen 李仲文 and Feng Xiaojiang 馮孝將.¹⁶ Both of these tales are found in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, the early-Song repository of classical tales that after centuries of relative neglect had been reprinted in Tang's early youth. The *Taiping guangji* version of the story of Feng Xiaojiang is rather short and may be translated as follows:

The prefect of Guangping 廣平, Feng Xiaojiang had a son called Mazi 馬子. Mazi dreamt of a girl of about eighteen or nineteen, who told him that she was the daughter of the preceding prefect Xu Xuanfang 徐玄方. She said that she had unfortunately died before her time and had been dead for four years, but that, as she had been wrongly killed by demons and according to the registers of life was destined to reach an age of over eighty, she had now been allowed to return to life to become his wife – would he marry her?

When Mazi dug up her coffin and opened it, she had already come back to life. Thereupon they became husband and wife.¹⁷

The tale of Li Zhongwen is more elaborate but follows basically the same pattern, with the difference that the girl's resurrection is botched by the premature intervention of the parents on both sides:

During the Jin dynasty, Li Zhongwen, the prefect of Wudu 武都, lost his daughter while holding office. She was eighteen at the time, and for the time being he provisionally buried her north of the city walls. He was succeeded as prefect by Zhang Shizhi 張世之. Shizhi's son's style name was Zichang 子長. Twenty years old, he lived with his father in the official quarters. He dreamt of a girl

¹⁵ Zheng Peikai 鄭培凱 (Pei-kai Cheng), "Mudanting de gushi laiyuan yu wenzi yinxi" 牡丹亭的故事來源與文字因襲, in his *Tang Xianzu yu wan Ming wenhua* 湯顯祖與晚明文化 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 1995), pp. 185–204. Also see Iwaki Hideo 岩城秀夫, *Chūgoku gikyoku engeki kenkyū* 中國戲曲演劇研究 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1972), pp. 215–30.

¹⁶ Tang, *Mudanting*, p. 1.

¹⁷ *Taiping guangji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961) 276, pp. 2181–82, where it is credited to Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 *Youminglu* 幽明錄.

of about seventeen or eighteen of extraordinary beauty. She informed him that she was the daughter of the former prefect, and that unfortunately she had died before her time. She said that this was the time she was destined to come back to life and, as she was filled with love for him, she now had come to see him and give herself to him. This went on for five or six nights, and then suddenly she appeared during daytime: her clothes were scented with a very special perfume. Thereupon they had sex as husband and wife, leaving the clothes in which she had slept soiled as if she had been a virgin.

Some time later Zhongwen dispatched a maid to inspect his daughter's grave. She therefore also called on Shizhi's wife. Inside the official quarters she saw below Zichang's couch one slipper of the girl. Holding it, she wept and cried that they had robbed the grave. She took the slipper home with her to show it to Zhongwen. The latter was startled and had someone ask Shizhi: By what means did your son come into the possession of my daughter's slipper? When Shizhi summoned his son and questioned him, the young man told him the full story in all detail. Li and Zhang both deemed this a strange affair, but when they opened the coffin for an inspection, the girl's skeleton was covered with flesh and she looked as she had done during her lifetime, though she only had a slipper on her right foot.

She appeared in a dream to Zichang and told him: "I was about to come back to life, but now my coffin has been opened. I'll die and my flesh will decompose, and I never will be able to regain life. How can I give expression to this feeling of unlimited frustration!" Awash in tears she took her leave.¹⁸

One of the most obvious similarities between these classical tales and our vernacular story is that in the latter Liu Mengmei is not portrayed as the single and unattached wandering student of the play, but as the son of Prefect Liu, Prefect Du's successor as prefect of Nanxiong 南雄.¹⁹ The most obvious point of departure between the classical tales and the vernacular story is of course that whereas the classical tales provide no background to the death of the girl, the vernacular tale uses about one half of its space to describe at length the cause and manner of her death.

¹⁸ *Taiping guangji* 319, p. 2524, where the story is credited to *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林.

¹⁹ Negayama Tōru 根ヶ山徹, *Min Shin gikyoku engekishiron jozetsu* 明清戲曲演劇史論序說 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 2001), pp. 15-42, provides a detailed discussion of the different charac-

In the vernacular story, Bridal Du is not her parents' only child.²⁰ She has a younger brother, and it is the need to provide both of their children with a proper education that prompts her parents to engage a tutor, even though it is Bridal Du's voracious reading which is commented upon. Her little brother is only mentioned twice again: when Bridal needs male help to have her self-portrait secretly mounted outside the government compound, and when her parents leave Nanxiong. Her reading in contemporary romantic literature enhances her sensitivity to the spring sights of the flowers behind the official compound, and the combination of outside stimulus and enhanced sensitivity result in her erotic dream and the subsequent longing that carries her to her grave.

Once Bridal Du has died and is buried inside the garden, leaving behind her self-portrait as a visible and unchanging substitute for her physical charms, the story turns its attention to the son of the next prefect, Liu Mengmei. Once the couple has made love and she has declared her true identity, his parents, in another major departure from the classical tales, take control of further developments. In the vernacular story, it is Liu Mengmei's father who is in charge of Bridal's disinterment and, together with his wife, ensures that she is taken care of properly so that she makes a speedy and full recovery. They next arrange for a formal marriage, and take steps to inform Bridal's parents (now their in-laws) of the developments, so there will be no misunderstanding in case the two families meet in the capital. Liu Mengmei later travels to the capital for the examinations, which he passes, and then he obtains a metropolitan appointment. Eventually he will be joined by both his own parents and wife, and by his parents-in-law, and all will live happily ever after. If in the first half of the story Bridal's parents are shown as indulgent parents who may be partly to blame for their daughter's anti-social and fatal indulgence in her own desires, Liu Mengmei's father and mother are portrayed as sensible parents who deal with their son's potentially dangerous ghostly liaison in an appropriate manner, which assures the proper resocialization of both their own son and the resurrected Bridal. Even while *Du Liniang muse huanhun* pales almost

terizations of Liu Mengmei in *Du Liniang muse huanhun* and in *Peony Pavilion* respectively, and tries to argue that the portrayal of Liu Mengmei in *Peony Pavilion* was intended to mirror Tang Xianzu's experience of banishment to Xuwen on the southernmost tip of the Leizhou peninsula.

²⁰ Most scholars who have commented on the characterization of Bridal Du would seem to be of the opinion that Tang hardly made any major modification to her basic character. However, I am convinced that her being an only child makes a major difference to the dynamics between Bridal and her father. I will develop this point in the final section of this paper.

into insignificance when compared to Tang Xianzu's later masterwork, it is a well-constructed story in its own right, which does not deserve the negative criticism to which it usually is subjected.²¹

If we compare *Du Liniang muse huanhun* to Basile's, Perrault's, or the Grimm brothers' rewriting of the Sleeping Beauty tale, one first of all is struck by the different way the European fairy tales and the Chinese vernacular tale treat their heroine's death. The European fairy tales present the girl's death upon hurting herself as a matter of fate: an inescapable prediction of a goddess or fairy. The Chinese vernacular story presents the developments leading up to the death of the heroine with a degree of psychological realism that is quite remarkable for its genre at the time of composition. It is this detailed description of psychological development that is the greatest claim to originality of the vernacular story,²² and also the element that must have exerted the greatest attraction on Tang Xianzu as he followed the plot-line of the first part of the story very closely, often borrowing verbatim from its text.

Another element of contrast between the European fairy tales and the Chinese vernacular story is the way in which they deal with the reintegration of their heroine into society. In the romantic rewriting of the fairy tale by the Grimm brothers the chaste kiss of the prince

²¹ Hsia, "Time and the Human Condition," p. 273 calls our story a "drab tale."

