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Kong Shang-ren, Peach Blossom Fan: Selected Acts

Kong Shang-ren's (1648–1718) *Peach Blossom Fan* is an historical drama that treats the brief Southern Ming regime set up in Nanjing in 1644 after the capture of Beijing by the rebel Li Zi-cheng and the suicide of the legitimate Chong-zhen Emperor of the Ming. This was the period of the Manchu invasion, which put an end to the "Southern Ming" in the process of establishing the Qing Dynasty. Strong sentiment for the Ming still lingered in the late seventeenth century when *Peach Blossom Fan* was written (1699), and the Qing government was proportionally sensitive to any hint of criticism. Luckily for Kong Shang-ren, the "Southern Ming" was so incompetent and corrupt that an historically accurate portrayal would not offend Qing imperial sensibilities. At the same time a passionate loyalty to the Ming could be represented, not directed against the Qing but against the self-destructive folly of the Southern Ming court.

In the play, Kong Shang-ren argued with some justification that the historical events portrayed were themselves theater: the "Southern Ming" was show rather than substance. Each of the two sections into which the forty acts are divided is introduced by an old man, once a minor participant in the events represented, speaking from the fictitious present of the play's performance in 1684. He concludes the introduction to the second half with a verse that underscores the point:

In those days reality was a play,
this play today seems reality.
From sidelines I watch a second time—
Heaven preserves the man with cold eyes.

The characters in the play all are based on individuals who took part in the actual historical events, and Kong Shang-ren drew extensively on historical documents. At the center of the action is the love story of Hou Fang-yu, one of the most famous writers of the day, and the courtesan Li Xiang-jun. The historical Hou Fang-yu was acquainted with Li Xiang-jun and even wrote a brief biography of her; but as with other characters, the more everyday facts and events of history are transformed under the imperatives of dramatic romance.

Performances of songs, plays, and popular storytelling, along with ceremonies staged like performances, occur throughout *Peach Blossom Fan*. The arch villain, Ruan Da-cheng, was not only a part of the corrupt Southern Ming government, he was also the preeminent playwright of his own day. References to Ruan's most famous play, *The Swallow Letter*, recur often as an example of a flawed, hollow art (it is also the favorite play of Prince Fu, who becomes the theater-loving Southern Ming emperor). Again and again, *Peach Blossom Fan* comes back to questions of

role playing, feigning, and the way the genuine can appear within a role. The finest example is the young heroine Li Xiang-jun, who is first taught to sing the role of a romantic heroine and finally becomes the kind of character she plays.

One of the most remarkable figures in the first half of the play is the painter Yang Wen-cong. It is he who gives Li Xiang-jun her name and he who eventually paints the bloodstains on Xiang-jun's fan into peach blossoms, from which the play takes its title. Moving easily between the camps of the good characters and the villains, Yang Wen-cong is the cause of the lovers coming together, the cause of their separation, and the one who initiates the events that lead to their eventual reunion. The scenes translated here are the Prologue and the three central scenes that involve Yang and the fan. Finally, part of the last reunion scene tells the ultimate fate of the fan.

The Prologue opens with a fictive first performance of the play in 1684, the beginning of a new grand cycle in the Chinese dating system. The old man, once an official at the Ming ancestral temple, praises the good government of the reigning Kang-xi emperor to help allay any hint of disloyalty.

PROLOGUE (I), OCTOBER 1684

Enter an OLD MAN with a white beard, a felt hat, and Daoist robes.

OLD MAN:

Is there such an antique as I?—
antique of neither bronze nor jade,
but my face gives off an antique gloss.
The last soul surviving, companions gone—
why flinch from young men's scorn?
The outrage that once filled my breast
has all been swept away,
and now I may well linger on, wherever
I find drink and song.
Now children revere their parents,
state officers are true,
all things rest secure,
so yearn no more for the ginseng root
that makes a man live long.

The sun shines gloriously on this age of sage-kings, and flowers bloom in the onset of a new cycle of years. There are no bandits in the hills, while gods and immortals fill the earth. I was once an Official at the Court of Imperial Sacrifices in Nanjing, a post of no great prestige or pay, so my name may be withheld here. It has been my great good fortune to have escaped disaster, and I have been alive these ninety-seven years, during which I have witnessed much of splendor and ruin. And now I have reached the first year of a new hundred-and-eighty-year cycle. A ruler comparable to Yao and Shun is on the throne, and ministers like Yu and Gao have been installed to aid him. Everywhere the pop-

place is happy, and the harvests have been abundant year after year. This is the twenty-third year of the Kang-xi Reign, and twenty-one signs of good luck have appeared.

VOICE [offstage]: What are these signs of good luck?

OLD MAN [counting them off on his fingers]:
The Yellow River Diagram appeared.

The Luo River Inscription appeared.

The Star of Virtue brightened.

Auspicious clouds manifested themselves.

A sweet dew fell.

An oily rain came down.

A phoenix roosted.

A unicorn roamed.

The ming plant came out.

The sacred mushroom grew.

There were no waves on the sea.

The Yellow River cleared.

Every single one of these occurred—doesn't that deserve celebration? I'm delighted to have lived to see such glorious times, and I roam about everywhere. In the Tai-ping Gardens yesterday I saw a new play being put on, entitled *Peach Blossom Fan*, which concerned what happened around Nanjing in the last years of the Ming. It treated the emotions of separation and reunion, and it described how people felt about the splendor and ruin of men and kingdoms. The events really happened and the people were real ones; it was all accurate. I not only heard of these things, I saw them all with my own eyes. Even more amusing, I, now a frail old man, was actually put on the stage as one of the minor characters. This inspired tears, laughter, rage, and condemnation in me. And no one in the whole audience realized that I, just an old man to them, was really one of the persons in the play.

VOICE [offstage]: Who wrote this fine play?

OLD MAN: Don't you gentlemen know that the most famous playwrights don't reveal their names. But when you observe how he appertions praise and criticism, it must come from someone with a family tradition in the study of *The Springs and Autumns*; and its suitability for singing shows that the author clearly had family instruction in the *Classic of Poetry*.

VOICE [offstage]: In that case it's obviously the Hermit of Yun-ting Mountain.

OLD MAN: To whom are you referring?

VOICE [offstage]: There's going to be a gathering of the upper crust of officialdom, and they're going to have this very play performed. Since you're one of the characters in it and since you've also heard this new version, why don't you give us an outline of the plot beforehand, and we'll all listen carefully.

OLD MAN: It's all in the lyrics to "Fragrance Fills the Yard," sung by the Daoist Zhang Wei.

[Sings]

A young gentleman, Hou Fang-yu,
sometime resident in Nanjing,
was matched with the Southland's fairest;
Harm worked unseen by vicious lies
in one night split this loving pair.

They saw the world turned upside down,
the Jiang-Huai garrisons amok.

Next a blind prince took the throne,
choosing performers, his only concern,
while faction's ills raised wicked ministers.

Their bond of love could not continue:

she in her tower with martyr's ardor,
he in his dungeon, in deep despair.

They owed thanks to Liu and old Su
whose earnest endeavors set them free.

At midnight ruler and minister fled,
who laments a loyal soul in misty waves?

And the peach blossom fan
shredded on the altar lay,

and I shall show you how they strayed.

VOICE [offstage]: Excellent! Excellent! But sometimes we couldn't quite understand you because of the ringing quality of the melody. Summarize it again in a few lines.

OLD MAN: Let me try.

[Recites]

The traitors Ma and Ruan lurked with swords
both inside the court and out;

deft Liu and Su went back and forth
seeking to tie the secret threads.

