

Plum and Portrait: Feng Meng-lung's Revision of *The Peony Pavilion*

Feng Meng-lung 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) is remembered today as an author and editor of vernacular fiction, but in his lifetime he was better known for his activities as an aficionado of the southern drama, particularly the *K'un ch'ü* 崑曲 form, which was popular in his native Su-chou. Sixteen plays either written or edited by him are extant, and portions of a manual of prosody are preserved in *Nan-tz'u hsin-p'u* 南詞新譜, an early-Ch'ing compilation that promoted the Su-chou style.¹

Feng's method of writing plays was similar to his short story method. He collected existing texts, edited them, and published the revised works either singly or in sets. Judging by the quality of the editions, his play-texts were intended for connoisseurs and were produced for reading enjoyment. But in addition, they were intended as models of *K'un ch'ü* written for performance.²

Feng took pride in his technical expertise at fitting text to song. Furthermore, in the published editions of his *K'un ch'ü* play-texts he consistently described his editorial contribution using the word *ting* 定 ("to set," "to fix").³ Although his descriptions do not explain what it was in the original libretto that needed "fixing," we can determine it by comparing his versions with the original ones. Such comparison is only rarely achievable in studies of his fiction,⁴ and it shows that Feng's editorial intervention in most cases was substantial. He

¹ For Feng's plays, see Lu Shu-lun 陸樹森, *Feng Meng-lung yen-chiu* 馮夢龍研究 (Shanghai: Fudan ta-hsueh ch'u-pan she, 1987), pp. 114-29, and Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1981), pp. 90-95. Fourteen of them have been published in *Mo-han chai ting-pen ch'uan-ch'i* 墨憨齋定本傳奇 (Peking: Hsin-hua shu-tien, 1960; hereafter *MHCCC*). Concerning the manual, see Ch'ien Nan-yang 錢南揚, "Feng Meng-lung Mo-han chai tz'u-p'u chi-i" 馮夢龍墨憨齋詞譜輯佚, *Chung-hua wen-shih lun-t'ung* 中華文史論叢 2 (1961), pp. 281-310.

² See the preface to his first play, *Shuang-hsiung chi* 雙雄記, where Feng announces that he has "gathered together several dozen [plays] and plan[s] to issue them one by one, to instruct the specialist." Both play and preface can be found in *MHCCC*, vol. 2; trans. Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, p. 91.

³ In increasing order of severity of adaptation: *ting-ting* 訂定, *keng-ting* 更定, *hsiang-ting* 詳定, and *ts'uan-ting* 釐定 (according to a personal observation made by Lu Shu-lun).

⁴ His revisions of vernacular stories largely supplanted the earlier versions. He collected these in three volumes: *Yü-shih ming-yen* 喻世明言, *Ching-shih t'ung-yen* 警世通言, and *Hsing-shih heng-yen* 醒世恆言. Two vernacular novels that he revised, *P'ing-yao chuan* 平妖傳 and *Hsin Lieh-kuo chih* 新列國志, also supplanted earlier versions, which survive only in rare editions. See Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, pp. 98-119.

rewrote lyrics, sometimes whole arias, and made plot changes, even combining different dramatic treatments of a story.⁵

An example is his revision sometime after 1623 of *Mu-tan t'ing* 牡丹亭 (*The Peony Pavilion*) by T'ang Hsien-tsu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616), which he titled *Feng-liu meng* 風流夢 (*A Dream of Love*).⁶ T'ang's play began circulating in 1598. It was immediately acclaimed for the beauty of its language but criticized for musical failings (some critics pronounced it unsingable). By the time Feng revised *Mu-tan t'ing*, its text had already been adapted for performance at least twice — in one case by his mentor Shen Ching 沈景 (1553–1610), which suggests that the play touched a nerve and engaged his critics beyond questions of performability *per se*.⁷

Feng's is the most extensive of the extant Ming revisions of *Mu-tan t'ing*.⁸ He not only cut T'ang's libretto drastically (*Feng-liu meng* contains 274 arias in contrast to 403 in *Mu-tan t'ing*), but also rewrote freely (only 74 of the 274 arias are retained as T'ang Hsien-tsu wrote them).⁹ Thus it is remarkable to read Feng's preface to *Feng-liu meng*, where he describes his editorial role in modest terms. Comparing *Mu-tan t'ing* to a woman whose beauty is hidden under a layer of dirt, Feng announces his intention "to give her a bath in order to make her beauty complete."¹⁰ The conceit suggests a desire on his part to preserve the integrity and beauty of the original work, much as a restorer of paintings removes the grime of centuries in an effort to preserve a masterpiece.

Herein lies my interest in *Feng-liu meng*: it claims our attention partly because of its umbilical relationship to one of the masterpieces of Ming drama. By itself, *Feng-liu meng* is a pedestrian work. But read alongside *Mu-tan t'ing*, it can

⁵ Ibid., pp. 90–95, which distinguishes between plays that Feng adapted and those he "merely edited." According to Lu Shu-lun's notes for Feng's plays, original versions for ten of the plays Feng edited are extant.

⁶ I have used the facsimile of a Ming woodblock edn. of *Feng-liu meng* included in *MHCCC*, vol. 3, also found in Ku-pen hsi-ch'ü ts'ung-k'an wei-yüan hui 古本戲曲叢刊委員會, eds., *Ku-pen hsi-ch'ü ts'ung-k'an ch'u-chu* 古本戲曲叢刊初集 (Shanghai: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1954). For *Mu-tan t'ing*, I have used the edition in Ch'ien Nan-yang, comp., *T'ang Hsien-tsu hsi-ch'ü chü* 湯顯祖戲曲集 (1962; rpt. Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1978; hereafter *MTT*), vol. 1; see also Hsü Shuo-fang 徐朔方 and Yang Hsiao-mei 楊笑梅, annots., *Mu-tan t'ing* (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh, 1982).

⁷ Shen's adaptation, entitled *T'ung-meng chi* 同夢記 (*The Shared Dream*), is no longer extant. Another made by Tsang Mao-hsun 臧懋循 (1550–1620) can be found in his *Lin-ch'üan ssu-meng* 臨川四夢 (Wan-li era woodblock edn.; held in the National Central Library).

⁸ For Ming and Ch'ing revisions see Chou Yü-te 周育德, "T'ang Hsien-tsu chü-tso te Ming Ch'ing kai-pen" 湯顯祖劇作的明清改本, *Wen-hsien* 文獻 15 (1983), pp. 21–41; rpt. in his *T'ang Hsien-tsu lun-kao* 湯顯祖論稿 (Peking: Wen-hua i-shu ch'u-pan she, 1991), pp. 239–52.

⁹ Chou, "Ming Ch'ing kai-pen," pp. 27 and 31. Despite this drastic editing, Feng used the term *keng-t'ing* (see n. 3 above) on the first page of *Feng-liu meng* to describe his contribution, and credited T'ang as the original author 創稿.

¹⁰ *MHCCC*, vol. 3, p. 3b. This conceit was often used by Ming critics to refer to sloppily written plays.

be used as a body of commentary, suggesting how the play was received by T'ang's contemporaries and what it was about it that unsettled some of its readers.

In his studies of Renaissance art, Leo Steinberg has argued the usefulness for the critic of copies, even bad copies:

Where they depart from their models — provided these departures are patently willful and not due to incompetence — they constitute a body of criticism more telling than anything dreamt of in contemporaneous writing. The man who copies a painting looks harder, observes by the inch, and where he refuses to follow his model, follows an alternative, usually critical impulse. Few writers on art have the patience or the vocabulary to match the involvement of a recalcitrant copyist. His alterations reveal how a closely engaged contemporary regarded his model, what he admired or censured, or chose to omit.¹¹

Steinberg goes on to point out that "in a strong design the detail is so integrated that it is hard to unthink," and that the "deviant renderings" of a copy can help us to see the decisions that went into the original design. When we see what a copyist misses (or leaves out), it helps us to notice what we otherwise might not.¹²

This kind of critical technique is relevant to a reading of *Mu-tan t'ing* in the light of *Feng-liu meng*. T'ang Hsien-tsu's language is visual, marked by an intricate and conceptually bold use of imagery. Through *Feng-liu meng* we see clearly that Feng was at pains to simplify and contain the effects of this language. Feng's efforts may not have been "patently willful" in Steinberg's sense — more likely his own ideas took hold in the process of rewriting — but he wrote with a different paradigm of romantic drama in mind. It is this aspect of Feng's response to *Mu-tan t'ing* that I wish to examine. I believe that it was more a matter of aesthetic expression than reputedly careless prosody that divided T'ang from his critics.

All four of T'ang's plays explore the place of *ch'ing* 情 (emotion, passion) in human life, although not all of them present it in a positive light. In *Mu-tan t'ing*, T'ang treats the experience of youthful love in all of its intensity, and without the pessimism found in his two later plays.¹³ I find that in *Mu-tan t'ing* romantic passion (especially sensual attraction) is treated at times with humor and irrev-

¹¹ Leo Steinberg, "The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Painting," W. T. J. Mitchell, ed., *The Language of Images* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1980), p. 85.

¹² Ibid. pp. 85 and 86.

¹³ *Nan-k'o chü* 南柯記 (*The Nan-k'o Dream*), completed in 1600, and *Han-tan chi* 邯鄲記 (*The Han-tan Dream*), completed in 1601.

erence, but it is essentially a force for good, associated with creativity and the life force. It is what invests its hero, Liu Meng-mei 柳夢梅, with whatever importance he has (his public exploits make him appear rather ridiculous), and it is crucial to the experience of the heroine, Tu Li-niang 杜麗娘.¹⁴

The play divides into three segments. The first culminates in Li-niang's death and burial in scene 20. It describes events that take place largely in a natural setting (a garden), apart from the outside world. The focus of the second segment of *Mu-tan t'ing* (scenes 21-35) remains fixed on this private world (essentially Li-niang's world, although her lover is drawn into it). Here Liu Meng-mei comes to the place where Li-niang is buried, she is resurrected, and they elope together. Then, beginning with scene 36, the action shifts to the public sphere, as the lovers flee Nan-an 南安 (Li-niang's home), and rebels invade from the north. Scenes 1-35 are unified structurally and thematically, whereas scenes 36-55 mark a shift of direction and emphasis.

I examine in some detail two motifs from Li-niang's garden world. Both involve the use of figures that metaphorically represent one (or in some cases both) of the play's central characters. The first of these is a plum tree, which makes its appearance in scene 12, "Pursuing the Dream."¹⁵ From the moment it suddenly appears before Li-niang it is clear that this is no ordinary tree. The amount of attention devoted to it, at the end of one of the play's longest scenes, alerts us to this fact. In some sense it represents Li-niang's mysterious dream lover, but its attributes furnish few reliable clues.