²² Research on the sources of *Mudanting* has focused on the various tales of resurrection from the grave, and no earlier Chinese tales of girls falling in love with a man they have only met in a dream have been identified. However, the first part of *Du Liniang muse huanhun* has a close parallel in "A Tale of Brief Slumbers" ("Utatane zōshi" 轉寢草紙), a medieval Japanese story preserved in a late-15th-c. illustrated scroll and ascribed to the female author Ichii no Tsubone 一位局 (also referred to as Asukai Masachika me 飛鳥井雅親女). Its heroine, neglected by her widowed father, is overcome by sadness at the sight of the falling petals of a cherry tree outside her room, and next falls in love in an afternoon dream with a young man who proffers her a flowering branch of wisteria and a poem. When she goes to bed that night, the young man sleeps with her in her dreams. Subsequently she suffers from melancholy and hovers on the verge of death. When all other means to cure her have failed, her distraught father sends her on a pilgrimage to the Guanyin temple in Ishiyama. There, she hears in a neighboring room the voice of a man who confesses to his love for a woman he has only met in his dreams and whom she recognizes as her own dream lover. When the next day on her way home she tries to commit suicide by jumping into a river, she is saved from drowning by a passing boat that happens to be the one of her lover. They get married and live happily ever after. A modern annotated edition of "Utatane zōshi" may be found in Ichiko Teiji 市古貞次 et al., eds., *Muromachi monogatari shū* 室町物語集, vol. 54 in *Shin Nihon kotenbungaku daikei* 新日本古典文學大系 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989-1992), pp. 269-89. For an English translation, see Virginia Skord, trans., *Tales of Tears and Laughter: Short Fiction of Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1991), pp. 65-79. The tale belongs to the amorphous genre of *oto-gi-zōshi* 御伽草子, which probably in its origin had a close link to performers and their orally transmitted materials (*Tales of Tears and Laughter*, pp. 1-15). While cases of the transmission of Japanese motifs and plots to China would appear to be very rare, its possibility cannot be excluded, certainly not in a case such as this in which the plot similarity is striking and the Japanese materials are of an earlier date. The most likely medium of transmission would have been some form of oral storytelling.

that brings the princess back to life is almost immediately followed by a happy marriage, at which the parents on both sides are present but have no role to play. This is the version of the tale that has achieved the greatest popularity,²³ and such a “happy end” is adopted both in Tchaikovsky’s ballet version (1890) and the Disney movie (1959).²⁴ Its conclusion is the “classic” romantic fairytale ending it shares with Snow White and Cinderella and that in recent decades has attracted much feminist criticism.

In the earlier versions, however, the tale does not end so simply. Both Basile and Perrault are aware that bringing a new bride into a family creates tensions that require resolution. Perrault presents a version one might perhaps rather have expected from a Chinese author as he focuses on the tension between the bride and her mother-in-law. In the version of Perrault the prince and the princess are properly married in her castle, which conveniently is provided with a chapel and a reawakened chaplain. The prince continues to visit her regularly and has two children by her, but only takes her home with him after the death of his own father. Departing for war, the young king entrusts his young wife and her two children to the care of his mother. The mother (“of a family of ogres”) immediately wants to eat her own grandchildren, but the hunter dispatched to kill them provides her with lamb instead, and when she later wants to eat the young queen, he provides her with venison. Eventually the king’s mother finds out she has been tricked, but just as she has prepared a huge vat filled with vipers to do away with the young queen and her children once and for all, her son the king returns. In frustration the old queen throws herself into the vat and dies. “The King could not help feeling sorry, for she was his

²³ Tatar, *Annotated Brothers Grimm*, pp. 233–34: “The Grimms’ ‘Sleeping Beauty’ has a narrative integrity that has made it more appealing than Basile’s story and Perrault’s tale, at least to audiences in the United States.”

²⁴ Tchaikovsky’s ballet is heavily indebted for its plot to Perrault and has a 17th-c. French courtly setting (allowing for elaborate pageantry and spectacular costumes), but follows the lead of the Grimm brothers’ version in ending the ballet with the wedding of Sleeping Beauty and her prince. For a fine study of the original composition of the ballet, its initial reception, the changes in performance during the years of the Soviet Union, and the controversies surrounding the 1999 St. Petersburg reconstruction of the original 1890 version, see Tim Scholl, *Sleeping Beauty: A Legend in Progress* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2004). Scholl (pp. 34–37) also draws attention to the the old-Norse legend of Sigurd waking Brunhild from her thorn-induced magical sleep after passing through a wall of flame and slicing open her armor, a story which was one of the inspirations for Wagner’s *Ring des Nibelungen*. While Wagner may well have influenced Tchaikovsky and his collaborators, the majority of fairytale scholars nowadays would appear to reject the story of Brunhild as one of the early examples of the Sleeping Beauty paradigm. Tchaikovsky’s music was adapted for the Disney movie, which followed the lead of the ballet by expanding the role of the evil fairy, but departed from it by greatly expanding the part of the prince.

mother. But he soon consoled himself with his beautiful wife and his children.”²⁵ Despite the ironic style of Perrault, the issue he raises is of course real enough: by marrying, a son finds himself caught in the conflict between the respect and fear for his formidable mother and his love for his charming wife (and in this case chooses the easy way out by finding an excuse for making himself scarce and leaving it to the women to battle it out).

In Basile's version our sleeping beauty (Talia) is not confronted with her prince's mother but with his first (and barren) wife. This evil woman does not want to eat her competitor's children but rather to feed the infants to her husband (who is already the king), but again the cook substitutes goat kids for the babies. When the first queen is about to burn her competitor on a huge pyre, the king only comes to the rescue of Talia when she has taken off all her clothes,²⁶ and when he learns that his first wife had Talia's children killed and cooked, he has her thrown into the fire. Both the versions of Perrault and Basile present a picture of a social reintegration of a bride into her husband's family that is fraught with conflict, but they agree with *Du Liniang muse huanhun* in manifesting the need for a more developed conclusion than the truncated happy-ending the Grimm brothers provide: true love only has a chance to survive if it is properly institutionalized through marriage and integration of the bride into her new family, which, in the traditional West as well as in the traditional East, under normal circumstances is the family of the groom.

THE TROUBLE WITH DOTING FATHERS

In *Peony Pavilion*, Tang Xianzu deliberately departed from the perfectly proper but admittedly rather undramatic ending of *Du Liniang muse huanhun*. In the play, Liu Mengmei is introduced (like a latter-day Student Zhang 張生) from the very beginning as a parentless orphan, so Tang could have ignored the final paragraphs of his source altogether and opted for a curtailed finale in the style of Wang Shifu's 王實甫 *Xixiangji* 西廂記 (and in the style of the Grimm brothers' fairy tale).²⁷

²⁵ Travers, *About the Sleeping Beauty*, p. 83.

²⁶ In *Du Liniang muse huanhun* it is the father of Liu Mengmei who orders the maids to undress the resurrected Bridal and have her provided with a new set of clothes.

²⁷ Both Liu Mengmei and Student Zhang are young students whose mind is set on the Way (and an official career). Student Zhang is diverted from that career at the very beginning of *Xixiangji* by the sight of the mighty waters of the Yellow River. Tang Xianzu makes a much greater effort to stress the serious commitment of Liu Mengmei, but then undercuts this characterization by having Liu Mengmei slip and fall into a little brook in Scene 22, "Traveler's Rest" ("Lüji" 旅寄).

Instead, he chose to focus on the relation of Liu Mengmei to his new parents-in-law, borrowing from the many tales on ghostly love and the suspected grave robbery. Probably the best-known example of this type of story is that about King Fucha's daughter Ziyu 紫玉 (Purple Jade) who dies during the absence of her lover, visits him as a ghost upon his return for a love-tryst, and leaves a present with him. (Her father later recognizes this object as one of the burial gifts, has her lover arrested and put in jail, and Ziyu appears to her father in order to explain the situation and free her lover.) Tang Xianzu was well acquainted with this story, because he refers to it in *Peony Pavilion*. He cites, however, as his specific inspiration the classical tale "Mr. Tan" ("Tan sheng" 談生), another case of a botched resurrection:

A certain Mr. Tan had reached the age of forty but was still without a wife – his life was devoted to diligent study. But then a girl of about fifteen or sixteen of peerless beauty and apparel came to him in the middle in the night and offered to have sex with him as husband and wife. Afterwards she told him: "I am not like ordinary human beings: you are not allowed to light a lamp in order to see me clearly. You can only do that after three years!" They became husband and wife, and she gave birth to a boy.

