# *Hsü Chen-ya's* Yü-li hun : *An Essay in Literary History and Criticism*

**By C.T. Hsia**

NOW THAT an increasing number of scholars are turning to late-Ch'ing and May Fourth fiction as rewarding subjects for study, the fiction of the intervening years, 1912-1918, appears all the more negligible for lack of critical attention. Conditioned by what we read in the available literary histories, we are content to dismiss that period as of little interest since it is mainly identifiable with the rise of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fiction (*Yüan-yang hu-tieh p'ai hsiao-shuo* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派小說) and Black Curtain fiction (*Hei-mu hsiao-shuo* 黑幕小說)—two pejorative labels designed to ward off all but the most determined students of Chinese fiction. The wide acceptance of the former label as a generic term for all types of Republican fiction produced by old-style writers before 1949 is further symptomatic of our critical indifference.[1]

The general inferiority of old-style Republican fiction is taken for granted even by the few scholars claiming an interest in the subject. Thus it seems to me quite characteristic that Professor Perry Link, who has written a pioneering study on the subject in English,[2] should examine it primarily as popular literature deficient in the

[1]Thus the most important guide to old-style Republican fiction is the Wei Shao-ch'ang 魏紹昌 compilation *Yüan-yang hu-tieh p'ai yen-chiu tzu-liao* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派研究資料 (Shanghai, 1962—abbreviated in the notes as *Yüan-yang*). It includes valuable contributions by such veteran old-style writers as Fan Yen-ch'iao 范烟橋 and Cheng I-mei 鄭逸梅, who all prefer the designation *Min-kuo chiu-p'ai hsiao-shuo* 民國舊派小說.

[2]I had completed the main text of my paper before Link's *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1981—hereafter abbreviated as *Butterflies*) was published. However, I did consult a Xerox copy of a typescript of identical title and presumably identical content (preface dated February 1979) given me by Professor Link, along with his article, "Traditional-style Popular Urban Fiction in the Teens and Twenties", in Merle Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1977).

kind of artistic seriousness that has distinguished the new-style modern fiction produced in the May Fourth period and after. Though his book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the social history and popular culture of the early Republican decades, as a literary historian I wish he had made a more systematic study of any of the authors cited in his book for their representative importance—Hsü Chen-ya, Li Han-ch'iu 李涵秋, Hsiang K'ai-jan 向愷然, Chang Hen-shui 張恨水, *et al.* Link does devote considerable space to Hsü Chen-ya's *Yü-li hun* and Chang Hen-shui's *T'i-hsiao yin-yüan*, but his failure to discuss any other novels at all adequately betrays his limited reading knowledge of this branch of fiction and also his superficial command of classical Chinese literature.[3] He tries to rise above the prejudices of the May Fourth critics who have pronounced on Butterfly fiction (in the broader sense of the term) with undisguised ridicule and scorn, but unfortunately his own sociological understanding of that fiction as a "fiction for comfort" is hardly designed to remove these long-entrenched prejudices.

As champions of a new, Western-oriented literature with a new ideological content, the May Fourth critics (Lu Hsün 魯迅, Mao Tun 茅盾, and Cheng Chen-to 鄭振鐸) were certainly justified to attack Butterfly fiction on ideological and artistic grounds.[4] But if Butterfly novels are ideologically backward and artistically shoddy, then what about Ming-Ch'ing novels, whose ideology cannot be any less backward from the May Fourth point of view? In this day and age, it seems to me hypocritical to maintain a double standard of judgment: to adopt all kinds of critical strategies, traditional as well as modern, to make the Ming-Ch'ing novels look respectable but to abide by the prejudices of the May Fourth critics and of the doctrinaire Communist Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai 瞿秋白 in our estimation of Butterfly novels. Given the scarcity of good fiction in any given age and culture, we can safely assume that the majority of the latter are as unworthy of serious attention as the majority of Ming-Ch'ing novels, but it is not unrealistic to expect that the most outstanding Butterfly novels, the ones that had captured the hearts of ten thousands of readers, may not compare unfavourably with the best of Ming-Ch'ing novels in artistic worth, and may command comparable interest as intellectual and historical documents of their time. Instead of treating them merely as a species of popular literature (after all, what are the classic Chinese novels if they are not works that have achieved enduring popularity through the centuries?), we should be prepared to examine the best Butterfly novels as artistic and ideological structures worthy of critical attention, and further study them in as many contexts (biographical, literary, social, philosophical) as may be needed to bring out their full significance. In a word, we should be as fair-minded about these works as we have been about the best of the Ming-Ch'ing novels.

The present paper attempts to give a rounded critical examination of one such novel, *Yü-li hun* 玉梨魂 (Jade Pear Spirit, 1912), the phenomenal best-seller of the early Republican period which sold several hundred thousand copies during its years

[3]His discussion of such novels as Li Han-ch'iu's *Kuang-ling ch'ao* 廣陵潮 and Hsiang K'ai-jan's *Chiang-hu ch'i-hsia chuan* 江湖奇俠傳 is much more perfunctory. He translates several passages from *Yü-li hun* and analyzes the novel from different angles.

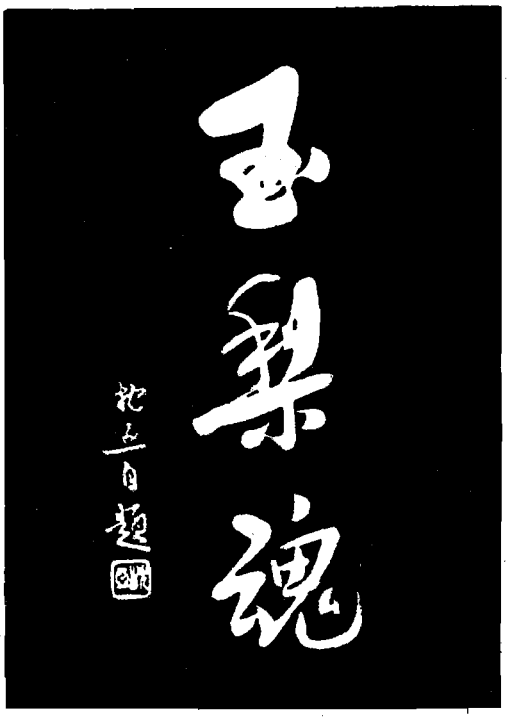
[4]See their essays in *Yüan-yang*, Section I.

of fame, and reached even larger audiences when it was made into a silent movie.[5] The novel is generally taken to be the outstanding representative of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fiction in its narrower definition, and its author, Hsü Chen-ya (1886-19??), was certainly the most renowned novelist of the school and the first to receive nation-wide acclaim. Despite its popularity, however, *Yü-li hun* was not written in an easy style for the enjoyment of the semi-literate; on the contrary, it is recorded in parallel prose and contains so many literary allusions and so many poems in the classical style that its proper enjoyment requires a sound education in Chinese literature and familiarity with its major poets, plays and novels. Nor is *Yü-li hun* a cozy novel of lovers nestling side by side like mandarin ducks or fluttering together like butterflies—the unfortunate generic image inviting the scorn of May Fourth critics;[6] for its author and its contemporary readers, it was a tragic novel of love (*ai-ch'ing hsiao-shuo* 愛情小說) which commented powerfully on the society and family system of its time. More importantly, it was a tragedy making full use of the sentimental-erotic tradition in Chinese literature, a long and proud tradition inclusive of such poets as Li Shang-yin 李商隱, Tu Mu 杜牧, and Li Hou-chu 李後主, and such works of drama and fiction as *Hsi-hsiang chi* 西廂記, *Mu-tan t'ing* 牡丹亭, *T'ao-hua shan* 桃花扇, *Ch'ang-sheng tien* 長生殿, and *Hung-lou meng* 紅樓夢. One major thesis of this paper is indeed to prove that *Yü-li hun* is a culminating work of that tradition without which the tradition itself would have been felt wanting. Far from being a commercial product exploitative of the sentimental clichés of the past for the amusement of the public, *Yü-li hun* owed its tremendous popularity to its astonishing emotional impact upon the educated readers of its time, and its equally astonishing literary virtuosity. It was a new kind of Chinese novel fully utilizing the traditional storehouse of lyrical imagery descriptive of love and its deprivation but partly inspired, too, by Lin Shu's 林紓 translations of Western fiction.

But if we regard *Yü-li hun* as an essential work of the Chinese sentimental-erotic tradition, then the career of Hsü Chen-ya is all the more disappointing for his rapid deterioration as a novelist. Challenged by the great success of *Yü-li hun*, Hsü took pains to write another version of the same story in the form of a journal. Initially serialized under the title of *Ho Meng-hsia jih-chi* 何夢霞日記 (The diary of Ho Meng-hsia), *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* (The snow and the swan: a lachrymose story, 1915) was most probably the first non-satiric Chinese novel recorded in the first

[5]Both Fan Yen-ch'iao 范烟橋 and Yen Fu-sun 嚴芙孫 are content to say that *Yü-li hun* sold "several hundred thousand copies", not counting unauthorized editions published in Hong Kong, Singapore, and other cities outside China (*Yüan-yang*, pp. 174, 462). Citing another source, Link reports that both *Yü-li hun* and *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* 雪鴻淚史 enjoyed "a total circulation of over a million, counting continued reprintings in the 1920s and later" (*Butterflies*, p. 53). The movie *Yü-li hun* (1924) was directed by Chang Shih-ch'uan 張石川 and Hsü Hu 徐琥 from a screenplay by Cheng Cheng-ch'iu 鄭正秋. Though the principal heroine (played by Wang Han-lun 王漢倫) dies tragically in the movie, the hero (Wang Hsien-chai 王獻齋) and other heroine (Yang Nai-mei 楊耐梅) are allowed to marry in the end. See Ch'eng Chi-hua 程季華 *et al.*, *Chung-kuo tien-ying fa-chan shih* 中國電影發展史 (Peking, Chung-kuo tien-ying ch'u-pan-she, 1963), I, pp. 64-65. There were two subsequent movie versions; see *Butterflies*, p. 54.

[6]Liu Pan-nung 劉半農, who had been friends with some old-style writers before supporting the Literary Revolution in 1917, is believed to have been the first one to jokingly label novels like *Yü-li hun* as *Yüan-yang hu-tieh hsiao-shuo*. This incident took place in 1920 at a Shanghai restaurant. See the account by P'ing Chin-ya 平襟亞 in *Yüan-yang*, pp. 127-129.



HSÜ CHEN-YA'S CALLIGRAPHY, for an edition of *Yü-li hun* published by his own firm, Ch'ing-hua shu-chü.

person.[7] It is a longer narrative with a slower pace and inclusive of more poems and letters exchanged between the hero and heroine; but since we have read so many of its incidents and their supporting documents in the earlier novel, it cannot but be a work of lesser impact though autobiographically more revealing. More important, whereas the reader of *Yü-li hun* could identify the author as a patriot in sympathy with the revolutionary ideals of the day, *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* disclosed more clearly a reactionary writer openly hostile to the modern ways and in fervent support of what we may call feudal morality. In *Yü-li hun* that reactionary tendency is somewhat camouflaged by its talk of patriotism and social reform; its attainment of vast popularity, however, had emboldened the author to declare himself on the side of Confucian morality, thus exposing his unbridgeable distance from the champions of the New Culture. Hsü, after all, had never studied abroad and was too well entrenched in the Chinese tradition to school himself in Western thought.

After his second serious experiment in novel writing, Hsü Chen-ya had clearly become a commercial storyteller, turning out short novels in rapid succession that exploit the tragic formula of his first success by denying sexual fulfilment to his lovers while affirming their moral purity. Reading *Yü-li hun* by itself, one could say that but for the high wall of Confucian feudalism the lovers could have escaped

[7]The first satiric novel in the first person was, of course, Wu Wo-yao's 吳沃堯 *Erh-shih nien mu-tu chih kuai hsien-chuang* 二十年目睹之怪現狀, partially translated by Shih Shun Liu as *Vignettes from the Late Ch'ing: Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over Two Decades* (Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1975).

into freedom; reading the subsequent works, one sees more readily that the lovers were as much committed to the love ideal as to the ideal of martyrdom. It is only in the context of despair and death that they could achieve the kind of sublimation that forever ennobles and enshrines their love. Written on the eve of the new culture movement, *Yü-li hun* extols spiritual love only to underscore the more poignantly the kind of feudalist inhumanity soon to be totally repudiated, but Hsü Chen-ya's subsequent career could only confirm him in his unenviable role as high priest of a feudal society and its life-denying code. Once Lu Hsün directed the nation's young readers to the cannibalistic aspect of that society in *The Diary of A Madman* (1918) and other stories, their repudiation of Hsü Chen-ya became inevitable.

But whatever we may say of Hsü's old-fashioned moralism and eventual worthlessness as a novelist, his youthful masterpiece, *Yü-li hun*, should be rescued from oblivion and restored to a position of honour in the sentimental-erotic tradition of Chinese literature. To repudiate *Yü-li hun* is to deny merit to that sentimental strain in *Hung-lou meng* that had moved generations of Chinese readers to tears. It has always been characteristic of that tradition to capitalize on the non-fulfilment of sexual love against supposedly higher social imperatives or religious commands: it is certainly to the credit of our novelist that, in contrast to the author of *Hung-lou meng*, he at least spurns the easy solution provided by Buddhism or Taoism to concentrate on the agonies of lovers equally obedient to the dictates of love and morality.

## I

IN TIME CRITICS may agree that the two decades preceding the full-scale launching of the new literary movement in 1919 were linguistically a most interesting and dynamic period in Chinese literature. One would have to be as learned and tradition-bound as Ch'ien Chi-po 錢基博 to fully appreciate and discriminate among the various styles of *ku-wen* 古文 and *p'ien-wen* 駢文, of *shih* 詩, *tz'u* 詞, and *ch'ü* 曲 as exemplified by the leading writers of that age;[8] but as early as 1921, in his "Survey of the Literature of the Last Fifty Years", even Hu Shih 胡適 found praiseworthy the poetic style of Huang Tsun-hsien 黃遵憲, the prose styles of authors and scholars as different from each other as Liang Ch'i-ch'ao 梁啟超, Chang Ping-lin 章炳麟 and Chang Shih-chao 章士釗, and the innovative achievements in prose scored by the translators Lin Shu and Yen Fu 嚴復. In that essay and elsewhere, of course, Hu Shih was even more enthusiastic about the descriptive prose of Liu Ê 劉鶚, the colloquial Northern idiom of the novel *San-hsia wu-i* 三俠五義, and the Soochow dialect of the novel *Hai-shang hua lieh-chuan* 海上花列傳.[9] But because Hu Shih was eager to

[8] Cf. Ch'ien Chi-po, *Hsien-tai Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh shih* 現代中國文學史 (Expanded edition, 1936. Reprint: Hong Kong, Lung-men shu-tien, 1965).