Chinese poetry often celebrated the plum blossom. Blooming early in the year, in the cold of winter, plum trees were admired for their fortitude and endurance, and their blossoms for their fragile beauty. The latter qualities were the plum's feminized attributes, while the tree's ruggedness and vitality were masculine.¹⁶ The sensual elegance of plum blossoms was depicted in art, and in Sung times its white flowers and subtle fragrance were especially admired. As

¹⁴ C. T. Hsia discusses four of Tang's plays in "Time and the Human Condition in the Plays of T'ang Hsien-tsu," Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1970), pp. 249-90. Li Wai-ye discusses Tang's complex treatment of *ch'ing* in *Mu-tan t'ing*, a "double perspective" of intense attachment (in the dreamworld) and detachment (effected through comedy); *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1993), pp. 50-64, esp. 54, 58, and 63.

¹⁵ Translations of *Mu-tan t'ing* are based on Cyril Birch, trans., *The Peony Pavilion* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1980; hereafter *MTT/Birch*). I have modified in some places to reflect the syntax of the original verse, and in other places to bring out aspects of T'ang's language that serve my argument. Translations from *Feng-liu meng* (hereafter *FLM*) are my own. I am grateful to Chou Wan-yao of the University of British Columbia for commenting on my translations.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the flowering plum in Chinese poetry and art, see Maggie Bickford, ed., *Bones of Jade, Soul of Ice: The Flowering Plum in Chinese Art* (New Haven: Yale U. Art Gallery, 1985), esp. pp. 18-26 for masculine and feminine attributes. See also Hans H. Frankel, "The Plum Tree in Chinese Poetry," *Asiatische Studien* 6 (1952), pp. 88-115.

early as the Southern Dynasties these qualities came to be identified with Confucian virtues of chaste isolation and plain elegance in women and moral rectitude in men.¹⁷ The plum's austere beauty was contrasted with the showy (and some felt vulgar) splendor of the peony.¹⁸ In *Mu-tan t'ing* the plum rather than the peony of the title is a vehicle for the depiction of love's longing and fulfillment. When we examine T'ang's use of it, we discover that he enhanced its sensual qualities while remaining faithful to its primary significance, as a symbol of the vigorous and restorative powers of nature.

The second motif is the self-portrait that Li-niang paints in scene 14, "The Portrait." It is an emblem of the heroine, and is readily seen as a conventional element of the southern drama.¹⁹ Thus its use by T'ang as a symbolic device is less remarkable than his introduction of the plum tree two scenes earlier. However, the symbolic use is original, and warrants an examination. Ultimately, Feng altered the two motifs. My conclusion considers how Feng's simplification distorted T'ang's ideas and discusses the differences between the two playwrights in the context of the late-Ming reception of *Mu-tan t'ing*.

THE PLUM TREE

In scene 10 of *Mu-tan t'ing*, "The Interrupted Dream," Tu Li-niang takes a springtime stroll with her maid, Ch'un-hsiang 春香, in the large, yet mysteriously empty, garden outside her bedchamber. Her ennui is disturbed by the burgeoning, half-wild beauty of the place, and after returning to her room she falls asleep. She dreams of a young man with a willow branch in his hand. He declares his love in an ardent song before carrying her to a mound of weathered T'ai-hu rocks. Their lovemaking, which takes place offstage, is witnessed by a Flower God, who describes it in the scene's climactic aria. The lovers reenter, and the young man takes his leave. To conclude the scene, Li-niang is soon awakened by her mother, who chides her for napping in midday.

Two scenes later Li-niang returns to the garden, drawn by the memory of her dream. She comes to a place very like the one in her dream: a T'ai-hu rockery with an enclosed bed of peonies. She struggles with the power of her emotions, and the apparent unreality of the experience that has stirred them. Who, after all, was her lover, and what is the nature of their bond? Is her experience of him to remain a dream? When, if ever, will he come to her? In this scene's climactic sequence Li-niang struggles to reconcile the expectations

¹⁷ Frankel, "Plum Tree," pp. 102 and 113; Bickford, *Flowering Plum*, pp. 19-22, 24-25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 32-33, and 40.

¹⁹ Stephen H. West, "Drama," in William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1986), p. 20.

aroused by her dream with the reality of her sheltered life. Highly susceptible to her dream's remembered pleasures, she soon surrenders to them, this time through the power of her imagination.

The rockery and enclosure of peonies, which figure prominently in both scenes, are a natural setting that reappears at key moments of the play. They are also a symbolic landscape, a *topos* associated with Li-niang's initiation into love, her death, and her revival at Liu Meng-mei's hands. In scene 10 the rockery is part of Li-niang's dream — the place to which her mysterious lover carries her, while in scene 12 it is an actual place, a deserted corner of the garden to which she is drawn, and where she recalls her experience of love.

It is at this moment, as her reverie ends, that Li-niang suddenly notices a large tree, which appears as if out of nowhere. The tree is remarkable both for the suddenness of its appearance and for Li-niang's description of it:

Li-niang: Why! In a place where no one comes, suddenly I find a great plum tree, with lovely thick clusters of fruit (且)呀, 無人之處, 忽然大梅樹一株, 梅子磊磊可愛。

偏則他暗香清遠	How can its hidden fragrance spread so clear,
傘兒般蓋的周全	Its shade like a parasol reach full round?
他趁這	Thriving,
他趁這春三月紅綻	Thriving in this third month of spring
雨肥天	"when rich rains split the red buds open,"
葉兒青	Its leaves shine green,
偏迸著苦仁兒裡	Yet bursting within its round fruit
撒圓	is a bitter heart. ²⁰
愛煞這晝陰	Cherishing this daytime shade,
便再得到羅浮夢邊	Let me find again a dream of Lo-fu. ²¹

Isolated in a desolate corner of the garden, the tree elicits a complicated response from Li-niang. Its sudden appearance as her dream fades suggests that it embodies the dream lover.²² Its verdant foliage and ripening fruit, which con-

²⁰ There is a pun on 仁 (*jen*, seed), whose homophone (*jen*, 人) refers to Li-niang. Hsü, *Mu-tan t'ing* (scene 12, n. 40), paraphrases: "I lament that the plums form their round fruit in the face of my bitterness." My translation, adapted from Birch's, suggests correspondence between the plum's seed and Li-niang. Lu Shu-lun proposed (personal communication) that bitter seed, or bitter heart 苦仁, intimates Li-niang's death. Above, "red buds" do not refer to plum blossoms.

²¹ *MTT* 12, pp. 280-81; *MTT/Birch*, p. 60. The allusion is to the story of a man who encountered a beauty on Mount Lo-fu and drank wine with her. He fell asleep, and awoke to find himself beneath a flowering plum tree. See Frankel, "Plum Tree," pp. 107-10.

²² This is its sense in the Ming vernacular source. "Tu Li-niang mu-se huan-hun." This story is discussed in Hsia, "Plays of T'ang Hsien-tsu," p. 286, n. 52. One of two extant versions of it is in Hsü Fu-ming 徐扶明, comp., *Mu-tan t'ing yen-chiu tzu-liao k'ao-shih* 牡丹亭研究資料考釋 (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1987; hereafter *MTTTL*), pp. 12-19.

trast sharply in Li-niang's mind with the cold loneliness of the garden setting, suggest vital and procreative forces of nature with which her lover has become identified, and the tree's deep shade associates it with the world of her dream. But the tree's imagery has more than one frame of reference. It evokes the male lover (real or imagined) and also reveals Li-niang's state of mind about herself. In particular, the female associations of the plum are conveyed in the image of the bitter seed bursting from within the fruit. The fruit is Li-niang's sexual ripeness, and its "bitter heart" (*k'u-jen* 苦仁) is her sadness at the passing of time and of her youth.²³

Subsequent references to the plum, and recurrences of language first used in this scene, contribute to the duality. In the song immediately following the one just quoted, Li-niang commits herself to keep company with the plum tree, which has become identified in her mind with her absent lover:

偶然間心似繡	My heart is drawn by chance,
梅樹邊	To this plum tree's side.
這般花花草草由人戀	Thus could we love which flower or herb we
	please,
生生死死隨人願	Live and die according to our wishes,
便酸酸楚楚無人怨	Then none would moan for bitter pain.
待打并香魂一片	I will marshal my fragrant spirit,
陰雨梅天	Through the dark rains of summer,
守的個梅根相見	And keep company with this plum's roots. ²⁴

Li-niang's desire to remain beside the tree anticipates her later wish to be buried beneath it. In death she will "keep company with" the tree as she kept company with her lover, briefly, in her dream. The echoing of language from scene 10 establishes the link with him (in Li-niang's mind, at least). The effect is to personify the tree; it is as if in death Li-niang will leave her parents and go to her husband.²⁵ The tree's arching branches are several times associated with shelter and protection, suggestive of the roles of lover and husband.²⁶

²³ In *Shih-ching* 詩經 20 ("Plop Fall the Plums"), ripening plums are an image of a girl's approaching maturity, and as they fall they express the passing of time and the transience of beauty. See Hans Frankel's note to his translation of this poem in Bickford, *Flowering Plum*, p. 153. This poem heads a section of her book devoted to poems about the flowering plum, together with Frankel's translations, pp. 151-91.

²⁴ *MTT* 12, p. 281; *MTT/Birch*, p. 61.

²⁵ Li-niang sings with her dream lover at their first meeting in scene 10: "Somewhere at some past time you and I met 相見/Now we behold each other in solemn awe." *MTT*, pp. 270 and 281; *MTT/Birch*, pp. 48 and 61.

²⁶ In scene 12 Ch'un-hsiang discovers Li-niang "standing beneath the trailing branches of the flowering plum 小立在垂垂花樹邊"; in scene 22, Liu Meng-mei is directed to seek shelter at Li-niang's Plum Blossom Shrine, "where snow-laden branches smile a welcome 看一樹雪垂垂如笑";

In *Mu-tan t'ing* references to the plum's blossoms are rare. When Li-niang first glimpses the tree, it is at the height of spring, the season of "rich rains," when red (not plum) buds split and bloom. The plum participates in the colorful fecundity of the garden, hence its green foliage and fruit are its outstanding attributes. When its blossoms are mentioned they are red and are identified with the dead Li-niang. The contexts are suggestive ones that deserve a close look.

In scene 20, "Keening," Li-niang, nearing death, asks her parents to bury her beneath the plum tree in the garden, and when they ask her why, she sings:

做不的病嬋娟桂窟裡	I can become no ailing Ch'ang O,
長生	immortal in the moon's cassia grottoes,
則分的粉骷髏向梅花	But am fated to be a pretty skeleton in
古洞	plum blossom's ancient cave. ²⁷

"*Mei-hua ku-tung*" 梅花古洞 is the first of many references to tomb-like cavities, which multiply in various guises through mid-play.²⁸ Cavities also suggest wombs, and in this way a bizarre image of Li-niang dead in her tomb hints at her rebirth. The second line contains two unusual juxtapositions: of beauty with death and of flowers with caves. Both images conflate categories usually kept distinct, and one effect is to dissolve (or weaken) the sense of indissoluble boundaries.²⁹

In scene 27, "Spirit Roaming," the plum is used in a deliberately figurative manner, and here its blossoms are again identified with the dead Li-niang. The season is spring; three years have passed since Li-niang's death, and the time has come for rituals to insure that her spirit will be reborn in the Jade Realm. For this occasion Sister Stone 石道姑, the priestess entrusted with the care of her grave, has put a flowering branch from the plum tree in a vase and placed it on the altar of Li-niang's Plum Blossom Shrine.³⁰ In the eyes of the celebrants, the flowering branch represents Li-niang herself, who was fated to die a premature death:

Celebrants: Tell us teacher, what is represented by the consecrated vase,

in scene 27 prayers are offered in the hope that Li-niang might return to life and dwell beneath the canopy of the plum's flowering branches 梅花帳. *MTT*, pp. 277, 326, and 350; *MTT/Birch*, pp. 57, 119, and 150.

