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The Ruins of Representation in the Fiction of Wu Jiwen[1]

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> Ruin is the self-portrait, this face looked at in the face as the memory of itself, what *remains* or *returns* as a specter from the moment one first looks at oneself and a figuration is eclipsed.
>
> Jacques Derrida

In this woodblock illustration from a 1617 edition of Tang Xianzu's celebrated late sixteenth-century *kunqu* opera, *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting*), the teenage protagonist Du Liniang is shown gazing into a small mirror as she sketches her self-portrait.[2] Having just woken up from a dream in which she met her "dream lover," Liu Mengmei, Du Liniang is shown here confronted by the contrast between her own idealized dream image and the necessarily imperfect appearance which she assumes "in real life." Although the

Figure 1 [Huang] Mingqi, *Painting the Self Portrait*. Woodblock illustration of a scene from *The Peony Pavilion* (1617 ed.)

[1] I would like to thank David Wang and Yvonne Chang for useful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

[2] First published in the 1617 edition of *The Peony Pavilion*. Reprinted in Chang Bide (1969: 10); reprinted, and discussed, in Ko (1994: 74-75) and Vinograd (1992: 17).

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scene is ostensibly centered around Du's specular act of gazing at her own mirror image, the corresponding text of the play makes clear that the "haggard" and "thin and frail" image which she sees reflected in the mirror is actually quite different from the mental image which she actually has of herself. Shocked by this visible evidence of the transitoriness of her own beauty, Du Liniang resolves to create a portrait immortalizing her own youthful visage. Inevitably, however, what she sketches is not the actual image she sees in the mirror, but rather her own idealized dream image. Du Liniang herself explicitly points to this slippage between the specular model and the idealized portrait when she exclaims, "But it will make a charming picture. Ah, surely my painting promises well, with a sweet appeal more marked than in the model!" (Birch 1994: 69)

This association of self-portraiture with death and spectral returns is not unique to Tang Xianzu's text. For instance, Judith Zeitlin, drawing on *The Peony Pavilion* as well as a number of other Ming and Qing literary works, has remarked on the close association of female self-portraiture and death in late imperial Chinese culture, suggesting that the act of female autography was almost always understood as an act of "auto-effigy." Similarly, in his *Memoires of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, Jacques Derrida also remarks on the mortuary and spectral connotations of the act of self-portraiture. He suggests that self-portraitive drawing takes, as one of the conditions of its existence, a moment of blindness, of the inevitable ruins of a prior vision: "At the moment of the autograph, and with the most intense lucidity, the seeing blind man observes himself and has others observe. . . " (Derrida 1993: 57). He further argues that the self-portrait always constitutes a *translation across* the ruins of death and blindness, a spectral return signaling its own impossibility: "[T]he autograph of the drawing always shows a mask . . . [t]he mask shows the eyes in a carved face that one cannot look in the face without coming face to face with a petrified objectivity, *with death or blindness*" (Derrida 1993: 72-73).

The juxtaposition here of Derrida's and Tang Xianzu's texts is uncannily apt insofar as the act of self-portraiture in *The Peony Pavilion* not only prefigures the self-portraitist's own subsequent "return as a spectre," but also because this

particular woodblock print depicts a cycle of "ruin" and "spectral return" inscribed within the very moment of self-portraiture itself. A close examination of the image reveals that, as Du Liniang gazes at her specular mirror image, she is not shown actually sketching the portrait before her, but rather is seen in the process of raising the ink brush to her own lips (ostensibly in order to use her tongue to draw the brush into a fine point). Coincidentally or otherwise, the image captures her at the precise moment at which the tip of the brush reaches the outline *of her own face*, producing the uncanny visual illusion that she is in the process of sketching her own visage. The resulting visual pun functions as an evocative reminder of how the attempted mimeticism of the self-portrait requires the self-portraitist to place, and reconstitute, herself in the position of the imagined absent spectator. In so doing, she implicitly must confront the necessary possibility of her own absence, and, by implication, of her own death. We might further speculate that the woodblock print not only portrays Du Liniang literally sketching herself, but also, moreover, sketching herself *as a specter*, with the inevitable necessity of her own death already inscribed within the self-portrait itself.[3]

". . . I want to look at things, but always see through them"

The Peony Pavilion describes Du Liniang's trans-mortal translation across the mimetic medium of her self-portrait, and this process of figurative translation continues far beyond the ostensible bounds of Tang Xianzu's play. For example, Du Liniang is figuratively "reborn" again two and a half centuries later in the person of Du Qinyan, the female-impersonating *kunqu* opera performer in Chen Sen's 1849 "literati novel" about operatic cross-dressing and male prostitution/homosexuality, *Precious Mirror for Evaluating Flowers* (*Pinhua baojian*). Near the beginning of this novel, when the opera patron Mei Ziyu happens to glimpse Du Qinyan, he explicitly compares Qinyan to

杜琴言
陳森
品花寶鑒
梅子玉

[3] Compare, for example, Roland Barthes' famous discussion of how "each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death" (Barthes 1981: 97).

his female (sur)namesake in Tang Xianzu's opera, Du Liniang (Chen 1993: 17). Furthermore, like Tang Xianzu's work, Chen Sen's novel also climaxes in a graveyard scene, in which the protagonist glimpses his/her "other self" across the mirror of the grave. The scene in question occurs in Chapter 55 when Du Qinyan visits the gravesite of his former incarnation, identified simply "female immortal Du." An unnamed woman he encounters there asks him why he does not perform obeisance to the grave, and Du tries to explain that it is because "she is I, and I am she" (Chen 1993: 636).

吳繼文

世紀末少年愛讀本

A century and a half later, on the eve of the 400th anniversary of Tang's original opera, the Taiwan publisher-turned-novelist Wu Jiwen also used the text of *Precious Mirror*, together with its explicit thematization of *The Peony Pavilion*, as the model for his first novel, *Fin-de-Siècle Reader of Young Love* (*Shijimo shaonian ai duben*) (1996). Unlike Chen Sen's novel, which is narrated by an (occasionally first person) omniscient narrator, Wu Jiwen's retelling of the work adopts the perspective of a minor, secondary character embedded within the text itself. As a result, the text becomes a sort of decentered auto-biographical inquiry, centered around a split between the autobiographical voice of the Self and the remembered images of assorted Others. As such, Wu Jiwen's novel can be seen as a reprise of one of the central motifs of *The Peony Pavilion* itself: namely, to borrow Wai-yee Li's perceptive formulation, the realization that "the willful intensity of passion is rooted in the act of looking into the mirror, *of perceiving the self from the viewpoint of the desiring other*" (Li 1993: 54).

天河繚亂

Although I will return later to the catoptric genealogy sketched above, in the body of the present essay I will nevertheless be most concerned with how these same themes are played out in Wu Jiwen's *second* novel, *Galaxies in Ecstasy* (*Tianhe liaoluan*) (1998). Structured as an elaborate genealogical "self-portrait," *Galaxies in Ecstasy* explicitly develops related themes of self-perception and blindness. The novel is itself literally framed by allusions to the limits of visual perception, as well as to the act of viewing the self from the perspective of the other. For instance, the work's own bilingual epigraph reads, "I want to look at things, *but always see through them*; galaxy's in ecstasies" (1998: 3; emphasis added), while

the mirror epigraph (appearing only in English) at the end of the work echoes the dissolution of Self/Other distinctions discussed above: "Every other world is this world; and every Other, is myself" (285).

Galaxies in Ecstasy oscillates between two separate narrative threads. One thread follows the "thirty-something" gay Taiwanese man, Shicheng, as he confronts the illnesses which threaten both the life of his aunt, as well as his own. These illnesses stand as a reminder of Shicheng's own mortality, and also serve as catalysts for what amounts to an epic act of self-portraiture, as he plunges deep into both his own, as well as his aunt's memories, in an attempt to piece together his increasingly complex identity. The parallel narrative thread presents extracts from the diaries of Swedish archaeologist Sven Anderes Hedin (1865-1952), which he wrote as he explored Central Asia in search of the famous Lop Nur "drifting lake." Below, I will begin with a close-reading of the novel itself, concentrating on the themes of vision, self-perception, personal genealogy, and gender fluidity. In the final section of this paper, I will return to the question of the novel's own "genealogy," while suggesting some ways of understanding the broader relevance of the themes which it develops.

