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The Theater and the Crowd: Jiangnan Performance Culture and Regional Identity in the Ming

INTRODUCTION

In late-imperial China elite writers claimed an elevated status for drama. Li Yu 李漁 (1610–1680) asserted that writing drama “though still of the Lesser Way,” was yet a “skill” requiring a “subtlety of abilities.”¹ He claimed as well that the theater, by meeting in the dark, revealed the mysterious, “like walking in the dark with a candle.”² Many essayists made still greater claims, and some suggested that theater could serve as an epistemological frame or interpretive metaphor. Writers deployed the motif of players on the stage as a prism through which to examine the panoply of the contemporaneous scene.³ Li-ling Hsiao has noted the use of drama to serve as “one of the most pervasive metaphors for

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¹ Li Yu 李漁, “Ciqu bu” 詞曲部 (“Lyrics and Music for Theater”), in *Xianqing ouji* 閒情偶寄 (*Chance Sojourns amid Leisure Passions*), in *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 (Zhejiang: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

³ Sophie Volpp examines the ways “theatricality” and the “histrionic” shaped literati behavior, noting that a quality of “social spectatorship” is seen in literati displays, and also arguing that “social spectatorship” reveals the influence of theatricality on social context; Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage, Theatricality in Seventeenth Century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), pp. 55, 86. See Li-ling Hsiao’s comment on the term “social spectatorship,” *JAS* 71.2 (May 2012), p. 536. Kim Besio has observed about drama, “Drama, perhaps even more than other literary form, is inherently related to social beliefs and practices”; “Gender, Loyalty, and the Reproduction of the Wang Shaojun Legend: Some Social Ramifications of Drama in the Late Ming,” *Journal of Economic and Social History* 40.2 (1997), p. 251. Also: Philip Kafalas’ discussion of Zhang Dai’s use of performance to induce a sense

human life.”⁴ Intellectuals found that theatrical roles influenced individual conduct; characters of the stage served as informing archetypes for individual “sensibilities,” or individual “role types.”⁵ Nor were literati the only ones who found the imagery of the stage compelling. Opera tropes shaped constructs of identity in demotic texts. David Johnson notes that villagers and urban denizens used opera characters as heralded exemplars.⁶ Hugh Shapiro has discussed “the appropriation of the cultural authority of drama” by psychiatric patients;⁷ and Meir Shahar argues that in miming opera-heroes of folk narratives, such as Crazy Ji, villagers voiced antinomian ideations.⁸ The narratives of opera characters at all levels of society provided patterns for mimesis.

In Ming-era Jiangnan 江南,⁹ intellectuals asserted a similarly potent identification with opera. Indeed, it is my contention that local writers self-consciously and elaborately refurbished the familiar features of local theater to serve as a trope of Jiangnan exceptionalism; they

of “layered illusion”; Philip A. Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream: Nostalgia and Zhang Dai’s Reminiscences of the Ming* (Norwalk, Conn: Eastbridge Books, 2007), pp. 109–10.

⁴ Li-ling Hsiao, *The Eternal Present of the Past: Illustration, Theater and Reading in the Wanli Period (1573–1619)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 224–25.

⁵ Early on, Kang-i Sun Chang noted the influence of drama on southern intellectuals such as Liu Rushi 柳如是 and Qian Qianyi 錢謙益. “The blossoming of the cult of *ch’ing* in late Ming took place largely through readers’ imitation of the *role types* (my italics) created in contemporary fiction and drama”; *The Late Ming Poet Ch’en Tzu-lung: Crises of Love and Loyalty* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1991), p. 11. For discussion of the use of dramatic roles in the configuration of filial women also see Li-ling Hsiao, “Political Loyalty and Filial Piety: A Case Study in the Relational Dynamics of Text, Commentary, and Illustration in ‘Pipa ji,’” *Ming Studies* 48 (Fall 2003), pp. 9–64. Wai-ye Li noted a similar use of drama: for the courtesan class there was a “*sensibility* (my italics) formed through drama or a penchant for dramatizing emotions”; Wai-ye Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal,” in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1977), p. 58. Also see Yuming He, “Productive Space: Performance Texts in the Late Ming,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2003), pp. 278–82.

⁶ “The distinction between gods and actors, between the genuinely supernatural and the artfully theatrical is intentionally effaced”; David Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice, The Ritual Foundations of Village Life in North China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), pp. 328–29.

⁷ Hugh Shapiro, “Operatic Escapes, Performing Madness in Neuropsychiatric Beijing,” in Jing Tsui and Benjamin A. Elman, eds., *Science and Technology in Modern China, 1880’s–1940’s* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 305. For women’s use of opera roles, see also Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China’s Collective Past* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2011), pp. 98, 103–4.

⁸ Meir Shahar, *Crazy Ji: Chinese Religion and Popular Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), pp. 14–17.

⁹ Jiangnan 江南 and *nanfang* 南方 are the most common terms for the region; others are Wu-Yue *jian* 吳越間 – “the region of Wu and Yue” – and Jiangzhe 江浙 (as in “Jiangzhe style 江浙式”). For late-imperial uses, see Antonia Finanne, *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550–1850* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), pp. 28–30, who refers to Jiangnan’s “shifting meanings.” It was also used to designate the province of Jiangnan in the Tang; and in late-imperial times was applied to the Yangtze Delta or the lower reaches

seized on the actualities of opera to devise a complex narrative of nativist self-definition.¹⁰ As David Knechtges has established, Southland writers have long expressed a “southern consciousness.” Building on the ancient rhetoric defining the Jiangnan, medieval writers argued that the region produced specific traits.¹¹

Early-modern writers were equally skilled at allying the Southland with a “southern consciousness.” Many asserted that, at minimum, material culture and social patterns differed; cities, products, manners, gender characteristics, music and theater – the panoply of features of the Jiangnan – were distinct.¹² Chen Zilong (1608–1647) argued that

of the Yangtze River, encompassing (present-day) southern sections of both Jiangsu and Anhui and northern parts of Jiangxi and Zhejiang. I follow Stephen Owen’s term “Southland” to designate the region that had become a “cultural cliché”; Stephen Owen, “Jiangnan from the Ninth Century On: The Routinization of Desire,” in Ping Wang and Nicholas Morrow Williams, eds., *Southern Identity and Southern Estrangement in Medieval Chinese Poetry* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 2015), p. 189.

¹⁰ Jiangnan opera refers to the various forms, from *nanxi* 南戲 or *xiwen* 戲文, through to early *chuanqi* 傳奇 and Kunqu 崑曲 operas (late Yuan through the early Qing). Cyril Birch referred to this operatic tradition as “the long and involved southern mode.” Guo Yingde 郭英德, *Ming Qing chuanqi shi* 明清傳奇史 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2001), pp. 38–47, has detailed the adaptations and changes in southern opera, esp. in the context of social changes affecting gentry, writers, and audiences. The focus of this paper is on the texts of late Ming through early Qing, when *chuanqi* and *kunqu* operas were the usual subjects of literati observation, although writers such as Xu Wei and Pan Zhiheng (discussed below) discoursed on these forms assuming them to be one tradition.

“Narrative” and “trope” are useful for parsing how late-Ming southern writers defined themselves. The terms refer to a verbal construct of motifs and figurative language, including iconic figures from history and myth. Of course, a narrative uses the terms and data of actual life. Ming and Qing writers seized on terms and data of theater life (audiences, actors, roles, etc.), as well as theater sentimentalities (romantic plots, tonalities, and mythological associations); they transformed them into emblems that in toto became Jiangnan theater narrative. “Narrative” finds echoes as well in Ming and Qing literati observations of local, often micro-cultures, where “*zhuan* 傳 (“tradition, narrative”) can refer to beliefs and stories that shaped those cultures; see Barend Ter Haar, *Telling Stories: Witchcraft and Scapegoating in Chinese History* (Brill, Leiden, 2006). This paper also uses “*matière*” – a body of written and oral texts allied with one narrative or trope; e.g., David Hawkes applies “*matière*” to the myths, story elements, and beliefs found in the many sources of the state of Chu; Hawkes, trans., annot., intro., *The Songs of the South, An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2012).

¹¹ David R. Knechtges, “Sweet-peel Orange or Southern Gold? Regional Identity in Western Jin Literature,” in Paul Kroll and David R. Knechtges, eds., *Studies in Early Medieval Chinese Literature and Cultural History In Honor of Richard B. Mather and Donald Holzman* (Provo, Utah: Tang Studies Society, 2003), p. 44. (I am in gratitude for his title.) Moreover, Knechtges points out (p. 37) the early-medieval “clash of cultures” marking the northern v. Jiangnan perspectives. Southerners considered themselves “culturally superior to their former mortal enemies in the North” (p. 49). At an inn near Hangzhou, in the 3d c., an elite southerner greeted a northern traveler: “Hey, northern lout 儋父, would you like to eat some noodles?” (p. 50). See also Ping Wang, “Plaint, Lyricism and the South,” in Wang and Morrow, eds., *Southern Identity and Southern Estrangement*, pp. 78–107.

¹² E.g., see, Xu Wenyu 許文雨, “Liu Shipei Nan-Bei wenxuan bu tong lun” 劉師培南北文學不同論, in *Wenlun jiangshu* 文論講疏 (Taipei: Zhengzhong chubanshe, 1976), pp. 387–434. On

the Jiangnan was sufficiently independent to be considered a “country (*guo*) in its own right”¹³ Indeed, a good deal of nativist pride informed the construct. The Southland was portrayed as not only exotic to the homogenizing imperial paradigm, but as the alternative center. The south was the matrix: the north an unfortunate aberration. The Ming encyclopedist Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567–1624) presented the argument tersely in his bland pronouncement, “Weiyang 維揚 (present-day Yangzhou) sits between heaven and earth 維揚居天地之中.”¹⁴ In Ming and early-Qing texts, however, the trope of Jiangnan exceptionalism was enhanced and elaborated on, using specific features of the opera narrative. Writers of the Southland created a grandiose configuration of the local, exploiting the themes, imagery, sentimentalities and characters of local opera. Performance culture was used to forge a sense, not only of regional distinctness, but of superiority and even sanctity. Not that this was an innocent project. Ming and Qing intellectuals were acutely aware of the late-Ming fracture with the standard orthodoxies regarding family piety and fealty to the court in the north. The elites of the south – rich, disillusioned and independent¹⁵ – used the paradigm of performance culture to construct – albeit with obvious effort – a variant orthodoxy tied to Jiangnan cities. In turn, Jiangnan performance culture provided the micro-society of the south with a dose of gravitas.

regional distinctions as observed by classical authors (esp. in the *Jin Shu* 晉書), see Liu Shilin 劉士林, *Jiangnan wenhua de shixing chanshi* 江南文化的詩性闡釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), pp. 29–37. For regional distinctions in folk and musical traditions, see Jiang Bin 姜彬, ed., *Wu Yue minjian xinyang minsu* 吳越民間信仰民俗 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1992), pp. 220–91; also Ping Wang’s discussion of the regional features of literatures of “the Southland” (Wang, “Plaint, Lyricism and the South,” p. 107). For Tang views of Jiangnan singularity, see Edward H. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird: Tang Images of the South* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1985). For Qing views, see James Cahill, “The Emperor’s Erotica (Ching Yüan Chai so-shih II),” *Kaikodo Journal* 11 (Spring 1999), pp. 25–27.

¹³ Frederic E. Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1985), p. 666.

¹⁴ Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, *Wu za zu* 五雜俎 (Taipei: Weiwen tushu chubanshe, 1977), j. 18, p. 7a. This echoes a famous debate over the empire’s *lingua franca*: Lü Kun had argued, regarding dialect superiority, that “Luoyang sits between heaven and earth,” and thus produced the suitable dialect. Anne E. McLaren, “Written for the Ear, Audiences and Regionality in the Market for Plays in the Ming Period,” in Zhou Shengchun 周生春 and He Chaohui 何朝暉, eds., *Yinshua yu shichang* 印刷與市場 (Zhejiang: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2012), pp. 242–43.

¹⁵ For discussions of southern intellectuals, see Wilt L. Idema, “‘Blasé Literati’: Lü T’ien-ch’eng and the Lifestyle of the Chiang-nan Elite in the Final Decades of the Wan-li Period,” in W. L. Idema, ed. [R. H. van Gulik,] *Erotic Colour Prints of the Late Ming Period, with an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch’ing Dynasty, B.C. 206–A.D. 1644*, Sinica Leidensia 62 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. xxxi–lxii. See Tobie Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2003), p. 106, for early-Qing literati self-portraiture in the Jiangnan: “the familiar image of the fashionable personality, or *fengliu* 風流, provided one of the building blocks for early Qing cultural and social reconstruction.”

Through an alliance with the imagery of the stage, intellectuals claimed for themselves iconic roles in a glamorous, utopian counter-tradition.

The solemn tropes of the imperium were elaborate and authoritative. Descriptions of court events relied on the rhetoric of correlative thinking; human behavior produced supernatural echoes. Likewise, filial domestic life was allied with the auspicious and potent. Literati authors depicted the rival narrative of the Jiangnan as equally numinous. Relying on euphuism and the rhetoric of divine influences, they mystified aspects of nanfang performance culture. This was no easy task. City life in the urban south was vulgar and crowded, the artistic life they championed – opera – was demotic, and the figures they heralded as divine – the *changji* 娼妓 – were “mean persons” (*jianmin* 賤民). Yet, they wrestled with all the divergent features of performance culture and reshaped them as august and ominous. First among their devices was the glamorized portrayal of their own encounters with the *changji*, the actress-courtesans, the famed divas 姬 of the day.¹⁶ These meetings were presented in exalted vignettes, in social dramas, to use the phrase of Victor Turner.¹⁷ Writers depicted ostensibly ad hoc encounters as pregnant with high significance. Attending a play, holding a banquet, a rendezvous by a canal side, admiring a *changji* performance on horseback, all were portrayed as transcendent occasions that rivaled court events in import. If they elevated the status of the meeting of performer and literatus they also elevated the role of the music of the south. The

¹⁶ Although the expression *changji* applied generally to women of both base and very high statuses – from prostitute to literatus inamorata – the *changji* of these southern descriptions were typically divas, known for their skills in performing the highly challenging roles for the *chuanqi* stage. Indeed, for translating the euphuistic term *ji* 姬 in Ming texts, I prefer “diva,” which conveys expertise in performance. For example, Chen Yuanyuan 陳圓圓 (1624–1681), the famous courtesan-mate (*jiaou* 佳偶) of Mao Xiang, was characterized not as a seductive beauty but as a southern performer. The early-Qing writer Zou Shu 鄒樞 used a nuanced catalogue of terms for musicians of the Southland when describing her as a “... *kunqu* opera disciple from the song-diva class of Suzhou 姑蘇歌姬昆曲戲子” (Zou, *Shimeiciji* 十美詞記, in Zhang Chao 張潮 et al., eds., *Zhaodai congshu* 昭代叢書 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990], p. 3230). See also Lu Eting 陸萼庭, *Kunju yanchu shigao* 昆劇演出史稿 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1980), pp. 141–46.