²⁷ *MTT* 20, p. 313; *MTT/Birch*, pp. 101-2.

²⁸ I document these in "Feng Meng-lung's *Romantic Dream*: Strategies of Containment in His Revision of *The Peony Pavilion*" (unpub. Ph.D. diss., Columbia U., 1990), p. 198, n. 17.

²⁹ In the case of flowers and subterranean spaces, the idea is taken up on a grand scale in scene 23 ("Infernal Judgement"), when Judge Hu makes erotic puns on a long list of flower names recited by the Flower God. For caves as wombs, see Rolf Stein, *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1990), pp. 71, 111, 291 (n. 118), and 305 (n. 196).

³⁰ *Mei-hua an-kuan* 梅花庵觀, also referred to in scenes 23 and 33 as "Red Plum Shrine" ("Hungmei kuan" 紅梅觀).

and what by the sprig of plum? (眾) 老師兄, 你說淨瓶像甚麼, 殘梅像甚麼?

Sister Stone (淨):

這瓶兒空像	Within the hollow of this vase
世界包藏	A world is concealed,
身似殘梅樣	While her body is like this faded spray of plum.
有水無根	Watered but rootless,
尚作餘香想	It still brings a fragrance to our senses. ³¹

The celebrants identify the plum branch with the dead girl in her tomb, an identification that Li-niang herself makes when her wandering ghost visits the shrine after the ritual has been completed and the celebrants have withdrawn. Drawn by the sweetness of the incense, she reads the prayers and notices the fading blossoms in the vase:

Li-niang: Ha, a faded plum branch from atop my tomb. Plum blossoms, like Tu Li-niang you faded in mid-bloom, how sad 咳, 便是俺塚上殘梅哩。梅花呵, 似俺杜麗娘半開而謝, 好傷情也!

則爲這斷鼓零鐘金	These broken drumbeats, random striking
字經	of bells, intoning of gold-lettered scriptures
叩動俺黃梁境	Have broken in upon my yellow millet dream.
俺向這地圻裡梅根	Thrusting its way past plum's roots in fissured
迸幾程	earth
透出些兒影	My shade emerges forth.

(She weeps): Unless I leave some trace of my presence, how can I show my appreciation for the devotion of these pious sisters? Then let me scatter petals of the plum here on the altar. (She does so.)³² (泣介) 姑姑們這般志誠, 若不留些蹤跡, 怎顯的俺鑒知他? 就將梅花散在經臺之上。(散花介)

Li-niang's song confirms the association of the plum with herself in some respects: its fading red blooms (mentioned by Sister Stone earlier in this aria), its rootlessness, cut off from the sources of life. In the immediate context the rootless stem symbolizes Li-niang's morbid state, but emerging from the watery cavity of the vase, scattered red blossoms take on other connotations.

Some commentators find a resonance between Li-niang's scattering of the plum blossoms on her shrine and the Flower God's scattering of red blossoms on the lovers during the dream sequence in scene 10.³³ In scene 27, Li-niang's

³¹ *MTT* 27, p. 350; *MTT/Birch*, p. 150. ³² *MTT* 27, p. 352; *MTT/Birch*, pp. 152-53.

³³ See selected commentary reprinted in *MTTTL*, p. 126. The comments are from a revision of

scattering of the blossoms evokes grief over her lost beauty and her wasted youth.³⁴ But if there is a resonance with the Flower God's gesture, as I feel there is, might not a different association of the image — linking the red blossoms to Li-niang's sexuality — also be possible? Ostensibly, the God scatters the flowers to wake Li-niang from her dream, but the rain of red petals 紅雨 that spatters 蘸 the lovers at the moment of consummation has erotic overtones, despite the fact that the consummation is only imagined, "fulfilled in the thought" 想內成 and not yet in reality.³⁵ In scene 12 Li-niang recalls the falling petals in her dream as "red shadows, petals torn from heart of flower" 一片撒花心的紅影 飛帛將來半天. Here, too, the image has sexual overtones.³⁶

If such extended readings of T'ang's imagery are permitted, then the faded blossoms scattered on Li-niang's shrine are more than a pathetic image of wasted maidenhood; they have some power as images of sexuality. So too does Li-niang's description of her ghost bursting from its root-encased tomb.

These aspects of T'ang's imagery, which suggest the procreative forces of nature, are further adumbrated in scene 28, "Union with a Ghost." Liu Meng-mei is gazing at Li-niang's portrait, which he has found in its red sandalwood box among the rocks beside her tomb. Wondering who could have produced such a painting, and the poem written on it, he expresses his wonderment through fanciful allusion:

他春心迸出湖山罅	Her spring longings burst from crevice in rock mound,
飛上煙綃萼綠華	A Green Calyx soaring aloft to light on this painted silk. ³⁷

Tsang Mao-hsün and from the "Three Wives" edn. of the play first published in 1694 (*Wu Wu-shan san-fu ho-p'ing Mu-tan-t'ing Huan-hun chi* 吳吳山三婦合評牡丹亭還魂記).

³⁴ These were well-established associations. Frankel, "Plum Tree," pp. 95-96. As scene 12 opens, Li-niang is saddened by the spectacle of fallen petals. Commentary cited in *MTTTL*, p. 126, supports this reading.

³⁵ *MTT* 10, p. 271; *MTT/Birch*, p. 49.

³⁶ *MTT* 12, p. 280; *MTT/Birch*, p. 60. In *The Western Chamber* (both the chantefable and the play), red blossoms in profusion mark the season of love; Wang Shih-fu 王實甫, *Hsi-hsiang chi* 西廂記 (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1978), p. 164, and idem, *The Moon and the Zither: The Story of the Western Wing*, trans. Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1991), p. 368. This line perhaps refers to the shedding of Li-niang's hymenal blood ("flower's heart" was a euphemism for the vagina), but such allusions are usually more delicate, and not spoken by the lady. See Wang, *Hsi-hsiang chi*, p. 138, and trans. of Idema and West, *Moon and Zither*, p. 334: "Its spring silk [Ying-ying's handkerchief] was at first sparkling white/But now I see a red fragrance has sprinkled its tender color."

³⁷ *MTT* 28, p. 357; *MTT/Birch*, p. 157. In a 4th-c. legend, Green Calyx achieves the liberation of soul from body after 900 years of discipline. There is a species of plum known as the "Green Calyx mei" (*li-o mei* 綠萼梅); Bickford, *Flowering Plum*, p. 247.

Repetition of the word *peng* 迸 (to burst, or gush forth), a strong word occurring in several important passages, provides a link.³⁸ Liu's lines echo Li-niang's of the scene before ("My shade emerges forth"); both passages imply a regeneration in which Liu Meng-mei has an important role to play but of which he is still unaware. Li-niang is aware, and she intimates her knowledge on the occasion of her first encounter with Liu, after having emerged from her tomb to wander as a ghost. Without revealing who (or what) she is, she offers herself to him and he joyfully accepts. In her grateful response Li-niang cryptically refers to her return from death, with recourse again to the imagery of the plant world:

Li-niang: Then my hopes in you are fulfilled 這等真個盼著你了.

幽谷寒涯	In cold secluded vale
你爲俺催花連夜發	You urge a flower to bloom through the night. ³⁹

The resonance of these verses with other ones is conceptual rather than verbal. The "cold secluded vale" may be other cavities that remind us of Li-niang in her tomb: the watery hollow of the consecrated vase, the cavern beneath the tree, the crevice in the rock mound where her portrait lies hidden. The night-blooming flower requires no explanation, but Liu's part in urging it to bloom does.

I believe that the sexual nature of this urging is implicit in T'ang Hsien-tsu's elaboration of the plum as an image from nature. Virtually every one of its attributes, as described in this play, is suggestive of human sexuality, both masculine and feminine. The fact that human sexuality is so depicted underscores the fact that it is part of nature and the natural process of death and rebirth. For the most part, however, the sexual act is only obliquely suggested in contexts devoted to the plum. A similar obliqueness obtains in other passages devoted to Li-niang in her tomb. Read alone, for example, a reference to a flower being urged to bloom in "cold secluded vale" would not seem a likely sexual metaphor, but when it is linked to other passages the case for a metaphorical meaning becomes stronger. In scene 32, "Spectral Vows," Li-niang finally tells Liu Meng-mei that he has been making love to a ghost, and when her lover appears hesitant, she uses vivid language to tell him what he must do to revive her:

Liu: So cold you must have been 好不冷!

³⁸ See the passage from scene 12, above, which refers to the bursting (swelling?) of the plum's seed within the fruit; also Swatek, "Strategies of Containment," pp. 211-14.

³⁹ *MTT* 28, p. 361; *MTT/Birch*, p. 163.

Li-niang:

凍的俺七魄三魂 Frozen body and soul,
僵做了三貞七烈 In coldest chastity.

Liu: What if I should cause your soul to start in terror 則怕驚了姐姐的魂,
怎好?

Li-niang:

花根木節 Beneath roots of flowering tree
有一個透人間路穴 Lies a cavern which leads to a mortal world.
俺冷香肌早偎的 And my cold fragrant flesh you have already
半熱 caressed half warm.

... Liu: Not knowing how deep you lie, I am afraid that we may not be
able to open a way to you soon 未知深淺, 怕一時開攢不徹.

Li-niang:

咨嗟 Ha,
你爲人爲徹 A man shows his worth by "going through
 to the end."
俺砌籠棺勾有三 Full three feet of earth are piled atop
尺疊 my coffin;
你點剛鏃和俺一 Take tempered spade and dig
謎掘 your way to me,
就裡 To where
陰風瀉瀉 Cold vapors disperse,
則隔的陽世些些 Some little way apart from sunlit world.*

Liu must penetrate to the cold moist world of Li-niang's tomb and revive her. As Li-niang implies, the process is already well under way ("And my cold flesh you have already caressed half warm"). When the actual revival takes place in scene 35, "Resurrection," it is something of an anti-climax and is described with liberal amounts of comedy. In the mid-play scenes leading up to that moment, however, the return of Li-niang's soul to her body is the central drama, and in depicting it T'ang celebrates the creative force of human passion with powerful images, unconventionally used. In order better to understand his treatment of this idea we need to examine his elaboration of another figure associated with his heroine -- the portrait. First we should examine Feng Menglung's response to T'ang's images of the plum.

THE PLUM IN *FENG-LIU MENG*

The introduction of the plum tree is differently anticipated and effected. In *Mu-tan t'ing* T'ang singles out the tree for attention only at the moment when Li-niang has returned to the garden in search of her dream. Its sudden and remarkable appearance underscores its special nature (especially its natural vitality), and this is further enhanced in the description of it in Li-niang's song. Feng chose to eliminate this song entirely from his revision of scene 12, and in his replacement he muted the play of natural imagery, focusing instead on Li-niang's response to the tree:

Li-niang: Look at that plum tree 看這梅樹呵!