時澄

". . . there's no way of making it come to a stop"

Galaxies in Ecstasy opens with a description of the protagonist, Shicheng, rushing to Tokyo upon hearing the news that his beloved aunt has fallen ill and been sent to the hospital. At the same time, we learn that Shicheng, though only in his thirties, is himself not in good health either. Although his illness is never explicitly identified, we are nevertheless told that, of his many symptoms, the one which depresses him the most is precisely the gradual deterioration of his eyesight (Wu 1998: 15). This linkage of sight and death returns at the end of the novel when, after the funeral of his aunt, Shicheng relates that he occasionally feels

> as if he had another self (*ling yi ge ziji*), floating above everything, with a compassionate expression in his eyes

另一個自己

眼神 洞見

(*yanshen*), simultaneously gazing at (*dongjian*) the past, present and future. Whenever his alter-self floated above everything, the self that remained on the ground stared ahead with both eyes, and fell into a kind of trance in which his consciousness was sober and calm, and before his eyes there was just a clear blank —like a lobotomized invalid with his brains removed. (265-66)

This description provides a compelling juxtaposition of the inevitable limitations ("blindness") of the localized, individual "look" ("staring ahead with both eyes. . .[but seeing merely] an empty blank") on the one hand, and the fantasy of a delocalized, transcendental "gaze" ("floating over everything... simultaneously gazing at the past, present, and future") on the other. Of particular interest here is the attention given to the "blank" and unfocused eyes of Shicheng's mortal double. As Slavoj Žižek has observed in another context, "in the uncanny encounter of a double (Doppelgänger), what eludes our gaze are always his eyes; the double strangely seems always to look askew, never to return our gaze by looking straight into our eyes—the moment he were to do it, our life would be over. . . ." (Žižek 1996: 94).

Enframed by these two reflections on blindness and mortality is an anguished project of self-representation, consisting of a complex montage of flashbacks and reminiscences which collectively amount to a journey of self-discovery which carries Shicheng into intersecting issues of personal genealogy, political history, and sexual orientation. This self-portraitive theme of Wu's novel is primarily developed through his attempts to represent and memorialize, not necessarily the narrator/protagonist himself, but rather those individuals closest to him. Shicheng's voyage of *self*-discovery is intimately bound up in his series of discoveries about a handful of intimate relatives and lovers. In fact, Shicheng spends almost as much time reconstructing his aunt's childhood as he does reflecting on his own. It is therefore appropriate that he experiences his aunt's funeral at the end of the novel as an uncanny rehearsal for his own impending death (263).

It is fitting that his aunt's illness and death should provoke in Shicheng a sudden insecurity regarding his own eyesight, because visual imagery had long occupied a particularly

privileged position in Shicheng's relationship with his aunt. One of the first things we learn about her, for instance, is that she had always been a rather mysterious presence for the young Shicheng; not only did he not see her in person until he was ten, but *even her photographs* had been systematically excised from the family photo-albums (17). We are also told that, when his aunt was travelling abroad, she and Shicheng would often rely exclusively on the explicitly visual medium of the picture-postcard to communicate with each other—"because they both felt that they had both contracted aphasia" (32). Furthermore, in ironic parallel with the concern with self-portraiture detailed above, the relationship between the aunt and the young Shicheng is one grounded very explicitly on patterns of corporeal mimesis. One of the most striking instances is the account of the ten-year-old Shicheng dressing himself up in his aunt's underwear, and putting on her make-up, thereby modeling himself directly on her (visual) image (46-48).

While the young Shicheng's act of strategic transvestitism can, at one level, be seen as mirroring the concerns with figurative self-portraiture detailed above, at the same time it also points to an important fracture within the structure of mimicry itself. The anthropologist Michael Taussig, for instance, points to what he identifies as "the two-layered notion of mimesis," consisting of, on the one hand, "a copying or imitation," and, on the other hand, "a palpable, sensuous connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived" (Taussig 1993: 21). Accordingly, Shicheng's early affinity for this latter form of contact-based "mimesis" is neatly contrasted with a profound ambivalence toward the more disarticulated dimension of mimesis as mere "copying and imitation." For instance, we are told that, when Shicheng reached puberty, even a mundane glance at his own reflection in a mirror was enough to cause him distress: "He didn't dare look at his reflection in the mirror, and even if he accidentally glimpsed his own shadow, he would feel a surge of terror" (62).

This ambivalence toward mimesis-as-imitation is reinforced throughout the novel by a recurrent sense of awed skepticism toward the mimetic potential of technologies of visual reproduction, particularly (but not exclusively) "modern" ones. Near the end of the novel, for example, these sorts of concerns

with the reproducibility of one's image are rearticulated with a much clearer focus on modern photographic technology. For instance, when Shicheng's friend Ye Jing invites Shicheng to go out with him to take a few photographs, Shicheng initially declines, on the grounds that,

葉淨

> for him, a camera is like being reflected in a demon mirror (*zhao mojing*), and that he doesn't even use a mirror (*zhao jing*) very regularly, much less allow himself to be photographed (*zhao xiang*), because he doesn't want to reveal his original form (*yuanxing*). Ye Jing replied, "Yes, [but] how do you know that you have much form [to begin with]?" (248)

照魔鏡
照鏡
照相
原形

Although this passage focuses attention specifically on the "modern" reproductive technology of photography, the original Chinese of the passage foregrounds the etymological connection (lost in the English translation) between producing one's image in a mirror [*zhaojing*], on the one hand, and in a photograph [*zhaoxiang*], on the other. Later in the same chapter, the narrator describes Ye Jing's dark room, in which the red lighting is said to illuminate his immobile body in such a way that it gives the impression of being a "transparent spirit" (*touming de youling*). This spectral quality is further reinforced by the multitude of photographs which, stretching in all directions as they are hung up to dry, are explicitly compared to being like "so many *pasts* which have been called out" (emphasis in the original). The whole scene reminds Shicheng of a "dreamscape" (*mengjing*) (250). Finally, just as Ye Jing's photographs are compared to "so many pasts," Shicheng's *memories* of his older brother, Qiulin, are at one point said to be "an old black and white movie" (236).

透明的幽靈

夢境

秋林

The transitoriness and ephemerality of visual perception, together with the limitations of technologies of visual reproduction, are captured well in a striking description of fish half-way through the novel. In that passage, Shicheng's aunt asks him to

> [l]ook carefully at those fish. Their sinuous bodies strike me as being inexpressibly perfect. And then there are their colors, both pure and flowing. No one can grasp that sort of color. That

> color which we can see with our own eyes, there is no way of making it come to a stop. *Even if you paint it, photograph it, or film it, you are still unable to duplicate its true color.* (108; emphases added)

As I will discuss in the next section, fish, for Shicheng, come to be potent symbols for personal origins. Not only is their visual appearance effectively beyond the grasp of conventional temporality ("That color which we can see with our own eyes, *there is no way of making it come to a stop*"), but they themselves also symbolize a space before and beyond conventional temporal boundaries.

". . . like fossils shuttling back and forth through the interstices of time . . ."

Near the beginning of Wu Jiwen's *Fin-de-siècle Reader*, the narrator compares memories to fossils (*huashi*) which limn uncertainly between their present and past existences: 化石

> Memories are like fossils embedded in a rock stratum; they unwittingly leave behind an impression of life at a particular moment in time. They originally should have belonged to the past, but at the same time without doubt share a temporal space with the present moment as well. They cleverly shuttle back and forth through the interstices of time, and easily decipher time's curse of only being able to move forward in one direction, foreclosing the possibility of return.