¹⁷ Victor Turner, an early scholar in performance studies, used the term “social dramas” to describe scenes isolated from ordinary social life, configured as vignettes, accorded status and elevated as spectacle. He distinguishes these “ritualistic” performances from the thaumaturgic “rituals” of established orthodoxies. “Through the social drama we are enabled to observe the crucial principles of the social structure in their operation, (The social drama is a) manifestation of... the values and anti-values... which are revealed in the often passionate action of the social drama, ... (that) becomes part of the community’s reflexive store” Victor Witter Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), p. 94. See also Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1984), p. 42, who discusses cultural performance as “framed activities” and “bounded events.” For a summary of the field, see Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

performed sounds evoked majestic themes; a soulful, tear-soaked performance suggested, not a vulgar entertainment, but the elegant echoes of a tragically failing empire. Likewise, city culture was made to shine. Southern writers implied that the setting of these spectacles--the public forums of parks, city spaces and canal ways – were places of elegance and grandeur. Crowds and commerce notwithstanding, southern cities were configured as divine precincts.

The present inquiry is philological; the method of examination is close reading.¹⁸ I am concerned with the multiple rhetorical formulations and linguistic strategies used in essays, poetry, and fiction to convert regional performance culture into a narrative of the transcendent and marvelous. I am confining my data to the rhetoric and terms used in both Ming and early-Qing *changji*-literati encounters. I am not, though, seeking to pinpoint or describe actual instances of this kind of local pageantry. Through an examination of the language of these texts I will establish the specific ways literati deployed the narrative of a mystified performance culture. We will examine those in three sections:

1. *Southern intellectuals reconfigure the urban encounters of courtesan and intellectual as opera-like spectacles.* In cities or public parks, by canals and harbors, on riversides, in settings of daily life and commerce, beyond the confines of an actual theater, the literati and their companions mimicked Jiangnan opera tropes. Indeed, these were performance events, presented as public pageantry.
2. *Southern writers inscribe Jiangnan opera with an occult legitimacy.* Both the music and the courtesan-performer were allied with the voice of a fabled, sacred south. In this construct, local, indeed, vulgar musical expression tied man to the sublime. The courtesan, in particular in her musical performance, as well as in her speech, gestures, and affect, channeled the features of a mystified south.
3. *Writers of biji essay, poetry, and fiction portray the southern city as a new sacred space.* They elevated the roles of both the anonymous public (*zhong* 衆) and city (*shi* 市) to serve as a romanticized setting for literati performance events. The opera-like spectacles appeared

¹⁸ Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics* (Princeton: Princeton U.P. 1974), p. 19, argued that in the details of specific linguistic choices and strategies one may observe the larger patterns of an author's work or of a culture's narrative. The method of close reading reveals the large patterns of the macrocosm that lie within the microcosm of the page or of the sentence. Hence examining writers' word choices and what they meant is my chief method; it assumes the authors were word masters – classically trained men for whom writing was their métier and passion. For an example of Spitzer's textual analysis, see his "On Yeats's Poem 'Leda and the Swan,'" in Anna Hatcher, ed., *Essays on English and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1962), pp. 1-13. For a close reading of a Chinese text, see Edward H. Schafer, "Cantos on 'One Bit of Cloud at Shamanka Mountain,'" *Asiatische Studien* 36 (1982), pp. 102-24.

iconic and glamorous in the crowd-filled, yet mystified, spaces of the Southland.

The literatus–courtesan pageantry was a complex trope of southern self-definition, with espoused connections among opera performance, literati life, and cities, thus forming a familiar and cohesive narrative of regional identity.

THE PLAY AND THE SPECTACLE

Many have noted the importance of theater in Southland culture. Wilt Idema, Wang Shunu 王書奴, Zhao Shanlin 趙山林, Jing Shen, Li Jiaqiu 李嘉球, Sophie Volpp, and Cyril Birch,¹⁹ among many others, have noted the dedication to theater. Professional and amateur actors, folk and elite musicians, elite and vulgar writers and their publishers, male and female impresarios, connoisseurs and collectors, merchant admirers, owners of private acting troupes and courtesan-owners of performance spaces, elite male and female attendees to hermitage productions, noisy urban audiences, as well as readers – male and female – all revolved within the orbit of the Jiangnan stage. In the Southland opera was an “obsession,” as Wilt Idema termed it.²⁰ Southern writers did more, however, than delight in local opera; they depicted themselves as miming the plots and characters of opera traditions, turning to exemplars from the stage to pattern their own conduct off stage. They were self-declared *renwu* 人物 – persons of note – in stunning and exotic clothing, gesticulating in the grand manner, conspicuously recognizable to their public as *dramatis personae* from the pages of theater scripts. In those urban spaces mentioned and in settings of daily life and commerce, beyond the confines of an actual theater, they behaved as if before a theater audience. Neither were these events common in tone, nor small in scale. They were trumpeted events, appropriated from the mundane and presented as glamorous pageantry. Intellectuals exalted them as ritual-like, isolating them from the continuum of

¹⁹ The literature on the southern enthusiasm for opera – especially among elites – is extensive; the well known term was opera madness (*xi pi* 戲癖). For a selection of scholarship see Idema, “Blasé Literati,” pp. xxxi–lxii; Wang Shunu 王書奴, *Zhongguo changji shi* 中國娼妓史 (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2004), pp. 198–224; Zhao Shanlin 趙山林, *Zhongguo xiju xue tonglun* 中國戲劇學通論 (Anhui: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), pp. 267–87; Jing Shen, *Playwrights and Literary Games in Seventeenth Century China: Plays by Tang Xianzu, Mei Dingzuo, Wu Bing, Li Yu, and Kong Shangren* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 22–26; Volpp, *Worldly Stage*, pp. 173–90; Cyril Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins: The Elite Theater of the Ming* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1995), pp. 6–15; and Li Jiaqiu 李嘉球, *Suzhou liyuan* 蘇州梨園 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1998), pp. 92–96.

²⁰ Idema, “Blasé Literati,” p. xxxii.

the ordinary. In this section I am considering the multiple rhetorical devices and linguistic formulations used to convert offstage life into grandiose spectacles that replicated theatrical plots.

By way of example, we will look in detail at a famous romantic meeting from the *biji* by Mao Xiang 冒襄,²¹ *Recollections from the Plum Shadow Nunnery* (*Yingmei An yiyu* 影梅庵憶語). In this highly polished *biji* Mao narrates the nine-year affair between himself and his consort, Dong Bai. As with many accounts of literati encounters with courtesans, Mao Xiang recycles the usual conventions of the idealized romantic meetings. He is not, however, content to repeat the standard trope of the literatus in his study with his so-called “book-reviser.” Rather, he redeploys the encounter in the context of Jiangnan performance culture, reshaping the central courtesan and literatus (*caizi* 才子 and *jiaren* 佳人) as characters from plays and theater-life. If the courtesan and her lover are not on stage, they are observing the stage; or they are familiar as characters resembling the *renwu* of the stage. These highly mystified events are encoded consistently with theater rhetoric. In this specific selection Mao Xiang celebrates a banquet with his consort Dong Bai at the famous Peach Leaf Crossing Pavilion (Taoye shuige 桃葉水閣) in Nanjing. In it we will see the strategies used by Mao Xiang to superimpose theatrical tropes on the narrative of a public event of import, tying both literati and lover to Jiangnan performance culture. The year is 1642.

On the Qinhuai Canal of Nanjing at Mid-autumn Festival my friends – all of us fellow members of the same (Restoration) Society – came from all over the realm. They had all been moved by the dangers my consort had refused to yield to: the bandits and terrible storms. They all came along at the invitation, one after another; and on her behalf they arranged a spread of wine by the balconies along Peach Leaf Crossing. At that time we were gathered as well with Madam Gu of the Eyebrow Pavilion and Madam Li of the Cold Cultivation Studio. Both were related to my consort, Dong Bai. Of our guests, many came to celebrate with us, to show their admiration for my consort’s forming her alliance with me. 秦淮中秋日，四方同社諸友，感姬爲余不辭盜賊風波之險，開關相從，

²¹ Mao Xiang was one of the great southern clans, one of the “Four Lords of the Lower Yangtze.” The event takes place at the Mid-autumn Festival two years before the collapse of the Ming. For a biography of Mao Xiang and Dong Bai and an overview of his *biji*, see Ōki Yasushi 大木康, *Bō Jō to Eibai an okugo no kenkyū* 冒襄と影梅庵憶語の研究 (Tokyo: Kyukoshoin, 2010).

因置酒桃葉水閣，時在座爲眉樓顧夫人，寒秀齋李夫人，皆與姬爲至戚，美其屬余，咸來相慶。

On that day the new opera “The Message of the Swallow” was first performed.²² The melodies were steeped in love and sensuality. When we heard the parts in which Huo and Hua parted and rejoined, my diva’s tears fell, as did the tears of her friends, Gu Mei and Li Xiaoda. That was the time: of the man of talent (*caizi*) and the person of excellence (*jiaren*), of the pavilions and stages among “the mist and waters,” of newly sounding music under the bright moon. It was a time when every detail was sufficient for all the ages; and, thinking of it now, it was for me no different from a trip to the land of the transcendents, a phantasm dreamed up on a pillow. 是日新演燕子箋，曲盡情豔，至霍華離合處，姬泣下，顧、李亦泣下，一時才子佳人，樓臺煙水，新聲明月，俱足千古。至今思之，不異游仙枕上夢幻也。²³

In this passage, Mao Xiang presents a celebration during which his colleagues and allies acknowledge Dong Bai’s status. Mao Xiang himself asserts the importance of the event, mythologizing the courtesan and literati in order to have them appear grandly heroic in scale. He asserts that the encounter was a trip to the land of transcendents (*xian* 仙) “like a phantasm dreamed up on a pillow.” He declares as well that this episode is of historical moment, a time that was “in all details, sufficient for all the ages.” He claims, in fact, that this vignette has iconic status, displaying the familiar marks of courtesan narrative.²⁴ Thus, he notes the figures are not simply individuals; they fulfill prototypes. “That was the time – of the man of talent and the person of excellence.” Having manufactured a moment of high pageantry, Mao Xiang does not install the lovers among standard elite pastimes. Rather, in this lush moment “sufficient for all the ages” he shifts the focus to the conventions of the stage. From the characterization of the participants, to the focus of the banquet, to the lachrymose response of the female attendees, he threads the account with theater images. With this continuum

²² “Yanzi jian” 燕子箋, by Ruan Dacheng 阮大鍼 (1587–1646) is a *kunqu* opera involving a love triangle of the *caizi*, the *jiaren*, and virtuous beauty. Ruan was well known as both playwright and official, although his reputation was blackened by allegiance to the powerful eunuch Wei Zhongxian. After the fall of the Ming he served the Nanjing court of the Southern Ming for two years, before moving to Fuzhou. This production of “The Message of the Swallow” was also described by Zhang Dai in *Taoan meng yi*, j. 8.

²³ Mao Xiang 冒襄, *Yingmei An yiyu* 影梅庵憶語, in Zhang Chao 張潮 et al., ed., *Zhaodai congshu* 昭代叢書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), p. 3235. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

²⁴ For the use of goddess rhetoric applied to the *changji*, see Schafer, “Cantos on ‘One Bit of Cloud at Shamanka Mountain,’” p. 102.

of theatrical tropes off and on the stage, the scholarly gathering is absorbed into a performance narrative. Scholars and their consorts are rearranged as courtesans and their lovers; the entire spectacle becomes a layered conceit of the acting world.

As the vignette opens we see the grandees gathering. These famed southerners are gathered, however, not to feast on multiple courses, nor to chant poetry, nor to examine scrolls, but to watch the “Message of the Swallow.” All eyes are drawn to the performance. Of course, as Sophie Volpp has noted, intellectuals used “private theatricals” to “afirm ... connections with members of ... political societies.”²⁵ Mao, however, does more than portray the performance as useful occasion. He uses the theater, rather, as mimetic pattern. In this passage Mao Xiang transforms the banquet by creating an elaborate, layered narrative in which great men of the official class are redefined by the emotions, gestures, sounds, and settings of *kunqu* 昆曲 theater. Using dialogue and gesture immediately recognizable by the crowd as opera mimesis, Mao reshapes the banquet into a hall of mirrors, with *changji* (courtesans) and scholars watching *changji* and actors, who depict *changji* and scholars; all of them replicating the tropes of performance culture.

Mao is meticulous in his use of opera as exemplar. He first indicates the importance of the *kunqu* pattern by providing unusual details on the selection to be performed. He names the play – “The Message of the Swallow” (a *kunqu* opera); he mentions the characters (Scholar Huo Duliang 霍都梁 and the courtesan, Hua Xingyun 華行云), names a specific scene (parting and rejoining), and describes the lachrymose melodies sung. He then proceeds to use the scene and characters as prototype; Mao presents himself, Dong Bai, and her actress associates mimicking the actions of encounter and weeping that occur onstage. With these overlapping layers of opera mimesis, the stage performance becomes the metadrama. Dong Bai is characterized in the same terms as the heroine of the play; she appears to mimic Hua Xingyun. We are told she has conquered terrible dangers to arrive, traveling through bandits and storms to be with her lover. Her tortuous journey to Peach Leaf Crossing resembles the trials of the stage-lovers. Likewise do the other two actresses and the observer, Mao Xiang, seem to mimic the action on the stage. Actors and viewers are all characterized by a “larmoyant eroticism,” to use the phrase of David Hawkes. They are all steeped in “lush emotion 盡情豔,” the expression Mao uses to describe the play. The lush emotion they express, however, is directed at events offstage as well as onstage. Mao tells the reader at the beginning of

²⁵ Volpp, *Worldly Stage*, p. 189.

the memoir that his lover has died; the entire memoir is written in the context of romantic misery. The opening paragraph is ripe with elegiac sentiment: “My own brush has been saturated with tears and tarnished with grief.”²⁶ He echoes the roles of male lovers who grieve at the separations so typical in these watery settings, becoming the familiar weeping amanuensis of such events. Even the title of the book announces the misery-soaked tenor of the scenes within. The “Shadow Plum Nunnery” of the title is where Dong Bai is buried. The entire *biji* on their affair is itself patterned after *chuanqi* 傳奇 tragedy. Mao creates another layer of tragic romanticism in reminding the reader of the political echoes of the time-frame. The year is 1642: two years before the fall of the Ming. Thus, the women and men of this banquet event are all, in effect, characters in the tragedy of failed empire. While they weep for the fate of the characters onstage, they weep as well for their own tragic futures. Thus, the tone of the entire banquet-event is tear-soaked. Although this is an event of celebration 慶, it is as “larmoyant” as the play on stage.