老幹 From ancient trunk
繁枝自卷 Many branches curl
圓如蓋可喜周全 To form a cover pleasingly round.

Ai! Old plum, old plum 咳, 老梅, 老梅,

春色未舒 Before the beauty of spring has unfolded,
是他偏占先 You are the first to bloom.

Just as you steal the march on spring 似你這般偷春手段呵,

似我杜麗娘夢兒裡 So Tu Li-niang found good fortune
可人方便 in a dream.*

Feng opts for the conventional meaning of the plum (as hardy precursor of spring), and Li-niang's identification of herself with the tree (in the manner of simile) removes the metaphoric ambiguity that characterizes Tang's figure. As a result there is nothing about the tree that hints at Liu's identity or future role; the only attribute that survives the rewriting is the reference to the tree's canopy, stripped of its most interesting qualities.

In other small ways Feng is not sensitive to the signs of the marvelous in the tree's appearance, and he appears to be intent on reducing the aura of mystery attending its presence in the garden. When Li-niang first meets her dream lover in scene 7 of *Feng-liu meng* (which revises scene 10 of *Mu-tan t'ing*), careful mention is made of the plum tree as a feature of the garden topos:

Li-niang (in a low voice): Where do you mean to go? Liu: Over there, beneath the big plum tree, is a good place to talk (且低問介) 待那裡去? (生) 前面大梅樹之下, 好講話哩.

* *MTT* 32, pp. 380-81; *MTT/Birch*, p. 189.

* *FLM* 9, pp. 21b-22a.

轉過這芍藥闌西 Beyond the enclosed bed of peonies,
緊靠著湖山石邊 Up against the T'ai-hu rocks.⁴²

This addition prepares us for the tree's (re)appearance in scene 9 of *Feng-liu meng*, "Li-niang Pursues her Dream." Feng aims for consistency in the arrangement of details, and in doing so sacrifices an element of surprise and wonder surrounding the tree that T'ang preserved from his source.⁴³ In scene 12 of *Mu-tan t'ing* the tree's proximity to the rockery is noticed by Li-niang only after she has emerged from her reverie. When it suddenly looms before her (and us), its appearance is colored by the longings from her dream recollection. This gives the image a powerfully subjective cast. In Feng's scene, by contrast, the tree is always part of the rockery setting, and so when Li-niang returns there it is mentioned by her as one of the familiar elements of the place, even before she has her vision:

Li-niang (walking): Coming straightway, I am already inside the garden. I see the pavilion and the enclosed bed of peonies — just as I remember them! But where is that student? (She sighs.) (行介) 一逕行來，已到園內。只見牡丹亭，芍藥闌，光景儼然。那生安在? (歎介)

那一搭可是湖山 Over there, the T'ai-hu rocks,
石邊
這一搭可有老梅 Over here, the old plum's mossy green.
蒼蘚
見柳枝低亞 See where the willow's branches bend low;
疑是玉人出現 I think that the jade one is about to appear!⁴⁴

Here the plum tree is paired with the willow. Plum is paired with willow in *Mu-tan t'ing* as well, but not to the same degree as in *Feng-liu meng*. The pairing occurs in the vernacular story upon which T'ang drew, where willow 柳 and plum 梅 hint at Liu Meng-mei's identity before he comes to Li-niang's burial place. They are mentioned in the story in connection with her self-portrait, but the representation is verbal rather than visual — a poem that Li-niang inscribes on the completed painting:

⁴² *FLM* 7, p. 16a.

⁴³ Feng's garden is a less remarkable place than T'ang's. Compare Liu Meng-mei's first visit in *Mu-tan t'ing* (scene 24) with the comparable visit in *Feng-liu meng* (scene 19). In both scenes the garden is wild and deserted, but Feng omits several of T'ang's strange embellishments (e.g., an empty swing from which dangles a girl's sash).

⁴⁴ *FLM* 9, p. 20b.

⁴⁵ *MTTL*, p. 14; *MTT* 14, p. 290. This follows closely an unpublished translation of C. T. Hsia, which he kindly made available to me.

近睹分明似儼然
遠觀自在若飛仙
他年得傍蟾宮客

Viewed close up she is strikingly myself,
Observed from afar she is as carefree as a fairy.
Were she in some other year to join
the man in the Toad Palace,
Let it be by the side of either plum tree
or willow.⁴⁵

不在梅邊在柳邊

"Willow" and "plum" augur the identity of the dream lover, but this representation is different from another, which is unique to the plum: "a great plum tree with lovely thick clusters of fruit." T'ang seems to have felt this difference in the two forms of representation in the source-story, and he preserved it as two modes of representation in his play.

For example, in scene 14 of *Mu-tan t'ing*, "The Portrait," Li-niang depicts herself in her self-portrait as holding a branch of green plums in her hand 撚青梅閒斯調. Here T'ang chose to include a metaphoric representation of Liu Meng-mei in the portrait in addition to the emblematic one of the poem. "Plum and willow" in Li-niang's poem hint at Liu's social identity (his family name); "plum" alone (as tree and fruit) gives us his attributes as lover.⁴⁶ The two aspects are distinct.

Feng favors the former mode of representation over the latter. Although his commentary furnishes no evidence that he distinguished between them, his manner of revising suggests that he felt a difference.⁴⁷ As we have just seen, in scenes 7 and 9 of *Feng-liu meng* he suppressed imagery that in T'ang's text is unique to the plum, and he played up the association of "willow" with "plum" in his evocation of the garden setting. In the same vein, he suppressed the detail of the green plums in Li-niang's self-portrait when revising scene 14. Li-niang instead depicts herself standing against a backdrop of willow and plum. The visual representation matches the poetic one, simplifying T'ang's more complicated representation.⁴⁸

Vestiges of the plum as a motif remain in *Feng-liu meng*, but they survive as

⁴⁶ In scene 30 ("Disrupted Joy"), when Li-niang's ghost gives Liu green plums, he compares their sourness to his unfulfilled desire. In the same passage (and in scene 2) sourness also refers to Liu's frustrated scholarly ambition; *MTT*, p. 369 (lines 4 and 8); *MTT/Birch*, p. 172. Portions of this passage are translated below.

⁴⁷ In *MTT*, the plum is mentioned exclusively in 45 passages (19 in dialogue, 3 in poems, 23 in arias), and in 4 scenes it is especially prominent. In *FLM* there are 25 references (15 in dialogue, 2 in poetry and only 8 in arias), with prominent mention in only one scene. *MTT* contains 11 places that refer to willow and plum in close proximity — either the same line of verse or adjacent lines (3 in poetry, 8 in arias), while in *FLM* there are 19 (2 in dialogue and 17 in arias). This excludes references to "willow and plum" in Li-niang's poem, which are common to both plays.

⁴⁸ Feng removes all references to the plum's fruit, including a rare deletion of verses declaimed by Tu Li-niang in scene 18 ("Diagnosis"), in which she refers to her dream affair as "我弄梅心事" (*MTT*, p. 303). Feng normally leaves declaimed verses unchanged.

pale versions of T'ang's original ideas in heavily revised contexts. Feng's heroine, like T'ang's, singles out the plum tree as her resting place in her death scene (scene 15 in *Feng-liu meng*), but her wish is expressed differently from that in *Mu-tan t'ing*:

Li-niang: Should I die, it is my wish that you bury my body beneath that plum tree. Madame Tu: Why do you ask this? (旦)兒若不幸,但葬我梅樹之下,足矣。(老旦)這是怎的來?

Li-niang:

我香魂已托梅花洞 My fragrant soul is already entrusted
to plum blossom's cave.⁴⁹

Here Feng eliminates an allusion and compresses two lines of verse into one, substituting "fragrant soul" for "pretty skeleton" in the process. Coming from the lips of a dying girl, the language is more delicate, but it loses a great deal in concreteness and expressivity. T'ang's verses create a tension between the allusion of the first line (Ch'ang O in her cassia grotto) and the image of Li-niang's entombed corpse in the second. Li-niang will experience a reawakening more vital than the chaste immortality of the goddess. Feng's language is plain and one-dimensional. There is no play of ideas beneath the surface meaning of the words.

Feng also debases the plum as metaphor. In a rare instance, he introduces a new reference to the plum (without willow), one not found in the original text. In his revision of T'ang's scene 26, "The Portrait Examined," Liu Meng-mei arrives in Nan-an, destitute and ill, after Li-niang has died and her father has departed for a new post. While convalescing there, he discovers Li-niang's portrait in the garden and takes it back to his study. He observes the willow and plum painted on it (so depicted in *Feng-liu meng* only), reads the accompanying poem, and correctly interprets these as referring to himself. The discovery excites him when he realizes that the beauty in the portrait must be his predestined mate:

Liu (infatuated): Ah, young lady, come down! Beautiful lady, young lady, please (作癡介)呀,小娘子走下來了。美人,請,小娘子,請!

動凌波	Her wave-tripping feet move,
盈盈欲下	Slow and supple she is about to descend,
不見個影兒那	But her image stays immobile.

Young lady, I, Liu Meng-mei, am all alone in this place 小娘子,我柳夢梅
孤單在此呵。

似老梅孤幹
借你做繁柯

Like the old plum, single trunked,
Through you I will make many branches.⁵⁰

In this passage, Feng has modified the last two lines of Liu's aria in T'ang's version:

拾的個人兒先慶賀	Having found this lady, first rejoice:
敢柳和梅有些瓜葛	Might this willow and plum have some entanglement? ⁵¹

Both versions of this aria express Liu's wish for a marriage alliance (his desire for social "entanglements"), but by using "plum" here alone, as simile, Feng mingles forms that in *Mu-tan t'ing* are distinct. As an image associated with the garden world, the plum tree in *Mu-tan t'ing* embodies the vitality of nature, with which both heroine and hero become identified: Liu through the image of the tree's foliage and fruit, Li-niang through the imagery of fruit, seed, and blossoms. The drama of Li-niang's death and rebirth is portrayed mimetically by means of this natural imagery. Her physical and spiritual death and rebirth are the central action of T'ang's play. The drama of social death and rebirth — an important element of romantic plays in the southern drama with specific reference to the hero — is not absent from *Mu-tan t'ing*, but it is subsidiary to Li-niang's story, which dominates the first thirty-five scenes of the play.

In scene 26 of *Mu-tan t'ing*, Liu's pairing of plum and willow is logical, since he has just read the poem on the painting and borrows its language to express his thought. Feng's reference to the "old plum, single trunked," used in a manner so strikingly different from the form in *Mu-tan t'ing*, indicates his effort to direct more attention to the hero's plight as an unmarried orphan, and to the heroine's role in saving him through her love (which resurrects him from a kind of social death).⁵² The change is a small one, but through it Feng sought to put a different "spin" on the scene, which in his version culminates in the spectacle of Liu's making feverish appeals to the beauty in the portrait to descend and rescue him from loneliness. In *Mu-tan t'ing*, Li-niang's initiation into the experience of passion, death, and resurrection constitute the subject of the play's middle scenes, with Liu Meng-mei cast in the role of bearer of life, a role of which he only gradually becomes aware.⁵³

⁴⁹ *FLM* 19, p. 4a. ⁵¹ *MTT* 26, p. 348; *MTT/Birch*, pp. 146-47.