Young Hou Fang-yu found true love's course
broken beyond recall,

Zhang Wei the Daoist gave judgment
on glory and the fall.

But here as I'm talking, Hou Fang-yu has already come on stage. Let's all watch.

Inherent in *Peach Blossom Fan* is a fascination with acting roles, both the kind that occur on stage and the kind that occur in the political and social world. In scene II, "Teaching the Song," we meet the heroine, Li Xiang-jun, at first the pure type of the nubile virgin, literally nameless. From the painter Yang Wen-cong she receives both a name and a marriage "plot" in which she is supposed to play her appointed role. Between her naming and the suggestion of a match, she practices singing the role of Du Li-niang in *Peony Pavilion*, the romantic heroine's role for which she is des-

lined both on stage and off. At her side, however, is the music teacher Su Kun-sheng, whose insistent corrections constantly remind us of the artifice of role.

The stage is set in the pleasure quarters of Nanjing, by the Qin-Huai River.

TEACHING THE SONG (II), APRIL 1643

Enter MADAM LI ZHEN-LI, *elegantly made up*.

Li [sings]:

With dark-drawn brows, I do not close
the doors of this red mansion.

On Long Plank Bridge thin willow strands
flirt and draw the passing riders.

I tighten up the harp strings
and deftly work the mouth organ's pouch.

[Reclines]

Blooms of pear are like the snow,

the grasses like a mist,

springtime comes to the Qin-Huai,

here on both its shores.

Courtesans' parlors in a row

look out on the waters,

and from each house reflections cast

the fetching images of girls.

I am Li Zhen-li, and I belong to the finest troupe of singers, to the most famous band of "misty flowers" and "moonlit breeze." I was born and bred in the pleasure quarters, where I have welcomed clients and sent them on their way across Long Bridge. This face, with its powder and paint, has not yet lost its bloom, and ample charms remain to me. I have raised one adopted daughter, a tender and gentle little thing, just now beginning to take part in our elegant soirées; but in her shy grace, she has not yet gone behind the lotus bed curtains. There is herabout a retired county magistrate called Yang Wen-cong, who is the brother-in-law of Ma Shi-ying, the governor-general of Feng-yang, and a sworn friend of Ruan Da-zheng, the former head of the Court of Imperial Entertainments. On his frequent visits to my establishment, Yang has often praised my daughter and wants to arrange for a client to "do up her hair."¹ The spring weather is so bright and inviting today, I suspect he'll be here for a visit. [Calls out] Maid, open the curtains and sweep up, and keep your eye out to see if any visitors are coming.

VOICE [offstage]: Yes, ma'am.

Enter YANG WEN-CONG.

YANG [reclines]:

Triple Mountain's scenery is

a resource for my paintings,

the flair of Southern Dynasties

courses through my poems.

I am Yang Wen-cong, a licentiate and former county magistrate who has retired from my post to live a quiet life. Li Zhen-li, the famous courtesan of the Qin-Huai, is an old friend of mine, and I'm taking advantage of the spring weather to pay her a visit and have a chat. Here I am now. I'll be going in. [Enters] Where's the lady? [Greets her] Splendid! See how the petals of the plum have fallen and the fronds of the willows are turning yellow. Soft and rich in color, spring's beauty is everywhere in the yard, which makes me wonder how we may best spend these moments.

Li: It is lovely indeed. Come to the little room upstairs. I'll burn some incense and put on some tea, and we can read over some poems.

YANG: Even better! [They climb stairs. He reclines]

Curtain stripes seem to cage the bird on its perch,

flowers' shadows seem to guard the fish in its bowl.

These are your daughter's apartments. Where is she?

Li: She hasn't yet finished dressing; she's still in the bedroom.

YANG: Ask her to come out.

Li [calling out]: Come out, child. Mr. Yang is here.

YANG [reading the poems on her walls]: How remarkable! These are all poems inscribed to her by well-known figures! [He clasps his hands behind his back and reclines them]

Enter HERONE, *splendidly made up*.

HERONE [sings]:

Just now called back from sweetest dreams,

I threw off red coverlets

brodered with mated ducks.

I put on lipstick and glossy rouge

and hastily did my hair

in a ponytail with straying tresses.

What relief is there for spring's moodiness?—

just learning new lyrics for songs.

[Greets YANG] Good-day, sir!

YANG: You have grown even more stunning in these past few days since I saw you last. These poems are not at all wrong in their praise of you.

[Reads on and registers surprise] Well, look at this! Such prominent figures as Zhang Pu and Xia Yun-yi have both written poems to you. I really must write you a poem of my own, using their rhymes. [Li ZHEN-LI

¹Having one's hair done up marked the passage into womanhood; here it is a euphemism for taking her virginity.

brings him a brush and inkstone. YANG takes the brush in hand and mulls over it a long time, as if ready to retire] I can't do as well as them; I might as well hide my weaknesses by decorating your white wall here with a few black-ink drawings of orchids.

Lr: That's even better!

YANG [*looking at the wall*]: Here's a rock like a fist painted by Lan Ying. I can use his painting as a background and draw my orchids over at the side of the rock. [*Paints and sings*]

The white wall glows

like rippling silk,

Here I sketch the *Li Sao*'s

poetic temper.²

Tender leaves and scented sheaths,

rain-burdened, drunk in streaks of mist.

This rock of Xuan-zhou, ink-flowers shattered,

with several spots of gray moss,

tingeing the pavements randomly.

[*Goes back and looks at it*] Not bad!

No match, of course, for black-ink orchids

done by masters of the Yuan,

that mood of nonchalance,

but our own famous beauties should wear

Xiang orchids at their waists.

Lr: This is truly the brushwork of a master. You have added much beauty to our apartments.

YANG: You're making fun of me. [*To HEROINE*] Tell me your professional name so that I can write it here in the dedication.

HEROINE: I'm still young and don't have a professional name yet.

Lr: Why don't you do her the honor of giving her a name?

YANG: There is a passage in *The Zuo Tradition*: "And because [he] orchid has the sweetest smell in all the land, people will wear it in their sashes and be fond of it."³ Why don't we call her Xiang-jun, "Queen of Sweet Fragrance"?

Lr: Excellent! Xiang-jun, come over and thank Mr. Yang.

XIANG-JUN [*bowing*]: Thank you very much, sir.

YANG [*laughing*]: We even have a name for these chambers. [*Writes the dedication*] "In mid-spring, this sixteenth year of the Chong-zhen Reign, 1643, I chanced to draw these orchids in ink in the Chambers of Beguiling Fragrance to win a smile from Xiang-jun, who is Queen of Sweet Fragrance. Yang Wen-cong of Gui-yang."

²By the emblematic associations within the *Li Sao* itself, the orchid was, in its solitary purity, associated with Qu Yuan.

³See p. 81.

Lr: Both the paintings and the calligraphy are superb, worthy of acclaim as a double perfection. Thank you so much! [*All sit*]

YANG: As I see it, Xiang-jun here may be the most beautiful woman in the land, but I don't know her level of skill in the arts.

Lr: She has always been spoiled and allowed to have her own way, so she didn't study anything. But just recently I've asked one of the habitués of the pleasure quarters to give her lessons in singing.

YANG: Who is it?

Lr: Someone called Su Kun-sheng.

YANG: Yes, Su Kun-sheng. His real name is Zhou Ru-song, originally from He-nan and now a resident of Wu-xi. I have known him well for some time—he is a true master. What suites of songs has he taught her?

Lr: The "Four Dream Plays" of Tang Xian-zu.

YANG: How much of them has she learned?

Lr: She's just now learned half of *Peony Pavilion*. [*Calls to XIANG-JUN*] Child, Mr. Yang here is no stranger to us. Get out your score and practice some of the songs you know. After your teacher quizzes you, you can try some new tunes.