[9] Cf. *Hu Shih wen-ts'un* 胡適文存, Vols. 3-4 (Taipei, Yüan-tung t'u-shu kung-ssu, 1953). Stephen H. L. Cheng 鄭緒雷 has completed a dissertation on *Hai-shang-hua* entitled "*Flowers of Shanghai* and the Late-Ch'ing Courtesan Novel" (Harvard University, 1979). [Ed: see Dr. Cheng's article in this collection, which is adapted from his earlier dissertation.]

legitimize the success of *pai-hua* or *kuo-yü*, he did not see that the universal adoption of the vernacular by the new writers of the May Fourth period had made possible a marked impoverishment of the language as seen in the literature of the period immediately preceding. The classical language, especially, was then in a state of vigorous health as it met the various challenges posed by the rise of journalism, the gravity of the national situation, and the task of translation. During his brief debate with the champions of *pai-hua* literature, Lin Shu still upholds terseness or brevity as an ideal of *wen-yen* 文言 writing, forgetting that, in the prefaces to his translations, he has repeatedly compared classical Chinese literature to Western fiction, citing in the latter's favour its abundance of narrative and descriptive detail and its wealth of humour and pathos.[10] However wanting in accuracy, his own translations attest to the fact that for the first time in Chinese history the *ku-wen* style was forcibly enlisted in the cause of copious narration interspersed with dialogue and description. Similarly, in the realm of political journalism and popular biography, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao had to forge a style able to meet the demands of clear exposition, rhetorical persuasion, and ample narration. Compared with the *ku-wen* masters of the past, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao was verbose and therefore vulgar, but for his intended audience his was a living style possessing the kind of verve and power it would have lacked if he had striven for classical terseness.

By the standards we invoke to praise Lin Shu and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, the author of *Yü-li hun* most also be judged a classical writer of great power and versatility for his time. His *p'ien-wen* style would be considered vulgar if compared with that of Yü Hsin 庾信 (513-581). Even Ch'en Ch'iu's 陳球 *Yen-shan wai-shih* 燕山外史 (c. 1810), the only pre-Republican work of full-length fiction set in parallel prose, would be regarded as purer in style. But whereas Ch'en Ch'iu was content to use various combinations of sentence units of four and six characters, Hsü Chen-ya is much more flexible in style, alternating the more formally structured passages of descriptive or lyrical emphasis with the more relaxed passages of dialogue or narration where a *ku-wen* type of prose is admitted. *Yü-li hun*, in addition, is studded with *shih* and *tz'u* poems in a variety of styles and metres, though the great majority are seven-word *lü-shih* 律詩 and *chüeh-chü* 絕句 in the style of Li Shang-yin. Letters, the majority set in an impassioned parallel prose style, are another regular feature of the novel. Except for his failure to use the lyrical metres of *tsa-chü* 雜劇 and *ch'uan-ch'i* 傳奇 (closet dramas of this type were regularly featured in late-Ch'ing magazines), one could say that Hsü Chen-ya had experimented with every type of classical verse and prose with great success. The immense popularity of *Yü-li hun* was surely due in great part to the public's ready appreciation of his poetic talent and stylistic virtuosity.

Given the reputation of Butterfly fiction and the irrefutable evidence of his rapid deterioration as a novelist, we are, of course, less disposed to accept Hsü Chen-

[10]Nearly all the prefaces and postfaces to Lin Shu's translations are collected in A Ying 阿英, ed. *Wan-Ch'ing wen-hsüeh ts'ung-ch'ao: Hsiao-shuo hsi-ch'ü yen-chiu chüan* 晚清文學叢鈔: 小說戲曲研究卷 (Peking, Chung-hua shu-chü 1960, hereafter abbreviated as *Yen-chiu chüan*). See particularly Lin's comments on Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* 斐洲煙水愁城錄; Scott's *Ivanhoe* 撒克遜劫後英雄略; Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* 拊掌錄 and *Tales of a Traveller* 旅行述異; and the Dickens novels.

ya as a master poet and prose stylist of his time. We want to know who were the teachers from whom he could learn to write so well. But, then, what illustrious teachers had guided Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, Lin Shu, and Lu Hsün in their youth so that they could write in various styles of prose and verse with ease? It would seem that during the late Ch'ing boys smart enough to profit from a rigorous classical education didn't need particularly famous teachers to guide them to a literary career. Two veteran writers knowledgeable about old Shanghai and old-style fiction, Ch'en Ching-chih 陳敬之 and Huang T'ien-shih 黃天石, have written memoirs about our author.[11] According to Ch'en, Fan Tseng-hsiang 樊增祥 (1846-1931), a Hupeh poet of national renown, was Hsü's teacher, but I am more inclined to agree with Huang, who had known Hsü in the twenties, that the senior poet was happy to befriend the novelist out of admiration for his literary talent.[12] According to Hsü himself, by age twenty he had written some eight hundred poems, mostly in the *lü-shih* and *chüeh-chü* style.[13] In the cultural climate of Chiangnan, a youth of literary bent needed only a coterie of like-minded friends to spur his poetic productivity.

It has always struck me as a matter of curious significance that the earliest promoters and practitioners of the new *pai-hua* literature should come from Anhwei and northern Chekiang rather than from Soochow, Wusih, Changshu, and other cities of southern Kiangsu, which had been the bastions of literary and artistic culture during the Ming and Ch'ing and had produced the largest number of scholars with the *chin-shih* degree. It would certainly seem that precisely because southern Kiangsu had been identified with literary culture, so many of its youths, if denied the opportunity to study abroad during the late-Ch'ing and early Republican years, would be content to serve as editors and authors for literary supplements and magazines. Thus the great majority of old-style novelists hailed from this region.

Hsü Chen-ya came from a family without scholarly pretensions which had long settled in Changshu. His father, however, had trained himself as a scholar but apparently enjoyed little success in the official world. In early retirement, he personally taught Chen-ya and his elder brother T'ien-hsiao 徐天嘯 and prepared them for the civil service examinations. But while T'ien-hsiao did earn the *hsiu-ts'ai* degree, Chen-ya, enjoying no such luck, received his further education in a normal school in

[11]Ch'en Ching-chih, "Yüan-yang hu-tieh p'ai ta-shih Hsü Chen-ya 鴛鴦蝴蝶派大師徐枕亞", and Chieh K'o 傑克 (pen name of Huang T'ien-shih), "Chuang-yuan nü-hsü Hsü Chen-ya 狀元女婿徐枕亞", are collected in *Min-kuo Chiu-p'ai wen-i yen-chiu tzu-liao ti-i-chi* 民國舊派文藝研究資料第一輯 (Hong Kong, Shih-yung shu-chü, 1978—hereafter abbreviated as *Chiu-p'ai wen-i*). Ch'en's article originally appeared in *Chang-ku yüeh-k'an* 掌故月刊, No. 2 (Hong Kong, October 1971), and Huang's in *Wan-hsiang* 萬象, No. 1 (Hong Kong, July 1975).

[12]Better known by his *hao* Fan-shan 樊山, Fan Tseng-hsiang excelled in parallel prose and wrote some of the most celebrated poems of his time in the late T'ang style. Thus there is much stylistic and temperamental affinity between him and Hsü. But while Hsü may have deferentially called himself a student in his correspondence with the senior poet, there would seem to be no period in Fan's life when he could have served as Hsü's teacher or patron. For a critical biography of Fan see Ch'ien Chi-po, *Hsien-tai Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh shih*, pp. 179-191.

[13]Cf. "Yin-sheng tzu-hsü 吟賸自序", in *Chen-ya lang-mo ch'u-chi* 枕亞浪墨初集 (Shanghai, 1915; 13th printing, Shanghai Ch'ing-hua shu-chü 1928—hereafter abbreviated as *Lang-mo*), *chüan* 2, p. 5.

Changshu and became a schoolteacher upon graduation.[14] Judging by *Yü-li hun* and other early novels, he was quite envious of his friends who had gone to Japan for advanced study. Had he been as lucky as Lu Hsün and Chou Tso-jen 周作人 in that regard, he would not have written *Yü-li hun* and might have joined the ranks of new writers. It was the spectacular success of *Yü-li hun* that confirmed him in the old ways and made it psychologically easy for him to scorn the new culture movement.

The Hsü brothers had been close friends with Wu Shuang-je 吳雙熱, a fellow townsman somewhat older than they. After teaching school for a while, Hsü Chen-ya joined the other two in Shanghai and served with them on the editorial board of *Min-ch'üan pao* 民權報, one of the most progressive newspapers of the day especially noted for its uncompromising opposition to Yüan Shih-k'ai during his presidency and subsequent reign as emperor. A founder of that newspaper was Tai Chi-t'ao 戴季陶 (Tai T'ien-ch'ou 天仇, also Tai Ch'uan-hsien 傳賢, 1891-1949), a staunch follower of Sun Yat-sen and subsequently one of the revered statesmen of the Republic. Just as Li Pao-chia 李寶嘉 and Wu Wo-yao 吳沃堯 had written for the most progressive journals of their day, so did the Hsü brothers in working for *Min-ch'üan pao*. We cannot say, therefore, that early Republican novelists had set out to write for money to please an audience unconcerned with national issues. It is following the rise of a literary avantgarde serving the more radical ideals of the West that these novelists began to look old-fashioned and consciously promoted a literature designed for readers intellectually unequipped to enjoy the new May Fourth journals.

Li Ting-yi 李定夷, a youth from Wuchin, another city of southern Kiangsu, had joined the *Min-ch'üan pao* a few months earlier than Wu Shuang-je and the Hsü brothers, and he, too, specialized in tragic love stories in parallel prose. When we speak of the early Republican vogue for Butterfly fiction in the narrow sense, we are strictly referring to the trio: Hsü Chen-ya, Wu Shuang-je, and Li Ting-yi.[15] Hsü

[14] *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* begins with an account of the hero's family which is much more autobiographical than its counterpart in Chapter 2 of *Yü-li hun*. Hsü Chen-ya himself wrote a commentary on the later novel ("*Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* p'ing 評", included in *Lei-shih*), designed to show that the earlier novel is more fictional, and I have no reason to doubt the veracity of this contention with regard to his family background up to the year 1909. In *Lei-shih*, p. 2, we read of the hero's father that "晚年督子綦嚴, …… 顧屬望方殷, 而名場已畢, 余兄猶博得一第以慰親心, 余乃一無成就。" This would seem to indicate that whereas T'ien-hsiao did earn a degree the author himself was denied the chance, following the abolition of the civil service examinations in 1905. In YLH, p. 9, however, we read of the hero that "夢霞雖薄視功名。亦曾兩應童試。皆不售。" Hsü may have taken part in these preliminary examinations. According to the essay "Tu-shu-t'ai chi 讀書臺記" (*Lang-mo, chüan* 2, p. 4), Hsü became a student at Yü-nan Normal School 虞南師範學校 in the spring of 1904. The corresponding school in *Yü-li hun* is called Liang-chiang 兩江 Normal School (YLH, p. 9).

[15] In his survey of old-style fiction (*Yüan-yang*, p. 177), Fan Yen-ch'iao has rightly grouped Su Man-shu 蘇曼殊 (1884-1918) with the trio as authors of *ai-ch'ing hsiao-shuo* though Su wrote sad love tales only in the *ku-wen* style. Because Su knew some foreign languages, cultivated an eccentric life-style, and had influential friends in the literary and political circles, he was a legend even in his lifetime and has always been treated much more kindly by literary historians than the writers of the Butterfly school. But whatever his importance as a cultural phenomenon of his period, I would maintain that, as a writer of fiction, he is certainly overrated. His longest and most famous piece of fiction, *Tuan-hung ling-yen chi* 斷鴻零雁記 (available in English as *The Lone Swan*) is a sketchy and rambling narrative with little to offer besides the vaunted monasticism of the autobiographical hero. *Tuan-tsan chi* 斷簪記 ("The Broken Hairpin"), the only other story by Su available in English, is unbelievably bad. W. Y. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau have unfortunately included that story in their otherwise excellent anthology, *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1978).

T'ien-hsiao, who also dabbled in fiction, was better known as a calligrapher and seal-carver. He was also more modern: according to Huang T'ien-shih, he went to Canton in 1918 and was among the first there to promote a *pai-hua* literature. Eventually he served in the Examination Yüan when Tai Chi-t'ao became its president in 1930.[16]

Wu Shuang-je's *Lan-niang ai-shih* 蘭娘哀史 (The Tragic tale of Lan-niang), the very first story to be featured in the illustrated supplement of *Min-ch'üan pao*, may have appeared earlier than *Yü-li hun*, which was serialized in the literary section of that paper. But even if this was the case, Hsü Chen-ya was still the first modern author to write a novel in parallel prose since *Lan-niang ai-shih* was only a tale of some ten thousand words.[17] *Yen-shan wai-shih*, though well known in modern times because Lu Hsün had favoured it with a discussion in his *Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, had remained an isolated experiment without any imitations, and we are not even sure if it had served as a direct stimulus for Wu and Hsü to write their stories.[18] Of greater influence would certainly be the massive example set by the translations of Lin Shu. If novels could be written in *ku-wen*, why couldn't they be in parallel prose? It would seem characteristic of the period when so many styles of verse and prose were assiduously cultivated that some youths from Changshu would want to choose parallel prose as a medium for fiction. According to Ch'ien Chi-po, the outstanding *p'ien-wen* writers of that period, such as Liu Shih-p'ei 劉師培, Li Hsiang 李詳, and Sun Te-ch'ien 孫德謙, were all natives of Kiangsu, though none came from Changshu.[19]

In its first two years of publication by the Min-ch'üan-pao Press, *Yü-li hun* sold over twenty thousand copies, an unprecedented record for a new work of fiction in China. As an employee of the newspaper, however, Hsü Chen-ya did not receive any royalty, which prompted him to make a legal fight for ownership of its copyright. He won the case and soon reissued the book under the auspices of his own monthly, *Hsiao-shuo ts'ung-pao* 小說叢報. It ran from May 1914 to August 1919 and serialized such new novels by Hsü as *Shuang-huan chi* 雙鬟記 (Two maid-

[16]Huang T'ien-shih, p. 44, in *Chiu-p'ai wen-i*.

[17]Hsü Chen-ya informs us of its length in his preface to *Lan-niang ai-shih* (*Lang-mo, chüan* 2, pp. 9-11). Regarding the publication of that tale in *Min-ch'üan hua-pao* 民權畫報, see Cheng I-mei's biography of Wu Shuang-je in *Yüan-yang*, p. 492. Of course, we cannot determine the dates of serialization for either work without access to a complete set of *Min-ch'üan pao* and its illustrated supplement. Under the circumstances, it is more reasonable to assume that Wu, an older man earlier entrusted with editorial responsibilities at the newspaper, wrote his tale first. It might not have occured to Hsü to compose a novel in parallel prose without having a shorter model serving as his direct inspiration and challenge.