This device – the play as template – is not exceptional in Ming texts. Just as Mao Xiang sets up the “Message of the Swallow” as interpretive structure for the account of Dong Bai’s meeting, so did other writers. Li Yu utilized the theater as an informing model for public events offstage. In his “Tan Chuyu 譚楚玉 conveys his love in the performance of a play, Liu Miaogu 劉藐姑 finishes her performance and sacrifices her life,” he uses the play performance as revelation of the authentic. The two actors – on the theatrical stage – create roles they will later assume offstage.²⁷ The celebrated *renwu* thus base their expressions of apparently deeply personal feelings on long-tested, publicly disseminated, immediately recognizable *dramatis personae* from the oral and textual traditions of southern theater.

Mao further exploits the theater-paradigm in the description of the audience’s response to the play. He tells us, “When we heard the parts in which Huo 霍 and Hua 華 parted and rejoined, my diva’s tears fell, as did the tears of her friends, Gu Mei and Li Xiaoda.” With this

²⁶ Mao, *Yingmei An yiyu*, p. 3232.

²⁷ Li Yu 李漁, “Tan Chuyu xili chuanqing, Liu Miaogu quzhong sijie” 譚楚玉戲禮傳情, 劉藐姑曲終死節, in idem, *Liancheng bi* 連城璧 (*Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小說集成; Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), vol. 34, j. 1. Feng Menglong also uses the device in the tale of Du Shiniang, as discussed below, in the sect. “The City and the Crowd.” Feng precedes the morning confrontation with an opera scene the previous night. On the boat, on the evening before the suicide, Du Shiniang “sings forth 歌出” a scene from the opera “Moon Pavilion” (“Bai yueting” 拜月亭) by Shi Junmei 施君美. As with Dong Bai at Peach Leaf Crossing, Du mimics the characters and emotions of the just-mentioned play when she is off stage. The play is the key, the musical cue, for the entire scene that follows.

weepy vignette we see finally that a banquet for the great men of politics has become a venue for the *qingyan* sentimentality of *kunqu*. Mao has effaced the role of the men and brought to the fore the actresses with their actorly rejoinder. They are, in fact, the only audience members of this great gathering that have a voice. Mao makes their lament heard and, in addition, specifically names them. To this point, in fact, no one has been named. The grandees of the south are introduced with some fanfare; they come from “all over the realm” (*sifang* 四方). Yet, for all their status, not one of them is mentioned specifically; and once announced, they subside into apparent silence. Dong Bai (referred to by the term diva 姬), Gu Mei 顧眉 (1619–1644),²⁸ and Li Xiaoda 李小大 (dates unknown) are the only *renwu* named. Having named them, Mao then amplifies their authority. He presents their weeping reactions, not as easy sentimentality, but as the meet response to a brilliant performance. Indeed, these women respond as informed professionals.

Nor would a Ming audience have failed to see these specific women as insiders, well positioned to fully acknowledge the performance before them. Dong Bai, Gu Mei and Li Xiaoda were all known as masters of the *qing*-soaked scene. They are *mingji* 名姬 – divas – of the southern stage. Dong Bai herself was a famous performer. Zhang Dai 張岱, in his *biji* on the late-Ming scene, titled *Taoan mengyi* 桃庵夢憶, rated Dong Bai as one of the three great opera singers of Suzhou. Dong Bai was ranked alongside Chen Yuanyuan 陳圓圓 (1624–1681). Both were established musicians in Suzhou opera culture;²⁹ and both came to Mao Xiang’s attention through performance culture. The two named guests, Li Xiaoda and Gu Mei, were also well known as performers. Zhang Dai characterized Gu Mei as expert in *kunqu* performance – comparable to Dong Bai.³⁰ Gu Mei in particular was allied with the stage. Yu Huai 余懷 (1616–1696), in *Flower Bridge Miscellany* (*Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記), notes her skills; “In the evening they took out the flutes and held up the pan pipes, and the Pear Garden women performed plays (*banyan* 扮演). The sounds were magnified to the ninth empyrean. Li Bian was the best, Gu Mei was next, and Cui Dun and Ma You were ranked after them.”³¹ As

²⁸ For treatment of Gu Mei and her relationship with Gong Dingzi, see Ying Zhang, “Politics and Morality during the Ming-Qing Dynastic Transition (1570–1670),” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 2010).

²⁹ Zhang Dai 張岱, *Tao an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶, “Guojian men” 過劍門, in vol. 57 of Yang Jialuo 楊家駱, ed., *Zhongguo biji xiaoshuo mingzhu* 中國筆記小說名著, Sibu kanyao 四部刊要 (Taibei: Shijieshuju, 1959), j. 7, p. 46.

³⁰ Zhang, *Tao an mengyi*, “Guojian men” 過劍門 7, p. 46.

³¹ Yu Huai 余懷, *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記, in Zhang Chao 張潮, ed., *Zhaodai congshu* 昭代叢書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), pp. 3147–48.

a musician she “kept instruments in her room and was a performer of *kunqu*.”³² She performed at very public venues, at temples, and at the elite settings known as “pure singing” events.³³ After two marriages, one to the rich merchant Wu Tianxing 吳天行, and the other to a doctor Xu 胥, she remained in the district as teacher “of music and dance.” In her youth she maintained a hall that was famous for orchestral performances, where “the performers would sing the most recent songs.”³⁴ The three specified women of this scene are prominent as musicians and impresarios.³⁵ Of course it has been widely noted that the famed courtesans were celebrated in, and aligned with, private spaces: in gardens, hermitage libraries and artist’s studios and on the private stages of gentry estates, in places of male privilege.³⁶ Mao Xiang exploits this private aspect of the courtesan-mates (*jiaou* 佳偶) in other passages. In this passage, however, he reminds the reader of the alliance of these courtesans with the stage. Women of performance culture are selected to perform the spectacle.

Other writers echoed Mao’s emphasis on the authority of the southern *changji*. Mao did not create the prototype; he repeated it. In the Ming the *jiaou* of the hermitage was not just of the hermitage. Rather she was portrayed as having social capital and professional authority based on her expertise as *kunqu* performer.³⁷ Li Yu implied, in fact, that

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 3147. Gu Mei’s marriage to Gong Dingzi 龔鼎孳 (1615–1673), scion of a great southern clan, was portrayed as mediated through the theater. Gu entered as a lowly *chang* 娼, but exited as Gong’s wife 婦人. Gong famously wrote an opera for her, now lost: “The Willow of White Gate” (“Baimen liu” 白門柳).

³⁴ Ibid., p. 3149.

³⁵ Mao Xiang notes that they regard one another as related 戚. This indication of pseudo-kinship, further implies a bond and special status among the women that is independent of the hermitage. They are kin, not through connections to male privilege, but through their shared status as *changji*.

³⁶ He, “Productive Space,” pp. 29–49; see also Judith Zeitlin, “‘Notes of Flesh’ and the Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth Century China,” in Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon, eds., *The Courtesan’s Arts: Cross Cultural Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford U.P.: 2006), p. 77. Jing Shen, *Playwrights and Literary Games in Seventeenth-Century China*, pp. 16–26, discusses networks of Jiangnan scholars dedicated to writing southern plays.

³⁷ *Changji* were known to be performers since the Han. During the Tang, they were trained from a young age for musical gatherings of officials; see Edward Schafer, “Notes on the Tang Geisha,” *Sinological Papers* 2 (1984), pp. 1–2. The Ming *changji* – no matter how elevated she became – was typically a woman who began her life as musician or dancer, or both. According to Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Xing shi hengyan* 醒世恒言 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), j. 3, p. 36: “Before entering the public realm, she is trained in “blowing wind instruments, plucking pipa, in song and in dance.” Anders Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts: Discrimination and Emancipation in Late Imperial China*, Sinica Leidensia 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 55–71, has noted that musical performance was one obligation of their class: the *chang*, by order of the imperial government, performed for holiday occasions. Andrea S. Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1700–1900* (Stanford: Stanford U.P.,

the great *jiaren* were, in effect, great opera performers, asserting that the roles of *chang* 娼 and actors (*you* 優) were interchangeable. “In these days these two women of the lowest class (*chang* and *you*) are linked together, in their both being performers of opera 做戲的人.”³⁸ The Ming writer Yu Shuhuan 徐樹還 asserted that the distinction between actress (*you*) and paid intimate (*ji*) had vanished. “In recent times, we see that these women are really “*changji cum* actors 娼兼優, because they are all trained and all perform as musicians.”³⁹ Scholars have also noted the alliance of *jiaren* with the role of *nüxi* 女戲 actress. Ōki Yasushi 大木康 has noted that courtesans are frequently portrayed as performers.⁴⁰ These women of the elite gathering would thus be recognized as southern actresses and, indeed, have great status *qua* performers. They were accorded great capital based in performance; and the weeping acknowledgement of the emotion on stage would have summoned up a sense of their own expertise. Thus, Mao has placed them, not as appendages to the gathering, but as the focus, because they, indeed, set the narrative.

Mao Xiang is not content to merely transform the gathering into an extended southern theater trope. In addition, he argues for the primacy of such a configuration. He depicts this theatrical mimicry and, at the same time, plays advocate of the avant-garde. In this terse depiction he implies a new ideal: a new orthodoxy to rival old orthodoxies. He deliberately evokes an “appeal to the future,” using an argument noted by Renato Poggioli in his treatment of the avant-garde.⁴¹ Pog-

2012), pp. 50–52, notes that in the “flower registers” of the Qing, intellectuals used performance skills in the ranking system of female impersonator-actors; and the class designation for both of them in the legal codes of Ming and Qing was “musician, *yuehu* 樂戶.” See Jiang Yonglin, trans., *The Great Ming Code: Da Ming Lü*, Asian Law Series (Seattle and London: U. Washington P., 2005), p. 87.

³⁸ Li, “Tan Chuyu xili,” p. 9. Elsewhere in the same story he argues that, in the Ming, “the *prima donna* (*nüdan* 女旦) is found in the *changji* ranks 女旦就出於在娼妓裡..., as well as from the ranks of actors (*you*).” He also notes that although the *nüdan* did “take guests,” she did not take them “casually.” “Therefore the *nüdan* from this region know the principle that one does not form liaisons lightly 這一方女旦知道這種道理再不肯輕易接人” (ibid., p. 9). Li does note that the two can differ: “As for *prima donnas* who come out of the *changji* life, during the day they perform in plays, and at night they entertain guests 日間做戲夜間接客” (ibid., p. 6). Terminology for actress-courtesans could conflate the roles of intimate consort and professional actress (e.g., *changyou* 娼優, *mingji* 名姬, 名妓, *lingji* 伶妓). Li Yu’s terminology for such women implied that concubines of the household were in fact public actresses; he refers to the young concubine-performers of his own household as *jiqie* 姬妾 (diva-concubine). Elsewhere he refers to these same *jiqie* 姬妾 as actors (*youren* 優人) and as singers (*yanchang* 演唱).

³⁹ Lu, *Kunju yanchu shigao*, p. 143, cit. Yu Shuhuan’s 徐樹還 *Zhixiaolu* 誌小錄.

⁴⁰ Ōki Yasushi, *Chūgoku yūri kukan: Min Shin Shinwai gijo no sekai* 中國遊里空間, 明清秦淮妓女の世界 (Tokyo: Seidonsha, 2002), pp. 185–91.

⁴¹ See Poggioli’s discussion of “futurism” in the discourse of the avant-garde; *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1981), pp. 67–84.

gioli argues that advocates of proposed social alternatives exploit the terminology of the modern. Mao ascribes a superior value to the trope using the language of currency, language that suggests substitution, a “new” to replace the old. Mao makes two references to the “new” in the passage. He tells us that not only is the *kunqu* opera “new” (*xinsheng* 新聲), but it is newly performed: *xinyan* 新演.⁴² The opera is conspicuously unfamiliar, fresh, current. Mao also conveys a sense of alternative orthodoxy with the use of the term *shu* 屬 to describe the occasion of the spectacle. He tells us that the men and women have gathered to celebrate the alliance of this *caizi* and *jiaren*. The use of the term *shu* implies occasion and formality; instead of a mere meeting of lovers, it is a bond of consequence. The *shu*-alliance, however, is not quite a marriage, it has a degree of substance, but is not an actual marriage rite; this is the Southland version. Likewise there is a sense of avant-garde challenge in the reference to the Restoration Society. He tells us the status of the men who gather to admire the courtesan and her lover. They are from among the greats of local society – members who had in the preceding decades suffered at the hands of the infamous court intrigues of the North. These were the noble reformers, the noble southerners. The sense of the new and exotic is implied elsewhere in Mao Xiang’s work. In another vivid encounter, Mao Xiang notes that the skirt worn by Dong Bai is an alien product, introduced by a foreigner, a Jesuit. With such terms, Mao posits a new and rival ideal that informs a counter-tradition. With these “appeals to the future” we see a self-conscious awareness of status: status that does not derive from traditional sources of court and family, but from a southern, urban source, shaped by the language of Jiangnan performance culture.⁴³

It has been noted that there are “performative,” “histrionic” and “theatrical” elements in Ming literati gatherings.⁴⁴ I would agree, and further argue that literati-courtesan gesture is performative in specific ways. Mao Xiang in this passage depicts the events and characters of *kunqu* and then, in turn, portrays himself and his companions as mim-

⁴² Kathryn Lowry, *The Tapestry of Popular Songs in 16th- and 17th-Century China: Reading, Imitation, and Desire* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 80–85.

⁴³ The rhetoric of advocacy and of newness is found in other Ming writers. Yuming He has noted the “appeal of an urban ‘counterculture’” in publications of urban sayings and anecdotes about urban life; Yuming He, *Home and the World: Editing the Glorious Ming in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 2013), pp. 87–95. Katherine Lowry has noted the “the rubric of currency” (*shang* 尙) used by authors and publishers to establish a specific type of validity for books; Lowry, *Tapestry of Popular Songs*, pp. 81–88.

⁴⁴ See especially Sophie Volpp’s discussion of “theatrical spectacle and social spectacle”; *Worldly Stage*, pp. 28–36.

ing the stage events. He thus rewrites the literati gathering as centered, not around the piercing beauty of the natural realm, nor around the glories of literati accomplishments, but around the emotional currents and gestures of the stage. Having seized on the language of the stage, moreover, he glorifies the encounter as “sufficient for all the ages.” Thus, through brilliant performance the intellectual and the courtesan are lifted from quotidian to magical. The public performances that mimic opera can rival the standard rituals of the age. The female performer – as the proficient oral archivist of local theatrical traditions was, in this construct, the necessary actor. She achieved center stage, now markedly important in the role Mao cast for her, while he, as observer, serves as her weeping amanuensis.