Although this figure of the "fossil" operates as simply a metaphor, it comes to have a highly specific significance in Wu Jiwen's *Galaxies in Ecstasy.* It is in the narrative thread which assumes the form of a diary written by Hedin that the figure of the fossil is given archeological significance.

The other thread of the story, set in present-day Taiwan, focuses on Shicheng and his own gradual archeological exploration of his family's (and, by implication, his own) hidden genealogical secrets. The two threads finally come together two thirds of the way through the novel when the protagonist of the second thread, Shicheng, while hospitalized at the age of

nineteen after an attempted suicide, is given the six volume text of Hedin's diary (of which Wu Jiwen's own novel only extracts a tiny fraction) by a stranger with whom he happens to share a hospital room. This act of "passing on" the diaries not only marks the suicidal Shicheng's decision to "start a new life" and persevere for at least another decade, but also signals the death of the anonymous stranger who gave him the diaries (in that the stranger disappears from their hospital room immediately afterwards, presumably because he has finally passed away). That being the case, the diaries could be seen as a sort of mediated "auto-effigy" comparable to Du Liniang's self-portrait in *The Peony Pavilion*. The twist, of course, is that the diaries do not depict the act of "perceiving the self from the viewpoint of the other," but rather, quite literally, the act of "perceiving the self as Other" (in the sense that the "I"/"eye" in the diaries corresponds neither to Shicheng nor to the hospital stranger).

Initially bewildered, Shicheng soon finds himself engrossed by the archeological annals, and spends the next two days and three nights reading them cover-to-cover. He is most fascinated by the account of Hedin's search for the famous Lop Nur lake in modern-day Xinjiang Province (an ethnic minority region in China's far Northwest).[4] This "drifting lake" is significant not only as an end-in-itself, but also because it provides a potential clue as to the location of the long-lost Han dynasty city of Loulan. 樓蘭

Although the hospital scene is the most explicit point of intersection of the two separate narratives, they nevertheless run parallel, and subtly reinforce each other, throughout most of the novel. In particular, there are several instances in which related themes are developed in evocatively similar ways in the two juxtaposed narrative threads. The most central of these convergences concerns the trope of the "drifting lake," the Lop Nur, itself—it is not only the locus of the Central Asian narrative thread, but also a powerful metaphor for Shicheng's own journey of "self" discovery. This metaphorical significance is suggestively

[4] The supplementary reference material included in the novel's appendix consists of a detailed account of the actual historical Lop Nur expedition, together with black and white photographs of the explorers themselves, as well as a satellite image of the Lop Nur lake.

addressed at one point near the beginning of the novel, where it is observed that "the topographical stages of the Talimu River resemble the stages of a human life, with the final stage, its grave, being that 'drifting lake,' the Lop Nur" (60).

This anthropomorphic description of the Lop Nur, furthermore, is itself sandwiched between two accounts of aquatic milestones in Shicheng's own life. To begin with, in the section immediately following the Lop Nur passage, Shicheng expresses what might be seen as a displaced hydrophobia when he finally protests his father's obliquely pederastic practices of bathing with him (65). More strikingly, in the preceding section there is a discussion of how Shicheng's younger brother once almost drowned in a lake, an event which left Shicheng with nightmares for the rest of his life, not to mention nagging suspicions that the trauma had permanently scarred his younger brother's own cognitive and emotional development (58, 59). Meanwhile, the symbolic linkage between water and human mortality, treated in the parallel discussions of the Talimu River and the near-drowning of Shicheng's brother, is itself mirrored in the suggestive parallels between the lives of Shicheng and his brother, whereby the near-drowning is said to create somatic scars, which are inscribed on the brother's physiognomy, as well as psychological scars, which leave their marks on Shicheng's own psyche. Finally, the post-traumatic cleavage of Shicheng and his brother itself mirrors the bifurcation of the lives of Shicheng's aunt, Chengxi, and her own twin brother, Chengyuan (a topic which I will address in more detail below).

成蹊　成淵

Another prominent intersection of the novel's two narrative threads also contains within itself an important clue to Shicheng's psychic development. In one of the "archeological" sections of the novel (section 17), there is a description of the discovery of the unknown tomb of a woman who had been buried for almost 2,000 years: "The outline of her face had not yet suffered the ravages of time; her eyelids dropped down, and her lips still retained a shadow of a smile. Only she didn't reveal at all the secrets of her life . . . " (104). Just as *Fin-de-Siècle Reader* describes how fossils can "cleverly shuttle back and forth between the interstices of time," this description of the unknown woman's tomb assumes an additional significance if one considers its implicit relation to the "contemporary" narrative

line with which it is juxtaposed. In the section immediately preceding it (section 16), Shicheng has just made one of the central discoveries of the entire novel—namely, that his beloved, but rather mysterious, aunt's "dark secret," is, in fact, that "she" was originally a man who cross-dressed for a number of years before ultimately undergoing a sex-change operation.

Shicheng's discovery, furthermore, is described in terms which are, ironically, like those referring to an archeological search for buried femininity. The disclosure scene in question details Shicheng's meeting with a certain Dina, one of his aunt's similarly transgendered acquaintances, who lead Shicheng by the hand into the crypt of her own "female identity." Only, in this case, the symbolic "tomb" of the unknown "woman" turns out to be empty, as revealed in the scene in which Dina guides Shicheng's hand first to "her" feminine breasts, and then on downwards to "her" genitalia. Upon reaching this symbolic sepulcher, Shicheng discovers with evident embarrassment that the expected female genitalia are not "there," but rather in their place there is, instead, a man's penis (102).[5] Finally, yet another subtle, but emphatic, linkage between these twin themes of gender and archeological ruins is the fact that the Han city of Loulan, whose ruins they are searching for, is at one point explicitly referred to as a "she" (*ta*) (184).[6]

她

To the extent that both of the narrative threads are concerned with a search for hidden origins (either archeological or personal/genealogical), they are both grounded on a suggestive topographical parallel. In the scene in which the text of the Hedin dairy enters the "Shicheng" narrative thread, for instance, the narrator explicitly stresses the geographic remoteness of the Central Asian territory where Hedin was searching for the Lop Nur, noting that,

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[5] This is because, although "she" had been taking female hormone supplements for some time, "she" had not yet had the actual "sex change" operation.

[6] Though this sort of feminization of geographic sites is not unheard of in modern Chinese (a practice borrowed from languages such as English, as is the modern Chinese pronoun "she" [*ta*] itself), it is more conventional to use the neuter third-person pronoun *ta* to refer to these sorts of inanimate objects.

它

> [a]fter a thirty year interim, "I"[7] found "myself" at the deepest point [8] of the earth's largest land mass, at a point where none of the earth's seas or oceans could have any effect; navigating a river which is simultaneously old and young, and which was given birth (*yunyu*) to by the run-off from the highest and coldest mountains in the world; and carefully examining (*shenshi*; literally, "carefully viewing") a world which is both familiar and alien. (185)

孕育
審視

The terrestrial remoteness of Shicheng's own personal origins is stressed in remarkably similar terms when, at the very beginning of the novel, we are told that, "Because Shicheng was born in a mountainous county, the sea, not to mention boats, always had a certain nonexistent quality for him, because he first learned of them through children's fairy tales and adventure movies. Shicheng had a great fondness for seascapes" (20). This mountainous birth-place, it is specifically noted, is located in the center of the island of Taiwan, as far as possible from the sea.

This doubled geographical distance from water becomes translated, within the novel, into a temporal distance which must be overcome. At one point the narrator remarks that, "Like his aunt, he [Shicheng] had a natural affection for the ocean, comparable to the affection which a child feels for his parents" (229). Shicheng notes too that his earliest, most primal childhood memory is that of "insomnia" (21-22); and as the novel goes on to make clear, the theme of sleep/insomnia is bound up with that of watery origins. For instance, about half-way through the novel, Shicheng discusses with his aunt the question of whether fish themselves can sleep. His aunt, in her

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[7] Here, the narrator is borrowing the first person pronoun of the diary's author, and indirectly ventriloquizing in his voice.