[18]In *Yü-li hun* we find many references and allusions to love stories celebrated in Chinese poetry, fiction, and drama. This can be taken as the author's way of honouring and acknowledging his indebtedness to previous works of the sentimental-erotic tradition. Thus of all the stories in *Liao-chai chih-i* 聊齋志異, he singles out for praise that of a fanatic lover, Sun Tzu-ch'u 孫子楚 ("A-pao 阿寶", *chüan* 2), to express his admiration for the kind of total commitment to *ch'ing* that also distinguishes the hero of his own novel. Thus Hsü's failure to mention *Yen-shan wai-shih* may mean that he was not impressed by the story or had not read it.

[19]Ch'ien Chi-po, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-126.


ADVERTISEMENT FOR *MY WIFE*, 余之妻 *Hsiao-shuo ts'ung-pao*, No. 19, 1916.

servants), *Yü chih ch'i* 余之妻 (My wife), and *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih*.

In August 1918 Hsü Chen-ya launched a new fiction quarterly called *Hsiao-shuo chi-pao* 小說季報 and released it through his own book firm Ch'ing-hua shu-chü 清華書局. Its large format and high price per copy ($1.20) doomed the quarterly from the start, and only four issues were published, the last one dated May 1920. From then on Hsü Chen-ya ran only the Ch'ing-hua shu-chü, which published many other works of old-style fiction besides his own. According to Cheng I-mei, an old-style author most knowledgeable about journals of Butterfly fiction, "later on, Hsü Chen-ya was too lazy to write any new books so that his book company declined in business until it could no longer be maintained. Moreover, the war of resistance had started; so he sold all the books in stock and their copyright to Ta-chung shu-chü 大衆書局 for a flat sum. With Ch'ing-hua ceasing to exist, Hsü himself returned to Changshu and lived in poverty. Soon afterwards he died. The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school of fiction, with its leader gone, slumped without any hope for recovery."[20] We don't even know the date of Hsü's death.

[20] *Yüan-yang*, p. 321.


ADVERTISEMENT FOR *HSÜEH-HUNG LEI-SHIH*, *Hsiao-shuo ts'ung-pao*, No. 19, 1916.

## II

IN A STUDY of *Yü-li hun* we cannot examine Hsü Chen-ya's other works in a too curious fashion. As a matter of fact, after such a long period of neglect, we cannot even establish the canon of his authentic works without a considerable amount of research. At the height of his fame, Hsü was such an obliging friend that he didn't mind lending his name to works written by friends so as to boost their sales, and later as an opium addict without much creative energy, he would ask friends to write novels in his own name so that two of his works serialized in *Hsiao-shuo chi-pao* were really by Hsü Chin-fu 許廑父, another veteran of old-style fiction.[21] Even two of his authentic early novels, the aforementioned *Shuang-huan chi* and *Yü chih ch'i*, listed among the so-called "four masterpieces of Hsü Chen-ya," are so patently inferior to *Yü-li hun* and *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* that one is discouraged from reading any further in his voluminous fiction. Content to be a mere storyteller in these two works, Hsü did not exert himself stylistically to rise to the heights of *Yü-li hun*. Though he continued to point to the absurdity of the family-arranged marriage and other evils of the old society, he capitalized on these as a tragic device to involve his heroes and heroines in needless suffering. Also sentimental in this regard, *Yü-li hun* and, to a lesser extent, *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* are nevertheless redeemed by a pervasive

[21] These two are *Jang-hsü chi* 讓婿記 and *Tieh-hua meng* 蝶花夢 (*Yüan-yang*, pp. 320-321). See also Huang T'ien-shih, p. 45, in *Chiu-p'ai wen-i.*


ADVERTISEMENT FOR *CHEN-YA LANG-MO* and Wu Shuang-je's *Shuang-je chüeh-mo, Hsiao-shuo ts'ung-pao*, No. 4, 1915.

note of lyrical authenticity bearing witness to the pain and turmoil of remembered experience. Hsü Chen-ya was primarily a poet and writer of autobiographical inspiration; his inability to create characters became patent once he left the autobiographical realm to fabricate stories, and the stories in turn became the more implausible the harder he tried to sustain his reputation as a tragic novelist. However, among the host of unexamined novels there might be one or two written out of deeply felt personal experience; it is much to my regret that I have not yet begun the task nor have I had access to the author's autobiographical and miscellaneous writings other than Volume I of *Chen-ya lang-mo* (1915).[22]

It was the fate of quite a number of early Republican writers to be left without a father before they reached manhood: Hu Shih, the Chou brothers, Yü Ta-fu 郁達夫, Mao Tun, and Lao She 老舍, among others. Hsü Chen-ya was only twenty years old when he lost his father, and for both him and his brother, the claims of filial piety toward the widowed mother exacted a high price in terms of personal happiness. Though Hsü Chen-ya in his poetry bragged of his youthful addiction to

[22] *Lang-mo*, 13th printing, carries an advertisement of Hsü's works up to 1928, including three additional series of *Chen-ya lang-mo: Hsü-chi* 續集, *San-chi* 三集, *Ssu-chi* 四集. Since the first collection provides much valuable biographical information and shows many facets of Hsü's literary versatility and connoisseurship, it is much to my regret that I have had no access to the subsequent volumes of *Lang-mo*. While his inspiration as a novelist soon flagged, Hsü appeared much more comfortable as a traditional man of letters writing in various styles of verse and prose and doing research and compiling for his own amusement. *Ping-hu han-yün* 冰壺寒韻, in *Lang-mo, chüan* 3, is a brief anthology of over seventy poetesses of the Ch'ing dynasty. Hsü must have read voraciously in Ch'ing literature to get some biographical information on these women and samplings of their verse.

wine as a form of heroic release from the pressures of everyday life, he was apparently a man of weak will very much under the domination of an unreasonable mother. Huang T'ien-shih reports as a matter of common knowledge among his friends that she made life intolerable for the first wives of her two sons if she did not actually drive them to suicide.[23] After the Hsü brothers had moved to Shanghai, they took turns returning home once every month to see their mother and family. In January 1915, a few days after his trip home, T'ien-hsiao again took the train to Changshu on account of his infant daughter's illness. Four days later, Chen-ya was shocked to receive a letter from his brother saying that not only had his daughter died, but also his wife. In the autobiographical narrative from which I am citing,[24] he does not see fit to give the cause and circumstances of her death, but there can be no doubt that his mother was to blame. Upon the death of his own wife in 1924, Chen-ya wrote two books, *Ku-p'en i-hen* 鼓盆遺恨 (The sorrows of a bereaved husband) and *Yen-yen li-hun chi* 燕雁離魂記 (The swallow and the wild goose: the record of a tragic death), to vent his grief. Another source states that he wrote altogether a hundred poems to lament his wife. If my sources are correct, we can safely assume either or both of the books contain a great deal of elegiac verse.[25]

For months Hsü Chen-ya would dissipate his sorrow in opium smoke rather than incur further tragedy by seeking a new wife. Liu Yüan-ying 劉沅穎, the daughter of the last *chuang-yüan* 狀元 in Chinese history, Liu Ch'un-lin 劉春霖, was greatly moved by *Yü-li hun* and Hsü's books on his late wife, and vowed she would marry no one but the novelist, despite their disparity in age. From Peking she started a correspondence with him, with the sole object of making him her husband. Finally, her father could not object to the marriage when Fan Tseng-hsiang himself served as matchmaker. In traditional scholarly circles no one was entitled to higher respect than a *chuang-yüan*, and a *chuang-yüan*'s daughter was usually a certified *ts'ai-nü* 才女 enjoying the benefit of a superior literary education. Liu Yüan-ying's infatuation with Hsü solely on the strength of his literary talent and the kind of depth of feeling as revealed in *Yü-li hun* is strictly comparable to recorded cases of young ladies pining after T'ang Hsien-tsu 湯顯祖 as a result of reading *Mu-tan t'ing*. It proves that, far from being despised by the traditional élite, Hsü's best-known works were as much loved as had been *Mu-tan t'ing* and *Hung-lou meng* in their time. But of course, Hsü Chen-ya, who could write heart-rending poetry to please his female readers, was not at all a dashing, romantic figure, and could not even break his addiction to opium to please his second wife. Their marriage, which attracted so much attention at the time, turned out to be a miserable failure, and the couple soon lived apart in Shanghai and Peking. It will be of interest to find out if our

[23]Huang, p. 45, in *Chiu-p'ai wen-i*.

[24]"Yü kuei yeh wan 余歸也晚", *Lang-mo, chüan* 1, pp. 1-5. Though labeled as a *ts'an-ch'ing hsiao-shuo* 慘情小說, this narrative is patently autobiographical. We are informed, for instance, that the author's daughter Ming 明 was born in May 1912 and T'ien-hsiao's daughter Ying 英 in October of the same year.

[25]Cf. Ch'en Ching-chih, pp. 66-67, in *Chiu-p'ai wen-i*, and Yen Fu-sun's biography of Hsü in *Yüan-yang*, p. 462. Judging by their titles, *Ku-p'en i-hen* could be a volume consisting entirely of memorial verse while *Yen-yen li-hun chi* could be either a confessional record or an autobiographical novel. Ch'en specifically mentions thirteen seven-word *chüeh-chü* poems in memory of the deceased wife to be found in *Ku-p'en i-hen*.

author ever wrote about his new unhappiness in the form of a novel.[26]

Hsü Chen-ya was much younger and took himself much more seriously as a novelist when he wrote *Yü-li hun*, which fictionalizes a period of his life predating his first marriage. Upon graduation from normal school, he became a teacher in some village of Wusih and lived with the Ts'ai 蔡 family where he also tutored the grandson. The boy's mother, a widow, and our novelist fell hopelessly in love, and the affair must have terminated when he quit his post as school teacher. When Huang T'ien-shih visits him in 1925, an enlarged picture of the widow still decorates the wall of his bedroom. Huang regards her as a rather attractive woman though he also knows from reliable sources that she is slightly lame in one foot. Hsü says that she is still living in her native place, and expresses some disappointment over her not being sufficiently *sheng-chieh* 聖潔 (holy and pure), which Huang takes to mean that she must have remarried.[27] In *Yü-li hun*, of course, Hsü Chen-ya has depicted the tutor and the widow as the purest of lovers who would never trespass beyond the bonds of propriety.

[26]In retelling the story of Hsü and Liu Yüan-ying here, I follow strictly the account of Huang T'ien-shih (composed in 1960), which is based on recollections of his actual meetings with Hsü in the years 1925-27. Huang first saw our novelist in late 1925. During his second trip to Shanghai, which took place most probably early in 1926, Huang saw Hsü more frequently, and on one occasion Hsü disclosed the news of Miss Liu's courtship and showed Huang a photograph and some letters of hers. She looked in the picture a pretty woman of twenty-three or twenty-four.

Huang returned to Kunming after a short stay in Shanghai, and re-emerged there a few months later, prior to his voyage to Japan. He again saw Hsü, who informed him that he had already been to Peking and become formally engaged to Yüan-ying and that he was going there again to get married and take his bride home. Huang stayed in Tokyo for over a year. Because of a coup d'état in Yunnan province (February 1927), he decided not to return to Kunming from Tokyo but go to Hong Kong instead. En route, he disembarked at Shanghai and again saw Hsü. Huang does not specify the month of his visit; but whether it took place in the spring or summer of 1927, by then Hsü was living alone because his wife had already gone back to Peking to resume her career as a teacher. Yüan-ying, who had been brought up in Peking, disliked Shanghai, and on his part, Hsü could not go to Peking for any length of time without neglecting his book company and feeling useless and stranded. But the main cause of her disillusionment, Hsü confided in Huang, was his inability to cure himself of his addiction to opium. Thus we can infer from Huang's article that, though the couple stayed married, the period of their actual cohabitation was extremely brief.

Perry Link, who prefers to follow some less reliable sources in his account of the marriage, would have us believe that Yüan-ying had a quarrel with her husband right on their wedding night because of her jealous inquisitiveness concerning his affair with the real-life counterpart of the heroine of *Yü-li hun*, which is totally unlikely. Link is also misled into believing that Hsü was a man of fifty in 1924 and Yüan-ying was about thirty at the time of her wedding. It is also unlikely that "Hsu had one son by Liu Yüan-ying; she, who became as depressed as Hsu himself, died a few years later", as Link would have us believe (*Butterflies* p. 47).

Ch'en Ching-chih (Ch'en, p. 67, in *Chiu-p'ai wen-i*) relates that Hsü wrote about a henpecked husband in *Chü-nei hsiao-shih* 懼內小史 (hard to tell by title alone if it is a novel or short story), but if he did turn out such a work, it is extremely unlikely that he would be drawing upon his painful experiences with his second wife. The title would indicate a comic rather than a tragic tale.

[27]Since, according to Yen Fu-sun (*Yüan-yang*, p. 462), the first wife was named Ts'ai Jui-chu 蔡蕊珠, Link believes that Hsü did heed the widow's advice by marrying her sister-in-law, a daughter of the Ts'ai family, thus providing an almost exact model for the hero of *Yü-li hun*. While further research is necessary to establish the facts of Hsü's first marriage, I find this hypothesis untenable. If Hsü had been married to the widow's sister-in-law, he would have regarded her as a rather close relative and could have continued to see her at family gatherings until her new marriage. Certainly he would not have talked about her the way he did in front of a new acquaintance. Huang does not say if the widow's picture had decorated Hsü's bedroom even while his wife was alive or if it was newly displayed after her death. In either case it would have been highly improper for a man of Hsü's Confucian upbringing to adorn his bedroom with a portrait of his wife's sister-in-law. If the two women were totally unrelated, Hsü's wife could have tolerated the picture, knowing as she did his premarital infatuation with that widow.


COVER OF *HUA-YÜEH HEN*
(Traces of Flower and moon),
lithographic edition, Shanghai 1908.

## III

SINCE THE REAL-LIFE romance of the tutor and the widow did not end in death, Hsü Chen-ya's decision to turn it into an agonizing tale of doomed lovers must have been due to his predilection for the tragic and his habitual immersion in the sentimental-erotic tradition of Chinese literature. That tradition began with the *Ch'u-tz'u* 楚辭 and had more recently acclimatized several Western works of fiction through Lin Shu's translation, particularly Alexandre Dumas fils' *La Dame aux camélias*. Along with some T'ang-Sung poets, I have already cited some great Ming-Ch'ing plays and *Hung-lou meng* as works constitutive of that tradition. Among the latter-day poets, Hsü Chen-ya and his circle seemed particularly to favour Wang Tz'u-hui 王次回 of the late Ming for his erotic and elegiac verse,[28] and among the post-*Hung-lou* novels Hsü prized above all Wei Tzu-an's 魏子安 *Hua-yüeh hen* 花月痕

[28]Wang Tz'u-hui is best known for his collection *I-yü chi* 疑雨集, which the Japanese writer Nagai Kafū 永井荷風 compares to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. For an excellent introduction to the poet see Cheng Ch'ing-mao 鄭清茂, "A Preliminary Study of Wang Tz'u-hui 王次回研究", *Wen-shih-che Hsüeh-pao* 文史哲學報 No. 14 (Taipei, National Taiwan University, 1965).