XIANG-JUN: How can I practice my singing with a guest present?

Lr: Don't be silly! For those of us in the quarter the costume for singing and dancing is the endowment that provides us our food. How are you going to get by if you won't practice singing? [*XIANG-JUN looks at her score*]

Lr [*sings*]:

When born among beavies of powder and paint,
and entering blossom and oriole troupes,
a throat that can carry an aria
is the place where we find our wealth.
Don't lightly throw your heart away,
but study "The early morning wind
and dying moonlight sinking";⁴
then with red clapper's slow beat,
from Yi-chun performers you'll steal the glow,⁵
and tied before you gate will be seen
horses of princes.

Enter SU KUN-SHENG, wearing a headband and in informal dress.

Su [*recites*]:

Idly I come to azure lodges
to train my parakeet,
lazily leaving vermilion gates
to see the peonies.

⁴This phrase is adapted from a famous lyric by the Northern Sung lyricist Liu Yong.

⁵Yi-chun Palace was the site of the famous "Pear Garden Academy" of imperial musicians and singers during the reign of Xuan-zong in the Tang.

I am Su Kun-sheng. I've left Ruan Da-cheng's levee to come here to the pleasure quarters. Taking this beautiful girl through her lessons is certainly a lot better than roading to that foster child of a eunuch. [*Goes in and greets them*] Well, Yang Wen-cong, fancy meeting you here. It's been some time.

YANG: My compliments, Kun-sheng, on taking such a stunning beauty as a pupil.

Li: Your teacher, Mr. Su, is here. Go pay him the proper welcome, child.

XIANG-JUN bows.

Su: No need for that. Have you memorized thoroughly the song I taught you yesterday?

XIANG-JUN: I have.

Su: We'll take advantage of Mr. Yang's presence as our audience to ask him for pointers as you go over it with me.

YANG: I just want you to show me how it should be performed.

XIANG-JUN [*seated opposite Su, sings*]:⁵

Coy lavender, fetching reds
bloom everywhere, here
all given to this broken well
and tumbled wall. Fair season,
fine scene, overwhelming
weather . . .

Su: Wrong! Wrong! "Fair" gets a beat and "overwhelming" gets a beat; don't run the two clauses together. Let's try it again.

XIANG-JUN:

Fair season,
fine scene—overwhelming
weather. Where
and in whose garden shall we find
pleasure and the heart's delight?
Drifting in at dawn, at twilight
roll away
clouds and colored wisps
through azure balustrades
streaming rain, petals in wind . . .
Su: No, that's not right again. "Streaming" carries a special weight in the melody; it should be sung from the diaphragm.

XIANG-JUN:

streaming rain, petals in wind,
a painted boat in misty waves,
the girl behind her brocade screen
has seen but dimly
such splendor of spring.

⁵The aria she sings is from "Waking from Dream" in *Peony Pavilion*.

Su: Excellent! Excellent! Exactly right! Let's go on.

XIANG-JUN:

Throughout green hills the nightjar cries
its tears of blood; and out beyond
the blackberry the threads
of mist coil drunkenly.
And though the peony be fair,
how can it maintain its sway
when spring is leaving?

Su: These lines are a bit rough. Try them again.

XIANG-JUN:

And though the peony be fair,
how can it maintain its sway
when spring is leaving?
Idly I stare

where twittering swallows crisply speak
words cut clear,

and from the warbling orioles comes
a bright and liquid melody.

Su: Fine! Now you've completed another suite of songs.

YANG [*to Li ZHEN-ti*]: I'm pleased to see that your daughter is so quick. I have no doubt she will become a famous courtesan. [*To Su*] I met young Hou Fang-yu the other day, the son of Hou, the executive in the Ministry of Revenue. He is well provided for, and he also is known for his talent. At present he is looking for a woman of distinguished beauty. Do you know him, Kong-sheng?

Su: Our families are from the same region. He is, indeed, a young man of great talent.

YANG: We'd be making no mistake if we arranged a union between these two.

[*Sings*]

Fair match for our Sapphire, now sixteen:⁷
she sings charming songs,
he rides a sleek horse.
He will lavish her with turban brocades,⁸
and hand in hand they will drain their cups.
Wedding poems will speed them to bed,
a lacquered coach to greet the bride.
With a rare young noble as her mate,

⁷Sapphire, Bi-yu, was the legendary concubine of the Prince of Ru-nan in the Southern Dynasties.

⁸Brocade used for turbans was the standard figure for gifts (i.e., payment) to a courtesan.

year after year she will never let
her Ruan Zhao go away,⁹
by the spring waters of Peach Leaf Ford
he will buy a cottage and stay.¹

Lr: It would be just wonderful if such a young gentleman were willing to come "do up her hair." I hope you will do what you can to help in bringing this match about.

YANG: It is on my mind.

Li [sings]:
No pearl can compare to this girl of mine,
who mimics the new oriole's sweet cries,
in springtime closed behind many gates,
never known by man.

We can't waste such a glorious spring day. Let's go have a little wine downstairs.

YANG: Sounds good to me. [Reclines]
In front of Little Su's curtain,
flowers fill the meadow.²

Lr:
orioles tipsy, swallows languid
across the springtime banks.

XIANG-JUN:
In my red silk handkerchief
are fruits of cherry,

Su:
waiting for Pan Yue's carriage
to pass west of the lane.³

Having arranged the sale of Xiang-jun's virginity, Yang Wen-cong anticipates a conventional union of "talented youth and fair maid." Xiang-jun has studied the role she is to play. After all, as her mother Li Zhen-li reminds her, it is by playing roles (singing in musical drama and making customers fall in love with her) that she must make her living. But instead of becoming the actress-courtesan who merely plays roles, Xiang-jun learns her role too well and actually becomes the romantic heroine.

In the acts that follow, factional politics creep into the conventional love match. The villain Ruan Da-cheng, rudely scorned by the politically progressive young men of Nanjing, is looking for someone to support his cause and win acceptance for him among the local elite. Yang Wen-cong tells Ruan of the match he has proposed between Li Xiang-jun and Hou Fang-yu, and he suggests that if Ruan were to provide

the "wedding gifts" (the price for Li Xiang-jun's virginity), Hou Fang-yu would be obligated to return the favor and use his influence with his friends on Ruan's behalf. Ruan Da-cheng agrees to the plan eagerly.

Yang Wen-cong then makes the proposal to Hou Fang-yu, intimating that Yang himself will cover the cost of the wedding gifts. He arranges for Hou Fang-yu and Li Xiang-jun to meet, and Hou is properly smitten by her beauty and shy charm. There is a "wedding" banquet and the couple go off happily to bed. In the sobriety of the morning after, Li Xiang-jun, hitherto docile and usually silent, begins to speak for herself, insisting on learning the truth of where the wedding gifts came from. When she knows the truth, she acts on it, causing the complications that will drive the play's love story. Hou Fang-yu, on the other hand, is initially more willing to participate in a world of compromises.

REFUSING THE TROUSSEAU (VIII), MAY 1643

Enter SERVANT, picking up the nightstools.

SERVANT:

Tortoise piss, tortoise piss
spews out little tortoises,
blood of turtle, blood of turtle
turns to little turtles fertile.
Tortoise piss and turtle blood,
whose is whose I cannot guess,
turtle blood and tortoise piss,
can't say if it's that or this.
Whose is whose I cannot guess,
can't say who the father is;
who can tell one from another?—
can't say who's the father's brother.