REGIONAL PERFORMANCE AND THE SACRED VOICE

Literati writers were not content to mime opera; they also mystified it. Performance culture of the Jiangnan assumed a grandiose significance. If intellectuals shaped the spectacle around opera, they first configured opera as weighty archetype, pregnant with nativist themes; they burdened local opera with a morose cosmology. Just as the stately modes and tunes of court music had been ascribed cosmic resonance, so – in this construct – did local musical expression tie man to the sacred. For the literatus, Jiangnan music reified the spirit of the Southland, serving as the sacred voice of a mystified terrain. Through its tonalities the singer revealed the authentic expression of a sacred local identity. As Zhang Dai remarks in the following passage describing a cherished performer: “Her elemental nature and fate lay in opera 性命于戲.” Music is both nature and fate for southerners. Nor are the listeners exempt from this typology. Connoisseurs of all classes are transfigured by performance, transformed into recipient vehicles for the mystery of Southland identity. Of course, the sacred voice of the terrain was autumnal; opera, performance events, and performers were darkly mystified. Yet the absence of the rhapsodic did not undermine the importance of music. Indeed, in the debate over “authenticity” (*bense* 本色) in the arts, intellectuals argued for the primacy of local musical forms.⁴⁵ In this construct, female musicians were of use. They retained, through their primal qualities, the discourse spaces of the demotic; they were the useful hybrid creatures that provided access to the local and, thereby,

⁴⁵ For an overview on the extensive debate on *bense*, see Guo, *Ming Qing chuanqi shi*, pp. 229–34; also Jing Shen, “*Bense* in Ming Drama Criticism,” *CHINOPERL Papers* 24 (2002), pp. 1–33.

the authentic. Such assumptions about the courtesan were not based purely on sentiment. Literati writers claimed that female performers – whether classified as *jiaren*, *chang*, *ji*, or *you* – were rigorously trained in powerful techniques that were binding, no less so for their not being bookish. The Jiangnan courtesan, master of the complex arts of *chuanqi* performance, occupies center stage of the theater narrative. Together with the connoisseur, miming plays in impromptu spectacles, she becomes the incarnation of nativist themes.

One depiction of a literati-courtesan spectacle is encoded with the central features of their argument on music and place. The author is Zhang Dai, already mentioned and quoted, above. He was famous in the late Ming for urbane descriptions of elite life in the south. In his *Taoan mengyi* 陶庵夢憶 he describes his own encounter with the beauty Zhu Chusheng 朱楚生. This description does not merely record a specific moment in Zhang Dai's life, it also records a resonant paradigm. With his observations on Zhu Chusheng's demeanor, appearance, affect, and attitude as well as on her skills, repertoire, training, and artistic sources, we find a late-Ming manifesto on the courtesan connection – through music – to the Southland. With this asserted lineage, the courtesan encounter serves as tendentious metaphor for the literati connection to the mystified Jiangnan.

Zhu Chusheng was a female opera performer, a performer of Diaoliang opera (Shaoxing opera). In both gesture and voice she was expertly subtle, so that even a court opera star could not rival her. It is probable that Master Yao Yicheng of Siming (Ningbo), who was a genius in pitches and modes, made a meticulous study of the intimate features (of the art form) with Zhu Chusheng and her group, until they achieved a great subtlety in the inner principles. Thus, for plays such as “Snow by the River,” “The Shining Sword” and “The Person in the Painting,” even the senior master-teachers of the Kunshan region, though they recreated her performances with exactitude, could not add a whisper of improvement. In terms of the troupe members and their artistic level, in cases of their being good enough to enhance Chusheng, only then did she keep them. Thus, the troupe itself became, in turn, still more refined in its subtlety. 朱楚生，女戲耳，調腔戲耳。其科白之妙，有本腔不能得十分之一者。蓋四明姚益城先生精音律，嘗與楚生輩講究關節，妙入情理，如“江天暮雪”、“霄光劍”、“畫中人”等戲，雖昆山老教師細細摹擬，斷不能加其毫末也。班中腳色，足以鼓吹楚生者方留之，故班次愈妙。

Her appearance was not that beautiful, but even the extraordinary women of excellence did not have that air of romantic mood.

Refined and willowy, her solitary nature was expressed in her brow line, her deeply passionate essence was in her lashes, and a quality of sensibility was in the smoky look and bewitching walk. 楚生色不甚美，雖絕世佳人，無其風韻。楚楚謾謾，其孤意在眉，其深情在睫，其解意在煙視媚行。

Her elemental nature and fate lay in opera. She set herself to the art of opera with all her might. If, in the performance of a line of music, she erred, and then one suggested the most minor of corrections, even if it took months, she would excise the error you mentioned. When Zhu Chusheng sat lost in thought, steeped all through in *qing*, she would seem adrift and volatile. One day we stood on a bridge together. The day was growing dusk, the fires were lit and the surrounding trees were darkening. She lowered her head and was quiet; her tears fell like rain. When I asked her (about her thoughts), she only made some trivial remark in reply. She was a woman who was vexed by grievances; eventually she did, indeed, die of *qing*. 性命于戲，下全力爲之。曲白有誤，稍爲訂正之，雖後數月，其誤處必改削如所語。楚生多坐馳，一往深情，搖颺無主。一日，同余在定香橋，日晡煙生，林木宵冥，楚生低頭不語，泣如雨下，余問之，作飾語以對。勞心忡忡，終以情死。⁴⁶

Written in the condensed code of the era, the account reproduces many of the same elements already discussed; the southern waterway, the adoring literatus, the weepy courtesan, the sense of high import expressed in a tone of *doloroso*. There is a sense of spectacle as well, with two celebrated *renwu* miming *qing*-soaked theatrical roles. Like Dong Bai, Gu Mei and Li Xiaoda, this woman – Zhu Chusheng – is a southern musician in a mystified Jiangnan setting. As with the mates in excellence (*jiaou*), examined above, she is both *changji* and *jiaren* – seeming to merge the statuses of both. In this passage, moreover, Zhang Dai carefully characterizes the courtesan as symbol; she becomes, in his portrayal, the reification of the elemental spirit of the south. With an array of casuistic argument he establishes that specific traits transform performance and the performer into living embodiments of the south. Intellectuals may have manufactured a tautology, but they did it meticulously. Zhang Dai formulates three features of the performer and performance culture in this depiction: 1. Music, musician, and place are linked by shared metaphysical traits; all three are of the same typology,

⁴⁶ Zhang, *Tao an mengyi*, pp. 45–46; see Zhang Dai, *Souvenirs rêves de Tao'an*, trans. with notes by Brigitte Teboul-Wang (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), also a brief discussion and partial translation of this passage in Jonathan D. Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain: Memories of a Late Ming Man* (New York: Viking, 2007), p. 45.

evincing the same lush, sensual and “feminine” amplitude, the same *qi* 氣. 2. Southern opera is mystified as the authentic national voice. The music of the Southland is the alternative orthodoxy. 3. Opera is a complex and rigorous art form bound to the local through a lineage of local teachers. The specific form of training, *viva voce* from teacher to disciple, aligns the music with place.

Through his description of a courtesan, Zhang Dai posits a congruency of features, formulating a three-part alliance of land, song, and singer. All three are defined by supposed aspects of the south: all three are characterized by the sensual, the emotional, the tremulous, and the tragic. Thus, as conduit for the music and the land, the *changji* does not manufacture the southern sounds; she releases them. Zhang Dai dedicates much of the passage to Zhu’s capacity to serve as musical vessel. He lays great emphasis on her physical traits: her body, her manner of movement, her facial features and affect, constructing an identification of her body with the music itself. Zhu Chusheng reverberates and amplifies the music; she is *Jiangnan* music made flesh.

Zhang Dai, thus, maps her features, charting her “refined and willowy” (*chuchu susu* 楚楚謏謏) manner, and “bewitching walk 在煙視媚行,” the “passionate essence 其深情” located in her lashes, and a “quality of sensibility 其解意” that was evident in the steamy look. Zhang tells us as well that she is deeply romantic 風韻, a vehicle for *qing*, “steeped all through in *qing* (emotion) 一往深情”; and, as already noted, she eventually dies of *qing*. Music and women share the same terms of soft and sensual as well; the human and the artistic are both described as yielding and soft, and oblique and “turning.” *Nanqu* sounds are “flowingly fine and gently turning 流麗婉轉” and “softly sensual 柔媚” in the words of Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593).⁴⁷ Mao Xiang characterized the lines of opera performed at Peach Leaf Crossing in similar terms, noting that the lines of opera are full of love and sensuality 情豔. If courtesan and music are of the same larmoyant eroticism, they share other traits as well. They share qualities of allusiveness. As we saw above, Zhu Chusheng is said to have a tremulous quality. She is “adrift and volatile 搖颺無主.” Likewise, Southland music is said to display the same qualities of the disturbed and unmoored. Xu Wei’s essay “On Southern Ci” (“Nanci xulu” 南詞叙錄) famously observed that southern music, “is as if cast adrift in a breeze, having lost your bearings.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Xu Wei 徐渭, *Nanci xulu zhushi* 南詞敘錄注釋, ed. Li Fubo 李復波 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1989), p. 76.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; the whole passages reads: 南曲則紆徐綿眇, 流麗婉轉, 使人飄飄然喪其所守而不自覺, 信南方之柔媚也。

Indeed, this specific sensibility was thought to reside in all southern women. Nor was the property acquired. It was part of their essential geographical inheritance. The peculiar erotic sensibility was labeled by using a geographical term, “the Jiang-Zhe style 江浙式.” Like the music, Southland women have beauty that is “softly obliging 溫柔” and “yieldingly graceful 婷婷娟好.”⁴⁹ Thus Zhu Chusheng’s presentation, from eyebrow to manner of walking, is suggestive, graceful, yielding, the correct vehicle for music that is of the same typology. This manner of the Jiangnan musician is found as well in female impersonators. According to Lu Rong 陸容 (1436–1494), female impersonators of the south display the Jiangnan style. In his *Shu yuan zaji* 菽園雜記 he describes troupes of singer-actors (*changyou* 倡優) who are called “opera disciples 戲文子弟.” These female-miming performers are dedicated to the “performance of *quanqi* love stories.” “Those who perform as women are called female impersonators 妝旦, and they are soft-voiced and graceful of step 柔聲緩步.”⁵⁰ Their soft and sensual manner is the suitable vehicle for producing the specific emotional content of this music.

Finally, the details Zhang Dai presents concerning Zhu Chusheng’s body, gesture, and temperament are allied with the details of her terrain. He situates the tremulous interview on a bridge over a southern waterway. Of course, she is residing in the south; but this woman is more than an inhabitant of the Southland, she is linked by her own body type and by her essential physicality to its natural features. Standing by southern waters, weeping into the water, she is somatically Southern. Like Du Shiniang and Dong Bai, she is the being that, by the logic of the narrative, is found just there. Her locality, features, and nature, as well as her musicianship, are all aligned.

There is nothing exceptional in this alliance of landscape and body types. Zhang Dai has in fact reached into the standard thesaurus of Jiangnan rhetoric. For Ming and Qing writers there was an inherent analogical association of body-type, music, and place.⁵¹ The web of associations encoded in the Ming “geographic imagination” figured powerfully in the portrayal of music and musicians. The performer

⁴⁹ Xie, *Wu za zu* 8, p. 7a.

⁵⁰ Lu Rong 陸容, *Shu yuan zaji* 菽園雜記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p. 124, describes female impersonators as a feature of *nanfang* cities.

⁵¹ See Antonia Finnane, *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550–1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), pp. 213–35. Also see Dorothy Ko, cit. Zhang Dai who describes Yangzhou as a center of the training and buying of female performers. Ko also cites a Qing gazetteer; “They are born not to weave or spin/ But to learn songs and dances”; *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1994), pp. 262–63.

was a native product – like the sour-peel orange – arising specifically out of the southern terrain, lushly erotic and sensual. One essayist, Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567–1624), provided the metaphor with a meta-physical interpretive structure, configuring the women of the Jiangnan as local emanations. Xie’s encyclopedia of Ming customs, *Wu za zu* 五雜俎, claimed that the lush natures of southern women must, literally, be something in the water: “Weiyang (Yangzhou) sits between heaven and earth and its waterways and bounteous marshlands 川澤 nurture 秀 what is charming in women. Therefore, the women there are rich in beauty, their natural temperament is obliging, and their comportment is amiably clever; they are all rich in what people like to call their ‘*qi* of marsh-like bounty 澤氣.’ By and large they are adored for their *qi* 氣 of refinement. No other region in China can rival this.”⁵² Larded with metaphors of landscape and agriculture, the passage is a riot of vegetation. Xie, in full control of the tautology, uses the word *ze* 澤 twice: once applied to land, meaning bounteous marshlands or wetlands, the second time meaning fertility or bounty – applied to women – creating an inclusive typology of marshy fertility. He argues that the women are “rich in 多” certain qualities, the verb commonly used in official catalogs of local products; the landscape nurtures 秀 women, as it nurtures local fauna and flora; and both the region 方 and the women are characterized by the common essence – *qi* – believed to circulate among related phenomena.⁵³ Women of the Jiangzhe area are a local product, like grapes.

Other Ming-Qing authors made the association among music, locale, and women’s bodies equally explicit. Li Yu exploited the paradigm in his famous story of an acting family of the Jiangnan; he described the upbringing and, indeed, breeding of the child destined by land and blood to become a woman of the musical stage. Li Yu asserted a close connection between a southern singer and southern places. He explained, “Of course, disciples of the Pear Garden practice their profession everywhere, but talents of the *prima donna* (*nüdan* 女旦) are particularly produced 出在 in this region of Quzhou (in Zhejiang). We find this because the roles (*jiaose* 腳色) of the *prima donna* were a natural product (*tuchan* 土產) of this region 方. Those sorts of extra qualities of deportment 體態 and voice 聲音 obtain to place 地方. On the one hand,

⁵² Xie, *Wu za zu* 8, p. 7a.

⁵³ For discussions of “the climactic *qi* of southern regions (*Nanfang* 南方)” applied to landscapes, diseases and somatic types see Marta Hanson, *Speaking of Epidemics in Chinese Medicine: Disease and the Geographic Imagination in Late Imperial China*, Needham Research Institute series (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 58–59.

it is due to geomantic imperatives 風水; and on the other hand, is in the *qi* of their bones 骨氣.⁵⁴ A courtesan is not just an entertainer; she is the open channel for the mystified sound. Conversely, her status is elevated by her specific access to the music. She is the best chamber for amplifying the Jiangnan voice. Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒 (1536–1621) most clearly articulated this argument on the courtesan in his various writings on opera. He discussed the concept of “sound” (*yin* 音), asserting that specific types of sound are brought forth from different instruments. He contrasted the sounds produced by reed or pipe (*zhu yin* 竹音) with sounds produced by the body or flesh (*rouyin* 肉音).