[8] The meaning of the Chinese term *shenchu* [depths] is slightly ambiguous, a semantic ambiguity which is mirrored in the English translation. On the one hand, it could be interpreted vertically, as in the "depths" of a well; but it also permits a horizontal interpretation, as in the "depths" of a forest. As it happens, both senses of "depths" are applicable to the Turfan Basin region under discussion, as it is not only one of the lowest points of dry land on earth, but is also almost as "deep" into the interior of the continent as you can get.

深處

response, makes explicit this connection between water and primal personal origins by evoking the figure of the fetus asleep in its own amniotic fluid (108). In another passage, his aunt tells Shicheng that she wants to go to Lake Baikal, and speaks of how, at that lake, there is a special kind of fish that doesn't lay eggs, but rather gives live birth (89). Finally, when she herself commits suicide at the end of the novel, her ashes are buried at sea, which is described as "returning her to her final resting place" (264). This return to the sea reminds us of her own remark, ventriloquized through Shicheng, at the very beginning of the novel, that "people shouldn't stray too far from the sea, because it was from the sea that humanity's ancestors originally emerged" (12).

貝加爾

Finally, this "sea" theme is explicitly interwoven with the novel's concerns with seeing and blindness in two evocative passages where the act of closing one's eyes yields a view of the "aqueous humor" on which visual perception is grounded. For example, near the end of the scene in which his aunt tells Shicheng the secret of her gender identity, Shicheng at one point "closed his eyes, and found that under his eyelids there appeared the multi-hued splendor of a school of fish" (109). This moment is mirrored by another shocking moment of Oedipal disclosure near the end of the novel, when Shicheng learns from his aunt that his own "real" father is actually "her" twin brother, Chengyuan, whom Shicheng had previously regarded as an uncle. Upon learning this news, Shicheng

> closed his eyes tightly, and his mind went blank for a moment. Afterwards, a cluster of images (*yingxiang*; also, "portraits") came rushing into his mind's eye (*naohai*) from every direction. There were several of his mother's faces, several of his father's faces, as well as several of *that father's* faces. (257)

影像
腦海

The fact that this figurative intersection of the "sea" and "non-seeing" is grounded on a metaphorical rather than literal connection (i.e., the "sea" is embedded within the expression "mind's eye," literally meaning "mind's sea" in Chinese) further strengthens the argument I am developing here, concerning the metaphoricity inherent in the act of perception, and particularly self-perception. That is, all of the texts under consideration

here, from *The Peony Pavilion* to *Galaxies in Ecstasy*, suggest in various ways that the act of *self*-perception is possible only through a "metaphorical" act of "viewing oneself as another."

A comparable "metaphorical" slippage between Self and Other is operative in the novel's narrative structure, whereby related themes are developed in parallel fashion. Even beyond the level of narrative structure, *Galaxies in Ecstasy* as a whole is grounded on a similar infrastructure of vicarious identifications and symbolic economies, as emblematized by a dream which Shicheng's aunt, Chengxi, has on the eve of "her" final sex-change operation. That night, s/he dreams of a young girl crying in the street, finds out that the young girl is crying on discovery that she has suddenly grown a penis, and wakes up *and realizes that the dreamed girl is actually him/herself* (144-45). This dream is neatly paralleled by one which Shicheng has on the eve of his discovery of his "father's" true identity. In that dream, Shicheng is looking for himself through the windows of a train. He finally thinks he has found himself, but when he looks closely *he realizes that it is actually another little boy.* Moments later, he further realizes that the boy in the dream is actually his older brother, Qiulin (221-3).[9]

Such metaphorical identification is also played out dramatically, and ironically, in the striking detail that, throughout the novel, Shicheng's moments of greatest psychic distress are somatically *mirrored* in the coincidental illnesses and deaths of his loved ones. The most striking example of such parallelism is the unexpected coincidence of Shicheng's medical treatment for an unspecified illness[10] with his aunt's own hospitalization for the cancer which will ultimately take her life. Other examples include a bizarre scene in which Shicheng encounters a male pervert in

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[9] The paradigmatic significance of this latter dream is further reinforced by the fact that it is precisely this dream which Shicheng relates to his aunt when she tells him, near the end of the novel, the secret of who his father is (258).

[10] With the subsequent knowledge of Shicheng's sexual orientation and lifestyle, the reader is perhaps tempted to suspect that this illness is, in fact, AIDS, though this is never explicitly specified in the novel.

an adult film theatre. Without even looking or saying a word, the other man takes Shicheng's hand and uses it to masturbate himself. Although he is horrified by the experience, Shicheng at the same time develops an elaborate sexual fantasy around this stranger in the theatre, hoping in spite of himself that he might encounter him again in person. Nevertheless, when a few weeks later Shicheng runs into someone in the street whom he becomes convinced is the same man, he finds him visually repulsive—with this moment of mis/recognition leading to a sudden implosion of the fantasy which Shicheng had developed around his imagined image (160-61). Immediately afterwards, Shicheng learns that his own grandmother has, like his own sexual fantasy, suddenly passed away (162).

Similarly, later on in the novel, Shicheng has a close brush with death when he almost falls off a mountain into the sea (an ironically appropriate fate, considering the symbolic linkage of water and death throughout the novel as a whole). As he recuperates in the hospital, he learns that his grandfather has died (223-25). Again, Shicheng's own earlier suicide attempt (he gets as far as slashing his wrists) is interrupted by a telephone call from a friend, a certain Xiao Gong, who, it turns out, is also contemplating suicide. Shicheng bandages his own wrists in order to find the telephone number of an emergency "life-line" for his friend. What happens next remains a blur; Shicheng is found unconscious in his apartment several hours later and taken to the hospital. As the narrator summarizes somewhat sardonically at the end of the chapter: "In the end, Shicheng survived, while Xiao Gong [ultimately] died; but that wasn't until many years later, and was over a completely meaningless love affair" (175-77).

小鞏

Shicheng's suicide attempt stems from a fight he has with his lover at the time, a man by the name of Shanzha. Shanzha believes he has seen Shicheng with another man, and immediately confronts him in a scene in which each lover becomes "ghost-like" (*guimei; youling*) in the other's eyes (172). This theme of spectral alienation is further developed when, as Shicheng is preparing to slash his wrists, he takes one last look at the mirror and almost doesn't recognize his own reflection: "Then he lifted his head to look in the mirror, and saw there a momentarily estranged (*mosheng*) visage; because it was *too* calm, it seemed as if *it belonged to someone else*" (173).

山楂

鬼魅 幽靈

陌生

At the heart of this suicide attempt, then, is a complex dialectics of intimacy and alienation. As such, I would suggest that it provides an evocative complement to the structuring principle, described above, whereby two ostensibly independent narrative threads mutually reflect back on and reinforce each other, just as important milestones in the Lop Nur narrative resonate with comparable ones in the contemporary Taiwan narrative. Furthermore, many of the other romantic/sexual encounters in the novel are similarly grounded on the axiological distance separating the two individuals in question—with their erotic pleasure, in many cases, being achieved not in spite of, but rather precisely because of, this distance. One of the clearest illustrations of this principle can be seen in the adult theatre scene described above, in which Shicheng's erotic fantasy is grounded on the fact that the identity of the man with whom he inadvertently had a sexual encounter was completely unknown to him.

