Theatre as a paradigm: Chinese theatre as expressive and Western theatre as active

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Theatre as a paradigm: Chinese theatre as expressive and Western theatre as active

Kendra Cui 崔睿文

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative exploration of the different paradigms that Western and Chinese theatre-making and theatre-viewing are based on. In examining the paradigms of Western and Chinese theatre, various components of the theater-making and theatre-viewing experience are considered, including assumptions regarding what a theatrical experience should entail, expectations shared between creators and audiences, and the prevailing methodologies of theatrical creation that are used to fulfill these expectations. In executing this comparative analysis of Chinese and Western theatrical paradigms, this thesis is broken down into two main components: the first component consists of secondary research, which is used to inform the second component, a translation and performance of a Chinese theatrical text. The research component consists of—among other topics—an analysis of the poetics of each theatrical tradition, as well as an examination of cross-cultural interactions between Chinese and Western writers and theatre-makers. The translation-performance component consists of a translation from the original Chinese of He Peizhu's 梨花梦 (Pear Blossom Dream) into English, and a series of three stagings (in English) of excerpts from the text, with each staging guided by a specific theatrical paradigm. The results of both the research and performance components of this thesis demonstrate that Western theatre is a theatrical form that is primarily occupied with action, plot and verisimilitude, whereas Chinese theatre is a theatrical model that is concerned with expression of emotion through the achievement of a stylized, harmonious aesthetic.
Acknowledgements

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Thank you also to Professors Ellen Widmer and Ruby Lam, without whom many of the obscure references in Pear Blossom Dream would have been lost on me.

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K. C

April, 2018
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**Introduction**

Picture this: in a theatre in China, an actor depicting a young girl walks onstage into a garden. The actor is dressed in a costume consisting of bright silk and an elaborate headdress that does not resemble everyday clothing at all (even period clothing), with angular arches of pink and white makeup on her face. The stage is mostly sparse, save for a painted silk backdrop decorated with trees branches. Music plays, and the actor sings of the sweet birdsong and luscious flowers surrounding her, addressing the audience and telling them of the beauty of the garden.

Meanwhile, in another theatre in the USA, a different actor walks into a garden. Her face is not made up and her costume consists of a simple dress—something that could be worn on the street. The stage is adorned with a bench and flower bushes, and the shaft of light shining across the stage tells us that is it almost dusk. The audience hears the chirping of birds in the background, as the actor silently plucks a flower from one of the bushes.

The events on these two stages depict the same scenario—a woman walking into a garden—yet they are presented in completely contrasting ways. We might describe the first scene—taken from Chinese opera—as something that does not resemble how we perceive the world in our everyday lives. The second scene—taken from a modern American play—resembles everyday life more closely. While the audience in the American theatre watches in silence, the theatre in China is filled with shouts of “好!” as the performer navigates a particularly difficult musical passage.

Why does this happen? Why is the same theatrical event depicted so differently on the two stages? When audiences and performers come together to partake in theatre, they
are both agreeing to a share a common experience. Although it is primarily the performers who are supplying the theatrical experience, and the audience who is receiving it, this shared experience is a two-way interaction. Audiences partaking in a theatrical experience will have certain expectations of what this experience will entail, and performers will likely have an awareness of what audiences expect from them; from these shared expectations arise a specific theatrical model. How are these expectations formed in different parts of the world, and how exactly do these different expectations lead to different forms of theatre across the globe?

When a set of shared expectations becomes conventionalized and engrained in a theatrical consciousness over long periods of time, they become part of a prevailing model of theatre-making that performers and theatre-makers will ascribe to. These expectations are not homogeneous across the globe, but are culture-specific and informed by the mechanisms through which a culture uses art to engage with the world. Collectively, these expectations form a paradigm through which theatre is made; in each cultural paradigm of theatre, a different framework of assumptions and priorities dictates how theatre should be written and performed, which elements of theatre are considered more important than others, and how audiences should receive and evaluate a piece of theatre.

Differing paradigms therefore lead to vastly different modes of theatre. Western and Chinese modes of theatre are perhaps two of the most contrasting theatrical traditions in the world, differing in style, form and content; and shaped by the philosophies, religions and cultural worldview from which it originated. Western and Chinese theatre-makers create theatre through vastly different paradigms, especially in the way they use
abstraction, mimesis and direct or indirect representation as theatrical tools. While Western theatre tends towards an almost scientific imitation of the world—recreating onstage the world as we experience it with our senses, Chinese theatre relies much more heavily on abstraction—favoring the use of symbolism over more empirical realism. These differences in approach shape an actor’s performance style, a playwright’s storytelling and a designer’s visual or auditory language, establishing vastly different mechanisms of eliciting audience reactions.

To this end, theatre is not necessarily a ‘universal’ art form—audiences accustomed to one form of theatre may find it difficult to make sense of another theatrical form because of the different paradigms on which each theatrical form operates. From this potential cross-cultural miscommunication arises the primary questions that this thesis will address: given the different paradigms and artistic vocabularies that different theatrical traditions use, what happens when audiences or theatre-makers of one culture attempt to engage with theatre from a different culture? What conflicts arise in this process, and what is gained or lost in these cross-cultural interactions?

Given the multi-layered nature of this question and the practical, ephemeral and personal nature of theatre, it is not sufficient to merely compare performance treatises from Chinese and Western theatres. To do so would be to ignore the fact that without directors, actors and designers coming together to create a physical product, theatre would not exist. This thesis has been shaped in response to these considerations: in examining the paradigms of Western and Chinese theatre, this thesis will explore theatre as both a written and performed art form.
This thesis will begin by clarifying how Western and Chinese artistic values dictate which elements of theatre are prioritized; this clarification will establish a foundation for an examination of cross-cultural theatrical interactions. In addition to texts written by both Western and Chinese theatre practitioners and performance theorists (such as Stanislavski and Mei Lanfang), texts by art philosophers (for example, Confucius and Aristotle) will also shed light on how a certain culture’s way of using art to engage with the world influences its theatrical form and style. Although non-theatrical texts will be used to help support discussion, the focus of this analysis will center on theatrical style and form, rather than on the socio-anthropological, literary or political implications of certain theatrical forms.

Upon establishing this foundation of which elements of theatre are prioritized in Chinese and Western theatre, this thesis will then address the question of what is lost and gained when texts from one theatrical form are adapted by and for people of a different culture—people who are accustomed to a different theatrical vocabulary. Examples of such interactions will be drawn from various periods in history, with different texts serving as case studies. For example, the Orphan of Zhao—a Yuan dynasty opera reinterpreted by Voltaire and, more recently, by the Royal Shakespeare Company—provides, in its many forms, interesting discussion on Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian forms of drama. Additionally, the first half of the early 20th century provides a wealth of primary sources that demonstrate how Western and Chinese theatre practitioners attempted to reconcile the performance theories of the two cultures, either by rejecting the theories of their own culture entirely, or arriving at an artistic ‘middle ground’. The advent of playwrights such as Lao She and Cao Yu, who pioneered the Western-style 话剧 (huaju or spoken drama) in
20\textsuperscript{th} century China and advocated for a shift to the Western vernacular style of drama, will also provide opportunities for research and exploration.

Additionally, the writings of early 20\textsuperscript{th} century continental European practitioners and their understandings of Chinese performance theories will be evaluated and contrasted with that of Chinese performers and audiences. Of particular relevance is Brecht’s interactions with the Chinese opera actor Mei Lanfang. Brecht claimed that viewing Chinese opera led him to create the ‘alienation effect’; the ‘alienation effect’ is one concrete example of how Western theatre practitioners interpret the theatrical model of Chinese theatre. Secondary sources critiquing Brecht’s interpretation of classical Chinese performance models may instigate discussion on whether he merely achieved a superficial understanding of Chinese theatre in his writings on the distancing effect, or whether he indeed conveyed an intrinsically Chinese mode of theatre in his works.

Certain contemporary productions will also provide insight into how theatre makers attempt to combine the different theatrical paradigms present in Chinese and Western theatres. For example, directors such as Julie Taymor and Mary Zimmerman have used Chinese performing tools in productions primarily intended for Western audiences. In these contexts, the Chinese performance techniques that are used are no longer part of the theatrical model they were originally intended for; they become part of a new theatrical paradigm and take on new purposes. What is lost and what is gained when these techniques are inserted into a new context can be particularly informative on how Western and Chinese theatrical paradigms differ.
This research will be used to inform a series of comparative stagings of *Pear Blossom Dream*, a five-scene opera by the female Qing dynasty writer He Peizhu. The capstone portion of this research thesis, these comparative stagings will attempt to highlight and possibly resolve some of the conflicts and issues encountered in research on cross-cultural theatrical interactions. Specifically, each version of the play will be staged with a different theatrical model in mind—one version emphasizing the Chinese theatrical model, a second staging focusing on the Western theatrical model, and a third staging that aims to blend Western and Chinese theatrical paradigms in a ‘hybrid’ approach. These effects of these stagings will be investigated through post-production audience surveys and talkbacks. These surveys and talkbacks will attempt to examine how an American audience’s reactions to onstage events changes based on the different models of theatre used in each staging, and will draw links to relevant material from the research component of this thesis. It is possible that audience reactions may generally confirm or refute any conclusions drawn from the research component; in either scenario, post-production analysis will attempt to explore the role that cross-cultural bridges play in crafting these reactions.

An examination of prevailing theatrical paradigms in Chinese and Western theatres will clarify more than just the theatrical tools that theatre makers of a certain culture have a preference for; it is also deeply revealing of how theatre makers of a certain cultural persuasion view the world around them. However, given the numerous ways in which theatre is a reflection of a culture’s engagement with the world, and the long history of both Chinese and Western theatre, we must first clarify the scope of this investigation before proceeding further.
Methodology

The methodology below is divided into two sections: the first section addresses in detail the approach to be used when conducting pre-performance research and literature review, while the second section discusses the rehearsal approach used in preparing Pear Blossom Dream for performance. As the research in this project is intended to inform directorial choices made in the staging of Pear Blossom Dream, the methodology will primarily be shaped in a way that considers the choices a director must make when staging a play.

Research Methodology

Before unpacking how theatrical paradigms operate on a theoretical and practical level in Chinese and Western theatres, we must first more specifically define what we mean to be “Chinese theatre” and “Western theatre”. In the process of defining these two broad categorizations of theatre, we will inevitably need to make generalizations; I will address the rationale behind the generalizations that are made, as well as discuss the implications of the generalizations, and suggest further avenues of exploration and research that may rectify the shortcomings that these generalizations create.

In general, we can define Western theatre as theatre forms that have originated and developed in European and American cultures; this encompasses theatrical forms developed in Classical Antiquity, through Renaissance Shakespeare and continental European drama and comedy, all the way through to Stanislavski’s psychological realism (with its many derivatives amongst American practitioners such as Strasberg and Adler), to productions developed in North American and Europe today. Dense interchange of ideas
within and between the European and North American continents, facilitated by revivals of thought from earlier periods of history (for example, the resurgence of classical Greek thought during the Renaissance and mid-18th century) means that the theatre forms in these areas share certain commonalities. Meanwhile, we can broadly define Chinese theatre as theatre forms that have originated and developed in what is today known as eastern China—lands traditionally occupied by the Han ethnic group, the majority ethnic group in China. This definition of Chinese theatre excludes theatrical forms developed by other ethnic groups in modern-day China, which traditionally have resided within the Northern and Western regions of China as its borders stand today. This distinction is made because the majority of Chinese theatrical documents that have survived to today were written and recorded by Han Chinese writers, historians, politicians and philosophers. Under this definition, Chinese theatre encompasses theatrical forms such as Bronze Age acrobatics and mime, musical drama that emerged over the next two millennia through to the Tang dynasty, Yuan dynasty 杂剧 (zaju)—a more structurally sophisticated form of musical drama which eventually diversified into the many regional forms of 戏曲 (xiqu or Chinese Opera), as well as "Westernized” plays in the style of Chekhov that emerged in the early 20th century.

As is evident from the broad definitions of Western and Chinese theatre above, theatre—regardless of its cultural birthplace—has evolved significantly over its many thousands of years of history, in terms of performance techniques used and contexts in which it is performed. For example, Greek tragedies are no longer necessarily performed at civic functions with dance or music. Shakespeare’s plays are no longer performed with
casts consisting only of men, and in outdoor theatres without technical design as they would have been when they were first premiered in the late 1500s to early 1600s. When Shakespearean original practice productions are mounted today, the original practice traditions and tools may seem just as foreign to a modern Western audience as the theatrical conventions of Chinese opera. Acting styles, too, have shifted dramatically: many Western actors today use acting methods developed over the past century—methods that were derived from Stanislavski’s seminal works at the turn of the 20th century. Therefore, modern actors may not have a strong connection to pre-Stanislavski acting techniques. Likewise, Chinese opera-theatre has also evolved significantly over the past millennium. Although Chinese opera may differ from Western theatre in that conventionalized acting skills are passed on through a direct lineage in a highly codified system of master and disciple, performing traditions have also evolved as a result of changing social contexts. Additionally, the advent of modern technology, including improvements in lighting equipment, the possibility of using computer generated sounds, and the availability of digital media mean that theatre makers today have many more tools available at their disposal than theatre-makers of previous centuries.

The purpose of this study is not to describe and compare in detail the many forms of Chinese and Western theatre that have emerged within the last two thousand years; such an endeavor would require an extensive survey of theatrical practices that may no longer be in use today. Although an investigation into original practice may be useful in detailing how theatrical paradigms have changed over time within Chinese and Western cultures, it would require a project of a much larger scope. Additionally, given that this thesis will culminate in a performance of a Chinese text to a modern American audience, a discussion
of how audiences of the past received theatrical experiences may not necessarily be useful in informing the directorial choices to be made for the final stagings of *Pear Blossom Dream*. Instead, in exploring differences in Chinese and Western theatrical paradigms, this thesis will examine historical theatrical practices as they are utilized today, and steer away from original practices which may be unfamiliar to modern audiences. This is not to say, however, that theatrical history will be ignored: in attempting to address why Chinese and Western theatre-makers prioritize different elements of theatre, it is necessary to understand what theatre makers, writers and artists have historically viewed as the most important components of a theatrical endeavor. What this study will do is discuss historical ideas and traditions that are still part of the modern theatrical consciousness, while omitting theatrical traditions and ideas that are no longer commonly utilized in theatre today. It is my hope that in defining the scope of the Western and Chinese theatre traditions in this manner, I can simultaneously acknowledge the ever-changing nature of theatre while accounting for longstanding traditional ideas that have shaped Western and Chinese theatres as we know them today.

Now that we have established the historical and geographic scope of the research, we can turn our attention to framing the research segment of this thesis in context of the final performance project. There are many tools in various theatrical traditions that shape theatrical models: costuming, lighting, sound, makeup, music, acting styles, staging, props and playwrighting. The development of these theatrical tools will involve ideas from art forms other than theatre, including visual arts, literature and music. Although discussion of these other art forms will be present in this thesis, they will be examined within the context of how they contribute to the development of a culture-specific theatrical model, and not as
standalone art forms. This research will be used to inform rehearsal and staging choices made in the final production of *Pear Blossom Dream*, and as such, any non-theatre art forms will be examined from the perspective of how they affect staging choices made.

Since *Pear Blossom Dream* is a written theatrical text, and the research portion of this thesis is done in service of the staging of *Pear Blossom Dream*, non-written forms of theatre (such as dance-drama or mime) or improvised forms of theatre in both the Chinese and Western theatrical traditions will not feature in this discussion. In order to focus on theatrical paradigms in the context of text-based theatre, specific productions of relevant texts will be examined closely for the effect that certain staging choices create. Texts chosen will have been performed and directed by both Western and Chinese theatre makers; examples include *The Orphan of Zhao*, a traditional Chinese opera that has been adapted by Voltaire and more recently by the Royal Shakespeare Company; *The White Snake*, a Chinese opera performed in various iterations, and adapted by Mary Zimmerman into a spoken play; and *The Tempest*, staged by Wu Hsing-kuo and Hark Tsui in 2004 as a Chinese opera. These texts address a wide variety of questions concerning the contrasting paradigms of Western and Chinese theatre, and discussion of specific stagings of these texts will allow us to see how varying theatrical paradigms operate on both a physical and written level.

The research component of the project will be structured as such: an overview of Western and Chinese theatrical paradigms as dictated in performance and theoretical texts, followed by case-study analyses of theatrical productions and cross-cultural interactions that address questions regarding the different theatrical paradigms found in Western and
Chinese theatre. Through this approach, this research will address both the broader origins behind and implications of different types of theatrical models, as well as how these broad implications are physically manifested in the staging of individual texts.

**Performance Methodology**

As previously denoted, the practical component of this thesis consists of a translation from its original Chinese of *Pear Blossom Dream* into English, and a series of stagings of portions of this text, with each staging using the principles of a different ‘type’ of theatrical paradigm. Since theatre is a somatic, empirical experience—it must be experienced in order to be understood—there is much valuable research to be gleaned from the experiential component of this thesis.

The translation of *Pear Blossom Dream* will occur first, before rehearsals begin. In producing an English language translation of *Pear Blossom Dream*, my goal is to compose a translation that is malleable enough to allow for different stagings, while retaining accuracy of language. In the interest of centering the focus of this project on how directorial choices (in terms of staging, design and acting styles) rather than writing choices shape theatrical reality, I will forgo producing different English versions of the text for each of the stagings (however—as will be explained—minor textual changes were made for different stagings). Although it is certainly true that onstage language and the structure and purpose of dramatic text shape both the audience’s and performer’s expectations of and engagement with a theatrical form, using the same version of the text will allow the text to be a control variable—so to speak—allowing me to isolate the effects of audio-visual staging choices on audience members. Whether and how the use of one version of the text limits and affects
the exploration of two differing theatrical paradigms will certainly be a point for discussion during the examination of audience responses to the production.

With regards to its content, *Pear Blossom Dream* is particularly amenable for exploring how theatrical paradigms affect staging: the text uses a dream as a structural and plot tool, and the deliberate manipulation of reality within the world of the text may be an effective means in exploring how the Chinese and Western theatrical models deal with varying levels of reality. Given that it was authored by a female playwright, *Pear Blossom Dream* is also a text that has not received much attention in the academic literature or in popular Chinese opera. The choice to use an obscure rather than a well-known text (for which more documentation and literature might exist) is to prevent—as much as possible—audiences from forming preconceived notions about a particular text based on any social, historical or political significance it may have, and instead encourage audiences to focus on the style, form and content of the various staged versions.

The rehearsal, staging and performance process will use a methodology that is not uncommon in most American and Western-style theatre companies. At the top of the rehearsal process, actors will be cast in the available roles through two sets of auditions—an initial audition in which actors read monologues by themselves, and callbacks in which actors are paired and read scenes. Following the auditions is the rehearsal and design process, during which I will work with the actors to shape character and blocking, and work with the designers to solidify aspects of production such as lighting and sound. Three weeks of rehearsal will culminate in a technical rehearsal during which actors will rehearse to become familiar with the production elements of the play. The process will conclude
with dress rehearsals and the final shows. Audience reactions will be solicited through talkbacks and surveys.

While the overall vision and rehearsals for each iteration of *Pear Blossom Dream* will be guided by overarching principles of theatrical reality—principles that will be consolidated beforehand through research, it is also important to consider the collaborative and spontaneous nature of theatre. Much of what occurs in the rehearsal room is intuitive, sometimes unexpected, and subject to the work and reactions of each of the individual actors. In the section on the rehearsal process, these overarching principles and the theatrical tools used in realizing these principles onstage will be detailed, as well as challenges and failures where certain methods used in achieving a particular theatrical reality were ineffective or discarded. However, it is much more difficult to shape and articulate a methodology that involves addressing the implications of each minute interaction with actors and designers, and the plethora of subtle choices that must be made in order to construct different types of realities. I will attempt as best as possible to detail the most relevant and significant methodologies used in addressing these empirical and somatic ways of conducting research in the section on the rehearsal process, but my words will likely not do full justice to the experiential intricacies of the rehearsal process.

It is important to acknowledge that adopting a single casting, rehearsal and performance timeline that is utilized widely in American theatre, rather than using three separate rehearsal timelines for each of the stagings, will affect the final product that is placed onstage. While the use of this single timeline may not explicitly impact any directorial choices regarding the presentation of different theatrical paradigms, different
rehearsal timelines are better suited to different theatrical models. It is a shortcoming of this study that only one rehearsal timeline is being used; however, due to time and material restrictions (for example, as we will see, performers of Chinese opera must train for years to master a specific set of skills), I will be employing the rehearsal timeline as described above.

1. The Poetics and Aesthetics of Western and Chinese Theatre

Although a director does not create theatrical text, most (if not all) choices that a director must make stem from the text that is being rehearsed and performed. We might even think of the director as needing to appropriately highlight the strengths of the text, and to theatrically support the choices that a writer has made. Thus, if we are to understand why Chinese and Western theatres have developed such contrasting theatrical vocabularies, we must first examine the texts behind these theatrical forms, and consider how the demands of the text limit or necessitate the types of theatrical tools used onstage.

In examining this issue, I would like to focus on both the aesthetics (and by aesthetics, I refer not just to the study of theory behind visual arts, but more generally to the values important to the various art forms in each cultural tradition) and poetics of the Western European and Chinese literary canons. Given that both Ancient Greek plays and Chinese opera can their trace textual roots to poetry, an examination of the techniques used in creating poetry—and therefore dramatic literature by extension—seems an appropriate avenue through which to explore the ideas behind the structure and purpose of dramatic texts. Additionally, aesthetics and poetics do not only inform the creation of dramatic texts, they also shape different audiences’ expectations of drama, and shape what
audiences of a shared cultural background will value in theatrical performances. By understanding what audiences expect from theatrical spectacles as dictated by these poetics and aesthetics, we can gain further insight into how a theatrical language is shaped, and the conflicts that arise when these expectations are either subverted or unmet.

In the Western theatrical tradition, the seminal theoretical text that has perhaps exerted the most influence in terms of how theatrical texts should represent the world is Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In it, Aristotle lays the groundwork for the structure, focus and purpose of drama—ideas that are referred to either explicitly or implicitly throughout the Western theatrical canon, from the Renaissance and Neoclassical playwrights of Western Europe, to the American playwrights of the 20th century. Of importance to Aristotle was the structure and purpose of the tragedy, and the use of mimesis in achieving this purpose. In examining Aristotle’s *Poetics* within the context of theatrical reality, I will focus specifically on the elements of time and action.

Before delving into further exploration, it is important to realize that the very concept of a dramatic text as ‘tragedy’ is a distinctly Greek one; this seemingly trivial conception of drama as tragedy has far ranging implications for what is considered important in Greek—and by extension, Western—theatre. This is not to say that the traditional Chinese theatrical canon does not acknowledge tragedy and comedy as elements of theatre; however, Chinese theatre does not explicitly or self-consciously categorize texts as tragedies or comedies. As such—and as we will see in the upcoming exploration of Chinese poetics—the whole paradigm through which Chinese theatre views the world is vastly different from that of Greek and Western theatre.
There are certainly theatrical practitioners, playwrights and philosophers who have appeared to misinterpret or rebel against Aristotle’s beliefs on what the ideal theatre should consist of; however, in attempting to establish the specific concepts that form the backbone of Western theatrical poetics, my primary preoccupation will not be with the intricacies of whether and how certain writers may have misinterpreted Aristotle’s thoughts, but with how their writings are positioned in the context of Aristotle’s poetics. As such, Aristotelian dramatic theory will form the crux of this investigation into Western poetics.

Most of Aristotle’s extant writings address the play as tragedy; while he does write on comedy in other texts such as *Rhetoric* (certain scholars have also suggested that a second book to the *Poetics* containing more details on his theories on comedy has been lost (Golden, “Aristotle on Comedy” 283)), the majority of his *Poetics* as we know it details the structure and purpose of dramatic tragedy. As a result, it is primarily through the form of tragedy that we become acquainted with Aristotle’s *Poetics* and his ideas on drama; in these ideas he positions tragedy as a product of mimesis (Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 64, Pauw 74). In our following discussion into Aristotle’s *Poetics* and its Renaissance, continental European derivatives, we will address these questions: what exactly does Aristotle mean by mimesis? What elements of drama do we end up focusing on as a result his engagement with mimesis? And what is prioritized and what is de-emphasized in Western theatrical practices?

Put very simply, mimesis can be translated as an imitation of the world. But what exactly is imitated, and the exact mechanisms though which this imitative process occurs
must be clarified. Before we further dissect Aristotle’s ideas on mimesis, we must first contextualize our discussion in terms of how he views art in general. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that “all human beings desire to know” and that mimesis is a tool through which we acquire knowledge (qtd. in Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 19, Halliwell 178). For Aristotle, art was cognitive; one of the primary goals of imitating the real world was to arrive at a transcendental truth and moment of “intellectual, emotional, and spiritual enlightenment” (Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 2). In arriving at these truths through art, we do not merely form experiences from the art, but use the art to craft judgements (Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 63).

So, what exactly does Aristotle define as a tragedy, and what role does mimesis play in the construction of an ideal tragedy? In Chapter 6 of his *Poetics*, Aristotle offers the following definition:

“Tragedy is, then, a mimesis of a noble and complete action [...] it is a mimesis of persons acting and is not accomplished by narration; through pity and fear it achieves the catharsis of such experiences.” (qtd. in Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 66)

Aristotle further clarifies that “tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action” (50). In explaining the tools that should be used to achieve this type of imitation, Aristotle states that tragic mimesis is built from “plot, character, thought, diction, melody and spectacle”, and in that order of importance (Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 72). It is clear that Aristotle prizes action and plot as the prime components of theatre (Pauw 75), and he even goes as far to say that “tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without character” (50).
In essence, we can conclude that tragedy is primarily an imitation of action; when a series of actions are arranged in sequence, they form a plot—the most important tool in the achievement of mimesis. The purpose behind mimesis, however, is not to create a completely objective imitation of real-world actions. An imitation of the form of an object or action is not all that Aristotelian theatre consists of; while imitation of form may be pleasing by itself, without meeting certain circumstances, these imitations will not be able to generate the intellectual enlightenment that Aristotle viewed as the goal of art.