(Traces of flower and moon), which was first published in 1859 but did not achieve great popularity until the Kuang-hsü period.[29] That tradition stresses the close linkage and ultimate identity of the three faculties without which no one can be called a lover: *ch'ing* 情 (capacity for love or feeling), *ts'ai* 才 (literary talent), and *ch'ou* 愁 (capacity for sorrow). Thus Hsü Chen-ya writes of the hero of *Yü-li hun* that he "was, to be sure, a man of talent and a man of feeling, but he was a man of sorrow as well."[30] Hsü employs another triad of key terms to describe his lovers in their self-destructive, tragic aspect: *ch'ing*, *ch'ih* 痴 (love gone crazy), and *tu* 毒 (love as poison, fatal love).[31] Implicit in the love poetry of Li Shang-yin, this morbid view of passion was not fully embodied until *Hung-lou meng*.

Thus, while Chinese literature boasts several pairs of happy lovers, such as Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju 司馬相如 and Cho Wen-chün 卓文君, Han Shou 韓壽 and Chia Ch'ung's 賈充 daughter, who have won praise for their romantic misconduct,[32] the main bias of the sentimental-erotic tradition, as Hsü Chen-ya sees it, has been to lyricize the kind of negative feelings the lovers may have when they are not together or when they entertain no hope of ever being united in wedlock, such as loneliness, despair, or grief, and to celebrate the true lovers in their courtship of martyrdom when confronted with a crisis. The sentimental-erotic literature of China is thus death-oriented: the unfulfilled lovers, including the countless palace ladies, singing girls, and merchants' wives, are trapped in a state of emotional death while the constant lovers, such as Han P'ing 韓憑 and his wife, Chiao Chung-ch'ing 焦仲卿 and Liu Lan-chih 劉蘭芝, assert their ultimate integrity through a suicide pact. True, most scholar-lovers do not die for their wives or mistresses: hence all the sentimental praise lavished upon the concubines and courtesans who die of grief or kill themselves in over-repayment of their lovers' kindness. Though the convention of Chinese drama departs from that tradition insofar as it calls for a happy ending for the lovers, in actual practice readers of *Hsi-hsiang chi* or *Mu-tan t'ing* have always preferred the more lyrically intense scenes descriptive of the hero or heroine in a state of love's deprivation to the more perfunctory or flippant scenes descriptive of the couple's self-satisfaction after they are assured of marital happiness.[33]

[29]For information concerning the novel and its author see K'ung Ling-ching 孔另境, *Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo shih-liao* 中國小說史料 (Shanghai, Ku-tien wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1957), pp. 227-233. The popularity of *Hua-yüeh hen* is attested by copious references to the work, usually laudatory, in *Yen-chiu chüan*. In Stephen Cheng's dissertation cited in Note 9 the novel is given a negative and rather perfunctory appraisal.

[30]YLH, p. 9. In Chapter II, Section 3: "The Romantic Route" of *Butterflies*, Perry Link discusses the attributes of the ideal lover quite fully.

[31]YLH, pp. 57-58.

[32]However, according to tradition, even Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju once wanted to take a concubine, to the chagrin of Wen-chün. The story of Han Shou was first told in *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* 世說新語, 35, where Chia Ch'ung's daughter doesn't even have a given name. The brevity of the tale notwithstanding, its subsequent popularity with Chinese writers in search of a romantic allusion indicates more than anything else the extremely small number of unconventional lovers worthy of celebration.

[33]See my discussion of these plays in "A Critical Introduction", *The Romance of the Western Chamber*, tr. S. I. Hsiung (New York, Columbia University Press, 1968), and "Time and the Human Condition in the Plays of T'ang Hsien-tsu", in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1970).

Today, of course, we are entirely justified if we feel the need to re-interpret the love tradition in Chinese literature by praising all the brave elopers, adulterers, and widows who seek love at the risk of their life and reputation, over against all the languishing maidens, loyal concubines and courtesans celebrated in that tradition. But to do so is to misconceive the tradition sanctioned by poets and moralists alike. Implicit in this tradition of eulogizing love's martyrs is the recognition that, while it is noble to be committed to love, it takes even greater courage to be obedient to the dictates of morality while in a state of love. Such lovers as Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju and Cho Wen-chün who circumvent propriety to achieve personal happiness are admired, but they remain paragons in a type of love poetry traditionally deemed to be of lesser seriousness. The despairing lover in Li Shang-yin's untitled poems is regarded as nobler not because his morals are any less questionable but because his passion appears so hopeless. For the highest type of lovers, however, the conflict between love and morality does not arise: because of their absolute double loyalty, when they die for love, they at the same time assert their integrity as moral beings.

Given our understanding of the sentimental-erotic tradition in Chinese literature, it is easy to see why, of all the heroines of *Hung-lou meng*, Lin Tai-yü 林黛玉 has been given the highest praise and the most profuse sympathy by its readers. She is not only the most abundantly endowed in terms of her capacity for *ch'ing*, *ts'ai*, and *ch'ou*. She is also the most correct in her observance of a puritan morality and therefore the most helpless in her state of romantic languishment. If she had done anything to encourage Pao-yü's physical endearments or curry favour with her elder relatives, she might have been spared her tragic destiny but would not have been as universally loved and praised. Of comparable heroines in earlier literature, Ying-ying 鶯鶯 also languishes but soon compromises herself in the arms of her lover while Tu Li-niang 杜麗娘 dies of languishment but the conventions of romantic comedy give her a new lease of life to properly enjoy her marital happiness. Tai-yü suffers and dies a virgin, and becomes in traditional Chinese eyes the most tragic of all heroines.[34]

While the mundane world of *Hung-lou meng* should properly be seen in a Buddhist-Taoist perspective, it must not be forgotten that at least the womenfolk in that world, including our beloved Tai-yü, are all victimized by feudal morality. A number of girls die of shame after being caught in an embarrassing situation, and some maidservants martyr themselves to show their love for their mistresses. Compared with Yüan-Ming fiction and drama, *Hung-lou meng* can be said to have introduced a purer code of morality for young women, which is observed in all subsequent domestic novels of the Ch'ing period like *Ching-hua yüan* 鏡花緣 and *Erh-nü ying-hsiung chuan* 兒女英雄傳. Though Wu Wo-yao is noted for his enlightened satire of various kinds of corruption in late Ch'ing society, his sole novel about young lovers, *Hen-hai* 恨海 (Sea of remorse), is surprisingly uncritical in its affirmation of

[34]Popular opinion to the contrary, I have denied Tai-yü the status of "a fully tragic character" in *The Classic Chinese Novel* (Reprint: Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1980). See, however, Anthony C. Yu's learned defense of her tragic status in "Self and Family in the *Hung-lou Meng:* A New Look at Lin Tai-yü as a Tragic Heroine", *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, II, No. 2 (July 1980).


ADVERTISEMENT FOR SCREEN PRODUCTION of *Hen-hai* (Sea of Remorse), Shanghai 1931.

feudal morality.[35] The story depicts the rapid degeneration of a weak-willed youth and the belated attempts by his devoted fiancée to restore him to physical and moral health. He dies, nevertheless, and she bids her parents farewell to enter a nunnery. One didn't expect Wu Wo-yao to be so very sentimental, and yet the social pressure for young women to remain chaste even during the collapse of the Manchu government must be such that the novelist cannot but avail himself of the pointless pathos of female martyrdom. Because of its sentimentality, *Hen-hai* has been cited by literary historians as a precursor of Butterfly fiction even though, as a realistic and often ironic piece of *pai-hua* narrative, it had very little to offer Hsü Chen-ya in point of style and technique.

Next to *Hung-lou meng*, *Hua-yüeh hen* was clearly the most important literary model for *Yü-li hun*. It emboldened our author to go all the way for tragedy and include in his narrative a large number of poems and letters. *Hua-yüeh hen* is little read today, and one can cite obvious reasons for its well-deserved neglect: a wooden narrative, no sense of humour, too many characters, too much space given to parties and wine games, etc. But for the late-Ch'ing readers, the novel showed first of all the tragic disparity between the idealized scholar-courtesan world of love and poetry

[35] A recent study of this novel is Michael Egan, "Characterization in *Sea of Woe*", in Milena Dolezelová-Velingerová, ed., *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980). Stephen Cheng has also written a paper entitled "The Portrait of a Lady: *The Sea of Regret* by Wu Wo-yao" for inclusion in a volume of critical essays Robert E. Hegel is editing.


WEI CH'IH-CHU,
from 1908 edition of *Hua-yüeh hen*.

and the actual unsettled conditions of China during the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion. Secondly, it exposed the sharp contrast between the forced gaiety of courtesans at wine parties and their gross maltreatment in the hands of pimps and bawds. The novel is certainly remarkable for extending our sympathy from the hapless young ladies of the Takuanyüan 大觀園 to the even worse situated prostitutes in nineteenth-century Taiyuan, Shansi.

*Hua-yüeh hen* chronicles in fifty-two chapters the contrasting fortunes of two scholar-courtesan couples, one pair waxing in prosperity and fame[36] and the other hounded to death by ill health and adversity. Wei Tzu-an, who was for years stranded in Taiyuan, is drawing upon autobiographical experience in depicting the latter pair, whose sad story accounted for the novel's immense popularity. A replica of the frail orphan Tai-yü, the unhappy prostitute Liu Ch'iu-hen 劉秋痕 is forced to ply her trade by her mercenary foster parents. Wei Ch'ih-chu 韋痴珠, the unhappy scholar, is a tubercular poet twice her age. As the novel progresses, he spits out ever larger quantities of blood until he dies almost unattended in Chapter 43 at the age of forty. Having recently suffered the death of a favourite concubine at the hands of the T'ai-p'ing rebels, Ch'ih-chu feels too keenly the transience of human attachments

[36]Han Ho-sheng 韓荷生, a scholar-general, and his wife Tu Ts'ai-ch'iu 杜采秋, formerly a courtesan.

LIU CH'IU-HEN (same source).

to want to redeem the prostitute he loves so dearly; he is also too much concerned about his absent mother and too poor to properly attend to the task of negotiating for her freedom. In any event, as rumours circulate that he wants to buy Ch'iu-hen, her foster parents abduct her to another city. She nearly dies of dysentery on the road, but thanks to an accidental fire which kills her foster parents in a hotel, she manages to return to Taiyuan only to learn of her lover's recent death. Ch'iu-hen dies the same night by hanging herself from a tree. To Chinese readers immersed in sentimental-erotic literature, nothing is more beautiful or pathetic than a high-minded prostitute or concubine killing herself in this fashion to prove her fidelity to her lover. Hers is an act of *hsün-ch'ing* 殉情 or *hsün-chieh* 殉節.

The unhappy lovers dream a lot, and in that dream world we are given to understand that Ch'ih-chu and his three loves are all incarnations of celestial beings banished to earth, but I don't think the author expects us to take this hoary fiction seriously. What he has done in the novel is to remedy the unequal fate apportioned to Pao-yü 寶玉 and Tai-yü by assigning his lovers an equal share of misfortune, ending in something like a death pact. Even today we find many Chinese critics too sentimentally partial to Tai-yü to appreciate properly the equally tragic, if not more tragic, fate of her rival Pao-ch'ai 寶釵 or her lover Pao-yü. After all, the latter marries on the eve of Tai-yü's death, gets his wife pregnant, and then leaves the mundane

world for good. Such readers—and they were legion in the late-Ch'ing period—would find *Hua-yüeh hen* far more satisfying in that Ch'ih-chu suffers as much as Ch'iu-hen and has so completely earned her love that she chooses to die as if she were the most faithful of wives.

The popularity of *Hua-yüeh hen* showed the Chinese readers' increasing appetite for a tragic literature (by now the reader should be aware that I use the terms "tragic" and "tragedy" quite loosely in this paper and not in conformity with Aristotelian definitions, for not to use such terms in a discussion of *ai-ch'ing hsiao-shuo* would prove an even greater incovenience). After the Opium War and the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion, the country was heading for worse times, and for that part of the élite unable to rouse itself to meet the national crisis, the ideal of love was worth clinging to when larger goals of personal fulfilment appeared out of reach. But for a novel like *Yü-li hun* to be written, which concentrates on the tormenting and agonizing relationship between lovers, there had to be the intervening example of the Western novel to serve as model and inspiration. The narrative style of *Hua-yüeh hen* is altogether too flat to go into the psychological condition of the lovers, who reveal themselves mainly through the poems they send each other. Luckily, by the time Hsü Chen-ya wrote *Yü-li hun*, many Western novels had already been rendered into classical Chinese through the collaboration of Lin Shu with his oral translators. His first work as a translator, *Ch'a-hua nü i-shih* 茶花女遺事 (*La Dame aux camélias*), especially, was a sensation when it appeared in 1899, and there is internal evidence in *Yü-li hun* itself that Hsü was consciously using the work as a model when composing his last two chapters.[37] Professor Leo O. Lee has called Lin Shu an "unusual" Confucian scholar for his excessive attachment to his family and excessive grieving over its departed members, and his high regard for sentiment (*ch'ing*) in general.[38] But if Lee examines the lives of other scholars and writers of the period besides Lin Shu and Su Man-shu, he will find that quite a number of them were attached to *ch'ing* and prone to grief. *Hua-yüeh hen* and *Yü-li hun* could not have been written and could not have won so many readers except for the sentimental bias of their age.

Lin Shu, who had contracted tuberculosis in his youth and had a sentimental regard for prostitutes not unmingled with respect, would naturally find *La Dame aux camélias* to his liking, and his translation would naturally appeal to all Chinese readers who had wept over the fate of Tai-yü and Ch'iu-hen, not to mention the scores of noble-minded courtesans celebrated in Chinese poetry and drama. It was especially easy for them to weep over the dying Marguerite Gautier because she is so very devoted to her lover and at the same time so very unselfishly moral. Armand Duval, while not a scholar in the traditional Chinese sense, comes from a substantial banking family and has studied law: he is not unlike the handsome hero of many a traditional Chinese short story who forms a liaison with a reigning courtesan in the capital before pulling himself together for the more serious business of getting the *chin-shih* degree. To further please the Chinese taste, while the author is all sympathy toward Marguerite, he is not at all antagonistic toward Armand's father who, after trying in vain to alter his son's course of dissipation, has little difficulty

[37] See Section 8, *infra*.