⁵² References to Liu Meng-mei as a "bare stick" (a bachelor) abound, especially in the second half of the play; see *FLM* 32, p. 45a; 34, p. 53b; 36, p. 56a (2 occurrences), 56b, and 58b.

⁵³ Wu Mei 吳梅 (1884-1939) remarked upon the fact that T'ang broke with convention by assigning the principal role to a female character in two of his four plays, Mao Hsiao-t'ung 毛效同, comp., *T'ang Hsien-tsu yen-chiu tzu-liao hui-pien* 湯顯祖研究資料彙編 (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1986), vol. 2, pp. 711-12.

⁴⁸ *FLM* 15, p. 36b.

Feng's appropriation of the figure of the plum in these scenes shows that he was determined to make *Mu-tan t'ing* conform more closely to his thematic expectations of romantic plays: never to allow the private play (the love story) to overwhelm the public play (the celebration of social values and harmonies).⁵⁴ His different handling of "willow" and "plum," and of natural imagery in general, reveals his effort to bring T'ang's language into conformity with familiar usage.

A final example of Feng's intentions can be found in his revision of scene 30, "Disrupted Joy." T'ang's scene begins in the middle of the night, midway in the journey of Li-niang's ghost from death to rebirth. She has taken Liu as her lover in scene 28, but has yet to reveal to him who and what she is (this will happen in scene 32). Li-niang has made a gift of wine, green plums, and "Lovely Lady" plantain flowers to Liu, and as the couple share a loving cup the imagery of flowers and fruits is deployed in elaborate word-play to depict intimacy:

Li-niang:

金荷 斟香糯
Into gold-leafed lotus cup,
Pour the sweet wine.

Liu:

你醞釀春心玉液波
Nectar you have brewed to stir hearts
to spring:
拚微醺 cheeks flush
東風外翠香紅釀
As flowerbuds the east wind brings
to reddest glow in leafy bower.

Li-niang:

也摘不下奇花果
Nor have I plucked a rare flower or fruit,
這一點蕉花和梅豆呵
For in these plantain flowers
and green plums,
君知麼
You must know,
愛的人全風韻
It pleases me that the seed's charms
are perfected,
花有根料
And the flower has roots.⁵⁵

Liu:

細哦
To pursue:

⁵⁴ Similar concerns surface in his revisions of other Ming plays, notably two by Chang Feng-i 張鳳翼 (1527-1613): *Hung-fu chi* 紅拂記 and *Kuan-yuan chi* 灌園記. Feng's revisions can be found in *MHCC*, vol. 1; Chang's plays are included in *Ku-pen hsi-ch'i'u ts'ung-k'an ch'u-chi*.

⁵⁵ There is again a pun on 人 (*jen*, man) and 仁 (*jen*, seed).

這子兒花朵
似美人憔悴
酸子情多
喜蕉心暗展

一夜梅犀點污
如何
酒潮微暈笑生渦
待嗽著臉恣情的嗚囁
些兒個
翠偃了情波
潤紅蕉點
香生梅唾

As for these fruits and flowers,
The one is wilted like a lovelorn maid,
The other is as sour as an amorous swain,
Yet happily heart of plantain flower
secretly unfolds,
And for one night plum's seed is sullied.⁵⁶
How comes this to be so?
Tide of wine flushes cheeks dimpled by smiles.
Soon lip drinks lip, wildly kissing.
And then,
Lids droop on loving eyes
Plantain petals stain deeper red,
Plum's fragrance fill the mouth.⁵⁷

A commentator remarks of this passage (and one in scene 28) that "the language of love is exceptionally subtle and obscure. From antiquity to the present, it is unique."⁵⁸ The language takes the form of an extended conceit, borrowing imagery associated with the plum and the plantain. The "metaphoric mutability" of the plum in terms of gender is evident.⁵⁹ As paired gifts presented to Li-niang's lover, the green plums seem to represent Liu, and the plantain flowers Li-niang, but in the final lines sung by Liu, both plum (seed and fragrance) and plantain flower refer to Li-niang. Two more songs follow, which sustain the intimate mood before it is shattered by the rude intrusion of Sister Stone.

Feng elects to cut the entire wine drinking sequence from this scene, an indication of his determination to blunt T'ang's language and achieve a different thematic emphasis in *Feng-liu meng*. The drinking of wine in T'ang's scene is a pivotal metaphor, which brings a number of disparate thematic contexts into relation with one another. With respect to the natural world, it imitates the pollinating of the flower (the gesture of pouring "sweet wine" into a lotus-shaped cup is metaphorically suggestive in *this* context, as is the moistening of the plum's

⁵⁶ T'ang is appropriating language spoken by Chang Kung to Ying-ying in *Master Tung's Western Chamber Romance*, in which *mei-tsi* (梅犀, plum's seed) refers to Ying-ying's maidenhead; Ling Chung-yen 凌景堪, comp., *Tung Chieh-yuan Hsi-hsiang chi* 董解元西廂記 (1962; rpt. Peking: Jen-min wen-hsueh, 1978), p. 113, and Li-li Ch'en, trans., *Master Tung's Western Chamber Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1976), p. 156: "Would I have deflowered you casually" 輒把梅犀玷污?

⁵⁷ *MTI* 30, p. 369; *MTI/Birch*, pp. 172-73.

⁵⁸ The anonymous comment 情豔語以幽澀出之古今獨絕 is by the compiler of the *Ping-su kuan* 冰絲館 (Ice Silk House) edn. presented to the throne in 1791; this became the basis for the edn. of Liu Shih-heng 劉世珩, *Nuan-hung shih hui-k'o Lin-ch'uan ssu-meng* 暖紅室彙刻臨川四夢 (1919; rpt. Yang-chou: Chiang-su Kuang-ling ku-chi k'o-yin-she, 1990).

⁵⁹ Bickford, *Flowering Plum*, pp. 25-26.

seed); with respect to the human order, the elaboration of the gesture imitates the sexual act, which produces progeny and perpetuates the family; with respect to the world of art, the drinking of wine imitates the moment of inspiration, when the artist breathes life into his work.

The first two contexts have been touched upon in my discussion of the plum, and my basic argument has been that Feng Meng-lung was unhappy with T'ang Hsien-tsu's "unique" use of natural imagery in the play. In *Mu-tan t'ing* the garden experience is eventually brought into harmony with a larger world of social relationships, but only belatedly so by the norms of the genre. An effect of Feng's revisions is that in *Feng-liu meng* the lovers' experience of passion — in the dreamworld and especially in the ghostly realm — is constrained by their awareness of social duty and responsibilities.

THE PORTRAIT

In *Mu-tan t'ing*, Tu Li-niang's self-portrait, left as a testament to her beauty and early death, is the physical object most identified with her. In keeping with the conventions of southern drama, it is a material symbol that "threads the fabric of the play" like the shuttle of a loom, helping to create a sense of unity in the sprawling work.⁶⁰ It is introduced in scene 14, "The Portrait," buried with her in scene 20, "Keening," and discovered by Liu Meng-mei in scene 24, "The Portrait Recovered." In the climactic scenes of mid-play (scenes 28–32), the portrait represents Li-niang's physical body, which has become separated from her soul in death. This is in keeping with its use in earlier stories and plays,⁶¹ although T'ang's treatment of the figure is characteristically rich with suggestion.

I cannot do justice to that richness here. Instead I propose to examine the portrait through the prism of Feng's changes, in conjunction with my discussion of the plum figure, above. There, Feng sought to contain and redirect a vital and erotic dimension of T'ang's imagery. I believe that Feng also responded to a similar dimension in T'ang's treatment of Li-niang's portrait, although in ways that are less immediately obvious.

In scene 14, Li-niang paints her self-portrait as a testament to her fading beauty and as an encoded record of her dream, which she hopes will someday

reach someone who will understand it. The scene begins and concludes with allusions to the Goddess of Wu-shan 巫山, who made love to prince Huai of Ch'u (Ch'u Huai wang 楚懷王) in a dream. Li-niang's mention of the prince's dream indicates her awareness of what happened in her own dream, even as that dream fades. In the scene's concluding coda, her thoughts return to the Wu-shan goddess, this time in connection with the portrait she has just painted:

Li-niang:

儘香閣賞玩無人到 None will come to the fragrant boudoir
to enjoy its beauty,

Ch'un-hsiang:

這形模則合挂巫山廟 This likeness is fit to hang in the temple
on Wu-shan.

Li-niang, Ch'un-hsiang:

又怕爲雨爲雲飛去了 Or might it take flight on account of
clouds and rain?⁶²

Here Li-niang expresses, with some ambivalence, the desire to expose her beauty to a lover. Of equal interest for the subsequent treatment of the portrait is T'ang's manner of insinuating her act of self-portraiture. There is, first of all, Li-niang's awareness of her ebbing vitality and life:

意妝成熏香獨坐無聊 My toilet made at last, I burn incense
and sit alone, listless.
逍遙 Before I can find ease,
怎剗盡助愁芳草 How to root out the choking weeds
that breed distress?
甚法兒點活心苗 By what means to bring to life the heart's
tender shoots?
真情強笑爲誰嬌 Whom to please if I mask my true feelings
with smiles?
淚花兒打進著夢魂飄 Tears gush forth as my dreaming soul drifts.⁶³

The drifting of the soul foreshadows the moment of death, when the body is deprived of the spirit that animates it, yet Li-niang clings to the hope that a way might be found to revive 點活 her spirits, and restore her vitality. By paint-

⁶⁰ Tseng Yung-i 曾永義, *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsi-chü lun-chi* 中國古典戲劇論集 (Taipei: Lien-ching ch'u-pan shih-yeh kung-ssu, 1975), p. 4; cited in West, "Drama," p. 20.

⁶¹ E.g., the story of Chen-chen 真真, discussed below. In a Yuan play, "A Marital Affinity Across Two Lifetimes" ("Liang-shih yin-yuan" 兩世姻緣) (see Tsang Mao-hsün, ed. and comp., *Yüan ch'ü hsüan* 元曲選 [1958; rpt. Peking: Chung-hua, 1979], pp. 971–86), the courtesan Yü-hsiao paints a self-portrait, which after her death functions as a surrogate for the living Yü-hsiao; see Charles Stone, "Self, Spirit, and Body in Two Chinese Plays: Self-Portraits of Dying Beauties" (unpub. paper).

⁶² *MTT* 14, p. 291; *MTT/Birds*, p. 72. "Clouds and rain" is, of course, a euphemism for lovemaking.

