This Fearful Object of Desire: On the Interpretation of a Bad Dream in Wang Shifu's *Story of the Western Wing* Glossary

Ce terrifiant objet du désir : à propos de l'interprétation d'un mauvais rêve dans

Le Pavillon de l'Ouest de Wang Shifu

慾望的恐怖對象：試論《西廂記》中「驚夢」釋義

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This Fearful Object of Desire: On the Interpretation of a Bad Dream in Wang Shifu's *Story of the Western Wing**

Rainier Lanselle

If one would think of the theme of dreams in great Chinese classical plays, the first example to come to mind would probably be Tang Xianzu's (1550-1616) series of four *chuanqi*, the "Four Dreams of Yuming Hall", or "of Linchuan" (*Yumingtang si meng*, *Linchuan si meng*), four works in which dreams play a pivotal role.¹ If one would think about love dreams, one would even more readily mention one of the titles of this group, *The Peony Pavilion*, *alias The Return of the Soul*, *Mudan ting Huanhun ji*, in which the heroine meets her perfect match in a dream and love has the power to bring the dead back to life. The impact of this drama on the readers and society of its time has been tremendous,² and this reception is not immune to the fact that here, dreams clearly direct reality—put in Freudian terms, they are undoubtedly the perfect fulfillments of wishes.

What I will address in this paper is more modest, as it deals with a much more down-to-earth dream, one that has drawn little attention, although it is found in a no less famous and influential play, *The Story of the Western Wing*, *Xixiang ji*, by Wang Shifu (fl. 1297-1307). The great Yuan *zaju* (actually a set of five *zaju* dramas, totaling twenty or twenty-one acts, depending on the

* The author wishes to express his thanks to the anonymous reviewer who made numerous insightful remarks on the first version of this paper. Within the limits imposed by the editor, many of his/her suggestions have been taken into account in this final version. The author would like also to express his thanks to Alan Wagner for his copy-editing of the article.

1. The series comprises four *chuanqi*: *Zixiao ji* (*The Purple Flute*), a.k.a. *Zichai ji* (*The Purple Hairpin*), *Mudan ting* (*The Peony Pavilion*), *Handan ji* (*The Tale of Handan*), and *Nanke ji* (*The Tale of South Branch*). For a brief presentation, see Idema 2001: 827-828.
2. On *Mudan ting* and its reception, see Chang and Owen 2010: 138 sq. (vol. 2); Lu 2001: 19-141; Ko 1994: 68-112; Zeitlin 1994; Swatek 2002; Berg 2006; Berg 2013: 128-159.

edition, without counting the “wedges”³), as is well known, has exerted its influence on centuries of fiction and drama, standing at the epicenter of the Chinese imaginary realm in the matter of love stories until the 20th century.⁴ In my reading of the play, I will employ a methodology that borrows from two apparently very different fields: one is the traditional editorial and commentarial tradition, in particular the commentary by the early Qing editor of the play, Jin Shengtān (1608-1661); the second one is a set of theoretical tools borrowed from French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). It is the aim of this paper to demonstrate that these two approaches, though coming out of two very different intellectual backgrounds, regard the problem of dreams—at least in this particular case—much less psychologically than structurally. More precisely, they converge in viewing dreams as discursive constructions, as such related to language. Language and its meaning being deeply related to the problem of the Other, this assessment leads them to conclude that it is in the very nature of dreams to make the subject experience not their imaginary fulfillment, but rather the intrinsic limitations of his/her own desire, this latter being rooted in the uncertainties of the Other’s desire. My goal is not to compare these two views or their validity, but rather to show that in two very different ways they sustain the same logical conclusion, though under different frameworks, and expressed through different forms: a narrative one for the former, which leads the editor literally to cut off the story as a result of his view that there is nothing beyond the dream; a highly conceptualized one for the latter, implying an analysis of desires that concludes in the existence of a fundamental subjective division. In a way, both conclusions are ethical in nature, as they prompt some kind of response vis-à-vis the above-mentioned limitations. On the narrative side, the impact of the dream scene we will focus on led to a rather pessimistic sort of conclusion, if not a melancholy one, contradicting centuries of reading and reception of the well-known love story.

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3. Or *xiezi*, the introductory acts, typical of the printed versions of the *zaju* genre, that have been added in various numbers and locations in the consecutive editions of the play.
 4. See, e.g., Dolby 1994; Carlitz 2006; Hsiao 2007; Wu 2016; Harris 1999. The English translation of the *Xixiang ji* we will refer to in this article is S. Wang 1991, (reed.: S. Wang 1995); the French translation we will refer to is S. Wang 2015.

The love story and the love dream

For the convenience of the reader, I will summarize briefly here the plot of the *Story of the Western Wing*, in order to place the dream scene in its context. Student Zhang, Zhang Sheng (*ming* Gong, *zi* Junrui), a young scholar who is on his way to the capital in order to take part in the imperial examination, is sojourning at the Monastery of Universal Salvation (Pujia si, present-day Yongji district, Shanxi province). He falls in love with Cui Yingying (“Oriole”), who is lodging there too, with her mother and her maidservant on their journey to the ancestral home, where they are escorting the coffin of Yingying’s father, a former chancellor of the Ministry of Rites. The exceptional beauty of Yingying has attracted the attention of Flying Tiger, Sun Feihu, a bandit who soon besieges the monastery with his army of deserters, demanding that the young girl be delivered to him. If his demand is not satisfied, he threatens to slaughter all the residents of the monastery, religious and lay. Everyone is terrified. Zhang Sheng “saves” them by having a monk rush through the enemy’s lines and carry a letter to his sworn brother, Du Que, the White Horse General (Baima jiangjun), who responds at once and comes with his army, quickly crushing the bandits. We should remark, though, that it is Zhang Sheng who is entirely credited with this achievement: the story makes it clear that he saved everyone, beginning with his beloved Yingying, by the sole force of his writing brush. After these terrible events, the love story unfolds during the fairest part of the play. Yingying’s mother had publicly pledged, before his high feats, that her daughter would be married to Zhang Sheng as a reward for saving the dwellers of the monastery, but when everything has returned to normal she takes back her word (Zhang Sheng is just a poor and obscure student with no connections after all), plunging the lovers into despair. A long and secret courtship ensues. With the help of the maidservant Hongniang, Zhang and Yingying communicate, exchange poems, and after much hesitation, the young girl gives herself to the student. Their liaison is finally discovered by the mother, who, in order to conceal the family’s disgrace, now reluctantly accepts the marriage of her daughter with the impecunious student, but under the condition that first he succeed at the examination and come back covered with glory. After a tearful separation with Yingying, Zhang Sheng, now en route to the capital in order to fulfill his promise, spends his first night at the inn. And this is where the dream scene takes place.