[38] See Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1973), Chapter 3.

persuading Marguerite to give him up so as to assure his worldly success and domestic happiness. Her self-sacrifice is all the more tragic because she leaves Armand utterly in the dark as to the cause of her sudden desertion. If Marguerite had not sacrificed herself and if Armand had continued to be her lover despite his father's anger and the eventual disapprobation of society, the story would have lost its flavour of something infinitely sad and beautiful cherished by sentimental readers all over the world. Though the novel and especially the play *La Dame aux camélias* were a great European and American success, we may regard *Ch'a-hua nü* as an even more auspicious happening in Chinese literary history for the novel's right combination of virtue and sentiment that could be properly enjoyed and wept over by the Confucian literati whereas a sentimental novel of more assertive romantic individualism, such as *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, might have left them cold.[39] It is not coincidental that the first spoken drama to be written and staged by the Chinese was also *Ch'a-hua nü*.[40]

Hsü Chen-ya was mindful of the examples set by Pao-yü and Tai-yü, Ch'ih-chu and Ch'iu-hen, Armand and Marguerite when writing about his lovers in *Yü-li hun*, but what was revolutionary in the Chinese context was that his heroine was a chaste widow with an eight-year-old son. It is the accident of autobiographical experience that has made possible this unlikely choice of a heroine for a tale steeped in the diction and imagery of the sentimental-erotic tradition. Had the author written an equally moving story about a young scholar's foredoomed love for a respectable girl or a prostitute, it would have lacked that dimension of tragic meaning or social relevance that the public, then about to be awakened to the absurd cruelty of feudal morality, found in *Yü-li hun*.

For, the historic daring of Cho Wen-chün notwithstanding, Chinese literature records few widows with a triumphant romantic story to tell. In life as in fiction, the good widows have abandoned all hope for romance and are supposed to lead a life as placid as the unruffled water in a well. Anyone who disturbs a widow's emotional life until it ripples is doing her an unkindness, and in traditional stories about such widows, "The Case of the Dead Infant" for instance,[41] that person is usually depicted as a villainous seducer. In *Hung-lou meng* the widow Li Wan 李紈

[39]In contrast, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a European work of far greater cultural impact, was not translated until 1921 by a self-proclaimed Romantic, Kuo Mo-jo 郭沫若. German fiction, of course, was almost totally ignored by late-Ch'ing translators; of some 600 works of foreign fiction translated into Chinese between the years 1875-1911, only three were by German or Austrian authors, one of them identifiably Hermann Sudermann. See A Ying 阿英, ed., *Wan-Ch'ing hsi-ch'ü hsiao-shuo mu* 晚清戲曲小說目 (Shanghai, Ku-tien wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1957), Section on Translated Fiction. However, even if Goethe's novel had been available, the great majority of late-Ch'ing and early Republican readers would have found the work baffling and its hero antipathetic. It is perfectly understandable for a young man or even an older man with wife and children to form a liaison with a courtesan; for a young man of culture to dote on a girl as good as engaged to another and to persist in seeing her even after her marriage, would make him look ridiculous, if not downright unprincipled. And his suicide would appear repellent while the suicide of a loving and tubercular prostitute, be she Ch'iu-hen or Marguerite, would be readily appreciated as something highly poignant.

[40]A group of male students in Tokyo staged the play in 1907.

[41]Translated by C. T. Hsia and Susan Aronold Zonana and included in Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations*.

participates to some extent in the social life of her younger cousins, but she has no story of her own other than that of rearing her son. The heroine of *Yü-li hun* has the poetic sensitivity and emotional vulnerability of a Tai-yü, but must lead the placid life of a Li Wan as befits a widow with a son to care for. When she is confronted with her Pao-yü, a true *ts'ai-tzu* as ardent as he is virtuous, her trials uncover a truly new territory for the Chinese psyche, never before explored in literature.

## IV

BRIEFLY TOLD, *Yü-li hun* is a tragic tale of love and self-sacrifice involving three principals: the hero Ho Meng-hsia 何夢霞 (Ho Dreaming of Rosy Clouds), the heroine Pai Li-ying 白梨影 (White Pear Image), and her younger sister-in-law Ts'ui Yün-ch'ien 崔筠倩. Meng-hsia, a twenty-one-year-old graduate from a normal school, goes from his native city of Soochow to teach in a village school near Wusih. While paying a visit to Old Mr. Ts'ui, a distant relative, in that village, he is persuaded to stay at his home to teach the eight-year-old grandson, P'eng-lang 鵬郎, in exchange for room and board. Li-ying, more familiarly known as Li-niang, is the boy's mother who, at twenty-seven, has been a widow for three years.

Though they rarely see each other, the tutor and the widow fall violently in love by reason of their spiritual and poetic affinity and regularly exchange poems and letters with P'eng-lang as messenger. Li-niang, while profoundly touched by and grateful for Meng-hsia's love and returning it in her own fashion, has no doubt whatever where her duty lies. It is only when he becomes ill and vows perpetual bachelorhood to match her determination to remain a widow that she becomes greatly worried and gets sick in turn. She cannot see him wasting his life for her sake when it is his primary duty to get married and produce a son to please his widowed mother. Moreover, with his talent, he should aim higher than being a lover —he should serve the country and, like the headmaster of his school, Ch'in Shih-ch'ih 秦石痴, go to Japan to study. She would exhaust her own savings to bring about the event.

When the seventeen-year-old Yün-ch'ien returns from her boarding school for the summer vacation, Li-niang shows dramatic improvement in health. The two sisters-in-law have always been very close, and to all appearances, Li-niang's recovery is due to Yün-ch'ien's able ministrations and cheerful company. But what restores her health so very quickly is the thought that it would be best for all concerned if Meng-hsia can agree to marry Yün-ch'ien and live with the family as a resident son-in-law. Meng-hsia, too, is duty-bound to go home for the summer to be with his mother and his elder brother due to return from Fukien, but he cannot leave so long as Li-niang remains ill. Fearful that outright rejection of her proposal will further endanger her health, he reluctantly agrees in principle to the match but stalls for time. He returns home and spends a miserable summer plagued by malaria.

When the fall term begins, Meng-hsia returns to the Ts'ui residence, unchanged in his love for the widow. His co-teacher, Mr. Li 李, suspects the worst and inflicts even greater torment on the lovers by his malicious meddling. This crisis soon brings about the betrothal of Yün-ch'ien to Meng-hsia, with Headmaster Ch'in, on holiday

from Japan, serving as matchmaker. Yün-ch'ien, who has set store by her modern education and talked much about women's liberation from feudal bondage, now quits school and resigns herself to her fate as a girl under paternal command to marry a stranger. Upon learning of her misery, Meng-hsia accuses Li-niang of duplicity and avows his love in even more violent terms. Under the unbearable pain of this accusation, the tubercular widow is now determined to die, hoping against hope that, with her out of the picture, the betrothed couple may yet find happiness. She hides her worsened condition from Meng-hsia and dies on New Year's Eve when the unsuspecting lover has already gone home to spend the holidays.

He returns in a disconsolate state. Equally grief-stricken is Yün-ch'ien when she discovers a long letter from Li-niang telling about her unfortunate affair with Meng-hsia, her well-intentioned plan to match him with her beloved sister-in-law, and her determination to leave the world to ensure their happiness. Deeply affected by her friendship and self-sacrifice, Yün-ch'ien wants to offer her life in love and gratitude, and dies half a year later in the sixth month of 1910. After studying in Japan for a few months, the doubly bereaved Meng-hsia dies a patriotic martyr in the Wuchang revolution of October 10, 1911, to topple the Manchu government.

My summary of the novel, I am afraid, does little to suggest its power and fascination while exposing all its weaknesses in the story line. We feel, first of all, that the tragic fate assigned to each of the principals is not inevitable enough. Drawing mainly upon his knowledge of classic Western tragedies, Northrop Frye has finely observed that "the tragic poet knows that his hero will be in a tragic situation, but he exerts all his power to avoid the sense of having manipulated that situation for his own purposes".[42] By the Aristotelian and Shakespearean standards implicit in that statement, *Yü-li hun* must be seen as a sentimental novel lacking the full dignity of a tragedy which unfolds a tragic situation in all its inevitability without authorial manipulation. In reading the plot summary, we feel that the hero's reluctant acceptance of the idea of marrying Yün-ch'ien, however nobly meant to assuage Li-niang's pain and improve her health, is somewhat out of character: the author has clearly manipulated his decision to quicken the pace of tragedy. Yün-ch'ien's sudden change of character is even less plausible: if she has flatly refused to consider the marriage proposal as befits a modern girl sustained by a vision of personal freedom, the wheels of tragedy will have stopped moving regardless of Meng-hsia's decision. Moreover, once he discovers Yün-ch'ien's revulsion against the idea, the least he can do is to cancel the engagement. Even if the betrothed pair do not want to disobey the dying wishes of their beloved Li-niang, there is every reason to suppose that her self-sacrifice should serve to cement their bond though they may have been indifferent, if not hostile, to each other at the beginning. Yün-ch'ien would have been a braver girl if she had obeyed her sister-in-law's dying injunction to love Meng-hsia and tried to find true love in a marriage she has not entered into willingly.

If we follow this line of reasoning, then Li-niang's original plan may not seem as crazy as subsequent events in the novel prove it to be: many a man can maintain

[42]Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 211.

a Platonic relationship with the woman he truly loves while fulfilling his conjugal duties to his wife. As resident son-in-law in the Ts'ui house, Meng-hsia should take satisfaction in being able to see his true love in the aspect of a sister-in-law and help bring up her son. If we honour her desire not to seek remarriage, the plight of Li-niang is of course more real. But even her tragic situation has been manipulated to some extent: not every unhappy widow is afflicted with bad health, and even an unhappy widow of frail health may want to live on if she truly minds the welfare of her son.

I have argued that every step of the way the tragic direction of the novel could be reversed. Indeed, if both Li-niang and Meng-hsia were truly governed by their passion, they could have formed a liaison from the very start in disregard of Confucian propriety. But, of course, no proper reader of the novel would have raised this question of ultimate disbelief: in education and refinement Meng-hsia is the very opposite of the Lawrencian gamekeeper, and Li-niang is no Lady Chatterley seeking sexual liberation and fulfilment. If Lawrence's lovers can be said to stand for life, then the point of our novel is precisely that, conditioned by their literary and moral culture, its three main characters all opt for death: Li-niang most obviously in her preference for a chaste widowhood and Yün-ch'ien no less so in decisively repudiating her modern education when a chance for martyrdom presents itself. Meng-hsia dies a patriot's death in the end, but the author plainly tells us that he sacrifices himself in this fashion so as to be worthier of the two women who have died for him. An eloquent protestant of love, Meng-hsia is certainly more of a weakling than Li-niang for his actual paralysis in the realm of action, his utter powerlessness to defy conventional morality. All three prefer death to life, choose the negative heroism of self-denial rather than adventure on the highway of life with all the risks and rewards such a journey brings.

Thus *Yü-li hun* is not a tragedy of fate as we ordinarily understand the term. If its three main actors strive for individual happiness, they can easily overcome the obstacles in their way. Their failure or refusal to do so symbolizes the paralysis of a society bound to its self-imposed laws, and defines the self-imposed tragedy of lovers committed to *ch'ing* but capable of only hurting one another because their passion is immobilized by their moral purity. Indeed, the tragedy of *Yü-li hun* can only take place in the moribund society of late imperial or early Republican China. In earlier love dramas, the lovers are set against the guardians of society, who are either satirized or ridiculed or else seen as menacing figures of authority, such as the mother of Ying-ying and the father and tutor of Tu Li-niang. Few authority figures in *Hung-lou meng* live up to their roles; quite a number are sensualists who exploit their advantages in a male-chauvinist society. In post-May Fourth novels written in conscious protest against the feudal society such as Pa Chin's 巴金 trilogy, *The Turbulent Stream* 激流三部曲, the young in all their suffering and indignation are diametrically opposed to their elder relatives set in their ways of inhumanity. In contrast to both traditional fiction and drama and the new literature of social protest, *Yü-li hun* is conspicuous for its absence of villains. The only character harbouring some villainous thought is the teacher Li, who manages to have Meng-hsia recalled home by his mother while blackmailing Li-niang with a compromising poem in the handwriting of her lover not intended for her eye. Li-niang, highly

incensed over Meng-hsia's supposed breach of confidence and over the bad taste of the poem, sends him a letter urging his immediate return. Because the lovers live in a self-enclosed world of secret communication into which only the confidants (P'eng-lang and the maid Ch'iu-erh 秋兒) can gain entrance, Mr. Li has to be in the novel to dramatize their fear of exposure. The actual effect of his threat, however, is to enable the lovers to meet and confer for the first time in the dead of night, for otherwise they are too moral to seek each other's company at close range. Meng-hsia is properly indignant over Li's evil design, but characteristically, Li-niang counsels forgiveness. And because Meng-hsia forgives Li and pledges his continual friendship, Li repents and is transformed into a good person.[43]

There are no authority figures who are antagonistic to the lovers, either. Old Mr. Ts'ui, who is kindness itself, never watches over the doings of his daughter-in-law. Quite unlike Chia Cheng 賈政 and Dowager Ts'ui 崔夫人, who are capable of inflicting corporal punishment upon their misbehaving children, this old man stays by himself and lets Li-niang run the household. He loves Meng-hsia like his own son and delightedly agrees when Headmaster Ch'in proposes his betrothal to his daughter. Though it would never occur to him to seek a new husband for Li-niang, there is little reason to doubt that, if Meng-hsia is proposed for that role, he will also give his assent once he sees the advantages to be derived from this arrangement: he will gain a son, Li-niang a husband, and P'eng-lang a father. The times are changing, even his own daughter is in school, and the old man has everything to gain even if initially neighbours and relatives may disapprove of the marriage. The only other authority figure in the novel is Meng-hsia's mother, who bears no resemblance to the author's mother and is an understanding and kind woman. Thus in a novel which wrings the reader's heart over a young widow's refusal to consider remarriage, there are no villains or authority figures blocking her path to a new lease of happiness. In her determination to stay constant to her deceased husband, Li-niang herself is her worst enemy.

Li-niang's individual tragedy of self-denial, however, mirrors a society in paralysis. Precisely because the author has endowed his hero and heroine with all the poetic expressiveness of the *ts'ai-tzu chia-jen* 才子佳人 of the past and the moral scrupulosity of the unquestioning supporters of the Confucian social order, they are noble embodiments of that spiritual disease afflicting the last generation of the traditional élite not yet awakened to the gospel of Western enlightenment—the disease that will be soon exposed in its true colours by Lu Hsün's short stories. Almost as morbid as the heroes and heroines of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, Meng-hsia and Li-niang move about noiselessly in and around a house, hardly ever seeing each other but forever aware of each other's existence, and turning an all-consuming love into a fury for self-destruction. Compared with Ligeia and Lady Madeline of Usher who assert their will even in death and are thus true vampires,[44] Li-niang would seem, of course, to be utterly incapable of malice as a pure example of self-denying womanhood. Yet we may press our analogy further and regard *Yü-*

[43]This takes place in Chapter 19. Mr. Li is given the name Ch'i-sheng 李杞生 in *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih.*

[44]Cf. the essays on Poe in Allen Tate, *The Man of Letters in the Modern World* (New York, Meridian Books, 1955).

*li hun* as a Chinese version of Gothic fiction when we see that, while praising Li-niang for her impeccable moral purity, Hsü Chen-ya has actually demonstrated the destructiveness of the kind of life-denying goodness she represents. Superficially, she is totally unlike Ligeia, who avenges herself on her husband's new wife Rowena by returning to life in the moribund body of her rival. But in her solicitude for her lover's welfare, Li-niang has not dealt openly with Yün-ch'ien and envelops her, too, in the stifling environment of a doomed house when the latter could have continued to breathe fresh air on the campus of a modern school.