In terms of sound that is received straight from heaven: it is true only of flesh sounds (*rouyin*). Of old it was said, “the bamboo (sound) is not as good as the flesh (sound):” bamboo sound is said to lack the natural 自然. How then can the two of these be confused? The strength of the bamboo sound 竹音 can be said to cut stone and be gut wrenching. Whereas the subtlety of the flesh sound can devastate the soul and make the listener die of *qing*. 受音于天, 惟肉也獨。古云: 竹不如肉。謂乏自然。然二者胡可淆也, 故竹音勁者可以裂石; 可以斷腸。肉音微者可以魂銷, 可以情死。⁵⁵

Pan’s emphasis on the singer as physical vehicle is not surprising. In this construct, the singer is configured as a channel. Judith Zeitlin’s treatment of Pan Zhiheng’s theory notes as well that flesh sounds are best produced by female musicians.⁵⁶ Zhang Dai’s portrayal of Zhu Chusheng echoes the paradigm. Her body type, her character, the sense of her “fate being bound to opera,” upon which she “expended all her strength 下全力爲之,”⁵⁷ and her immersive dedication all make her the correct vessel. She does not so much create the music, as release it. The Russian *prima ballerina* Natalia Makarova observed that dancers “are trained to eat the dances – to ingest them and make them part of who they are.”⁵⁸ The courtesan was likewise corporeal in her access to and creation of the Jiangnan voice. Zhu Chusheng is, like the land and the

⁵⁴ Li, “Tan Chuyu xili chuanqing,” p. 5.

⁵⁵ Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒 and Wang Xiaoyi 汪效倚, *Pan Zhiheng quhua* 潘之恆曲話 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1988), p. 28.

⁵⁶ See her discussion of *rouyin* 肉音, and its alliance especially with the *changji* of the south in “Notes of Flesh,” esp. pp. 80–81. Lowry, *Tapestry of Popular Songs*, pp. 8–9 and 330–31, cit. Pan Zhiheng, notes the alliance of *qing*, not just with music, but with the spoken dialect. “Pan claimed the Wu dialect with its soft pronunciation ‘easily alters one’s feeling and stirs the soul.’”

⁵⁷ Zhao, *Zhongguo xiju xue tonglun*, pp. 581–93, discusses the use of the closely related phrase 性明以之, as applied to other actors.

⁵⁸ Jennifer Homans, *Apollo’s Angels: A History of the Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), p. xix.

music, tremulous, erotic, and water-bound. Nor does her essential basic nature (*ziran*) or corporeal sound (*rouyin*) diminish her in the eyes of the literati. Rather, through her physicality, she becomes the useful conduit for the local sound.

As misery-soaked performer, however, Zhu Chusheng is not just a local heroine. Rather, in her portrait there are echoes of national identity. Her profound sadness – “she is steeped all through in *qing*” and “vexed by her worries 勞心忡忡” – and her stance on the bridge weeping: all these features do not just refer to local identity. Her morose performance implies as well the context of fallen empire. Indeed, many scholars have noted the political overtones of the Ming courtesan portrayals. Wai-yee Li has argued that the courtesan in Qing sources served as symbol of the collapse of the Ming. Writers such as Yu Huai and Kong Shangren 孔尚任, she observed, linked “courtesan culture to personal loss, the end of a dynasty, and the destruction of a culture.”⁵⁹ In “Lament for Jinling” from “Peach Blossom Fan” (*Taohua shan* 桃花扇), Kong Shangren associates “loyalist sentiments toward the dynasty” with the destruction of the courtesan district.⁶⁰ Mao Xiang relies on this trope in the first passage examined. He conveys a sense of imminent danger in the passage at Peach Leaf Crossing. The city of Nanjing is surrounded by bandits and we know that the courtesan will die as the empire is overrun. Zhang Dai relies on this construct in his *Dreamlike Recollections of West Lake* (*Xihu mengxun* 西湖夢尋), allying southern music and performance-events with the deep feelings of loss for the vanished order of the Ming. His description of Hangzhou is prefaced by the description of the fall of the Ming and the destruction of the city. “When I returned those two times to West Lake – in 1654 and 1657 – I passed through Yongjin Gate, to the Shang clan properties with their towers, the Qi clan with their hermitage, then to Qian and Yu clan country houses, and, finally, along to our own Sojourning Garden. Of all that swathe of lake properties there was nary a tile or stone remaining.”⁶¹ The subsequent descriptions of the glamorous city are placed firmly in the context of the city’s destruction; indeed the paean to the city is an oblique indictment of the Manchu conquest.

Likewise, the music itself symbolized the failure of empire. The eroticism of the music notwithstanding, the cultural referent was the epic of empire. Multiple writers aligned southern music with the fall

⁵⁹ Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan,” p. 47.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶¹ Zhang Dai, “Zixu” 自序, in *Xihu mengxun* 西湖夢尋 (Zhejiang: Zhejiang sheng xinhua chubanshe, 2010), p. 1.

of dynasties; for them the lush tonalities carried the frisson of national tragedy. Qing writers allied it with the fall of the Ming; and Ming writers allied it with the fall of the Song. Lu Rong, in his *Shu yuan zaji*, described the musical performances he observed in a number of southern locales, noting the emotion-rich sounds and the weeping responses. He assigned the music a Song dynasty referent: “This is because this *chuanqi* music likely derives from music connected to the loss of the Southern Song state 南宋亡國之音.”⁶² Other intellectuals asserted that *Jiangnan* music mourned the Song collapse. Xu Wei noted about *nanqu* 南曲: “This is truly the nature of the soft and sensual sound of the south 南方. It is a case of – as we say, ‘the sounds of a perished kingdom are expressions of grief 亡國之音哀以思: 是已.’”⁶³ In his articulation of the origins of southern music, Xu clearly signaled the conventionality of the idea; using the expression—“as we say,” or “so-called” 謂, reminding the reader of what the reader knows well. Others concurred. Zhou Xuanwei 周玄暉 and Wei Liangfu 魏良輔 both allied southern elegiac music with the heroic retrieval of culture following the establishment of the Ming.⁶⁴ The mournful tunes of “the south” were hymns, fossil forms from an era of greatness. This politicized feature of southern music did not simply apply to the sorrowful events of the Song dynasty, however. Writers of the Qing linked elegiac performance with the Ming collapse. The play “Peach Blossom Fan” relies extensively on the trope of southern music as dirge for the lost Ming state.

As the once true voice of the former era, Jiangnan music was configured thus as orthodox, not exotic. Writers claimed the southern voice was the authentic music of the empire itself, the genuine national voice. Xu Wei’s manifesto on southern music famously disparaged music of the north as oomp-pah-pah music: crude, brassy and, indeed, not Chinese: “The music of the Plains (of the North) is largely foreign (*hu* 胡) in origin... . Hearing northern tunes (*qu*) stirs one’s mood and spirit, rendering one as fierce and martial as the soaring falcon.”⁶⁵ But such sounds, Xu argues, are “no longer the correct sounds of previous generations.” Rather, they are musical fakery: “The music of the Plains is “nothing more than the fraudulent production by the remnants of those barbarians from the distant borderlands 不過處於邊鄙裔夷之偽造

⁶² Lu, *Shu yuan zaji*, p. 124.

⁶³ Xu, *Nanci xulu zhushi*, p. 76. The classical origins of this expression in the *Liji* enhance the sense of dignity in the phrase; see Richard Mather, trans., *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World [By Liu I-ch’ing, with Commentary by Liu Chün]* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), pp. 358–59.

⁶⁴ Cited by Li, *Suzhou liyuan*, p. 40.

⁶⁵ Xu, *Nanci xulu zhushi*, p. 76.

耳。”⁶⁶ With this insult, Xu Wei reclaimed centrality for southern music. Intellectuals exalted the importance of the local in literature as well, claiming they too came from “authentic” sources.⁶⁷ Jiangnan voices – whether of the Song or Ming era – were seen as the weeping hymn to the original, authentic polity. Thus, it was argued, the elegiac tunes of opera emerge from the south out of cosmic necessity, as *qi* emerges from the earth. The watery landscape gives voice to the lush sounds. Music is the noise, not from the south, but of the south. The female performer is likewise privileged as the open channel for the emitted voice. The *changji* was the meet instrument for the musical emanations from the land.

If land, sound, and performer were gathered in the same typology, then musical training per se forged another link from music to land. Zhang Dai, in the passage bearing his long description of Zhu Chusheng (see above, in this section), argues that the specifics of her musicianship reveal an observable lineage of complex musical traditions in the south. Zhang emphasizes the oral transmission of her art. Great southern opera was conveyed directly from one generation to the next generation among performers of the southland; musical training passes, he implies, viva voce from teacher to disciple. Zhang is specific and redundant in emphasizing the personal and oral as opposed to the bookish. He tells us that as a specialist in the music of Shaoxing, Zhu Chusheng has acquired her expertise from another southerner, a “Master Teacher of Ningbo.” We are told as well that she is measured against arts of the senior masters of the Kunshan region. Finally, she, in turn, maintains by oral tradition the skills of her own troupe. “In terms of the troupe members and their artistic level, in cases of their being good enough to enhance Chusheng, only then did she keep them.” Within this one passage there is a cacophony of southern voices that shaped the voice of Zhu Chusheng and her troupe members – none of whom having emerged from the court or the hermitage. The tradition of opera training was, according to Zhang Dai, a demotic lineage from demotic sources.⁶⁸ This transmission through the medium of her

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶⁷ Katherine Lowry has noted that in the debate over literary orthodoxies vulgar poetic forms such as the *shange* 山歌 were elevated; *Tapestry of Popular Songs*, pp. 251–54.

⁶⁸ Lowry, *Tapestry of Popular Songs*, p. 325, n. 138: “The musicologist Dai Ning has written on musical culture of the pleasure quarters, and calls the courtesans the principal ‘artery’ through which new tunes were absorbed into the popular song tradition,” cit. Dai Ning 戴寧, “Mingqing shiqi Qinhuai qinglou yinyue wenhua chutan” 明清時期秦淮青樓音樂文化初探, in *Zhongguo yinyue xuekan* 中國音樂學季刊 (1997.3), pp. 40–54. Also see Zeitlin, “Notes of Flesh,” pp. 87–90.

voice, however, is not portrayed as evanescent or unreliable. Rather it permits a deep connection to the idealized Jiangnan. Of course, as Anne McLaren has established, literati writers concerned with raising “the status of the nanxi form” did not, in fact, “use southern speech styles and song modes.”⁶⁹ They retreated from the local and sought, rather, to correct, in other words elevate, the language of local opera. Yet, many literati writers romanticized the courtesan as a masterful adept of the local and vernacular.

Zhang Dai was not alone in his allying the arts of oral performance to the local. Li Yu describes a family of *you* – actors – who raise their daughter in the tradition of opera; in the story he notes the importance of local teachers and clan instruction, praising the actor’s preparation as based in parent-child, oral transmission.⁷⁰ Likewise Zhang Dai in another passage notes that a performer – the male actor Peng Tianxi 彭天錫 – meticulously passed on the traditions of his teachers. He notes that Peng is the “most brilliant of actors who, for every minute of his performance, had a specific predecessor; he would never fabricate or invent even one word 彭天錫串戲妙天下，然齣齣皆有傳頭，未嘗一字杜撰。”⁷¹ Other Ming writers explored the role of intimate instruction through clan or family training. Family members who performed are typically portrayed as teachers. *Flower Bridge Miscellany* mentions *changji* who were trained by their mothers, as well as courtesans who became teachers after they grew too old to perform. Likewise, intellectuals noted the rigor involved in training that began in childhood. The Suzhou troupe “Shuang Qing 雙清” owned by Aunt Gu employed child-actors. These girls started out in choral performance at ten or eleven years and later became opera performers.⁷² Thus, the term that Li Yu uses for the training of the performer – *shunyang* 順養,⁷³ “to train,” as to train an animal, to inculcate skills from a young age.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ McLaren, “Written for the Ear,” pp. 234–40; also see Stephen West, “Text and Ideology: Ming Editors and Northern Drama,” in Hua Wei 華瑋 and Wang Ailing 王瑗玲, eds., *Ming Qing xiqu guoji yantaohui lunwen ji* 明清戲曲國際研討會論文集 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo choubenchi, 1998), pp. 237–83.

⁷⁰ Li, “Tan Chuyu xili chuanqing,” pp. 3–4.

⁷¹ Zhang, *Tao an mengyi*, “Peng Tianxi chuanxi” 彭天錫串戲, p. 47.

⁷² Lu, *Kunqu yanhu shigao*, p. 241.

⁷³ Li, “Tan Chuyu xili chuanqing,” p. 3.

⁷⁴ Recent scholarship has confirmed the role of oral transmission in the preservation of opera. Anne E. McLaren, *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefables* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 188 and 325, n. 138, states: “Wife Liu’s farewell to her husband is one of the outstanding examples where women are obvious bearers of cultural values: values which were passed down orally, in many cases in metrical form, and which instate women as subjects rather than objects in the transmission of cultural lore and the inculcation of moral values.” Also see Dai Ning 戴寧, “Mingqing shiqi Qinhuai qinglou yinyue wenhua chutan” 明清時期秦淮青樓音樂

The courtesan, her marginal status notwithstanding, was considered to be the reliable inheritor of southern music. As local performer fully versed in local musical traditions, she had direct access to the “oral means,” necessary to acquire the complex skills of the “authentic” demotic art form. “We don’t know where southern music came from, but the women of the Education District knew them,” notes Xu Wei.⁷⁵ Zhu Chusheng’s craft was derived proudly and rigorously from the local. As native performer she could best articulate the long sad sigh of a sanctified regional culture. Thus, as iconic performer in the literati dramas, she did not serve merely as erotic paramour, but as authoritative source for the sacred local voice of the Jiangnan.

Li Yu describes, in his *Random Sojourns among Leisure Passions* (*Xianqing ouji* 閒情偶寄), the features of the actresses he sought for his own acting troupe.⁷⁶ The chapter is entitled “Selecting the Girls” (“Xuan po” 選婆) and is concerned with the acquisition, indeed, purchase, into bond servant status, of the “mistresses” or “young aunties” *po* 婆 for his domestic troupe, to become his concubine divas (*jijie* 姬妾). The subject matter is pragmatic: how do you assess the commodity of a good actress. Yet he did not simply confine himself to the specific features of gesture, movement, expression, and voice that will produce a good stage performer. Rather, in praising the skills of his concubine divas he claims they are the latter day goddesses of the ancient world: he refers to them as “Enchantress of the Realm” and “Heavenly Fragrance.” Likewise, he elevates his own role in the search for a good actress in similar terms. He claims that when he “ranks the actresses by their appearance ...and dares to judge them by their music and dance skills,”⁷⁷ he is in fact imitating the ancient Chu kings depicted in the famed rhapsodies of the Han and medieval eras. Li declaims about his search for actresses: “And so, for my readers who have come upon this book, if they wish to study the origins of what I do, please look to the matter of Yangtai Mountain of the Kingdom of Chu.”⁷⁸ He asserts that his reader must use “past events to interpret what I am doing,”⁷⁹ namely

文化初探, in *Zhongguo yinyuexue jikan* (1997.3), pp. 40–54. For the role of oral transmission, see Judith Zeitlin, “Between Performance, Manuscript, and Print: Imagining the Musical Text in Seventeenth Century Plays and Songbooks,” in Maghiel Van Crevel, Tian Yuan Tan, and Michel Hockx, eds., *Text, Performance and Gender in Chinese Literature and Music: Essays in Honor of Wilt Idema* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 272.