As Student Zhang has just fallen asleep, Yinying appears on the scene.⁵ In a series of arias, she declares that she could not bear the separation from Zhang, and has taken advantage of her mother and her servant being asleep to run away from the monastery in the middle of the night. Hurrying, despite her bound feet, all alone across the countryside, she is eager to be reunited with Zhang Sheng and to continue the journey with him. When she arrives at the inn, Zhang marvels at her intrepidity. He sings about his tender feelings, and his determination never to be separated from her again. Suddenly a gang of bandits storms onto the stage. They are the same ones who besieged the monastery earlier in the play. From behind the door, they demand that the girl be handed over to them straightaway. Zhang Sheng is disconcerted, and Yinying, in a tone of commanding authority, tells him to leave this to her and stay behind. She then opens the door of the inn, and confronts the bandits herself, scolding them with perfect self-control and authority, and reviling their pathetic attempt to besiege the Monastery of Universal Salvation. When Zhang Sheng says he is going to talk to the assailants, she makes him shut up and again bids him to stay behind. She goes on insulting the rascals, telling them that the gallant General Du, a “hero,” will turn them “into salted pickles ... into blubber and blood,” as he will come “riding a white horse.”⁶ As she pronounces these words, the bandits snatch her and take her away, leaving the stage. At the same time, Zhang Sheng wakes up suddenly, exclaiming: “Ya! So it was only in a dream!”⁷ From this point until the end of the act, Zhang Sheng’s perception of what exactly is a dream (this particular dream, or the whole encounter with Yinying?) is never clear, and the verses he sings are most ambiguous. When the dawn breaks, he continues his journey to the capital with his young servant, in the midst of a sense of irremediable loss.

The evolution of the theme

The remarkable thing about this dream scene, is how it is... quite unremarkable. It is not one of those lavish, supernatural dreams Chinese narrators so often excel in. It is a very plain, “realistic” dream, the kind

5. The dream scene at the inn occurs in Act 4, Play IV. See S. Wang 1987: 165-169; S. Wang 1955: 130a-134a; English translation: S. Wang 1991: 358-366; French translation: S. Wang 2015: 289-302.

6. S. Wang 1987: 168; S. Wang 1955, 133a. Translations borrowed from S. Wang 1991: 364.

7. 呀！原來卻是夢裏！

real people would have in normal life. Furthermore, it retains the uncertain characteristics of “real” dreams, including a high level of ambiguity, without the clear, even transparent signification we find too often applied to dreams narrated in fiction. Without being a nightmare, it is a typical bad dream, a dream of frustration and anguish, of helplessness, one in which the dreamer’s desire (or should we say: conscious desire) is thwarted. What is depicted here appears to be what Zhang Sheng fears most: the loss of his beloved Yingying and his incapacity to retrieve her. And this feature of uncertainty comes at the end of a story centered on an ardent, unabated courtship and quite successful love story.

It is always a good methodology to look into previous versions of a story, or of a narrative detail of a story, whenever they are available. In this case there are many, including the ur-story by Yuan Zhen, early poems and Northern Jin to Yuan songs, and the celebrated *zhugongdiao* by Dong Jieyuan.

Yuan Zhen’s (779-831) tale in literary Chinese (*chuanqi*) “Yingying zhuan” (“The Story of Yingying”, *alias* “Huizhen ji”, “Story of an Encounter with an Immortal”)⁸ is the well-known original version of the theme. In this tale, the only dream scene is actually a half-dream, a highly equivocal reverie somewhere between phantasy and reality. It coincides with Zhang spending his first night with Yingying. The whole scene is imbued with an atmosphere of eeriness, as Yingying doesn’t utter a single word, and is described by the author with fairylike qualities subtly placed at the edge of the metaphoric and the literal meanings. At dawn, when she withdraws, Zhang is not sure whether his happiness belonged to dream or to reality. He has to rely on concrete tokens of her presence, like traces of make-up, hints of perfume, to persuade himself she has really been there. Here is how the scene is narrated:

A few nights later Zhang was sleeping alone by the veranda when someone shook him awake. Startled, he rose up, to see Hongniang [the maidservant] standing there, a coverlet and pillow in her arms. She patted him and said, “She is coming! She is coming! Why are you sleeping?” And she spread the quilt and put the pillow beside his. As she left, Zhang sat up straight and rubbed his eyes. For some time it seemed as though he were still dreaming, but nonetheless he waited dutifully. Then there was Hongniang again, with Miss Cui leaning on her arm. She was shy and yielding, and appeared almost not to have the strength to move her limbs. The contrast with her stiff formality at their last encounter was complete.

8. Full text included in S. Wang 1987: 259-264 ; see full English translation in Hightower 1973: 93-103 and Hightower 1994. Full French translation under the title “Folie de jeunesse (Biographie de Yingying)” in Lévy 1992: 101-121.

This evening was the night of the eighteenth, and the slanting rays of the moon cast a soft light over half the bed. Zhang felt a kind of floating lightness and wondered whether this was an immortal who visited him, not someone from the world of men. After a while the temple bell sounded. Daybreak was near. As Hongniang urged her to leave, she wept softly and clung to him. Hongniang helped her up, and they left. The whole time she had not spoken a single word. With the first light of dawn Zhang got up, wondering was it a dream? But the perfume still lingered, and as it got lighter he could see on his arm traces of her makeup and the teardrops still sparkling on the mat.

For some ten days afterwards there was no word from her.⁹

This dream scene is clearly not the origin of the dream we analyze here, in the Yuan *zaju*, as it is not placed at the same location of the narrative, occurring not near the end but in the middle of the love story. There is no hint either of a return of the bandits who attacked the monastery. Nevertheless, the scene prefigures some features that are strongly present in the *zaju* and in particular in the dream at the inn in Act 4, Play IV, *i.e.*, the main theme being the subject's incapacity to distinguish clearly between dream and reality, thus doubting that Yingying has a real existence beyond the subject's own volition (expressed as hope, dream or reverie). As in many places of the *zaju* (but *not* the final dream scene), Yingying remains speechless, like some forever-unattainable supernatural being.

Quite a few of the earlier songs, mainly from the Song period, which bear witness to early stages of the evolution of Zhang Sheng and Yingying's story in oral literature have been preserved until the present day. They include, *e.g.*, two *tiaoxiao zhuan* (or *tiaoxiao ling*, short comic narrative dance-tunes, related to *ci*-tradition songs) sharing the exact same metric, by Mao Pang (1064- ?) and Qin Guan (1049-1100), both entitled "Yingying",¹⁰ and a much longer *ci*-suite, more precisely a *guzici* ("drum-lyrics"), by Zhao Ligzhi (*zi* Delin, 1061-1134, a well-known author, and one of Su Shi's (1037-1101) friends), in which the story is developed in the course of a song to the well-known tune "Die lian hua" ("Flower-Loving Butterfly"), repeated no less than twelve times.¹¹ The two former pieces, which are very short (fifteen lines each) and are but brief sketches retracing a few details of the love story, do not refer to any precise dream scene that would occur in the narrative, but they do perpetuate

9. Translation by James R. Hightower 1973: 96. Original text: S. Wang 1987: 261. I have converted Hightower's Wade-Giles transcription into *pinyin*.