It is next to impossible today to know all the facts about Hsü Chen-ya's life when he was serving as a tutor in the Ts'ai house though it would not be too difficult to find out how a tutor stationed in a scholarly family would have lived during the first decade of the century. It would not surprise us if Hsü Chen-ya had indeed reduced the size of the Ts'ai family or exaggerated its observance of Confucian decorum to suit his artistic needs. As we have seen, the Ts'ui family is extremely small in size, consisting of the old man, the widow and her son, and a daughter in school during the regular academic terms. Even if the whole family and Meng-hsia dine together, they would not make a full table by Chinese standards. And yet the rules governing the sexes are so strict that our hero, who would normally expect to be introduced to P'eng-lang's mother on the day of his visit if he agrees to serve as his tutor, hasn't caught a glimpse of her during the first two weeks of his residence at her place. We don't even know if Li-niang ever dines with Mr. Ts'ui on a regular basis though it would seem to be no part of the Confucian etiquette to segregate a young widow from her father-in-law if his wife is no longer alive. A very lonely man, Ts'ui would certainly welcome Meng-hsia as his dinner companion, but they, too, eat separately. The tutor lives in a small lodge in the garden, and meals are brought in by a servant. Sometimes Li-niang cooks his meals herself out of her concern for his health, but she would never go to his place when he is there. Since early Republican readers did not find all this separate dining and segregation of the sexes implausible enough to impede their enjoyment of the novel, it would be idle for us to question its realistic integrity on these minor details. On the other hand, it would certainly seem to be the case that, in stressing the morbid isolation of the members of the Ts'ui house, the author was guided by his artistic instinct to turn his story into a Chinese Gothic novel to underscore the sickness of society precisely because of its preoccupation with etiquette and morality.

## V

*YÜ-LI HUN* has thirty chapters of which the first one and a half may be taken as a prologue and the last two as an epilogue.[45] The unhealthy note of exaggerated sentimentality is already powerfully struck in the prologue, which establishes the spiritual affinity of the hero and heroine even before they have met. Since we have nothing comparable to the Gothic conventions in the traditional Chinese novel, Hsü

[45]The first two chapters are titled "Tsang-hua 日記" and "P'ing-tiao 憑弔". 葬花" and "Yeh-k'u 夜哭", and the last two "Jih-chi

Chen-ya achieves his Gothic effects mainly by developing key episodes in *Hung-lou meng* involving Lin Tai-yü. Thus the prologue reworks the famous incident of the burial of fallen flowers. Meng-hsia, having lived in his cottage for two weeks, rises one Sunday morning to see the blossoms of the pear tree all shattered to the ground after a night of blistering wind while the magnolia, the only other tree in the courtyard, is beginning to bloom in its gorgeous beauty. Greatly saddened by the fallen petals, he sweeps them together and makes a mound over them. He hasn't slept very well the previous night, and becomes very tired after busying himself the whole morning and crying over the flowers and his own fate into the bargain. But after lunch, he has regained enough energy to compose a poem each about the pear and the magnolia tree, and carve some characters on a stone tablet for the duration of two hours. This done, he asks a servant to erect it above the mound and goes to sleep without supper. At about ten o'clock in the evening, he is wakened by someone crying in the courtyard. In the bright moonlit night, he sees the apparition of a young woman in white crying over the pear tree and, upon discovering the tablet on the mound, caressing it and crying even harder. To get a closer view of the woman, Meng-hsia knocks his head against the glass window, which frightens her and makes her flee.

In *Hung-lou meng*, Chapter 23, before her quarrel with Pao-yü over some imagined insult, Tai-yü is having a good time all decked out as a gardener to bury the fallen petals; it is in Chapters 27-28, after Tai-yü has received some further slights, that Pao-yü happens to overhear her crying and chanting her song about the fallen flowers. But even if Pao-yü joins in the crying, the two teenagers, after sharing a heart-to-heart talk, are soon in a better mood. Hsü Chen-ya's relentless rewriting of these scenes toward far greater pathos is designed to establish the mood for the novel and identify the hero and heroine as persons abundantly endowed with *ch'ing* and *ch'ou* and therefore liable to feel profound empathy even with flowers. One may ask incredulously: since Meng-hsia is a man, how can he respond to fallen blossoms with even greater grief than Tai-yü? But in *ts'ai-tzu chia-jen* fiction and drama the hero and heroines have always been equally delicate in features and demonstrative of emotions, and the immense success of *Hung-lou meng* has further established the virtual identity of hero and heroines in appearance and sensibility, so much so that in contemporary films of the novel Pao-yü is always played by a young woman: a male actor will betray too much masculinity to fit the popular image of the hero. Nevertheless, *Yü-li hun* does represent the over-ripe decadence of a literary tradition insofar as few heroes before Meng-hsia have so self-consciously emulated Tai-yü and agitated themselves over such a common occurrence in nature.

In the symbolic scheme of the novel, of course, the pear tree stands for Li-niang, and the magnolia for the younger beauty Yün-ch'ien. Because pear blossoms are white and easily shattered by wind and rain, Chinese poetic tradition has long established their affiliation with sorrowing, easily vulnerable women. By virtue of her name and misfortune, Li-niang has certainly long identified herself with the pear tree in the courtyard, and sight unseen, Meng-hsia now earns her love and gratitude because of his great sympathy for that tree. But no matter how grateful, she can only take flight once she discovers he is spying on her. As cousins, Pao-yü and Tai-yü communicate rather freely in the early days of the Takuanyüan; as a widow,

Li-niang does not desire and is indeed afraid of further physical contact with Meng-hsia. The prologue thus ends with a masterly little scene which rehearses the tragedy to come: the widow's principled refusal to accept her lover even though the lover, equally immobilized by his regard for Confucian decorum, hardly does any non-verbal wooing beyond knocking his head against a window.

## VI

LI-NIANG FLEES upon being discovered, but in comparison with Meng-hsia, who hardly ever contrives to meet her, she is decidedly the person of greater initiative in trying to know about the man who cares for her so deeply. When assured of his absence in school, she time and again glides into his study to take and leave some mementoes of love. After her first such visit, Meng-hsia returns to his study to find the manuscript copy of his poems on *Hung-lou meng* missing.[46] From the floor he picks up a camellia apparently dropped from his fair visitor's hair, and he wonders if this is deliberate on her part. Sufficiently encouraged, he writes the first of his many letters to her, in which he gives his best regards, regrets their not having formally met even though he did catch a glimpse of her the other night, and wishes to see some of her own compositions in exchange for the poems she has taken. After supper, P'eng-lang comes as usual to do his lessons, and Meng-hsia asks him to take the letter to his mother. Thus the eight-year-old boy plays Cupid and enables the lovers to communicate incessantly with their written and oral messages even though they rarely see each other. The reader is thus privileged to read their innermost thoughts through their poems and letters.

If the poems exchanged by the lovers testify to Hsü Chen-ya's thorough immersion in the sentimental-erotic tradition, it is the letters that impart his novel's peculiar power and tone of authenticity. For impassioned eloquence, these letters far surpass those in *Ch'iu-shui-hsien ch'ih-tu* 秋水軒尺牘, which had by late Ch'ing times become a standard reference work for home use and may have inspired Hsü to include correspondence as a staple of his novel.[47] Stylistically, these letters in parallel prose are, of course, utterly unlike the colloquial, chatty letters we read in eighteenth-century English novels. Yet in his own way and for his own time, Hsü Chen-ya was surely the Chinese Samuel Richardson in directing the Chinese novel toward greater coverage of subjective experience through his regular use of the epistolary form. In *The Rise of the Novel* Professor Ian Watt has rightly defined Richardson's role as an innovator of modern literature:

[46] *Lang-mo, chüan* 3, contains a cycle of sixty *tz'u* poems, each about a specific episode from the novel, bearing the general title *Hung-lou meng-yü tz'u* 紅樓夢餘詞. This cycle was composed in 1908 when the author was twenty years old.

[47] At his friends' urging Hsü Ssu-mei 許思湄, an obscure Ch'ing scholar who made his living mainly as a teacher and yamen secretary away from his ancestral home in Shaohsing 紹興, collected his letters to friends and relatives under the title *Ch'iu-shui-hsüan ch'ih-tu*. See Hsü, 詳校補註秋水軒尺讀, with notes by Lou Shih-jui 婁世瑞 (Shanghai, Hui-wen t'ang shu-chü 會文堂書局, 1912).

> What forces influenced Richardson in giving fiction this subjective and inward direction? One of them is suggested by the formal basis of his narrative—the letter. The familiar letter, of course, can be an opportunity for a much fuller and more unreserved expressions of the writer's own private feelings than oral converse usually affords, and the cult of such correspondence was one which had largely arisen during Richardson's own lifetime, and which he himself both followed and fostered.
>
> In itself it involved a very significant departure from the classical literary perspective; as Madame de Staël wrote, "the ancients would never have thought of giving their fiction such a form" because the epistolary method "always presupposes more sentiment than action". Richardson's narrative mode, therefore, may also be regarded as a reflection of a much larger change in outlook—the transition from the objective, social, and public orientation of the classical world to the subjective, individualist, and private orientation of the life and literature of the last two hundred years.[48]

Hsü Chen-ya has not adopted the personal letter as the sole formal basis of his novel though it may be of interest to remark that, like Richardson, he, too, wrote at least one manual of letter-writing. Whereas the English novelist was seized by the idea of writing an epistolary novel while engaged in the preparation of such a manual, the author of *Yü-li hun* was induced by its great popularity with the young readers, who were then beginning to entrust their amatory messages to the post office, to provide a volume of imaginary letters to cover a variety of situations such lovers might encounter.[49] If Hsü Chen-ya was as conservative as Richardson in his moral outlook, he was certainly equally forward-looking in sensing "the subjective, individualist, and private orientation of the life and literature" of his own time. And it is certainly characteristic of his subjective orientation that Hsü should subsequently recast his novel in the form of a journal, with even more liberal inclusion of letters

[48] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1959), p. 176.

[49] *Hua-yüeh ch'ih-tu* 花月尺牘 (Corrected edition: Shanghai, Hsiao-shuo-pao she, 1920). Its first edition must have appeared by 1916 since it was advertised in the first edition of Hsü's novel *Lan-kuei hen* 蘭閨恨 (Shanghai, Hsiao-shuo ts'ung-pao she, February 1917). Even today this manual can be safely recommended to students as a textbook on the *p'ien-li* 駢儷 style of writing. At the end of each imaginary letter Hsü Chen-ya provides notes on literary and historical allusions.

The 1920 edition of *Hua-yüeh ch'ih-tu* carries an advertisement for Li Ting-yi, ed., *Hsin yen-ch'ing shu-tu* 新艷情書牘, featuring imaginary letters by Li himself and some fifty other writers. The East Asian Library of Columbia University owns a copy of *Feng-yüeh yen-ch'ing ch'ih-tu* 風月艷情尺牘 (Third printing: Canton, Chung-hsing shu-chü, 1937). Hsü Shen-ya 徐沈亞 is listed as author, but that name does not appear on the cover (on covers of reliable editions of his works the name of Hsü Chen-ya is always conspicuously displayed). The book is actually an assemblage of imaginary letters by various hands, including Li Ting-yi and several others responsible for *Hsin yen-ch'ing shu-tu*. Many of the letters are addressed to or written on behalf of imaginary prostitutes. Some letters, designed to be humorous, are in low taste though stylistically competent. So the volume was definitely a project carried out by veteran Butterfly writers in Shanghai. Li Ting-yi or even Hsü Chen-ya himself could conceivably be its editor if we assume that by the late twenties such writers had declined in popularity and had to write and compile books of questionable taste for an audience much inferior in literary culture to that which had made *Yü-li hun* an instant success. *Feng-yüeh yen-ch'ing ch'ih-tu* must have appeared in Shanghai many years before it had its unauthorized third printing in Canton. By 1937 the *p'ien-li* style of writing was definitely passé.


COVER DESIGN
for an early edition of *Yü-li hun*.

and poems exchanged between the lovers. Though the debt has not to my knowledge been acknowledged, Hsü's two novels certainly paved the way for the many love novels written in *pai-hua* during the May Fourth period, including those cast entirely in the form of letters.[50]

Letters between friends have enjoyed generic dignity as a form of literary discourse since Han times. In some of the best-known early models, the writer uses the vehicle for candid self-disclosure, so as to vindicate his name and defend his honour, and the convention is followed by subsequent writers of *ch'uan-ch'i* fiction like Yüan Chen, who includes in his famous tale a most appealing letter by Ying-ying. In the course of their correspondence, Meng-hsia and Li-niang carry forward this convention inasmuch as they are engaged in a perpetual recrimination precisely because they love each other so much. Theirs is the kind of soul communion which dispenses with physical contact and even oral converse but capitalizes on the solitary hour when the lover can vent all his frustrations and griefs in a torrential flow of epistolary verse and prose. More than *Hung-lou meng* and even more than the romantic plays does *Yü-li hun* explore the subjective world of the hero and heroine.

[50]Thus Chang I-p'ing 章衣萍 (1902-1946), best known for *Ch'ing-shu i-shu* 情書一束 (1926), wrote much fiction incorporating love letters and diaries. See his biographies in Jos. Schyns, ed., *1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays* (Peiping, Scheut Editions, 1948), and Li Li-ming 李立明, *Chung-kuo hsien-tai liu-pai tso-chia hsiao-chuan* 中國現代六百作家小傳 (Hong Kong, Po Wen Book Co., 1977).

Short of translating the novel in its entirety, it is impossible to suggest the kind of pain the lovers ceasely inflict upon each other. The more passionate Meng-hsia becomes in his avowal of love, the more touched Li-niang is by his declaration but at the same time the more alarmed about the misery they are sowing for each other. In Chapter 8 for instance, after he spits blood over his hopeless love, Li-niang asks her son to send him a comforting letter and two pots of orchids which instantly lift his spirits. Then, in a state of recuperation, he accompanies Mr. Li on a Sunday excursion with students to visit the neighbouring schools. He lies in bed upon his return that evening and finds to his surprise a suitably framed photograph of Li-niang underneath the coverlet. Beside himself with happiness, he regrets that he should have wasted a day when his beloved was going to visit him. Moreover, she must have written some poems while in his studio and then burned them on the evidence of one surviving line, which would seem to indicate her disappointment over his absence. In raptures over the photograph and the significance of that line, Meng-hsia writes two poems on the back of the photograph and sends her two additional ones. In her reply Li-niang says, however, that it is just an accident that a fragment of her verse has survived the fire and that of course she would not have paid a visit if she had not known he would be gone for the day. The portrait is a gift of love, but it is also a souvenir to console him with because their future union is out of the question. Furious with this cold answer, Meng-hsia writes a passionate letter avowing his eternal love. He would rather be a bachelor than ever think of transferring his love to some other woman; he would hasten his end so that, in view of their present frustration, they might both look forward to a happy life together in their next round of existence. This letter makes Li-niang grievously ill, and decides her upon a course of action which will precipitate the three principals to their doom.