⁷⁵ Education district 教坊 referred to the courtesan district; Xu, *Nanci xulu zhushi*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ Li, *Xianqing ouji*, pp. 108–9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 109.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the events of the divine encounter – the “matters of clouds and rain” – between the goddesses of the Yangzi Gorges and “King Xiang of Chu who was lord of men.” With obvious self-flattery, he mimics the Chu king and his quest of the goddess from the *matière* of the Southland. Costumed in the mythologies of the past, he recasts his trip to the market as a drama of mythic resonance, suitable for opera-like spectacle. Likewise, the banquet, the canal-side encounter, the visit to the busy tourist site, are removed from the mundane and vulgar realms of life in the education district and served up as ad hoc opera vignettes. The courtesan – sanctified as voice of the mystified south – emerges from the demotic world of performance to become, along with the *fengliu* 風流 literati, the “new” icons of a utopian counter-tradition.

THE CITY AND THE CROWD

Literati and courtesan mimed theater tropes. In banquets, in conversations, in romantic meetings – even in scenes of apparent intimacy – they produced recognizable gestures derived from Southland drama. They converted their lives into pageantry laced with hoary icons and old beliefs. The depictions of these theatrical scenes, however, did not simply rely on opera gesture and opera-dialogue to create a mimicry of theatrical performance. Rather, Jiangnan intellectuals introduced a third feature into their self-conscious narratives. They presented themselves as if before an audience, performing not just for each other, but as if in the presence of observers; their lives were spectacular in the literal sense. The literati and courtesan were *renwu*, objects of observation, noted by others, aware of public praise. Thus, southern writers included in their self-portraits descriptions of an admiring throng. The grandiose lamentations are witnessed by city people (*shimin* 市民) who accommodatingly act like an audience (*guan zhe* 觀者). Likewise, if city people are the audience, the city itself is the stage. The available features of the cityscape – parks, tourist sites, temples busy at holidays – these are summoned to serve as temporary stages for the operatic vignettes. Indeed, the contemporaneous city serves as a “modern,” highly public backdrop for the iconic Southland exemplars. I would argue, in fact, that the southern intellectual regarded the public forum of the city as essential to his vision of the theater narrative. In their repeated portrayals of the literati-actress encounters they insisted on the demotic setting of the city. The observing crowds were, thus, not neutral and anonymous; rather they offered the necessary acknowledgment of the

iconic status of the literati and female performer. New rituals needed new legitimacies.

One example of the *fengliu* encounter portrayed as publicly observed pageantry is found in the Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 story, “Du Shiniang in Fury Sinks Her Treasure-Casket in the River” (“Du Shiniang nuchen baibao xiang” 杜十娘怒沉百寶箱).⁸⁰ This tale of the tragic romantic is one of the most well-known recastings of the *fengliu* encounter. The rhetoric, tropes, and cultural codes are repeated throughout Ming texts. Indeed, Allan Barr has established the way the main features of the Du Shiniang 杜十娘 account – thought at the time to be based on a real event – faithfully replicate the features of other literati–courtesan encounters.⁸¹ It circulated in multiple versions: in classical accounts, in *biji* and in plays and fiction.⁸² In his discussion of the classical language version by Song Maocheng 宋懋澄 (1569–1620),⁸³ he notes that the basic story captured the Ming imagination. The story depicted a “distinctively late-Ming character.”⁸⁴ Barr argued that the courtesan exemplified a “martial spirit” of that specific time.⁸⁵ Zhou Jianyu 周建渝 also argued that the episode was a resonant Ming story; the tale of revenge through sacrifice encodes a Ming “power shift” from a male-centered to a female-centered perspective.⁸⁶ In addition to these idealized features, we see, as well, an explicit concern with the crowd as observers of the event, and with the city as setting for the event. Feng Menglong, for the dénouement, places the grand gestures of the iconic female diva among the Jiangnan urban throng; conveniently, the crowd steps to the fore to serve as admiring claque.

The key scene of Feng Menglong’s story begins just after Du Shiniang has been, in essence, sold by her lover Li Jia 李甲. Li has agreed to offer up Du Shiniang for a thousand pieces of gold to the merchant Sun Fu 孫富. When told of the transaction, she reacts with calm acknowl-

⁸⁰ Feng Menglong, “Du Shiniang nuchen baibaoxiang” 杜十娘怒沉百寶箱, in idem, *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), j. 32, pp. 485–99.

⁸¹ Allan Barr, “The Wanli Context of the “Courtesan’s Jewel Box,” *HJAS* 57.1 (1997), pp. 136–40.

⁸² In addition to the Song Maocheng and Feng Menglong versions, Barr notes the version in the Qing-era collection *Jingu qi guan* 今古奇觀 and multiple stage versions; Barr, “Wanli Context,” pp. 107–9.

⁸³ Song Maocheng 宋懋澄, “Fu qing nong zhuan” 負情儂傳, in idem, *Jiu yue ji* 九篇集 (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 1984), pp. 112–18.

⁸⁴ Barr, “Wanli Context,” p. 141.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁸⁶ Zhou Jianyu 周建渝, “Chongdu Du Shiniang nu chen baibao xiang” 重讀杜十娘怒沉百寶箱, in Zhang Hongsheng 張宏生, ed., *Ming Qing wenxue yu xingbie yanjiu* 明清文學與性別研究 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002), p. 278.

edgement and proceeds to stage her suicide, as she reveals the contents of the treasure chest. Feng reveals as well the role of the public.

Sun Fu (the merchant) believed he had caught Du Shiniang and believed she could not escape; so he ordered his servant to place her chest of possessions out on the bow of the boat. But then, Du Shiniang took out her own key, unlocked it and drew out a stack of drawers from the chest. Du Shiniang then asked Sun to open the first drawer; he saw then what was in it. It was filled with fine jewelry worth hundreds in silver. Du Shiniang then grasped the jewels and precious ornaments from the drawers and cast them into the river. Li Jia and Sun Fu as well as the others on the two boats gasped in horror. Du Shiniang then told Li Jia to pull out another drawer where was found her vertical flute made of jade and her double-reed instrument made of gold. Then from another drawer out came pleasing treasures of ancient jade and gold alloy, all worth thousands in silver. Du Shiniang cast them into the river as well. 孫富視十娘已爲瓮中之鱉，即命家童送那描金文具，安放船頭之上。十娘取鑰開鎖，內皆抽替小箱。十娘叫公子抽第一層來看，只見翠羽明鸞，瑤簪寶珥，充牣于中，約值數百金。十娘遽投之江中。李甲與孫富及兩船之人，無不驚詫。又命公子再抽一箱，乃玉簫金管；又抽一箱，盡古玉紫金玩器，約值數千金。十娘盡投之於大江中。

Now at this point a group of onlookers were forming a wall of people on the shoreline. They all called out in unison “Terrible! Terrible!” At that point they were not sure what was happening. Then the last drawer came out and within it was a smaller box. When she opened it there were brilliant pearls, emeralds and cat’s eye stones as well as more finely worked *objets*. No one had ever seen such goods before, and they could not guess at the value. The onlookers cried out aghast; the shouts were like thunder... Then Du Shiniang turned to Li Jia: ... “I have opened now this chest – to display before the eyes of this crowd that a few thousand taels of silver is, in fact, worth nothing to me. In my cabinet is such treasure; yet, grievously, you have not the eyes to see it. My fate is perverse! I escaped from the bitter lot of the world of dust, but now I have been abandoned. All of you – this crowd today – who have eyes and ears, together you serve as my witness. I have not been unfaithful to him; he has proved unfaithful to me!” Then all of the crowd of gathered onlookers were moved to tears, they spat at Li and cursed him and they called out charges of ingratitude and disloyalty... Then Du Shiniang leapt into the Yangtze River. The

onlookers cried out for rescue and help, but saw only the cloudy, dark heart of the Yangtze River. ... Grinding their teeth in fury the onlookers wanted to attack Li and Sun, but the two escaped... People of later times took (the sad fates of Sun and Li) to be the River's revenge. 岸上之人, 觀者如堵. 齊聲道: “可惜, 可惜!” 正不知什麼緣故. 最後又抽一箱, 箱中復有一匣. 開匣視之, 夜明之珠約有盈把. 其他祖母綠、貓兒眼, 諸般異寶, 目所未睹, 莫能定其價之多少. 眾人齊聲喝采, 喧聲如雷... (十娘)向孫富罵道: “... 今日當眾目之前, 開箱出視, 使郎君知區區千金, 未為難事. 妾櫃中有玉, 恨郎眼內無珠. 命之不幸, 風塵困瘁, 甫得脫離, 又遭棄捐. 今眾人各有耳目, 共作證明, 妾不負郎君, 郎君自負妾耳!” 於是眾人聚觀者, 無不流涕, 都唾罵李公子負心薄倖... 十娘抱持寶匣, 向江心一跳. 眾人急呼撈救, 但見雲暗江心, ... 當時旁觀之人, 皆咬牙切齒, 爭欲拳毆李甲和那孫富... 人以爲江中之報也.⁸⁷

The tragic end of Du Shiniang's life mimics, as Allan Barr has shown, a pattern; this is a prototype among prototypes. Indeed, Du resembles the courtesan on the bridge much admired by Zhang Dai, and she resembles as well Dong Bai, whose life will likewise end in tragedy; all of them water-bound, actorly, miserable and deceased: dying of *qing*.⁸⁸ In this passage what we will look at, however, is the peopled setting. Feng manufactures for his readers a specifically urban Jiangnan setting filled with the salient indicator of urban life: the crowd. The features of vulgar spaces are used to frame the female performer in her final performance. Nor does the frame of the city simply serve as location; rather the crowds on the shoreline serve as magnificent echo: they recognize the “authentic nature” of her passion; they are the demotic voice of the new sentimentality. Jiangnan intellectuals were acutely aware of constructing this public as her public. They can acknowledge her status as sacred performer and see the spectacle as the new ritual. They are essential to the theater narrative.

Feng Menglong is careful to tell his reader about the size, appearance, noise and emotion of the crowd; he draws our attention repeatedly to their behavior, making nine references in this short passage. He notes the volume of massed spectators, referring to them as “today's

⁸⁷ Feng, *Du Shiniang nuchen baibaoxiang*, pp. 498–99.

⁸⁸ Feng Menglong echoes features of the courtesan encounter already noted, above. As with Dong Bai and Zhu Chusheng, Du Shiniang is a performer displaying a distinct awareness of her audience. She calls them her witness: “All of you – this crowd today – who have eyes and ears, together you serve as my witness” Additionally, as southern actress, she lives fully the *qing*-soaked role; like Zhu Chusheng, she dies from the consequences of tragic *qing*. Of course, Feng Menglong stresses as well the southern location. He tells us that Guazhou is resolutely southern, in fact, the gateway to the south. Du mentions, “we are about to cross into the Jiangnan”: soon they will be able to see the sites of “Wu-Yue *jian* 吳越間.”

crowd of people 今眾人” and “this mass” (*zhong*). He describes them as a solid presence: “As for the people on the shoreline – they were an audience resembling a wall 岸上之人觀者如堵.”⁸⁹ These “observers 旁觀之人” not only gather en masse, they produce a massive sound: “Their voices rose like thunder 聲如雷”; and they call out “in unison 齊.” Du Shiniang herself acknowledges the crowd: “I now open this chest of jewels before this mass of people.”

We see, however, that the *zhong* are not simply observers. They are connoisseurs of the public event, appreciating fully the *qing*-soaked stagings. The crowd is a participant in the construct; they are an invested public who respond with outrage. We see, in fact, that the role of the public is as important to the performance as an actual audience. They affirm the event’s potency and significance, and provide a demotic authority to the event. Feng portrays them as agitated and sympathetic, deeply affected, even transformed by the performance. Feng calls them, in fact, an audience (*guanazhe*). Thus, we are told that their voices surge up in specific response to her actions. United in rage, they produce “shouts of amazement 聲喝彩喧.”⁹⁰ Like theater viewers, in fact, they appear to follow the plot; at first they do not know what is going on, then they become aware through observation. There are multiple references to watching and looking. They are then overcome with emotion. These viewers do not just react with emotion, however, they declaim, spit, curse, and cry: “Then all of those who were present were moved to tears; they cursed and spat at Li 無不流涕, 都唾罵.” Nor was the courtesan unaware of their response. They are her public. Du Shiniang summons them “to be her ears and eyes 各有耳目,” to “serve collectively as her witnesses 共作證明.” They, in turn, respond as an audience responds, on cue, more like connoisseurs than an anonymous pack. These city denizens line the shore in empathetic response to her well-paced declamation, thus serving to enhance the drama of her final apotheosis. This southern city of Guazhou 瓜州 has become an ad hoc, open-air stage for a compelling spectacle.

Du Shiniang’s urban audience echoes other audiences, as Feng exploits a well-known feature of the Southland; southerners are transformed, as if in collective ecstasy, by a soulful performance. Feng’s depiction clearly echoes the depictions of southern opera audiences. In Ming texts theater audiences are famous for the demonstrative response. Feng fully conflates the actual theater audience with the city audience

⁸⁹ Feng, “Du Shiniang nuchen baibaoxiang,” p. 499.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

in this passage. Many writers remarked on the morose response to the southern play. Lu Rong's *Shuyuan zaji* portrays a typical audience response in four Jiangnan cities. Lu Rong notes the audience (*guanzhe*) gathered to hear the “opera disciples” performing southern *chuanqi*:

We find well trained musician-actors 倡優 who are called “opera disciples 戲文子弟.” Even the finest homes are not ashamed to have them perform there. These troupes perform *chuanqi* love stories, and there are always women, and there is always weeping: causing in people who listen to them easily arising feelings of deep sorrow.⁹¹

Lu Rong thus embroiders – as do many intellectuals – on the emotional response that “causes in people who listen to them 令人聞之 easily arising feelings of deep sorrow 易生悽慘.” Similarly, Yu Huai's *Flower Bridge Miscellany* describes an opera performance with the emotional response of the audience:

The diva assumed the part of the major role of Wang Shipeng 王十朋. When the time came for the two scenes, ‘Sacrificing at the River’ and ‘Mother’s Visit,’ she performed those heart rending tear-soaked lines, her voice and her sobs rushed out. We were overwhelmed at her performance 悲壯淋漓，聲淚俱迸，一坐盡傾. Even veterans of the Pear Garden training sighed at her unmatched performance.⁹²

Audience response to southern performance is more than that of superior cognoscenti engaged in intellectual judgments. The performance produces collective transformation. Demotic acclaim, thus, served in Ming texts as trope of legitimacy. The crowd cheering from the sidelines was more than collective noise; it acknowledged iconic status. If southern intellectuals abandoned the sanctions of the court, they appeared to seek new ones in the city. Thus, we see other writers who utilized the trope of demotic acclaim. Just as Du Shiniang's observers wept for her and jeered her callow lover, other Jiangnan crowds were equally moved. In *Kaidu zhuanxin* 開讀傳信, the author Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585–1645) narrates the events surrounding the arrest of scholar-official Zhou Shunchang 周順昌 (1548–1627). Zhou was one of the martyrs of the Donglin 東林 political movement. In the account of his arrest in Suzhou, Wen describes the actions of the sympathetic

⁹¹ Lu, *Shu Yuan zaji*, p. 124.