One of the primary circumstances required to an intellectual response through mimesis is familiarity with the object being imitated:

“If one lacks prior familiarity with the subject, the artifact will not give pleasure qua mimetic representation but because of its craftsmanship, color, or some other reason.” (qtd. in Halliwell 178).

Aristotle reasons that if an audience is familiar with an object or action that is being imitated, the audience will be able to derive a form of pleasure in the mimesis, even if the object imitated is unpleasant to view in reality (Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 19). In the context of dramatic tragedy, audiences are witnessing the imitation of an unpleasant event, and can expect to feel unpleasant emotions—particularly fear and pity—that they would feel when witnessing the said event in real life. (Halliwell 184-185, 189). It is when audiences recognize these imitated events as hypothetical realities that might be applied to their own life experiences, when audiences move from understanding an action in a specific context to understanding the implications of an action in the context of a universal truth that all humans may experience, that this intellectual enlightenment is achieved.
Crucial to bridging this gap between the particular and the universal is an understanding of the motive behind an action that is being imitated and committed by the tragic hero (Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 17). As such, the intellectual pleasure ultimately gained from viewing any successful tragedy arises from recognizing in the imitation of action various kinds of human intentions that the audience is familiar with in their own lives (Halliwell 201).

From Aristotle’s *Poetics*, we can therefore see a preoccupation with onstage action; understanding the motives behind actions and projecting these actions onto our own lives are crucial to the success of a tragedy. From here, we can ask: what do these ideas mean for audiences experiencing Greek theatre? What aspects of the drama are audiences encouraged to focus on, and how do playwrights shape their works accordingly?

To begin with, Aristotle’s emphasis on tragedy as an imitation of action means that dramatic texts following the Greek model are primarily driven by plot, and by the tragic-hero who must execute a set of actions in order to set the plot in motion. More specifically, a plot must contain a unity of action, meaning that it represents “a complete and unified action consisting of a beginning, middle, and end linked by necessary and probable causation” (Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 73), and that if a single incident from a well-unified play were displaced, the overall action of the play would suffer (Aristotle 52). These definitions suggest a strong emphasis on a plot that is intellectually credible, in which the consequences of incidents are persuasive and stand up to logical reasoning. Additionally, a plot is all the more compelling if the actions being imitated subvert audience expectations, but are still unified (Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic* 73). Therefore, we have a theatrical form
that is absorbed with logic and the outcome of events, and a theatrical form that derives
dramatic tension from plot elements. Since these events are necessarily driven by the
actions of characters, this theatrical form also causes audiences to focus upon and search
for credibility in the inner development of a central protagonist (Dale xiii). As a result,
dramatic texts with subplots are few and far between in the Greek tradition (Friedland,
“The Dramatic Unities” 57). Additionally, according to Aristotle, “of simple plots and actions
the episodic are the worst” (Aristotle 53), since the actions in each episode do not always
arise out of necessity from actions in previous episodes.

From our examination of Aristotle’s Poetics, we encounter a theatrical paradigm that
prioritizes action, plot and motive as its core components. In our discussion on Aristotelian
poetics, we have also primarily engaged with literary poetics, and have spoken little about
aesthetics. This is no omission—given that he is immersed in a theatrical form that is
engaged so heavily with construction of plot and the writing of theatre, it is little wonder
that Aristotle states that “the tragic effect is quite possible without a public performance
and actors” (Aristotle 51).

Aristotle’s ideas do not experience a major resurgence until the mid- to late-
Renaissance era, when his ideas are taken up by French and Italian writers and
philosophers of the 16th to 17th centuries. This group of writers is perhaps most well-
known for striving for verisimilitude (which is quite distinct from mimesis, as we will see)
through the construction of the “three unities”—the unities of time, place and action. These
three unities, established during these two centuries as non-negotiable requirements for a
play to be considered ‘regular’ (Pauw 72, Herder 294-295), were derived rather
erroneously from Aristotle’s writings by this group of writers, who molded Aristotle’s writings to suit their Renaissance ideologies. My preoccupation with the unities of time and place are not about the extent of and the specific mechanics behind these misinterpretations, but rather what these misinterpretations reveal about what these writers— influenced by the Greek theatre model— valued in their own models of theatre.

Whereas Aristotle never named his unities as strict rules to be followed by all tragedies, instead—as posited by Pauw—only laying down these rules for the most ideal and excellent of tragedies (71-72), Castelvetro in his 1570 document *The Poetics of Aristotle* names the unities of action, time and location as rigid laws to be followed in any dramatic text (110-111, 116, Friedland 59, Schafer 66). These unities were later transplanted to France, and practiced by many playwrights from Corneille to Mairet with varying degrees of strictness (Lancaster 207). While the unity of action is decidedly Aristotelian, Castelvetro misinterprets it, suggesting that “the action making up the plot should be one and relate to one person only” (111), when in fact Aristotle states that “the unity of plot does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject.” (52). Additionally, the unities of time and location are Castelvetro’s own creations. Whereas Aristotle suggests that tragedy *tends* as much as possible to take place within one revolution of the sun (Pauw 74), Castelvetro interprets this to mean that the action of the play *must* take place within twelve hours (111). As to the unity of place, there is no mention of it at all in Aristotle’s original texts.

While completely erroneous when considered within the context of Aristotle’s own words, we can easily see why Castelvetro and his Renaissance contemporaries might be tempted to derive the unities of time and place from the unity of action. Castelvetro’s
conception of theatre rests heavily on a highly representative mode of theatre, where the reality of the theatrical world is determined by the constraints of the stage (Castelvetro 108): both he and Corneille (Corneille in his 1660 treatise *Of the Three Unities of Action, Time and Place*) suggest that, ideally, the action onstage should take exactly as long as the action would take in real life (Castelvetro 110, Corneille 162). We see here that the unities of time and place arose because of a distinctly Renaissance preoccupation with verisimilitude and believability (Lancaster 208); an action depicted onstage should, as closely as possible, resemble a real-life action. While Corneille acknowledges that Aristotle does not specify unity of place as a necessity for a successful play, both he and other Renaissance writers acknowledge that unity of place helps onstage representations to achieve verisimilitude (Corneille 164-166, Friedland, “The Dramatic Unities” 62). Using Corneille’s words specifically, unity of place (which need not be confined to a single room, but which may be expanded to encompass one city) would “help to deceive the spectator” (166).

In the Renaissance theatre, we therefore begin to see a preoccupation with the representational and the verisimilar; presenting reality as accurately as possible is clearly of great importance to Renaissance playwrights (Castelvetro 116, Corneille 162, Friedland, “The Dramatic Unities” 64, “The Dramatic Unities Cont’d” 454). The unity of place, for example, allows for the use of sets depicting specific environments in a representational manner (Friedland, “The Dramatic Unities Cont’d” 467)—a decidedly non-Greek theatrical tool—and allows the audience to more easily recognize locations in a play (Lancaster 217). When combined with the unities of action and time, these elements of dramatic text and onstage design support the actor’s endeavors in performing a sequence of actions onstage;
in following this sequence of actions, the audience can concentrate on the motives and the characters driving these actions (Lancaster 216, Friedland, “The Dramatic Unities Cont’d” 467).

In tracing Aristotle’s writings through two periods of history—in antiquity and in the Renaissance period—we therefore see the foundations upon which most modern (post-Renaissance European and American) Western theatre models are built. We have established the Western theatrical model as one that is primarily concerned with a sequence of actions (plot), with the motives that drive characters to execute these actions, and with a representational method of depicting onstage environments.

Unlike the Western theatrical-literary tradition, the Chinese literary canon does not contain a seminal literary or theatrical treatise comparable to Aristotle’s Poetics that has shaped literary poetics and playwrighting. There is no significant body of work that consciously examines “mimesis” as a theoretical concept; this is not to say that the idea of imitation is not present in Chinese literature, but that mimesis is never explicitly named as a theoretical concept, and is dealt with implicitly instead (Gu 403-404, Schechner ix, xi). In fact, compared to classical antiquity, formal documents articulating theories of poetics and theatre are quite sparse in pre-modern China; the majority of pre-Yuan dynasty literary and theatrical texts often concern audience reception, and are not directly addressed to practitioners (Schechner x).

The lack of an established and formalized theory of mimesis may seem like a disadvantage in this comparative study of Western and Chinese theatre-poetics; after all, it makes direct comparisons between the two bodies of theatrical literature less
straightforward. However, the mere fact that mimesis is not explicitly named as a core concept of Chinese literature is highly revealing of how Chinese theatrical poetics functions. As mimesis is not formalized in any seminal theoretical text in the Chinese theatre-literary tradition, we could say that mimicry of the natural world as Aristotle defined it does not take precedence in Chinese poetics.

Additionally, Chinese theatrical texts do not orient themselves around the model of tragedy the way Greek theatre does, meaning that the very structure and purpose of dramatic texts are completely different from the Greek model. This is not only indicative of a lack of Aristotelian poetics in the Chinese literary canon, but also of a wholly different moral paradigm in Chinese culture—shaped by Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Dale attributes the de-emphasis on tragedy in Chinese art to the “moral optimism” (Dale x) of the Chinese worldview, a worldview that places emphasis on communal harmony, and the inherent good nature of human beings. As the Three Character Classic—one of the seminal Confucian texts opens: “人之初，性本善”, which translates to: when a man is born, his character is innately good (my trans.). The Daoist belief that the alignment of art, human and nature results in a harmony, and the Confucian view of human society as a reflection of a harmonious order (Dale xi-xii) shape the entire paradigm through which theatre is viewed: the theatre is no longer a space in which plot-based suspense and tension dominate, but instead facilitates a dynamic exploration of human emotions and reactions in the context of this harmonious order (Wichmann-Walczak 140).

As such, Chinese art and theatre is expressed not in terms of conflict and action (as Aristotle believes), but as an “expression of essence—the meaning, often the emotion, of a
moment within the flow of the dynamic and harmonious natural world” (Dale ix-x). Unlike Aristotelian poetics, there is very little preoccupation with plot and action as revealing a truth to an audience (Wichmann-Walczak 140). Cai echoes this viewpoint, defining the difference between the two theatrical traditions as thus: “Western critics demonstrate an overriding concern with literature’s relationship with truth. . . by contrast, Chinese critics share an overriding concern with literature’s role in harmonizing various processes affecting human life” (2). Cai further elaborates that “poetry is seen as the initial part of a performance that aims to harmonize internal and external processes” (36). I would like to expand Cai’s framework by examining it in tandem with theatrical texts written before the 20th century—after some closer examination, we will see that the ideas underlying these texts fit nicely (if not implicitly) into Cai’s framework.

So, how exactly does this Chinese idea of literature as harmony manifest itself in dramatic literature? At this point, let me drift off on a small tangent (all will be clear once I return to this point at the end of this section on poetics). A cursory glance at Pear Blossom Dream shows us that there are multiple large sections of text in which the protagonist Du Lanxian describes her natural surroundings while in an emotionally desperate state. It may seem puzzling at this point in time as to why she might decide to describe her surroundings as she pines for her long-lost soul mate, but in fact this type of occurrence is not rare in Chinese writing. It is a type of literary technique referred to as 借景抒情 (jiejing shuqing)—literally translated to as ‘borrowing the scenery to describe feelings’ and is (as I will demonstrate) a distinctly Chinese product of Chinese poetics. Given that I will need to assist the actors of Pear Blossom Dream in navigating these passages, I will frame my final conclusions on Chinese poetics in the context of this technique.
In order to break down this idea of Chinese literature as a harmonizing art form into more specific and pointed thoughts that will be useful as I direct *Pear Blossom Dream*, I will examine these poetics through two main ideas: firstly, looking at poetry, song, dance and performance as an extension or amplification of an emotional state; and secondly, Chinese mimesis as focusing on imitating the essence of a subject rather than its form.

I want to reiterate once again that Chinese and Western poetics have entirely different paradigms regarding what is meaningful. Although various philosophers and writers in the Western tradition have differing views on this issue, since the resurgence of Aristotle’s ideas in the Renaissance, Western literary discourse has primarily been contextualized within the relationship between literature and truthfulness (Cai 10-14). Early Chinese discussions of literature make relatively fewer explicit references to literature and its relationship to ‘truth’. In the first chapter of the *Book of Documents* (Shujing or *Book of Documents*), which is dated as early as the Zhou (510-314 BC) dynasty and as late as the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), we see one of the earliest statements on the purpose of literature, “诗言志，歌永言”, which Cai translates as “poetry expresses the heart’s intent (志); singing prolongs the utterance of that expression” (qtd. in Cai 35). Even in this rather simple and concise statement, we are given the sense that poetry is a magnified extension of inner will and emotion, rather than a search for motive and truth.

It is important to note (especially as this thesis is a discourse on theatrical rather than literary reality) that when in referring to poetry, the *Book of Documents* does not merely refer to written words, but to poetry as verbalized performance—often chanted, sung and danced to. The idea that poetry expresses 志 (zhi or the heart’s intent) applies
also to the performative elements of poetry. In the preface to the *毛诗序* or *Mao’s Poetry with Notes and Commentaries*, compiled by Mao Heng and Mao Chang, the unknown author writes:

“Poetry comes from desires and dreams. Poetry expresses one’s heartfelt desires with words. When inner impulses are compelling, one finds words; when [written] words alone are not enough, one recites them with an expressive cadence; when this is not enough, one sings with all his heart; when singing is not enough, one finds his hands and feet dancing by themselves.” (22, square brackets are the translator’s)

In other words, chanting, singing and dancing become necessary components of poetry when words alone do not have the capacity to express emotion. The poetry itself is not an end, but rather a means to an end. This is the paradigm through which we can view Chinese poetics—literature as a means of expression of emotion rather than as means of mimesis. Even as forms of narrative writing (such as fiction and drama) began to be formalized beginning with the Yuan dynasty, we still see “expressive theory” (Gu 413) being used to discuss these narrative works.

However, where do these emotions or inner desires come from? What are they generated in reaction to? The answers to these questions will help to clarify Cai’s model of poetry as harmonizing internal and external processes. Specifically, poetry is an expression of the inner emotions and desires that are experienced as a result of (spontaneous) external situations (qtd. in Gu 410, 412). In the aforementioned *Mao Text of the Book of Poetry*, the author further states that:
“The melody in a peaceful land is serene, expressing satisfaction with the fair and amiable nature of the government. The melody in a chaotic world is full of grievances, demonstrating resentment toward the unpopular political measures. The melody of a conquered nation is woeful, lamenting the human suffering. . . . To move gods and ghosts, there is nothing more up to the mark than poetry.” (22)

From this statement, we are beginning to see the relationship between poetry, internal desires and the external environment. Poetry is a reflection of the heart’s will and emotions, and these emotions are generated in response to events. Poetry is the means by which the writer can align his own emotions and thoughts with external circumstances (Cai 36).

In order to fully convey the extent of these emotions, the words of the poetry must suit the emotion expressed. Often, these words should be aesthetically pleasing, as described by Zhu Qun in his Taihe Records of Music/Drama (42-44), when he uses swirling metaphors and similes to convey his admiration for the works of past playwrights. Confucius, too, emphasized the importance of verbal embellishment as a tool for expressing strong emotions (Cai 269). This is not to say, however, that literary embellishment is an end—it is instead a means to an end. As later Yuan and Ming dynasty literati such as Li Zhi and Yuan Yuling stressed, embellishment is ineffective if it is not governed by emotionally intuitive impulses and is unable to generate emotion in the audience (Li Zhi 50-51, Yuan 66). Likewise, in Beijing Opera, aesthetically pleasing visual and auditory tools—such as the physical skill of the actors, craftsmanship on the part of the costumers, and the poetry sung by the actors—are not merely used for technical display; they serve to externalize the thoughts of characters, forming an aesthetic whole (Wichmann-Walczak 130).
Does this mean that there are no similarities at all between Western and Chinese poetics? That is not necessarily the case. As discussed earlier, the idea of mimesis in Chinese poetics is not explicitly denoted in texts on poetics, but that does not mean that traces of mimetic thought are not present in Chinese literature, poetry and drama (Gu 405). In fact, scholar Wang Jide in 曲律 (Qulü or Principles of Lyric Drama) suggests that, “Drama imitates and describes events and situations in life” (62). But the imitation that Wang referring to is clearly very different from Aristotle’s conception of imitation. How is Chinese imitation different from Greek imitation both in its purpose and its means?

In order to delve further into this question, we must first realize that any implicit theories of mimesis in Chinese poetics originates primarily from the visual art tradition. Whereas Aristotle was primarily concerned with mimesis as present in dramatic texts, the Chinese notion of imitation has its foundations in painting (Gu 405). There are suggestions that the connection between the visual arts and theatrical poetics can be attributed to calligraphy, which is both a visual and literary art form (Tian, “Meyerhold” 254).

In Chinese painting, there are two ways in which an artist can depict subjects: there is 写实 (xieshi), or the depiction of subjects through the imitation of their physical and outwards forms, and 写意 (xieyi), or the depiction subjects by capturing their essence. Chinese painting generally favors the latter over the former (Wichmann-Walczak 130, Wang 64-65); Jin dynasty painter Gu Hutou is noted by Su Shi as saying that he searches for each subject’s spirit in a different area of his or her face (Su 30). This tendency may be attributed to Daoist thought, according to which, “man should not emulate or imitate nature in its physical form but choose to follow its course intuitively, experiencing and
assimilating its spirit and quintessence” (Tian, “Meyerhold” 242). Similarly, Chinese poetry—which primarily focuses on the evocation of images and landscapes rather than the recounting of events or actions (as is the case with Greek epics, for example), is similarly preoccupied with depicting the essence of its subjects.

It cannot be overstated how highly visual Chinese poetry—and the poetic songs of Chinese opera—are. The term 意象 (yixiang or idea-image) signifies the capturing of an essence through an image, and given the strong influence of visual imitation on poetics, even narrative forms of literature such as drama were thought of as depicting the idea-images of the world through words (Gu 407). The connection between painting, aesthetics, poetry and theatre becomes even stronger when we remember that calligraphy—through which poetry was formally recorded—is considered both a literary and a visual art. In fact, the aesthetic principle of 圆形 (yuanxing or roundness) is present in both 草书 (caoshu or calligraphy) and in the physical gestures of the actors onstage, who strive to use curves and arcs in their gestures (S. Li 176). Thus, both the literary language and the theatrical language used on the Chinese stage are highly visual: the words spoken and the physical presentation of these words are steeped in a shared cultural emphasis on visual aesthetics.

The Chinese focus on capturing the essence of objects and people does not mean that imitation of a subject’s form is not important; rather, formal mimesis is used as means to convey the spiritual essence of an object or scene. Gu Kaizhi, another painter of the Jin dynasty, stressed the importance of “using formal resemblance to impart spiritual resemblance” (Gu 408) while in his commentary on 水浒传 (Shuihuzhuan or Water Margin), a seminal Chinese novel, Ye Zhou expounds on this idea, writing: “the mimetic
representation of Song Jiang and Yan Poxi not only paints what appears before the eye but also what lodges at heart” (qtd. in Gu 418). Ye was also conscious of the difference between lyrical poetry and narrative literature—while poetry was primarily concerned with conveying idea-images by creating in the reader’s mind an image with a potent scene, narrative literature uses formal and outward mimesis to capture the emotional essence of a person. In these short statements, we see both the strong link between visual mimesis and textual mimesis, as well as the use of external mimesis as a means to capture the essence of a subject. The most accomplished dramatic texts and performances achieve both formal and spiritual resemblances (Gu 418). As Su Shi, a literatus of the Northern Song Dynasty, writes:

“The famous Jester Meng impersonated [the late] Sun Shuao so vividly that people thought the dead man had come back to life. It was not because the actor was an exact copy of the man but because the actor had captured the essential spirit of the man.” (30)

I would like to now reexamine the idea of 借景抒情 (jiejing shuqing), or using scenery to depict feelings, within the context of the discussion above. I posited that jiejing shuqing was a literary technique that arose out of a distinctly Chinese set of poetics. The purpose of this technique is to use descriptions of the natural environment (often through symbols with specific meanings) to convey a character’s emotions and thoughts. This technique bridges a person’s inner life with his or her external environment, following the harmonizing process that Cai has outlined. The ultimate goal of this technique is to use objects which are described in terms of their physical form (the surrounding environment)
to convey the essence of a character onstage (the character’s internal feelings). The understanding of these poetics will be crucial in directing the actors and designers in the production of *Pear Blossom Dream*, and helping them make sense of the extensive descriptions of the natural environment that occur during the characters’ most emotionally charged moments. Chinese poetics does not view verbal description as a final product in and of itself, but as a means of exploring a character’s emotional essence. As Li Yu states in his *Li Liweng on Theatre*,

“I feel that the ability to handle “emotion” (情) and “scene” (景) constitute the two most important challenges for a playwright...those who excel in depicting mountain and river excursion scenes, in depicting moonlight and flower garden excursion scenes, will only succeed partially if they cannot handle the emotions of each of their characters.” (81)

2. Poetics in Action: *The Orphan of the House of Zhao*

While certainly not exhaustive, the above discussion of Chinese and Western poetics establishes a general grounding for understanding the purpose of theatrical text in each theatrical tradition, and the mechanisms through which these purposes are achieved. Given these two vastly different paradigms of theatre and poetics, how does one begin to translate a text across these theatrical traditions? I am not merely speaking about translating a text in terms of the language used, but also preparing a play to better meet the expectations of audiences who have been shaped to demand different things of their respective theatre forms. How do these different poetics shape speech, structure and characterization in Western and Chinese theatrical texts? In attempting to elucidate
specific textual differences between the two theatrical forms, I will be discussing the text 赵氏孤儿大报仇 (The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao), a Yuan dynasty play which has been translated by various Western European writers from the Enlightenment Age through to today.

*The Grand Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao* expounds on themes of revenge, filial piety and Confucian morality: set during the Spring and Autumn period, the general Tuan Gu successfully frames his rival Zhao Dun, and as a result the entire Zhao family is killed. Only one member of the Zhao family survives—the infant orphan Zhao; he is rescued by the doctor Cheng Ying who sacrifices his own child to hide the Zhao orphan. As he has no male heir of his own, Tuan Gu inadvertently adopts the Zhao orphan, whom he believes to be Cheng Ying’s own son. Twenty years later, after the Zhao orphan has reached maturity—growing up as the adopted son of Tuan Gu—he learns of his heritage and exacts his revenge on his adoptive father.

*The Grand Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao*, attributed to the 13th century Yuan dramatist 纪君祥 (Ji Junxiang), appeared in its original form as a Yuan 杂剧 (zaju) play consisting of four acts (折 or zhe) and an interlude (楔子 or xiezi, literally translated as a ‘wedge’). Since its initial publication, the text has subsequently been adapted into various other forms of Chinese theatre, including many regional forms of Chinese opera (Yu 145). The original 杂剧 form is presented—as the 杂居 theatrical form dictates—through sung and spoken poetry and prose, dance, and mime, with each act serving as a self-contained set of songs. It is important that we briefly explore the history of this text, as there are considerations that are relevant to our discussion, especially in terms of dramatic structure.
The extant Yuan dynasty text only contains the songs used in the presentation of the play, and none of the prose dialogue or stage directions. When *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao* made its way into the realm of 18th century Western European translations, it did so by means of a later Ming dynasty version, which was collated by Zang Jinshi in his anthology *元曲选* (*A Selection of Yuan Songs*) (Yu 153, West and Idema 49). This version of the text contains prose dialogue, and as a result expands the number of performers known to the reader from one male lead actor in the Yuan version who sings all the poetry—it is 杂剧 convention to assign all songs to the main actor (Yu 149)—to a variety of male and female actors in the Ming version who sing in poetry and prose. When French missionary Joseph Henri Prémare produced his French translation upon which Voltaire’s later *L’Orphelin de la Chine* (*The Orphan of China*) is based, he translated only the prose dialogue from the Ming version of the text, indicating any sung poetry through stage directions.

Jean-Baptiste du Halde, who published Prémare’s translation in 1735, attributes Prémare’s omission of the songs to the fact that they “are difficult to be understood, because they are full of allusion to things unknown to us, and figures of speech very difficult to observe” (qtd. in Yu 154). However, given that sung poetry in Chinese theatre is generally used as a tool through which characters can explicitly express their emotions to the audience, while prose dialogue—by its very nature of being a conversation between two or more characters—is used to convey elements of plot, I would suggest that Prémare’s omission of poetry also reflects a preoccupation with the action of a play. Du Halde himself certainly seemed to recognize this distinction between prose as conveying plot and poetry
as conveying emotion in Chinese theatre. Although he doesn’t comment on the implications of omitting sung poetry, he does write, “le chant est fait pour expérer quelque grand mouvement de l’âme, comme la joie, la douleur, la colère, le désespoir” (qtd. in Hsia 336)—meaning “songs are used to express large movements in the soul, such as joy, pain, anger or despair” (my trans.). At the same time, however, Du Halde also expresses shock at the fact that a Chinese performer might, in the middle of a dialogue, suddenly sing (qtd. in Hsia 336). Having previously established Western theatre as a form that is primarily focused on action, logic and motive, rather than the Chinese mode of dynamic expression of emotion, it doesn’t seem improbable that the omission of songs was made partially in service of (or in unintentional facilitation of) a Western, Aristotelian preoccupation with the action in the play—action which would undoubtedly be broken up by sung poetry.

Prémares’s omission of the songs in the Ming dynasty text, however, are not the only major changes The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao undergoes when it is translated by various 18th century Western European writers. Active around a century after the Renaissance resurgence of Greek thought and the establishing of the unities of place and time as a means of achieving unity of action, these writers all made extensive changes to the Ming dynasty text so that it would conform to the three unities. Writers such as Du Halde and Voltaire disparaged the original Orphan text as irregular for not following the unity of time in particular, with Voltaire calling the play “barbarous” (Hsia 336, 339, Yu 154). In its various 18th century English, French and German iterations (including those by Voltaire, William Hatchett, an anonymous German writer and Arthur Murphy), the time span of the Orphan story is radically shortened from twenty years to timelines ranging
from one day to a few months, depending on how strictly each playwright observed the three unities (Hsia 337-344, Yu 156, 161).