⁶³ *MTT* 14, p. 287; *MTT/Birds*, p. 67.

ing her self-portrait she seeks to preserve her beauty against the ravages of illness, and once it is finished she identifies with it strongly, treating it as an extension of her person, especially her body. Fearing that it will fade with time, she orders that it be mounted:

日灸風吹懸襯的好	From burning of sun and buffeting of breeze,
怕好物不堅牢	mount and line it well,
把咱巧丹青休澆了	For fear that "finest things are least enduring,"
	My portrait's pretty hues must not be sullied. ⁶⁴

On their surface, these lines simply express Li-niang's fear that her portrait will fade with exposure to the elements, but the use of the word "澆" to describe the destruction of "pretty hues" accomplishes far more. The same word refers to Liu Meng-mei's semen at the beginning of scene 24, and in scene 28, after he has discovered Li-niang's portrait, he fears, in a context of sexual desire, that he may "soil the portrait's hues."⁶⁵ In this light, the above lines also suggest that Li-niang is fearful that her beauty may arouse "impure" thoughts in the beholder.

Li-niang's desire to preserve her beauty inviolate, expressed through her efforts to mount and bury her portrait, is belied by other language suggesting that in her mind the portrait stands for her body, which awaits the coming of a lover who will reanimate it. At the moment of its creation, the act of self-portraiture is described by her as the conveying of her person into the portrait:

則待注櫻桃染柳條	Now let me daub cherry mouth,
渲雲鬢煙霧飄蕭	sketch willow brow,
眉梢青未了	Touch up the hair with wash of drifting mist.
箇中人全在秋波妙	Blue of eyebrows tapers off at the tip,
	My person complete in the charm of her eyes. ⁶⁶

The eyes, the spiritual seat of a portrait, seem to contain Li-niang's person 箇中人. Elsewhere, she suggests that the portrait houses her spirit. At the moment of her death in scene 20 she speaks of it as the repository of her soul 心靈:

⁶⁴ *MTT* 14, p. 290; *MTT/Birch*, p. 71-72.

⁶⁵ "But that to take her portrait in my hands could soil its hues 怕澆的丹青亞/I long to embrace her image as I lie" (*MTT* 28, p. 356; *MTT/Birch*, p. 157). The reference to semen is at the beginning of scene 24, as Liu inspects his stained bedclothes. Hsü Shuo-fang suggests that *yün-wo* 雲澆 refers to rain that has dampened Liu's quilt, but Birch translates it as "the cloud stains of a passionate dream" (*MTT* 24, p. 338; *MTT/Birch*, p. 135). Other sexual references to staining and defilement are: scene 16 ("The Invalid"), where Li-niang's mother fears that by venturing into the garden her daughter was "sullied by a willow spirit 怕腰身觸污了柳精靈", and scene 30, where "hien-wu 點污" describes the "sullyng" of the plum's seed (Li-niang's maidenhead). Feng removes these, with the exception of the mother's verse in scene 16.

⁶⁶ *MTT* 14, p. 289; *MTT/Birch*, pp. 68-69.

Li-niang: One thing I have to tell you. That portrait on which I inscribed the poem: I do not care to expose it to the general view. When I am buried, put it in a red sandalwood box and hide it beneath the T'ai-hu rocks. Ch'un-hsiang: What is your purpose in this? (旦) 春香, 我記起一事來。我那春容, 題詩在上, 外觀不雅。葬我之後, 盛著紫檀匣兒, 藏在太湖石底。(貼) 這是主何意見?

Li-niang:

有心靈翰墨春容	That portrait and those brush strokes
	which possess my soul,
儻直那人知重	May reach someday someone
	who understands. ⁶⁷

At the comparable moment in *Feng-liu meng*, Li-niang treats her portrait more as a picture (a representation), and no mention is made of a lover:

Li-niang: As for this picture of a spring outing 這幅行樂圖:

是俺親描畫	It is I who painted it,
向柳梅叢	Close to willow and plum.
更題詩	Next I indited a poem,
將啞謎籠	And enclosed a riddle within it.

I am fearful of exposing it to the general view. When I am buried, put it in a red sandalwood box and secrete it beneath the T'ai-hu rocks. Ch'un-hsiang: What is your purpose in this?

Li-niang:

敢精靈出現還如夢	Were my spirit to appear, it would still
	be like my dream. ⁶⁸

The portrait's physical and spiritual qualities are effaced, and we are given instead a sense of it as a riddle awaiting a solution. The two lines of Li-niang's aria reappear as one line, and the word "spirit" (*ching-ling* 精靈) may refer to Li-niang's soul lodged in the portrait.⁶⁹ As a result, her intentions in burying her portrait are unclear; certainly there is no sense of a desire to have it come into the possession of "someone who understands."

Feng's particular sensitivity to T'ang's handling of the portrait inspired a

⁶⁷ *MTT* 20, p. 313; *MTT/Birch*, p. 102. ⁶⁸ *FLM* 16, p. 37a.

⁶⁹ In scene 11 of *FLM* (p. 27a), Li-niang paints her portrait and then sings to Ch'un-hsiang: "If my spirit 精靈 comes out from the portrait, may it be conveyed into a good lad's keeping."

revision of two lines sung by Ch'un-hsiang towards the end of scene 20, just after Li-niang's death. In the midst of her keening she recalls the portrait:

Ch'un-hsiang: But that reminds me of the self-portrait she made. When it was seen by the master he ordered me to bury it with the corpse for fear that the sight of it would distress Madam Tu. I think of my mistress' dying words 提起那春容, 被老爺看見了, 怕奶奶傷情, 分付殉了葬罷。俺想小姐臨終之言,

依舊向湖山石兒	As before she will lean
靠也	against the T'ai-hu rocks,
怕等的箇拾翠人來	But I fear that her portrait will fade from
把畫粉銷	waiting for the garden-strolling youth. ⁷⁰

Feng makes a revealing change, substituting *mai-tsang* (埋葬, to bury) for *k'ao* (靠, to lean on) in the first line, so that Ch'un-hsiang sings:

依舊向湖山石下埋葬也	She is once again buried
	beneath the T'ai-hu rocks,
等得箇拾翠人兒怕畫	Waiting for the garden-strolling youth,
粉銷	I fear her portrait will fade. ⁷¹

In *Mu-tan t'ing*, Ch'un-hsiang's wish to have her mistress "lean as before" by the rock mound recalls the moment in scene 10 when Li-niang's dream lover leads her there to make love.⁷² The repetition of *k'ao* has the effect of animating the portrait and underscoring its close identity with Li-niang's person. Feng's *mai-tsang* obliterates this effect (awkwardly, since he retains the phrase "as before"), and identifies the portrait with Li-niang's corpse. He may have wished to avoid a blatantly physical identification and removed the sexual dimension of its discovery and exposure.

Exposure occurs again in scene 26 of *Mu-tan t'ing*, "The Portrait Examined," as Liu Meng-mei gazes at Li-niang's portrait and is impassioned. The first couplet of Liu's entrance poem refers to "wind and rain" (suggestive of lovemaking); in the second, he resorts to imagery of shadow and light in describing the portrait he has found in the garden (in scene 24):

芭蕉葉上雨難留	Hard for rain to linger on the plantain's leaves,
芍藥梢頭風欲收	In the tips of the peony's branches
	the wind subsides.

畫意無明偏著眼
春光有路暗抬頭

Scrutinize the painting's obscure meaning,
And look where gleam of spring light
holds the clue.⁷³

To Liu, the portrait is something obscure, in need of the illumination of his gaze. The "obscure meaning" is the riddle of the painting's message, to be deciphered through the visual and verbal clues contained in it, which hint at Liu's special connection to Li-niang. Imagery of darkness and light concretizes this idea. Shadow and darkness are associated with Li-niang as ghost and image, light with Liu Meng-mei as lover and adorer of Li-niang's portrait. Repeatedly characterized in this scene as shadow 影, the portrait seems empty 空 and insubstantial 無形 to Liu, yet it also seems to have a kind of life, or potential for life. Having unrolled the portrait and gazed at it, he resorts again to light and shadow juxtaposed to express his bewilderment over its origins, describing the beauty as "light of moon born from brush's tip" 片月影光生豪末.⁷⁴ The image is endowed with brilliance 光, evoking masculine agency, much as the allusion to Green Calyx "bursting from crevice in rock mound to light on painted silk" evokes the feminine role two scenes later.⁷⁵ By this logic, the portrait is something created, with a potential for life that is actualized by some inspiring action.

Feng shows little interest in this language, and thus eliminates Liu's opening poem and the verse about the image "born from brush's tip." Instead, he draws attention to the portrait's eyes, traditionally regarded as the feature through which a subject's spirituality was captured for posterity. In his revision of Li-niang's painting aria in scene 14 he appears especially intent on reformulating T'ang's language concerning the eyes:

輕絹	Light silk,
硯磨銅雀	Polished inkstone.

This likeness of Tu Li-niang 我杜麗娘這十分春容呵

都付與龍香兔毫	Entrust to ink and brush
---------	--------------------------

(Looks at herself in the mirror and sighs):

怕青銅照不出愁	I fear the mirror does not reflect
多少	how great is my sorrow,
聊淡抹	Lightly daubing,

⁷⁰ *MTT* 20, p. 314; *MTT/Birch*, p. 105. ⁷¹ *FLM* 16, p. 38b.

⁷² "Beyond the enclosed bed of peonies/up against the T'ai-hu rocks. 轉過這芍藥欄前/緊靠著湖山石邊"; *MTT* 10, p. 270; *MTT/Birch*, p. 48.

⁷³ *MTT* 26, p. 345; *MTT/Birch*, p. 143. ⁷⁴ *MTT* 26, p. 345; *MTT/Birch*, p. 144.

⁷⁵ "Brushes tip" possibly has phallic overtones, and the reference to Green Calyx suggests birth from the womb, especially when read in conjunction with Li-niang's verse describing the emergence of her ghost from her tomb (trans. above).

試輕描 Deftly limning,
論丹青只有點眼 In painting, dotting the eyes is most difficult.⁷⁶
為高

Later, when revising scene 26, Feng returns to the eyes as the spiritual seat of a portrait, when Liu Meng-mei's attention is captured by them:

Liu: To speak of nothing else, these eyes alone are unearthly 莫說別件, 只這隻嬌眼, 也是天下沒有的。

十分意態 Perfect demeanor,
描神只在秋波 Her soul conveyed in the eye's clear gaze.⁷⁷

In a marginal comment, Feng wrote: "The line about 'eye's clear gaze' recalls the earlier verse 'dotting the eyes is most difficult,' sung at the time of transmitting her soul into the painting."⁷⁸

Feng's emphasis on the eye-dotting gesture comes at the expense of the original formulations. *Mu-tan ting* had couched the actions surrounding the creation of the portrait in provocative if somewhat obscure language. In *Feng-liu meng* the moment of artistic creation is reduced to a conventional formula — a strategy typical of Feng.⁷⁹

Mu-tan ting uses the portrait further. The reanimation of Li-niang's corpse in scene 35, "Resurrection," is anticipated through allusions to a well-known story about a beauty in a portrait. T'ang borrows two actions in order to bring the portrait to life: the calling out of the beauty's name, and the inspiring of her portrait with wine. By scene 35 inspiring assumes rich significance, because two constellations of language have converged, one associated with the plum, the other with the portrait. The exhumation and revival of Li-niang's body are a lighthearted affair, but note the elaborate introduction to it in previous scenes.