Another evocative example can be seen in the scene in which Shicheng and his male friend Shangjiang are forced to share a bed because of inclement weather outside. After waiting until he believes Shangjiang to be asleep, Shicheng reaches over and begins to slowly caress Shangjiang's body. He then gradually moves his hand downward until finally reaching Shangjiang's genitalia, whereupon he discovers with delighted astonishment that Shang already has an erection. He then fondles Shang's erection for a long time, until Shang (without having said a word the entire time) finally rolls over to face the opposite wall. The next morning, neither of them mentions the incident, and both act as if nothing unusual had transpired. 上將

The precise role of this axiological distance is specified at the end of this passage, when the narrator notes that,

> Most of the time, [Shicheng] had to rely on fantasizing about Shangjiang's body in order to reenact in his minds' eye (*naohai zhong*; literally, "in the sea of his mind") the dangerous details of that night, and only in this fashion was he able to achieve release (*shujie*). At this point, he discovered that he didn't derive satisfaction from his own excitement. *With this, he realized that his greatest satisfaction must come from others, with his own excitement being a function of the excitement of others.* (211; emphasis added) 腦海中 紓解

Shicheng's realization here is that his erotic fantasy is not so much grounded on his memory of Shangjiang's naked body, as it is on in his vicarious identification with Shangjiang's own receipt of sensual pleasure. Since Shicheng is the person originally pleasuring Shangjiang in the first place, this means that Shicheng's fantasy is homoerotic in an unusually literal sense, insofar as he derives excitement from imaginatively projecting himself into the position of the Other that he himself is in the process of pleasuring. In this way, by a transitive logic of *jouissance*, Shicheng is in effect fantasizing about pleasuring *himself*.[11]

This passage, in turn, echoes one of the major implications of Wu Jiwen's *Fin-de-Siècle Reader*. In the latter part of that novel, in which Du Qinyan's fellow (female-impersonating) actor, Lin Shanzhi, describes to Qinyan and the narrator the circumstances following his purchase by his new master, Hua gongzi. Shanzhi relates that he initially had mixed feelings about the prospect of physical intimacy with the older man, but what ultimately changed his mind was the sight of Hua's flaccid and entirely unimpressive penis:

林珊枝
華公子

> In the deepest recess of that thick mass of pubic hair—at first I couldn't believe what I was seeing, thinking that it was my blurred vision (*yanhua*) or an optical illusion (*cuojue*)—in that deepest mystery or mysteries, there was a purplish-red phallus (*fenshen*). It looked like the viscera of some animal, listlessly laid out there on display . . . . (Wu 1996:201)

眼花　錯覺

分身

This scene ultimately culminates in an act of "mutual" masturbation which clearly anticipates the *Galaxies in Ecstasy* passage cited above:

憐愛

> I tenderly (*lian'ai*, literally "sympathetically and lovingly") used an ointment to gently cover his phallus, and that formerly limp and cold thing gradually was restored to its former vitality . . .
>
> This was the first time that I was able to carefully observe

[11] The French term *jouissance* conventionally means, in this context, "erotic pleasure." However, in an ironic echo of my focus here on the *mediated* return of erotic pleasure, it also has the meaning of "property," and interest payable.

> and touch a body, one which was completely open to me, and receptive to my sympathy (*lian*), and which could use love (*ai*) to respond to my love. . .I let my hand move faster, *and felt as though the person lying there was myself, and as though it were my own phallus in my hand* (1996: 201-2; emphasis added)

憐 愛

The term which I have translated here as phallus is *fenshen*—which literally means "parted or partial self"[12] (echoes, perhaps, of the penile-grafting scenes in the earlier novel), and which is also, the direct inverse of the two characters used in Chinese for the binome "identity" (*shenfen*).

This use of *fenshen* here to refer to the phallus suggests a compelling link to Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Lacan, the phallus is an example of a kind of entity which he calls "partial object," or *object petit a* ("object little o[ther]"). These "partial objects" are so named because they can become disassociated from the body and circulate within a psychic liminal realm wherein they come to function as "causes of desire." The quintessential *object petit a*, for Lacan, is the mother's missing phallus, which the child (of either sex) identifies with in order to compensate for the mother's apparent castration:

> The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but insofar as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack. (Lacan 1973: 103)

Similarly, in the scene here, we can see Shanzhi clearly, and in

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[12] This reference to the penis as, literally, a "partial object" is perhaps an (unconscious?) echo of the penis-grafting scene in Chen Sen's *Precious Mirror for Evaluating Flowers*, on which Wu Jiwen's novel is itself based. The scene in Chen Sen's novel, in turn, explicitly tropes on a famous scene in Li Yu's early Qing dynasty novel, *Carnal Prayer Mat* (*Roupu tuan*). Speaking of direct and indirect literary appropriations, it is perhaps useful to note that the term *fenshen* itself is of Buddhist origins, though the use of it to refer to the male sexual organs is apparently of Wu Jiwen's own invention.

李漁
肉蒲團

some ways quite literally, identifying with Hua's penis. The use of the term "parted/partial self" (*fenshen*) to refer to the phallus in this passage also encapsulates neatly the general dynamics of vicarious voyeurism which pervade and dominate the scene as a whole. That is to say, Shanzhi, in his symbolically emasculated social position, clearly derives a certain paradoxically vicarious pleasure from identifying with Hua's flaccid, de-phallicized phallus. Subsequently, after revitalizing Hua's phallus, Shanzhi explicitly recounts his sense of identification with the body and "partial/parted body" before him. He also derives additional vicarious pleasure from recounting this encounter to Qinyan and his other interlocutors.

Finally, to return to Wu Jiwen's *Galaxies in Ecstasy*, we can also see Hedin's journal functioning as a "partial object" in the sense that, as a personal diary, it represents an object which originally enjoyed a very intimate and privileged relationship to the author's own self-identity, which subsequently became severed from its original owner and entered into circulation within a vast symbolic economy of vicarious identification. Wu's novel stresses in no uncertain terms the fundamental *transmitability* of this text insofar as the anonymous man in the hospital not only acquires it, but prizes it dearly as the last personal possession he gives away before he (presumably) dies. Similarly, Shicheng, when he receives the journals, is so enthralled by them that he puts his life on hold in order to finish reading them.

When the narrator discusses Shicheng's receipt of the diary in section 35 of the novel, he consistently refers to its narrative voice as "I" [with the scare-quotes in the original]. On the one hand, the scare-quotes serve as a useful reminder of the enormous spatial and temporal gap separating the diary's contemporary readers from the autobiographical voice which originally "gave voice" to it. At the same time, however, the first person pronoun facilitates a potential identification with the diary's narrative voice as "partial object." This is true insofar as the first person pronoun does not have any meaning in-and-of-itself, and acquires significance when exchanged between actual speakers. As Emile Benveniste has observed, "What then is the reality to which I or *you* refers? It is solely a 'reality of discourse,' and this is a very strange thing. I cannot be defined

except in terms of 'locution,' not in terms of object as a nominal sign is." Benveniste then goes on to suggest that it is precisely this referential openness which creates a space for the construction of subjectivity: "Language is [. . .] the possibility of subjectivity.[. . .] In some way language puts forth 'empty' forms which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriates to himself and which he relates to his 'person,' at the same time defining himself as I and a partner as *you*" (Benveniste 1971: 218, 227; cited and discussed in Silverman 1983: 43-53). As he reads the Hedin diaries, Shicheng experiences this process of pronomial projection/identification in a strikingly literal way: "In summary, as he read page after page of the diary, he would often feel that *he had become one with the narrator* . . .participating in this arduous *voyage, becoming the eyes, nose, skin, and hands of that 'I'"* (186; emphases added).