In adapting *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao* to suit their ideas of an ideal, regular theatre, these European playwrights used various strategies; Voltaire, for example, confined the action to events occurring immediately after the massacre of the Zhao clan, and did not show the events of the revenge twenty years after the play's inciting event. In doing so, he also introduces characters that were not present in the initial text, revealing not only his thoughts on dramatic structure, but also his views on Confucianism and morality (Yu 159). Another approach that these playwrights used was to instead focus only on the events of the play that occur twenty years after the initial massacre of the Zhao clan; Irish playwright Arthur Murphy uses this approach in his *The Orphan of China*, whereby the orphan's youth and adolescence is narrated, while the events depicted onstage focus on the revenge exacted on Timurkan (Murphy's Tuan Gu figure).

Here, we come to an interesting discussion on the role of narration in Chinese and Western theatrical forms. Narration, as it is constructed from the vantage point of action-focused Western drama, does not exist as a distinct theatrical tool in the Chinese theatrical tradition; while actors will introduce their roles upon entering (sometimes introducing themselves in multiple scenes, as in the case of Tuan Gu in the Ming dynasty version of the text ([*The Orphan* 74, 77]) and may often break out of dialogue to sing, these occurrences are not self-consciously referred to as narration. In fact, in the Chinese tradition, narration and drama are not distinct from each other (Hsia 336). Given the very nature of Chinese theatrical text as a poetical expression of thought, and the purpose of Chinese theatre as a
means of contemplating one’s place within a larger natural and social order, characters must by necessity articulate the emotions they experience in reaction to the people and events surrounding them. In doing this, their speech satisfies a dramatic function—expressing their emotions—and a narrative function—articulating the events around them that have caused them to experience these emotions—at the same time; we see here a lack of distinction between narration and drama in the Chinese performing tradition. Contrast this with Aristotle’s definition of tragedy as encountered earlier: “Tragedy . . . is a mimesis of action and is not accomplished by narration” (qtd. in Golden, 66). Aristotle places narration in opposition to action: he sees action as contributing to the drama of a tragedy, and narration as non-dramatic, creating a clear distinction between drama and narration.

We can therefore see how differing systems of poetics result in narrative speech being used to fulfill different purposes in Chinese and Western theatre. In the case of the Orphan story, while Murphy’s words serve to recount a past scenario from which a logical series of events can now unfold (Murphy 7), the Ming dynasty text shows Cheng Ying recounting his emotions and the events of the past twenty years such that the audience is aware of the moral duty he must fulfill in helping the orphan to exact revenge (The Orphan 98–99). Murphy’s narration is externalized, and replaces onstage action, preserving the unity of time; the “narration” of the Ming dynasty text is internalized—not an aside, but an inevitable verbal articulation of emotion. If viewed from the Western vantage point of narration as a means of replacing action, the Chinese theatrical form—with many narration-like segments recounting events and emotions—may seem quite action-less to a Western audience. In Chinese theatre, we therefore see little of the plot tension that characterizes Western theatre (Wichmann-Walczak 140).
These complete restructurings of the *Orphan* story by these 18th century European playwrights demonstrate how a shift in poetics can dramatically alter theatrical text. Whereas the episodic nature of the Chinese text allows for greater focus on expressing the emotional states of the characters onstage, and allows the performer to show off the skills used to express these emotional states (Tian, “Adaptation” 254), the Greek foundation of Western theatre causes these European playwrights to reject the episodic plot of the Chinese text, and to instead craft a continuous sequence of events out of the original source material (Tian, “Adaptation” 253).

In translating *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao*, these playwrights have altered the original source material so greatly that the translations no longer resemble their original counterpart. Is there, however, a way of translating *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao* for a Western audience, while still retaining its original structure?

Hsia states that “Voltaire discovered a certain Shakespearean trait in the Yuan play that he, of course, considered a weakness.” (340). It is also interesting to note that of the 18th century writers who translated *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao*, the English and Irish writers take on more forgiving views of the original text, and adhere to the unity of time less strictly (Yu 155-156). This is not coincidence; in the previous section on Western poetics, Shakespeare was not discussed as part of Aristotelian poetics because he did not subscribe to the three unities that were adopted by his continental European counterparts. This is particularly evident in his later works, which do not adhere to the unities of time and place in particular—plays such as *Othello, The Winter’s Tale* and
*Cymbeline* feature significant jumps both in time and in location. Given the disregard for the unities of place and time in Shakespearean drama and in the Chinese *Orphan* text, can Shakespearean dramatic text offer a theatrical form through which *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao* might be adapted for a Western audience?

There are notable similarities between the Shakespearean form and traditional Chinese theatre; they both do not adhere to the unities of time and place, and structure is generally episodic (Hu and Ye 187). Although unconfined by the unities of space and time, they do follow a unity of action in the sense that disparate elements of plot are revealed to be related, and that the removal of a single event would impact the overall arc of the play. We see this unity of action even where Shakespeare has filled his text with more than one plot line; in *King Lear*, for example, the subplot concerning Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund—by way of mirroring the primary plot between Lear and his daughters—is unified within the overall action of the play (Schafer 70, Herder 299). Chinese playwrights—though they have never collectively and self-consciously acknowledged the existence of a unity of action—have also stressed that the action of a play must be tightly woven. Ding Yaokang and Li Yu, both dramatists of the early Qing dynasty, refer to the importance of constructing unified plots in these respective writings on crafting dramatic text:

“Don’t develop too many plot lines lest they should crowd out the main action ... you must tightly unify your play. You are a true master when you take care to weave all the loose ends, clues, hints, innuendos and so on into a logical web.”

(Ding Yaokang 75-76)
“A play not only germinates from one single character; it comes from one single inciting incident related to that character... the action of the play should be unified, coherent, and connected as the veins are by the blood that flows through them. Even seemingly unrelated incidents should have hidden connections to the main action that gradually become evident” (Li Y. 79-80).

Additionally, Richard Hurd, in commenting on Thomas Percy’s translation The Little Orphan of the House of Chao, notes that although the original Orphan text is episodic, each episode succinctly advances the play to the final primary event—the execution of vengeance. In his mind, this made the original Orphan text unified in action, almost to the extent that Aristotle demands (Yu 155).

The lack of unity of time and place means that the level of verisimilitude demanded from Shakespearean text is different from that of its continental European counterparts. For instance, Shakespearean text does not necessarily require the use of the authentic scenery that is demanded by French and Italian texts of the same era (Herder 295). Shakespeare’s texts—when they were first premiered—were played on a mostly bare stage, with information on location and time often supplied through dialogue between characters. Similarly, theatrical texts in the Chinese tradition also contextualize the location and time of onstage events through poetry or dialogue between characters.

However, the exact mechanics of conveying this information differs between the two forms, especially when addressing large and drastic differences in time and space, such as the twenty-year time jump present in The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao. These differences make it clear that Shakespearean drama—despite certain
similarities to traditional Chinese theatre—is still operating out of a theatrical vantage point that prioritizes continuity of action and believability of motive. In the prologue to *Henry V*, Shakespeare self-consciously and readily acknowledges a lack of verisimilitude in terms of the time span and locations that the play attempts to cover, writing:

“Suppose within the girdles of these walls  
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,  
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.  
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.  
Into a thousand parts divide on man  
And make imaginary puissance.  
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs i’ th’ receiving earth.  
For ’tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
Carry them here and there, jumping o’er times,  
Turning the accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,  
Admit me Chorus to this history” (Prologue.19-32)

This suggests that while Shakespeare does not subscribe to the three unities in his writing, he is aware that the audience expects some acknowledgement of the need for continuity in time and location (Friedland, “The Dramatic Unities” 75), and uses a chorus figure to self-consciously address this need. This self-aware acknowledgement is not present at all in the Ming dynasty version of *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao*; after the twenty-year time jump between acts three and four, the actor playing Tuan Gu merely
states at the beginning of act four, “Twenty years have passed already since I slew the Orphan of Zhao” (The Orphan 98). In addition to revealing a Chinese nonchalance regarding large jumps in time in dramatic texts, the use of a character rather than a narrative figure to acknowledge the leap in time once again reinforces the lack of distinction between narration and dramatic action in the traditional Chinese theatre.

Another distinction between Chinese and Shakespearean text is how the two forms resolve the issue of representing these large jumps in time and space. In the prologue to Henry V, Shakespeare specifically appeals to the audience’s “thoughts” (Prologue.19) and mind in order to mentally recreate what cannot be portrayed with verisimilitude onstage—for example, the English and French armies, and long journeys across the two countries. Shakespeare avoids physically depicting these armies onstage, because to do so in a representational manner would be logistically difficult within the confines of a stage. The Chinese theatrical system, meanwhile, is not engaged with verisimilitude in the same way that Western theatre is. As such, it is free to employ non-representational theatrical tools to depict events whose physical scale exceeds that of a stage: for example, two large armies would be symbolized through specific flags, while a long journey might be conveyed through a specific type of walk. The use of these visual symbols is decidedly un-Shakespearean: as much as Chinese and Shakespearean theatrical texts share certain structural commonalities in their lack of spatial and temporal unity, the intricacies of the ways in which the lack of these unities is addressed are quite different.

This is the case with the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 2012 production of The Orphan of Zhao, adapted from various source materials by James Fenton. The
Shakespearean elements of Fenton’s adaptation—namely, the lack of the need to observe the unities—allows for the preservation of The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao’s twenty-year time span. Unlike both the Voltaire and Murphy translations, Fenton preserves the Chinese convention of characters introducing themselves at their entrances. Similar in tone and purpose to a Shakespearean soliloquy, these introductions allow the characters to express their thoughts and emotions within the context of their reactions to the events occurring around them, achieving a narrative and dramatic purpose simultaneously—a Chinese theatrical feature.

In creating his adaption, Fenton also chose to reinstate songs into the text that his European predecessors omitted. However, he did not use the songs in the Ming dynasty text (translated by Stephen West and Wilt Idema—one of the sources he consulted (Fenton, “Acknowledgements”)), instead choosing to pen his own. On some level, the reinstating of these songs does reintroduce some ‘Chinese-ness’ into the text relative to previous European translations; the songs—rather than serving as ballads recounting events—are laden with natural imagery and symbols, and remind audiences of the 借景抒情 (jiejing shuqing; using imagery to express feelings) technique discussed in the previous section on Chinese poetics. When the Ballad-Singer sings, “The petal is ripped from the flower, the branch from the tree” (Fenton 3), the images serve as symbols for the impending massacre of the Zhao family (Yu 163).

Although Fenton’s reintroduction of sung poetry does provide some semblance of a traditional Chinese performance paradigm, it is important to note that almost all the songs are assigned to the Ballad-Singer character—an addition of Fenton’s who is never directly
involved in the events of the play. All the other characters—the orphan, Tuan Gu and Cheng Ying—speak in prose. The relegation of music to a character whose only function is to sing means that the music does not serve as a direct extension of the characters’ emotions—a critical aspect of Chinese theatre.

There are other aspects of *The Orphan of Zhao* that betray Fenton’s Western approach to adapting this play. Although Fenton does retain an extensive character introduction for Tuan Gu in the second scene of the play that mirrors the introduction present in the prologue of the Ming dynasty version, there are substantial omissions from Fenton’s introduction. Fenton chooses to omit Tuan Gu’s recounting of actions and events from the introduction; for example, while Tuan Gu in the Ming dynasty text tells the audience how he sent the knight Chu Ni to assassinate Zhao Dun (*The Great Revenge* 74), this event is physically depicted using multiple actors in the fourth scene of Fenton’s play (10-12). The choice to depict this event onstage rather than communicate it through the character introduction reflects once again Western theatre’s preoccupation with onstage action.

Fenton also constructs events in his version of the story that are not present in the Ming dynasty text: an accidental encounter between the fully-grown orphan, Cheng Bo, and his mother (who was not killed during the initial massacre) after which the orphan starts to question his origins; and a trip through the country that Cheng Bo takes, during which he hears of the atrocities committed by his adoptive father, Tuan Gu, and begins to doubt Tuan Gu’s virtue. In Yu’s words, these two events “prepare [Cheng Bo] psychologically for the revelation of the tragic history of his family and his revenge against Tu’an Gu” (164).
According to Yu’s assessment, the purpose of these events is to provide a form of logically sound internal motive to drive Cheng Bo’s eventual actions; once again, this reveals a distinctly Western mode of viewing theatre, in which the motives and inner conflict behind a character’s actions—rather than the expression of a character’s emotion as enhanced by an actor’s skill—are seen as necessary to the providing of dramatic tension.

While Fenton produces a version of the *Orphan* story that is much closer to the Ming dynasty text than any of his European predecessors have created, this resemblance is only textual. So far, in discussing theatrical poetics, we have not yet fully unpacked the relationship between the poetics of a theatrical form and the onstage tools that result from a specific system of poetics. Although Fenton’s text may bear certain similarities to the Ming dynasty text, Gregory Doran’s production of *The Orphan of Zhao* used few traditional Chinese performance techniques—there was no use of stylized costume or makeup, and the actors’ performance style was naturalistic (Yu 164). In the following sections, we will examine the onstage theatrical tools commonly found in each tradition, consider how they are shaped in order to support the poetics of each theatrical style, and analyze how they have been (mis)interpreted across cultural boundaries.

3. Early 20th century cross-cultural interactions: Mei Lanfang, Brecht and Stanislavski

Basic models of performance

In order to shift our focus from theatrical text to onstage theatrical tools, we will now turn our attention to Chinese and Western theatres of the early 20th century. A series of political circumstances, including England and France’s forced opening of Chinese
borders and the institution of a republic in China, meant that it was no longer just theatrical texts that were being exchanged between Chinese and Western theatre makers; theatrical practitioners had much greater opportunity to experience first-hand the onstage practices that were used in the performance of these texts. After all, many of the 18th century writers discussed above—despite their theoretical knowledge on Chinese society and literature—had never witnessed a performance of *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao* in person, and were adapting the text without great consideration for the specific performance techniques used in traditional Chinese performance.

With the early 20th century, however, we see theatrical practitioners and performers from China, Europe and North America coming into direct engagement over the performance techniques used in their respective theatre forms. Bertolt Brecht and Constantin Stanislavski, for example, experienced Beijing opera performances first-hand when renowned旦 (*dan* or female role) actor Mei Lanfang performed in Moscow in the spring of 1935; Mei also frequently corresponded with practitioners such as Stanislavski and Meyerhold, and embarked on an American tour in 1924. In China, playwrights such as Lao She and Cao Yu introduced the Western model of tragedy to the popular stage through texts such as 茶馆 (*Tea House*) and 雷雨 (*Thunderstorm*), respectively; these plays adopted models of realism established by playwrights such as August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov, and utilized Stanislavski’s psychologically motivated acting techniques—hitherto completely unknown in Chinese theatre.

To fully understand the implications of these cross-cultural exchanges, however, we must first consider the state of Chinese and Western performance at this critical juncture in
time. What did Stanislavski’s method of acting entail, and what is its place in the larger context of Western theatre today and in the past? What were the conventions of traditional Chinese performance by the time Mei Lanfang rose to international prominence?

Most acting theory in modern Western theatre can trace some connection back to Stanislavski; notable American acting pedagogues such as Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg have taken inspiration from Stanislavski’s teachings (Adler 13-14, Benedetti xx-xxi). While some may argue that these practitioners did not always convey Stanislavski’s teachings as he originally conceived of them (Strasberg’s development of the ‘method’ acting approach serves as a notable example), the fact that so many schools of Western acting today are indebted to Stanislavski’s work is a testament to his influence (Benedetti, xx-xxi).

In the section on poetics, we established action as the crux of Western theatre; with Stanislavski, action still forms the basis of an actor’s work. While Stanislavski’s techniques for acting are certainly not how Greek performers would have performed in Aristotle’s day, or even how Renaissance performers who were part of the neoclassical resurgence would have acted, there is an Aristotelian approach that grounds Stanislavski’s overall paradigm of acting. Take, for example, this excerpt from his An Actor Prepares:

“Acting is action. The basis of theatre is doing, dynamism. The word “drama” itself in Ancient Greek means “an action being performed”. In Latin the corresponding word is actio, and the root of this same word has passed into our vocabulary, “action”, “actor”, “act”. So, drama is an action we can see being performed, and, when he comes on, the actor becomes an agent in action.” (40)
Stanislavski’s approach to acting is therefore grounded in the principle of actions—these actions can be both mental or physical (Stanislavski 40), whereby the nature of an action is shaped by the specific “given circumstances” that a character might find him or herself in—a set of external circumstances that serve to motivate a character’s aim (Stanislavski 46-47). We see here a strong, logical and intellectually rigorous progression of generating these actions onstage: these actions portrayed onstage must be convincingly informed by the objective reality that a character is experiencing. In language that is strikingly similar to that of Aristotle’s description of the necessity of a well-unified plot, Stanislavski stresses that these actions must be “inwardly well-founded, in proper, logical sequence and possible in the real world” (48).

That these actions should be possible in the real world forms an important tenet of Stanislavski’s techniques; for Stanislavski, there should be no difference between how actions are performed onstage and how they are performed in real life (Stanislavski 153-154, Sun 171). In his mind, only when onstage actions closely resemble an analogous and specific situation in real life does onstage acting become ‘true’ and believable to both the audience and fellow actors (Stanislavski, 145). That is the rationale behind his ‘magical if’ technique, whereby an actor executes an action onstage as if he or she were in the given circumstances experienced by the character. The ultimate aim of Stanislavski’s technique is to achieve a performance where there is no distinction between character and role, and the audience can believe that they are witnessing a spontaneous event (Sun, 172).

We see here that the standard for what is believable and what can be accepted by an audience as ‘true’ is determined primarily by how easily they are convinced that the actions
taking place onstage resemble real life. We might say that a ‘fourth wall’ exists between the actors and the audience, meaning that actors onstage behave as if the audience were not present, while the audience observes the events of the stage out of the consciousness of the character onstage—as if peering through the wall to see the characters existing in their own world (Huang 156). Stanislavski never explicitly used the term ‘fourth wall’ but he does stipulate that characters onstage should exist in a separate plane from the audience, unaware of the audience’s presence and aware only of their given circumstances and present environment:

“By ‘necessary Tasks’ I mean:

1. Tasks that exist on our side of the footlights and not on the other. In other words, Tasks which are related to the play, directed towards the other actors, and not to the audience in the front rows.” (145)

It for this reason that the realist plays around the turn of the 20th century—particularly those of Chekhov—are so amenable to Stanislavski’s techniques: providing characters that actors can play by performing layers of simple physical and mental tasks, such as eating, chatting or playing cards, they recreate through onstage action the complexities of real-life in as much detail as possible (Sun 173).

20th century China, meanwhile, presents us with a fully mature form of 戏曲 (xiqu or Chinese opera), which has developed out of the Yuan dynasty 杂剧 (zaju) and Ming dynasty 昆曲 (kunqu) forms. By the Qing dynasty, regional variations of the Chinese opera form had been established; these including Cantonese Opera, Beijing Opera and kunqu, among
others. While these regional variations exhibit many differences, including the language used and types of tunes sung, as well as differences in performance text, and different cross-gender casting traditions, these regional forms of 戏曲 all exhibit considerable mutual influence on each other, and share significant similarities. These similarities include the categorization of actors and roles into the 生 (sheng or male), 旦 (dan or female), 净 (jing or painted face male) and 臭 (chou or clown) role types, shared conventions in costuming and makeup (as determined by character type), the use of sung and spoken poetry, and the incorporation of martial arts. In examining the performance techniques of xiqu here, I will attempt as much as possible to refer to techniques that apply to all regional forms of xiqu, noting when needed if specific techniques apply only to certain regional xiqu forms.

As we encountered in our section in poetics, there is not a seminal text that has informed acting technique in the traditional Chinese theatre today. It is worth reminding ourselves again that unlike Western art—which is primarily characterized by a sequence of opposing intellectual movements—Chinese art heavily favors honoring a dynamic tradition of thought and techniques (Dale x). Additionally, as Chinese performance technique relies heavily on visual and auditory skills—skills which may be difficult to convey as written ideas—information regarding performance technique has, with the exception of the past century, primarily been communicated orally and physically between master and disciple.

One of the mostly instantly recognizable features of any Chinese opera tradition is the idiosyncratic and highly stylized visual and auditory language—the abundant use of the falsetto voice in the delivery of prose and song, the vivid costuming and makeup, and the
use of highly codified and non-naturalistic gestures. It is not my intention here to meticulously catalogue the many costumes, gestures, props, hair or makeup techniques employed by the many different character types in Chinese opera—that undertaking has already been performed excellently (see Siu and Lovrick, and Riley). What is important to the understanding of xiqu performance techniques in the context of this thesis are the guiding principles behind the use of these myriad performance elements.

In our discussion on poetics, what emerged as central components of Chinese theatre are: transmitting the essence of a character, and theatrical text as a platform through which a character externalizes his or her feelings and thoughts in the context of the events occurring. In capturing the essence of a character onstage, and in order to allow the actor to externalize a character’s feelings and thoughts in a competent manner onstage, actors should identify emotionally with the character they are portraying (Tian, “Meyerhold” 246). This emotional identification permeates both acting technique and an audience’s appreciation of acting. Pan Zhiheng of the Ming dynasty writes on his experiences of seeing *牡丹亭 (Mudanting or The Peony Pavilion):

“The young boy who played Liu seemed so possessed by the emotions of his role that his impersonation showed consummate understanding. It is, of course, Du Liniang’s love and passion that is the most difficult to convey and explain. . . only those who are capable of becoming consumed by love are capable of feeling it deeply and then capable of portraying it. Jiang and Chang, the two young performers from Wuchang, are not only capable of becoming emotionally
possessed by their character's love, but they are also capable of physically enacting their love... in a completely natural and unaffected manner.” (59)

This emotional identification required of actors becomes even more pronounced when they are playing characters of the opposite gender. Li Yu states of women playing men onstage, “If she puts herself in her character’s shoes and lives the part, the female performer will win praises because she embodies his spirit and expresses his emotions truthfully and accurately.” (87). The focus here on playing emotion, rather than action, is an important contrast between Western and Chinese actions; whilst Stanislavski warned his actor against playing emotions onstage that are not the result of a specific set of circumstances (56), insisting that the students always execute a task as defined by an active verb (148), there is no such aversion to directly playing emotion in the acting of xiqu.

Interestingly, however, Mei Lanfang made the following statement, “What I have experienced my whole life onstage is compatible with the Stanislavsky system” (qtd. in Sun 175), further adding that ideal acting was where “the actor and the character cannot be told apart” (qtd. in Sun 176). When onstage, actors in the Chinese xiqu should forget that they are performing (Li Y. 87, Sun 176), and act as if they were in the situation that their character was in—an approach not unlike Stanislavski’s. How, then, do we account for these similar statements given the vastly different acting styles present in Western and Chinese theatre? It is worth clarifying that Mei was referring to a very specific component of xiqu acting that he saw as similar to Stanislavski’s. Mei was most likely referring to the internal actions and emotions of an actor as being realistic in the performance of xiqu; when it comes to the
externalizing of these internal impulses, Stanislavski favors physical actions as we would witness them in real life, while Beijing opera favors a stylized approach.

This stylized approach may seem contradictory to the ‘naturalness’ that Pan commends the actors Jiang and Chang for. We must remember, however, that because Chinese and Western theatres are fundamentally shaped for different purposes, ‘naturalness’ in each of the two theatres can carry different connotations. Given that adherence to tradition and convention are highly prized in xiqu, both audience and actor are familiar and share a common understanding of the connotations of the symbolic gestures, props and skills displayed onstage. Since audiences and actors will recognize the same onstage vocabulary, the stylization of the performance techniques is not contradictory to naturalness. Rather, naturalness is instead found in the ease and technical mastery with which the performers can execute highly stylized speech and movements.

After all, as our discussion of Chinese poetics demonstrates, action and plot are not the main driving components of xiqu. These stylized elements of acting are all performed in service of highlighting the emotional essence of a character; that is why elements of exposition—such as journeys on horseback—are compressed in time and represented through a series of symbolic movements and a whip (Siu and Lovrick 40-42), while elements involving the expression of emotional states are expanded in length and time, with extensive songs occurring in the few seconds it may take for a clock to strike (Wichmann-Walczak 149). During these songs, conventionalized techniques are used to express emotion: pheasant tails attached to a headdress, for example, may be manipulated in ways that symbolize specific emotions (Siu 132-137); props such as handkerchiefs or 水袖 (shuixiu or
water sleeves—silk sleeves that may extend to a meter long) are handled in a series of codified gestures to demonstrate emotional states. As Huang Zuolin, a 20th century Chinese theatre director writes, Chinese opera is about conveying “the essentialism of life, that is, not life as it is but life as extracted, concentrated and typified... human movements [are] eurythmicized to a higher plane [and] language [is] elevated to lyrical height” (158).

The presence of so many highly codified gestures on the performer’s part means that audiences of Chinese opera must—in order to fully comprehend each character’s emotional state—be privy to the meaning behind the symbolic gestures that are being employed onstage. This requirement on the audience’s part means that the audience by necessity must be conscious of the performer’s skill at all times, and are aware that what they are seeing is a performance. Much of the dramatic impetus in Chinese opera therefore comes not from the plot, as is the case with Western theatre, but from the appreciation of the actor’s skill. As much as Mei might agree with certain aspects of Stanislavski’s technique, the fact that a discerning audience of Chinese opera is aware of the performer’s skill at all times means that there is not a fourth wall present in Chinese opera—this is not to say that a fourth wall is broken, but that there was never a fourth a wall in the first place. In displaying these specific skills, which are firmly rooted in the emotional experience of a character and not merely technical displays (Wichmann-Walczak 130), the actor strives to convey the essence of character in a manner that is pleasing to and can be appreciated by an audience (Sun 177).

**Introducing the spoken drama to China**

Against the backdrop of these two vastly different performance techniques, Western-style spoken drama first made its way into the Chinese consciousness in the early
20th century, and we see texts that fully resemble Western theatrical forms by the 1930s. Chinese students who had returned from the West and from Japan (which was embracing Westernization vigorously) contributed to an intellectual environment in China where Western theatrical texts—from Shakespearean plays to French and American novels—were beginning to be dramatized (Liu, 412). This theatre was called 话剧 (huaju or spoken drama), as the characters no longer sung onstage, but delivered prose dialogue in a spoken manner.