[*Langhng!* Tsk, tsk, tsk. Last night Miss Xiang-jun lost her virginity, and the hoopla went on half the night. I got up early today and have to scrub out the nightstools and empty the chamberpots. There's so much to get done. I wonder how much longer the client and our girl are going to spend in each other's arms. [*Scrubs the nightstools*]

Enter YANG WEN-CONG.

YANG [sings]:

They spend nights deep in willow lanes
of Ping-kang Ward,⁴
and outside the gate a flower peddler
wakes them suddenly from dreams.
The finely wrought door still unopened,
and the curtain hooks are tinkling,

⁹The story of Ruan Zhao and Liu Zhen's encounter with two immortal maidens in the mountains and their staying with them for more than half a year became a standard figure for losing oneself in a love affair. "Young Ruan Goes Away," *Ruan-lang gu*, was a famous melody.

¹Peach Leaf was another famous concubine of the Southern Dynasties. Peach Leaf Ford, where Wang Xian-zhi of the Jin supposedly wrote a quatrain to the young lady in question, was on the Qin-Huai River, in the area of the pleasure quarters of Nanjing.

²Little Su was another famous courtesan of the Southern Dynasties.

³The Jin writer Pan Yue was known for his good looks. One story has it that when he traveled in his carriage, the women would gather around him and throw fruit to him as a sign of their attraction.

⁴The Ping-kang Ward was the pleasure quarter of the Tang capital Chang-an.

with spring blocked off by ten layers
of hanging lace.

I've come early to offer Hou Fang-yu my congratulations, but as you can see, the door to the establishment is closed tight and there's not a sound from the servants. I suppose they haven't gotten up yet. [*Calls out*] You, boy, go over to the newlyweds' window and tell them that I've come to offer my congratulations.

SERVANT: They got to sleep rather late last night, and they may not have gotten up yet. Why don't you come again tomorrow, sir.

YANG [*laughing*]: Don't be silly. Quick, now, go find out!

Li [*from within*]: Boy, who's that who just came?

SERVANT: It's Yang Wen-cong, who's come to offer his congratulations.

Li [*enters hurriedly, recites*]:

Head rests on pillow, spring nights too brief,
but good often comes from a knock at the gate.

[*Greets YANG*] Thank you so much for bringing about this lifelong union for my daughter.

YANG: Think nothing of it. Have the newlyweds risen yet?

Li: They went to sleep late last night and still haven't gotten up yet. [*Gets thurs to YANG to sit*] Please have a seat while I go hurry them up.

YANG: There's no need for that.

Exit LI ZHEN-LI.

YANG [*sings*]:

Young passion is heady like flower wine,
so fine that they think of nothing else
but to share that sweet black land of sleep.

Which would have been impossible, of course, failing my help.

Pearls and kingfisher feathers gleam,
silks and satins ripple and rustle,
each and every item of new attire
is proclamation of love's desire.

Enter LI ZHEN-LI.

Li: It's so charming. They're both in there buttoning each other up and looking in the mirror to see how they look as a pair. They've finished combing and washing up, but they're not through with getting dressed. Let's go into their rooms together and call them out to drink a cup of wine to help their hangover.

YANG: It was unforgivable of me to have woken them. [*Exeunt*]

Enter HOU FANG-YU and XIANG-JUN, *fully made up*.

HOU and XIANG-JUN [*sing*]:

Passion's cloud joining
to cloudburst and rain

scratches a wondrous itch in the heart—
who now disturbs the sleeping pair
of mated ducks?
Blankets heaved in waves of red,
as we joyously took full measure
of all love's pleasure.
A lingering scent on the pillow,
a lingering scent on the handkerchief,
sensations that melt the rapturous soul
tasted now as we rise from dream.

Enter YANG WEN-CONG and LI ZHEN-LI.

YANG: Well, you've gotten up at last. Congratulations. [*He bows, then sits*]

Did you like the wedding night verse I wrote for you yesterday evening?

HOU [*bowing*]: Thank you very much. [*Laughs*] It was the height of excellence—except for one little point . . .

YANG: What little point?

HOU: However tiny Xiang-jun may be, she deserves to be kept in a chamber of gold, but [*looks in his sleeves*] how would I get her in my sleeves?⁵

All laugh.

YANG: I'm sure you also must have written something fine last night when you two declared your love.

HOU: I just scribbled out something hastily—I wouldn't dare show you.

YANG: And where is the poem?

XIANG-JUN: The poem is on the fan.

XIANG-JUN *takes the fan out of her sleeve and gives it to YANG WEN-CONG, who looks it over.*

YANG: It's a white satin palace fan. [*Sniffs it*] And it has a subtle aroma. [*Recites the poem*]

"Blue mansions line the road,
a single path slants through,
here the prince first drives
the Count of Fu-ping's coach.
Everywhere upon Blue Creek
there are magnolia trees—
no match for blooms of peach and plum
in the east wind of spring."⁶

⁵The Han emperor Wu-di said that if he could get A-jiao as his consort, he would keep her in a chamber of gold. Hou Fang-yu is referring to a line in Yang's poem in which she would be "hidden in his sleeves," suggesting an embrace rather than Hou Fang-yu's joking interpretation.

⁶The poem is not repeated in this act, but I have included it from scene VI. The poem is, in fact, a variation on one by the historical Hou Fang-yu. The praise of "peach and plum" over the magno-

Excellent! Only Xiang-jun would not be put to shame by this poem.
[Hands it back to XIANG-JUN] Take care of it. [XIANG-JUN puts away the fan. YANG sings]

Scent of peach and scent of plum,
fragrance at its sweetest,
all written on a satin fan.
Lest they meet the tossing gusts
of wild winds,
hide it close within your sleeve,
hide it close within your sleeve,
hide it close within your sleeve.

[Looks at XIANG-JUN] After her wedding night, Xiang-jun seems to have an even more sensual beauty. [To HOU FANG-YU] You're a lucky man to enjoy this splendid creature.

HOU: Xiang-jun's natural beauty makes her the fairest in the land, but the pearl and kingfisher ornaments that she wears in her hair today and all her silken finery add something extra to her utterly flowerlike beauty. She is entirely lovable.

LI: This is all thanks to Mr. Yang's assistance.

[Sings]

He sent the turbans of brocade,
the chests of varied gems,
fringed curtains wound with pearls
and kingfisher feathers, silver
candlesticks, shades of gauze
shining through the night,
golden cups for offering wine
to go along with song at feasts.

And now he has come to see you so early today.

As though you were his very own
children he raised himself,
first providing the needed trousseau,
now also paying this early call.

XIANG-JUN: It seems to me, Mr. Yang, that even though you're a close relative of the governor-general, Ma Shi-ying, you are in rather difficult financial circumstances yourself and live on the goodwill of others; why should you so casually throw away your money into the bottomless pit of the pleasure quarters? For my own part, I am embarrassed to receive it, and on your side, it was given anonymously. Please make things clear to us so that we can plan how to repay such generosity.

HOU: Xiang-jun is quite right to ask this. You and I have met like duckweeds drifting on the water; your show of kindness the other day was so generous that I feel uncomfortable.

lia plays on Xiang-jun's surname Li, which is the word for "plum." Peach blossoms will play an even larger role in the play.

YANG: Since I have been asked, I can only tell you the truth. The trousseau and the party cost somewhat over two hundred pieces of silver, and all of it came from a gentleman from Huai-ning.

HOU: Who from Huai-ning?

YANG: Ruan Yuan-hai, who was the head of the Court of Imperial Entertainment.

HOU: Do you mean Ruan Da-cheng from An-hui?

YANG: That's right.

HOU: Why has he been so lavish?

YANG: He simply wants to become acquainted with you.