⁹² Yu, *Banqiao zaji*, p. 3148. Xie Zhaozhe noted as well the emotional reactions to opera made by “women and eunuchs”: “they always weep with emotion until they have no more voice”; *Wu za zu* 15, p. 37a.

crowd of protesters who demand the release of the scholar-official; “Save our Zhou” they call out.⁹³ The *Ming Dynastic History* (in describing the same event) refers to the lead protester and his “class” (*deng* 等) of followers as “city people 市人.”⁹⁴ City folk constituted a recognized affiliation (*deng*).⁹⁵ Likewise in the anonymous *Minchao Dong Huan shishi* 民抄董宦事實, the urban masses are portrayed as righteous avengers. Hundreds of angry citizens surge through the house of Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), outraged by the artist’s abuse of local citizens.⁹⁶ Of course, in this public spectacle, the obvious actor would be the opera singer. Trained to produce the grand gesture, and by temperament able to produce the right emotion, the *changji* figured as featured character. Scholars have noted that the courtesan became in the late Qing an emblem of the city;⁹⁷ but a pre-Qing version of this urban icon was present in Ming writers as well. Of course, they had an explicitly public role to sing at festivals on specific holidays.⁹⁸ Writers noted the ways in which the Ming performer was an object of public observation; she was the necessary actor in public venues.

⁹³ Charles Hucker, *Two Studies in Ming History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1971), pp. 59–61 (annot. trans. of Wen Zhenheng 文震亨, *Kaidu zhuanxin* 開讀傳信).

⁹⁴ *Ming shi* 明史 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974) 234, p. 6353. On images of city people in the Tang and Song, see David Johnson, “The City God Cults of T’ang and Sung China,” *HJAS* 45.2 (Dec. 1985), pp. 363–457. For Qing usage of the term “city people” (*shimin*), see William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796–1895* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1989), pp. 15–22.

⁹⁵ For a full discussion of urbanites and urbanization in the Qing, and for treatment of Ming origins see William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City*, 71–87.

⁹⁶ For *Minchao Dong Huan shishi*: http://www.motie.com/book/5302_99644. Of course, crowds in some Ming sources are portrayed as inchoate, terrifying mobs. Examination riots are portrayed ambivalently, and Suzhou’s famous *shengyuan* riots are typically allied with crude violence. Tsao Jr-lien has noted the violence of crowds as recorded by Wang Zhideng 王禪登 in his *biji* titled *Wushebian* 吳社編. During the annual festival for the Sages of the Five Directions (Wufang Xiansheng hui 五方賢聖會) “dozens of toughs from the great households along with street bullies” intimidated citizens; Tsao Jr-lien, “Remembering Suzhou, Urbanism in Late Imperial China,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 1992), pp. 39–49.

⁹⁷ Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love, Courtesans, Intellectuals & Entertainment Culture, 1850–1910* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2006), p. 249, notes that, for the late Qing, the “courtesan and the city are in a literary embrace, a form of mutual embodiment,” the courtesan being the “new metropolitan protagonist.” Patrick Hanan has noted the alliance in Qing literature of the courtesan with southern cities, stating that *Fengyue Meng* 風月夢 is the “first Chinese city novel” and “Yangzhou the first city to be so treated”; “Fengyue Meng and the Courtesan Novel,” *HJAS* 58.2 (Dec. 1998), p. 349. Miao Yu has treated the Shanghai courtesan as “urban iconography” based on the use of the courtesan as an “urban beauty.” Miao Yu, *Imagining and Inventing “Shanghai”: The Courtesan Illustrations, the City, and Early Modern Identity* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2008), pp. 26–35. Ōki, *Chūgoku yūri kukan*, p. 293, mentions that frequently the meetings of literati and courtesan occurred in public places in the city, e.g., Peach Leaf Crossing Pavilion; and Zhang Dai’s *Dream-pursuit of West Lake* depicts the courtesan as a figure of urban events.

⁹⁸ Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts*, pp. 55–71.

If Feng Menglong emphasizes the role of the mystified public, he also draws our attention to the landscape of the city. He and other Jiangnan writers find in the common, open, and crowded spaces of the city an accessible setting for their pageantry. In the cities people could gather and observe the social dramas of literati and courtesan and acknowledge them now as the new divinities. Cityscapes acquired gravitas. Guazhou is, thus, presented as an urban space. Guazhou is, of course, known as the meeting place of the Yangtze River and Grand Canal; and Feng enhances this sense of a crossroad setting. He tells his reader that the events of the final drama take place on the shoreline 岸上, an open space where it is possible for crowds to gather. Feng Menglong further indicates the public setting. When Du and her lover are planning the days ahead, Du tells her lover that at night with few people around they can have privacy. In daylight, however, the area will become filled with crowds, she says. Her prediction is accurate. The morning arrives and so do the crowds.

Once again, Feng seizes on the familiar. Jiangnan intellectuals typically exploited the image of the city as setting for public spectacles; and, despite their refined lives within the hermitage, they burnished the public spaces. Si-yen Fei, in her study of Ming-era Nanjing, noted, "The late Ming witnessed a new perception and conceptualization of urban space that captured the vitality of urban life at the time."⁹⁹ Certain sources from the Ming reflected urban and urbane perspectives. The *ketan* 客談 genre was, for example, a "fitting medium for expressing the amorphous lived experience of a highly mixed and mobile urban population."¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Tobie Meyer-Fong has noted "By the late Ming it had become commonplace practice to tell stories about the parties and activities of famous people in their urban context."¹⁰¹ The urban context was clearly exploited by Mao Xiang in his portrayal of some of his encounters with Dong Bai. For example, in *Recollections from the Shadow Plum Nunnery*, he portrays one glamorous meeting before a noisily attentive crowd; he describes an encounter with Dong Bai that is surprisingly public. On a trip to Gold Hill, Mao emphasizes the groups of anonymous admiring followers.

⁹⁹ Si-yen Fei, *Negotiating Urban Space, Urbanization and Late Ming Nanjing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), p. 250.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁰¹ Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture*, pp. 28–30, and others have noted the Qing-era awareness of the urban context; see also Margaret B. Wan, "Local Fiction of the Yangzhou Region: *Qingfengzha*," in Lucie Olivová and Vibeke Børdahl, eds., *Lifestyle and Entertainment in Yangzhou* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2009), p. 177, on "the increasing consciousness of local identity among men of letters in Yangzhou."

In each other's company we climbed Gold Hill. At that time four or five dragon boats surged about in the rough waves as they moved upriver; and the travelers on the mountain – who numbered in the thousands – trailed after the two of us, gesturing, saying we were transcendents. We circled round the mountain and wherever the pair of us stopped, the dragon boats would vie to attend to us, circling us several times without leaving... At the end of the day we returned to our boat... The great flourishing of such glamorous figures, set against the Jiangnan backdrop, dazzled in that one piercing moment;¹⁰² and – still today – it is admired by our commentators.

Mao Xiang sets this moment of *fengliu* brilliance that “dazzled in that piercing moment 照映一時” in a surprising context – amid the buzz and bustle of a southern waterway.¹⁰³ The setting is Gold Hill, a busy tourist spot on the Yangtze River.¹⁰⁴ Mao mentions the size of the crowd; the passersby 游人 number in the thousands; and, along with the boatmen below, they are given a role: to observe and enthuse. Mao and his lover are depicted, in fact, as figures of importance (*renwu*), who have “dazzled in that one piercing moment.” The adulation and crush of the crowd serve the same role as the shoreline crowd serves in the Du Shiniang story: they announce in demotic voice the divine nature of the iconic figures. In turn, the Jiangnan city and its crowd have become emblematic of nativist spectacle. The spectacle and the crowd are inseparable.

Ming writers were, indeed, interested in capturing “the vitality of urban life at the time,” and in using it as prop and extension of the literati–courtesan encounter. In his recollection of Hangzhou, *Dream-like Recollections of West Lake*, Zhang Dai exploits the imagery of the crowd. He portrays the gregarious throng who gather at famous sites at festival times. In one passage, he depicts the Incense Market (Xiangshi 香市), where crowds of tourists, shopkeepers, and market visitors celebrate: “There were hundreds and thousands of men and women, old and young, who gathered every day like a thicket 簇擁, pressing before the temple front and back, left and right.”¹⁰⁵ This deeply nostalgic ac-

¹⁰² “Dazzled in that one piercing moment 照映一時”: the phrase dates from the Song poet Wang Tingjun and is considered a touchstone phrase descriptive of the evanescence and glamour of the romantic (*fengliu*) moment. In the Ming the phrase was famously repeated by the poet Wu Meicun (1602–1672) about three famous figures of the Jiangnan – Wu Weiye 吳偉業, Gong Dingzi (see n. 33, above), and Qian Qianyi.

¹⁰³ Mao, *Yingmei An yiyu*, p. 3234.

¹⁰⁴ Gold Hill, originally a small island in the Yangtze, is located north of Zhenjiang 鎮江.

¹⁰⁵ Zhang, *Xihu mengxun*, p. 21.

count remembers the hubbub as an ideal. Likewise, Feng Menglong is clearly interested in the use of the city as backdrop. In his discussion of *Sanyan* 三言, Patrick Hanan notes the frequent use of city imagery. Hanan notes that in eight of the stories Feng Menglong creates a vivid urban picture of Hangzhou. Feng lists in sequence the sites encountered by characters, providing specifically the names of streets, gates, quarters, embankments, bridges, shops, parks, and canal crossings to set his tale. There is so much attention paid in this cluster of stories to the ordinary sites of Hangzhou, that Hanan labels the technique “Hangzhou realism.”¹⁰⁶ The southern city animated the Ming imagination. Urban festivals often figured in the myth of the urban space. Calendrical holidays were frequently harnessed to the narrative of the benign crowd. Poets and essayists remarked on the seasonal bustle of crowds: the noise, the thunder of carts, and the brilliant look of the melee.¹⁰⁷ The lantern festival is famously gaudy: *nao* 鬧, with southern festivals ranked among the most notable. Indeed, the chronology of the festival year in *Dreamlike Recollections of West Lake* encodes the imagery of crowds. Hangzhou, in Zhang’s presentation, is no longer a space: but is, rather, a divinely ordered schedule of events in which the crowd functions as witness.

In these places of crowds, the public spaces become impromptu stages. The city, to these observers, is a romanticized performance space. Tiger Hill just outside of Suzhou was famous for its singing festival on mid-autumn night,¹⁰⁸ when “every family in the city, shoulder to shoulder” gathers up the hillside like “geese flocking along sand banks, like mist blanketing the Long River, like thunder rumbling or lightning crackling,” with as many as a thousand singers. Out of the masses of gathered participants, finally, one singer produces a transcendent sound: “The purity of sound penetrates so that listeners feel their souls melting.”¹⁰⁹ Likewise, Zhang Dai suggests that Hangzhou is – city-wide, from temple to temple – an extended stage for musicians. In *Dreamlike Recollections of West Lake*, he recalls: “I have often asserted that for paying a visit to West Lake, no site is without music

¹⁰⁶ Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1981), p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ Victoria Cass, “Revels of a Gaudy Night,” *Chinese Literature, Essays, Articles and Reviews* 4.2 (1982), pp. 222–25.

¹⁰⁸ Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道, “Huqiuji 虎丘記 (accessed from http://www.gushiwen.org/wen_1105.aspx); also see Richard E. Strassberg, trans., “Yüan Hung-tao (1568–1610) 袁宏道, Tiger Hill 虎丘 (1597),” in idem, *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1994), pp. 305–7.

¹⁰⁹ Trans. Strassberg, *ibid.*, p. 306.

and dance, no hillside is without music and dance, and no waterway is without music and dance.”¹¹⁰ Thus, in city portraits, masses of people, festivals, and performances are all allied.

The crowded city of the Jiangnan is not, however, depicted as mundane. Ming writers again created a paradox. Just as the courtesan and her skills were portrayed as both demotic and mystified, so the crowded cityscape of the Jiangnan was both demotic and sacred. City life in these spectacles is depicted in euphuism, in the rhetoric of the supernatural. Just as the crowd calls out to Mao Xiang, declaiming him and Dong Bai to be *shenxian* 神仙, so do the Jiangnan writers transform the cityscape into a divine setting. The rhetoric of religion and myth is used to transform the mundane and crowded setting into a magical one, appropriate to the meetings of the new immortals. Writers of the Southland had a vested interest in this transformation.

Feng Menglong links the port of Guazhou to larger mythologies of the south, recreating Guazhou within the trope of a sacred ground. Relying on a lengthy history of classical and folkloric references, he charges the southern city with a sense of the ominous and magical, tied to narratives of female divinities. Feng exploits the folklore of the Yangtze River to encode the event with echoes of the supernatural, investing the scene with a lachrymose and morbid romanticism. Thus, he uses the Yangtze River as source of divine retribution. He tells us at the end of the story, after the suicide, of the terrible fates of the callow lovers, Sun Fu and Li Jia; both come to bad ends befitting their earlier calumnies. Feng comments on their deaths: “This was the revenge of the Yangtze River.”¹¹¹ Southern waters effect the revenge called for by Du Shiniang and by the crowd; the river serves as divine agency. Feng portrays the swirling depths as accomplice. Du Shiniang uses the watery fate of her jewels to publicly shame her lover. As she feeds her treasures to the water she displays them before her lover’s eyes and the eyes of the crowd; and when she casts them to the Yangtze, they become proof that Li Jia “had not eyes to see their value.” Finally, the waters embrace her as divine suicide. Within the mystified waters she achieves transfiguration. Feng uses the imagery of southern waters as the wronged woman’s element. The alliance of the roiling waters with sacred women is used elsewhere by Feng. He found this trope useful in the story, “Yang Siwen Meets an Old Friend in Yanshan.”¹¹² Feng

¹¹⁰ Zhang, “Leng quan ting” 冷泉亭, in *Xihu meng xun*, pp. 76–77.

¹¹¹ Feng, “Du Shiniang nuchen baibaoxiang,” p. 499

¹¹² Feng Menglong, “Yang Siwen Yanshan feng guren” 楊思溫燕山逢故人, in idem, *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue, 1981), pp. 366–83.

depicts a wronged wife emerging from the waters to drag below her faithless husband. In this tale, the vengeful ghost personally executes her revenge; and in both tales, water is the appropriate medium for female apotheosis. Feng deploys the convention in another tale, “Bai Niangzi yongzhen Leifeng Ta” 白娘子永鎮雷峰塔.¹¹³ Again, the water imagery adds a sense of defiant women from the realms beyond. Du Shiniang is essentially a character from a realistic narrative, but still she evokes these women of the supernatural; she has left the city of Chang’an and arrived in the un-North, where local gods inhabit the waves, and a rival sanctity rules.