Finally, this dialectic of alienation and identification is brought full circle at the end of that same section of the novel. There, Shicheng finally finishes reading the diary, and resolves to live on for at least another decade, regardless of how barren and desolate the world might appear—"even if human life turns out to only be a simple river and its lonely river basin, even if the world turns out to only be a 'drifting lake,' and time surrounds everything with its boundless desolation" (186-87). Of particular interest, however, are the following words: "Maybe there will be an 'I' who—perhaps staggeringly, perhaps confusedly, perhaps delightedly—might suddenly step out of a mirage and bear witness (*jianzheng*) to his [Shicheng's] fleeting existence" (187). 見証 In ironic anticipation of the conclusion, where Shicheng greets his own impending death with a fantastic displacement of his imaginary gaze from his corporeal body, this scene following Shicheng's suicide attempt plays out one of the central concerns of the present essay. It is precisely at this moment when Shicheng stands at the threshold of death (viz., his own "failed" suicide), that Shicheng musters the resolve to start a new life. But, like Du Liniang in *The Peony Pavilion*, this process of trans-mortal translation is accomplished precisely through symbolic identification with an external, disarticulated subject position (the "I" of Hedin's diaries), which in turn allows him to figuratively *view* (*jianzheng*) himself as if from outside.

Moreover, Shicheng's figurative gesture outward, toward a

hypothetical external observer (an "I/eye"), is mirrored neatly by the end of the *fenshen* passage in *Fin-de-siècle Reader*, discussed above. There, Shanzhi remarks to Qinyan that, "I hope that someday, someone will be able to relate to me their own secrets, the same way I have just done for you" (Wu 1996: 203). This remark points to a precise aural translation of the visual logic which we repeatedly find in *Galaxies*. Just as Shicheng repeatedly falls back on imagining himself *observing himself* as if from outside, similarly Shanzhi's final remark makes clear that he is vicariously identifying with his own interlocutors, while at the same time imagining a time when he might listen to someone else's sexual secrets the same way that his interlocutors are currently listening to his.[13]

". . . taking a sheet of invisible paper and placing it over that hidden wound . . ."

As Wu Jiwen's novel unfolds, it becomes clear that the pattern of misrecognition and vicarious identification which characterizes some of Shicheng's romantic encounters also forms the ground upon which Shicheng's family structure is based. This being the case, the aunt gives an explanation to Shicheng of why his "father" chose to maintain the elaborate fantasy which allowed him to regard Shicheng as his own son:

> After you were born, your father actually immediately welcomed you [into the family]; and he has always loved you deeply. This would seem to be rather difficult to explain, but it is also not hard

[13] The recursivity and self-alienation inherent in this moment is even more striking when one considers the fact (made clear in Chen Sen's original novel) that Qinyan, Shangzhi's primary interlocutor, is actually *already a displaced replacement of Shangzhi himself.* Specifically, Shanzhi had originally been an apprentice for Qinyan's current patron, and Qinyan was himself purchased with the money which his patron received from selling the apprentice for whom he had traded Shanzhi. In this sense, Qinyan can be seen as an indirect replacement of Shanzhi, or as a material embodiment of the exchange value which was produced when Shanzhi himself entered into circulation (see Rojas forthcoming).

> to understand. Maybe he was always someone who truly loved children. For the sake of your and your brother's and sister's happiness, he was able to temporarily forget his wife's betrayal; and, taking a sheet of invisible paper and placing it over that hidden wound, he devoted his full attention to creating a happy family." (260)

To the extent that Shicheng's "father" was, in fact, successful in using a "sheet of invisible paper" to suture over the gaping "hidden wound" fracturing the core of Shicheng's nuclear family, the novel as a whole is most explicitly concerned with Shicheng's attempt to peel back this makeshift bandage and reexamine the original wound. As such, Wu Jiwen's entire novel can be seen as a rather perverse twist of the archetypal Oedipal narrative, wherein Shicheng's own voyage of self-discovery is mediated through the gradual and systematic archeological inquiry into the primary "mother" and "father" figures in his life: his father and his aunt. At the figurative bedrock of these two excavations lie two rather astonishing surprises—namely, that his motherly "aunt" was, in fact, originally his "uncle"; and that his "father" (whom he detests) is not actually his biological father but his "uncle," with his "real" father being his ostensible "uncle," Chengyuan. Chengyuan had been involved with a political dissident group in the 60s, and after he was discovered, fled to Shicheng's parents' house for asylum. The shock apparently gave Shicheng's (ostensible) father a nervous breakdown, while his mother ended up sleeping with his "real" father, Chengyuan (257-59).

These two revelations lead to a double reversal of the archetypal Oedipal paradigm, in that Shicheng learns not only that the "maternal" relative to whom he ultimately felt closest was not a woman after all, but rather was originally a man, just as the "father" by whom he felt most threatened turns out not to be his actual father. We could compare Shicheng's process of self-discovery to Freud's celebrated "Wolf Man" essay, about a subject who as a child inadvertently witnessed the parental *coitus a tergo*, and whose subsequent "symptom formations were nothing but so many endeavors to integrate this primal scene into the present, synchronous symbolic network, to confer meaning upon it and thus to contain its traumatic impact" (Žižek

1991: 202). In Shicheng's case, the "symbolic network" (the "writing," if you will, on the "invisible paper" mentioned above) constitutes an attempt to make sense not of a glimpse of parental coitus. And "while Freud's Wolf Man is transfixed by this visible glimpse of the tripled act of coitus, Shicheng is equally fascinated by the comparative invisibility of his tripled "uncles": the three brothers (including his own natural father) who largely fall out of the family's sight.

The novel mentions, at one point, that there are three individuals whom the family doesn't really talk about much: Chengxi, Chengyuan, and Shicheng's oldest uncle (17). Although the text, at this point, only mentions that all three have led particularly difficult lives (including being imprisoned, in the case of Chengyuan, and being "forced" to live in exile, in the case of Chengxi), it is interesting that all three of these symbolic erasures can also be seen as revolving around different points of weakness within the dominant patriarchal and political ideology. That is to say, since all three brothers were born under an uxorilocal marriage, the family's first son (Shicheng's oldest uncle) had to be given his mother's surname rather than his father's (115). And although the following sons, the twins Chengxi and Chengyuan, did in fact take their father's surname, Chengxi effectively repudiates the patriarchal order by renouncing his masculinity, himself representing a potentially subversive gender "fluidity." Meanwhile, Chengyuan challenges this same patriarchal order in a somewhat more subtle way, by secretly impregnating his sister-in-law. In addition, Chengyuan's illicit intrusion into Shicheng's family is directly related to his challenge of the ruling orthodoxy: because of his activities as a political dissident, Chengyuan also represents a point of weakness within the Nationalist ideology. At the same time, however, these latter two erasures produce a highly articulate metaphorical structure, with the entire novel in a sense constituting an attempt to talk through their respective consequences.

One of the central concerns of an uxorilocal marriage structure involves the relation between naming and gender, with the man's agreement to "marry into" the woman's household typically premised on the agreement that at least some of their children would be given *the mother's* surname. A similar

emphasis on naming is played out ironically in the *given names* of several of the main characters. In an twist on the Confucian precept of "rectification of names," many of the personal names of the main characters in the novel reflect back ironically on their own conflicting identities. For instance, and most obviously, the *yuan* in Chengyuan's name means literally "dark pool," which resonates with the obvious association, explored throughout the novel, between water and origins. Meanwhile, the second character in Chengxi's given name actually has two potential readings. Pronounced *qi*, it suggests the binome *qiqiao*, 蹊蹺 meaning "odd" or "strange"—a meaning certainly not without relevance to this mysterious, transgendered figure. The same character, however, can also be read *xi* meaning "path." This latter reading is explicitly pointed to in the novel when it is observed that Shicheng originally found his aunt's name to be rather odd, but that it made more sense to him when, one day, he saw a magazine article citing the aphorism, "The peaches and plum trees are without speech, but the ground beneath them is nevertheless *trod into a path*," and realized that his grandparents had not simply made Chengxi's name up out of thin air (36). This aphorism has a metaphorical relevance to Chengxi's eventual sex/uality, in that s/he does not simply accept the sex/uality with which s/he was originally born, but rather attempts to deliberately "trace the path" of a new one. In addition, this bifurcation of the aunt's name at the level of its pronunciation and meaning is reinforced by the fact that she is not only a twin, but also at times sees herself "as her own twin" (153).