[Sings]

He admires your prospects and panache,
your name for talent like Luo-yang's Zuo Si,
your writings like those of Si-ma Xiang-ru.
Wherever you go, you find welcome;
all crowd around the young man in the coach.⁷
In the finest spots of the Qin-Huai
you sought a fair maiden for your side,
but you lacked the spread for the marriage bed
and lotus make-up.

You wonder who did this—
the senior Ruan of the southern branch⁸
put himself out for your wedding apparel.

HOU: Ruan Da-cheng was an acquaintance of my father's, but I despise him and have had nothing to do with him for a long time. I can't understand this unexpected show of generosity to me now.

YANG: Ruan Da-cheng has a problem that troubles him and he would like to put it before you.

HOU: Please explain.

YANG: Ruan Da-cheng used to be associated with Zhao Nan-xing and was one of our own.⁹ When he later became associated with the faction of Wei Zhong-xian, the eunuch, it was only to protect the East Grove faction.¹ He had no idea that once the Wei Zhong-xian faction was defeated, the East Grove faction would treat him like an arch enemy. Members of the Restoration Society have recently advocated attacking him, and they viciously beat up and humiliated him. This is a fight within the same household. Even though Ruan Da-cheng has many former associates, no one will try to explain his side of the story because his actions were so

⁷The reference again is to Pan Yue.

⁸This refers specifically to the Wei poet and eccentric Ruan Ji, to whom Ruan Da-cheng is, somewhat outrageously, compared.

⁹Zhao Nan-xing had been a senior Ming official who was unjustly denounced and sent into exile by the Wei Zhong-xian faction.

¹The East Grove Society was a group of late Ming intellectuals dedicated to reforming the Ming government. After they were purged, a successor group, the Restoration Society, was formed.

dubious. Every day he weeps toward Heaven, saying, "It is painful to be so savaged by one's own group. No one but Hou Fang-yu of He-nan can save me." This is the reason that he now seeks so earnestly to make your acquaintance.

HOU: Well, in this case I can see why he feels such anguish, and it seems to me that he deserves some pity. Even if he had really been a member of Wei Zhong-xian's faction, he's come around again and is sorry for his mistakes. One shouldn't ostracize him so absolutely, and even less if there's an explanation for what he did. Ding-sheng and Ci-wei are both close friends of mine. I'll go see them tomorrow and try to resolve this.

YANG: It would be a great blessing for us if you would do this.

XIANG-JUN [*angrily*]: What are you saying! Ruan Da-cheng rushed to join the corrupt men in power and lost all sense of shame. There is not a grown woman or young girl who would not spit on him and curse him. If you try to save him when others attack him, what camp will you be putting yourself in?

[Sings]

You aren't thinking
when you speak like this so frivolously.
You want to rescue him from ruin,
you want to rescue him from ruin,
but beware lest the judgment fall on you.

The only reason you're going to speak for him is because he provided my trousseau; that is disregarding the common good and selling oneself for private benefit. Don't you realize that I find all these bangles and hairpins and skirts and gowns beneath contempt. [*She pulls out hairpins and takes off gown*]

I take off these skirts,
accepting poverty;
in homespun and simple adornments
a person's name smells sweet.²

YANG: You're being far too hot-tempered, Xiang-jun.

Lr: What a pity to throw away such fine things on the floor! [*She picks them up*]

HOU: Splendid! Her judgment in this matter is better than mine. I truly stand in awe of her. [*To YANG*] Please don't think ill of me in this. It's not that I wouldn't accept your suggestion, but I fear the scorn of women.

[Sings]

In the pleasure quarters' lanes
they can lecture on principle and good name;
while school and court,
while school and court

confuse virtue and vice,
and cannot tell black from white.

My friends in the Restoration Society have always held me in esteem because of my sense of right. But if I associate myself with someone who is corrupt, they will all rise and attack me, and I won't have a chance to save myself, not to mention someone else.

Principles and good name
are no common things;
one must consider carefully
what is serious and what is negligible.

YANG: Considering Ruan Da-cheng's goodwill, you shouldn't act so drastically.

HOU: I may be foolish, but I'm not going to throw myself in a well to save someone else.

YANG: In that case, I will take my leave.

HOU: All these things in the chests belong to Ruan Da-cheng. Since Xiang-jun has no use for them, there's no point in keeping them, so would you have them taken away?

YANG: As the couplet goes:
One full of feeling finds himself
upset by lack of feeling,
I came here following my whim;
the whim done, I return.³ [*Exit*]

XIANG-JUN shows herself upset.

HOU [*looking at XIANG-JUN*]: When I look at your natural beauty, pulling out a few pearls and feathers and taking off your fine silken gown, your perfect beauty is doubled in its perfection, and I think you are even more lovable.

Lr: Whatever you say, it's still too bad to give up so many fine things.

[Sings]

Gold and pearls come to you,
you carelessly throw them away;
these spoiled and childish poses betray
all my hard efforts to sponsor you.

HOU: These things aren't worth brooding over. I'll make the loss good in kind.

Lr: Then it will be all right.

[Reclines]

The money spent on powder and paint
costs some consideration,

²In this line, Xiang-jun is playing on her name, "Queen of Sweet Fragrance."

³This couplet, quoted as proverbial, is constructed of a line from a lyric by Su Shi and a metrical rephrasing of a passage in *New Stories and Tales of the Times*.

XIANG-JUN:
homespun skirts and hairpins of twig
do not bother me.

HOU:
What matters is our Xiang Princess
could take off her pendants,⁴

XIANG-JUN:
the standard of taste does not follow
the fashions of the times.

Ruan Da-cheng, infuriated by Hou Fang-yu's refusal of his wedding gifts, uses the opportunity of unrest in the army to accuse Hou of plotting rebellion. Yang Wen-cong hurries to warn Hou Fang-yu to escape before he is arrested. After parting from Xiang-jun, who swears to remain faithful to him, Hou puts himself under the protection of the great general Shi Ke-fa, a friend of Hou's father. Meanwhile the Ming armies are collapsing everywhere, the rebel Li Zi-cheng takes Beijing, and the Ming emperor commits suicide. The Manchu armies of the Qing come down from the Northeast and take North China (an event treated in the play only with the utmost discretion). A new Ming regime is established in the South, with its capital in Nan-jing. The new emperor is a figurehead, the drama-loving former Prince Fu, with the villain Ma Shi-ying and Ruan Da-cheng as the powers behind the throne.

With Hou Fang-yu out of the picture, Yang Wen-cong suggests to Ma Shi-ying a new match for Xiang-jun. When she refuses, officers are sent to compel her to remarry. Yang goes along to try to prevent trouble. Xiang-jun persists in her refusal and tries to commit suicide by banging her head on the floor—staining the fan, her wedding gift from Hou Fang-yu, with spots of her blood. Seeing that Xiang-jun will harm herself if they persist, Li Zhen-li offers to go in Xiang-jun's place. Li Zhen-li is taken off, and as the next scene opens, Xiang-jun is left alone in the house, lamenting her fate.

SENDING THE FAN (XXIII), JANUARY 1645

Enter XIANG-JUN, looking ill, her head wrapped with a kerchief as bandage.

XIANG-JUN [*sings*]:
These icy silks pierced through
by wind's harsh chill,
the heart too dull
to light the scented brazier.
The single thread of blood, here
at the tip of brow,
is a more becoming red than red of rouge.
My lonely shadow stands in fear,

a weak soul tossed about, my life
suspended as by a spring floss strand.
A frosty moonlight fills the upper rooms,
the nighttime stretches on and on,
and daylight will not melt this pain.