10. Included in Dong 1982: 360-361; Liu 1957, 92-93, 101; and S. Wang 1987: 274.

11. Text included in Dong 1982: 362-365; S. Wang 1987: 275-278; Liu 1957: 56-67.

a strong sense of eeriness, of unreality about what happened between Zhang and Yingying. The reference to dreams is present in both, though, at least metaphorically. In Qin Guan's *tiaoxiaoling*, the encounter is evoked like a "vernal dream" (*chunmeng*), and the place of the love-making compared to a "Grotto of Immortals" (*shenxian dong*). Mao Pang's piece is more precise, and its last stanza clearly hints at the departure of Zhang Sheng to the capital, leaving behind him the young lady who gave him a token of her love and continuing, on the road that stretches out ahead of him, the uncertain quest for another, no less evanescent object. The departure and the sense of renouncing someone who may not have actually existed is a theme that is shared with the dream scene of the future play, but the rationale for the behavior still follows the judgement that emerges in Yuan Zhen's *chuanqi*, of a Zhang Sheng presented as a weak young man with a flimsy commitment to the loved one:

In what place [is he?] On the road to Chang'an. He does not remember the flower, east of the wall, that caressed the tree. Once having played the Tune of Rainbow Skirts on the precious jade zither, Lonely again at the window lit by the moon, at the windy door. A heartless young lover like flying catkins, In his dream pursuing the jade ring, to the west has gone.¹²

In Zhao Lingzhi's long suite, written slightly later, we see the first clear occurrence of a dream scene *after* Zhang has left Yingying and starts his voyage to the capital. This scene occurs in the ninth reprise of the "Die lian hua" aria:

After the separation, my heart troubled with love-longing, There are no words of fragrant news, But suddenly I send a message, a goose from the south. I write on flower-pad and tear-drenched paper, Depicting minutely my heart, so that he can see.

Sleeping alone in this fine night, with no way to dispel my thoughts, In my dream all of this [is] so vague, [but] For a brief moment it is like I still can see him as usual. The secret meeting is not over, yet my soul is shattered, Half the bed sheets seem warm but regardless, he is far away.¹³

Of course, the most obvious difference here with the future scene in the play is that these stanzas refer to Yingying, not Zhang Sheng, dreaming of the lost one (several details in the song make it perfectly clear, including the (predominantly) masculine pronoun *yi* 伊, in 教伊看: "so that *he* can see"). It has been observed

12. S. Wang 1987: 274.

13. S. Wang 1987: 277; Liu 1957: 64.

that the Song period is marked by a rise in narrative themes in which a young lady of good family falls victim to the ingratitude of a young man who does not hesitate to sacrifice her to the priority of his social success.¹⁴ While this *guzici* may have reflected this tendency, we should note that, viewed from the angle of the oneiric theme, from either subjective standpoint (Yingying's or Zhang Sheng's) the aftershock of the amorous encounter is a sense of a dreamlike, unreal experience, a doubt that it did really happen. This ethereal appreciation of the existence of the other in the love-scene is not only at the core of Yuan Zhen's story, contributing for a large part to its incomparable literary value, but remains present in all forms of later commentaries, evocations, rewriting and recycling of the narrative theme. In these different forms of reprises, be they narrative or evocative, we find, among the most enduring characteristics, a strong mutual appreciation of the other as someone belonging in equal parts to the phantasmagoric and the worldly realm and a constant shift between dreams in real and metaphorical senses, with the abolition of any clear-cut frontier between the two. These features were already present in some of the earliest commentaries on the theme, as in "Yingying's Poem", "Yingying shi", attributed to Yuan Zhen himself and included in Wei Hu's (Five Dynasties, Hou Shu, mid-10th century) anthology *Caidiao ji*:

The fleeting hidden smile is no smile at all,
The fragrance you seem to smell is not really perfume.¹⁵

We know that the chantefable *The Story of the Western Wing, Ballad in All Keys And Modes, Xixiang ji zhugongdiao*, by Dong Jieyuan (fl. 1189-1208), was the principal and most direct source of Wang Shifu's *zaju* play *The Story of the Western Wing*.¹⁶ It has two dream scenes, both on the theme of sexual

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14. See, e.g., on the theme of Cai Bojie and the formation of Gao Ming's (?-1359) *Pipa ji*: Yan Changke in Yan 1983: 84 ; in relation with the theme of Guiying, victim of Wang Kui: Xu 2006: 160-184; Lowry 2005: 184.
 15. Translation by Hightower in 1973: 108; text in S. Wang 1987: 265; On the relationship between Yuan Zhen and his early lover, Cui Yingying's prototype, and the authorship of love poems attributed to Yuan Zhen in Wei Hu's anthology, see Huang 2009; see also Gu 2005: 74.
 16. For a complete translation, see Dong 1994. On the textual transition between the *zhugongdiao* ballad and the *zaju* drama, and a substantial presentation of Dong Jieyuan's version including a book by book abstract, see the Introduction by Idema and West to their translation of the play: S. Wang 1991: 48-58. On the history of the *zhugongdiao* as a genre: Ch'en 1972, 1973; Idema 1978, 1993, 1995.

frustration. The second one, appearing in Book 6 of the *zhugongdiao* ballad,¹⁷ directly inspired the *Xixiang ji* dream we are discussing here.

The feminine figure remodelled

Again, comparing the *zhugongdiao* ballad and the *zaju* drama on this particular scene is very instructive. The differences inform us of the intentions of Wang Shifu when he rewrote this scene, and how he read and understood it. As always with rewriting processes, the resemantization appears to be a form of commentary in its own right.

This rewriting here blends literal quotations from the *zhugongdiao* source with changes in many respects. The latter consist of two different kinds of alterations, either as editing (mainly in the sense of amplification) of the ballad's details, or as *addenda* of features that are not present in it. These changes are too numerous to be described here in full detail, and the reader may refer to the different versions and their translations.¹⁸ To sum them up, we may say that all these alterations generally tend to make Yingying a stronger and more formidable figure. Whereas in the *zhugongdiao* she escaped with her maidservant, now she travels alone. She is more fearless and has more presence; she becomes a singing role which, as a result, tends to marginalize Zhang Sheng;¹⁹ she has significant and substantial dialogue parts; and though she declares her love, there is a kind of otherworldly loftiness about her. In the *zhugongdiao* version, by comparison, as soon as Zhang meets Yingying, he gets her undressed and they jump into bed most unceremoniously, while in the theater play there must have been no possibility of such intimate gestures. (Let us recall that the *zhugongdiao* genre was a third-person narrative, without any actual representation onstage, and that it was much more sexually explicit than the later *zaju* version. Wilt Idema has suggested that the “in all keys and

17. The first one appears in Book 5, which opens with Zhang Sheng and Oriole experiencing the “union of rain and cloud”, until... Zhang Sheng awakes and discovers that it was only a dream. See Dong 1982: 192-193; translation by Ch'en Li-li: Dong 1994: 127-128.

18. *Xixiang ji zhugongdiao* version, Book 6: text, Dong 1982, 263-269; translation: Dong 1994: 177-182. *Xixiang ji zaju* version, Play IV, Act 4: see above, note 6.

19. This infringes one of the basic rules of the *zaju*, which imposes a single singing role per act. In this one, Zhang Sheng is normally the singing role. We know that Wang Shifu has introduced numerous exceptions to the general formal rules of the *zaju* genre in his *Xixiang ji*. For a general summary of these exceptions, see the presentation by Idema and West in S. Wang 1991: 62-76 (Introduction).

modes” version may even be read as a treatise on the *ars amatoria*, especially on the art of the bedchamber as practiced in bordellos.²⁰⁾

The end of the scene is altogether different. In the *zhugongdiao*, in just one aria, while they are just beginning to make love, Zhang and Yingying are interrupted by clamors, orders are shouted to search the room, then the door is kicked open... and Zhang awakes from his dream even as he stands up to fight back.²¹⁾

The table below summarizes the main differences between the *zhugongdiao* and the *zaju* versions in managing this scene:

<i>Xixiang ji zhugongdiao</i>	<i>Xixiang ji zaju</i>
Yinying comes accompanied by Hongniang.	Yingying comes alone, having escaped her maidservant's and mother's watchfulness. Here bound feet did not hinder her from rushing through the countryside.
The road from the monastery to the inn is difficult but evoked in only one stanza.	Yingying's fearlessness, intrepidity, and strong personality, as well as the difficulties of the road that she has traveled alone, are stressed and described in great detail. Some details are even more dramatized through the use of the first person.
Yingying says nothing except for a short response in dialogue.	Yingying becomes a partial singing role, and describes at length her deep motivations, her attachment to Zhang, and the audacity of her decision through four consecutive arias and in several dialogue parts.
As soon as Zhang and Yingying meet, he goes about getting her undressed.	In his turn, Zhang sings his deep admiration and love for Yingying through four consecutive arias and in dialogue parts. He keeps his distance from her. No erotic gesture.