As Liu contemplates Li-niang's portrait in scene 26, he becomes excited by the green plums:

Liu: Why is she holding a branch of green plums in her hand, just as if she were holding me 卻怎半支青梅在手, 活似提掇小生一般?

他青梅在手詩細哦 Green plums in hand, she softly
 intones her verse,

⁷⁶ *FLM* 11, p. 25b. ⁷⁷ *FLM* 19, p. 2b.

⁷⁸ *FLM* 19, p. 2b: for the eyes and the "transmission of the spirit" (*ch'uan-shen* 傳神) in portraiture, see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, comps., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1985), pp. 13-14.

⁷⁹ Feng's emphasis on eye-dotting anticipates the moment in *MTT*, scene 33, when Liu Meng-mei inscribes a dot on Li-niang's spirit tablet at her shrine — an important gesture in the original play; see below.

逗春心一點蹉跎 Luring my heart to stumbling thoughts of love.
小生待畫餅充饑 Just as I "sketch a cake to appease my hunger"
小姐似望梅止渴 So she "gazes at plums to slake her thirst."

Ah, my young lady, my young lady/小姐, 小姐,

未曾開半點么荷 A lotus bud, not yet open,
含笑處朱唇淡抹 Red lips lightly daubed harbor a smile.
韻情多 Full of charm and passion,
如愁欲語 Sadly she longs to speak,
只少口汽兒呵 But lacks breath.⁸⁰

Hunger and thirst refer here to sexual desire, and mark the culmination of erotic tensions, which have built through the scene. In the aria immediately preceding, the word *ch'un* 春 (spring) occurs four times, indicative of Liu's mounting excitement. Given this tension, the mention of the beauty's closed lips, which "lack breath" is suggestive, especially in the light of what is to follow.

Liu in fact will breathe life into those lips, and the literal means by which he does this is to pour wine mixed with a life-giving potion down the throat of Li-niang's corpse. Prior to this, he has shared a loving cup of wine with Li-niang's ghost (in scene 30). Both moments are memorable, the latter because of the erotic boldness of the language, the former because it is part of an unusually graphic enactment of the exhumation and revival of Li-niang's corpse. Read beyond their literal meaning, the two actions involving wine drinking can, I feel, both be understood as inspiring and inseminating gestures.

In the popular story of Chen-chen 真真, wine is the means by which a beauty who is lodged in a portrait is brought to life by a young scholar. He calls to her for a hundred nights, and when she responds he pours wine on the portrait, whereupon she descends and becomes his wife.⁸¹ Li-niang alludes to this after completing her portrait in scene 14, and so does Liu Meng-mei when he calls to the portrait in scene 26.

The connection between the revival of Li-niang's inert body in the play and the story of Chen-chen's portrait is clear, not only because in both cases wine is the instrument of revival, but also because T'ang seems to borrow playfully from the story when he describes the life-giving potion as wine mixed with the ashes of the burnt crotch section of a virile man's trousers 偉男兒深褲襠. In the story, the infusion is described as a preparation of wine mixed with ashes

⁸⁰ *MTT* 26, p. 347; *MTT/Birch*, pp. 145-46.

⁸¹ Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) et al., comps., *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi* 太平廣記 (Peking: Jen-min wenshüeh, 1959) 286, p. 2283. This story can also be found in *MTTTL*, pp. 19-21, where wine is the means by which the immortal Chen-chen is rendered human.

obtained from burning some kind of cloth,⁸² but the intimate nature of the garment in the play is T'ang's invention.

My association of this moment with the wine-drinking sequence in scene 30 is speculation, but links are established through shared language. Wine is poured into a lotus-shaped cup 金荷, a gesture that calls to mind Li-niang's tightly closed mouth "like a lotus bud" 么荷, which "lacks breath." The "sully-ing" 澆 of the plum's seed calls to mind Li-niang's fears that her portrait might be sullied — an association with sexual intimacy (and with Liu's role as Li-niang's lover). Even the unfolding of the "heart of flower" in the release of passion may find a counterpart in the references to the heart-soul contained within Li-niang's portrait, waiting to be touched to life.

Wine disappears from Feng's revision. In scene 30 he confines Liu's and Li-niang's intimacy to a brief duet notable for its decorum:

Liu:

我坐黃昏盼伊早過
爲甚鎮消停恁般延惰
In twilight gloom I hoped for your early coming,
Why did you stop and dawdle so?

Li-niang:

非是我慢歡哥
候雙親堅臥
又收拾起繡床花朵
It isn't that I kept my darling waiting
I waited 'til my parents were fast asleep
Then gathered up my flower-embroidered
quilt.

Liu, Li-niang:

四目共睽
兩情正和
偏則是幽期處話多
Two pairs of eyes gazing,
Our feelings one,
Why at this hour of bliss this urge to words?⁸³

Moreover, in Feng's version of the exhumation scene, Li-niang is revived with ginger tea, and mention of the trouser-patch potion is eliminated, including scene 34, "Consultation," devoted to its concoction.

Feng retains one aspect of the inspiriting motif, which provides a clue to his use of the portrait in *Feng-liu meng*. In scene 33 of *Mu-tan t'ing*, "Confidential Plans," Liu Meng-mei presents himself at Li-niang's shrine as her husband, and offers to prove his claim to a dubious Sister Stone by performing the ritual of

inscribing her spirit tablet with a dot, a ritual normally performed by a person of distinction. We are told that Li-niang's father, Tu Pao 杜寶, neglected to perform it in his haste to depart for a new post. When Liu inscribes the dot the tablet moves. This convinces Sister Stone of his claim, and she decides to assist him in the exhumation and revival of Li-niang's corpse.

The significance of this ritual appears to be primarily social, marking a moment when authority passes from Tu Pao (as father) to Liu Meng-mei (as husband).⁸⁴ In *Mu-tan t'ing* the dotting gesture, which anticipates Liu's role in Li-niang's exhumation, also has an inspiriting quality.⁸⁵ This dimension, together with its implication about the sources of Liu Meng-mei's power, is lost in Feng's revision, but the social meaning is retained.

Feng passes over his revisions of erotic language in silence, but he does comment several times about the portrait, which is indicative of the importance he attributed to it.⁸⁶ That importance can be summed up in the word recognition. The portrait doesn't simply represent Li-niang; it also represents Liu and holds the clue to his future relationship with her. It contains an encoded message that he must decipher. In scene 26 of *Mu-tan t'ing*, Liu reads the poem on the portrait and recognizes that he has some connection to the lady depicted there, but he subsequently fails to act on this knowledge. He fails to link the beauty in the portrait to the "lovely girl" in his dream (in scene 2, "Declaring Ambition"); he fails to see that the maiden with whom he has formed a liaison (Li-niang's ghost) is the beauty depicted in the portrait. After making love to Li-niang's ghost, he appears to forget the portrait altogether. In Feng's view, this makes him appear fickle 薄倖,⁸⁷ and his infatuation with beauty reveals a lack of good faith and a weakness of character unbefitting a hero.

Feng is at pains to point out these defects in T'ang's hero and to indicate how he has rectified them in *Feng-liu meng*. In revising scene 26 of *Mu-tan t'ing*, in which Liu first examines the portrait, he depicts Liu as instantly recognizing the lady of his dream.⁸⁸ In the light of this recognition, his growing infatuation with the portrait is firmly rooted in a conviction that this lady (he does not yet

⁸² The story (cited in previous n.) has 百家綵灰酒. Modern dictionaries (citing Han sources) define 百家衣 as a patched garment worn by children to insure long life. See *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* 大漢和辭典, vol. 8, p. 47.

⁸³ *FLM* 22, pp. 142-3.

⁸⁴ As Liu performs the gesture, he sings: "See how my brush turns stone to living person 看俺點石爲人, / As husband furnishes host 靠夫作主." *MTT* 33, p. 385; *MTT* *Büch*, p. 195. Feng supplies a subject for the second line, underscoring the fact that Li-niang relies on Liu as husband to perform the gesture: "See how my brush turns stone to living person, / As she relies on husband 他靠夫 to furnish the host." *FLM* 24, p. 21b.

⁸⁵ Li-niang's aria (trans. above) mentions "touching to life 點活." When Liu dots (*tien* 點) the tablet it moves, as if animated.

⁸⁶ *FLM* 11, p. 27a; 16, pp. 38a, 40a; 19, pp. 2b, 3a; and 22, p. 13b. Most of these comments are reprinted in *MTTTL*, pp. 64-65.

⁸⁷ Feng makes this observation twice: in a marginal comment to scene 22 and in his general remarks, where he describes how he has "made good Liu's flaws"; *MTTTL*, pp. 63 and 65.

⁸⁸ *FLM* 19, p. 3a.

know her name) is his destined mate. In other words, desire is grounded in loyalty: to the lady, and to the alliance with her that the portrait represents.⁸⁹

By contrast, *Mu-tan t'ing* has Li-niang point out the connection between herself and the portrait, after she and Liu exchange vows in scene 32. Liu's forgetfulness is puzzling, and Feng was among the first to call it a defect in character. One clear aim of his revision of *Mu-tan t'ing* is the rehabilitation of its hero. When we examine his treatment of the motifs discussed in this essay, we can see that it is part of a deliberate effort to change the thematic emphasis of the play, to portray the love affair between Li-niang and Liu Meng-mei in a different light, and especially to redefine Liu's character in the process.

CONCLUSION

This comparison of *Mu-tan t'ing* and *Feng-liu meng* has explained aspects of revision that Feng Meng-lung did not discuss. I have made some use of Feng's commentary, but have based my interpretation of his methods and intentions largely on the evidence furnished by a close reading of both texts. This enables us to go beyond Feng's own account of what he was doing. Reading *Mu-tan t'ing* in the light of *Feng-liu meng* shows that T'ang Hsien-tsu's unconventional language, as well as his idiosyncratic prosody, made Feng's engagement with it "recalcitrant."

Written before the *Kun-shan* musical style became preeminent in the southern drama, *Mu-tan t'ing* was created not in ignorance of prosodic requirements, as T'ang's critics alleged, but according to a less rigid idea of how linguistic and musical text should be accommodated to each other. T'ang was comfortable with varying the song-forms to fit his text. His critics were not, and once they began to rewrite his plays according to the forms prescribed in their manuals, a struggle to define his play-texts ensued, lasting several decades.⁹⁰

In the end, T'ang's original libretto emerged intact, and revisions such as Feng's, in which the language was varied to fit the prescribed song forms, passed largely into oblivion. Once the forms of *Kun ch'ü* melodies were set, T'ang's libretti posed difficulties, but no insurmountable obstacles, to adaptation for

singing in that style. After the necessary musical accommodations were made, three of his plays became staples of the *Kun chü* repertoire.⁹¹

What divided T'ang and his critics at least as sharply as their differences over musical form were their differences over appropriate language. T'ang favored an unconstrained literary style that made no concessions to the reader or viewer (or performer), while revisers such as Tsang Mao-hsün and Feng Meng-lung favored familiar and accessible language. The act of translating *Mu-tan t'ing* into simpler language inevitably changed its ideas, and I have suggested that the pattern of Feng's choices contains an underlying thematic critique of the play that may not have been fully conscious. The criticisms directed at T'ang's prosody appear to have reflected a largely unacknowledged discomfort with his elaborate, and at times obscure, depiction of romantic passion in a text destined for the stage.