[*Sings*] In a moment when I had no other choice, I inflicted wounds on my own flesh as the only way to save myself. By doing so I managed to keep my honor intact. But now I lie here, sick and alone in these empty rooms, under cold blankets within chilly bed curtains, with no companion. It's so cold and lonely here.

Freezing clouds and patchy snow
block Long Bridge,
the red mansions are closed up tight,
and men seeking pleasure, few.
Low beyond the balcony the lines of geese
write signs in the skies,
and from the curtained windows
icicles hang;
the charcoal chills, the incense burns away,
and I grow gaunt
in the sharp evening wind.

Though I live here in the blue mansions of the pleasure quarters, all scenes of love and passion are finished for me from now on.

Past patterned doors winds wail,
the parrot calls for tea, its skill
displayed for its pleasure alone;
the chambers are still,
the snow white cat hugs the pillow
sound asleep.

My skirt, pomegranate red,
ripped to shreds,
waist dancing in wind,
and phoenix-decorated boots,
slit to pieces
the wave-pacing soles;
with sorrow's increase sickness grows,
never again will these chambers allow
the turmoil of passion.

I think back on when Hou Fang-yu had to flee for his life in such haste, and now I don't know where he's gone. How can he know that I am living here alone in this empty house, protecting my honor for his sake?

[*Rises and sings*]

I recall how in an instant
all thrill of charming song was swept away,

⁴When goddesses such as the Xiang Princess (*Xiang-jun*, punning on Xiang-jun's name) take off their pendants, it is usually the sign of plighting troth with a man; here it seems to refer to Xiang-jun's stripping away her ornaments in rejecting the trousseau.

at midnight passion's flood forsaken;
 I look for him at Peach Leaf Ford,
 I seek him out by Swallow Jetty—
 just hills with rolling clouds
 where winds blow high,
 and wild geese faint and far.
 Who would have thought
 that though the plums will bloom again
 reliably,
 the man would be still farther away?
 I lean on the balcony
 and concentrate my gaze,
 but autumn floods from lovely eyes
 are frozen hard by sour wind.

It enrages me how the servants of that evil man crowded into my gate
 and insisted that I get married. How could I ever betray Hou Fang-
 yu?

They took advantage of a courtesan
 whose fate is fragile, not her own;
 their awful arrogance depended on
 the Minister's authority.
 To keep this alabaster body pure
 I could not help rending
 these features like flower.
 The saddest thing of all is how my mother sacrificed herself for my sake
 and was whisked away. [Points] See her bed there as it always was, but
 when will she come back?
 Just like a petal of peach,
 borne on snow-capped billows,
 or floss of willow, tossed in wind;
 her sleeves hid a face like the breeze of spring,
 as she left the court of Han at dusk.⁵
 Such loneliness—the dust
 that covers her quilt
 not brushed away;
 a silence where a flower bloomed,
 which I admire alone.
 A rush of sourness catches me unawares when I consider this.
 It seems to goad me in the heart,
 so many teardrops spilled.
 No girlfriends call me away
 to idle pastimes,

I listen to the clack of hooks
 hanging from the curtain.

Sitting here with nothing to do, I'll take out the fan with Hou Fang-yu's
 poem and look at it. [She takes out fan] Oh no! It's ruined, stained all
 over with drops of my blood. What am I going to do?

Look at them—some far apart,
 some thick together,
 dark spots and pale,
 with fresh blood haphazardly stained.
 Not sprinkled from the nightjar's tears,
 these are the peach blooms of my cheeks
 turned to a red rain,
 falling speck after speck, splattering
 the icy silk.

Oh Hou Fang-yu! This was all for you.

You caused me to dishevel
 hair's cloudy coils
 and mar my slender waist;
 Senseless I lay like the Consort
 on Ma-wei's slope interred,⁶
 my blood streamed like the concubine
 who leapt from tower's heights.⁷
 I feared the shouts of those below
 and left my too frail soul uncalled.
 In silver mirror, afterglow
 of scarlet cloud,
 and on the lovers' pillow,
 red tears in spring flood.
 In the heart a rancor sprouts,
 and melancholy sits upon the brows,
 I washed away the rouge,
 that stained the seafolk gauze.
 I feel a weariness coming over me. I'll doze here a moment at my dress-
 ing table. [Falls asleep on the fan]

Enter YANG WEN-CONG in everyday clothes.

YANG [practise]:
 I recognize this red mansion
 that slants on the water's face,
 a row of dying willows
 bearing the last of the crows.

⁵The reference here is to Yang the Prized Consort, whose death was demanded by the imperial guard when Xuan-zong fled Chang-an.

⁷Green Pearl, the concubine of Shi Chong, threw herself from a tower rather than be taken from him by a powerful enemy.

Enter SU KUN-SHENG.

SU [*recites*]:

The silver harp and castanets,
a lovely maiden's yard,
now with wind-blown snow the same
as the home of a recluse.

YANG [*turning his head and greeting him*]: Ah! Good to see you, Mr. Su.

SU: After Li Zhen-li got married, Xiang-jun has been living alone. I can't stop worrying about her, so I always come by to visit.

YANG: The day that Li Zhen-li had to go, I stayed with Xiang-jun the entire night, but I've been so busy at the office these past few days that I haven't been able to get away. Just now I was going to the eastern part of the city to pay a visit, and I thought I'd look in on her.

They enter her apartments.

SU: Xiang-jun won't come downstairs, so why don't we go upstairs to talk to her.

YANG: Fine. [*They climb stairs.* YANG *points*] Look how depressed and sickly Xiang-jun seems, all worn out dozing there at her dressing table. Let's not wake her up for a while.

SU: Her fan is spread out here by her face. Why does it have so many splashes of red?

YANG: This was Hou Fang-yu's wedding gift to her. She has always kept it hidden and wasn't willing to show it. I imagine she's left it out here to dry because it got stained with blood from her face. [*Pulls away fan and looks at it*] These spots of blood are a gorgeous red! I'll add some branches and leaves and decorate it for her. [*Thinks*] But I don't have any green paint.

SU: I'll pick some of these plants in the flowerpots and squeeze fresh sap from them—that can serve in place of paint.

YANG: An excellent idea. [*SU KUN-SHENG squeezes plants and YANG paints and recites*]

The leaves share the green of aromatic plants,
the blooms draw their red from a lady fair.

The painting is finished. SU KUN-SHENG looks at it with delight.

SU: Superb! It's some broken sprays of peach blossoms.

YANG [*Laughs*]: It's a true peach blossom fan.

XIANG-JUN [*waking startled*]: Mr. Yang, Mr. Su, I'm glad to see you both. Please forgive me. [*She invites them to sit down*]

YANG: During these past few days when I haven't come to look in on you, the wound on your forehead has gotten better. [*Laughs*] I have a painted fan here that I would like to present to you. [*Hands fan to XIANG-JUN*]

XIANG-JUN [*looking at it*]: This is my old fan that was ruined by bloodstains! I can't even look at it. [*Puts it in her sleeve*]

SU: But there's some marvelous painting on it—how can you not take a look and admire it?

XIANG-JUN: When was this painting done?

YANG: It's my fault. I've just ruined it.

XIANG-JUN [*looks at the fan and sighs*]: Ah! The unhappy fate of peach blossoms, tossed and fallen on this fan. Thank you, Mr. Yang, for painting my own portrait in this.

[*Sings*]

Every blossom breaks the heart,
lazily smiling in springtime breeze;
every petal melts the soul,
sadly swirled in the current.
Fetchingly colors freshly picked,
drawn from nature;

even old masters like Xu Xi
could hardly have painted these.⁸

Vermilion's tint is mixed on cherry lips,
first sketch made on lotus cheeks,
then in a few strokes, red peach blossoms,
depicting the truth within.

