CONTENTS
Volume 47

Editorial

This forty-seventh volume of *CLEAR* presents recent meditations on the central questions of Chinese literature, traditional and classic, through both its research articles and its book reviews. The heroic period of the journal's founders is represented through reminiscences of Kai-yu Hsü, whose editing, translation, and painting should not fade away. In the remaining articles, reception-histories are curiously prominent. Is this a diversionary move, or a way of getting at the essentials of literary art?

One old—not as old as claimed, but quite old nonetheless—dream about the powers of writing is displayed in the "Metal-Bound Coffer" (Jinteng 金縢) chapter of the *Shang shu,* the afterlife of which is analyzed here by Olivia Milburn. In Zhou-dynasty China as elsewhere, motives are invisible, rumors run wild, one finds one's actions adorned with the worst possible interpretation—and wouldn't it be nice if the truth could be preserved in some secure place, written in forthright characters to be opened and read by an understanding soul? That would be vindication. But as Milburn's patient tracing of the allusion-history of the motif shows, the moment of truth never comes. Every attempt to draw on the "Jinteng" story for historical authority reintroduces the ambiguity of motive that it was supposed to clear, and the emulation of Zhou Gong's deed by a lineage of fakers and forgers plays havoc with the connotations of self-revelation and sacrifice. Maybe some boxes are best left unopened.

此中有真意, said Tao Yuanming ("in this there is true meaning"), or according to Daniel Hsieh's reading, 此還有真意 ("returning to this there is true meaning"): but unlike the Zhou Gong of the story, Tao Yuanming did not enclose a slip purporting to disclose that true meaning: Daoistically, he leaves us to gather the hints from the ambient air. Whether with an eye that accidentally perceives, 見, or an eye that deliberately gazes, 望, Tao turns to the Southern Mountain of hallowed memory and turns us with him. Though admired for his simplicity, Tao Yuanming turns out to have started a complicated game that his readers would keep going for centuries.

Did I say "Tao Yuanming said…"? By what deductions did I come to that? Isn't it rather that a fantasy character summoned up by marks on a page, by my teachers, by echoes of conversation, by an ethos traced out by representative stories, has received credit for this act, or these acts, of speaking? How strange it is that we can still "hear" (as we call it metaphorically) and recognize this person, even have opinions about what he would or wouldn't have said (見 or 望? *If you knew Tao Yuanming like I know Tao Yuanming*…). And stranger still, might we not find ourselves regulating our own conduct by his example? (Here insert fantasies of living in the country and dedicating one's time to drinking ale and picking chrysanthemums.) The Lives of the Poets, like the Lives of the Saints, contain many a dubious relic and miracle, and yet *longen folk to*

goon on pilgrimages, even to cap Tao Yuanming's rhymes and pose as his reincarnation. Such behavior deserves an explanation.

Lucas Bender ventures one, observing that the "autobiographical thesis" that would treat the relation between a Chinese poem and its author as self-evident harbors many more subtle mechanisms. Thwarted communication is one of the great subjects of early lyric verse. The "transpersonal affordances" of shared emotion, struggling against the obstacles, afford a platform on which the author emerges. Yixin Gu, likewise, traces the development of a self-referential ontology in narrative: Baoqin occupies a transitional space that is precisely the "space of indeterminacy" captured by Roman Ingarden's phenomenology of reading.

If authorship is a kind of conjuring, an apotropaic spell, then what more sovereign gesture is there than the repeated self-censorship of Ming authors examined by Thomas Kelly, burning their previous works while making sure to tell us about it? The title of Dong Sizhang's poetry collection, *Weifen gao* 未焚稿 (Manuscripts Not Yet Burned, before 1628), could be applied to any book. But the cultural precariousness it connotes was a feeling Dong shared with many later writers. Dong Yue's puzzling *Xiyoubu* 西游補(1640) here gains a new level of meaning (and material self-reference) as Kelly is led to explore "how setting fire to words conditioned, rather than negated, increasingly sophisticated reflections in Chinese literature on the meaning and purpose of writing." Huiqiao Yao starts from another act of destruction, the burning of the woodblocks of *Sanjiao kaimi yanyi* 三教開迷演義, a fiction the adherents of the "Three-in-one" cult found blasphemous. Their destruction was unsuccessful—barely so.

One form of fictionality cherished in Chinese literature is displacement. Fiction writers reworked Ming-dynasty tales of seafaring, colonization, and piracy to voice concerns specific to the middle Qing in the era of the opium wars, or they revisited *Liaozhai* tales in the 1980s and 1990s to accommodate new ghosts and fox-spirits: cases of temporal shifting analyzed for us by Rachel Junlei Zhang and Tao Peng. Requiring from the reader background knowledge and the ability to transpose contexts, I would say the operation makes the reader more intelligent. Among the generic signals of such writing, the superwoman is conspicuous: a rebuke to incapable men or a dream of a feminist future?

Realism, so often championed or derided around the world over the last hundred and fifty years, is often theorized as a mode or style, not a set of objects (to conceive of it through its objects, it seems, would be naïve). But what happens to realism when it clashes with the unsayable? The whole point of realism in the era of Zola was to depict, acknowledge and reveal what pious conformity wanted to keep hidden. That is how an aesthetic mode passes into a form of social action. Marco Fumian proposes a "poetics of the invisible" as a "map of the reterritorializations of Chinese fictional representations." In a correlative manner, Bo Ærenlund Sørensen informs us about novels whose referential horizon is set by omniscient and pervasive surveillance. Between the invisible and the impossible-to-hide—that would be the narrow space of realism for our times.

Vernacular writing was supposed to reveal real life and authentic voices. But one of the earliest publishing projects of what would be the May Fourth generation was Lin Shu's version of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. The Lambs cleansed the Bard from anything resembling either the earthy or the tragic, and Lin Shu likewise policed the texts he translated, removing any obstacle to popular reception. What modernity is this? What is it doing in *Xin qingnian*? The curiously "instrumentalized" Shakespeare that resulted nonetheless moved in the company of such as Lu Xun, Qian Xuantong, and Zhang Taiyan, as César Guarde-Paz recounts. If the lesson is that there are no permanent schools, parties, or party lines in literature, let's accept it. Routines and set beliefs deaden us to art, and new explanations spring from the failure of the old ones.

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