Feng's discomfort is evident in his treatment of the plum and the portrait. In the case of the plum, he eschewed the openness of T'ang's language and reverted to simile. The tree is identified primarily with Liu Meng-mei, his plight as orphan, and his search for social connections. In one passage where Li-niang compares herself with the tree (scene 9), it reminds her of her desire to find a mate and blossom, a canonically familiar association for a young girl to make. The plum's other attributes — its red blossoms, green fruit, and lush foliage — go unremarked; the attributes that Feng singles out are roots and branches, suggestive of Liu's desire and need for social ties.

T'ang's figure emerges in striking contrast to the one in *Feng-liu meng*. In depicting Li-niang and Liu Meng-mei, he exploited the plum's "metaphoric mutability" and its wealth of associations. As tree, the plum is identified with Liu as lover and eventual savior of Li-niang. In this respect T'ang may have wished to underscore his role as "Lord of Spring" and restorer of Li-niang's soul; this was one dimension of the plum's meaning in poetry.⁹² The plum tree's powers of renewal, even into old age, made it a symbol of vitality and vigor, and although references to sexual vigor by way of this image were muted in poetry and painting, in *Mu-tan t'ing* this dimension is vividly in evidence, with reference

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 65-76. See also Ho Wei 何爲, "T'ang Hsien-tsu, Shen Ching, Yeh T'ang" 湯顯祖沈璟葉堂, in *T'ang Hsien-tsu yen-chiu lun-wen chi*, pp. 463-79. The play that resisted adaptation was his early work, *The Purple-Jade Hairpin* (*Tzu-ch'ai chi* 紫釵記).

⁹² In scene 2 of *MTT* we learn that after Liu dreamt of a lovely girl standing beneath a flowering plum, he changed his name to Meng-mei ("Dream of Plum") and took the style "Spring Lord" (*ch'ün-ch'ing* 春卿). For association of the plum with the return of the soul, see Iwaki Hideo, "Baika to Hankon Soshoku ni okeru saiki no higan" 梅花と返魂蘇軾における再起の悲願, *Nippon Chügoku gakkai hō* 日本中國學會報 30 (1979), pp. 135-49. I am grateful to Professor Ōki Yasushi of Tokyo University for bringing this article to my attention.

⁹⁰ For the importance of recognition in Chinese thought and literature, see Eric Henry, "The Motif of Recognition in Early China," *HJAS* 47.1 (1987), pp. 5-30, esp. p. 30, for use in drama.

⁹¹ Chou, *T'ang Hsien-tsu lun-kao*, pp. 225-39. T'ang's improvisational methods are discussed in Chang Hsiu-lien 張秀蓮, "T'ang-Shen chih cheng wai-lun" 湯沈之爭外論, in *T'ang Hsien-tsu yen-chiu lun-wen chi* 湯顯祖研究論文集, Chiang-hsi sheng wen-hsüeh i-shu yen-chiu so 江西省文學藝術研究所 (Peking: Chung-kuo hsi-chü ch'u-pan she, 1984), pp. 480-99. See also Swatek, "Strategies of Containment," chap. 1.

to both Liu Meng-mei and Li-niang.⁹³ In the case of the plum's red blossoms, T'ang did more than exploit the well-established association of "fallen blossoms" with lost maidenhood, and I have suggested that the plum's blossom also refers to Li-niang's emerging sexuality, hence the preference for red blossoms over the white ones favored by poets. Even the fruit, the most "canonical" image of the plum by virtue of its mention in the ancient *Shih-ching*, is transmuted in *Mu-tan t'ing* from an image suggestive of the desire to marry and procreate into something more complex, partaking of both bitterness and desire.

It is tempting to find in T'ang's elaborate use of the plum a deliberate subversion of its "orthodox" symbolism, in particular its close identification with such Confucian values as chastity and moral rectitude, which, in their extreme form, are caricatured in the important males: Ch'en Tsui-liang 陳最良 (Li-niang's tutor), Tu Pao (as parent), and Liu Meng-mei (as ambitious scholar-to-be).⁹⁴ But one cannot carry this reading too far. What can be said is that the plum as figure pertains to the garden, and thus to the world of *ch'ing*, not the world of *li*. Once Li-niang and Liu Meng-mei flee the garden and depart from Nan-an (in scene 36, "Elopement") the plum ceases to be an important figure.

Feng likewise reduced the complexity of T'ang's figurative use of the portrait. In *Mu-tan t'ing* it embodies beauty for both Li-niang and Liu Meng-mei, and their responses to it reveal more about their own subjectivity than anything else.⁹⁵ Liu's infatuation with it is based solely on sensual attraction, which causes him to forget all else. In this respect his experience matches that of Li-niang with her dream: each becomes obsessed with passions aroused by the imagined presence of the sought-for loved one, so much so that the illusory is confused with the real.⁹⁶ In *Feng-liu meng*, the portrait is the device that brings Liu to Li-niang. Its messages furnish him with necessary clues to his destiny, and in his treatment of it he is shown to be an attentive and devoted lover. Quite unlike

the situation in *Mu-tan t'ing*, in *Feng-liu meng* Liu's steadfast devotion to Li-niang's portrait demonstrates how his sensual impulses are domesticated and his infatuation 情癡 is governed by his reason. The distortion of T'ang's idea is particularly striking in this case. Feng's rational bias is evident not only in these efforts to redefine Liu Meng-mei's character, but also in his concern for a logically consistent plot and a harmonious prosody free of jarring improvisations.⁹⁷

T'ang Hsien-tsu, on the other hand, espoused a style unconstrained by conventional notions of form and plausibility, and the following preface to a friend's collection of marvels reveals his contempt for the excessively literal imagination:

In this world, the only people with whom one cannot discuss literary art are narrow-minded pedants and fusty scholars. There is much that they have not heard and more that they have not seen, and yet they make a show of their superficial and limited knowledge. Looking over writing in the world today, one wonders, will there ever be writing again after this? I think that what is miraculous in writing does not consist in a slavish adherence to appearances. Spiritual inspiration comes naturally in a flash, in the absence of conscious thought 自然靈氣, 恍惚而來, 不思而至. Uncanny and amazing, this is a state to which none can give a name, not anything with which one ordinarily can manage to identify. When Su Tzu-chan (Su Shih 蘇軾, 1037-1101) painted withered trunks, bamboos, and rocks, he broke completely with painters of both the past and his present, and the style of his paintings became all the more marvelous. If one were to assess his paintings in terms of painting style, it is almost as if they do not have one.⁹⁸

T'ang was fond of invoking the example of great painters in his own defense,⁹⁹ and his disdain for models is well illustrated in *Mu-tan t'ing*, at both the musical and the linguistic level. His aesthetic and Feng's agenda were diametri-

⁹³ The flowering plum tree in paintings could allude to sexual vigor in older men; James C. Cahill, *The Compelling Image* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1982), pp. 120-21.

⁹⁴ In scene 2 Liu uses a "purer" form of the plum image to declare his ambition: "Some day spring sun will touch in the dimness the willow to yellow gold 有一日春光暗度黃金柳, / and snow's approach burst open the plum white as jade 雪意衝開了白玉梅. *MTT* 2, p. 237; *MTT/Bird*, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 52, observes of Li-niang that "To fall in love with and die pining for a figure one dreams up is then to endow subjectivity with potential infinitude and willful autonomy." Liu Meng-mei exhibits a similar "willful autonomy" in his response to Li-niang's portrait. Both responses troubled Feng.

⁹⁶ This is the point of the following comment to scene 26, from the "Three Wives" edition of the play: "People know that a dream is an illusory realm, but they don't know that the realm of a painting is especially illusory. Dreams are form without shadow; paintings are shadow without form. Li-niang seeks love 歡 in a dream and the "Spring Lord" seeks a mate in a painting; in their infatuation 癡 they are a pair for all time. But by their not taking their experience as illusory, the illusory becomes real"; Liu, *Nuan hung shih hui-k'o Lin-ch'uan ssu-meng*, p. 159. For Liu as "Spring Lord," see n. 92, above.

⁹⁷ Feng was careful to link together the disparate dream segments, so that Li-niang and Liu Meng-mei share one dream rather than experiencing separate ones. See his general comments in *MTTIL*, p. 63.

⁹⁸ "Ho-ch'i' hsi 合奇序," in Hsü Shuo-fang, comp., *T'ang Hsien-tsu shi-wen chi* 湯顯祖詩文集 (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1982), p. 1077-78. I have mostly followed the trans. of Richard Lynn, "Alternate Routes to Self-Realization in Ming Theories of Poetry," Susan Bush and Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1983), p. 335. For T'ang's aesthetic views, see Chou, *T'ang Hsien-tsu lun-kao*, pp. 87-105.

⁹⁹ As when he attacked an earlier revision of *MTT* in a letter to Ling Meng-ch'ü 凌濛初 (1580-1644), citing a painting in which Wang Wei 王維 (701-761) depicted a platanus as part of a winter scene. This unseasonal representation bothered innumerable critics, but T'ang praised Wang's style for being "expansive and unrestrained" 駘蕩淫夷 and implied that *MTT* was under attack for the same petty reasons; *T'ang Hsien-tsu shih-wen chi*, p. 1345.

cally opposed, and we can assume that had T'ang been able to read Feng's adaptation he would have been outraged. Although both men are identified with the late-Ming cult of *ch'ing*, and both men shared a love of vernacular literature, when it came to the writing of plays the differences between them were very great.

T'ang Hsien-tsu refused to respect the stylistic and ideological boundaries separating genres, addressing personal concerns in his plays in a distinctive and linguistically challenging idiom. But such use of the drama was the issue, and by rewriting his plays Feng and others were reappropriating them for the public domain, asserting control over the ideas expressed in them in the name of performability. Although *Feng-liu meng* was also intended for reading (as we can infer from the quality of the printed edition), one does not obtain fresh insights from the reading experience. There are no privileged readings, no subtexts, and the perusal of them was meant to recreate the experience of a performance. In *Feng-liu meng*, and in Feng Meng-lung's drama in general, we glimpse the stern Confucian and strict moralist that was Feng the public man, and are left to consider the contrast between this persona and the bohemian romantic of his other writings.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FLM	Feng Meng-lung 馮夢龍, <i>Feng-liu meng</i> 風流夢
MHCCC	<i>Mo-han chai ting-pen ch'uan-ch'i</i> 墨憨齋定本傳奇
MTT	T'ang Hsien-tsu 湯顯祖, <i>Mu-tan t'ing</i> 牡丹亭
MTT/Birch	<i>The Peony Pavilion</i> , trans. Cyril Birch
MTTTL	<i>Mu-tan t'ing yen-chiu tzu-liao k'ao-shih</i> 牡丹亭研究資料考釋