After two years Tan could not suppress his curiosity any longer. That night he watched for her to fall asleep, and then secretly lighted a lamp. It turned out that from the waist up her body was covered with flesh like a human, but that from the waist down she was only bare bones! When she woke up, she thereupon said to him: "You have betrayed me! I was about to come back to life, so why couldn't you wait for another year before lighting a lamp?" Tan profusely offered his apologies and was unable to stop his tears from flowing. She continued: "Even though the great bond between the two of us is forever severed, I am still filled with concern for my son. As you are too poor to be able to feed him, you'll have to come with me for a while so I can give you some things."

Tan followed after her and entered a painted hall. Its construction and the objects were out of this world! She gave him a pearl-sewn coat and said: "This should be enough for your needs." She also tore a sleeve off his gown, which she kept when she departed.

Later Tan took this coat to the market where it was bought by the household of the Prince of Suiyang for ten million cash. The prince recognized the coat and said: "This is my daughter's coat:

he must have robbed her grave!" He then had Tan arrested and questioned. Even though Tan told him the whole story truthfully, the prince still did not believe him. However, when he inspected his daughter's grave, it showed no sign of disturbance at all. When the grave was opened and they viewed her, they indeed found the sleeve of Tan's gown under the coffin. When the prince then called for his son, the boy was the spitting image of his daughter! Only then did he believe in Tan's story. He immediately summoned Tan, returned to him the coat his daughter had given him, and made him prince-consort; he also reported the birth of Tan's son so he could be appointed as palace attendant.²⁸

Tang claimed that he had borrowed the scene of Prefect Du's arresting and questioning Liu Mengmei from this tale ("As for Prefect Du's arrest and questioning of Student Liu, this resembles the arrest and questioning of Mr. Tan by the Prince of Suiyang of the Han dynasty").²⁹ But this is hardly the most original aspect of this tale. That has to be found in the terrifying image of the girl about to be resurrected whose upper body is perfectly well-shaped but whose lower body is reduced to bare bones. Could it be that other factors affected Tang Xianzu's fascination with this tale?³⁰

Tang Xianzu's preface to *Peony Pavilion* is often quoted for its celebration of passion (*qing* 情):

Now Bridal can be called a person of passion. One may not know from where passion arises, but once it continues it will only deepen, to the extent that a living person may die of it, and a dead person can come back to life because of it. If one cannot die for its sake while alive, and come back to life following one's death, it is not the extreme of passion.³¹

From this one could easily conclude that the play as a whole is a paean to passion as embodied in Bridal. But curiously, when Tang discusses his sources just a few lines down, he refers to *Du Liniang muse huanhun* as "the tale of the affair of Prefect Du" (*chuan Du taishou shi zhe* 傳杜太

²⁸ *Taiping guangji* 316, pp. 2501-02, where the tale is credited to *Lieyi zhuan* 列異傳.

²⁹ Tang, *Mudanting*, p. 1, "Zuozhe tici."

³⁰ The second part of Tang Xianzu's *Mudanting* is a blatant reversal of the conventional plot of melodramatic *chuanqi* as represented by Gao Ming's 高明 *Pipaji* 琵琶記. In plays of this type it is the prime minister who is determined to make the brilliant young man his son-in-law despite the protests of the latter that he is already married and wants to stay loyal to the wife of his days of poverty. In some plays of this type the prime minister has his revenge on the steadfast brilliant student by sending him off to the borders to fight the barbarians.

³¹ Tang, *Mudanting*, p. 1, "Zuozhe tici."

守事者),³² suggesting that for him the main character of his play after all is not so much Bridal but her father. This is not the place to present a detailed analysis of the character of Prefect Du. Clearly it is too simplistic to view him solely as the embodiment of a narrow-minded orthodox Confucianism, the spokesperson for an abstract *li* (principle) as codified in a law-like ritual, and “the executioner of his own daughter.” Throughout the play he is shown as a model official, first in his local administration of Nan’an, and later as governor of Yangzhou, and such is the strength of his personality that from the moment of his arrival he turns around the mood in the besieged city of Huai’an and stiffens the resolve of the officers under his command.³³ But while Prefect Du is very well prepared to deal with the problems of society at large, even at a time of national crisis when the survival of the dynasty is at stake, he is much less equipped to deal with the situation in his own family.³⁴ He is not depicted, I would argue, as a strict disciplinarian, but, despite his occasional grumblings over his lack of a son, rather as a doting father of his only daughter, to the extent that he refuses, despite the pleadings of his wife, to take a concubine in order to sire a son for the continuation of the family line.³⁵ Convinced of his daughter’s innocence and purity, he cannot accept that she has grown up into a woman with sexual desires. When in Scene 16, “The Invalid” (“Jiebing” 詰病), Bridal’s mother suggests the sexual nature of their daughter’s disease, Prefect Du’s reaction is one of indignant denial:

MADAM DU: Examine her pulse! If only we had found a marriage partner for her in good time, then no such sickness would have occurred.

DU: What! Among the ancients, “man takes wife at thirty, at twenty woman goes out as bride.” Such a child as our daughter, what can she understand?

³² Tang, *Mudanting*, p. 1, “Zuozhe tici.”

³³ Lu Li 陸力 criticized the widespread tendency to view Prefect Du as “a staunch supporter of the feudal system and of feudal ritualism” as early as 1987 in an article published in *Jinzhou shifan xueyuan xuebao* 錦州師範學院學報 and summarized in Deng Shaoji 鄧紹基 and Shi Tieliang 史鐵良, eds., *Mingdai wenxue yanjiu* 明代文學研究 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2001), p. 598. Lu proposes to interpret Prefect Du as the idealized self-portrait of Tang Xianzu as an official.

³⁴ This failure of Du Bao is neatly summarized by the anonymous author (perhaps the 19th-c. Suzhou performer Ma Rufe 馬如飛) of a *tanci kaipian* 彈詞開篇 entitled “Quannong” 勸農: “It is much easier to govern the country than one’s family 治國非難難治家”; Xu Fuming 徐扶明, *Mudanting yanjiu ziliao kaoshi* 牡丹亭研究資料考釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), pp. 283, 288.

³⁵ Birch, *Peony Pavilion*, p. 142.

A silly girl,
 what can a babe know of the seven passions?
 She has a fever from going abroad,
 an ague of some kind,
 some convulsion or inflammation of the spleen.

I fear that you, as her mother,
 Have not kept fast our jewel tightly in your palm,
 and so, too delicate a blossom,
 she suffers from some heartsickness.³⁶

This little dialogue, in which Prefect Du blames his wife for not taking proper care of Bridal, reveals his overly possessive attitude towards his daughter (by his reluctance to have her married off) and his refusal to recognize, despite all evidence to the contrary, that his daughter is growing up.

Near the end of the play Prefect Du has no trouble at all to accept the fact that his wife, whom he believed to have been killed by rebels, is still alive, but he refuses to come to terms with the resurrection of his daughter.³⁷ He clings to the rumor that Liu Mengmei has robbed her grave and that the resurrected Bridal is a look-alike lascivious monster. As his statement to the emperor in Scene 55, “Reunion at Court” (“Yuan-jia” 圓駕), reveals, this attitude is not just informed by rational doubt,³⁸ but far more by his denial of his daughter’s blatant sexuality:

DU (*kneels*): This man who dares to lie in Your Majesty’s very presence has already debauched my daughter’s memory. For your servant’s daughter

Was buried a virgin maid
 among the springs of Hades –
 how should she consent to wild liaison
 with this adventurer?³⁹

Peony Pavilion is not only a celebration of the passion of young lovers, but also a meditation on the tragedy of fathers who see their innocent darling daughters slip away from them, only then to reencounter them as the willing wife of another man.⁴⁰

³⁶ Adapted from *ibid.*, p. 78. For the Chinese text, see Tang, *Mudanting*, p. 78.

³⁷ This contrast is highlighted by Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds*, p. 140.