20. Idema 1995, 252.

21. Aria to the tune “Ding fengbo”, Dong 1982: 267-268; translation: Dong 1994, 181.

Furthermore, numerous details are added by Wang Shifu that are not present in the *zhugongdiao* by Dong Jieyuan:

- In the dream scene, we are back at the Monastery of Universal Salvation, and not at the inn any more.
- When the bandits burst onto the scene, it is no longer Zhang Sheng who tries to repel them, but Yingying herself, almost completely evicting Zhang's figure and presence.
- Yinying appears as the one resisting figure in a full, energetic aria (to the tune "Shuixianzi") where she is the only singer, bluntly defying the bandits, even reviling them, while she tells a timorous Zhang Sheng twice to step back and leave the whole matter to her.
- Yingying spontaneously refers to "the hero" who will come and save her, and this hero is... the White Horse General.
- Suddenly she is snatched away by the bandits and disappears (whereas there is no reference to her abduction in the *zhugongdiao*); exactly at the same instant Zhang suddenly awakes.

The whole *zaju* scene deserves to be cited here:

(Extra clown and party, costumed as soldiers, enter and shout. [Extra clown] speaks:)

We saw a girl crossing the Yellow River a moment ago, but we don't know where she went. Bring a torch! It's clear that she's fled into this inn. Bring her out! Bring her out!

(Male lead speaks:) What do we do now?

(Female lead speaks:) You stand back. I'll open the gate myself and confront them. "Shuixianzi" (Female lead sings:)

Stubbornly you surround the Monastery of Universal Salvation, set to work with spades and picks;

Cruelly, you grab our throats, pull out swords and axes.

Rebellious hearts and gluttonous eyes are by nature deformed.

(Student speaks:) Let me confront them.

(Female lead speaks:)

([She] sings:)

Don't speak;

Stand back.

(Extra speaks:)

Whose daughter are you to cross the Yellow River in the dead of the night?

(Female lead speaks:)

Don't talk nonsense.

([Female lead] sings:)

General Du—you know him as a hero—

He'll glance just once and turn you into salted pickles;

He'll point just once and transform you into blubber and blood.

He'll come riding a white horse!

(Extra grabs female lead and leaves [with clown and party]. Student speaks:) Ya! So it was only in a dream! Let me open the gate and look—all I see is a whole heaven of dewy vapor, a whole earth of frosty flowers. The morning star has just appeared, and the remnant moon is still bright.

(Student recites:)

Without reason swallow and magpie clamor on the highest branch;

On a single pillow a dream of mandarin ducks fails to coalesce.²²

In the *zaju*, without Zhang Sheng having as little as touched her, Yingying becomes clearly the prominent personality of the passage. The feminine figure is remodeled into a formidable object, or rather a determined subject, with a will of her own. Numerous details added to the narrative enhance this portrait of a strong female character, and this scene is clearly presented as a re-enactment of the prior Monastery siege. While Zhang Sheng seems to be stricken with total impotence, she is snatched from him under his very eyes at the second she expresses her hope that Du Que, the “hero” will appear riding his white horse and save her. It is Wang Shifu's rewriting that has brought about these changes to such significant details in the story.

22. Translation by Idema and West 1991: 363-364 (I depart from his translation for the first sentence Zhang pronounces when awakening); French translation: S. Wang 2015: 297-299. The last distich recited by Zhang Sheng goes back almost *verbatim* to the *zhugongdiao* version (but for one character): Dong 1982: 269, and translation: Dong 1994, 181. Original text: Dong 1955: 133a-133b; Wang Jisi's version, which relies on Ling Mengchu's (1580-1644) edition, has fewer details: Wang 1987: 168. The two last verses are: 無端燕鵲高枝上, 一枕鴛鴦夢不成.

Rewriting and interpretation

No dream account ever goes without an interpretation. And the *zaju* *The Story of the Western Wing* being basically a rewritten version of the *zhugongdiao* and other textual traditions related to this narrative theme, we are justified in considering this rewriting of the scene as being Wang Shifu's interpretation of it.²³

What is striking in the rewriting of the dream is how, for Wang Shifu, Yingying seems to reveal little-expected aspects of her personality. Far from the delicate figure of a bound-footed damsel of respectable family, she runs alone, unaffected by social conventions, in the dead of the night through the open country, the epitome of desire and sexual drive. But this is not all. Upon joining Zhang, she reveals the unconscious truth about her fidelity to him: while he is stricken with impotence and reduced to playing second fiddle, she is the one who opens the gate of the monastery—a space which has been judiciously characterized by Wilt Idema as a *yin* space, a feminine world²⁴—to call on the one who has a power matching hers, Zhang Sheng's sworn brother Du Que. And under the former's eyes, in this triangular relationship, the author chooses to cut through the scene at the exact moment the hero's true name is uttered, in Yingying's judgement: General Du, on his white horse. This utterance carries her desire. And this desire drives her away from Zhang Sheng the very instant she is abducted by the bandits—for in the story the bandits who besiege her from the beginning of the play are nothing more than the metaphor for lust.²⁵

Reading this, a psychologist, be it as a manner of pleasantry, might think of a very common fantasy in obsessive-compulsive personalities, who love to imagine sharing their own wife with their best friend. But we must not forget that, reporting on characters of fiction, what we are dealing with here are imaginary persona, not real beings, and that there is no point in attempting a psychological depiction of the deeds of a fictitious being.²⁶ We should be careful here in order to fathom what is at stake on a more structural level, especially as Wang Shifu's own interpretation of this dream scene will be

23. On rewriting and interpretation from a theoretical point of view, see Lefevere 1992, in particular chapters 5 and 7.

24. S. Wang 1995: 52-63, in general introduction, 5, "An Introduction to the World of *The Western Wing*."

25. Lanselle 2009: 76.

26. Thus, in my opinion, the idea that the scene in which Yingying is abducted by Flying Tiger's soldiers could be explained as Zhang Sheng's "guilt about leaving" is of little significance: S. Wang 1995: 79.

highly consequential and influential for generations to come of both writers and readers. If some analysis should be attempted here, it would thus be on a metapsychological level rather than a psychological one.

Though we mentioned her desire, we actually know nothing about the woman's motivation. This is the privilege of the writer to remain highly imprecise on her account and to entertain an atmosphere of nebulosity about her that was to be highly praised by future readers of the play (beginning with Jin Shengtan [1608-1661], on whom we will say more in what follows). Like Zhuang Zhou's butterfly, she is only an object in the subject's dream, and this subject gives us his interpretation of the dream scene, as soon as he realizes that "It was only in a dream"²⁷:

On a single pillow, the dream of mandarin ducks failed to coalesce.²⁸

The rest of the act, up to the moment of the departure from the inn, is full of evocations of a Yingying who might very well have been altogether illusory. The "jade person" isn't there anymore, and this might have all been a dream:

A flutteringly empty Zhuang Zhou: a dream of butterflies

[...]