To turn to another cluster of letters, we are now in the eleventh month of the lunar calendar, and the engagement between Meng-hsia and Yün-ch'ien has been formalized. One afternoon, Meng-hsia overhears her singing a series of songs to the accompaniment of the organ that are modeled after a famous sequence of Tu Fu's poems.[51] She sings of her former freedom and her preference for study to sewing, of her old father, of her deceased brother, of her sister-in-law in her widowhood, and then of her own total forfeiture of happiness due to the arbitrary arrangement of her future. Meng-hsia, who has been all along unhappy about his betrothal, is shocked by his discovery that Yün-ch'ien is in an even worse state of misery. So he sends Li-niang a letter bitterly accusing her of duplicity, of the folly of plunging both herself and her sister-in-law in a sea of torment, and once again pledging his eternal love regardless of whether she wants to sever relations with him or not. Li-niang, who has become all too keenly aware of Yün-ch'ien's growing estrangement and therefore of the obvious failure of her scheme, is profoundly shocked to read this accusatory letter. She composes a reply even while in a state of uncontrollable weeping, literally drenching the sheets of paper with her tears, and bids her son to

[51] Tu Fu, "Ch'ien-yüan chung yü-chü T'ung-ku hsien tso-ko ch'i-shou 乾元中寓居同谷縣作歌七首", in P'u Ch'i-lung 浦起龍, *Tu Tu hsin-chieh* 讀杜心解 (Peking, Chung-hua shu-chü, 1961), I, pp. 262-265. The first four of Yün-ch'ien's songs appear in translation in *Butterflies*, p. 209.

give Meng-hsia a package containing besides the letter a lock of her newly cut hair and the manuscript copy of his poems on *Hung-lou meng*, which has been in her keeping all these months.

It is already the second watch of the night when Meng-hsia receives the package and examines its unbelievable contents. He faints away upon reading the letter, which charges him of gross insensitivity in having misconstrued her good intentions and announces her decision to terminate their love. Upon awaking, he rereads the letter, caresses the lock of hair and then burns the manuscript. Though anxious to reassure Li-niang, who must be in a worse state of mental turmoil than he is, Meng-hsia is too confused and upset to write an immediate reply. After lying in bed for two hours, however, he rouses himself and bites a finger of his left hand until it bleeds. Then choosing a new brush, he dips it in the blood to write a two-page letter filled with self-reproach and passionate declarations of undying love:

> The next day Li-niang received the letter, and was so shocked that she almost passed away. One blur of blood, eye-appalling and mind-boggling, all dots and lines, indecipherable and indescribable, what was this fiery red thing? Hsia-lang 霞郎, Hsia-lang, why did you punish yourself so? At the moment Li-niang was in such a state of fright and agony that her hands kept trembling, her face had changed colour, and her eyes couldn't focus. And she felt as if her heart were being stabbed by ten thousand relentless awls. Nevertheless, with tears in her eyes, she proceeded to read the text:
>
> Alas, you want to sever our ties, do you really want to sever our ties? What is there for me to say? And yet how can I fail to speak? If I don't speak, then my heart will remain besmirched and your anger will remain unpacified. You have misunderstood me and want to have nothing to do with me. How can I not lay bare my heart so as to be ready to accept your repudiation? But once my heart is laid bare, I know that you will not have the heart to forsake me. My last letter was written in a state of extreme agitation. I know it now, but at that time I was under the seizure of extreme pain, and to whom if not to you should I pour out my anger and resentment? I did not know that you, too, would be stabbed by pain and that my letter would serve further to wound your heart. I was wrong, I was wrong. I wanted to sever ties with you first; how could I now blame you for wanting to sever ties with me?
>
> Nevertheless, though I may be said to be insensitive, I have never harboured the thought of forswearing our love. I am not wood or stone, how could I not know that you have exerted your mind and body on my behalf to the point of exhaustion? My gratitude to you has reached the utmost degree; there can be no one who can rob me of my love for you. And you have always loved me and pitied me. If you don't love me, who else will love me? If you don't pity me, who else will pity me? If you want to repudiate my love, then it amounts to passing a death sentence on me. Do you have the heart to see me die? If you want me to die, what choice is there for me but to die? But I want to die as a martyr of our love, and not as a victim of your repudiation. Even if I die, I still hope that you will have pity on me. My words stop here, but

> my remorse is limitless. I bit my finger and wrote these two sheets with my own blood and now submit them to you. When one is about to die, one cries plaintively. May you see my condition and forgive me.
>
> Written by Meng-hsia with his own blood, the fourth watch of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, in the year *chi-yu* (1909).[52]

This letter is quite short and relatively unadorned with the kind of metaphors and allusions that make some of the other letters impossible to translate. Still, it is difficult to convey the full intensity of its emotional rhetoric because certain recurrent terms like *chüeh* 絕, variously translated above as "sever", "repudiate", "forsake", and "forswear", cannot be consistently rendered with a single English word. Nevertheless, because the original letter is so very powerful, I hope even an inadequate rendition may convey something of Meng-hsia's despairing agony.

If the liberal inclusion of the lovers' letters and poems constitutes a primary distinction of *Yü-li hun* as a Chinese novel, we may note at the same time that the behaviour of these lovers has been anticipated in earlier fiction and that Hsü Chen-ya fully expects us to see this indebtedness for the proper enjoyment of his work. In *Hung-lou meng*, before Tai-yü dies, she burns two old handkerchiefs given her by Pao-yü along with her manuscript poems, just as Meng-hsia burns his when they are returned by Li-niang. In *Hua-yüeh hen*, when Ch'iu-hen is stranded in a hotel and believes she is dying, she tears off a piece of her chemise and writes thereon eight four-word lines with her bleeding finger because there are no ink and brush to be had.[53] But the novelist has merely a servant report the incident as he hands over this piece of cloth and other farewell gifts to Ch'iu-hen's anxious lover. Hsü Chen-ya has enlarged upon this episode in having his hero write a two-page letter, and thus enhanced the Gothic quality of his novel. Meng-hsia and Li-niang may not be tested to the limit of their courage as to what they can do to achieve happiness, but given their unquestioning obedience to feudal morality and their disdain for happiness if it conflicts with their sense of duty or honour, they can only engage in a worsening quarrel with each other. The translated letter serves to show that Hsü Chen-ya would agree with the sentimental novelists of eighteenth-century Europe in believing that "the subject of the novel is the 'human heart', which is to say, the psyche in all its complexities and dark self-conceits, but especially in the moment of love".[54]

## VII

IF THE MAY FOURTH period signalizes the advent of Romanticism in modern Chinese literature, then *Yü-li hun* is surely the kind of sentimental novel popular in England and continental Europe prior to the full-scale launching of the Romantic

[52]YLH, Chapter 24: "Hui-hsüeh 揮血", pp. 133-134.

[53]Ch'iu-hen's farewell message goes: 釵斷今生，琴焚此夕。身雖北去，魂實南歸；裂襟作紙，嚙指成書。萬里長途，伏維自愛! *Hua-yüeh hen* (Reprint: Hong Kong, Kuang-chih shu-chü), II, p. 362.

[54]Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, Criterion Books, 1960), p. 84. Fiedler has in mind especially Richardson, Goethe, and Rousseau.

movement, inclusive of Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe* and Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*. *Yü-li hun* shares with the latter the epistolary method of narration, the preponderant interest in the human heart, the dual concern with virtue and sentiment, and the minimal representation of the objective social world for the fuller exploration of characters afflicted with love. But inheriting the *ts'ai-tzu chia-jen* tradition of Chinese drama and fiction, Hsü Chen-ya sees his lovers as identical in background, education, and taste, the sole barrier standing in the way of their marital happiness being the Confucian code governing a widow's conduct. The main difficulty with their English and German counterparts, on the other hand, is that they cannot communicate as readily on account of their differing tastes and social origins. As an aristocrat, Lovelace is fascinated by the world of bourgeois virtue as represented by Clarissa, and meets with repulse. Precisely because he is a poet and artist delighting in his solitary communion with nature, Werther is irresistibly drawn to Charlotte, who inhabits the altogether different world of domestic duty and contentment. Meng-hsia doesn't have to woo his lady in the manner of Lovelace and Werther, and yet because of the moral barrier separating him from Li-niang, he is in a worse state of torment for a longer period of time than Werther ever is, and inflicts as much pain upon his beloved as has been endured by Clarissa in the hands of her cunning seducer. One way of accounting for the Chinese novel's fascination in comparative terms is indeed to look upon its hero and heroine as Chinese versions of Werther and Clarissa.

Meng-hsia is much luckier than Werther in that his object of adoration reciprocates his love totally, sight unseen. Charlotte is a woman of lesser spiritual capacity than either Li-niang or Clarissa, nor is she Werther's intellectual equal. But eighteenth-century Europe allowed much freer social intercourse between young men and women, and is thus kinder to a despairing lover than Chinese society ever was. Werther sees Charlotte almost daily, during his two periods of sojourn in her locality. She delights in his adoration but in the end is forced to agree with her husband that Werther is insane for his inconsiderate craving for her company. Thus Werther suffers without ever getting the kind of spiritual recompense he is entitled to: his grim suicide concludes the tragedy of an individual and not of a pair of lovers sharing the same ideals.

Hsü Chen-ya grants his lovers two nocturnal interviews when they can talk to their hearts' content, though only the one precipitated by Mr. Li's villainy is fully described. Werther and Charlotte see each other far more frequently, but only their final interview, which takes place after Werther has already decided to kill himself, can be counted as a lovers' meeting. Regardless of how much each author drew upon autobiographical experience in his lengthy description of the lovers' confrontation, to compare the two interviews is to be struck with greater force by the glaring sickness of Hsü Chen-ya and his world.

Both Werther and Meng-hsia have been pure and idealistic lovers who care far more for spiritual communion than for bodily contact; both have not been alone before with their beloved for a tête-à-tête at night, and Meng-hsia has never seen Li-niang at close range. Their interview occupies the whole length of Chapter 18, entitled "Crying Face to Face" (*Tui-ch'i* 對泣), and that's precisely what they do when they are not talking about Mr. Li's villainy or communicating through poetry.

After all their misunderstandings are cleared, Meng-hsia chants four quatrains of impromptu composition amid his sobs; in addition, he asks for brush and paper to write out four seven-word poems in the regulated style for Li-niang to read. With all their sobbing and gazing at each other until almost dawn, it seems all quite unnatural that Meng-hsia should still communicate his love through poetry. Before seeing him off, Li-niang sings some verse from *Romeo and Juliet*. Ironically, the brief lines would seem to be taken from Act III, Scene 5, where Juliet is initially urging Romeo to stay even though morning light is already flooding her room.[55] The Shakespearean lovers have spent their night making love; the Chinese lovers haven't even held hands.

Whereas Meng-hsia has to be summoned by Li-niang to both of their meetings, Werther surprises Charlotte with his final visit. Though she has asked him not to come before Christmas Eve, he wants a last interview with her when she is alone rather than surrounded by her family. Quite uneasy because her husband is not home, Charlotte asks her visitor to entertain her by reading something. Werther, who does not enjoy the gift for impromptu composition, asks for his manuscript in her keeping and reads therefrom his own translation of Ossian the Gaelic poet, who is then the rage of Europe.[56] This long recitation of poetry causes "a torrent of tears" to stream from Charlotte's eyes; Werther also weeps bitterly. Then he reads a few more lines intimating his suicide:

> The whole force of these words fell upon the unfortunate Werther. In deepest despair, he threw himself at Charlotte's feet, seized her hands, and presented them to his eyes and to his forehead. An apprehension of his terrible plan seemed to strike her. Her thoughts were confused, she held his hands, pressed them to her bosom; and, turning toward him with the tenderest expression, her burning cheeks touched his. They lost sight of everything. The world vanished before them. He clasped her in his arms tightly, and covered her trembling, stammering lips with furious kisses.[57]

Charlotte, of course, immediately regains her composure and asks Wether to desist. But though on this occasion he is as much of a spiritual lover and lachrymose poet as Meng-hsia, Werther cannot restrain himself from demonstrating his thirst for love in physical terms—the only scene of this kind in the whole novel—and

[55]The relevant passage from Chapter 18 (YLH, p. 101) is as follows: 乃低唱泰西羅米亞名劇中天呀。天呀。放亮光進來。放情人出去數語。促夢霞行。 Juliet's line, "O, now be gone, more light and light it grows," best corresponds to Li-niang's Shakespearean injunction to her lover. At the present state of our knowledge, we do not know if Hsü lifted or adapted it from some source or made it up after acquainting himself with the story of the tragedy. That brief passage does not appear in Lin Shu and Wei I's 魏易 complete translation of *Tales from Shakespeare* entitled *Yin-pien yen-yü* 吟邊燕語 (1904), while an earlier partial translation of the text, *Hsieh-wai ch'i-t'an* 澥外奇譚 (1903), does not even include the play. For fuller information on these two books, see Ko Pao-ch'üan 戈寶權, "Sha-shih-pi-ya ti tso-p'in tsai Chung-kuo 莎士比亞的作品在中國", in *Shih-chieh wen-hsüeh* 世界文學 (Peking, May 1964).

[56]The Ossianic poems of James Macpherson (1736-1796).

[57]Translated by Victor Lange in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther; The New Melusina; Novelle* (New York, Rinehart & Co., 1949), p. 129.

Charlotte cannot but reciprocate. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* would have been an incomplete novel without this scene giving concrete proof of the hero's desperate need on the eve of his suicide, and we may say of *Yü-li hun* that it would have been a work of greater truth and power if its lovers, who are much more in love, had on rare occasions yielded to caresses under the power of their emotion.

That these lovers should not lose self-control even under the most inviting circumstances tells as much of the society of their times as of the author's determined championship of feudal morality. And, as I have said earlier, it is mainly due to Hsü Chen-ya's increasing self-satisfaction with that role that his subsequent novels should appear so very irrelevant and out of touch with reality. The lovers' first nocturnal interview in *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih*, for instance, takes place in the presence of Ch'iu-erh, who serves as her mistress's chaperon. Meng-hsia no longer chants his four quatrains in that interview; he writes them out and has them delivered to Li-niang by her maid. The distraught lady, too, has much less to confide in her visitor and dismisses him early without singing those verses from *Romeo and Juliet*. After returning to his studio, Meng-hsia tosses and turns in bed, thinking mainly of Li's villainy, and then writes the same four seven-word *lü-shih* poems in the morning for his own consolation.[58] The author has certainly gone to absurd lengths to assure the reader of his lovers' utter transcendance of paltry passion (*yü* 欲).