³⁸ In *Du Liniang muse huanhun* it is initially Liu Mengmei’s mother who expresses disbelief in the possibility that a ghost may come back to life.

³⁹ Birch, *Peony Pavilion*, p. 331; Tang, *Mudanting*, p. 275.

⁴⁰ Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds*, deals in great detail with the refusal of Du Bao to recognize his daughter as an adult with her own identity. My interpretation of the character of

Tang Xianzu wrote his play during a very specific moment in Chinese literary history. The early-seventeenth century would see a sudden burgeoning of a fascination with the innocence and purity of young girls on the part of male literati, a phenomenon extensively studied by Dorothy Ko.⁴¹ This development may partly have been a reaction to the surging development of pornography. Tang Xianzu himself has been suggested as the author of *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅 by no less an authority than David Roy,⁴² and about the time he finished *Peony Pavilion*, Lü Tiancheng 呂天成, the son of one of his best friends, wrote *Xiuta yeshi* 繡榻野史 (*Unofficial History of the Embroidered Couch*), most likely China's earliest vernacular pornographic novel.⁴³ These developments may well have contributed, together with more philosophical discussions on the nature of *qing*, to the heightened awareness of the power of passion in Tang's work, together with an understanding of the psychological mechanism that makes a father in a world of blatant desire insist against all better knowledge that his daughter at least is a creature of pure innocence.⁴⁴

If, however, such turns out to be not the case, the blame cannot be with the daughter, but has to be found with her seducer, the young man who claims to be her legal husband. While Tang Xianzu claims the tale of "Mr. Tan" as his authority for Scene 53, "Interrogation under the Rod" ("Yingkao" 硬拷), that classical tale does not provide the model for the ferocious viciousness of the beating administered to Liu Mengmei.⁴⁵ Could it be that the image of a lower body reduced to

Du Bao is not intended to subvert her analysis of the relation of Bridal and her father, but to supplement it by providing an explanation for Du Bao's "stubborn refusal to recognize his daughter as human" (p. 141).

⁴¹ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1994), p. 99 speaks about the "morbid fascination" of male literati of the time with "the death of [female] teenage poets."

⁴² David Roy, "The Case for Tang Hsien-tsu's Authorship of the *Jin Ping Mei*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 8 (1986), pp. 31-62. Also see André Lévy, "Tang Xianzu and the Authorship of the Novel *Jin ping mei* - Under the Light of Some Data regarding the Play *Mudanting*," in Christina Neder et al., eds., *China in seinen biographischen Dimensionen: Gedenschrift für Helmut Martin* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2001), pp. 83-88.

⁴³ Wilt L. Idema, "Blasé Literati': Lü T'ien-ch'eng and the Lifestyle of the Chiang-nan Literati in the Final Decades of the Wan-li Period," in R. H. van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period*, authorized rpt. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. xxxi-lix.

⁴⁴ The "cult of *qing*" in the seventeenth century has given rise to a sizable body of scholarship in recent years. Here I limit myself to mentioning just a few titles: Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, esp. pp. 68-112; Wai-yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1993); Martin W. Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Anthony C. Yu, *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1997), esp. pp. 53-109.

⁴⁵ One could of course argue that beatings were a normal procedure in traditional courts,

bare bones triggers a loving father's worst nightmare as he imagines his daughter subjected by desire to the pains of menstruation, defloration, and childbirth? Is it possible that an awareness of the father of his own guilt as he eventually will have to give his daughter away in marriage lies behind this vicious torture?⁴⁶ Or should we go even further and suggest that Prefect Du's refusal to marry his daughter off in a timely manner is a dim reflection of the Freudian "family complex," and that his insistence on her innocence is a distorted expression of his subconscious desire to keep his daughter to himself?⁴⁷

Before one dismisses the above suggestions as completely out of sync with the "innocent" nature of the fairytale, it might be useful to have a second look at the medieval story of Troilus and Zelandine. In that story, Zeland, the sleeping beauty's kingly father, has her laid out on her bed in the nude. The modern scholar E. Zago comments:

The character of Zelandine's father is ambiguous enough to deserve some examination. His decision to have his sleeping daughter [laid out] completely naked on a bed is rather puzzling. One could venture to say that the author seems to skirt incest. Or he could just amuse himself, and his readers, and reverse traditional values. ... Zeland places his daughter under the protection of the sun god, which is another erotic allusion, and makes her accessible only to himself or to supernatural beings.⁴⁸

but the title of the scene would appear to draw attention to the exceptional ferociousness of the torture administered.

⁴⁶ Recent scholarship has shown convincingly that female sexuality was considered sinful and a source of suffering in "popular Buddhism." See for instance Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1998). I am convinced that such views of female sexuality were widely shared among elite families, if not by all men, then certainly by the overwhelming majority of women. In many precious scrolls (*baojuan* 寶卷) from the Ming and Qing total sexual abstinence is touted as the only way to escape from this sin and its attendant sufferings.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of nature and distribution of "family complex" tales, see Allen W. Johnson and Douglass Price-Williams, *Oedipus Ubiquitous: The Family Complex in World Literature* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1996). Tales on the sexual tension between daughter and father are discussed on pp. 24–27. Sun Fali 孙法立, "Ping Wang yi Mudanting," 评汪译牡丹亭, *Waiyu yu waiyu jiaoxue* 外语与外语教学 (2001.2), pp. 44–45, timidly suggests the presence of Freudian themes in *Peony Pavilion*, but he basically limits himself to interpreting Bridal's dream of her first meeting with Liu Mengmei as an expression of repressed sexual desire. Other articles which apply Freud to Bridal would appear to limit themselves to the same cautious approach. Also see Deng and Shi, *Mingdai wenxue yanjiu*, pp. 599–600.

⁴⁸ Zago, "Medieval Versions of Sleeping Beauty," p. 421. Bettelheim, *Uses of Enchantment*, pp. 228–30, discusses some possible Oedipal implications of the Sleeping Beauty tales by Basile and Perrault. Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1987), p. 152, has the following comment on the development of the fairy tale in Victorian times: "Of the two components that shape female Oedipal plots – the fantasy of the amorous father and the fantasy of the rivalry with the mother – only the latter has become a prominent, virtually undisguised theme in popular tales depicting the marriage of female pro-

Prefect Du's handling of the burial of his daughter is equally questionable. As is stressed at a number of places in *Peony Pavilion*, the proper thing for him to have done upon his daughter's death would have been to ensure that she was buried with her ancestors in faraway Chengdu. But he accedes to her wish that she be buried in the flower garden, under a plum tree that is laden with fruit. It is clear that Bridal identifies herself with the plum tree. The plum tree laden with fruit is of course a well-known metaphor for a young woman impatiently awaiting a suitor.⁴⁹ Just as king Zeland can only expect his daughter to be deflowered once he leaves her body the way he does, so too Prefect Du in his doting indulgence is more party to his daughter's pursuit of desire than he is willing to admit, which may go a long way to explain the vehemence of his reaction. King Zeland, on the other hand, is easily persuaded when his deflowered daughter gives birth to a boy that she has been visited by a god, rather than a mere princely mortal.

It may be instructive too to have a closer look at the final exchange between Prefect Du and his daughter's resurrected ghost. When all other attempts to convince her father of her existence as a human being have failed, Bridal Du sings an aria that is highly suggestive in its symbolism:

DU: Leave this Liu Mengmei, and I will acknowledge you when you return to my house.

BRIDAL:

You would have me return to my girlhood home,
quit my husband's house.
I'd be an azalea blooming still for you
but that would not stop the cuckoo's crimson tears.

(*She weeps.*)

Ai-yo, here before
the father I knew in life,
the mother who gave me birth
my dizzy soul loses its hold on sense.

(*She faints away.*)

DU (*startled*): Bridal, my daughter!⁵⁰

tagonists. While (step)mothers are habitually demonised as nags at home and witches in the woods, fathers qua fathers tend to fade into the background or to be absent from the tale." While this description might apply to *Du Liniang muse huanhun*, it clearly would not apply to *Peony Pavilion*.