Painful, sensitive, the wound of parting;

Vexing, beguiling, such a fine dream was hard to give up.

Chilling, chilling, cold moans:

That lovely and dainty jade person — where is she now?²⁹

Nevertheless, Zhang continues his travel, the aim of which is to come back and ultimately be worthy of her.

Two facts in particular deserve attention here. The first is that in this whole dream scene the female character appears to the dreamer as what we would call a perfectly phallic woman. This importance, this outstanding status of Yingying in the story dates back to the very beginning of the theme in Yuan Zhen's *chuanqi*, and was to be documented at length by the *Xixiang ji*'s greatest commentator Jin Shengtan, who sums up this characteristic in the *dufa*

27. 原來卻是夢里!

28. 一枕鴛鴦夢不成。

29. Aria on the tune "Deshengling": S. Wang 1955: 133b; S. Wang 1987: 168; English translation by West and Idema: S. Wang 1991: 365; French translation: S. Wang 2015: 299-300.

(“Method of Reading”, “How to Read”) essay he placed at the beginning of his edition of the play :

The *Story of the Western Wing* is entirely dedicated to the depiction of one single person, and this one single person is Shuangwen [Cui Yingying].

(“How to Read the Sixth Book of Genius”, item 50)³⁰

The second fact worthy of attention is that Du Que, the White Horse General, Baima jiangjun, is literally Zhang’s alter ego.³¹ If one reads the monologues in which they present themselves to the public (/reader), they appear as forming the two halves of one single persona, endowed with the qualities of both *wen* and *wu*, the civil and the martial (and one might add: the symbolic and the real). They both come from Luoyang; they are sworn brothers (*babai zhi jiao*); they have studied together and have the same age; their *ming* (personal names), Junrui and Junshi, bear one common character, like the generation markers shared between siblings or cousins; when they first appear on stage they spontaneously speak of one another; and it is said that after Du Que has “abandoned the civil for the military” (*qi wen jiu wu*), he has become first laureate at the military examination (*wuju zhuangyuan*), parallel to the way Zhang Gong is destined later to become first laureate at the civil examination.³²

The elusive Other of the dream

Having noted these few details, this is where we should try to understand the dream scene structurally, that is, far from an attempt at psychologizing the characters, by locating what mechanisms are at stake that make this dream appear as a watershed in the story. After his dream, the until-then besotted Zhang Sheng seems to doubt there was even someone at all to love. This could

30. Zhang 1986: 19.

31. The persona of the White Horse General is neither an invention by Wang Shifu nor by Dong Jieyuan in his ballad in all keys and modes, as it was present in recreations of Yuan Zhen’s story as early as the Tang: there is a mention of him in a ballad by Li Shen (772-846), quoted by Dong Jieyuan himself in his *zhugongdiao*. The personal name Du Que, though, is associated with the general only in the *zhugongdiao* and in the play. See Li Shen’s ballad “Yingying ge” in S. Wang 1987: 272; on its role in the formation of the story : S. Wang 1991: 44-47 (Introduction).

32. Monologues, Act 1, Play I, and Act 2, Play II (or additional “wedge”, *xiezi*, placed between Acts 2 and 3 in editions posterior to the Hongzhi edition): S. Wang 1955: 32a-32b, 67a; 1987: 5, 66-67; 1995: 116, 163; 2015: 10, 105.

only be an episode of little importance, but if we take into account the huge impact this interpretation of the dream by Wang Shifu had for generations to come, it must have been because some structurally important mechanism was operating, that went well beyond the circumscribed occurrence, and had a kind of general value.

In order to analyze this mechanism, which implies such fundamental questions as desire, the structure of the self's identity vs. otherness, and of course unconscious activity, of which the dream is the paradigm (if any), I propose to use one of Jacques Lacan's diagrammatic representations, the "Diagram L" (see "Diagram L1", "Diagram L2").³³ Like other figures that he developed, the "Diagram L" should not be understood as a static representation, but rather dynamically.

Diagram L1

If we try to formulate what can become a rather complicated matter as simply as possible, we might say that the subject ("S" on the diagram) is never directly addressing the great Other—that is, another subject (here: the woman)—for the reason that the subject has no address by him/herself. His/her address is mediated through his/her ego (as subject and ego are two separate entities), an

33. Lacan 1978: 334; Lacan 1999a: 53; Lacan 1999b: 27; Lacan 2013: 145. See also: "Schema L" in Evans 1996: 172-174; Chemama and Vandermersch 2003, 379-382; Dor 2002: 155-165; Porge 2000: 174-177.

ego which in its turn has an imaginary, mirror-like structure. This originates from the fact that our subjectivity was formed unconsciously out of interactions with others, and first of all with the parental Other (“A” on the diagram) from whom we received our name.

When a subject wants to communicate with another subject, he or she, unconsciously, lets the Other address a part of oneself (the ego, “a” on the diagram) which is no more than a projection of the subjectivity, an imaginary projection (“a” [or “petit autre”, “little other”] on the diagram), by which the subject is mediated and marked by a fundamental alterity. The ego is literally a mirror image that the subject has tacked onto him/herself.

This is exactly the role played here by the imaginary presence of the White Horse General, evoked in Student Zhang’s dream scene. When he lets Yingying long for “the hero”, it is actually the desire of the Other towards himself that he wants to trigger. But himself under the guise of his alter ego. (On the diagram, imagine an arrow starting from the lower right “A”, then making a sharp “L”, finishing at the upper right “a” via “S”). And this is why Yingying appears as so phallic in this scene: she signifies unequivocally all that he, himself, in his present situation, and by contrast, is lacking—and lacking what? *Her*, of course. And what makes her so phallic? The very fact that she is the object of the general, who will come and possess her, whereas he (the dreamer) cannot. Here we have to remember that when we use the word “phallic”, we understand it in its true meaning of something unattainable, that no one either *is* or *possesses*. Far from representing any kind of fulfillment, the phallus has no existence but as a pure signifier, and *le signifiant du manque* at that: the signifier of lack.³⁴

Though expressed through the paradoxical motive of frustration, Zhang’s dream is nonetheless the expression of a desire, or more exactly, a desire of a desire: one day Zhang Sheng will be at the place of the alter ego, Du Que—whose name, by the way, refers to the *du que*, the helper of marriage³⁵—and he will be the object of the woman’s desire, her “hero”.

34. Evans 1996, 143-146; Dor 2002, 189 et 190.

35. It has long been asserted that the general’s name, Du Que, might be a wordplay referring to the *du que*, “the magpies that cross” the Milky Way, in order to reunite the Weaver Girl (Zhinü) and the Cowherd (Niulang) on the night of the Qixi Festival. According to this interpretation, the legend’s Celestial River (Tianhe) has its correspondent in the play as the Yellow River, with the general Du Que residing at Puguang, that is to say across the river from the Pujiu Monastery, thence placing himself in the same position as the Niulang in regard with the Zhinü. See Yao 1976, 336. On the symbolic geography of the *Xixiang ji* and the celestial meaning of the Yellow River: S. Wang 1991: 78-83.