Cao Yu’s Thunderstorm represents perhaps the most well-known and commonly performed of these spoken dramas. The wealthy, Westernized Shanghainese Zhou family is met with tragedy after a sequence of events reveals the incest between two half-siblings. Zhou Ping, the son of the Zhou household who once engaged in an affair with his stepmother Fanyi, is now in love with his servant Sifeng. Over the course of the four-act play, it is revealed that Zhou Ping and Fanyi share the same mother; this realization results in the death of Fanyi, Zhou Ping and Zhou Chong—Zhou Ping’s younger brother who has a crush on Fanyi.

Structurally, this play adheres almost perfectly to the three unities: with the exception of a prologue and epilogue, the events of Thunderstorm occur within a time span of a day, and the action is set in two houses in Shanghai. While the framing device of the prologue and epilogue, set ten years after the events of the main play, does not fully adhere to the unity of time, it does indeed establish a greater unity to the action. Presented with the circumstances of the prologue, which explores the repercussions of the events of the main play, the playwright must now use the events of the main text to produce a logical and
probable sequence of events that result in the circumstances of the prologue and epilogue. As a result, the play is no longer episodic, as is the case in Chinese opera.

The body of the text in general also deals with themes very similar to that of the Greek tragedies, 17th century French tragedy, and the realist works of Ibsen: in plot, theme, characters and ideas, *Thunderstorm* takes after tragedies such as *Oedipus*, *Hippolytus* and *Phèdre*, building on a series of circumstances that involves love between a mother and son, incest between a brother and sister who are—until the final climax of the fourth act—unaware that they are siblings, and the final deaths of the two siblings as a result of this discovery (Chen R. 1, Chen R. and Zhao 4). Cao Yu himself acknowledges that Greek drama had an influence on his writings, describing the events of the plays in *Thunderstorm* as “cruelty in the cosmos”, referencing the element of fate that pervades a number of Greek tragedies (Chen R. 1-2).

Cao Yu’s *Thunderstorm* is not only successful in capturing a Western mode of theatre both structurally and thematically—it’s initial production also closely followed the psychologically realistic mode of performance advocated by Stanislavski. While there are no primary sources documenting the process undertaken by the actors at the premiere of *Thunderstorm*, it is clear that various Chinese directors of the 20th century established a good grasp of the defining features of Western theatre. Jiao Juyin, a director of spoken drama, characterizes Western theatre as, “packing lots of actions into a given time frame, not explaining crucial changes as they happen, or leaving many things in suspense intentionally for the audience’s benefit until the last minute” (Jiao 160). With *Thunderstorm*, we see none of the symbolized conventions that populate various forms of
Chinese opera: the actors behave as they would in real life, in a naturalistic fashion. The type of speech used by the characters is an especially important indicator that the play was presented using Western acting techniques. Although various translations of Western theatrical texts and novels began making their way into China during the first three decades of the 20th century, some of these texts were translated into classical Chinese speech rather than the Chinese spoken in 20th century China, making these texts difficult to be presented to a contemporary audience (Liu 416). Cao Yu’s creation of Thunderstorm, presented instead in the vernacular Chinese of the early 20th century, reflected a theatrical model that aimed to present characters engaging in a style of dialogue that one would hear in real life.

**Misunderstandings: Brecht and Chinese opera**

Cross-cultural exchanges of Chinese and Western theatrical forms did not always occur without misunderstanding, however. Perhaps one of the most notable examples of cross-cultural misunderstanding is that of Brecht’s interpretation of Chinese theatre as ‘alienating’. It was from his engagement with xiqu that he derived his concept of ‘verfremdungseffekt’, or the distancing effect. This term first appears in his 1936 essay “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting”, one year after he had seen Mei Lanfang perform a series of Beijing opera excerpts in Moscow. This essay is one of many that documents his goal of establishing a theatre counter to that of the prevailing models of realism and Stanislavski-based acting. Brecht saw in 20th century European theatre an intellectual complacency brought on by emotional engagement with the characters onstage, and advocated instead for a form of theatre that would encourage his audience to think critically about modern life as depicted onstage, and thus galvanize audiences to effect
change in the real world (Ding Yangzhong 29). Brecht primarily achieves this critical engagement through his ‘distancing effect’: this effect reminds audiences that what they are viewing onstage is only a representation of reality, so that they might react to onstage events critically rather than emotionally (Luk 293). Although the goal of Brecht’s theatre is antithetical to the prevailing conception of theatre as realism or as verisimilitude, his ideas—in rebelling against this established backdrop of Aristotle- and Stanislavski- based theatre—actually serve to highlight the importance of the ‘fourth wall’ in Western theatre.

Indeed, it can be easy to understand why Chinese opera—from the perspective of an inexperienced audience member—might be perceived as distancing. For example, scenes in Chinese opera often begin with an opening verse and close with a concluding couplet. Additionally, characters will often introduce themselves upon their entrances. Brecht incorporated these elements into his own texts: scenes are introduced with titles and narrated through song, third-person speech, and the past tense (Sun 175). However, we must make a clear distinction between narration as it features in Brecht’s plays, and narrative elements as they exist in Chinese opera. Brecht and the Epic theatre are characterized by a certain ‘narrativity’—a fourth wall is broken by an actor who directly and objectively relates onstage events to an audience (Ding Yangzhong 30-31). It is this element of narration that Brecht sees in Chinese theatre, writing: “Stylistically speaking, there is nothing all that new about the Epic Theatre. Its expository character and its emphasis on virtuosity bring it close to the old Asiatic theatre.” (Ding Yangzhong 30-31).

However, as seen in our discussion on *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao*, narration as a self-conscious theatrical tool does not exist in the Chinese theatrical
model. The character introductions, opening and closing couplets, and scene titles that Brecht appropriated for his own purposes are not explicitly seen as narrative in the Chinese tradition. Given that Chinese opera has never presupposed a need to maintain a fourth wall—a relationship whereby the audience and the actors exist in separate planes, enhancing the “illusion of reality” (Luk 295)—speech can be delivered to other actors onstage and to the audience at the same time. Brecht fails to distinguish between a Chinese theatre where a fourth wall has never existed—meaning that there was never an illusion of reality that could be broken using distancing tools such as narration, from a Western theatre where a fourth wall is present, and where there exists an illusion of reality that can be broken by distancing (Huang 156, Luk 295). Brecht’s conception of narration as a distancing tool in Chinese theatre is therefore entirely a product of his rebelling against prevailing Western theatrical practices.

Brecht also perceived elements of distancing on the part of the actor’s technique. The use of various symbolic gestures and props, and singing, all of which require technical skill to execute, led Brecht to write:

“The performer's self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character completely... the audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing and looking on... [the actor] constantly keeps a distance between himself, his character, and the spectator... consequently he never loses control of himself.” (qtd. in Ding Yangzhong 38, Chen X. 410-411)
Here, what Brecht is advocating is a style of acting wherein the actor does not identify emotionally with the character being portrayed, but instead is an objective and detached onstage agent (Sun 174). However, this approach is completely antithetical to *xiqu* acting techniques we have previously observed in primary sources; in *xiqu*, both actors and audience members place great emphasis on the role of emotional identification in crafting a character. Moreover, it contradicts what Mei Lanfang states about identifying with Stanislavski’s approach to acting, where actor and character aspire to become one.

Brecht also perceived the use of music and song in Chinese opera to be distancing (Chen X. 411), and uses music in his own texts to create a distancing effect: in the fourth scene of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, for example, when Simon and Grusha are reunited, their stilted, verse-like speech is punctuated by a singer—the effect here is to prevent the audience and actors from being emotionally affected by their reunion (Luk 293). However, the use of music in Chinese opera is not to encourage a level of objectivity on the audience’s part, but rather to encourage an emotional reaction, as Zhuo Yan (a Qing dynasty scholar) writes:

“I didn’t know that much about musical measure or rhythm, but what came into my ear went straight to touch my heart, taking over my whole being completely. Musical tunes in plays may commend small respect, but they affect people in subtle yet profound ways.” (123)

Playwright Sun Huizhu offers an explanation for reconciling these contradictory viewpoints: Chinese performance is a model of performance whereby actors’ internal impulses mirror the internal impulses of the characters, but external actions do not mimic
real life ones. Brechtian theatre similarly features a disconnect between the internal and external, but while external actions still resemble real world actions, the actors are internally disconnected from these. Meanwhile, the Stanislavski mode of acting strives for realism in both internal and external gestures (Sun 175-176).

The reason that Brecht failed to make this distinction is because he did not see that the stylization of Chinese opera is guided by emotional impulses. While both audiences and performers of Chinese opera are conscious of the blatant theatricality of Chinese opera, such consciousness does not always create a distancing effect for either the actor or the audience. Audiences familiar with Chinese opera are able to react in an emotional manner despite the high stylization of Chinese theatre, because of a shared understanding that these stylizations were developed as conventions to express the emotions of a character (Luk 293). Brecht misinterprets Chinese opera because his ideas were formulated without a significant understanding of the underlying cultural context that has shaped the paradigms behind Chinese theatre, and the mechanisms through which audiences should receive and evaluate Chinese theatre.

4. Cross-cultural interactions in 21st century theatre

Since the early 20th century, the number of cross-cultural interactions between Western and Chinese theatre has only grown. Prolonged exchange of theatrical ideas by practitioners who engage with both Chinese and Western theatres has resulted in various productions and newly developed theatrical texts that draw not only on performance techniques from both Chinese and Western theatres, but also design elements from both forms. Two such examples include Mary Zimmerman’s 2013 The White Snake (first
produced at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival)—an adaptation of a classical Chinese legend for American audiences, and Wu Hsing-kuo and Tsui Hark’s 2004 production of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (Lin, producer) which uses performance traditions found in Beijing opera and *kunqu*. These productions provide interesting insight into how theatre-makers continue to address the problem of finding connections between two theatrical forms whose poetics and value systems are vastly different; they also reveal the difficulty of working with a theatre form where prevailing theatrical paradigms are different from one’s own.

Mary Zimmerman’s *The White Snake* is a spoken adaptation of the story of Bai Suzhen, a white snake spirit who travels to the earth with Xiao Qing, her green snake companion (Xiao Qing is called Greenie in Zimmerman’s text). In doing so, she falls in love with a mortal man Xu Xian, but attracts the wrath of the monk Fa Hai. This story is widely presented in various forms of regional Chinese opera, from Beijing opera to Cantonese opera. In addition to differences in language and specific performance techniques, each regional form of the opera features a slightly different storyline—an inevitability given the vast and long oral history of this tale.

Unlike previous Western adaptors of *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao*, Zimmerman does not adapt the legend in order to make its centuries-long timeline and many locations conform to the unities of location and time. In fact, she acknowledges the many different versions of the tale through narration, as is the case when the audience is introduced to various events that led to Bai Suzhen’s journey to earth (Zimmerman 8-11). As previously discussed, however, narration is a Western mode of theatrical
storytelling; it highlights the presence of a fourth wall, which is not distinctly present in Chinese opera.

Zimmerman does retain an element of song that is reminiscent of Chinese opera; a few free verse songs in the play are used to express emotions that characters do not explicitly express in dialogue with other characters. Take, for example, this song to be sung when Bai Suzhen and Xu Xian are to be married:

“My heart is blooming
Like a thousand flowers.
To Heaven and Earth we bow.
And now to our ancestors,
Bless us if you will.

This night and forever I to you am bound.” (Zimmerman 45)

The likening of an emotional state to a natural object—flowers—is reminiscent of the 借景抒情 technique encountered in the section on poetics, whereby elements of the natural environment are used to describe emotion. The declaration of an emotional state, “this night and forever I to you am bound” is also reminiscent of text in many Chinese operas; it simultaneously serves a dramatic purpose—expressing the speaker’s state of mind—as well as a narrative purpose—clarifying a character’s intent and action. However, as is the case with Fenton’s The Orphan of Zhao, Zimmerman—who also directed the premiere of The White Snake—assigns this song, and all other songs, not to any of the characters who are involved emotionally in the events of the play (such as Bai Suzhen or Greenie) but to narrator figures. What this does is emphasize the narrative purpose of the song, while de-emphasizing the ability of this song to express a specific character’s emotions. If
Zimmerman had instead assigned this song to Bai Suzhen, for example, the song would better serve a narrative and expressive purpose at the same time: expressing and contextualizing Bai Suzhen’s emotions in reaction to the specific circumstance of the moment in a lyrical, stylized and aesthetically pleasing manner—all goals of sung poetry in Chinese opera.

Zimmerman’s visual style, meanwhile, does take on a level of abstraction that is not present in the Western theatrical model, which prioritizes verisimilitude. For example, when Bai Suzhen and Greenie are in their snake forms, they are depicted as two puppets that are controlled by their respective actors (Zimmerman xvii, see figure 1)—in this way, audiences are reminded of the performativity of the theatre that is being presented, in a similar way that Chinese opera does. When Bai Suzhen and Greenie first meet Xu Xian, in the rain, Zimmerman depicts the falling rain using sheets of blue fabric that drape from the ceiling, rather than through a sound or lighting cue that closely mimics...
the appearance and sound of rain in real life (Zimmerman 24, see figure 2).

However, we must be careful to distinguish between the type of abstraction that occurs in her production of *The White Snake* and the type of abstraction that occurs in Chinese opera portrayals of the story. Aside from being specific techniques that do not exist within the Chinese opera canon (for example, while puppetry is found in certain forms of Chinese theatre, *xiqu* performers do not interact with puppets on the same stage), the techniques that Zimmerman uses achieve very different end results compared to the techniques of Chinese opera. In the case of presenting the characters as snakes, Zimmerman’s use of snake puppets—despite the puppets being a stylized tool—introduces an element of verisimilitude to the staging. The snakes, being otherwise difficult to portray objectively as they would exist in real life using human actors, are instead given a realistic representation onstage through a stylized tool. This is in contrast to the Beijing opera presentation of Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing as snakes: the two women are never presented in their snake forms, there is no idiosyncratic physicality to acknowledge that they were once snakes, and the actors are simply dressed in the prototypical costumes for the 旦 (*dan*) roles (Chinese National Peking Opera). It is sufficient for the audience to infer from both the text and their preexisting knowledge of this well-known tale that Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing are snakes. In the case of the depiction of rain, Zimmerman’s abstraction of rain as blue cloth is—despite the abstraction—still in service of verisimilitude onstage; the abstraction is used to mimic, albeit in a stylized manner, the presence of rain as we would see it in everyday life. Meanwhile, in the Beijing opera presentation of the white snake legend, there is no use of any production effects, such as lighting or music, to indicate rain, despite Xu Xian saying, “归来风雨忽迷离，风吹柳叶丝丝起，雨打桃花片片飞.” (This
translates to, “On the road back, the wind and rain suddenly obscure the road; the winds blow so that the leaves of the willow billow like silk; the rain strikes the peach blossoms until their petals fly.” (Chinese National Peking Opera, my trans.) The words of the text and the umbrella that Xu Xian carries while delivering this line are a sufficient depiction of the rain. Even when using abstract rather than strictly representational tools, we can see Zimmerman aiming for a certain standard of verisimilitude in a character’s physical form and a locale’s physical environment—verisimilitude that is not demanded in Beijing opera.

Other elements of Zimmerman’s original production that immediately and obviously resemble Chinese opera are certain pieces of costuming; Bai Suzhen, for example, wears a headdress that is similar to the headdress worn by the 旦 (dan or female) role in the Chinese opera tradition (Zimmerman 147, see figure 2). While none of the costumes in Zimmerman’s production—like costumes present in Chinese opera—are constructed from objectively accurate historical detail, and contain only hints of references to various periods in Chinese history, only Bai Suzhen’s costume is stylized in any way that significantly resembles the stylization of Chinese opera. More specifically, it is primarily towards the beginning of the play—when she is mostly a supernatural snake spirit rather than an everyday human—during which Bai Suzhen wears this headdress. We see this costume distinction between the supernatural and the everyday in other Western-based productions that draw from Chinese performance elements; one example is Julie Taymor’s 2004 production of Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte (produced by the Metropolitan Opera). The production draws on various elements of African and Asian performing and design elements; we can distinctly see a Chinese influence in the costume design for the Queen of the Night—a supernatural character. The silhouette of the costume, created by the flags
that extend backwards, are reminiscent of the costume worn by the 武旦 (wudan or warrior woman) role-type in Chinese opera (see figures 3 and 4):

![Figure 3: Taymor, Julie. Costume sketch for the Queen of the Night.](image1)

![Figure 4: Wudan costume.](image2)

In this production, we see once again the most stylized silhouettes and costumes being designed for the characters with more supernatural tendencies, instead of a stylization applied uniformly to all characters, regardless of whether they are human or supernatural.

It seems that while directors such as Zimmerman and Taymor are willing to embrace elements of Chinese theatre in their works, they only do so in order to highlight elements of the plot that are supernatural occurrences. While stylization in Chinese opera is used to depict both supernatural and everyday occurrences, Zimmerman and Taymor take two distinct approaches to depicting supernatural and everyday occurrences, favoring stylized tools to depict supernatural events and representational tools to depict everyday occurrences. What this means is that these stylizations and abstractions—despite being
drawn from Chinese performance techniques—are still being used with a very Western theatrical paradigm in mind: the stylizations—being used primarily for supernatural occurrences—are used in the pursuit of verisimilitude.

In the presentation of a Western text by a Chinese practitioner, do we run in to the same conflict regarding the need for verisimilitude? Wu Hsing-kuo and Tsui Hark’s *The Tempest* uses the performance techniques of Beijing opera and *kunqu*, in addition to a few elements of Taiwanese dance, to present Shakespeare’s play (Lin). As such, the acting technique is inevitably stylized, and will not employ the naturalistic external gestures that are found in Western theatre. The Chinese opera influences mean that acting technique, makeup and costuming are influenced by the character type assigned to each actor; Miranda, for example, closely resembles the *花旦* (*huadan* or unmarried woman) type, while make-up designs for Stephano and Trinculo are closely based on those used in the *丑* (*chou* or clown) character type.

In certain facets, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is perhaps one of the most ‘Western’ of his plays—with the exception of the opening scene, which occurs in a boat off the island, it is one of the few Shakespearean plays that strictly adheres to the unities of action, time and space: the action occurs within the confines of Prospero’s island, and resolves itself over the course of one day. Based on our discussion on Renaissance poetics and the suggestion that the unities facilitate the presence of verisimilitude onstage, might we see depictions of physical environment that are more objectively representative of the real world in Wu and Tsui’s production?
Although the actors’ overall acting style still resembles those found in Chinese opera—verse is sung, the performers speak in a falsetto, and traditional ways of moving the hands and feet remain—the adherence to the three unities means that certain gestures that exist in the Chinese opera canon become irrelevant. There is, for example, no more need for conventionalized movement that symbolizes long journeys, because the characters remain in the same location for the entirety of the play. A text that follows the three unities removes—by omission—certain symbolic components of Chinese opera, especially in terms of symbolic gesture and movements.

Perhaps the largest shift to objective representation that Wu and Tsui make in this production is in terms of the lighting design. This is especially evident in the opening scene of the play, where a storm sinks the ship carrying the Duke and his train. Whereas in the traditional Beijing opera of the white snake legend, the words spoken by the actors were sufficient in informing the audience of the raging winds and rain, Wu and Tsui have chosen, in a technique that deviates from traditional Chinese opera, to depict the wind and rain in a representational manner. The dimming of stage lights and the incorporation of strobe effects to mimic lighting flashes, as well as the sound effects that replace music and mimic thunder indicates on the part of the designer a desire to represent the storm in realistic detail. Additionally, lighting levels change throughout the production to indicate various parts of the island; they are lighter when we see Prospero and Miranda overlooking the ocean, for example, and dimmer when we see Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo sneak into Prospero’s lair. In a Chinese opera presented in the most conventional fashion, lighting levels would remain consistent throughout the play, and any information about the physical environment is generally indicated through a stylized background and inferred
through the words spoken. In this production of *The Tempest*, Wu and Tsui have supplied the audience with information about the environment by recreating these environments based on how one might experience them through the senses in real life: in real life, a lair might be dark, and so the lighting is dimmed for scenes that takes place in a lair. While this may seem like a trivial change, it reflects on Wu and Tsui’s part a theatrical approach that leans towards the verisimilitude that is present in Western theatrical forms.

While these productions by no means cover the many approaches that directors can use in attempting to integrate elements of Chinese and Western theatres, they do highlight some of the difficulty of using performance techniques that have risen out of a theatrical model that is contrary to the theatrical model of the original text. The following three sections of this thesis will detail the process of translating and staging *Pear Blossom Dream*, as well as audience reactions to the three different stagings. In detailing this process, I will make references to the previously discussed conflicts and challenges regarding the cross-cultural use of theatrical techniques, and note my own attempts to resolve such conflicts.

**5. Translating *Pear Blossom Dream***

We now turn our attention to the creative and performance portion of this thesis, beginning with the translation of He Peizhu’s *梨花梦* (*Pear Blossom Dream*). As discussed in the methodology, the English translation of this text will serve as a basis from which three separate stagings, each driven by theatrical paradigms from a different culture, will arise. While the text in its entirety was translated word-for-word to provide an extant English translation of the entire text, only scenes one and four were then further developed and refined for use in performance. This was done to keep the run time for the performance to
a reasonable length, given that the two scenes would be presented three times in one evening. The final translation used in performance can be found in appendices 1A and 1B, where the version found in appendix 1A contains the translation as taken directly from the original text, and the version in appendix 1B contains modifications made for one of the stagings. These modifications will be explained in the following section; for the time being, I would like to focus on the development of the original translation.

A five act xiqu, Pear Blossom Dream traces the thoughts of Du Lanxian, a noblewoman who yearns to share her literary talent with the world. Unable to do so due to her gender, she dresses as a man. In a dream, she encounters a pear blossom immortal who is also her soul sister. Separated from her soul sister when she is awake, Du Lanxian laments her existence.

The source material is taken from Academia Sinica's 1992 publication of He’s text. It has been edited for punctuation (in the original woodblock print, no punctuation is present), but otherwise bears little resemblance to how Western theatrical texts are published. The primary aspect in which it differs from Western texts is that lines are not attributed to specific characters. The playwright does not denote characters by their names, but rather by their role types; Du Lanxian, as the primary female character masquerading as a man, is referred to as the 小生 (xiaosheng or youthful male role) instead of by her name. This is due to the fact that Chinese opera actors who specialize in one role type may be often called upon to play two separate characters in the same play (Wu xvi), as is the case with the 贴旦 (tiedan or secondary female role) in Pear Blossom Dream who plays both Qing Yan and the Lotus Blossom Immortal. It is therefore the job of the
performer and (in this case) the translator to determine from context and any relevant stage directions which lines must be attributed to which performers. In translating *Pear Blossom Dream* into English, I have re-structured the text such that it resembles a script used for Western plays, with lines attributed to specific characters.

The attribution of lines to actors rather than characters is revealing of a subtle shift in focus in Chinese theatrical texts compared to Western theatrical texts. We see a preoccupation not with scripting plays where the actor and character are assumed to be one, but where actors and characters are, in fact, separate entities. Attributing lines to actors of specific types throws into sharper relief that the events occurring onstage are an artistic creation, and the characters are simply personas that the actors take on when the text requires them to. If we use the conclusion reached in section three of this thesis regarding the different acting techniques advocated by Stanislavski and Mei, we might say that the Western textual convention of attributing lines to characters reminds audiences that a fourth wall is often present in Western theatre, while audiences and actors engaging with traditional Chinese theatrical texts do not perceive a fourth wall where actor and audience exist in separate planes.

When stage directions are given in *Pear Blossom Dream*, they mostly denote specific gestures and movements that must be made for the text to function logistically; these include directions on entrances and exits, or directions on when a specific prop must be handled in order for the events of the play to proceed. Many stage directions do not explicitly name the location or the atmosphere of the location in which the events take place. This is unlike Western theatrical texts from the Renaissance onwards (although, as
seen in the previous discussion on poetics, Shakespeare is an anomaly, never noting down explicit locations in any stage directions). In his opening to *The Glass Menagerie*, for example, Tennessee Williams provides an extensive description of the Wingfield apartment. Although he professes that “the scene is memory and is therefore non-realistic” (Williams 21), take note of how extensively he describes the surrounding environment in terms of what can be perceived empirically through the senses:

“At the rise of the curtain, the audience is faced with the dark, grim rear wall of the Wingfield tenement. This building, which runs parallel to the footlights, is flanked on both sides by dark, narrow alleys which run into murky canyons of tangled clothes-lines, garbage cans, and the sinister lattice-work of neighboring fire-escapes... the audience hears and sees the opening scene in the dining room through... the transparent fourth wall of the building.” (Williams 21-22).

This description involves the presupposition of a fourth wall; in addition to William’s direct acknowledgement that the scene be viewed through a fourth wall, he describes the location that the scene takes place in not through the theatrical tools used to create it, but as if the physical space onstage were real.

With *Pear Blossom Dream* however, location (or for that matter, time) is never denoted in the stage directions in terms of a specific place or environment; it is instead framed in terms of the onstage objects used to imply a certain location. In her opening stage direction, He writes, “场上设扁舟一支，内香炉，茗碗，书卷等物” (He, 269). Translated into English, this reads, “Present onstage is a shallow boat; inside the boat are an incense burner, a tea bowl and scrolls, among other items” (my trans.). Here, instead of
being directly told that the scene takes place by a riverside, the audience is instead required to infer from the boat that the scene takes place by a river bank. As with the Chinese convention of attributing lines to a performer rather than character, this method of describing scenery—denoting the specific tools used to create a location onstage rather than the location itself—emphasizes the performativity of Chinese theatre. This is in opposition to Williams’ method, which—in describing a location not through the tools that are used to create it onstage, but through how we might see said location in real life—highlights a Western theatrical preoccupation with the need to maintain an illusion of reality.