⁴⁹ *Shijing*, "Guofeng," 11/9 (Mao no. 20); text and translation may be found in James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 4, *The She King* (rep. Taipei: Wenshizhe, 1971), pp. 30-31.

⁵⁰ Birch, *The Peony Pavilion*, p. 336; Tang, *Mudanting*, pp. 277-78. A somewhat more literal

As all Chinese readers would know, the cuckoo was the transformed soul of Du Yu, an ancient ruler of the state of Shu (the home of the Du family who in this play come from Chengdu rather than from Taiyuan as in *Du Liniang muse huanhun*). The call of the cuckoo is traditionally understood to mean *burugui* 不如歸, which usually is translated as “better go home” but here also might be understood in the meaning of “better get married,” as the word *gui* is also used in the meaning of “to marry” when applied to a girl. At this level the symbolism is simple enough. However, the ancient ruler is said to have died out of remorse over having raped the wife of his minister/successor, and the tears of blood the bird is believed to shed are caused by the same remorse over this heinous crime against nature. The azalea flower, in its turn, has been dyed red by the bloody tears of the cuckoo. If Bridal compares herself, if brought home, to the azalea, it would appear that the cuckoo has to stand for her father, who by implication is accused of a crime he will regret for eternity.⁵¹ It is difficult to imagine that Tang Xianzu would have been unaware of the implications of such blood-soaked imagery at this pivotal location in the text. By conspicuously mentioning the azalea and the cuckoo in two subsequent lines he must have intended to draw attention to the relation between the two images and the legends behind them.⁵²

Tang Xianzu's primary motivation in introducing the rumor of grave robbing and its attendant plot complications probably did not go

rendition of the first four quoted lines of song (from the aria to the tune *Simenzi* 四門子) might read: “Make me go back to the Du family/ And after dumping Liu/ Become your azalea flower/ Yet you cannot unmake the cuckoo shedding its crimson tears.” Wang Rongpei's recent translation, *The Peony Pavilion* (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe; Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2000) 2, p. 975, reduces this to: “If you want me to go back to the family of Du/ And leave the family of Liu,/ All my life I'll weep and hate you.” Zhang Guangqian's rendition, *The Peony Pavilion* (Beijing: Tourism Education Press, 1994), p. 402, stays closer to the original: “It is impossible to shun the Lius/ and return to the Dus as you wish./ Though you might be able to transplant a cuckoo flower/ you would not be able to stop the cuckoo's tears.”

⁵¹ I find the suggestion that both flower and bird should stand for Bridal rather unconvincing. It should be admitted, however, that the images of the azalea and the cuckoo occur a number of times elsewhere in the play without having the implications I impute to them here.

⁵² It may be instructive here to compare the relation between Prefect Du and his daughter in *Peony Pavilion* to that of Princess Miaoshan 妙善 and her father in *Xiangshan baojuan* 香山寶卷 (*Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain*), which circulated from the early 16th-c. onward; it has the father urging his unwilling daughter to marry. As she continues to refuse to do so, he threatens her with execution. On the eve of her execution the king visits the naked and shackled Miaoshan once again in her cell at midnight to make a last effort to make her change her mind by extolling to her the pleasures of sex, all to no avail. His daughter points out to him that his behavior could easily give rise to suspicion and rumor. See Wilt L. Idema, “Evil Parents and Filial Offspring: Some Comments on the *Xiangshan baojuan* and Related Texts,” *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions* 12-13 (2002), pp. 1-40. While on the surface the father-daughter relation in both texts is diametrically opposed, both texts testify to the sexual tension that is inevitably an aspect of that relation.

beyond a desire to provide a certain measure of dramatic tension and novelty to the second part of his long play once the lovers had been brought together. However, the plot-development he came up with does turn Prefect Du into a major character in the second part of the play. As I have tried to argue, Prefect Du's characterization is not without its own psychological realism. If Prefect Du is mistaken, he errs not because he loves his daughter too little, but because he loves her too much; not because he is a strict disciplinarian who denies all passion, but because he himself is a creature of passion as much as his daughter. But whereas Basile and Perrault portray their jealous competitors of the bride as women who are very much aware of their own murderous intent, Prefect Du as conceived of by Tang Xianzu remains unaware of possible implications of his fatherly doting. His daughter, however, is portrayed as sharp enough to suspect, in a final flash of insight, the possible implications of his love and spell it out to him. Once she verbalizes this suspicion, it not only shuts up her father up for good,⁵³ but also horrifies herself to such an extent that she faints.

If one accepts the above interpretation, the play does not end with a reluctant reconciliation of father and daughter, but with a definitive break between them, as the silenced father cannot but acquiesce to a marriage that is confirmed by the highest authority on earth, the emperor. But despite its irreconcilable conflict between daughter and father the play does not question or attack the traditional marriage system of late-imperial China (an interpretation that is repeated *ad nauseam* in the bulk of scholarship on Tang Xianzu and his play),⁵⁴ it rather reaffirms the traditional marriage system: however much a father may love his daughter, it is only natural that she follows the groom, and it is the refusal of the father to let his grown-up daughter go that turns his dotting affection into abnormal obsession.

China of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth century had no commercial theaters, in which the box office determined the repertoire. Modern histories of Chinese drama, reflecting the nature of our sources, describe the last decades of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century as the heyday of the "family troupes." The repertoire of these family troupes, as that of the upper-class courtesan houses that offered theatrical entertainment, may well have consisted mostly of extracts from *chuanqi* rather than complete plays.⁵⁵ However,

⁵³ Except for his final exclamation: "Bridal, my daughter!" But is he startled by her fainting (as usually assumed), or by her implied accusation?

⁵⁴ Deng and Shi, *Mingdai wenxue yanjiu*, p. 591, provide some illustrative quotes.

⁵⁵ For a detailed discussion of the family troupes throughout Chinese history, but with an

both the sophisticated courtesan culture of the last century of the Ming dynasty and the popularity of the family troupes would appear to have been primarily a regional phenomenon, limited to the Jiangnan area, where Suzhou by the end of the sixteenth century had become the undisputed center and *kunqu* the preferred style of performance. Both the patronage of the star courtesans and the ownership of family troupes, moreover, must have been limited to the extremely rich, a minute section of the population. The overwhelming majority will only have been able to enjoy theater when plays were performed as a component of a community, lineage, or family celebration.⁵⁶ Among family celebrations, weddings and funerals, along with birthday celebrations, stand out. On such occasions it would appear to have been customary to perform complete plays.⁵⁷

Tang Xianzu, as is well known, did not write *Peony Pavilion* for the *kunqu* theater of the Jiangnan region and disparaged the revisions of his play by his Jiangnan colleagues to fit its text to the needs of *kunqu*. He wrote his play with his own local Jiangxi theater in mind. He maintained intensive contacts with professional actors, but to the best of our knowledge did not own a family troupe (it is difficult to imagine how he would have been able to do so in view of his much-praised probity and honesty in office). I am convinced that he intended *Peony Pavilion* to be performed in full. No occasion would have been more suited to such a performance than a grand wedding celebration (at the groom's house), as *Peony Pavilion* not only celebrates the all-conquering love between bride and groom, but also underscores the painful but irrevocable rift between father and daughter when a girl is transferred from her natal family to that of her husband. With its celebration of love and romance, *Peony Pavilion* may well have been written with performance at weddings in mind. If that hypothesis is true, it would explain why the text had to be subjected to so many changes and revisions once it was removed from its original context and absorbed in the *kunqu* repertoire. The well-known estheticizing tendency of *kunqu*, which has only increased with the centuries, is, I am afraid, utterly alien to the spirit of *Peony Pavilion* as originally conceived by Tang Xianzu with all

emphasis on the 16th to 18th cc., see Zhang Faying 張發穎, *Zhongguo jiyue xiban* 中國家樂戲班 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2002).

⁵⁶ Piet van der Loon, "Les origines rituelles du théâtre chinois," *JA* 265 (1977), p. 155: "Pour la grande majorité des chinois, le théâtre était avant tout un hommage aux dieux au cours des fêtes. En dehors de cela, ils n'avaient jamais l'occasion d'assister a une représentation théâtrale."