Diagram L2

Here the fulfilled desire, *in the dream*, would be what the subject would fear the most, as it would simply annihilate the very possibility of desire, in its true, reduplicated dimension (a desire of desire)—everything this dream is about. This desire is represented in the play through the stereotyped happy ending of success at the civil examination, followed by marriage, that is to be developed throughout the Play V of the *Xixiang ji* series. The ending of the dream scene (in the *zaju* version) at the exact moment Yingying is spirited away by the bandits, in erasing this very possibility, relieves the subject's anxiety about this contradictory situation: he lets go of the object but keeps the woman as a pure phallic signifier, a signifier of lack that maintains open the possibility to see his desire fulfilled one day. In so doing, he keeps from falling into a situation of anxiety, for anxiety, as Lacan puts it elsewhere, is nothing other than something occurring when the lack itself is lacking.³⁶

Is there something beyond the dream?

It is interesting to see, though of course out of a completely different mindset and conceptual toolbox, how traditional views reacted to the original text of the *Xixiang ji*, in what we could call a new round of commentaries or interpretations, in a way that is not at all contradictory to this analysis.

36. This is the subject of Lacan's seminar: Lacan 2004. See Evans 1996, 10-12, "Anxiety".

As we know, long after the *Xixiang ji*, in its *zaju* version, had become a play to read rather than to interpret on stage (although there is evidence suggesting the *zaju* continued to be performed until the very end of the 16th century in Nanjing), the book became a classic throughout the Ming period, with dozens of editions circulating. By the turn of the 17th century, around seventy different editions of the play were available to the readers,³⁷ bearing witness to the enduring presence of the story of Zhang Sheng and Yingying within the imaginary landscape of the time. As is well known, the most influential by far of the later editions was *The Story of the Western Wing, The Sixth Book of Genius, by the Guanhuatang Printing Studio* (*Guanhuatang Di liu caizi shu Xixiang ji*), published in 1656 by Jin Shengtan (1608-1661), an editor and commentator considered ever since to be the king of the literati commentary tradition of vernacular narrative literature.

Jin Shengtan's edition of the *Xixiang ji* is well known for the innumerable textual changes he introduced in regard to earlier versions of the play, as well as for the quantitatively impressive and qualitatively insightful commentarial apparatus he included in his edition of the text.³⁸ Being to some extent a rewriting of the play, Jin's edition can be rightfully considered a commentary on the story in its own right, in the sense referred to above. As regards the dream we are considering here, Jin Shengtan's editing and rewriting is in itself yet another interpretation of the scene, and what interests us is that this interpretation appears to be making explicit the latent contents of Wang Shifu's version in a way fully compatible with the implications we have just deduced from the logic of Diagram L. Which means that Jin Shengtan, who did not believe in the satisfaction of the sexual drive, did make something apparently very different with this dream scene as compared with Wang's version, but different merely on the surface: in fact, we can consider it only a *reading* of Wang's version, which unveils its latent signification, or put in more Lacanian terms, its unconscious truth—expressed through the handling of the dreaming subject's desire.

In his rewriting of this passage,³⁹ Jin Shengtan profoundly remodels Yingying's portrait. He achieves this through a set of textual changes that converge towards a general effacement of her own person. In his rewriting,

37. On the subject of the different editions of the *Xixiang ji*, see Church 1993: 1-21.

38. J. C. Wang 1972 is still a good general introduction to Jin Shengtan; the best modern edition of Jin Shengtan's edition of the *Xixiang ji* is the carefully edited and annotated one by Zhang Guoguang: Zhang 1986. See also the presentation by John C. Y. Wang in Rolston and Lin 1990: 124-146; Church 1999.

39. Zhang 1986: 264-266.

Yingying is still the courageous and loving woman who comes to join Zhang Sheng at the inn, but she does not appear as phallic anymore, compared to the bold, daring, and loquacious female of earlier versions. Now she hardly utters a few limited words as she knocks at the inn's entrance and has Zhang open the door, meet her and invite her in—and that's pretty much all for her. In the rest of the scene, she is just a silent presence, never says a word, much less sings a verse.⁴⁰ In front of the menacing bandits who have come to ravish her, she is not taking the lead, does not open the inn's gate, and Jin Shengtan boldly puts the same aria to the tune “Shuixianzi” by which *she*, originally, stood up to the bandits in the gutsiest terms... in Zhang's mouth! (At this moment, Jin Shengtan's stage direction even indicates that she has already left the stage.) Consequently, it is Zhang, not Yingying, who is calling for the White Horse General's presence, to whom he is identified like he was in the original scene in which he “saved” the Monastery.

In this painting, this detail illustrates the passage according to Jin Shengtan's edition, with the figure of a shielding and protective Zhang Sheng (see illustration 1 “Dream scene in Jin Shengtan's version”).

Yingying is literally under his wing.⁴¹ And it is in this advantageous posture, and after having “frightened” the bandits himself (far from letting Yingying be snatched by them in front of his own eyes), that he suddenly wakes up, concluding the dream by the same lines quoted above:

Without reason swallow and magpie clamor on the highest branch;
On a single pillow a dream of mandarin ducks fails to coalesce.

If we compare this illustration with the one that accompanies the same aria to the tune “Shuixianzi” in a version much closer to Wang Shifu's original text, the Hongzhi edition (1498), where Yingying had the singing role in this aria and was the one menaced the bandits and told them off, the difference

40. Jin Shengtan even takes the rule of Northern drama that does not allow two main actors to sing within the same act as a pretext in order to deny Yingying the possibility of having any singing part in this one. This is quite sly from him, as every reader of the time knew that there were many exceptions to this rule in this particular play. See the commentary before the aria to the tune “Qiaomu cha,” Zhang 1986: 262. On the exceptions to the *zaju* rules in *Xixiang ji*, see S. Wang 1991: 62-76.

41. From an anonymous 19th c. album, signed “Yunhan”, in 32 sheets, 14 paintings and 12 calligraphies, illustrating the *Xixiang ji* in 16 acts (Jin's version). Partly reproduced in Cahill *et al.* 2006: 71-95. The detail figures on p. 94-95. The author expresses his gratitude to the owner of the image, Ferdinand Bertholet, for his kind permission to reproduce it.

Ill. 1. Dream scene in Jin Shengtan's version
© Collection Ferdinand Bertholet

is striking (see illustration 2 “Dream scene, 1498 edition”). The “phallic” Yingying is facing the bandits alone, and there is no presence of the dreamer:⁴²

Ill. 2. Dream scene, 1498 edition

生店夢盜趕驚夕出店拒盜 “At the inn, the Student dreams of the pursuing bandits; Yingying comes out of the inn to resist the bandits”.

The comparison of the two illustrations makes even more palpable the sense of Jin Shengtan’s “commentary” on the scene—as this is how we can consider his rewriting—a commentary congruent with the deduction drawn above from the mechanisms implied in Diagram L: one day Zhang Sheng will be at the place of the alter ego, Du Que, and he will be the object of the woman’s desire, her “hero”. We would say here that Jin’s rewriting has interpreted and rendered manifest the original dream scene’s unconscious meaning.

As stated above, this meaning, which consists in a desire of a desire, can only be expressed through the paradoxical motive of frustration. This understanding is encapsulated in one of those many lapidary formulations that so often make Jin Shengtan’s commentary on the *Xixiang ji* appear so stunningly insightful:

42. S. Wang 1955: 133a. From the Hongzhi (1498) xylographic edition of the *Story of the Western Wing* by the Yue family of Jintai. Free access on Chinese Text Project [<http://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&res=4753>].