Finally, the second ideograph in Shicheng's own given name also has two potential readings. Read *cheng*, the 澄 ideograph literally means "to make clear," suggesting Shi's general goal, which motivates him throughout the novel, of clarifying the muddy waters of time: *shi*. 時 The same character, however, could also be read as *deng*, in which case it becomes an intransitive verb meaning "to precipitate out." This latter reading suggests an additional metaphorical reading of Shicheng's name, insofar as he is not simply concerned with "clarifying" the muddy waters of time, but also with uncovering the multiple layers of historical sedimentation which contributed to that muddiness in the first place. In a sense, Shicheng's own

subjectivity is a product of this same surplus precipitate (*deng*). Here, we might profitably compare a passage on penis-envy, of all things, in which Freud also draws on a similar figurative intersection of "ground" and "sedimentation":

> We often feel that, when we have reached the wish for a penis and the masculine protest, we have penetrated all the psychological strata and reached "bedrock" [*der gewaschsener Fels*] and that our task is accomplished. And this is probably correct, for in the psychical field the biological factor is really rock-bottom. (Freud 1963: 271)

In a useful discussion of this passage, Judith Butler notes that Freud is pointing to "a figure of a ground that is nevertheless *sedimented through time*, and so not a ground, but an effect of a prior process covered over by this ground" (Butler 1993: 200). Similarly, Shicheng's own search for his past uncovers, not a stable ground, but rather a continual *process* of sedimentation.

We might conclude this discussion of "rocks" and "grounds" by returning to one of the most famous "rocks" in Chinese literature—the Stone left over from Nüwa's creation of the celestial firmament at the beginning of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The Stone is not only "reincarnated" into the oddly phallic piece of jade which the protagonist, Jia Baoyu, wears around his neck, but also comes to have inscribed on its surface the entire text of the novel itself. I would suggest that the Hedin diaries in Wu Jiwen's novel function in a similar manner, being intimately tied to the lives and deaths of those who possess them, and containing on their pages the projective inscription of the entire novel itself. Indeed, it is these diaries which come to stand in for the "sheet of invisible paper" which is described as suturing the "wounds" (both psychic and somatic) located at the heart of the novel itself.

Coda

By way of conclusion, I will return briefly to the same sixteenth-century play *The Peony Pavilion* with which I began. Beyond its thematization of visual imagery and practices of perception, Tang Xianzu's play serves aptly as a companion-text

to this study for another reason as well: as one of Chinese theater's best known stories, the work has enjoyed a long tradition of performances and passionate obsession. For Dorothy Ko

> If Ming and Qing woman readers shared a common vocabulary, it was based on *The Peony Pavilion*. No other work triggered such an outpouring of emotion from women. . . . The women's response . . . was shocking in its novelty, intensity, and a certain consensus of sentiment, despite subtle differences in interpretation. True to the spirit of the cult of *qing, women created communities transcending spatial and even temporal barriers through their shared appreciation of this play.* (Ko 1994: 73; emphases added)

These Ming-Qing women's "literary communities" provide a useful model for contextualizing Wu Jiwen's novels. Just as they use *The Peony Pavilion* as a touchstone for the expression of their own sensibilities, Wu Jiwen, in his first novel, harks back to, and establishes an imaginary camaraderie with, Chen Sen's "homoerotic" novel from a century and a half earlier.

Furthermore, Wu's first novel was published in 1996, the same year that another Taiwan writer, the openly lesbian novelist and short story writer (Qiu Miaojin), published her own final novel, *Montmartre Suicide Note* (*Mengmate yishu*)—a work which appeared posthumously after she explicitly used it to sketch her own impending suicide (just as Du Liniang unwittingly anticipates, in her act of self-portraiture, her own impending demise). Though the temporal coincidence of Wu's and Qiu's works—with their mutual interest in, and thematization of, queer identity—is undoubtedly fortuitous in and of itself, it is less so when considered from the perspective of the remarkable efflorescence in the past decade of "queer fiction" from both Taiwan, and the broader transnational Chinese community.

邱妙津
蒙馬特遺書

While Wu's and Qiu's 1996 novels direct us to the theme of delocalized (queer) communities, another coincidence of publication dates will serve to recapitulate another central concern of this essay as a whole. In 1994, Zhu Tianwen published her *Notes of a Desolate Man* (*Huangren shouji*). In this cryptically autobiographical novel,[14] Zhu Tianwen

朱天文
荒人手記

[14] For a discussion of the issue of the autobiographical resonances of Zhu Tianwen's novel, see Ng (1996: 265-312).

ventriloquistically adopts the voice of a Taiwanese gay man (a character who, she claims, is actually based on a close friend of hers) as he reminisces philosophically in the wake of the death of his lover from AIDS. In that same year, American gay author Robert Glück also published his novel *Margery Kempe*. In precise inverse of Zhu's narrative position as a woman author adopting the voice of a gay man, Glück is a gay male author who adopts the voice of a (straight) woman, Margery Kempe—the author of the fifteenth-century text, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which borrows on the genre of hagiographic *biography* to produce what is often regarded as the first English-language *auto*biography. All of these works center around the mediated discourse of the self, "autobiographically" narrating the self as if from the position of an "other." Historically speaking, early Chinese autobiographical narratives also borrowed explicitly and liberally from *biographical* models.[15] Throughout this article, I have centered around the moment of self-alienation implicit in the figurative act of self-portraiture, and Wu Jiwen's own *Galaxies in Ecstasy* not only develops this theme at a theoretical level, but also realizes it at a practical level in the sense that the novel is itself largely autobiographical (Wu Jiwen has conceded that the novel draws in important respects from his own experiences).

Galaxies in Ecstasy is itself very much concerned with tracing Shicheng's attempt to come to terms with his sexual orientation in a society in which heterosexual norms were, in a very literal sense, visually inscribed on bodies—as exemplified most vividly in the account of how Shicheng's male schoolmates tattooed the names of their girl-friends on their own flesh (82). Michel Foucault has observed that, although homosexual acts and practices have a very long history, a distinct homosexual *identity* only emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century, in direct response to the efforts of the psychological establishment

[15] See Wu (1990) and Huang (1995). This crossing between the genres of biography and autobiography is, of course, not unique to the Chinese tradition. In fact, Margery Kempe's own "autobiography," which is narrated in the third person, draws extensively on elements provided by the pre-existing genre of female sacred biography (see Staley 1994: esp. Chapter 2).

to classify and, in the process, proscribe it (Foucault 1990). A comparable phenomenon can be observed in China, where although there is a history of discussions of "homosexual" practice (Hinsch 1990), Chen Sen's mid-nineteenth-century novel (with its apparent naturalization of homosexual practice and "identity") appeared during roughly the same period in which the Chinese government was beginning, for the first time, to actively proscribe and criminalize homosexual conduct (specifically, male-male anal intercourse).[16] Similarly, although the recent efflorescence of Chinese queer writings in the nineties is undoubtedly the result of a variety of different factors, one important component of this literary phenomenon is undoubtedly the challenge of the global AIDS epidemic.

In addition, an equally important factor in this development of a transnational "queer" consciousness has been the concurrent rise and popularization of the internet as a transnational medium facilitating the formation of virtual communities consisting of individuals of common interests and concerns.[17] For instance, Marjorie Garber has noted that, "sex, romance, and courtship today are being pursued, and perused, by computer, situating hundreds of thousand of people at 'the locus of desire and technology'" (Garber 2000: 34). Similarly, referring more specifically to the Taiwan gay scene, the Taiwan "queer" author and critic Chi Ta-wei [Ji Dawei] has recently observed, 紀大偉

> In the mid-nineties, homosexuality and the internet both achieved rapid popularity in Taiwan, and the two could naturally not avoid "making eyes" (*meilai yanqu*) at each other. Queers (*tongzhi*) need opportunities to come together, but each 眉來眼去 同志

[16] Several historians have recently posited that official Chinese criminalization of male-male homoerotic acts has its origins only in the mid-Qing. See, for instance, Meijer (1985), Ng (1987, 1989) and Hinsch (1990). In a more recent study, however, Matthew Sommer has pointed out that laws prohibiting anal sex between men first appeared on the books in the late Ming, though it was not until the mid-Qing that they began to be vigorously enforced (Sommer 2000: esp. 114-65).