⁵⁷ Zhang Faying, *Zhongguo xiban shi* 中國戲班史, rev. edn. (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), esp. pp. 106–16.

its exquisite lyrics, but also its low humor, sexual innuendo and broad bawdry, in the spirit of China's rich (but largely unrecorded) *naofang* 鬧房 culture. The more ironical, therefore, that *Peony Pavilion*, because of its immediate and universal popularity, has become the typical play *par excellence* of the modern *kunqu* repertoire.

Appendix

A Complete Translation of *Du Liniang Craves Sex and Returns to Life*⁵⁸

At leisure in my study I was reading through various stories:
Rare is a case such as that of Liniang who returned to life!
So now I will adapt this romantic affair of ancient times
As a novel tale in order to admonish the men of later days.

Our story goes that during the Southern Song dynasty in the reign of emperor Guangzong there was an official who was by promotion appointed as prefect of Nanxiong prefecture in Guangdong province. His name was Du Bao 杜寶, and his social name was Guanghui 光輝; he had entered upon a bureaucratic career by passing the metropolitan examinations. His family hailed from Taiyuan in Shanxi province, and he was fifty years of age. His wife, lady Zhen 甄, was forty-two, and the couple had one boy and one girl. The girl was sixteen and was called Liniang, and the boy was twelve and was called Xingwen 興文. Both children were beautiful and outstanding. Half a year after Prefect Du had arrived at his post he hired a tutor to instruct his daughter and her brother at home in reading and ritual. Within half a year this young lady had shown herself an intelligent and quick-witted student: there was

⁵⁸ This translation is based on the modern typeset edition of the text of *Du Liniang muse huanhun* in Hu Shiyong 胡士瑩, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun* 話本小說概論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), pp. 533-37. Hu based himself on the text as printed in He Dalun 何大掄, ed., *Yanju biji* 燕居筆記, j. 9 (a slightly simplified version of the same text is also found in Yu Gongren 余公仁, ed. *Yanju biji*, j. 8). The text of this story in He Dalun's version of *Yanju biji* is also printed by Xu Shuofang in his *Tang Xianzu nianpu* 湯顯祖年譜 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), pp. 239-47. In Taiwan the text was included by Yang Zhenliang 楊振良 in his *Mudanting yanjiu* 牡丹亭研究 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1992), pp. 27-33. The He Dalun edition of *Yanju biji* has been photomechanically reprinted as vol. 87 of *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小說集成 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995); the text of *Du Liniang muse huanhun* is found on pp. 524-41.

no book she hadn't read, there was no history she failed to understand, and she also was well-versed in the polite accomplishments such as the zither and chess, calligraphy and painting, chanting of the breeze and singing of the moon, and the feminine arts such as embroidery. Everybody in the official compound called her the "female student."

On a certain day, just in the middle of the third month at the end of spring, when the weather was mild, when the sky was now clear and then covered and the temperature not too cold and not too hot, this young lady, accompanied by her ten-year-old servant girl Chunxiang 春香, went into the flower garden behind the official compound to enjoy herself. When strolling about she arrived inside the flower garden. She saw:

Fake mountains and true streams, emerald bamboo and rare flowers;
 All-encircling deep-blue ponds – the willows planted by their side a lingering green, massively rising black peaks – the blossoming peaches at their feet a dazzling pink!
 In pairs, powdered butterflies flit through the flowers, in couples, dragonflies touch on the water;
 On beams purple swallows chirp and twitter, in willows yellow orioles warble their song.
 Everywhere terrace pavilions and water-side halls, innumerable the precious plants and rare buds!
 Here truly are found flowers that do not fade throughout the four seasons, these indeed are plants that continuously blossom throughout the year!

The young lady could not get her fill of enjoying the sights, yet each of these wounded her feelings, and as her heart was filled with depression she quickly returned to her room. Sitting there alone without distraction she was moved by the sights of the last month of spring. With bowed head she heaved a heavy sigh and said: "Can it then indeed be true that spring colors vex one so? I always read in poems, lyrics, and narrative ballads that the maidens of ancient times were moved to passion by spring and were filled with regret in autumn, so that really is not a lie! I'm already sixteen and still haven't found a husband who plucks a branch from the cassia tree; moved by the sights I am filled with emotion – how do I obtain my moon-palace visitor?⁵⁹ In earlier times Guo Hua 郭華

⁵⁹ Bridal does not hope for just any husband, but for one who will pluck a branch of the cassia tree in the moon, i.e., will have passed the metropolitan examinations with highest honors.

met by accident with Yueying 月英, and Student Zhang 張生 succeeded in encountering lady Cui 崔.⁶⁰ Then there are books like the *Bridal Collection of Concentrated Passion* and the *Tale of Jiaoniang and Feihong*, in which a beautiful woman and a dashing poet first share their love during a secret rendezvous,⁶¹ but eventually they all seem to end up happily married! Alas, I was born in a family of officials and grew up in a renowned household. Even though I have reached the age of marriage, I have not had the luck of an early wedding. In truth, I pass this verdant spring in vain and time passes by like a flash.” After she had sighed and moaned like this for quite a while, she said: “How bad! My body is as beautiful as a flower but my life, alas, is like a leaf on the wind!” She then, leaning on a little table, dozed off for a noontime nap.

But as soon as she closed her eyes, she saw a student who had just turned twenty and cut a fine figure. As he snapped a willow branch in the garden he smiled to her and said: “Miss, as you are versed in books and histories, how about writing a poem to voice your appreciation?” She wished to reply to him, but she was both startled and pleased and did not dare speak rashly. She thought by herself: I have never met him before and I don’t even know his name, so how does he dare to enter here? Just as she was puzzled by this, the young man came over to her and locked her in his arms, and by the side of the peony (*mudan*) pavilion, next to the paeonia (*shaoyao* 芍藥) fence, together they achieved the pleasure

⁶⁰ These two stories mentioned are representative of the popular love comedies of the early and mid-Ming. Student Zhang and Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯 are the main characters of Wang Shifu’s 王實甫 five-play *zaju* cycle *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (*The Western Wing*) and its various *chuanqi* rewrites. Guo Hua 郭華 and Wang Yueying 王月英 are the main characters in Tong Yangzhong’s 童養中 *Yanzhi ji* 胭脂記 (*Rouge*). The plot of this play goes back to a tale first included in Liu Yiqing’s *Youming lu* (*Taiping guangji* 247), and was very popular with playwrights from the Song dynasty onwards. In the *chuanqi* version, set in Song dynasty Kaifeng, the student Guo Hua travels to the capital to take part in the examinations. Once there, he falls in love with Wang Yueying, a girl who works in a cosmetics shop. With the help of her maid-servant, the couple sets up a rendezvous in a monastery on the night of the Lantern Festival, but when Yueying arrives at the designated spot, she finds her lover sleeping and she is unable to wake him up. As she departs, she leaves behind one shoe and a scarf. When Guo Hua wakes up, he swallows the scarf in frustration and chokes on it. Eventually Judge Bao brings about the happy reunion and marriage of the couple.

⁶¹ The two titles here are representative of the romantic classical novellas that were apparently so popular in the 15th and 16th cc. *Zhongqing liji* 鍾情麗集 (*Bridal Collection of Concentrated Passion*) tells the story of a long drawn-out love affair of two cousins which ends happily, whereas the equally secretive affair of two cousins in *Jiaohong ji* 嬌紅記 (*Tale of Jiaoniang and Feihong*) does not end in marriage. The latter tale also was very popular with dramatists: it was adapted as a two-play *zaju* cycle in the early decades of the Ming by Liu Dui 劉兌, and as a *chuanqi* in the final years of the Ming by Meng Chengshun 孟稱舜 (1601–1684). The latter work has been translated by Cyril Birch as *Mistress and Maid* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2001).

and joy of rain and clouds. But just as both their feelings were in perfect harmony, her mother came into the room and woke her up: she was covered in cold sweat, and it all turned out to have been only a dream!