## VIII

HSÜ CHEN-YA had no knowledge of Goethe's novel when composing *Yü-li hun*, but he had read *Ch'a-hua nü* among other translations by Lin Shu and was obviously in its debt not merely as a Western example of a sentimental tragedy featuring a noble-minded heroine but, more importantly, as a direct model for the writing of a conclusion to his own novel. Though we can say in a general way that exposure to Western fiction had led some late-Ch'ing novelists to try new techniques, *Yü-li hun* was the first Chinese novel whose compositional indebtedness to a European model could be conclusively proven. As such, it should be of further interest to students of comparative literature.

As an epilogue, the last two chapters of *Yü-li hun* are different from the earlier twenty-eight chapters in narrative form and method. Li-niang has died in Chapter 26, and in the next chapter Yün-ch'ien discovers on her person that long letter disclosing in full her affair with Meng-hsia and her well-intentioned effort to bring about a happy marriage between him and her beloved sister-in-law. Chapter 28 goes on to describe Yün-ch'ien's remorse and Meng-hsia's belated return to the Ts'ui house two days after Li-niang's death. Since she is already in the coffin, he finds it more comforting to lament her alone by the now moss-covered grave for the pear blossoms. Except for the prelude, which lifts the incident of the burial of flowers from its proper temporal context, the author has organized the first twenty-eight

[58] The two sets of poems in *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* contain three substitute words, however. The phrase *wo-shih* 我是 in the second *lü-shih* poem (*Lei-shih*, p. 139) is a misprint for *shih-wo* 是我, as in YLH, p. 100.

chapters as a straightforward chronicle of the year 1909, from the first to the last month, plus two additional days. (In *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* he recasts the narrative as a month-by-month journal of the hero, not forgetting even to enter the intercalary month following the second.)[59] These twenty-eight chapters, then, constitute a third-person narrative by an ominscient narrator having access to all the papers belonging to the late hero and heroine. Once in a long while the narrator speaks out in the first person, but since such authorial commentaries are nothing unusual in traditional Chinese fiction, we are not too curious about his identity.

It is the main business of the epilogue to relate the deaths of the other two main characters so as to conclude the tragedy, but since even Yün-ch'ien outlives Li-niang by half a year, a detailed chronicle is no longer feasible or desirable in the absence of a continual variety of engaging incidents. With Li-niang gone, both Yün-ch'ien and Meng-hsia are waiting for the end, and there is little to tell about the other members of the Ts'ui family. Moreover, the author has already given us a full account of Li-niang's ghastly death, and he cannot hope to top it with a similar omniscient narrative about Yün-ch'ien's last days. Nor should he do so in view of the fact that, as the title heroine, Li-niang's death should properly be the climax of the novel. So Hsü Chen-ya hits upon the brilliant idea of giving us a fragmentary diary of the dying Yün-ch'ien. Her daily entries, some long and some quite brief, while differing in dramatic effect from the sustained narrative of Li-niang's death, are grimly impressive in their own way and add further interest as a new type of document copied into the novel.

There can be no doubt whatever that Hsü Chen-ya got his inspiration for introducing the diary from his reading of Lin Shu's translation of *La Dame aux camélias*. Following the introductory section, the latter novel is in the main Armand's retelling of his affair with Marguerite to the first-person narrator, a sympathetic novelist. By Chapter 25, Armand has dozed off, "tired by this long narrative, often interrupted by his tears,"[60] and the novelist starts to read on his own Marguerite's last letter to her lover, who received it from her friend Julie Duprat. The letter begins with an account of the elder Duval's secret visit to Marguerite, which has compelled her to leave his son for seemingly mercenary reasons, but soon turns into a journal wherein the dying courtesan records her sensations and thoughts for her absent lover's perusal. The entry for February 5, the last entry in her own handwriting, goes as follows:

> Oh, come, come, Armand! I suffer horribly; I am going to die, O God! I was so miserable yesterday that I wanted to spend the evening, which seemed as if it were going to be as long as the last, anywhere but at home. The duke came in the morning. It seems to me as if the sight of this old man, whom death has forgotten, makes me die faster.

[59] Thus *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* consists of fourteen chapters, the first thirteen covering the year 1909 and the last chapter the succeeding half-year. Li-niang now dies on the 25th of the 4th month of the year *keng-hsü* (1910).

[60] Alexandre Dumas fils, *Camille: La Dame aux camélias*, tr. Edmund Gosse (New York, Heritage Press, 1955), p. 211.

> Despite the burning fever which devoured me, I made them dress me and take me to the Vaudeville. Julie put on some rouge for me, without which I should have looked like a corpse. I had the box where I gave you our first rendezvous. All the time I had my eyes fixed on the stall where you sat that day, though a sort of country fellow sat there, laughing loudly at all the foolish things that the actors said. I was half dead when they brought me home. I coughed and spat blood all the night. Today I cannot speak, I can scarcely move my arm. My God! My God! I am going to die! I have been expecting it, but I can not get used to the thought of suffering more than I suffer now, and if . . . .[61]

After that entry, Julie Duprat continues the letter from February 18 on, keeping a record of her friend's last few days. The very last chapter (Chapter 27) is in the form of a postscript in which the first-person narrator tells of his accompaniment of Armand on several visits and gives his reason why he has recorded this true story of Marguerite.

In Chapter 29 of *Yü-li hun*, entitled "The Diary", the first-person narrator finally reveals his identity as an old classmate of Ch'in Shih-ch'ih. Mindful of his reputation as the Alexandre Dumas fils of the Orient (*tung-fang Chung-ma* 東方仲馬), Shih-ch'ih had sent him in the winter of 1910 a rough draft of Meng-hsia's love story and asked him to turn it into a novel. The oriental Dumas, however, is reluctant to do so because of his contempt for Meng-hsia, who has callously survived Li-niang; furthermore, he doesn't know what has become of Yün-ch'ien. By sheer accident, a friend of the author's, who also took part in the Wuchang uprising, has returned to his native city of Soochow with a journal which a dying comrade has entrusted to his care. He shows the journal to our author, who has no difficulty in identifying its original owner because of the many poems to and from Li-niang contained therein and develops further a great admiration for Meng-hsia, who has followed her instructions to study in Japan and died a patriot.[62]

Our Dumas is further encouraged to write the story down because he now knows about the fate of Yün-ch'ien. Duly transcribed into the journal is a record of her last days (5th to 14th day of the sixth month in the year of *keng-hsü* 庚戌 [1910]), as taken from her own diary. The diary is clearly modeled after Marguerite's, as may be seen in her last entry:

> The 14th. I am very ill. Can't even swallow one drop of water. My hands and feet are numb and have gradually lost the sense of touch. My throat is so parched I can't utter a single sound. All that congestion of phlegm has blocked my breathing; I can only gasp as if someone

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

[62] In the eyes of his comrade, Meng-hsia had a jade-like complexion but barely enough strength to tie up a live chicken (其力殆足縛雞). He reports, nevertheless, that, though a bleeding victim of several bullet wounds, our hero didn't die until he had fatally shot three enemies in rapid succession with his Mauser rifle. The forced heroic note is somewhat comic. Cast in the form of a journal, *Hsüeh-hung lei-shih* ends with the hero about to depart for Japan in the company of Shih-ch'ih. His resolve to die for his country is hinted at, however.

> were choking me. There is no pain quite like it. My old father has written a letter to Meng-hsia for me. I have been yearning for Meng-hsia but Meng-hsia hasn't come even at this late hour. I am afraid I can't wait for him any longer. I can't even have a glimpse of my husband at the time of my death. How can I die with my eyes contentedly closed? But after my death he will surely come, and my diary will surely be read by my husband. I hope he will take care of himself and not become grief-stricken. As I am writing this, I can't even form characters properly. From now on I can't even hold a brush any more.[63]

At this point we find Meng-hsia's postscript to the diary in which he describes his remorse over his shabby treatment of his long-suffering fiancée and records her age (18) and the date of her death (the 17th of the sixth month). He also notes her last agonies as does Julie Duprat her friend's in her continuation of Marguerite's letter.

Having read through Yün-ch'ien's journal, the Chinese Dumas is filled with the compulsion to see her old home and to know what has become of the rest of her family, and the final chapter, entitled "The Site Revisited," is mainly taken up with that visit. In the last chapter of *La Dame aux camélias*, too, the first-person narrator, accompanied by Armand, calls on two of Marguerite's dearest friends, visits her grave, and spends some time with Armand's father and sister at their country estate. But the chapter is only two pages long, and the visit to the grave is summarized in one sentence ("Lastly, we went to Marguerite's grave, on which the first rays of the April sun were bringing the first leaves into bud").[64] In his last chapter, however, Hsü Chen-ya has immeasurably improved upon his model with an elegiac recapitulation of all the themes of the novel.

The narrator takes a special journey to Wusih to see Ch'in Shih-ch'ih and goes with him to the Ts'ui house in the village. Only a crone guards the place now; old Mr. T'sui has died and P'eng-lang has been entrusted to the care of relatives. The grave for pear blossoms, no longer marked by the stone tablet, is barely visible under the moss. Both the pear tree and the magnolia, prematurely dead like the young ladies of the house, have been chopped down. Meng-hsia's old study, dusty and foul-

[63] YLH, p. 164.

[64] *Camille*, p. 231. Dumas does not dwell on this visit because earlier in Chapter 6, before Armand begins his narrative, he and the narrator had visited Marguerite's original grave and had her corpse moved to a new burial site. They saw her face after the shroud was removed:

> It was terrible to see; it is horrible to relate. The eyes were nothing but two holes, the lips had disappeared, vanished, and the white teeth were tightly set. The black hair, long and dry, was pressed tightly about the forehead, and half veiled the green hollows of the cheeks; and yet I recognised in this face the joyous white and rose face that I had seen so often [p. 47].

This is the most impressive piece of description in the whole novel, and not something that a translator would render casually. To see if Lin Shu has done it justice, I quote from Hsiao-chai Chu-jen 曉齋主人 (Wang Shou-ch'ang 王壽昌) and Leng-hung Sheng 冷紅生 (Lin Shu), trs., *Ch'a-hua-nü i-shih* (Taipei, Commercial Press, 1964), p. 13:

> 面赫然。見目眶已陷。唇腐齒豁。直至耳際。齒粲白猶如編貝。黑髮覆額上。左偏直掩其耳。此即當年坐油壁車臉如朝霞之馬克也。

Lin translates altogether too freely, but his terse language is certainly impressive. While some obvious departures from the original may be regretted, his addition of the phrase 坐油壁車 cunningly links Marguerite to several Chinese courtesans of the past, including the ill-fated beauty celebrated in Li Ho's 李賀 "Su Hsiao-hsiao mu 蘇小小墓".

smelling after long neglect, is bare of furniture except for a full waste basket from which the visitors retrieve two *tz'u* compositions by its former occupant. These poems of autumnal lament, quoted in full, appropriately conclude the novel.

I have discussed the epilogue of *Yü-li hun* at some length partly to establish our author's obvious indebtedness to Dumas in matters of narrative technique and partly to show what a fine artist he was to conclude his novel the way he did, by first validating the credentials of his first-person narrator and then assigning him an active role in the story as eyewitness to the ruin of a house where the tragedy once took place. Whereas the main body of the novel is experimental only within the context of the sentimental-erotic tradition, the epilogue anticipates Lu Hsün for its use of a diary, for its employment of a concerned but helpless narrator, and for the desolate landscape he observes for us.

When Hsü Chen-ya styles himself the Oriental Alexandre Dumas fils in the epilogue, most probably he is not calling attention to his specific indebtedness to the French novelist's craftsmanship but rather to his proud creation of a noble but unfortunate heroine who will wring tears from his readers. Both Li-niang and Marguerite are victims of pulmonary tuberculosis, and if Marguerite, like her Chinese sister, has not attracted critical attention in recent decades as a character in fiction, her tubercular condition certainly receives much implicit commentary in Susan Sontag's probing study of *Illness as Metaphor*, though the brevity of that book allows only one mention each of Marguerite and her operatic counterpart, Violetta Valery. And what Sontag has to say about the TB victim in mainly nineteenth-century Western literature applies with equal force to our heroine, as may be seen in the two following quotations:

> In contrast to the modern bogey of the cancer-prone character—someone unemotional, inhibited, repressed—the TB-prone character that haunted imaginations in the nineteenth century was an amalgam of two different fantasies: someone both passionate and repressed.[65]
>
> TB is disintegration, febrilization, dematerialization; it is a disease of liquids—the body turning to phlegm and mucus and sputum and, finally, blood—and of air, of the need for better air. . . . TB is a disease of time; it speeds up life, highlights it, spiritualizes it.[66]

As a Chinese widow steeped in Confucian culture, Li-niang is actually much more "repressed" than Marguerite, who attempts a life of false gaiety after relinquishing Armand to his respectable father. And if Marguerite lives a life of febrile dematerialization, the three principals of the Chinese novel all do so in their intense cultivation of passion as something ethereal, disembodied. Prodigiously decked out in the vocabulary of melancholy, sickness, grief, despair, decay, and death, *Yü-li hun* surpasses all previous works of the Chinese sentimental-erotic tradition for its morbid lyricism, and if we follow Sontag, it may be said to be the prime example of a work conceived by a tubercular imagination even though Hsü Chen-ya himself was

[65] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York, Vintage Books, 1979), p. 38.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

not known to be afflicted by the disease. Li-niang literally turns her body into "phlegm and mucus and sputumn and, finally, blood"; in her last moments, she gasps for air as well. The author has not specified Yün-ch'ien's terminal illness, but as we have seen from the quotation from her diary, she, too, cannot breathe and craves for air. Meng-hsia also spits blood though he suffers for a longer period from the febrile condition of a malarial patient. And it is not an accident that his study, from which he has written so many passionate poems and letters, should eventually strike the two visitors for its "evil and foul" air that forces them to leave in precipitate haste.[67]

All this sickness and decay may define *Yü-li hun* as a Chinese variant of the Gothic novel, but surely it would seem more appropriate to regard its hero and heroines with their emotional hypersensitivity and sexual repression as inhabitants of that windowless house of iron Lu Hsün describes in his preface to *Na-han*. Lu Hsün, himself a TB victim, is especially aware of "the need for better air" and for "bright, wide-open spaces".[68] Though not an awakener of Chinese youth in that sense, the author of *Yü-li hun* has certainly defined the stifling condition of that iron house with poetic fervour and deep personal feeling, fully exposing the agonies of its inhabitants. With his unswerving allegiance to the Chinese literary and moral traditions, he has nevertheless evoked the horror of Chinese decadence with a kind of power rarely felt in works by later authors explicitly denouncing the feudal system.

[67]The relevant passage goes: 室中空氣惡俗。余不能耐。呼行癡曰。去休。是間不可以少駐矣。 YLH, p. 169.

[68]This phrase comes from a famous passage written in 1919 where Lu Hsün urges the awakened man to "shoulder up the gate of darkness" so that the children "may rush to the bright, wide-open spaces and lead happy lives henceforth as rational human beings". Translated by Tsi-an Hsia in *The Gate of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1968), pp. 146-147.