[17] It is worth noting here that Wu Jiwen has his own email address printed at the end of each of his novels.

> individual may be separated from others by vast distances, or alternatively they might spend a long time glancing around (*piao*) in the streets but not be able to see (*kanbuchu*) where any potential dinner dates are. However, the internet provides a large number of opportunities for such encounters. Furthermore, most queers/*tongzhi* still have problems with "coming out," but with the internet everyone can interact via text and images, and therefore they don't have to show their true face (*zhen mianmu*). As a result, in general they don't have to run the risk of public exposure (*baoguang*). (Chi 1997: 54)

瞟
看不出
真面目
曝光

Aside from gesturing to the "twin births" of the sudden popularity of homosexuality and the internet in contemporary Taiwan, the above passage points to the role of the internet in providing a sort of prosthetic visuality. The passage begins with a specifically visual metaphor ("making eyes") to describe the flirtatious relationship between Taiwan homosexuality and the internet, and then goes on to specify that one of the biggest challenges confronting contemporary homosexuals is precisely one of the limitation of *sight* (looking for, but not being able to see, potential dates). However, the internet allows users to *see better* (in this specific sense) precisely to the extent that it allows those being "seen" to hide behind false appearance (not having to show their "true face"). The logic behind this apparent paradox is suggested by the double entendre of the term "exposure" in the final line; in both English and Chinese, it suggests both the act of making public one's "identity," as well as the process of photographic "exposure." Therefore, "exposure" functions here as an oxymoron, suggesting not only the "true revelation" of one's identity to outside observers, but also the *mediated translation* of one's image onto photographic print. (This double meaning of "exposure" also has clear relevance to this essay's concern with self/portraiture and auto/biography.)

The internet is one of the most visible symptoms of current trends toward globalization. Although globalization is often criticized for its reductive homogenization of cultural diversity, many critics have noted that it also creates a space for the construction of new identities. For instance, Stuart Hall has pointed to its potential "pluralizing impact on identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and

making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified, or transhistorical" (Hall 1996: 628). In the context of Wu Jiwen's novel, we see this theme of globalization being played out particularly dramatically in Chengxi's adamant insistence on remaining abroad, and it is also borne out by the community she establishes in Tokyo with her friend Dina and other transvestites and/or transgendered individuals (many of whom appear to be fellow expatriates).

The sorts of trans-spatial, and indeed transnational, "reading communities" which we glimpse in the recent efflorescence of Chinese queer fiction are revealed equally dramatically by the recent, well-publicized, global dissemination of the same Tang Xianzu play with which I began this essay. In the spring and summer of 1999, two separate North American performances of the Ming opera—directed by Peter Sellars and the American émigré director Chen Shizheng, respectively—have uprooted the work from its "original" context, entering it into a global symbolic economy.

Reminiscent of the divergent fates of the twin brothers in *Galaxies*, these two performances of *The Peony Pavilion* were initially linked together at birth, subsequently separated by the contingencies of fate, and ultimately reconverged with almost simultaneous North American debuts (though on opposite sides of the continent). In 1997, John Rockwell, founding director of Lincoln Center Summer Festival, toured Chinese *kunqu* opera troops with both directors (Chen and Sellars), having initially envisioned parallel performances of Chen's careful historical reconstruction and Sellars' more idiosyncratically personal interpretation of the same work. Over the next two years, the two performances parted paths, with Sellars opting to distance himself from mainland Chinese institutions altogether and proceed with an almost entirely expatriate cast, while Chen's own performance received international headlines as it was unexpectedly cancelled by local Chinese authorities on the eve of its originally scheduled 1998 premiere in New York.

In terms of presentation, the two performances could not be more dissimilar. Peter Sellars' adaptation, which had its North American premiere in Berkeley, California in March 1999, enlisted the efforts of many Chinese expatriates, including the prominent post-modernist composer Tan Dun, and it took full

advantage of a variety of technological resources with banks of video screens, simultaneous interpretation, and a deliberately free mixing of different cultural, operatic and musical traditions. About four months later, on the opposite American coast, Chen Shizheng debuted his own version of the complete, fifty-five scene opera, in a twenty-hour marathon performance. As the production's own program notes claims, "Because of its enormous production demands, the complete *Peony Pavilion* has very rarely been staged. . . .It is safe to say that this integral production by Lincoln Center Festival 99 is unprecedented in its scope and completeness, and that Kunju opera on this scale has not been seen for centuries" (Xu 1999: 24k).[18]

Chen Shizheng's 1999 debut was all the more dramatic because, like the female protagonist Du Liniang, Chen's performance itself had, in effect, returned from the dead. Almost a year earlier, Shanghai officials forced the cancellation of the scheduled impending debut on the grounds that Chen's interpretation of this Chinese masterpiece was "feudal, superstitious and pornographic."[19] Furthermore, just as Du Liniang's reincarnation was mediated by the visual image of her self-portrait, a rather more modern technology of visual reproduction ironically played an important role as a concrete copula, linking Chen's earlier, scuttled production and its subsequent resurrection. According to one newspaper account,

> Since January [1999], Chen himself had spent plenty of time in front of video monitors. The production's co-producer, Paris' *Festival d'Autumne*, had videotaped the Shanghai company's dress rehearsals back in the spring of 1998, and those tapes

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[18] Many of the reviews of the performance claimed that it was the first complete production of the opera "in more than a century," but Cyril Birch, in his introduction to his English translation of the work, notes that "a performance of the entire play was mounted in Peking during a national drama festival in the mid-1950's" (1994: xiv).

[19] It is of ironic relevance to the concerns of the present essay that one of the facets of Chen's "resurrection" of the complete version of Tang's opera which disconcerted the Shanghai culture bureau is quite possibly the explicit jokes about male homoeroticism—found in scenes which are typically not performed any more.

> have been Chen's best connection, beyond his memory and that of [the actress playing Du Liniang] Qian [Yi] and [music director] Zhou [Ming], with his initial conception. (Smith 1999: 5)

These dress-rehearsal videos (taken, as it turns out, on the event of the performance's untimely demise) function quite explicitly as a sort of self-portrait. As Chen himself said of the relationship between the still-born and the reincarnated productions (which were put together and performed by two almost completely different casts of actors and other workers), "this year [the company] is different but essentially, it's the same production. The *vision* is still the same" (cited in Smith 1999: 5; emphasis added).

This question of the level of visual mimeticism between Chen's two performances of *The Peony Pavilion* reproduces the larger debates over the degree of visual continuity between Chen's and Sellars' respective contemporary interpretations and the plays' own "original" historical incarnation. Considerations of transhistorical verisimilar fidelity also serve as a reminder of the degree to which the themes of visual identification and misrecognition are at the core of the plot of the Ming opera itself. In the present essay, I have similarly examined the role of visuality within the processes of vicarious identification and systematic misrecognition which lie at the core of Wu Jiwen's *Galaxies in Ecstasy*. I have stressed the status of "vision" and blindness within practices of auto(bio)graphy, together with their role in linking the Self both to assorted "Others," as well as to the Self's "own" past. These considerations are not only relevant to an understanding of the actual plot of *Galaxies in Ecstasy*, but also have compelling applicability to the larger social phenomena of queer identity and strategies of self-representation in which the novel is embedded. As part of the body of queer literature which achieved sudden visibility in Taiwan and other Chinese communities in the 1990's, Wu Jiwen's semi-autobiographical novel itself reflects the potential role of projective identification and misrecognition in the formation of transnational and transhistorical public spheres and reading communities.

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