In translating this piece into English, I have addressed this issue by reframing the stage directions in a way that a Western-trained theatre-maker might expect stage directions to read: replacing descriptions of objects used to imply a certain location with explicit description of said location. With He’s opening direction for *Pear Blossom Dream*, for example, I have instead written, “Spring time, along a river bank”. Does reframing this stage direction in this way influence the designers’ work on the play, and the way the actors perceive the location in which the scene occurs? It certainly helps to facilitate a staging of the text using Western theatrical principles: in drawing attention away from the creation of the riverbank, there is less focus on the performative aspect of creating this location.

In translating He’s text, we must also realize that it is written for the Chinese opera form, and follows a distinct set of conventions. Throughout the play, we see text set in verse and to specific tunes that He denotes (we may think of these as akin to arias in the Western
operatic tradition), as well as dialogue that is set in prose (these are generally analogous to recitatives in earlier Western operas). Translating the form of the language itself is therefore another consideration that we must make; the verse in particular requires careful thought. Should a verse form particular to the English language (such as blank verse) be used to demonstrate to audiences that the original text was in verse?

In creating this translation of *Pear Blossom Dream*, I have not transformed the Chinese verse into a specific verse form, and instead have simply used free verse, writing “song” in the translation to denote that the original words were set to a specific melody. There are indeed rhymes and rhythms present in the original Chinese that are no longer present once they have been transformed into free verse; however, I made the decision to use free verse based on a number of factors. Many verse forms in the English language developed as a result of specific historical, cultural and linguistic circumstances—English iambic pentameter, for example, was historically derived from Latin and eventually French and Italian poets. Iambic pentameter is a verse form developed for syllabic languages, which Chinese is decidedly not. I ultimately did not want to suggest that any of these distinctly Western cultural or linguistic circumstances had any role in the creation of *Pear Blossom Dream*, so free verse was used to denote any original songs in verse.

Although appearing somewhat tangential to the discussion at hand, it is interesting to note the relative paucity of verbs in classical Chinese relative to languages that can trace their roots to Western Europe. While the construction of verbs in Western European languages can be quite complex, with various conjugations that depend on the tense and case involved in addition to the pronoun performing the verb, verbs in the Chinese
language are much simpler, requiring little conjugation. In fact, some sentences in classical Chinese do not require verbs to be grammatically complete, and establish complete trains of thought through nouns, adjectives and implied actions. Even the very languages involved in the translation process reinforce the primary ideas arrived at in our discussion on theatrical poetics: Western theatre as primarily being occupied with Aristotelian action and motive, and Chinese theatre as focusing on image and expression of essence.

Thus, in transforming *Pear Blossom Dream* from Chinese into English, the language does—in a sense—need to be made more active. Much of the difficulty in translation lay in the need to infer verbs that were not present in the original text, to establish relationships between the performer and receiver of the action denoted by an implied verb, and to insert these verbs in a manner that retains the original intention of the author while making grammatical sense in the English syntax. Take, for example, the second line of verse from the first scene: “粉香腮莲花一朵” (He 269). Translated word-for-word, the text would read, “pink fragrant cheeks a lotus”. To translate this into a clause that makes sense in English, we must first infer that the character Du Lanxian is not merely naming a series of nouns and adjectives, but in fact is performing the action of comparing these “pink fragrant cheeks” to “a lotus”; we must therefore insert a verb into this sentence that establishes that these cheeks are in the act of being like a lotus. It is also necessary to clarify that the cheeks are Du Lanxian’s, and not another person’s. Only after clarifying the action performed and the performer of the action in relation to the speaker can we arrive at a translation that is satisfying in the English syntax: “my pink, fragrant cheeks are like a lotus”. Of this challenge in translating, there are many more instances.
Many of these more complex instances involve scenarios in which the nouns referred to without accompanying verbs are not merely simple everyday objects, but rather references to historical and mythical figures. For example, Du Lanxian speaks of Chang E and Nong Yu in the opening scene (He 270); each woman is described in a clause consisting only of nouns and few prepositions or verbs. In some cases where the cultural references are too concise and oblique, and would necessitate a complete overhauling of a sentence structure in order to make sense to an English audience (often this complete overhaul entailed the addition of verbs and prepositions in order to explicitly denote the relationships between the reference and the events occurring onstage), I have omitted the reference entirely. While omissions mean that both the actors and audiences gain less insight into the character’s thoughts and emotions, it was more important to me to mimic the sentence structure of the original Chinese as closely as possible. This was done out of the concern that changing the structure of the language too radically would subtly but profoundly change the lens through which the actors would relate to the text.

In fact, does the mere act of translating *Pear Blossom Dream* into English already make this play more ‘Western’ in the sense that the language has suddenly become more focused on action rather than image? Or do the elements of drama onstage that are not immediately concerned with text—such as costuming, music or properties—help to retain the inherent Chinese paradigm present in the original text? Audience reactions to the final series of stagings (to be discussed in the penultimate section of this thesis) may provide more specific answers to these questions. At this point in time, I would like to posit that the specific components of language underlying a dramatic text subtly shift the audience’s expectations for a different type of theatrical language. In this case, a translation from
Chinese into English may shift audience focus onto actions executed by the characters. Subtle shifts in language will also cause the actors to relate to and deliver the words in a slightly different manner; whereas a greater occurrence of verbs may cause the actors to focus more strongly on internal motivation, a de-emphasis on verbs and stronger focus on images may lead actors to think more about emotions evoked in response to these images. In this sense, *Pear Blossom Dream* has already become more ‘Western’ simply through the different language in which the text is now presented; we are working with a linguistic system that prioritizes a different aspect of communication.

In order to examine theatre as both a written and physical art form, it is now necessary to turn away from *Pear Blossom Dream* as a piece of text, and examine the various stagings developed in the performance component of this thesis.

6. Rehearsal: processes and rationales behind staging and design

This section will detail and discuss the various choices made during the staging, rehearsing and designing of *Pear Blossom Dream*, as well as challenges encountered and resolved. Although I have previously stressed this point, I will reiterate it once again: as rehearsal, design and performing are ultimately collaborative experiences, I will unfortunately run into the challenge of attempting to describe knowledge that is experiential. While the concepts driving each staging can be articulated using the theory and research explored previously, much of this knowledge is personal, as the sites of exploration upon which this research is conducted are living, breathing bodies, intuitions and emotions. Inevitably, there will be much information that will be lost in this attempt to
transcribe transient actions and experiences onto paper. A link to the video recording of the final performance is available in appendix 4.

The rationale behind specific staging choices made in the three iterations of these two scenes were shaped by both the poetics at large in each cultural tradition, as well as specific theatrical elements (lighting, sound, costume and props, staging) that are distinctive to each theatrical form. Informed by this knowledge, I have created three specific stagings that prioritize elements of time, location, action, and character in different ways.

**Developing an overall approach**

Of three stagings, the Chinese iteration of *Pear Blossom Dream* was perhaps the most straightforward to rehearse and stage. As evidenced in the discussion on Chinese poetics, Chinese literature and performance have developed under a cultural paradigm in which art is viewed as an expression of harmonizing one's own emotions within the larger context of a natural and communal societal order. One of the products of this worldview is that Chinese artists are often very aware of the dynamic artistic tradition that they contribute to, unlike Western art, which often places great focus on individual thought and is structured around opposing ideologies (Dale x, xi). A large part of cultivating a Chinese theatrical paradigm with regards to staging *Pear Blossom Dream* therefore involves acknowledging—before any specific work has begun on shaping the visual and auditory language of the play—that the creator should be aware of and subscribe to the well-established traditions and techniques of Chinese performance. As such, creating a distinctly Chinese iteration of *Pear Blossom Dream* involved honoring the already established
performing tools in *xiqu*, and using these to stage the text. As demonstrated before, many of these tools—which may seem abstract, distancing and unnatural to Western practitioners—are forged with a distinctly Chinese paradigm in mind, with a focus not on investigating actions and motives, but on externalizing emotion.

In comparison, the ‘hybrid’ approach used in staging *Pear Blossom Dream* involved combining philosophies, rehearsal techniques and design elements from both Western and Chinese theatres; the end goal of this staging was to assess whether or not these two vastly different performance styles could be brought together into one cohesive unit. I have used observations and research into previous cross-cultural productions to inform this staging, and attempted—as much as possible—to avoid the types of cross-cultural miscommunications that have occurred in previous hybrid approaches.

The Western staging of *Pear Blossom Dream* was perhaps the most difficult to handle; in adapting a traditional Chinese text to conform to Western poetics and a Western theatrical model, major changes were made to the text, and the final staging was highly antithetical to many Chinese performance principles. The major issue that needed to be dealt with was the three unities—discussed in the section on poetics. *Pear Blossom Dream*—as can be expected of a Chinese play—does not adhere to the unities of time or place: the first scene occurs during springtime, while the second scene being presented (the fourth act in the full text) occurs during autumn of the same year. While the first scene occurs by a riverbank, the second scene occurs in a garden. Additionally, as discussed in the section on poetics, the play as a whole lacks major plot tension that characterizes Western theatre; between Du Lanxian’s meeting of the immortal in the first scene and reunion with
the immortal in the last scene, the text consists primarily of a series of laments, rather than dialogue or action.

**Addressing the three unities**

It is quite difficult to resolve this lack of action without dramatically altering the content of the play; however, I did attempt as best as possible to address the lack of unity in time and space. This was done by modifying certain passages so that they would perform a narrative function—a distinctly Western theatrical feature. As noted in the discussion on the various translations of *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the House of Zhao*, introducing narrative passages is a tool that European playwrights have used in order to introduce temporal unity into Chinese theatrical texts. With *Pear Blossom Dream*, segments of songs during which a character was expressing her emotions were written into past tense (given that classical Chinese has no distinct tense conjugations, there is a certain liberty a translator can take regarding verb tense), while dialogues between characters were translated into the present tense (see appendix 1B for the full performance text with all tense modifications). Take, for example, this segment from the first scene that includes the past tense modifications:

**Du Lanxian:** (Song) Suddenly, I saw a woman whose grace one can only encounter once every three lifetimes; I had been desolate and alone until midday but at that moment, I was filled with extreme happiness. Her red cheeks, they were like peach blossoms between a person’s fingers. All alone had she snuck down from the heavens, and secretly unlocked the jade gate to the heavenly palace. She must have been lonely, unhappy and suffered much; prevented from wandering freely in that graceful gait of hers, her eyes couldn’t help but cloud with pain-filled tears.

Can I inquire as to your name? Where do you live? Why have you wandered here? Please enlighten my ignorance.
**Immortal:** You and I once lived together, how could you forget that? Today the pear blossoms are about to fall, spring is reaching its final phases, I couldn’t miss this sight.

I heartily entreat you to compose a verse for me; I don’t know if you would be willing to bestow it upon me to recite out loud?

**Du Lanxian:** Yes! You and I did once live together! Please wait for me to compose a verse.

(She spreads open a sheet of red silk, and when she has finished writing gifts the immortal with a small jade piece. The immortal takes the red silk and reads.)

**Immortal:**

Washing the red of springtime off my silk sleeves,

I am presented with a flower still decorated with dew drops.

The swallows are no longer returning and we must say farewell,

In the budding cold and misty rain I see a woman’s quarters.

Pink and soft dimples waste away like the fading evening,

And from the clouds a beautiful maiden falls to the earth.

I would ask Fei Huan for her reed flute,

And in the spring cold waken the myriad flowers with my song.

Oh! What melodious and beautiful words; I did not want to stop reading. But I am afraid that under the tempestuous winds and rain, the flowers in your poem would not have thrived; what unfairness to those beautiful grasses!

(Song) Nothing was left but these words that should be treasured like flowers, yet tell a sorrowful tale; I madly clung to springtime dreams of fragrant flowers and grasses. Were these feelings not the result of turbulent emotions that have accumulated in my heart from ancient times, whirling sorrows that my heart did not know how to hide from?

By re-writing segments of songs into the past tense, these songs take on a narrative function, whereby the character narrating is now recalling the events of the play. Given that the text in this staging both began and ended in this narrative mode, the final intended
effect was to establish a greater sense of temporal and spatial continuity by placing events occurring in the present tense into each character’s memories—somewhat akin to a ‘flashback’ framing device. We are now in an onstage space where the characters are narrating their memories to the audience, as opposed to seeing two separate scenes occurring in separate times and spaces.

These moments of narration were further clarified using lighting and sound design. Following the representative approach that Western theatre often takes with regards to design elements, moments in which narration is not occurring but when we are seeing the events of the text play out as memories in specific physical locations were crafted through objective, empirical detail. With regards to the first scene, which takes place during a spring day by the river, this meant examining the lighting and sounds present along riversides as they are perceived by our sense in real life, and replicating them onstage. As director, I provided the designers—Kelly Huang and Jodi Wei—with nature documentaries featuring these two environments; these videos served as sources for how the two environments would be like in real life. The same approach applied to the second scene, which occurs during an autumn night in a garden. The result of this approach was lighting that mimicked sunlight for the first scene, and moonlight for the second, as well as a host of sounds—including wind rustling, crickets and birdsongs—that one would observe if one were physically in these environments.

When the narration occurred, however, these lighting and sound effects disappeared, and were replaced by silence and a spotlight on the narrating character. Any non-narrating characters also froze at the same time as these lighting and sound changes.
The rationale behind this design was two-fold; the primary reason was to demonstrate to the audience that the characters were no longer in the physical environment in which the scene takes place, but that the play had now shifted into a narrative mode occurring inside the headspace of the narrating character. These shifts between narrative space and physical environment could have been done without the accompanying changes in lighting and sound; I imagine the effect here would be analogous to that of a Shakespearean soliloquy, where—by means of an established dramatic convention—a mere shift in an actor’s focus or target can drive dramatic action to a slightly more narrative mode in which the speaking character expresses her thoughts. However, the abrupt shift in lighting and sound introduces a slightly Brechtian element to the staging, and while I was not striving for complete emotional detachment, I wondered if these sudden shifts between a dramatic and narrative mode would make the audience feel any level of emotional detachment. After all, the change of lighting and sound further highlights the existence of a fourth wall (a distinctly Western theatrical concept)—a wall that is broken when a narrating character directly addresses the audience. In establishing this subtle Brechtian overtone to this Westernized staging, I would then have the opportunity to compare this to the Chinese staging, and gauge whether audiences experienced any similar distancing elements in the two stagings.

**Acting paradigms**

After all, as seen in section three, Chinese theatre does not presuppose the existence of any fourth wall—a crucial misunderstanding Brecht made when watching *xiqu*. In the early stages of rehearsal, I made sure to emphasize to actors in the Chinese staging that no fourth wall should exist between the audience and actor. I was also clear to de-emphasize
the role of action, plot and character motives as they relate to acting, and emphasize the outward expression of inner emotions through physical and vocal tools. This acting paradigm was crafted with the goal of setting up a specific relationship with the audience such that long passages of text would not feel like narration to the audience.

Present tense was used throughout the entire text in order to remove any narrative elements that the use of past tense was intended to achieve. The de-emphasis on action, plot and motives was achieved in tandem with emphasizing the characters’ inner emotional state. In speaking with the actors, my primary point was to draw attention to the long passages in the text in which the characters extensively describe the surrounding environment around them. One prime example is the opening of the second scene, in which Du Lanxian describes the nature around her, while lamenting the disappearance of the Pear Blossom Immortal. I introduced the (previously discussed in the section on poetics) concept of 借景抒情 (jiejing shuqing or using the environment to express one’s emotions) to the actors—encouraging them to think of these passages not as narration that set the scene up for the audience, but as an externalized train of thought, in which the qualities and the symbolic meanings of the physical environment around the character could be used to obliquely reveal the character’s emotions. The passage:

“Now, it is late autumn once again. Look at these crabapple petals, strewn like an unending streak of red tears; look at this pool of green weeds, filled with withering lotus roots.”

for example, was not to be delivered with the intention of establishing a time and place for the audience, but instead utilized as a declamation of the character’s emotions. This was
achieved through specific instructions on how to treat the audience and the characters on stage; the actors were told not to treat the audience as a spectator separate from the physical environment onstage (the riverbank and the garden in which the two scenes take place), but as spectators whose presence inside the physical environment was welcome. Additionally, the actors were instructed to treat the other actors onstage and the audience as similar entities—as listeners with whom each character’s inner emotions should be enthusiastically shared. In doing so, the actors did not presuppose a fourth wall.

One notable example of when this principle was applied was in the first scene, after Pear Blossom Immortal reads the poem that Du Lanxian has composed for her. She says the following words:

“Nothing is left but these words that should be treasured like flowers, yet tell a sorrowful tale; I madly cling to springtime dreams of fragrant flowers and grasses. Are these feelings not the result of turbulent emotions that have accumulated in my heart from ancient times, whirling sorrows that my heart does not know how to hide from?”

Rather than treat this passage as an aside, delivered outside the realm of knowledge of the other character onstage, or as a direct address to the audience, the actor was instructed to share these words with both the audience and Du Lanxian at the same time. This delivery creates an audience-actor relationship where the audience participates as an active persona with whom the actors can share their thoughts at any time. This is not intended to be presentational or distancing, as Brecht might suggest; we can contrast this to how the actors related to the audience in the Western-influenced staging. In that iteration of Pear
*Blossom Dream,* the fourth wall is clearly present and broken at times through narration; therefore, it is Western staging rather than the Chinese staging that takes on certain distancing elements.

Understanding the paradigm through which to mentally approach these lines was key for the actors in understanding the purpose of spoken poetry in traditional Chinese theatre: they came to use the poetry a tool to express their character’s emotions in the context of the surrounding physical world. This world could encompass both audience and onstage partners simultaneously. Once the actors had understood this mindset, I then went on to provide them with the appropriate physical and vocal tools from the Beijing opera vocabulary.

Whereas dramatism in Western theatre is derived from elements of psychological conflict and plot tension, dramatism in Chinese theatre is derived from the showcasing of the performer’s skill, wherein the skills used are stylized physical, visual and auditory expressions of a character’s emotional state. In terms of the physical aspect of *xiqu* performance, the hands and feet play an important role in expressing character emotion—a point I emphasize to the actors in the Chinese staging.

In working with the actors on the hands, one specific shape out of the many codified hand shapes that each symbolize a specific thought or emotion was used. Whilst the shape of the hands changes frequently throughout a *xiqu* scene, this staging of *Pear Blossom Dream*—in the interest of allowing actors to develop extensive familiarity with a few stylized gestures—primarily used a single hand shape often employed by younger 旦 (dan or female) characters: all the fingers are extended straight, and the middle finger and
thumb are brought close together. The specific technique utilized in the movement of the feet can be best described as quick succession of rapid, small steps, also distinctly used by 旦 (dan) characters. This gait involves rolling through the ball of the foot to the heel and taking very small steps while the knees are bent, giving the appearance that the upper body is floating. The actors were also introduced to the concept of 圆形 (yuanxing or roundness) that is prevalent in Beijing opera (Li 176, Riley 295-298, Wichmann-Walczak 132); in walking onstage or gesturing, they should avoid straight lines and angles as much as possible, and use curves and arcs. These techniques were all used to achieve a pleasing aesthetic—which is a critical component of Chinese opera. Notice that the acting techniques used are primarily concerned with the visual language onstage; reflecting once again an engagement with the 意象 (yixiang or idea-image) present in Chinese poetics.

Regarding vocal skills used in presenting the text, it was clear to me from the outset that the actors would not sing any of the text, as the technical skills needed for this endeavor cannot be developed in the time span of three weeks. (Professional xiqu performers often train for years in order to master a set of highly specialized skills that are needed for performance; in working with a rehearsal period that encompassed only three weeks, the actors were not able to acquire the breadth of skills that a fully staged Chinese opera would demand.) However, in order to capture some semblance of musicality in the words, most of the text work with the actors focused not on finding internal motives for the words that a character speaks (as would be the case in Western acting), but on exploring variations in pitch and rhythm. In particular, exercises that unlocked the extremes of the voice in terms of higher and lower registrations were repeated and applied to the text until
the actors felt that the greater variations in pitch were second nature, and could apply them in a way that was not artificial. We must recall at this point that when poetry is set to music, it is not for the purpose of showcasing the music; rather, the music is an extension of emotion expressed through the voice ("Mao’s Poetry” 22). This is why I emphasized to the actors that the pitch variations should feel natural and intuitively driven. As the actors were not singing, the sound designer and I came to the conclusion that a soundtrack featuring melodic tunes would not be an appropriate extension of the actors’ words. Instead, highly melodic music might overpower the actors’ words. As much of the actors’ vocal works centered on variations in pitch and rhythm, the sound designer and I ultimately settled on a more percussive soundtrack that functioned more harmoniously with the actors’ vocal delivery.

In the context of a highly symbolic and abstract performing style such as Chinese opera, it may seem inappropriate to encourage the actors to work intuitively. After all, to an audience not accustomed to the art form, their first impression may be that the conventionalized symbolic language and stylized physicality preclude any intuitively-driven acting. While movements and vocal delivery in Beijing opera are indeed choreographed and pre-planned, many practitioners and performers cite that they originate from deeply emotional sources. Our discussion on acting techniques and on Mei Lanfang’s thoughts on Stanislavski-based acting in section three demonstrated the importance of identifying with a character’s internal emotion as part of the xiqu acting technique. We see a similar sentiment in the writings of Ji Yun, a Qing dynasty scholar:
“... the actor replied, “When I impersonate a female on the stage, I not only try to look like a female in my physical appearance; I also try to feel like a female in the depth of my heart. It’s the tender emotions together with the sweet and delicate demeanor of a female that enthralls the audience.”” (89)

The stylization and symbolism in the drama should not be read as antithetical to intuition and emotion, but as distinctly Chinese external manifestations of these impulses. When the physicality of the actors is combined with the various production elements onstage, the two function in an aesthetically harmonious manner (think back to the harmonizing process discussed in the section on poetics).

In attempting to help the actors find the intuition behind these highly technical skills, I recreated as much as possible an extremely truncated xiqu rehearsal process by first practicing these technical skills repeatedly, and separately from the text. The rationale for beginning the rehearsal process in this manner was to firstly emphasize to the actors the symbolic and non-representational language that was being used onstage, but also to make these technical skills a part of muscle memory. Once these skills became an unconscious part of the actors’ physical language onstage, the actors were freer to find the natural impulses governing these very specific motions. Improvisations within the confines of this specific physical language proved to be useful in achieving this goal.

This acting approach—drilling physical and vocal skills into the actors—and then finding degrees of freedom and intuition within this framework contrasted greatly with the approaches used in the other stagings. While the Western and hybrid iterations of Pear Blossom Dream were dissimilar in other ways, the acting process behind both was steeped
in an exploration of actions, psychological motives and stream of consciousness—products of Stanislavski’s ideas (in all its variations) that populate modern Western acting schools. The rationale behind using a Western acting method in the hybrid staging as well as the Western staging was as thus: in the adaptations of Chinese texts for Western audiences that I have explored in this thesis (Fenton’s *The Orphan of Zhao* and Zimmerman’s *The White Snake*), the actors have always used a naturalistic, Western-style acting technique. It seems that directors of these productions see this Western technique as essential to successfully adapting Chinese theatrical texts for Western audiences.

Crucial to this developing Western-style approach in both the Western and hybrid stagings was considering the motive behind a character’s actions, rather than focusing on expressing emotion. Much of the acting process was centered on considering both external and internal impetuses that may compel a character to speak or perform an action, or using Stanislavski’s words, examining the “given circumstances” of these scenes (59). For example, because so much of the text involves description of the natural environment, much of the initial rehearsal process was spent assisting the actors in visualizing the specific details of the physical environment the characters are in, and discussing the quality of the objects within these environments. As much care was taken to be as specific as possible; for example, questions that I would ask of the actors include, “How tall are those flowers on the ground?” “Are they wet or dry, cold or warm?” Once the actors had shared their own visualization of these environments with each other, they were able to establish a shared physical space, one in which the objective details—filled out with their imaginations—would logically lead to the words that they were speaking.
Although the general approach used in the hybrid version was similar to the Western version, there are notable differences. There was, for example, no narrative element present in the hybrid staging; in delivering long monologues, the actors did not speak to the audience, but maintained a fourth wall between audience and stage, delivering extended sections of text to objects present in the environment in which the scenes are taking place. (One specific direction given to the actors was, “Deliver this portion of text as if sharing your secrets with the trees around you”). This approach maintains the logic of action and motive demanded by Western theatres by firmly planting the actors in a world separate from that of the audience; a fourth wall is erected, but never broken.

The hybrid approach borrows from Chinese modes of theatre by actively physicalizing a character’s inner emotions; however, rather than relying on a series of conventionalized symbols as is the case with Beijing opera, these physicalizations are naturalistic instead. For example, whereas Du Lanxian’s despair and longing for the Pear Blossom Immortal in scene two may be physicalized in the Chinese performance tradition through specific gestures and hand shapes, the hybrid staging physicalizes these emotions by establishing a prolonged moment of eye contact between the two characters, even though Pear Blossom Immortal is not in the garden space that Du Lanxian is in. A similar approach is used in scene one to physicalize the connection between the two characters; although the characters do not immediately speak to each other when they first meet, the prolonged eye contact they share makes their mutual attachment clear to the audience through a physically naturalistic gesture.
Production elements

In addition to specific approaches used by the actors, the hybrid staging deviates from the Western staging in that there are certain abstractions and deviations from objective reality—abstractions that are not present in the Western staging. The costuming in these two stagings is clear example; while the costuming in the Western staging takes on an objective and historically-accurate approach, employing Manchurian style clothing that would have dominated the 19th century, when He wrote this semi-autobiographical play (see figure 5), the costuming in the hybrid staging takes some historical liberties, as influenced by Beijing opera costuming principles.