This, of course, is deeply familiar ground. Southern waters are famously allied with female suicides and watery tragedies. From local river cults, to Buddhist goddesses of the sea, to divinities of the Yangtze Gorges, the southern waters have been the setting for female apotheosis. Feng Menglong is mining the tradition for his own versions. Folktale and religious lore are ample sources of the tradition. Song Maocheng in his version of the story alludes to the lore of watery revenge in a coda. We learn that Du Shiniang forbid him in a dream to write her story. He, however, ignores her proscription; and the next day discovers that one of the maids in his household has drowned.¹¹⁴ Alan Barr has pointed out the alliance of the martyred water goddesses with the late-Ming courtesan Du Wei 杜韋 (no dates). Du Wei, a historical figure, the lover of the literatus Fan Yunqian 范允謙 (1549–1577), mimes the story of the fictional character Du Shiniang. Barr notes that Du Wei was elevated to cult status after she committed suicide in the Yangtze River – near Guazhou. Pan Zhiheng and Shen Defu mention belief in her divine/demonic influence.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Barr lists other courtesan suicides that have troubled the waters of the Yangtze.¹¹⁶ The courtesan as watery revenant had obvious predecessors; anthropologists have long noted the persistence of local cults dedicated to doomed women in the Jiangnan regions.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Feng Menglong, “Bai Niangzi yongzhen Leifeng ta” 白娘子永鎮雷峰塔, in idem, *Jing-shi tongyan*, pp. 420–48. See especially Eugene Wang’s discussion of White Snake and the “topos of the strange” in “Tope and Topos: The Leifeng Pagoda and the Discourse of the Demonic,” in Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu, with Ellen Widmer, eds., *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), pp. 504–8.

¹¹⁴ Song Maocheng, “Fu qing nongzhuang” 負情儂傳, in idem, *Jiu yue ji*, p. 117.

¹¹⁵ Barr, “Wan-li Context,” p. 130.

¹¹⁶ See especially Barr’s discussion of the Shaohong tale; *ibid.*, pp. 125–26.

¹¹⁷ Wolfram Eberhard, “On the Folklore of Chekiang,” in idem, *Studies in Chinese Folklore*, Indiana University Folklore Institute Monograph Series 23 (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center for the Language Sciences, 1970), p. 31. Also see Brigitte Berthier, *La dame-du-bord-de-l’eau* (Nanterre: Societe d’ethnologie, 1988).

Nor is this a tradition located only in the substrata of local practice and folktale. Elite literature has consistently relied on this trope. As with Du Shiniang, water sprites and goddesses of classical literature are allied with tragic erotic encounters, with a “larmoyant eroticism.” Morose divine encounters are the archetypal event for misty, storm-filled gorges and riverways of the South. The trope of the courtesan encounter configured as a theater of erotic misery was sufficiently established in scholarly discourse, to have been included in the Qing encyclopedia *Gu jin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成. In its section dedicated to “Feminine Charm” (*guiyan* 閨艷), within the subsection “Brilliance in Women” (*guiyuan dian* 閨媛典), the editors compiled an anthology of literary texts allied with watery tragedies. The collection begins with Han and medieval rhapsodies (*fu* 賦) on the divinities, the Luo River Goddess Luoshen 洛神), the Divine Woman (Shen nü 神女), and the Consort of the Jiang River (Jiang Fei 江妃). The early material includes as well poetry dedicated to, or concerning, the Goddess of Shamanka Gorge (Wushan nü 巫陝女), the deity Yaoji 瑤姬, and other icons of love.¹¹⁸ In these passages the erotic meeting of male supplicant and female deity is aretology, but painted in dour colors. The erotic encounter is misery soaked and the divine marriage is a failed hierogamy. The Qing encyclopedia, however, does not limit the trope to the accounts of divinities, however, but includes as well classical tales about misery soaked encounters between *caizi* and *jiaren*, with the courtesan making frequent appearances.¹¹⁹ The editors, thus, considered the courtesan and Divine Woman to be of the same *matière*: the courtesan serving as inheritor of the ancient and medieval archetypes. Feng Menglong exploited the familiar, recreating the sense of divine, but doomed, eros; the Guazhou riverbank – the watery, crowded, southern place – is a mythic setting for lachrymose, female sacrifice. He, like other Jiangnan writers, created for their readers an idealized portrait of urban life to frame properly the grandiose, “new” spectacles of the literati, branding the setting as urban, crowded, southern and magical.

Multiple writers have appropriated the motif of the early-modern city. In treatments of urban culture in Japan, Kobayashi Tadashi has argued that intellectuals characterized themselves as city denizens of

¹¹⁸ Chen Menglei 陳夢雷 et al., *Gu jin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1977), Ming lun huibian 明倫彙編, Guiyuan dian 閨媛典, Jiayan bu 佳艷部, ce 421, *yiwen* 藝文 1, j. 352, vol. 41, pp. 3462–69. For late-imperial appropriations of the Luoshen 洛神 image in visual arts, see James Cahill, “Where Did the Nymph Hang? (Ching Yuan Chai so-shih I),” *Kaikodo Journal* 7 (Spring 1998), pp. 8–16.

¹¹⁹ Chen, *Gujin tushu jicheng, yiwen* 2, j. 353, pp. 3470–79.

Edo; they called themselves “Children of Edo” (*edokko* 江戸っ子). Kobayashi argues that the “depth of *edokko* culture should not be underestimated...”; there was, he asserts, an “Edo consciousness.”¹²⁰ For southern writers, however, no one city seems to dominate the trope. Hangzhou, Suzhou, Nanjing, and Yangzhou are frequently used, but the smaller canal towns and crowded tourist sites can figure as well. The water-bound city, in its several variations, is the essential fixture for the grandiose drama of erotic misery. In those public places writers married city imagery to familiar *chuanqi* characters and allied their public lives with grand-scale hierogamies from the *matière* of the South. The *fengliu* literati of the prosperous south thus sealed the connection between the mystified south and the bustling cityscapes that existed before their eyes. Within this urban narrative, however, intellectuals did not assign themselves center stage; rather they ceded the central role to the *nüdan*, that hybrid creature: the partially domesticated native from the Southland. It is just her vulgar connection to the physical essence that enhanced her value, however, as she provided access to the “genuine.” Performers and opera, public spectacle before the throng, and the literati as weeping amanuensis were all configured as iconic of the lushly romantic but ominously tragic paradigm.

CONCLUSION

In his *Book to Be Burned* (*Fenshu* 焚書), Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602) stated that the romantic southern dramas “Xixiang ji” 西廂記 and “Baiyue ting” 白月亭 (an excerpt of which was performed by Du Shiniang) are the literature of lament, protest, and rage. The dramaturge of the romantic play is, he asserts, a man of passion who roils inside with suppressed fury, as if he has “something in his throat which he can’t get out 其喉間有如許欲吐而不敢吐之物,”¹²¹ Of course, plays of timely events (*shishi xi* 時事戲) voiced outrage at contemporaneous events. Mei Chun has noted that Zhang Dai recorded over ten plays about Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢, the politically powerful court eunuch;¹²² and Deitrich Tschanz asserted that the anonymous “Ming feng ji” 鳴鳳記 of the early-Wanli period

¹²⁰ Kobayashi Tadashi, “Society and Culture, Ukiyo-e’s Setting,” in Anne Nishimura Morse, ed., *Drama and Desire: Japanese Paintings from the Floating World, 1690–1850* (Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), p. 20.

¹²¹ Li Zhi, *Fenshu zhu* 焚書注, ed. Zhang Jianye 張建業 (Beijing: Li Zhi yan jiu cong shu, 2013), p. 272.

¹²² Mei Chun, *The Novel and the Theatrical Imagination in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 21.

named names and reviled practices under the minister Yan Song.¹²³ Li Zhi, however, pushed the argument, claiming that romantic *chuanqi* was also allied with protest; the playwright, he claims, “borrows this predestined union – the love match between this man and woman – to make his point 故借夫婦離合因緣以發其端於是焉,”¹²⁴ using the small gesture to symbolize the great. This argument was echoed by writers contributing to what Duncan Campbell referred to as, “the intense, bitter and often dangerous literary polemics of the late Ming period,”¹²⁵ whereby marginal and often vernacular literatures were considered the vehicles for the new value of passion, *qing*. Indeed, as Guo Yingde has noted, multiple writers determined that *nanqu* was the ideal vehicle for authenticity (*bense* 本色), truth (*zhen* 真) and was, above all, the primary means for voicing the passionate – *qing*.¹²⁶

Theories of interpretation, however, were not the only issue. As Mei Chun has noted, “The literary realm of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was keenly attuned to the contemporary political disorder.”¹²⁷ Indeed, the immense enthusiasm for southern music among southern intellectuals and artists coincided with the political and economic crises occurring from the Wanli period to the end of Ming. That this concurrence is an accident of timing seems unlikely. The lament over erotic miseries in a deeply southern mode may have been a necessary mask; imperial response may have forced the artistic agenda. As many have noted, the south was troublesome to the court, as gentry and merchants developed “embryonically expressed autonomous intellectual interests.”¹²⁸ Southern autonomy may have fed the crisis which led to romantic drama as a literature of rage.

Autonomy of the south was fed by well-documented activism, which was stirred to the boil in multiple venues. Many have noted the role of southern clubs and affiliations, the most famous of which was the Academy of the Eastern Grove (Donglin). This southern coalition, with membership in the thousands, organized direct confrontations with the court. Ming gentry were active in political and moral

¹²³ Dietrich Tszhanz, “History and Meaning in the Late Ming Drama, *Ming fengji*,” *Ming Studies* 35 (August 1995), pp. 11–13.

¹²⁴ Li, *Fenshu zhu*, p. 273.

¹²⁵ Duncan Campbell, “The Epistolary World of a Reluctant 17th Century Chinese Magistrate: Yuan Hongdao in Suzhou,” *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 5.2 (December, 2003), p. 8.

¹²⁶ Guo, *Ming Qing chuanqi shi*, pp. 229–32.

¹²⁷ Mei, *The Novel and the Theatrical Imagination*, p. 18.

¹²⁸ Frederic Wakeman, cited in Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power, Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1993), p. 319.

debate as well. Martin Huang has discussed the importance as well of the “*jiangxue* 講學 activists,” a vast network of debate forums that constituted “almost a mass movement.” Many of these debate sessions favored the “school of mind” (*xinxue* 心學), which was characterized as both southern in origin and as an explicit challenge to traditional mores.¹²⁹ Monks gathered large followings in the south as well; Da Guan 達觀 had students among gentry and intellectuals; and members of the official class, including Mei Guozhen (1542–1605) as well as his daughter, attended the temple lectures of Li Zhi. Li Zhi’s arguments on reform of social mores and reform of the canon were taken as critical of establishment Confucianism. His famous students, Yuan Hongdao and his brother Yuan Zhongdao, in turn, became leaders of the influential Gongan school. They promulgated Li Zhi’s views of passion, and of marginal literary genres.¹³⁰ Publications were another obvious expression and wellspring of southern activism. Li Zhi’s books circulate broadly among the populace,” Gu Yanwu observed;¹³¹ and the essays of Yuan Hongdao on the canon and on spontaneity were widely published. His works were so popular that publishers forged his name to books by other writers to increase sales. Of course, plays and popular performances in themselves voiced the new ideals of *qing*.¹³² Tang Xianzu’s 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹亭) struck a chord with men and women of the south: they wrote about its portrayal of the *qing*-soaked heroine Du Liniang.

However, if there was a southern activism, there was a southern crackdown. The Wanli emperor responded with vitriol to the perceived disloyalties of the age, allowing or enacting purges: many directed toward the southern region, and, indeed, to the intellectuals we have discussed in this paper. In the mid-Wanli era in the 1580s when writers and gentry were turning to *chuanqi* opera, the heated *jiangxue* gatherings were forbidden, southern academies were closed, and their compounds converted to government use. One academy in the south had its statues of the sages thrown in the river.¹³³ Reformist leaders were

¹²⁹ Martin Huang, “Male friendship and Jiangxue (Philosophical Debate) in Sixteenth Century China,” in idem, ed., *Male Friendship in Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 152–54.

¹³⁰ Pei-kai Cheng, “Reality and Imagination: Li Chih and T’ang Hsien-tsu in Search of Authenticity,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Yale University, 1980), pp. 128–66.

¹³¹ Pauline C. Lee, *Li Zhi, Confucianism, and the Virtue of Desire* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 7.

¹³² Shen Jing discussed the networks of southern intellectuals whose associations were formed by play reading and play attendance, in *Playwrights and Literary Games*, pp. 21–22.

¹³³ Jie Zhao, “Chou Ju-teng (1547–1629) at Nanking: Reassessing a Confucian Scholar in the Late Ming Intellectual World,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Princeton University, 1995), pp. 157–58.

silenced. Li Zhi was arrested and died in prison in 1602. The monk Dagan, a popular lecturer with thousands of followers, was arrested and killed in prison. It is impossible to consider these attacks as randomly directed. Zhao Jie has argued that in the purges against monks and lecturers and leaders of local movements, the emperor was using the old device of “killing the chicken to scare the monkeys.”¹³⁴ The court imperiled or killed mid-level troublemakers to warn officials and gentry of rank too prone to autonomy.

We know that in some cases the gentry who loved, or who wrote, opera took warning. Shen Defu 沈德符 (*jinshi* 1577), who chronicled opera texts and performances in his famous *biji*, *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編, noted that when the purges heated up in the 1590s his literary club, the Society of the Grape, broke up and avoided meetings.¹³⁵ We also know that during the purges of the popular monks and savant-lecturers, gentry took heed. Clearly Yuan Hongdao and Yuan Zhongdao knew of the purges of the monk Dagan as they sheltered his disciples at their small estate near Gongan.¹³⁶ Most devastating was the news about the imprisonment of their teacher, Li Zhi. Yuan Zhongdao had already expressed concern about Li Zhi’s notoriety, speculating that his revered teacher should know better than to “talk about military and governmental affairs with people of obscure background. ... Is he too old to have a clear mind?”¹³⁷ Indeed, Yuan Hongdao referred to this entire era as *moji* 末季 “the final days.”

In the context of these dark political days – “the final days” – drama was more than a distraction. Many have noted Tang Xianzu’s withdrawal from court in 1598 after a political struggle. A former student of Li Zhi, he turned his hand later in life to one of the art forms praised by Li Zhi, southern drama. After retiring from office, he produced *Peony Pavilion*, famously an exploration of the values of *qing*. The play of love and separation immediately engaged audiences. But the lament would have resonated at multiple levels, as the play treats, not only love, but also politics. Tang Xianzu depicts the struggles of lovers caught in the failing days of the Song dynasty as Jurchen invaders approached. It is a play about failed empire. It seems highly likely that the late-Ming audience would have heard disturbing echoes located within

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Hung Ming-shui, “Yüan Hung-tao and the Late Ming Literary and Intellectual Movement,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1974), p. 160.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

¹³⁷ Zhao, “Chou Ju-teng,” p. 158.

the depiction of the failing state, when it was produced in Suzhou and Nanjing in the late-Wanli era.