This is a dream that, at the moment, makes Zhang Sheng most frustrated, yet this is a fact that, in the long run, makes Zhang Sheng most satisfied,

says he, in a section commentary placed just between the menacing song addressed to the bandits and the moment Zhang wakes up.⁴³

In a way, this pretty much sums up everything. If there is a revelation for the subject—the modern, “divided” subject—it is that the ultimate object that motivates his or her desire is by no means someone who could be represented in reality by any actual person. As we can see in the illustration above, it is him/herself who comes in the place of the other (the “a” of Diagram L) in order to fulfill his/her own fantasy. In order for the fantasy to be maintained, the great Other (*i.e.*, the woman) has to be maintained as... Other (access to it is to be denied). Here the bandits, who as we said represent the sexual drive, appear as the impersonation of stress and fearfulness, and in this quality, they function as a metaphor: they are frightening as is the instant when the object of desire is literally rapt away, this happening as a corollary to the sexual drive. The subject may find him/herself unhappy in the end, but he/she has nonetheless satisfied his/her fantasy.

This is where Jin Shengtan is extremely consequential in his approach of the story of Zhang Sheng and Yingying, although, as stated before, he reads the play from a completely different conceptual point of view. The main goal of his entire commentary to this act—an act for which he coins the title “Jing meng”, “Awakening from the dream”—is to point out that the notion of dream concerns not only this scene, but actually *the whole story*. This is made clear at the very moment Zhang Sheng wakes up. In the original version, his exclamation when awakening is:

(Student speaks)

Ya! So it was only in a dream!⁴⁴

(生云)

呀！原來卻是夢里！

In Jin Shengtan’s it becomes:

43. 是張生此時極其不得意夢，是張生多時極得意事。Commentary to the “seventeenth section” of 4.4 (四之四, “Jing meng” 4.4, “Awakening from the dream”), Zhang 1986: 266.

44. See above note 22.

(Student Zhang makes the gesture of awakening; makes the gesture of reflecting)
Ya! So all this was but a big dream!⁴⁵

(張生醒科，做意科)
呀！原來是一場大夢！

Through this slight change, he indicates unambiguously that the notion of a dream applies to the whole story and no longer to this particular dream scene. In the different parts of his commentary to this Act 4, Play IV—be it the general introductory essay to the act or the interlinear notes—Jin comments at length about the dream of Zhuangzi and the butterfly (which the dreamer classically refers to in one of the arias), even rewriting the narrative so that Zhang Sheng dreams not once, but twice, as if to produce the impression of a dream within the dream. In his introductory essay to the act, he indiscriminately borrows arguments from all three of the Three Teachings, quotes the *Diamond Sutra* about the illusory nature of reality, saying that Zhang Sheng has attained the “highest perfect awakening” (*Anouduoluo sanmiaosanputi, anuttarā-samyaksambodhi*), and makes references to the Perfect Sage, who doesn’t dream, because he knows already that we all are in a dream—unlike the simpleton, who doesn’t dream either, but because his life is spent in a dream he is unaware of, etc. The whole introductory essay is thus entirely developed around the general idea of an awareness of the ultimate, dreamlike nature of reality. Jin even states that his views on the matter are well known to such and such persons whom he names, hinting to the fact that he may have given public lectures on the subject.⁴⁶

Jin Shengtian even goes a step further in his conclusions, as it is from his reading of this dream scene that he determines the story of Zhang Sheng and Yingying should be cut short at this point of the narrative, at the end of Act 4 and last of Book IV, and not have any further development beyond it. As noted above, the *zaju* *The Story of the Western Wing* is made up of five consecutive plays (or “books”, *juan*), but there has been a tremendous amount of critical and editorial discussion, from Ming times up to the present day, as to whether

45. Zhang 1986: 266.

46. General commentary to Act 4, Play IV, “Jing meng”, “Awakening from the dream,” Zhang 1986: 256-260. Allusion to *Jingang boreboluomi jing, Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, sect. 37, Zhang 1986, 256: 一切有為法，如夢幻泡影，如露亦如電，應作如是觀。“The phenomena of life may be likened unto a dream, a phantasm, a bubble, a shadow, the glistening dew, or a lightning flash, and thus they ought to be contemplated.” Translation by William Gemmell 1912: 109-110.

the fifth book, with its new ordeals of fidelity, the triumphant return of Zhang Sheng after passing the examination, and the final reunion (*tuanyuan*) of the lovers, was or was not by the same hand that authored the four first books. There was a general consensus that Book V was of inferior quality, and that it may have been written by someone other than Wang Shifu, perhaps the celebrated playwright Guan Hanqing (*ca.* 1241-1320). For many late Ming readers, like Xu Fuzuo (1560-*ca.* 1630), the dominant opinion was that this book was nothing more than, as the expression goes, a dog's tail patched onto a sable coat.

Accordingly, Jin Shengtan includes the fifth play under the name "Sequel" ("Xu"), and comments on it almost entirely negatively, in order to prove that it is not coherent with the sublime first four books.⁴⁷ But his emendation is not made for reasons of external critique: it appears as the consequence of what he understands is going on in the story through his careful reading of the first four books, culminating in his interpretation of the dream. If he decides to put an end to the story at this very point, it is as a logical consequence of what happens, or more accurately what *does not* happen, between the subject and the object of his/her (in this case *his*) desire. As stated in his comment cited above, it is not so much that Zhang Sheng remains unsatisfied with his own desire, but rather that he finds himself satisfied in a way that was unexpected (be it a frustrating way), and should be regarded as a revelation. In other words, for Jin there is something structural in this aporetic ending, in this culmination of the story in a dream that has nothing beyond it and cannot have anything. Put in psychoanalytical terms, his ego is certainly frustrated, but the subject in him, the divided subject has attained its goal, which is to maintain the contradictory fantasy of alienation and separation from the object that causes his desire. A situation that Lacan labelled through one of his "mathemes": $\$ \diamond a$, where the divided subject (\$) is in a relation of conjunction *and* disjunction (the rhomboid $\diamond$) with the object (a).⁴⁸ The Other being eternally lacking, there is simply no possible fulfillment to be expect from it (him/her): this is simply a logical conclusion. There is no possible "sequel" to represent this, as this lack

47. For a synthetic summary of the diverse opinions about the authenticity of the fifth play, see Liao 2000, 154-158. (I am grateful to Aude Lucas for drawing my attention to this book.) Although Liao discusses Jin Shengtan's treatment of the play from the dream scene on, she hardly makes any attempt to analyze his reading of the dream. The question of Book V is also discussed by Zhang Guoguang in his introduction to his edition of Jin Shengtan's commentated version: Zhang 1986: 3-4.

48. Lacan, Nov. 16th, 1966; Lacan 1999c: 252-253, 257-259; Dor 2002: 485; Evans 1996: 60-62, 111.

has no representation.⁴⁹ This is how I understand Jin Shengtan's innumerable remarks he makes throughout his reading of the *Xixiang ji*, in which he points out the fact that the play should not be read, as is too often the case, as a representation of the reality of a sexual relationship, but that there is something else, much subtler, to it.

If, under the pretext that the *Story of the Western Wing* is full of words expressing the mutual concupiscent desires of male and female, you would really make it something that improper, and nothing more, then you should as well destroy it altogether, without having it leave any trace.⁵⁰

Simply deducing, from such statements, Jin's terse moralistic preoccupations would be, in my opinion, totally missing the point.