She hastily arose and greeted her mother, who then asked her: "My child, why are you not doing some embroidery or perhaps reading a book to while away the time? How come you are taking a noontime nap?" The young lady replied: "A moment ago I took a walk in the flower garden when I was overcome by the warmth of spring. So I returned to my room, but as I had nothing to occupy me, I must have dozed off. Please forgive me, mother, for not jumping to my feet properly." Her mother said: "My child, that flower garden behind our residence is a desolate and lonely place, you should not go there too often!" The young lady replied: "Of course I won't, mother!" Following this conversation the prefect's wife and the young lady went to the central hall to have their meal.

This young lady may have given this obedient reply, but in her heart she kept thinking of what had happened in the garden. She never could get it out of her mind, and whether walking or sitting she was not at ease, feeling as if something was lacking. She did not care for drink or food, her eyes were brimming with tears, and that night she went to sleep without having eaten anything. The next morning after breakfast she was sitting all by herself in the flower garden, gazing at the spot where she had met the student, but it was desolate and lonely, deserted and still, and he was nowhere to be seen! All of a sudden her eye was caught by a large plum tree. Laden with plums it was quite lovely, and its trunk was low, with the result the tree had the shape of a canopy. The young lady walked up to the tree and said overjoyed: "It would be my good fortune if I could be buried under this tree upon my death." She then went back to her room and told her girl servant Chunxiang: "When I die, I want to be buried below the plum tree. Remember that!"

When the young lady was seated in front of the mirror the next morning and making her toilette, she realized that her face had grown gaunt. She ordered Chunxiang to fetch her brush and ink, inkstone and paper and with these at hand she painted her own portrait: in a red skirt and a green jacket, with her girdle gems dangling at her waist, and her hair done up with halcyon and golden

pins, it seems as if alive! When she compared the portrait to her mirror image there was no difference. She was very pleased with it and ordered her little brother to find a mounting shop outside the official residence and have it mounted as a little informal portrait. She hung it on the wall of her room and gazed on it from early till late. One day she all of a sudden wrote a quatrain, which she inscribed on the painting:

Seen from close up, she clearly looks exactly like me,
Watched from afar she naturally resembles a flying immortal.
If in some later year I will meet my moon-palace visitor,
It's bound to be by the side of the plum or of the willow.

When she had finished her poem, she was filled with longing for the student she had met in her dream. He had plucked a willow branch – could it be that the man she would wed was surnamed Willow (Liu)? Perhaps that was why she had received such a startling annunciation?

Because of her craving for sex, Liniang from this moment on spent her days silently seated in her room. She became more and more despondent as a fever raged in her heart. There was no pain that did not trouble her and she found it impossible to suppress her spring passion. From early in the morning till late at night she thought of him and her whole nature became wrapped up in this delusion. Eventually she developed a chronic disease: she had just turned twenty-one at the time. When her parents saw that she was suffering in this way, they invited every physician but to no avail and prayed to every Buddha but without response. As time moved from spring to autumn, they worried that the westerly winds would send off the summer heat and jade-white dew would engender the chills of fall. As the autumn rains poured down, the cruel cold pierced her bones, and her state became even more critical. When the young lady realized that she would not live much longer, she ordered Chunxiang to call her mother to her bedside. Her eyes brimming with tears she cried bitterly: “I am an unfilial and disobedient daughter, incapable of paying back the favors shown to me by my parents in feeding and raising me. It must be because of heaven’s fate that I now am set to die an early death! But mother, if after my death you will bury me under the plum tree in the flower garden behind the official residence, all my wishes will be fulfilled.” Having said that, she heaved a sigh and passed away. That day was the fifteenth of the eighth month. Her mother

was overcome by grief. A coffin and shroud were bought, and after her daughter had been encoffined, she told her husband: "When our daughter was about to die, she instructed me that she wanted to be buried below the plum tree in the back garden. We cannot go against her wish." Prefect Du went along with his wife and ordered her buried there. Her mother was overcome with grief and pain and thought of her all day.

But time goes on. All of a sudden the three years of Prefect Du's appointment were over and the prefect appointed as his successor had arrived, so prefect Du packed his luggage and, together with his wife and son Du Xingwen,⁶² he boarded the boat that would take him back to the capital, where he would receive his next appointment, but we will not discuss that further.

Now the name of this new prefect was Liu En 柳恩. He hailed from Chengdu prefecture in Sichuan province and was forty years of age. His wife lady He 何 was thirty six. They were a loving couple with only one son, who was eighteen years old and was called Liu Mengmei (Willow Dreams of Plum). He got his name because his mother had become pregnant upon dreaming of eating a plum. This young man was an accomplished scholar, [a master] of the zither, in chess, calligraphy, and painting, who finished his essays as soon as his brush touched paper. He had come with his father to Nanxiong prefecture. After his father had assumed office, accusations were honest and court-cases simple.

While cleaning up the back room, this Liu Mengmei happened to find a small painting amidst a tangle of grasses and tares.⁶³ When he unrolled it to have a look, it turned out to be a painting of a beautiful person. The subject had been given a perfect appearance, she looked like the moon goddess herself! Liu Mengmei was overjoyed and took it inside to hang on the wall of his study, where he gazed on it from early till late obsessively. Suddenly one day his eye was caught by the four-line poem on the painting, and after mulling its contents for quite some time, [he said:] "This is an informal self-portrait of some girl, so why does she say: It's bound to be by the side of the plum or of the willow?"

⁶² The Chinese texts actually writes Du Wenxing, which evidently a mistake for Du Xingwen.

⁶³ The translation follows the text as transcribed by Hu Shiyong, p. 535 (*caomao zata* 草茅雜沓). The text in He Dalun, p. 531 reads *caomao zazhi* 草茅雜紙 ("grasses and tares and miscellaneous papers").

This is very strange indeed, very curious!” He then took up his brush and also inscribed a quatrain on the painting that matched the other poem’s rhymewords:

A face like the goddess of the moon, from natural beauty:
If she’s not a heavenly sylph, she must be a fairy on earth!
If she would but deign to descend and sleep with me once,
I’ll kneel down by the bed and swear to love her forever.

When the poem was finished, he admiringly gazed at the painting for a long time. As chance would have it, evening was falling. Because Liu Mengmei was longing for this girl in the painting, he felt depressed. In truth: If you haven’t experienced this feeling, your feelings have never been moved. All he thought about was when he could meet with this girl. He was just like someone who tries to slake his thirst by looking at plums or who tries to still his hunger by painting a bun. He had no desire whatsoever to review the classics and histories, and while the candle was burning he was lying in his bed with all his clothes on, tossing and turning, unable to fall asleep. When he heard the watchtower far away beat out the third watch of the night, it seemed as if a cold breeze went through his room and he suddenly noticed a fragrant scent. When he threw on his clothes and got up, he heard someone knocking on his door. When he asked who it might be he got no reply, but shortly later the knocking started again, and this was repeated for a number of times. When he opened the door and looked around by the light of his lamp, he saw a girl whose cloudlike locks had been lightly combed into cicada wings and whose eyebrows like willow leaves imitated a frown like spring hills. The girl quickly slipped into his study, and he hastily closed the door behind her. She then rearranged her clothes, stepped forward, and ever so softly greeted him. He was as much startled as pleased, so he greeted her and asked: “Who may you be, my lady, that you come to this place in the middle of the night?” This girl opened her tiny red mouth, showed her fine white teeth, and said: “I am a daughter of the neighbors to the west. I came here secretly out of love for your handsome beauty in order to share with you the pleasures of marriage. But would you be willing to accept me?” Liu Mengmei answered with a smile: “It is for me a joy beyond any hope if I am loved by you, so how would I dare reject you?” He and the girl thereupon undressed, extinguished the candle, and closed the

bed curtains behind them. They had sex like husband and wife and enjoyed the pleasures of fish and water.

Some time later, after their love-making, she said with a smile to Liu Mengmei: "There is something I would like to ask you. Please don't scold me for it." He answered her with a smile: ["Please say whatever you want to say!" She smilingly continued:] "Since I have entrusted my precious body to you, I hope you will never betray me. As long as I can share your pillow and mat every night, my greatest wish will be fulfilled." He answered her with a smile: "Since you feel this love for me, how would I ever dare forget you? But tell me, what is your name?" She replied: "I am a daughter of the neighbors to the west." But before she had finished, crowing cocks announced the fifth watch and dawn was about to break. The girl dressed and slipped out of the door, and when Liu Mengmei hastily got out of bed to see her off, she had already disappeared.