You added some azure twigs and leaves,
remarkably fresh and fair,
and of an unfortunate woman
drew the portrait in blooms of peach.

YANG: Now that you have this peach blossom fan, you need a companion like Zhou Yu to notice you and appreciate you.⁹ Do you really mean to live here as a widow in the spring of your life like Chang E in the moon?

XIANG-JUN: Don't go on like this. Guan Pan-pan was also a courtesan, and didn't she stay locked up in Swallow Tower until old age?¹⁰

SU: If Hou Fang-yu were to come back tomorrow, wouldn't you come down from your tower then?

XIANG-JUN: In that case I'd have a glorious married life ahead and would enjoy everything. I wouldn't just come down from my tower, I'd want to go roaming everywhere.

YANG: We don't often see such a long-suffering sense of honor these days. [*To SU KUN-SHENG*] Mr. Su, I would feel a lot less worried if you would go find Hou Fang-yu and bring him back here, out of the affection of a teacher for his student.

⁸Xu Xi was a famous painter of flowers and vegetation of the tenth century.

⁹literally, "a young master Zhou to pay attention to the tune," referring to Zhou Yu, the admiral of the Wu fleet in the Three Kingdoms, who was said to have had a particularly fine ear for music.

Yang Wen-cong is, of course, continuing his campaign to have her remarry.

¹⁰Pan-pan, the concubine of the powerful Tang military governor Zhang Jian-feng, refused to remarry after his death. Although such behavior was considered proper for first wives, it was an unusual sign of devotion on the part of a concubine.

Su: Yes, I've had it in mind to go visit him for some time now, and I've found out that he served on the Huaai for half a year with Shi Ke-fa, then from the Huaai he came to Nanjing, and from Nanjing he went to Yang-zhou. Now he's gone off again with the army of General Gao Jie to defend the Yellow River. I was going to go back to my hometown soon, and on the way I can go look for him when I have the chance. [To XIANG-JUN] It would be a good idea if I had a letter from you.

XIANG-JUN [to YANG WEN-CONG]: My words come out without literary polish. Would you write for me Mr. Yang?

YANG: Just tell me how to write what is in your heart.

XIANG-JUN: Just let me think a moment. . . [Thinks] No, no! All my griefs and sufferings are on the fan, so take the fan with you.

Su [delighted]: Well, this is a whole new style in personal letters.

XIANG-JUN: Wait while I wrap it up. [Wraps up fan, then sings]:

He plied the brush's silvery hairs
and will know these lines he wrote before.
Specks stain the red marks of the dice—
newly painted, hold it fast.
For though the fan be small,
it has heart's blood, ten thousand streaks;
wrapped up in my handkerchief,
with hairribbon wound about,
saying much more than palindrome brocade.²

Su [taking the fan]: I'll take good care of it and deliver it for you.

XIANG-JUN: When are you going to leave?

Su: I'll get my things ready in the next few days.

XIANG-JUN: I just hope that you'll set out soon.

Su: All right.

YANG: Let's go downstairs now. [To XIANG-JUN] Take good care of yourself. When we tell Hou Fang-yu of the hardships you have endured to stay true to him, he will naturally come to get you.

Su: I won't be back before I leave. As they say, [recites]

A new letter sent afar:
the peach blossom fan,
YANG [capping couplet]:

a yard forever shut up tight:
the Tower of the Swallows.³ [Exeunt]

XIANG-JUN [wiping away tears]: Mama hasn't returned and now my teacher is going away too. It's going to be even more lonely closed up here in my room.

²This refers to the famous palindrome woven into brocade by Su Hui and sent to her husband, both to express her love and to call him home.

³The Tower of the Swallows is where Guan Pan-pan, the beloved concubine of Zhang Jian-feng, shut herself up after his death.

[Sings]

The warbler's throat has done with
melodies of North and South,
the icy strings have given up
tunes of Sui and Chen,
my lips will no more play the pipes,
the flute is thrown aside,
the mouth organ is broken,
and castanets are cast away.
I wish only the fan's swift delivery,
that my teacher be ready to set off soon;
Let my young Liu come on the third of May,⁴
then hand in hand we'll come down from the tower,
and eat our fill of peach blossom gruel.⁵

[Recites]

The letter will reach the garden of Liang
ere the snow has melted,
when the path along Blue Creek
will be blocked by springtime floods.
Peach Root and Peach Leaf
are visited by none,⁶
by Ding-zi Curtain
there is a broken bridge.⁷

Hou Fang-yu finally receives the fan and makes his way back to Nanjing, only to discover that, through the machinations of Ruan Da-cheng, Xiang-jun has been taken away into the imperial harem to perform for the drama-loving emperor. Along with a group of his friends, Hou Fang-yu is arrested for his ties to the Restoration Society and thrown into prison. Meanwhile, the Southern Ming is crumbling before the Qing armies advancing on Nanjing. As the city is about to fall, Xiang-jun and Hou Fang-yu escape separately, and they make their way to refuge in the mountains.

Around the central love story are numerous subplots that tell the grand story of the destruction of the Ming Dynasty. The threads of all these interwoven stories come together in scene XL, "Accepting the Way," presided over by Zhang Wei, originally an officer in the imperial guard in Beijing who had buried the Chong-zhen emperor after his suicide. Zhang Wei had made his way to the Southern Ming court in Nanjing. There he was given a high post but eventually grew disillusioned by the corruption and theatrical falseness of the regime. His decision to withdraw from public life was inspired by another painting of peach blossoms—this one of the idyllic

⁴The reference is to Liu Zhen.

⁵This was evidently a custom of Luo-yang for the Cold Food Festival.

⁶For Peach Leaf, see note on p. 952; Peach Root was her sister.

⁷Ding-zi Curtain was a spot in the Nanjing pleasure quarters.

retreat of Peach Blossom Spring. The painting was done by Lan Ying, who had taken up residence in Xiang-jun's quarters after she was carried off to the imperial palace; and it was Lan Ying, working on this painting, whom Hou Fang-yu had discovered on coming back to Nanjing and going in search of Xiang-jun. Indeed, Hou Fang-yu himself writes the inscription on the painting that helps convince Zhang Wei to withdraw. When Zhang Wei leaves public life, he becomes the abbot of a Daoist monastery in the mountains, the very monastery in which gather the various figures in the play after fleeing Nanjing.

In the first part of "Accepting the Way," Zhang Wei laments the Chong-zhen emperor (the Ming emperor who had taken his own life when Beijing fell); then Zhang has visions of the loyalists who died defending the dynasty. We pick up the scene as Xiang-jun and Hou Fang-yu come from separate directions to listen to Zhang Wei's sermon. Xiang-jun is accompanied by Bian Yu-jing, a former courtesan who has become a Daoist nun, while Hou Fang-yu is accompanied by a Daoist priest, Ding Ji-zhi, a former balladeer.

FROM "ACCEPTING THE WAY" (XI), SEPTEMBER 1645

Enter BIAN YU-JING, leading XIANG-JUN.

BIAN YU-JING: The greatest joy in Heaven and among mortal men comes from doing good. We and a group of Daoist nuns have just strung up votive banners before the altar to Empress Zhou, and now we come to the lecture hall to listen to the abbot's sermon.

XIANG-JUN: May I just come along?

BIAN YU-JING [pointing]: See all the Daoists and laypersons in the two side porches; there are too many to count, so there shouldn't be any problem with you watching. [BIAN bows before the altar] Your disciple Bian Yu-jing prostrates herself. [Together with XIANG-JUN, she stands back to one side]

Enter DING Ji-ZHI.