Costuming in Chinese opera is not dictated by any form of historical or objective accuracy; whiles costumes we see in the greater Chinese opera world today were developed and conventionalized during the Qing dynasty, they do not reflect everyday Qing dynasty clothing (nor clothing from any other historical era, for that matter). The costumes instead serve to highlight the performer’s skill; even actors playing beggars are costumed not to reflect the poverty of their circumstances, but in a stylized way such that their expressive skills are highlighted. Therefore, in the Chinese iteration of *Pear
Blossom Dream, Du Lanxian and Pear Blossom Immortal were costumed in the garb suited for the 小生 (xiaosheng) and 小旦 (xiaodan) roles respectively. Both these costumes feature 水袖 (shuixiu or water sleeves)—long sleeves that trail and can be handled in a variety of ways to symbolically communicate different states of mind and to emphasize the expressive skills of the hands (see figure 6). The costume for Qing Yan, a 贴旦 (tiedan) role, does not features the water sleeves—typical of young servant-girl roles.

Figure 6: Costuming in the Chinese staging (my image).
Costuming in the hybrid version took after the costuming in the Chinese version by taking certain historical liberties; although the costumes here were not stylized to the point that they are not representative of fashion in any period of Chinese history (as is the case with Chinese opera costumes), Tang dynasty rather than historically accurate Qing dynasty costumes were used for this staging (there is a difference of about one to one-and-a-half millennia between the two dynasties) (see figure 5). In using costumes reflecting Tang dynasty clothing, a level of historical objectivity—objectivity that I attempted to achieve in the costuming of the Western staging—is still retained; however, using clothing from this particular era of Chinese history hopefully conveys some of the aesthetic harmony and stylization so important to Chinese theatre. Since the Tang dynasty is often regarded favorably by writers and artists of later dynasty as an ‘ideal China’, and recognized as the zenith of ethnic Han power and intellectual progression, costuming the characters in this era of Chinese clothing was done with the intention of conveying an aesthetic and artistic ideal while accounting for the need for Western historical objectivity and verisimilitude (a ‘hybrid’ between Chinese and Western approaches to theatre).
7. **Audience reactions to *Pear Blossom Dream***

When these three stagings were presented to audiences over the course of four performances, the order in which they were presented was randomized each night. The purpose behind this choice was to remove the order of the stagings as a possible contributing factor in shaping the audience’s reactions; prior to performance, there were concerns that the audience may react to the first staging most strongly because that would be their first encounter with the text, or react most strongly to the last staging because that would be the one that they might recall the most clearly. In randomizing the show order, we might be able to control for its effect.

Audience reactions were solicited through fifteen-minute talkbacks after each show, as well as through a survey, from which twenty-three responses were recorded. A link to the survey is presented in appendix three.

In general, there were a wide variety of responses from audiences, all of whom had varying levels of exposure to theatre and Chinese culture, and no concise consensus can be reached as to the effect of each of the stagings. There are, however, certain reactions that were recurring, as well as a few polarized reactions to certain stagings. Generally, talkbacks after the show revealed that audiences favored the hybrid staging heavily, as well as some preference for the Chinese staging. Audiences felt least emotionally connected to the Western version of the staging. The primary reason cited for this lack of connection to the Western staging was the use of the past tense narration in which the characters would break the fourth wall and address the audience directly—for many of the audience members, this resulted in a disconnect between the actors onstage. When asked to
compare this narration to the audience address used in the Chinese staging, audiences seemed to recognize that the audience address in the Chinese staging was a convention, and that they were being invited to share in the events onstage.

Given that the purpose behind this past tense narration was to examine if Brecht’s distancing effect does indeed mimic the relationship between the audience and performer in Chinese opera, I would say that the fact that audiences experienced greater disconnect in the Western staging compared to the Chinese staging suggests that Brecht’s distancing effect and the method of narrative-dramatic delivery in Chinese opera are not the same thing.

However, for certain audience members—especially those unfamiliar with Chinese opera—the production elements and the acting style of the Chinese staging did create a disconnect. Generally, the stylized elements of the Chinese presentation provoked two opposing responses: audiences either appreciated the aesthetic beauty of the costumes, hand shapes and movements of the actors (to use the words from survey responses, the “deliberate” stylization of the Chinese staging highlighted the “artistry” of the performers and was “beautiful”), or found the costuming and movement “distracting” and “awkward.” It seems that there was a conscious awareness of the theatricality and craft of the Chinese staging on the part of all audience members. However, those who found that the stylization created an emotional disconnect between performer and audience often noted in the survey that they were unfamiliar with Chinese opera, and were unsure of how to receive it.

This uncertainty on the part of certain audience members on how to receive the stylized elements of the Chinese staging might account for these polarized reactions. In
questions asking audience members whether or not theatre must be aesthetically pleasing, only one respondent—on a scale of one to six—agreed fully with this statement. Given that much of the dramatic tension in Chinese opera arises from the appreciation of the performers’ skill in the context of their character’s emotions, the fact that most audience members did not place a strong importance on the role of a pleasing aesthetic in theatrical performances could account for the disconnect that the Chinese stylization provoked in certain audience members.

What audiences did list as important in their evaluations of a theatrical piece was the emotional connection between characters onstage and the characters and audience, and, when asked to rank each of the stagings in order of emotional connection and impactfulness, a number of respondents conflated emotional connection with being impactful. The means by which this emotional connection was being created, however, was especially telling of the way the audience was evaluating the play. For many audience members, the most impactful moments of theatre occurred when they were treated as invisible observers of the events onstage, rather than being addressed directly. Placing the audience in the space of an invisible observer (effectively upholding and not breaking the fourth wall, a technique advocated by Stanislavski) meant—on the part of many audience members—that the characters were able to interact with each other and with the physical environment in which the scene takes place more fully. It is through this emotional interaction between characters that these audience members feel emotionally connected to the events onstage, and thus experience an “impactful” performance.
This may be why the majority of audience members responded to the hybrid staging of *Pear Blossom Dream* most favorably: in the hybrid staging, I deliberately place the audience in the position of being an invisible observer—there is no narration as is present in the Western version, and no declaration of emotion made simultaneously to the other characters onstage and to the audience as is the case in the Chinese staging. The actors addressed only each other (despite certain segments of text that—logically—cannot be delivered to another character onstage) or, if delivering extended monologues, addressed elements of the natural environment in the scene around them.

The survey also reveals an interesting distinction between what is considered real and what is considered believable onstage. A fair number of survey respondents—when asked what the words “theatrical reality” meant to them, expressed that events onstage were realistic if they were probable and logically sound events that “feel like [they] could actually happen”. When asked to expand on the differences between naturalism and believability in theatre, however, these respondents do acknowledge that there is an element of suspension of disbelief that applies to all theatrical performances, and that performances do not necessarily need to be naturalistic in order to be believable. This suggests that while the audiences who viewed this play do accept varying levels of stylization in the theatre, their primary point of reference for evaluating a theatrical performance involves—on either a conscious or unconscious level—an assessment of whether onstage events could logically and probably occur in real life. This idea is highly reminiscent of Aristotle's emphasis on unity of action as a series of necessary and probable events, and perhaps suggests that audience members who responded to the survey with
this particular response are on some level accustomed to evaluating theatre through an Aristotelian lens.

8. Conclusion

Any theatrical audience member will experience and evaluate theatre based on a certain set of expectations; these expectations—informeed by culture-specific principles on the purpose of theatrical, visual and literary art, and the specific mechanisms by which these art forms should fulfill these purposes—influence what an audience might consider important and effective in the creation and onstage presentation of theatrical text. These expectations provide suggestions as to how different theatres around the world have been shaped into the forms we know them to be today. When considered collectively, these varying expectations form paradigms through which audiences and theatre-makers of different cultures engage with theatre. When theatre-makers and audiences of contrasting paradigms meet, theatrical tools that were used to achieve a specific effect in one form of theatre suddenly take on new meanings.

In this thesis, I have attempted to elucidate and trace the sources of these theatrical paradigms in Chinese and Western theatre: in my exploration, I have identified action and verisimilitude as key components of the Western theatrical paradigm, and expression of emotion and visual symbolism as central to the Chinese theatrical paradigm. While the differences in these two paradigms mean that cross-cultural interactions between Western and Chinese theatres can easily result in misunderstandings, I have also offered instances in which Western and Chinese theatre share similarities.
These ideas are conclusions generated from this specific exploration; they should by no means be accepted as true for all theatre forms in the Western and Chinese theatre traditions. Inevitably, the omission of non-written theatrical forms, such as improvised theatre, dance drama, shadow puppetry or street performers means that the conclusions generated here only explore a small facet of theatre in Western and Chinese cultures. Exploration into these forms of theatre many provide contradictions or alternatives to the conclusions made here. Additionally, there are a number of theatrical schools of thought that have appeared in the last century that do not necessarily follow traditional models of Chinese and Western theatre established as here. While the discussion of Brecht and of Western-style Chinese plays here briefly touch on this issue, further discussion on these divergent schools of theatre—and whether they merely reinforce the existence of the prevailing theatrical paradigm or operate on completely new paradigm of theatre—would better inform the conclusions made here.

There is also the consideration that while theories of performance can shape the overall paradigms of different theatrical forms, personal knowledge plays a large part in the creation and reception of any theatrical experiences. An individual audience member may react differently to two different actors playing the same role in one theatre form for completely idiosyncratic reasons—this was certainly a possibility in the presentation of *Pear Blossom Dream*. In this scenario, personal preferences, which may or may not be informed by prevailing theatrical models, will also influence an individual's engagement with theatre. Therefore, while this thesis is able to examine collective impulses and responses to Chinese and Western performing paradigms, it has not examined the formation of these paradigms on an individual basis. A possible redress to this issue would
be to take a more personalized approach to investigating paradigms of theatre in Chinese and Western theatres, conducting research through means of interviews with audience members with varying levels of exposure to Chinese and Western theatres, and documenting their individual reactions to these theatre forms.

Theatre is an endeavor that requires the continuous, dynamic engagement of individuals on an intellectual and emotional level, and theatre-makers who challenge audiences through the creation of cross-cultural theatre will continue to contribute to this engagement. Think back to the woman introduced right at the beginning of this thesis—the woman onstage entering her garden. Although this might seem like an incredibly simple onstage action to execute, the circumstances and details regarding this simple onstage act have been influenced by thousands of years of culture-specific shaping of poetics, theatrical conventions and acting styles. The next time you see a person walk into a garden onstage, I challenge you to consider the many years of collective cultural thought that have shaped that single moment in time.
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Appendix 1A: Performance translation of scenes one and four of *Pear Blossom Dream* by He Peizhu, used in the hybrid and Chinese stagings

Scene 1: Presenting Flowers

(Springtime, along a river bank. Du Lanxian enters quietly, wearing a man’s dark hat and light clothing.)

**Du Lanxian** (Song): Although I am talented and capable, I lament that I am met with so many troubles; my pink, fragrant cheeks are like a lotus. A blue bead freezes on the corner of my eye; pear jade hangs on my sloping shoulders. A spring breeze disturbs my reflection; reflecting my sickly, lonely, worried, elegant countenance.

A desolate silhouette emerges between the silk-like reeds; reminiscing of home, I see myself once again lean upon a pillow while the stove is clanking. Cold rain falls on the little trees and the insects are quiet; pear blossoms call up all my memories of bygone times. I am Du Lanxian, I have a beautiful countenance and possess many talents, and I bear a divine, sage-like poise. My waist, limbs and gait are soft like a willow’s; when my breath flows from my lips, orchids bloom like the swelling water of the Li River. At the age of ten I was an expert in embroidery, and I am able to compose a verse in seven steps. Now I travel north to accompany my husband; on the road, the dew and wind have been like a heavy curtain, and we have eaten only spicy and bitter food. I recall the Han River and my female neighbors and friends, playing with grass and examining flowers, studying under the clouds and falling drunk under the moon. Sometimes I hoped that I might be a man, and be a revered and respected scholar. Today the spring is colored bright red, and I am finding it difficult to let go of these attachments, so I play at being a man in these garments. Oh, to think of the old days!

(Song) With endless stems of emerald-green lotuses and red beans I bundle my emotions into this little bouquet, and in a blind drunken stupor, gaze at people washing their clothes in the river, as if in a dream. I ask the east wind, do you know what is in my heart? Nong Yu lived in the Qin Tower, and Chang E resides in the moon’s craters; both are unique and full of grace, but even they can only gaze at and listen to humans from afar, and are trapped lamenting their inescapable fate.

Emotions trap people. For the time being, I will retreat behind my bed curtain to rest.

(The immortal enters carrying a pear blossom.)

**Immortal** (Song): With nothing to do in the courtyard, and the harsh spring hastily passing, who would want to tend to the white flowers by the east gate, and practice
calligraphy? Over these past days, why has my heart been so disturbed, and why have the wind and rain been so ferocious?

(There is a sound from inside.)

Where did that sound come from? I see that there is a small boat here. That sound was mellow and beautiful—like the pine leaves in the wind mimicking the gentle swish of open waves or the sound of rain falling on bamboo; it was very pleasing to hear. (She sees Du Lanxian and is startled.) I, Lan Xiang, have been banished to this earthly realm, and have never seen a mortal before. Encountering this person here today—well, I should proceed to find out more from her, shouldn’t I?

(Song) Pulling my silk dress behind me, I walk past these verdant plants. Oh! The flowers have been crushed under my feet; to see such a sight increases my hate and anxiety. I have only a furrowed brow and tear-filled eyes. (She steps onto the boat. Du Lanxian awakes with a start, lets the immortal sit, and sings to the audience.)

**Du Lanxian:** (Song) Suddenly I see a woman whose grace one could only encounter once every three lifetimes; I have been desolate and alone until midday but am now extremely happy. Her red cheeks, they are like peach blossoms between a person’s fingers. All alone has she snuck down from the heavens, and secretly unlocked the jade gate to the heavenly palace. She must have been lonely, unhappy and suffered much; prevented from wandering freely in that graceful gait of hers, her eyes can’t help but cloud with pain-filled tears.

Can I inquire as to your name? Where do you live? Why have you wandered here? Please enlighten my ignorance.

**Immortal:** You and I once lived together, how could you forget that? Today the pear blossoms are about to fall, spring is reaching its final phases, I couldn’t miss this sight.

I heartily entreat you to compose a verse for me; I don’t know if you would be willing to bestow it upon me to recite out loud?

**Du Lanxian:** Yes! You and I did once live together! Please wait for me to compose a verse.

(She spreads open a sheet of red silk, and when she has finished writing gifts the immortal with a small jade piece. The immortal takes the red silk and reads.)

**Immortal:**

Washing the red of springtime off my silk sleeves,

I am presented with a flower still decorated with dew drops.

The swallows are no longer returning and we must say farewell,
In the budding cold and misty rain I see a woman's quarters.

Pink and soft dimples waste away like the fading evening,

And from the clouds a beautiful maiden falls to the earth.

I would ask Fei Huan for her reed flute,

And in the spring cold waken the myriad flowers with my song.

Oh! What melodious and beautiful words; I did not want to stop reading. But I am afraid that under the tempestuous winds and rain, the flowers in your poem would not have thrived; what unfairness to those beautiful grasses!

(Song) Nothing is left but these words that should be treasured like flowers, yet tell a sorrowful tale; I madly cling to springtime dreams of fragrant flowers and grasses. Are these feelings not the result of turbulent emotions that have accumulated in my heart from ancient times, whirling sorrows that my heart does not know how to hide from?

**Du Lanxian:** (Song): From this flat boat I see the moon slowly grow small, and the green shadows of the trees pass by. A puff of white cloud wraps itself around the falling moon. This red silk—although Mei Fei’s pearl-like tears do not adorn it—there are still beautiful women who would look upon it. I only wish I could bundle all my feelings, falling like the tears of a candle, into it. (There is a sound from within.) The boat has suddenly moved; fear grips my soul. (The Immortal exits. Du Lanxian awakes.) It was just a dream. Recalling that scene before my eyes, how sorrowful it was!

(Song) It was like a sheet of chilly rain striking the lotus flowers, like a swarm of sorrowful moths throwing themselves into the fire.

It is already near noon, I might as well ask the captain to set off.

(Song) For the time being let me listen to this little girl sing a boat song. Wiping clean the trails that my tears have left, and with lovesick pining, I will retreat into the nest of my heart, and stay there all day. (She exits.)

**Qing Yan:**

Poets only know how to speak of a beautiful woman; only she has feelings more expansive than the night sky.

The willows tethered to the riverbank despise witnessing this separation, the racing clouds and passing moon are witness to our predestined fates.
Scene 2 [scene 4 in the original text]: Sorrowful Autumn

(That same year, autumn. It is now deep in the middle of the night. Onstage, we see a garden filled with flowers and bamboo trees. Du Lanxian enters in a male official’s headdress and robes. Her pining for the Immortal has clearly taken a physical toll on her.)

Du Lanxian: (Song) The sycamore and the bamboo leaves murmur; together, they rustle and tap endlessly on the jade-colored windows. My own sickly reflection frightens me to my core, and with my rose-embroidered handkerchief I ceaselessly wipe away my tears.

Mindlessly, I have replayed my springtime dream while gazing into the mirror, my withered brows are slowly disappearing. I lament that my womanly bones are becoming thinner than cotton fibers spun from a plant; I am even thinner than a pear tree blossom. I am Lanxian. After sketching the likeness of me and my sister-immortal, the spring and summer seemed to wither and die right before my eyes. Now, it is late autumn once again. Look at these crabapple petals, strewn like an unending streak of red tears; look at this pool of green weeds, filled with withering lotus roots. Amongst the shadows of the sparse willow branches, the timid cicadas dart about in the night; under the shadows of the silent plantain tree, the deer now sleep deep into the day. Oh! I have been sick for almost a year—my many worries are like a cocoon entombing me. From inside this inlaid boudoir and toilette filled with hairpins, how can I ever seek out my soul-sister? I could go for a quick stroll, and recall the immortal’s countenance, and use that to chase away the silence—there’s not anything wrong with that! Oh!

(Song) I think of the immortal’s beautiful face and graceful bearing; even if she washed off her heavenly trappings she would still be as beautiful. Her soft words are like the songs of orioles and parrots, and make my tears flow in a small stream, as if they were one strand of unbroken silk. I cannot help but endlessly think of her; she must be living in the city of immortals. If I played a song on this pearl-inlaid, clear-sounding flute, would my soul-mate hear me? It is almost daybreak; the flowers have bowed their buds and the moon is calm. My pain, it is like the tired butterflies and cold bees being jolted from an autumn dream; the cool night, it is resplendent with the perfume of purple azaleas and red ginger.

The gentle night stretches into the heavens; where are you beautiful immortal? Let me turn around these hills and creeks, and lean against the fence to rest a little.

(Song) The weather is clear and the night sky is tender; the thin trees flap and rustle in the heavy wind. The falling leaves pile haphazardly in the courtyard; the symphony of crickets chirp and the moss is cold. Standing by this pavilion surrounded by willows, I gaze at the autumn waters through the tree branches. Look into the center of the rippling moon, and see how it reflects my wasted silhouette—what a pitiful sight; I fear that under these silk robes my sick bones will no longer be able to endure. Ambling mindlessly, who will ask
after me? Oh! Another gust of wind. See the dew splashing onto the shoots and soaking the green grasses; see the wind carry the reeds onto the far side of the pond.

(The Tiedan playing the servant girl Qing Yan enters, carrying a candle.)

**Qing Yan** (Song): Holding this torch, I emerge into the fragrant pavilion, the autumn moon is clear like a palace mirror. Let me pass around this thick grass. Because she has spent all her time pining away, my mistress has become weak and will not leave her quarters; she has many worries and sicknesses. Under the strains of an incomplete song, her pining for the lady increases, and her thoughts grow heavy.

Mistress, mistress, it is already deep into the night, the dew is fresh and the wind is cold; with your slim and sickly body, how can you sit alone like this?

**Du Lanxian:** Qing Yan, I also don't know why I sit here; I felt that my heart was heavy, so I came for a short stroll.

(song) As I admire the sunset and the autumn days that pass, I think of that beautiful immortal I encountered in the springtime. The more I envision her face, the more I am unwilling to part with that memory of her; remembering the poem I wrote for her on a red sheet of silk, I lament that I have not received any messages from her. In my sleep I am unable to dream of her; as I pace I envision the jewelry on her face. Qing Yan, my heart, it has tasted endless grief and sorrow. Bone-deep are these feelings, how I have suffered this past summer! Look at me; in loneliness, I am like a tender orchid in snow and can no longer endure this pain. You and I, we are devoted to each other like a shadow is attached to a body; we fear what the autumn winds bring and we are both lonely in this world.

**Qing Yan:** Mistress please do not work yourself up, come back into the room for some rest first.

(Song) The incense in the burner has died out, it is already the third watch of the night. Mistress! Mistress! Your garments which are light as a cloud and luminous as the moon trail along the green garden path. Pear blossom immortal! Pear blossom immortal! In your heavenly palace inlaid with pearls you are trapped under the curved roofs. It is clear, right at this point in the deep night, my mistress must leave behind any notions of you, and wake from this living dream. (Du Lanxian and Qing Yan walk arm in arm.)

(Song) With gentle entreaties and soft voices, we walk arm in arm around the pavilion. The pink blush on my mistress’ cheeks has withered and her beauty is fading; a broken heart and a sickly spirit makes her body even more wasted. I know: right at this point in the deep night, my mistress must wake from this living dream.
The wind rustles and rises into the Milky Way, but the screens in the room obscure the passing moon.

Remembering the rain falling during the pear blossom season, she sits in the cold nights and pines to be reunited with her long-lost soul mate.

Appendix 1B: Performance translation of scenes one and four of *Pear Blossom Dream* by He Peizhu, used in the Western staging

**Scene 1: Presenting Flowers**

(Springtime, along a river bank. Du Lanxian enters quietly, wearing a man’s dark hat and light clothing.)

**Du Lanxian** (Song): Although I am talented and capable, I lament that I am met with so many troubles; my pink, fragrant cheeks are like a lotus. A blue bead freezes on the corner of my eye; pear jade hangs on my sloping shoulders. A spring breeze disturbs my reflection; reflecting my sickly, lonely, worried, elegant countenance.

A desolate silhouette emerges between the silk-like reeds; reminiscing of home, I see myself once again lean upon a pillow while the stove is clanking. Cold rain falls on the little trees and the insects are quiet; pear blossoms call up all my memories of bygone times. I am Du Lanxian, I have a beautiful countenance and possess many talents, and I bear a divine, sage-like poise. My waist, limbs and gait are soft like a willow’s; when my breath flows from my lips, orchids bloom like the swelling water of the Li River. At the age of ten I was an expert in embroidery, and I am able to compose a verse in seven steps. Now I travel north to accompany my husband; on the road, the dew and wind have been like a heavy curtain, and we have eaten only spicy and bitter food. I recall the Han River and my female neighbors and friends, playing with grass and examining flowers, studying under the clouds and falling drunk under the moon. Sometimes I hoped that I might be a man, and be a revered and respected scholar. Today the spring is colored bright red, and I am finding it difficult to let go of these attachments, so I play at being a man in these garments. Oh, to think of the old days!

(Song) With endless stems of emerald-green lotuses and red beans I bundle my emotions into this little bouquet, and in a blind drunken stupor, gaze at people washing their clothes in the river, as if in a dream. I ask the east wind, do you know what is in my heart? Nong Yu lived in the Qin Tower, and Chang E resides in the moon’s craters; both are unique and full
of grace, but even they can only gaze at and listen to humans from afar, and are trapped lamenting their inescapable fate.

Emotions trap people. For the time being, I will retreat behind my bed curtain to rest.

(The immortal enters carrying a pear blossom.)

**Immortal** (Song): With nothing to do in the courtyard, and the harsh spring hastily passing, who would want to tend to the white flowers by the east gate, and practice calligraphy? Over these past days, why has my heart been so disturbed, and why have the wind and rain been so ferocious?

(There is a sound from inside.)

Where did that sound come from? I see that there is a small boat here. That sound was mellow and beautiful—like the pine leaves in the wind mimicking the gentle swish of open waves or the sound of rain falling on bamboo; it was very pleasing to hear. (She sees Du Lanxian and is startled.) I, Lan Xiang, have been banished to this earthly realm, and have never seen a mortal before. Encountering this person here today—well, I should proceed to find out more from her, shouldn't I?

(Song) Pulling my silk dress behind me, I walk past these verdant plants. Oh! The flowers have been crushed under my feet; to see such a sight increases my hate and anxiety. I have only a furrowed brow and tear-filled eyes. (She steps onto the boat. Du Lanxian awakes with a start, lets the immortal sit, and sings to the audience.)

**Du Lanxian:** (Song) Suddenly, I saw a woman whose grace one can only encounter once every three lifetimes; I had been desolate and alone until midday but at that moment, I was filled with extreme happiness. Her red cheeks, they were like peach blossoms between a person’s fingers. All alone had she snuck down from the heavens, and secretly unlocked the jade gate to the heavenly palace. She must have been lonely, unhappy and suffered much; prevented from wandering freely in that graceful gait of hers, her eyes couldn’t help but cloud with pain-filled tears.

Can I inquire as to your name? Where do you live? Why have you wandered here? Please enlighten my ignorance.

**Immortal:** You and I once lived together, how could you forget that? Today the pear blossoms are about to fall, spring is reaching its final phases, I couldn’t miss this sight.

I heartily entreat you to compose a verse for me; I don’t know if you would be willing to bestow it upon me to recite out loud?

**Du Lanxian:** Yes! You and I did once live together! Please wait for me to compose a verse.
(She spreads open a sheet of red silk, and when she has finished writing gifts the immortal with a small jade piece. The immortal takes the red silk and reads.)

**Immortal:**

Washing the red of springtime off my silk sleeves,

I am presented with a flower still decorated with dew drops.

The swallows are no longer returning and we must say farewell,

In the budding cold and misty rain I see a woman's quarters.

Pink and soft dimples waste away like the fading evening,

And from the clouds a beautiful maiden falls to the earth.

I would ask Fei Huan for her reed flute,

And in the spring cold waken the myriad flowers with my song.

Oh! What melodious and beautiful words; I did not want to stop reading. But I am afraid that under the tempestuous winds and rain, the flowers in your poem would not have thrived; what unfairness to those beautiful grasses!

(Song) Nothing was left but these words that should be treasured like flowers, yet tell a sorrowful tale; I madly clung to springtime dreams of fragrant flowers and grasses. Were these feelings not the result of turbulent emotions that have accumulated in my heart from ancient times, whirling sorrows that my heart did not know how to hide from?