When she came again the following night, Liu Mengmei again repeatedly asked her for her name, but she again replied in the same fashion. This went on for more than ten nights. One night, when they were laying side by side, Liu Mengmei asked her: "If you don't tell me the truth, I will not continue this relation, but I will inform my parents and they will complain to your parents. You should tell me your name, so I can entreat my parents to send over a matchmaker with the proposal to make you my wife, so we can be a married couple for the rest of our lives. Wouldn't that be wonderful?" The girl smiled but remained silent, yet when Liu Mengmei kept pressuring her, she eventually gave in and told him under tears: "Don't be scared: I am Du Liniang, the daughter of the former prefect, Prefect Du. When I was eighteen years old I passed away because my craving for sex turned into regret. When I was still alive, I always loved the plum tree in the back garden, and when I was about to die I implored my mother to have me buried under that tree. That is now one year ago, but my spirit has not dissolved and my corpse has not decomposed. Because you and I have an unfinished karmic bond of marriage from a previous existence, you found my little portrait. That's why I disregarded all notions of propriety to share with you the pleasure of pillow and mat, and you did not reject my love. If you do not despise my phantasmal body, please inform your parents of my sincere emotions. Dig up my coffin tomorrow under the plum tree in the

back garden, and when you open it, I will return to life, and you and I will be husband and wife for the rest of our lives.” When Liu Mengmei heard this, his hair stood on end. Startled out of his wits he asked: “If this is indeed the truth, we will dig up your coffin tomorrow!” As he said that, it was already the fifth watch. The girl got dressed and got out of bed, and she repeatedly implored him: “Make haste in digging me up, and don’t allow for any delay! Because otherwise I will never be able to come again now my secret has been revealed. Please be careful, so you won’t have any regrets. If I cannot come back to life, I am bound to carry a grief against you in the world of the dead!” Having said this, she turned into a wisp of air and was nowhere to be seen anymore.

The following morning after breakfast Liu Mengmei went to the central hall and informed his mother. She could not believe that such a story was possible, and so she called in Prefect Liu. When he had been told the story, he said: “If we want to know for sure, we only will have to question the old runners and servants in this office, and then we will have all the details.” Prefect Liu immediately summoned the old runners. When he questioned them, it turned out that the daughter of Prefect Du, Du Liniang, indeed had been buried under the plum tree in the back garden now one year ago. Prefect Liu was startled by this information, and hastily called for laborers to accompany him to the back garden in order to dig up the coffin under the plum tree. They did indeed find the coffin, and when they opened the covering lid of the coffin, everyone saw that the girl looked exactly as if she were alive. Prefect Liu immediately ordered water to be heated for a bath and had the corpse moved to an inside room. There he ordered maids and servant girls to undress the corpse and wash and clean it with fragrant water. In a short while her body started to show faint signs of life, she slightly opened her phoenix-eyes, and slowly, very slowly she came back to life. Mrs. Liu gave orders to fetch new clothes for her to wear. When her three souls had reunited and her seven spirits had come back to life, the girl raised herself and stood up, and Prefect Liu, Mrs. Liu, and Liu Mengmei beheld a tender body like that of a paeonia leaning against its fence, with jet-black locks cascading down just like peach blossoms after a rainy night. She looked like a Xi Shi 西施 who has just finished her bath, and was the spitting image of a Concubine Yang 楊妃 tipsy with wine. When Liu Mengmei had seen her, he was overcome joy, and ordered the maids to support her to sit down. After quite some time she took

the soul-stabilizing potion and the soul-fixing powder, and a short while later she regained the power of speech. She raised herself and said to Liu Mengmei: "Please ask your parents to come in so I can pay my respects to them." Prefect Liu and his wife both insisted that she should take care and not overexert herself, and they ordered servant girls to help her to a bedroom to take a nap. Mrs. Liu gave orders to make preparations for a celebratory banquet in the back hall, and when that night the banquet had been laid out, she told the servant girls to go and fetch the young lady to join them for dinner. Rejoicing in her return to life, Du Liniang that day once again made her toilette, and then made her formal bows before the hall. Mr. Liu said to her: "Who could have expected that our son and you would have such a karmic marriage bond from a former existence! It is really a god-sent miracle that today you could come back to life. Tomorrow I will dispatch a messenger to Taiyuan in Shanxi to the house of Prefect Du in order to tell them the good news." And his wife said to him: "Now she has returned to life through this miracle, we have to choose a date for the wedding to our son." Her husband agreed. The next day he dispatched a messenger with the good news letter, but we will not talk about that here.

After a ten-day period had passed, they decided on the fifteenth day of the tenth month as the lucky day. In truth:

The opened screen displayed a golden peacock couple,
The silken cushions were embroidered with lotus flowers.

Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei exchanged cups and shared the couch: everything was taken care of. When later that evening the party dispersed, she and he retired behind the gauze bed-curtains, and sharing pillow and blanket they fully enjoyed the pleasures of the human realm.

Here our tale diverges. After Prefect Du had returned to Lin'an prefecture and settled down in a guesthouse, he was received in audience the next morning by emperor Guangzong. The emperor showed his pleasure in his face, and with his own brush appointed him as administration vice-commissioner for Jiangxi province. Accompanied by his wife and son he had taken up his post now two years ago. Suddenly one day a man arrived with a letter for his excellency Du, and when he was asked where he came from, he replied: "I have been dispatched by Prefect Liu of Nanxiong prefecture in Guangdong province." He fetched the letter from his

bosom and presented it. Upon opening and reading the letter, his excellency Du was informed that his daughter had come back to life and had become the wife of Liu Mengmei, and that this letter had been sent to announce the good news. Upon reading the letter his excellency Du was filled with joy, so he treated the messenger to a good meal: "Wait for me to write a letter to take back to our relatives, the Lius." His excellency Du took the letter inside to the back hall to show to his wife, and he told her that Prefect Liu had sent a letter to inform them that their daughter Liniang had come back to life and had become the wife of Prefect Liu's son. His wife was filled with joy when she heard this news, and said: "This happy news was predicted by the buds formed by the lamp's flower last night, and by the repeated call of the lucky magpie this morning!" His excellency said: "I will write a letter in reply, so we can meet some time in the near future in Lin'an." When he had finished his letter he handed it to the messenger, whom he also gave five taels of silver. The messenger kowtowed to show his gratitude and departed, but we will not talk about that here.

Our story goes that when Liu Mengmei learned that the announcement for the spring examinations had gone out, he took his leave of his parents and wife and with a servant boy and traveling money left for Lin'an to take part in the examinations. After quite a while he arrived in Lin'an where he found an inn. He entered the examination hall, and when the three sessions were done, he turned out to have passed in the second group and was appointed assistant judge in Lin'an prefecture. Liu Mengmei wrote a letter and sent his servant home to tell his parents and wife. When Du Liniang learned that her husband had passed the examinations and had been appointed as assistant judge in Lin'an prefecture, her heart was filled with joy. At the end of the year, when the term of Prefect Liu's appointment had come, he returned to Lin'an with his wife and Du Liniang, and they all stayed with the assistant judge. When assistant judge Liu was reunited with his parents and wife, his heart was filled with joy, and he arranged for a banquet to celebrate their arrival. They were awaiting the return to court of administration vice-commissioner Du. Within two months it so happened that administration vice-commissioner Du returned to Lin'an with his wife and son, where they stayed in official accommodations. But assistant judge Liu brought administration vice-commissioner Du and his wife to his residence, where they were

reunited with his wife Du Liniang. Their joy cannot be described in words, but we will not talk about that here.

Liu Mengmei eventually reached the rank of prefect of Lin'an prefecture, and Du Liniang gave birth to two sons, who both became illustrious officials. The husband achieved glory, the wife obtained a noble title, and they lived to a blessed old age.