DING Ji-ZHI: Hard to be born in human form, hard to learn of the Way. [He bows before the altar] Your disciple Ding Ji-zhi prostrates himself. [Calls out] Hou Fang-yu! This is the lecture hall. To come here will bring you joy.

Enter HOU FANG-YU hurriedly.

HOU: Here I am. Long weary of the sufferings of the secular world, I now see the path that can lead to immortality. [Stands back to one side with DING Ji-ZHI]

ZHANG WEI [biting his lectern]: You good folk listening in the wings, you should abandon your worldly hearts utterly, for only then can you seek the path that will lead you upward. If you still have even a grain of base

passion, you will have to endure a thousand more revolutions of the karmic cycle.

HOU [looks at XIANG-JUN from behind the fan and is startled]: That's Xiang-jun standing over there. How did she come to be here? [He pushes forward urgently]

XIANG-JUN [sees him and is startled]: Hou Fang-yu, I almost died of longing for you.

[Sings]

I think back on how you abruptly left me,
faint and far
across the silvery River of Stars
no bridge could span,
a barrier higher than
the very edge of sky.
No way to convey a letter,
I struggled in vain to reach you in dream,
and yet the passion did not end;
and when I escaped, the road to you
seemed even further away.

HOU [pointing to the fan]: When I looked at these peach blossoms on the fan, I wondered how I would ever repay your love.

[Sings]

See how fresh blood covered the fan
and bloomed into red blossoms of peach,
as they say flowers fell from Dharma Heaven.⁸

XIANG-JUN and HOU FANG-YU examine the fan together. DING Ji-ZHI pulls away HOU FANG-YU, while BIAN YU-JING pulls away XIANG-JUN.

BIAN YU-JING: The abbot is at the altar. You can't go discussing how you feel about one another now!

HOU FANG-YU and XIANG-JUN cannot be restrained. ZHANG WEI slams his hand on the lectern in fury.

ZHANG WEI: What sort of young people are you, making love talk in a place like this? [He comes quickly down from the altar, snatches the fan out of HOU FANG-YU's and XIANG-JUN's hands, tears it up, and throws it on the ground] These pure and unsullied precincts of the Way have no room for lecherous young men and loose girls to get together and flirt with one another.

⁸When Abbot Guang-cheng reached the best part in his lectures on the sutras, flowers were supposed to have fallen from Heaven.

CAI YI-SO [*recognizing them*]: Aiyai! This is Hou Fang-yu of He-nan. Your Reverence knew him once.

ZHANG WEI: Who's the girl?

LAN YING: I know her. She's Xiang-jun. I used to live in her apartments. She is Hou Fang-yu's concubine.

ZHANG WEI: And where have the two of them come from?

DING JI-ZHI: Hou is staying at my Lodge of Finding the Genuine.

BIAN YU-JING: Li Xiang-jun is staying at my Retreat of the Genuine Accu-
mulated.

HOU [*bowing to ZHANG WEI*]: This is Master Zhang Wei, who was so mer-
ciful to me in the past.

ZHANG WEI: So you're Hou Fang-yu. I'm glad you were able to escape from prison. Did you know that it was on account of you that I renounced the world?

HOU: How could I have known?

CAI YI-SO: I am Cai Yi-so. I also renounced the world on account of you. I'll tell you at leisure how all this came to pass.

LAN YING: I am Lan Ying. I brought Xiang-jun here looking for you, but I didn't think we would finally meet you.

HOU: Xiang-jun and I will need lifetimes to repay your kindness in taking us in, Ding Ji-zhi and Bian Yu-jing, and to repay the feeling you two showed in guiding us, Cai Yi-so and Lan Ying.

XIANG-JUN: And don't forget Su Kun-sheng, who accompanied me here.

HOU: And Liu Jing-ting, who came with me.

XIANG-JUN: The way in which Su and Liu stayed with us through everything, without flinching in desperate situations, is even more moving.

HOU: When my wife and I get home, we hope to repay you all for every-
thing.

ZHANG WEI: In all this babbling and jabbering, what do you think you are talking about? Great upheavals have turned Heaven and Earth upside down, and you're still clinging to the love and passion that has taken root within you. Isn't this ludicrous!

HOU: You are wrong in this! A man and a woman founding a household has always been the primary human relationship, a focus for love through separation and reunion, through grief and joy. How can you be concerned about this?

ZHANG WEI [*furious*]: Aaah! Two desorted worms. Just where is your na-
tion, where is your family, where is your prince, where is your father? Is
it only this little bit of romantic love you can't cut away?

[Sings]

Pathetic trifling of man and maid—
the world turned upside down
and you don't care;
you babble on
with wanton phrases, lurid words,

tugging clothes and holding hands, declare
a happily-ever-after to the gods.
Don't you realize that long ago
your fated wedlock was erased

from registries in Heaven?
With thudding wingbeats mated ducks
wake from dream
and fly apart,

the precious mirror of reunion
lies in fragments on the ground,
happy endings proved unsound.

Blush at this bad performance of your scene,
inspiring bystanders' laughter—
the great path lies before you clear,
flee on it immediately!

HOU [*bowing*]: What you have just said makes a cold sweat run down me,
as if suddenly waking up from a dream.

ZHANG WEI: Did you understand?

HOU: I understood.

ZHANG WEI: Since you understood, go accept Ding Ji-zhi as your teacher
right here and now.

HOU FANG-YU goes and bows to DING JI-ZHI.

XIANG-JUN: I also understood.

ZHANG WEI: Since you understood, right here and now go accept Bian Yu-
jing as your teacher.

XIANG-JUN goes and bows to BIAN YU-JING.

ZHANG WEI [*instructing DING and BIAN*]: Dress them for the parts of Daoists.

HOU FANG-YU and XIANG-JUN change clothes.

DING and BIAN: Would Your Reverence please take the seat at the altar so
that we can present our disciples to you.

ZHANG WEI *climbs back to the altar and seats himself*. DING JI-ZHI leads HOU
FANG-YU and BIAN YU-JING leads XIANG-JUN before him; they bow.

ZHANG WEI [*sings*]:

Weed out the sprouts of passion,
weed out the sprouts of passion
and behold

jade leaves and boughs of gold
wither up and die;

cut out the embryo of love,
cut out the embryo of love
and hear

phoenix chick and dragon spawn cry out.

Bubble swirling in the water,
bubble swirling in the water,
a spark struck from flint,
a spark struck from flint,
half this life adrift remains
and now you will learn the Teaching.

[*Pointing*] The male has his proper domain, which lies to the south and corresponds to the trigram Li; go then at once south of the southern mountains, where you will learn the Genuine and study the Way.

HOU: Yes. Now I understand the rightness of the great Way, and feel regret recognizing the strength of my passion. [*Exit DING Ji-ZHI to the left, leading* HOU FANG-YU]

ZHANG WEI [*pointing*]: The female has her proper domain, which lies to the north and matches the trigram Kan; go then at once north of the northern mountains, where you will learn the Genuine and study the Way.

XIANG-JUN: Yes. In the turn of a head everything all proved to be illusion. Who was that man facing me? [*Exit BIAN YU-JING to the right, leading* XIANG-JUN]

ZHANG WEI [*descending from the altar with a loud laugh; sings*]:

Note that when those two parted
no love-lorn glances passed.
Thanks to my having ripped
shred by shred
the peach blossom fan,
no more may besotted worms
spin their soft cocoons of thread
enwrapping themselves a thousand times.

[*Recites*]

White bones and blue ashes lie
forever in the weeds,
the peach blossom fan bids goodbye
to a southern dynasty.
Never again will come those dreams
of glory and the fall,
but when will love of man and maid
melt away once and for all?