**Du Lanxian:** (Song): From the flat boat, I saw the moon slowly grow small, and the green shadows of the trees pass by. A puff of white cloud wrapped itself around the falling moon. This red silk—although Mei Fei’s pearl-like tears do not adorn it—there are still beautiful women who would look upon it. I only wish I could have bundled all my feelings, falling like the tears of a candle, into it. (There is a sound from within.) The boat has suddenly moved; fear grips my soul. (The Immortal exits. Du Lanxian awakes.) It was just a dream. Recalling that scene before my eyes, how sorrowful it was!

(Song) It was like a sheet of chilly rain striking the lotus flowers, like a swarm of sorrowful moths throwing themselves into the fire.

It is already near noon, I might as well ask the captain to set off.
(Song) For the time being let me listen to this little girl sing a boat song. Wiping clean the trails that my tears have left, and with lovesick pining, I will retreat into the nest of my heart, and stay there all day. (She exits.)

Qing Yan:

Poets only know how to speak of a beautiful woman; only she has feelings more expansive than the night sky.

The willows tethered to the riverbank despise witnessing this separation, the racing clouds and passing moon are witness to our predestined fates.

Scene 2 [scene 4 in the original text]: Sorrowful Autumn

(That same year, autumn. It is now deep in the middle of the night. Onstage, we see a garden filled with flowers and bamboo trees. Du Lanxian enters in a male official’s headdress and robes. Her pining for the Immortal has clearly taken a physical toll on her.)

Du Lanxian: (Song) The sycamore and the bamboo leaves murmur; together, they rustle and tap endlessly on the jade-colored windows. My own sickly reflection frightens me to my core, and with my rose-embroidered handkerchief I ceaselessly wipe away my tears.

Mindlessly, I replayed my springtime dream while gazing into the mirror; my withered brows slowly disappeared. I lamented how my womanly bones were becoming thinner than cotton fibers spun from a plant; now, I am even thinner than a pear tree blossom. I am Lanxian. After sketching the likeliness of me and my sister-immortal, the spring and summer seemed to wither and die right before my eyes. Today, it is late autumn once again. Look at these crabapple petals, strewn like an unending streak of red tears; look at this pool of green weeds, filled with withering lotus roots. Amongst the shadows of the sparse willow branches, the timid cicadas dart about in the night; under the shadows of the silent plantain tree, the deer now sleep deep into the day. Oh! I have been sick for almost a year—my many worries are like a cocoon entombing me. From inside this inlaid boudoir and toilette filled with hairpins, how can I ever seek out my soul-sister? I could go for a quick stroll, and recall the immortal’s countenance, and use that to chase away the silence—there’s not anything wrong with that! Oh!

(Song) I think of the immortal’s beautiful face and graceful bearing; even if she washed off her heavenly trappings she would still be as beautiful. Her soft words are like the songs of orioles and parrots, and make my tears flow in a small stream, as if they were one strand of unbroken silk. I cannot help but endlessly think of her; she must be living in the city of immortals. If I played a song on this pearl-inlaid, clear-sounding flute, would my soul-mate...
hear me? It is almost daybreak; the flowers have bowed their buds and the moon is calm. My pain, it is like the tired butterflies and cold bees being jolted from an autumn dream; the cool night, it is resplendent with the perfume of purple azaleas and red ginger.

The gentle night stretches into the heavens; where are you beautiful immortal? Let me turn around these hills and creeks, and lean against the fence to rest a little.

(Song) The weather is clear and the night sky is tender; the thin trees flap and rustle in the heavy wind. The falling leaves pile haphazardly in the courtyard; the symphony of crickets chirp and the moss is cold. Standing by this pavilion surrounded by willows, I gaze at the autumn waters through the tree branches. Look into the center of the rippling moon, and see how it reflects my wasted silhouette—what a pitiful sight; I fear that under these silk robes my sick bones will no longer be able to endure. Ambling mindlessly, who will ask after me? Oh! Another gust of wind. See the dew splashing onto the shoots and soaking the green grasses; see the wind carry the reeds onto the far side of the pond.

(The Tiedan playing the servant girl Qing Yan enters, carrying a candle.)

Qing Yan (Song): Holding a torch, I emerged into the fragrant pavilion; the autumn moon was clear like a palace mirror. Let me pass around this thick grass. Because she spent all her time pining away, my mistress became weak and did not leave her quarters; she had many worries and sicknesses. Under the strains of an incomplete song, her pining for the lady increased, and her thoughts grew heavy.

Mistress, mistress, it is already deep into the night, the dew is fresh and the wind is cold; with your slim and sickly body, how can you sit alone like this?

Du Lanxian: Qing Yan, I also don't know why I sit here; I felt that my heart was heavy, so I came for a short stroll.

(song) As I admire the sunset and the autumn days that pass, I think of that beautiful immortal I encountered in the springtime. The more I envision her face, the more I am unwilling to part with that memory of her; remembering the poem I wrote for her on a red sheet of silk, I lament that I have not received any messages from her. In my sleep I am unable to dream of her; as I pace I envision the jewelry on her face. Qing Yan, my heart, it has tasted endless grief and sorrow. Bone-deep are these feelings, how I have suffered this past summer! Look at me; in loneliness, I am like a tender orchid in snow and can no longer endure this pain. You and I, we are devoted to each other like a shadow is attached to a body; we fear what the autumn winds bring and we are both lonely in this world.

Qing Yan: Mistress please do not work yourself up, come back into the room for some rest first.
(Song) The incense in the burner has died out, it is already the third watch of the night. Mistress! Mistress! Your garments which are light as a cloud and luminous as the moon trail along the green garden path. Pear blossom immortal! Pear blossom immortal! In your heavenly palace inlaid with pearls you are trapped under the curved roofs. It is clear, right at this point in the deep night, my mistress must leave behind any notions of you, and wake from this living dream. (Du Lanxian and Qing Yan walk arm in arm.)

(Song) With gentle entreaties and soft voices, we walked arm in arm around the pavilion. The pink blush on my mistress’ cheeks had withered and her beauty was fading; a broken heart and a sickly spirit made her body even more wasted. I knew, right at that point in the deep night: my mistress must wake from her living dream.

The winds rustled and rose into the Milky Way, but the screens in the room obscured the passing moon.

Remembering the rain falling during the pear blossom season, she sat in the cold nights and pined to be reunited with her long-lost soul mate.
Appendix 2: Word-for-word translation of *Pear Blossom Dream* by He Peizhu, used to inform the performance translation

The following translation is the first word-for-word translation produced from the entirety of the original *Pear Blossom Dream* text. This text was used to inform the performance version of the play.

I have used the Western opera convention of aria and recitative to distinguish between text that is sung, following a certain form, structure and melody, and text that does not follow any specific form, structure or melody.

Items in the square brackets are my own additions and not part of the original text. These include character names, which are not given in the original text. Where each character’s intentions behind symbols, historical references and allusions—of which Chinese is full of—can be explained fairly succinctly, I have also included them in square brackets. Longer explanations are in footnotes. In the interest of preserving the original language I have left any symbols and references in the body of the text, rather than delete obscure symbols completely and replace them with their figurative meaning. Punctuation marks are also included in square brackets; these marks indicate punctuation not present in the 1992 Academia Sinica edition of the text, or punctuation marks in the 1992 edition that I have retained (such that the translated text would closely resemble the original) but do not make sense in the English syntax. (There are no punctuation marks in the original woodblock print of *Pear Blossom Dream*, as is the convention with classical Chinese.

(Rounded brackets are part of the 1992 Academia Sinica edition of the text, upon which this translation is based.)

*Pear Blossom Dream*

(Qing dynasty) Composed by He Peizhu of Huangshan, styled as Zheng Xiang

**Volume 1: Presenting Flowers**

(Present onstage is a shallow boat; inside the boat are an incense burner, tea bowl and scrolls, among other items.)
(The 小生 xiaosheng¹ [Du Lanxian], wearing a dark hat and light clothing, enters quietly, and sits in the center of the boat.)

**[Du Lanxian]** (Northern New Water Song [OR “aria”]): Although I am talented and capable, I lament that I am met with so many troubles; my pink, fragrant cheeks are like a lotus. A blue bead freezes on the corner of my eye; pear jade hangs on my sloping shoulders². A spring breeze disturbs my reflection; reflecting my sickly, lonely, worried, elegant countenance.

[“Recitative”] A desolate silhouette emerges between the silk-like reeds; reminiscing of home, I see myself once again lean upon a pillow while the stove is clanking. Cold rain falls on the little trees and the insects are quiet[,] pear blossoms call up all my memories of bygone times. I am Du Lanxian, I have a beautiful countenance and possess many talents, and I bear a divine, sage-like poise. My waist, limbs and gait are soft like a willow’s; when my breath flows from my lips, orchids open like the water of the Li River. At the age of ten I was an expert in embroidery, and I am able to compose a verse in seven steps. Now I travel north to accompany my husband[,] on the road, the dew and wind have been like a heavy curtain, and we have eaten only spicy and bitter food. I recall the Han River and my female neighbors and friends, playing with grass and examining flowers, studying under the clouds and falling drunk under the moon[,] sometimes I hoped that I might be a man, and be one who carries incense and ink slabs [i.e. a scholar]. Today the spring is colored bright red, and I am finding it difficult to let go of these attachments, so I play sit here in these men’s garments. Oh, to think of the old days!

(Arranging Cotton Wads Southern Yue Song [OR “aria”]) With endless stems of emerald-green lotuses and red beans³ I bundle my emotions into this little nest [bouquet?], and in a blind drunken stupor, gaze at people washing their clothes [in the river] as if I am entering a dream. I ask the east wind, do you know what is in my heart? Nong Yu lived in the Qin Tower⁴, and Chang E resides in the moon’s craters⁵[,] both are unique and full of grace, but even they can only gaze and listen to humans from afar[,] and are trapped lamenting their inescapable fate.

[“Recitative”] Emotions trap people[,] but for the time being, I will retreat behind my bed cerain to rest.

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¹ 小生 refers to the male lead in a Chinese opera. In this case, Du Lanxian—who is a female character masquerading as a man—is played by a male actor
² Traditionally considered attractive
³ Red beans were a symbol of lovesickness
⁴ Allusion to Nong Yu, a beautiful woman whose father built a tower for her
⁵ Allusion to Change E, an immortal who lives on the moon (with her rabbit)
(A beautifully made-up Xiao Dan⁶ [the immortal] enters carrying a pear blossom.)

**Immortal** [Song as before [OR “aria”]]: With nothing to do in the courtyard, and the harsh spring hastily passing, who would want to tend to the white flowers by the east gate, and practice calligraphy? These few days, why is my heart so disturbed, and why have the wind and rain been so ferocious? It is as if the buildings are tumbling and the armies have set off⁷, an equal waste of time. The sufferings of the mortal world are endless.[]

(There is a sound from inside.) ([The immortal] glances around.)

[“Recitative”] Where did that sound come from? I see that there is a small boat here. That sound was mellow and beautiful[,] like the pine leaves in the wind mimicking the gentle swish of open waves or the sound of rain falling on bamboo, it was very pleasing to hear. (She sees [Du Lanxian], and is startled.) I[,] Lan Xiang[,] have been banished to the world of the mortals, and have never seen anything like this. To meet [this person] here today, I should proceed to find out more from her, shouldn’t I? (She walks.)

(Black Sesame Song [OR “aria”]) Pulling my silk dress behind me, I have walked pass those verdant plants. Oh! The flowers have been crushed under my feet[,] to see such a sight increases my hate and anxiety. Where is the jade-green ocean and silvery skies? I only have a furrowed brow and tear-filled eyes. (She steps onto the boat.) ([Du Lanxian] awakes with a start, and lets the immortal sit, and sings to the audience.)

**Du Lanxian** [Shang-Tone Song Collection] (Eight Gem Adornment Song Collection) (Golden Sycamore [OR “aria”]): Suddenly I see a graceful woman that one could meet once every three lifetimes[,] I have been desolate and alone until midday but am now extremely happy. Her red cheeks[,] they are like peach blossoms between a person’s fingers. (Four Pieces of Gold [OR “aria”]) All alone has she snuck down from the heavens, and secretly unlocked the jade gate [to the heavenly palace]. (Five Changing Rotations [OR “aria”]) She must have been lonely[,] unhappy and suffered much⁸, prevented from moving freely in that graceful gait of hers, leading to those pain-filled tears. (She turns.)

[“Recitative”] Can I inquire as to your name? Where to you live? Why have you wandered here? Please enlighten my ignorance.

([The immortal] smiles.)

**Immortal** [“Recitative”]: You and I once lived together, how could you forget that? Today the pear blossoms are about to fall, spring is reaching its final phases, I couldn’t miss this

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⁶ Actress in Chinese opera who plays the primary female role
⁷ An incredibly difficult reference to translate directly; the army referred to is mentioned in the Tang dynasty poem “出塞” by 王昌龄, which tells of an endless standoff between the Qin and Han states
⁸ This may be a reference to the *kunqu* opera titled 黛玉葬花
sight[.] I would especially entreat you to compose a verse for me[.;] I don’t know if you
would be willing to bestow it upon me to recite out loud?

([Du Lanxian] is silent for a moment, pondering and thinking.)

[Du Lanxian] [Recitative]: Yes! You and I did once live together[!] Please wait for me to
recite a verse [of poetry]. (She spreads open a sheet of red silk, and when she has finished
writing gifts the immortal with a small jade piece. The immortal takes the red silk and
reads.)

[Immortal] [“Recitative”]9:

Washing the red of springtime off my silk sleeves,
I am presented with a flower still decorated with dew drops.
The swallows are no longer returning and we must say farewell,
In the budding cold and misty rain I see a woman’s quarters.
Pink and soft dimples waste away like the fading evening,
And from the clouds a beautiful maiden falls to the earth.
I would ask Fei Huan10 for a reed flute,
And in the spring cold waken the myriad flowers with my song.

Oh! What melodious and beautiful words[.;] I did not want to stop reading. But I am afraid
that under the tempestuous winds and rain, the flowers [in your poem] would not have
thrived[.;] what unfairness to those beautiful grasses11! (She cries.)

(Amber Kitten Drooping [OR “aria”]) Nothing is left but these words that should be
treasured like flowers but tell a sorrowful tale, (San Tai Verse) and I madly cling to
springtime dreams of fragrant flowers and grasses. (Mountain Goat Verse) Although the
red parrots with their shattered intestines12 cry over the flowers, the hateful butterflies are
also afraid of being trapped in spider webs. Are these feelings not the result of turbulent
emotions that have accumulated in my heart from ancient times, whirling sorrows that my

9 The following poem, however, is in verse, even if the singing style is not
10 Historical reference to Yang Yuhuan, more commonly known as Yang Guifei (Tang Dynasty). She is known as one
of the ‘four great beauties of China’. She was the highest-ranking consort of Emperor Xuanzong. During the An
Lushan Rebellion, Xuanzong’s men asked that Yang Yuhuan be put to death because they blamed the uprising on
her cousin. The emperor had no choice but to send his servant to strangle her to death. She died at a Buddhist
shrine and was buried at Mawei with no coffin, but in purple funeral shrouds.
11 This is originally a question in Chinese, but it has been very difficult to make that question make sense in English
12 The intestine or gut was thought of as the font of pain, despair and loneliness
heart does not know how to hide from? Words cannot express how I felt during that instant [when I read the poem].

([Du Lanxian] sings [OR “recitative”] (Sycamore Droops During the Five Night Watches)\textsuperscript{13}: From this flat boat I see the moon slowly grow small, and the green shadows of the trees pass by.\textsuperscript{14} A puff of white cloud[,] wraps itself around the falling moon. This red silk [with the poem on it], although Mei Fei’s\textsuperscript{15} pearl-like tears do not adorn it, yet there are still beautiful women who look upon it. (Five Turns) I only wish I could bundle all my feelings[,] falling like the tears of a candle[,]\textsuperscript{16} into it[,] The boat has suddenly moved, (there is a sound from within) fear interlocks with my soul. (The [Immortal] exits.) ([Du Lanxian] awakes.) It was just a dream. Recalling that scene before my eyes, how sorrowful it was!

(Song as before [OR “aria”]) [It was] like a sheet of chilly rain striking the lotus flowers, like a swarm of sorrowful moths throwing themselves into the fire.

[“Recitative”] It is already near noon, I might as well ask the captain to set off.

(Ending couplets [OR “aria”]) For the time being let me listen to this little girl sing a boat song. Wiping clean the trails that my tears have left, and with lovesick pining, I will retreat into the nest of my heart, and stay there all day. (She exits.)

Poets only know how to speak of a woman’s great beauty, only she [who?] has feelings more expansive than the night sky.

The willows tethered to the riverbank despise witnessing this separation, the racing clouds and passing moon are witness to our previous lives [and this predestined relationship].

Volume 2: Remembering the Dream

(Onstage are fake mountains\textsuperscript{17}, a wall covered with flowers, banana trees, wutong trees\textsuperscript{18}, pear blossoms and crabapple flowers among other trees.) (Dressed in a male official’s robes and cap, [Du Lanxian] enters.)

[Du Lanxian] (Northern Wild Grass [OR “aria”]): Once again spring is almost ending, and the spring cold envelopes the new moon. Listening to the patter in front of the gate of the unending spring rain, [it seems] even the orioles sympathize with the flowers, both

\textsuperscript{13} The night was split into five watches; these were used to infer time as well
\textsuperscript{14} I think it is still daytime; the moon has come out during the day
\textsuperscript{15} Historical reference to Concubine Mei of Emperor Xuanzong and contemporary with Yang Guifei. She was left behind in Chang An during the An Lushan rebellion, and subsequently murdered
\textsuperscript{16} Also expresses how quickly time is passing; there is a sense of urgency
\textsuperscript{17} Traditionally painted on a silk backdrop
\textsuperscript{18} Also known as a parasol tree, but often left untranslated
enduring a sunless spring heavy with sorrow. Once the redness of spring is taken away by
the spring winds, I will curse its departure[,] the falling flowers[,] and my body wither
away.

[“Recitative”] The stars shine brightly and the night sky stretches to the ends of the
heavens, may I ask whose reed flute is singing? The bright moon shines through the
twenty-four supports on the bridge, and the vast sky is filled with clear light and emerald
clouds. I am Du Lanxian, I detest the rouge on my face, and would change it for a man’s cap
and roves, declare myself a talented and refined scholar, and wash off this womanly body. I
remember in the 36th year travelling north, and while dreaming on the boat I met a
beautiful woman, whose hands carried a pear blossom, who asked me for a verse of poetry,
there was such ardor and affection [between us], truly she was beautiful. (She sighs.) I
think how I am like a withering red toon tree, how I am like a sallow violet, lost in this sea
of people[;] I yearn to seek out a soul-mate like the immortal in my dreams, yet it is truly
not a simply cast. Tonight the moon is clear and the flowers are silent, I will stroll around
the gardens, or hope to meet the woman in my dreams[;] I do not know yet. (She walks.)

(Song As Before [OR “aria”]) My dreams are fewer and my emotions are disappearing20, my
attachments linger but my sorrows linger even stronger. Within these turreted walls, the
moonlight glides onto these silken robes, the fragrant winds sieve through the flower
branches, and under the shadows of the parasol tree I gaze fixedly. I am overwhelmed by
the charm and grace [of the immortal;] will the woman in my dreams return to me tonight?
(Shes is weary from walking, sits in a daze by the creeks and mountains, and stands again.)
(Shes sings.)

(Song As Before [OR “aria”]) The dewdrops [glisten] under the dense banana tree shadows,
and the silhouettes of the bamboo trees standing before the wind are tall and lean. Tonight,
the crabapple flowers exude an inebriating aroma, the lotus flowers hasten the passing
night21, and the orchids in the pots are already bearing seeds. Of this three-part emotion[,] how
many parts are sorrow? When the morning comes[,] I shall fear to look in the mirror
and see myself three parts thinner. (She walks under the pear blossom tree, and addresses
the flowers again.) (She dithers and sing in a low voice.)

(Song As Before [OR “aria”]) Emerald green drops congeal on the sleeves of the flower
branches, and the ripples in the water break up the waning moon’s reflection. Your22
beautiful face is shrouded with the hazy glow of the spring moon, your soft heart is
entangled in silken threads of longing, and your silken robes are adorned with brocade

19 i.e. The mortal world
20 I.e. I can no longer recall the emotions that I felt when I met the immortal
21 Literally hasten the dripping water-glass (akin to an hourglass, but uses water instead of sand)
22 Addressing the flowers, but in this case the pear blossoms are a stand-in for the immortal; a common literary
technique in Chinese when objects are used to stand in for/convey emotions
clasps. I am afraid that this predestined relationship in this life will break easily especially at this crucial time.

["Recitative"] Oh! Flower immortal, flower immortal, why do you not return to me? (She cries.)

(Southern Releasing Drunkenness [OR “aria”]) A set of fine brows are locked into place, the red blush vanishes from two peach blossom-like cheeks. I wonder which small boat Mulan boarded beyond the Milky Way [i.e. very far away] is the land of immortals. From this night forth, the cold clouds and pallid moon will have no choice but to grieve [for my fate], and the pavilion and corridors are dark and gloomy. I lament my bitter regrets in vain, never mind the eve of the Ching Ming festival, [when the] immortals’ plums are fragrant.

["Recitative"] I yearn to speak with my flower immortal, like two Buddhist monks speaking with their own system of gestures and symbols. But you are in the land of the Buddha, and are subject to the disorder of the Eight Feng Maidens, to think of this brings such grief to my heart!

(Song As Before [OR “aria”]) I pine over that graceful silhouette [i.e. the immortal’s] in vain, thankfully the gods of the heavens still look on me with endless favor and grace. Oh[,] in whose courtyard does the spring still linger? Just as a falling petal’s path[,] whether it lands on the bed or in the privy[,] is subject to the whimsy of the breeze[,] it is difficult to predict one’s luck and path in life. You ladies who have not promised yourselves to one of the many men swarming you like bees and butterflies to do a flower, my short dream are constantly broken by the laughs of baby swallows. It is useless to look around, all there is to see are the wild grasses by the eastern fence, and the untamed moss on the jade steps.

["Recitative"] I[,] Du Lanxian[,] have such monumental talents, yet where are the opportunities that will allow me to feel proud or elated? How can I change myself into a young, educated [male] youth, so that I may be with these beautiful women? Ah! What a silly thought. How many wealthy people are happily married?

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23 This type of clasp is called a Mandarin Duck Clasp (鸳鸯扣); Mandarin ducks were believed to be monogamous and thought of as a symbol of marital fidelity and loyalty. Du Lanxian is also referring to the clasps as attachments that are stronger than that between a married couple
24 Legendary woman of the Northern Wei dynasty, who took her father’s place in the army and served for twelve years before retiring with high honors
25 Festival taking place on the 15th day after the spring equinox, in which the living pay respects to their ancestors by sweeping their graves
26 i.e. We speak the same language
27 i.e. The winds and whim of fate. The Eighteen Feng Maidens were wind spirits who descended from heaven to wreak havoc in the Tang Dynasty Tianbao Palace
The record of those who are happily married is short\textsuperscript{28}, and determines who are fated to spend their lives together in the sweet raptures of sorrow and attachment[;] fragrant paper is scarce, and it is impossible to write down all these sweet and melancholy woes. From this day forth I will cast my sorrows beyond the clouds, and put away all the lingering attachments still in my bosom. When Fei Yuan\textsuperscript{29} died the spring grew hopeless, when Shou Yan\textsuperscript{30} returned home the butterflies frolicked once again. These two fabled happenings, who can explain them? [The only traces of these people] is a small metal case at Ma Wei\textsuperscript{31}, buried with Guifei’s bones. (She walks out from under the pear blossoms, and leans against the fence to address the moon.)

To wash off these womanly features and change my beautiful face is difficult, to erase these tears from my eyes[,] which fall like the pelting rain[,] is impossible. I sigh at how you are free from any worries or troubles, and yearn to walk and sit shoulder-to-shoulder with you once again. I only want to draw a picture to pay tribute [to you]; would you send me numerous and sweet letters in return? Sorrow has caused my brows to congeal[,] in the face of this boundless moon, I will break apart my hairpin.

With my broken intestine [i.e. in this unending sorrow] devoid of joy, I may as well return to my sleep. (She walks.)

The light of the glistening stars and snow-white moon floods the heavens []; tonight how I will endure the slow dripping of the clock?\textsuperscript{32} I am unworthy of your beautiful silhouette that resides in the skies above. (She exits.)

The gardens are noiseless and shrouded in deep silence, even great beauties must cover their faces.\textsuperscript{33}

Needless to say[,] the spring light [i.e. youth] disappears quickly, but sorrows and cold rain do not hamper a flower’s growth.

\textsuperscript{28} i.e. There are not many who are happily married
\textsuperscript{29} i.e. Yang Guifei
\textsuperscript{30} Reference to Zhao Feiyun, another one of the ‘four great beauties’ in Chinese literature and Empress Xiaocheng to Emperor Cheng of the Han dynasty. Often referenced in juxtaposition with Yang Guifei; whereas Yang was known to have a rather full build in accordance with Tang fashions, Zhao had a slim build—the juxtaposition is used to refer to the fact that beauty is found in many shapes and styles.
\textsuperscript{31} Where Yang Guifei was buried after being killed
\textsuperscript{32} Refers again to a water clock
\textsuperscript{33} Reference to a poem (琵琶行) by Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi (白居易) in which he reflects on the talent and unfortunate experiences of a pipa player, and in doing so expounds on the injustices of life, corruption in society and his own unjust banishment away from the court
Volume 3: Writing about the Silhouette

(Onstage are some colored inks, a brush and ink stone, and a silk scroll.) ([Du Lanxian] enters in a male official’s headdress and long robes.

[Du Lanxian] (Anticipating a Great Beauty [OR “recitative”]): The silks scroll[,] paper and red ink appear passive and uninviting, [I must] reacquaint [myself] with the sights of spring. With two parts splendid color and one part anxiety, [I think of] the soft moon and [rising] smoke, not of the autumn skies. Why does the spring mud cover the blooming flowers? The red grass buds planted last year on the tombs have already opened. Who could possibly depict that immortal’s body and soul? I want to carry flowers and mourn at Yuhuan's\textsuperscript{34} grave. Oh! [I,] Du Lanxian[,] met with the immortal-sister in my dreams[,] her heart was mild and sweet, and I would entrust all of my three lives to her.\textsuperscript{35} I would entreat her in my letters, but it is impossible for us to even glimpse each other. What misfortune it is for such a beautiful person to find themselves in these circumstances, what sadness that someone so talented with her words should experience such pain. If only I could send a poem [to the immortal] on this paper, and entreat the swallows to deliver my word to her; if only I could convey my thoughts through beautiful language, but the warblers would not be able to transport my feelings up [to her].\textsuperscript{36} Holding this brush I can’t help but feel such pain [in my heart], as I have been born so unluckily; setting down my wine and gazing afar, it is easy to be overwhelmed by sorrow. Today spring has gone and I am lonely once again, the flower blossoms are nowhere to be seen, tears stream from my eyes and I have fallen silent. (She is sad.) Why don’t I paint a silhouette [of the immortal], and console myself a little. (She spreads the scroll open and begins to paint.)

(With Graceful Small Steps [OR “aria”]) With her silk robes and her blushing makeup[,] her beauty would cause entire cities to fall[,] her pink dimples are like a smiling peach blossom. It is not easy for my attachments [to her] to disappear, my pain and sorrow have reached a breaking point[,] if only I could murmur these thoughts in your [i.e. the immortal’s] ear. My tender feelings I will entrust to this brush[,] as I write down my innermost feelings I am feel the greatest pain in my bosom.

(The Tiedan\textsuperscript{38} who plays the serving girl Qing Yan enters.)

[Qing Yan] (Song name [OR “recitative”]): The screens with their many classical paintings are arranged [throughout the room], the mountains and rocks [in the paintings] are layered on top of each other. Over there is a peony stem, over here is a bunch of butterfly flowers

\textsuperscript{34} i.e. Yang Guifei
\textsuperscript{35} Buddhist saying that refers to one’s current, next and past life
\textsuperscript{36} Both swallows and warblers were seen as harbingers of spring (especially in Southern China)
\textsuperscript{37} Most likely referring to her gender (she is an aristocrat)
\textsuperscript{38} Actress who plays secondary female characters
fringed irises]. Silk sleeves billow endlessly, as the east wind\textsuperscript{39} blows [through the window]. [I now] no longer work on embroidery, [my mistress should be] guiding her maidservants [on their embroidery]. I am indeed one of Du Laxian’s servants. When I think of my mistress, who dreamed of a flower, and who has now become obsessed with her dream, muttering and murmuring to herself all day, [I see that] her fine features have become heavy and sickly, and she is nothing more than an empty shell. Right now she is once again working at her paintbrush, painting a picture of her beautiful immortal from which she will sustain herself\textsuperscript{40}; I say[,] isn’t that laughable? I can only imagine how deeply the two of them are tangled in each other’s affections!

(Drunken Returning [OR “aria”]) With one glance a beautiful woman [i.e. the immortal] will bid a handsome man [i.e. Du Lanxian] to come to her, with a fine but furrowed brow it is difficult to depict beauty like Xi Zi’s\textsuperscript{41}; waiting for a sign [from the immortal] from the ends of the world, a woman’s heart will burst and her body will wither. What is most painful is that such a relationship started well but ended in separation and melancholy[,] what is most pitiful is that at such a tender age[,] my mistress drinks herself into a stupor. (She presents some tea.)

([Du Lanxian] is finished with her painting[,] she spreads it out and sighs.)

[Du Lanxian] [“Recitative”]: Ah! Look at her clear and supple body, how exquisite and wonderful it is! (She stands, and positions herself to sing.)

(Black Silk Robe [OR “aria”]) Under the dim moon and anxious old sky, my brow furrows above my delicate eyes[,] it is hard to let go of that dream. A guzheng song ascends into the jade-green clouds, it is the excellent Nichang\textsuperscript{42} song. Against the springtime peach blossoms growing by the river, against the willow leaves fluttering in the autumn breeze[,] my sleeves become stained with ink, and strains of flute songs float in the air. All of my emotional attachments merge into one, wrapping together like strands of silk.

[“Recitative”] The earth and heavens are so wide, yet there is not one person who is like my immortal. Li Nian was gentle and vivacious, and was revived from the dead; second aunt

\textsuperscript{39} Also a reference to spring time
\textsuperscript{40} I.e. The picture that Du Lanxian paints of the immortal, Du Lanxian will uses to nourish and sustain herself emotionally (and physically)
\textsuperscript{41} The one with the furrowed brow refers to Du Lanxian, while Xi Zi refers to the immortal. Xi Zi is a historical reference to another one of the ‘four great beauties of ancient China’. Xi Zi (or Xi Shi). She lived during the Spring and Autumn period in the state of Yue, and was said to be so beautiful that fish who looked at her would stop swimming and drown
\textsuperscript{42} Refers to a famous song of the Tang dynasty. Both the song and the characters in the text also refers to garments of rainbows and feather worn by the Eight Immortals of Daoist mythology
Yu was smart yet sickly, and endured a long death. If it were not for a beautiful face that is known among many, I may as well be buried and forgotten. (She cries.)

(A Good Sister [OR "aria"]) Those who have had their intestines shattered can do nothing but scribble dejectedly; everyone needs a loving youth. These youths murmur about the flowers and moon, and write exquisite poems about beautiful women. Reading their poetry, their brush strokes seem to sweep the pain of separation onto the paper, as if to drench all their hate on the Milky Way. (She exits with the painting.)

([Qing Yan] tidies the brush and ink.)

[Qing Yan] (Ending couplets): In her previous life my mistress must have lived on Peng Lai Island [an island of immortals], but accidentally fell into the mortal world and suffered; I cannot bear to see her lily-like face lose its blush and her limbs to become thinner than a willow’s branches.

If it is not a city of woe it must be a river of love, what difference does it make in after death?

With a soul that is as precious as a graceful silhouette, it is no wonder that there is plenty of karma.

Volume 4: Sorrowful Autumn

(Present onstage are a horizontal wooden banner inscribed with the word "Wenxiang Pavilion", in addition to some flowers, bamboo, a creek and mountains among other objects.) ([Du Lanxian] enters in a male official’s headdress and long robes, in a sickly manner.)

[Du Lanxian] (Golden Plantain Leaf [OR “aria”]): The sycamore and the bamboo leaves murmur, together they rustle and tap against the green window frame. Gazing into the hexagonal mirror I am shocked at my reflection [and how sickly it looks]; with my rose-embroidered handkerchief I ceaselessly wipe away my tears.

["Recitative"] Mindlessly I have replayed my springtime dream while gazing into the mirror, my withered brows are slowly disappearing. I lament that my womanly bones are becoming thinner than cotton fibers spun from a plant; I am even thinner than a pear tree blossom. I am Lanxian; after sketching the likeliness of me and my sister-immortal, the

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43 These two women are references to characters from The Peony Pavilion, an 18th century Ming Opera considered one of the seminal works of the Chinese canon. Du Liniang, the primary female character, dies from lovesickness but is revived because the gods determine that she is destined to marry Liu Mengmei
44 Most commonly associated with the Tang Dynasty, commonly thought of as the zenith of ethnic Han Chinese power
45 The immortal who is like a sister to me, not literally my sister who is an immortal
spring and summer flashed by and died before my eyes, now it is late autumn once again. Look at this streak of red tears, [created by] crabapples appearing everywhere [before my eyes]; look at this pool of green weeds, full of withering lotus roots. Amongst the shadows of the sparse willow branches, the timid cicadas dart about in the night; under the shadows of the silent plantain tree, the deer still sleep in the day. Oh! I have been sick for a year, my many worries are like a cocoon [entombing me]. The medicine pans and tea bowls, are accompanied with warm [??]; in this inlaid boudoir and toilette filled with hairpins, who is my soul-sister? ([Du Lanxian is sad.) I could go for a quick stroll, and recall the immortal’s countenance, and use that to chase away the silence[,] there isn’t anything wrong with that? Oh!

(Mountain Goat ["aria"]) Thinking of the immortal’s beautiful face and graceful bearing[,] even if she washed off her heavenly trappings [i.e. makeup] she would still be naturally beautiful. Her soft words are like the songs of orioles and parrots, and make my tears flow in a small stream, as if they were one strand of unbroken silk. I endlessly fathom[,] she must be living in the city of immortals. If one were to play on an inlaid [i.e. gorgeously crafted], clear-sounding flute[,] would a soul-mate be listening? It is almost daybreak[,] the flowers have bowed their buds and the moon is calm. Pain, [it is like] tired butterflies[,] cold bees and being jolted from an autumn dream; the cool night, [it is resplendent with] the perfume of purple azaleas and red ginger.

["Recitative"] The gentle night stretches into the heavens[,] where are you beautiful immortal? Let me turn around these hills and creeks, and lean against the fence to rest a little. (Du Lanxian gives a long sigh.)

(Song as before) The weather is clear and the night sky is tender, the thin trees flap and rustle in the heavy wind. The falling leaves pile haphazardly in the courtyard[,] the symphony of crickets chirps and the moss is cold. (She walks slowly alongside the pond.) [Standing] by this pavilion surrounded by willows, I gaze at the autumn waters through the leaves of the willow. Look into the center of the rippling moon, and see how it reflects my wasted silhouette, what a pitiful sight, I fear that under these silk robes my sick bones will no longer be able to endure. Ambling mindlessly, who will ask after me? Oh! Another gust of wind. Feminine grace, the dew splashes onto the shoots and soaks the green grasses; warm countenance, see the wind carry the reeds onto the far side of the pond.

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46 To clarify, Lanxian is comparing the crabapples to tears, not describing her own tears
47 In the original woodblock print, a character is missing; unfortunately, due to the tendency in classical Chinese to strip away all extraneous words (articles, prepositions etc.) it is difficult to infer the missing word based on context
48 Rhetorical question—she cannot find someone who truly understands her soul
49 This sentence makes no sense in English as a question but in the original it is a question
50 Literally “makeup”
51 Those two interjections “feminine grace” and “warm countenance” are purely poetical
(The Tiedan playing the servant girl Qing Yan enters, carrying a candle.)

[Qing Yan] [Threads of Gold [OR “aria”]]: Holding this torch, I emerge into the fragrant pavilion, the autumn moon is like a palace mirror; let me pass around this thick grass. Because she has spent all her time pining away, [my mistress] has become weak and will not leave her quarters; she has many worries and sicknesses, under the strains of an incomplete song her pining for the lady increases, her thoughts become heavier, her thoughts become even heavier.

[Recitative] (Seeing Du Lanxian sighing) Mistress, mistress, it is already deep into the night, the dew is fresh and the wind is cold; with your slim and sickly body, how can you sit alone like this?

[Du Lanxian:] [“Recitative”] Qing Yan, I also don’t know why I sit here; I felt that my heart was heavy, so I came for a short stroll.

(Mountain Goat [OR “aria”]) As I admire the sunset and the autumn views that pass, I think of that beautiful immortal I encountered in the springtime. The more I envision her face, the more I am unwilling to part with that memory of her; remembering the poem I wrote for her on a red sheet of silk I lament that I have not received any messages from her. Under my phoenix-embroidered blankets I am unable to dream of her; as I pace I envision the jewelry on her face. Qing Yan, my heart, it has tasted endless grief and sorrow. Bone-deep are these feelings, never mind how I managed to endure this past summer! Look at this timid sight [i.e. her surroundings]; in loneliness, I am like a tender orchid in snow and can no longer endure this [pain]. You and I, we are like a shadow is attached to a body; we fear what the autumn winds bring and we are both lonely in this world. (She cries.)

[Qing Yan:] [“Recitative”] Mistress please do not work yourself up, come back into the room for some rest first.

(The Kitten Droops [OR “aria”] The incense in the burner has died out, it is already the third watch of the night. Mistress! Mistress! Your garments which are light as a cloud and luminous as the moon trail along the green garden path. Pear blossom immortal! Pear blossom immortal! In your heavenly palace inlaid with pearls you are trapped under the curved roofs. It is clear, right at this point in the deep night, [my mistress must] wake from [i.e. leave behind any notions of] a heavenly and unearthly place. ([Du Lanxian and Qing Yan] walk arm in arm.)

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52 Not literal diseases; refers more to an emotional ‘sickness’ or ‘imbalance’
53 “Become heavier” has connotations of an illness worsening
54 Nights were conventionally split into five watches; the third night implies some time a little after midnight
With gentle entreaties and soft voices, we walk arm in arm around the pavilion. The pink blush on my mistress’ cheeks has withered and her beauty is fading; shattered intestines and a sickly demeanor makes her body even more wasted. I ponder: right at this point in the deep night, [my mistress must?] wake from [i.e. leave behind any notions of] a heavenly and unearthly place.

The wind rustles and rises into the Milk Way, but the screens [in the room] obscure the passing moon.

Remembering the rain falling during the pear blossom season, she sits in the cold nights and pines to be reunited with her long-lost soul mate.

**Volume 5: Meeting the Immortal**

(Present onstage are silk curtains, embroidered screens, a stone table (for tea) and flowers. [Du Lanxian] enters quietly in a male official’s headdress and long robes. She sits.)

**[Du Lanxian]**: (Northern New Water Song [OR “aria”]) A cluster of pear blossoms blocks the hidden window. My black cap covers my pink forehead, and the purple silk follows the curve of my womanly shoulders. (Stands and walks). Facing into the wind under these beautiful trees, who can truly know if they have a faithful lifelong partner?

[“Recitative”] I cannot withstand even the slightest chills under my crane-embroidered cloak, look here at my linked brows[,] long fingers and slim waist. In my next life I want to be an extraordinary man; in this life I am merely a sickly woman [trapped] in her chambers. Du Lanxian[,] why has your life come to this? Oh! My heart is pure and innocent, I should have been a roc flying above the highest layers of the clouds, I cannot help that I have encountered so many misfortunes in my life, as if I were a sick crane shut in a cage. Bound and fettered by my body, I might as well just give up. These rich[,] luxurious trappings, they are nothing but meaningless fantasies. But the ardor and aspiration pumping through my breast, oh how hard it is to push aside!

(Southern Graceful [a woman’s grace] Step [OR “aria”]) The richness of the mortal realm is all but an illusion, even the brightest gold is worthless. My heart is pure as water and more steadfast than the full moon, and so full of bravery and pride, that even a Bingzhou\(^58\) knife

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\(^{55}\) I am currently attributing this to Qing Yan, but it is not completely clear as to who the speaker is

\(^{56}\) If the singer of this song is Du Lanxian, then she would be referring to herself

\(^{57}\) It was fashionable to draw the brows until they almost linked

\(^{58}\) There is a double meaning here; refers to Bingzhou, a land in modern day Shanxi and in Ancient Chinese legend. Bingzhou was one of nine provinces that Emperor Yu (禹) created after many floods in the second millennium BC. No contemporary records of Emperor Yu exist; he may very well be an amalgamation of historical figures and orally transmitted legends. Bingzhou was known for its particularly superb sword making. This may also be an allusion to a Song dynasty poem 湘春夜月 written by 黄孝迈, in which the words 并刀 (Bing knife) is used as a metaphor for great sorrow
[no amount of sadness] could not slice through my convictions. I could pour my steadfastness into the green[,] cloud-filled skies, and transform it into a ten thousand zhang long\textsuperscript{59} rainbow that sets the sky alight.

[“Recitative”] Oh! When it comes to a soul-mate who could accompany me for life, no-one surpasses the immortal in my dreams.

(Northern Twisting Bay Tree Song [OR “aria”]) I cherish most the memory of being around my intellectual equals, of being around women who understand my heart’s longings. Under these richly-layered garments, I feel that the moon is even livelier than normal. Who are these immortals that the undulating winds transport? They truly have a steady and quiet temperament. But why is [someone’s] hair untidy and hairpins askew? It is as if this testifies that I and my soul-mate, with whom I picked flowers and laughed, and with whom I share a bond even stronger than that of two people in marriage, were predestined to be bound to one another. Why are my blush fading and my cheeks withering, and why am I drowning in such sickly despair? I see only the red silk upon which I wrote my poem [to the immortal], and fear my inability to write down the endless worries I feel in my belly\textsuperscript{60}. (She is tired and retreats behind the bed curtains.)

(Wearing the robes of a male court official, she re-enters playing the immortal. [It is obvious to the reader that this is a self-aware act; both the reader and Du Lanxian know that she is masquerading as the immortal.])

[“Recitative”] Oh! What a glorious sky! On my travels here, I passed by countless valleys and mountains, jade-like flowers and grasses, flocks of cranes and herds of deer, and scores of great rocs [—] all coming together in this celestial landscape.

(Waters of the Southern River [OR “aria”]) Suddenly I arrive at Lang Huan [the Celestial Library], what an otherworldly place it is. Seeing the jade-green mountains[,] finely-layered stone cliffs and brightly colored lotus flowers, hearing the spring waters trickle as lotus petals drift onto their surface, my heart fills with even more joy amongst these sheer cliffs and trembling vines. Lanxian, Lanxian! If only I could place you in this beautiful landscape, and once again open my eyes [to a dream][;] these heavenly mountains would say, to who else but me would this world belong to?

[“Recitative”] Let me ascend this mountain peak and describe my life’s aspirations.

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\textsuperscript{59} Traditional unit of measurement, approximately 3.65 yards

\textsuperscript{60} As before, the abdomen, stomach and gut (as opposed to the heart in Western cultures) is thought of as the center for despair and sorrow
(Northern Goose Landing with Victory Song [OR “aria”]) I yearn to ride astride the jade-green Luan\textsuperscript{61} and ascend the emerald skies, I yearn to climb upon the Golden Turtle\textsuperscript{62} and swim in the Penglai\textsuperscript{63} Gardens; I yearn to play a reed flute and sing with the cranes, I yearn to pull the rime off trees as if displaying a bright a Wu blade\textsuperscript{64}. Oh! I yearn to frolic in palace robes and catch the Three-Legged Toad\textsuperscript{65} in the ocean, I yearn to ride a silver boat right to the cowherd and weaver girl\textsuperscript{66} in the sky; I yearn to strike the strings of a coral-red zither and sing the Youlan Yuan\textsuperscript{67} song, I yearn to don amour and side aside my eyebrow pencil. I yearn to cultivate myself, until I am even more heroic than Taoist monks of the Yuju temple\textsuperscript{68}; I yearn to soar in the heavens, such that I could laugh at the Qin Emperor’s self-pity\textsuperscript{69}, such that I could laugh at the Qin Emperor’s self-pity.

[“Recitative”] Oh! I do feel quite preposterous saying all of this[;] on second consideration it is just my boredom speaking. As I have the demeanor of a wise man, why shouldn’t I indulge in some self-admiration? I have already lived such a desolate life[,] let others laugh and sneer at me as they please. The warm skies and soft waters, they shall become my beautiful garments and shoes; the quiet willows and bright flowers, they do not care what I look like! Look at those two immortal sisters approaching[,] I will listen to what they are saying.

(The Immortal played by the Xiao Dan [i.e. the Immortal from the first scene] enters bearing a pear blossom, while the Xiao Tie [who previously played the servant girl Qing Yan] enters dressed as a Lotus Blossom Immortal, and bears a lotus flower.) (The two immortals sing together.)

[**Pear Blossom Immortal and Lotus Blossom Immortal**] (Southern Jiao Song [OR “aria”])

The dragon has sowed paths of bamboo, and the crane has cultivated the garden of the glossy ganoderma\textsuperscript{70}. I have suddenly and gracefully descended from the red palace, with

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\textsuperscript{61} Bird related to a phoenix, it has the long tail feathers and colors characteristic of a phoenix. I have not been able to find an English equivalent at all (it is not a phoenix—there’s actually quite an important distinction)

\textsuperscript{62} Refers to a mythological turtle, based off a species of Chinese pond turtle that is endemic to Asia

\textsuperscript{63} (蓬莱) Refers to the land of the immortals

\textsuperscript{64} Curved sword

\textsuperscript{65} Another mythical creature

\textsuperscript{66} Reference to stars in the Milky Way: a cowherd and weaver girl fell in love, but as their love was forbidden, they were banished to opposite sides of the night sky. Each year, on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, magpies build a bridge across the sky to reunite the lovers for one evening

\textsuperscript{67} Allusion to famous song

\textsuperscript{68} Reference to Taoist temple in Chengdu;

\textsuperscript{69} The First Emperor of Qin unified the warring states of China in 221 BC after he conquered all the neighboring states; the Terracotta Warriors are perhaps the most famous point of reference for many. After his victories, he searched in vain for an elixir of immortality

\textsuperscript{70} This fungus is cultivated by immortals and has magic powers, among which include reviving the dead and bringing great luck
the simple desire to seek my soul-mate and ruminate upon our intertwined fates, to seek my soul-mate and ruminate upon our intertwined fates.

[**Pear Blossom Immortal**] [“Recitative”] Lotus Sister, there is Sister Lan staring silently into the wind, leaning against the wall as the frosts of sorrow bite her, she is lost within her thoughts, like in the old days. I must go up to her and speak with her!

(Northern Jiangnan [OR “aria”]) Oh! Standing solitary against the deep green rocks and crimson red mountains, oh! With the flowers and birds whispering amongst themselves, one’s restless anxieties and mortal worries are sure to be driven away. (The immortals and Du Lanxian see each other, Du Lanxian is pleasantly surprised.)

[**Du Lanxian**] [“Recitative”] Where have you two sisters come from? Oh! This is the Pear Blossom Immortal, but who is this? I have never seen you before, but why does your face seem so familiar? (The Lotus Blossom Immortal smiles.)

[**Lotus Blossom Immortal**]: You and I are also sisters, how could you forget? (Du Lanxian is confused.) (The immortals sing together.)

[**Pear Blossom Immortal and Lotus Blossom Immortal**]: How could you forget bygone days in the palace when we would laugh and stroll[,] shoulder to shoulder? Crafting letters together, and debating poetry, your scholarly and heavenly demeanor was always immediately obvious.

[**Du Lanxian**]: Yes of course! We were originally sisters, and by the best of luck we have encountered each other today[,] how should we pass the time?

[**Pear Blossom Immortal**]: Why don’t we stroll about hand in hand.

[**Du Lanxian and Lotus Blossom Immortal**]: Yes! (They walk together.)

[**Pear Blossom Immortal**]: Look and see, this is Yingzhou, this is Yuyu, this is Qiangtai, this is Ruoshui. Is that not the emerald city over there? This wall here points to Buddha’s country. Luofu, Taihua, Emei, Huangshan, all point up like fingers from a hand.

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71 Easternmost of three fabled islands in the Eastern China sea, abode of immortals and home to the elixir of immortality
72 Literally, jade universe; refers to a jade palace in the sky in which immortals lived
73 Refers to a palace of the Chu Warring State (about two millennia before this play was written) that served as the permanent residence of the emperor
74 Major river system in Northern China that originates in Northern Gansu province
75 Another palace for immortals
76 These are all specific mountain peaks in China (they are real) that are fabled to be residences of or bridges to immortals
(While they are walking, three rocs suddenly fly by; each woman sits astride one of the birds and they fly to a stone house, where flowers dot the ground like embroidery, and waterfalls arc through the sky. The two immortals bring out deer meat, stag liver, sesame and flower syrup to eat and drink.) (They all sing together.)

[All] (Pleasantness of the Southern Forest Garden [OR “aria”]): I write to you on flowered[,] pink paper, I see my ancestral home among the unbroken mountains and rivers[,] we have already walked once around the jade pavilion. Looking afar[,] we point at the smoke rising from all of China, looking afar[,] we point at the smoke rising from all of China.

[Du Lanxian] [OR “recitative”]: If I may so bold as to ask, how did I arrive here?

[Pear Blossom Immortal and Peach Blossom Immortal]: I say, haven’t we been here for a long time already? Oh! I now realize that our time together is dwindling, the time to bid goodbye is approaching, please have one last cup [of the syrup], so that we may see our sister off to road to the mortal realm.

([Du Lanxian] is full of sorrow, she drinks one last time and rises to her feet.) (They all sing together.)

[All] (Northern Buying Fine Wine with Tranquility Song [OR “aria”]) The sorrows of departure[,] will you not take pity on anyone[,] The sorrows of departure[,] will you not take pity on anyone? My soul is breaking, and my hopes are lost. The mountain birds’ songs grow as if to urge our departure, and the calls of the cuckoo on the branches frighten me, its sweet song full of lingering emotion. How many times more will we be able to see each other? How much pain and impatience will we have to endure[,] Unable to complete this letter about pear blossoms, I grow thin with tender affection.

[Du Lanxian]: Oh I, I will give myself over to pining until my brow and fingers grow thin, until my waist and shoulders wither, oh! I will weep into my empty existence until my tears become an unbroken string of beads.

(They all exit.) (There is the sound of a bell from within.) (Amid the bed curtains, [Du Lanxian] awakens and stretches.)

[Du Lanxian] [“Recitative”] Oh! It was all just a glorious dream! (She pushes open the window[,] pacing and gazing out.) Upon reflection, life is but a dream, and when the dream is heavenly, why must one awaken? It is as if I was just speaking face-to-face with my sisters, and to be awoken by the morning bells again, my desolation has increased thousand-fold!
Clear Stream [OR “aria”] Our lives are but mirages and are as transient as lightning, it is no use envying those who are happily married. Figs are fruits of the Buddha, jasmines are flowers of the immortals, but it is impossible to tell apart men and women.

[End]

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77 Original text refers to Mandarin Ducks which are thought of as ardently monogamous, and used as metaphors for marital fidelity
78 Refers to both Taoist and Buddhist immortals
Appendix 3: Survey sent to audiences of *Pear Blossom Dream*

The full survey sent to audiences of *Pear Blossom Dream* can be found at: https://goo.gl/forms/mlGsth3ufKb1lhv2.

Appendix 4: Video recording of *Pear Blossom Dream*

An online video recording of *Pear Blossom Dream*, performed in order of the hybrid, Western and Chinese stagings, can be found at: https://vimeo.com/266878213.