Conclusion: the long-lasting destiny of an unremarkable dream

It is with this in mind that we should approach the destiny of the story of Zhang Sheng and Yingying in later years, beginning of course with its presence in another huge dream narrative, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*). While we know there are multiple references to drama in Cao Xueqin's (1715/1724-1763/1764) novel, *The Story of the Western Wing* is the most often cited of all, and above all the one that most triggers the identification of the young characters, beginning with Jia Baoyu, and above all Lin Daiyu. Both of them literally learn about love in reading the *Xixiang ji* together as if it was a manual.⁵¹ We should remember here that the play Cao Xueqin referred to was Jin Shengtan's edited version: and this not only because Jin's edition, once published in the 17th century, eclipsed almost completely every other

49. See the remarks the commentator makes in his essay "How to read the Sixth book of genius" ("Du Diliu caizishu Xixiang ji fa"), around the notion of wu 無: items #31 to #39, Zhang 1986: 11.

50. 《西廂記》一書，其中不過皆作男女相慕悅之詞，如誠以之為無當者而已，則便可以拉雜摧燒，不復留跡。Introductory essay to Act 4, Play IV, Zhang 1986, 256. Among his many comments related to these topics, see in particular the first six items of his "How to read...": Zhang 1986: 10-11.

51. The *Xixiang ji* is referred to or indirectly alluded to in no less than twelve chapters of the *Honglou meng* (if we include remarks made by its different commentators): chap. 3, 23, 25, 26, 35, 40, 42, 45, 49, 51, 54, 58. Chap. 23 even includes the name of the *Xixiang ji* in its title, in parallel with Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*, another highly influential reference.

version until the 20th century, but because we have many textual proofs that what Cao Xueqin has his characters read is indeed Jin Shengtan's text, including citations of textual emendations by Jin and act titles minted by him only.⁵² If we add to this the sarcastic and contemptuous tone with which Cao Xueqin dismissed the conventional happy-ending of the typical genius-and-beauty novels of the time, we should be aware that with the *Xixiang ji* in Jin Shengtan's commented version as, quite obviously, one of his sources, Cao Xueqin may have been highly perceptive of Jin's treatment of the lovers' love as a melancholy, hopeless affair, as encapsulated in the final dream. But this is an altogether different topic.

To summarize what I have tried to point out in this article, I would say that, whatever its form, genre or period, the narrative of Zhang Sheng and Yingying has always been marked by the presence of some kind of dream, and that this dream was understood as revealing something of the relationship between the two protagonists of the love story, and beyond them, more generally, of the relationship between the sexes. This dream is never presented as something supernatural, calling for a supernatural explanation, but rather as a personal enigma, experienced at a very intimate and personal level, which makes the dream appear at the same time very common and very modern—as it concerns the subject at the very individual level of his/her own fantasies. Hence my recourse to Lacan's Diagram L, a conceptual tool that has the capacity to take into account several aspects involved here, including the sexual Other, desire, identification, the subject/object relationship, and above all an unconscious dimension within which the subject's drive is channeled in such a way that he/she acts or feels without knowing what makes him/her act or feel that way. (This is what is conveyed by the concept of "divided subject"). This personal enigma had all the qualities to interest everyone personally, be it a reader, a singer of a popular song, or a spectator of a play. Hence, too, the remarkable need that we may observe for every generation to rewrite, and thus to comment on, the dream scene—as well as the whole destiny of the emblematic lovers.

Moreover the dream, in this case, plays its role as a conservatory of a memory repressed. It appears as the key to a truth unknown, or forgotten. And here this memory has to do with the history of the narrative itself. If we go back to the ur-story, the late 8th/early 9th-century tale in literary Chinese by Yuan Zhen, we remember that Zhang and Miss Cui's was the story of a missed encounter. It is to the failure in the subject/object relationship that this ancient tale owed much of its magnetism and mysterious appeal. We have seen

52. A good account of the relationship between Jin's *Xixiang ji* and the *Honglou meng* can be found in Xu 2008. See also Zhang 1986: 5.

how generation after generation of rewriters did their best to bury this aspect and pass on a secular effort to deny the ambiguity of the love story with its asymptotic encounter, and replace it with a highly formalized, fusional happy-ending. We have only to look at how Jin Shengtan multiplies the references to the idea of *revelation* in his commentary to Act 4, Play IV, to understand how he sees this dream as *the* key by which some fundamental verity is unearthed. Remarkably enough, this verity is also a return to the original, late Tang story, with its fuzzy ending and blurred perception of the loved one.

If we add to this the fact that his interpretation was, as we said, well-known to Cao Xueqin (this could make for another interesting paper), we can only marvel at how, being continuously rewritten, commented upon, twisted, and turned for nearly a millennium, that insignificant, plain little dream turned out to be astoundingly consequential after all.

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GLOSSARY

Anouduluo sanmiaosanputi 阿耨多羅三藐三菩提
babai zhi jiao 八拜之交
Baima jiangjun 白馬將軍
Cai Bojie 蔡伯喈

Caidiao ji 才調集

Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹

chuanqi 傳奇

chunmeng 春夢

ci 詞

Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯

“Deshengling” 得勝令

“Die lian hua” 蝶戀花

“Ding fengbo” 定風波

Dong Jieyuan 董解元

“Du Diliu caizishu Xixiang ji fa” 讀第六才子書西廂記法

dufa 讀法

Du Que 杜確

du que 渡鵲

Gao Ming 高明

Guan Hanqing 關漢卿

Guanhuatang Di liu caizi shu Xixiang ji 貫華堂第六才子書西廂記

Guiying 桂英

guzici 鼓子詞

Handan ji 邯鄲記

Honglou meng 紅樓夢

Hongniang 紅娘

Hou Shu 後蜀

“Huizhen ji” 會真記

Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉

Jin Shengtan 金聖歎

“Jing meng” 驚夢

Jingang boreboluomi jing 金剛般若波羅蜜經

juan 卷

Junrui 君瑞

Junshi 君實

Li Shen 李紳

Lin Daiyu 林黛玉

Linchuan si meng 臨川四夢

Ling Mengchu 凌濛初

Mao Pang 毛滂

Mudan ting 牡丹亭

Mudan ting Huanhun ji 牡丹亭還魂記

Nanke ji 南柯記

Niulang 牛郎

Pipa ji 琵琶記
Puguan 蒲關
Pujiu si 普救寺
qi wen jiu wu 棄文就武
“Qiaomu cha” 喬木查
Qin Guan 秦觀
Qixi Festival 七夕節
shenxian dong 神仙洞
Shuangwen 雙文
“Shuixianzi” 水仙子
Su Shi 蘇軾
Sun Feihu 孫飛虎
Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖
Tianhe 天河
tiaoxiao zhuanta 調笑轉踏 (or *tiaoxiao ling* 調笑令)
tuanyuan 團圓
Wang Kui 王魁
Wang Shifu 王實甫
Wei Hu 韋穀
wen 文 and *wu* 武
wuju zhuangyuan 武舉狀元
xiezi 楔子
Xixiang ji zhugongdiao 西廂記諸宮調
Xixiang ji 西廂記
Xu Fuzuo 徐復祚
“Xu” 續
Yan Changke 顏長珂
“Yingying ge” 鶯鶯歌
“Yingying shi” 鶯鶯詩
“Yingying zhuan” 鶯鶯傳
Yongji 永濟
Yuan Zhen's 元稹
Yumingtang si meng 玉茗堂四夢
zaju 雜劇
Zhang Guoguang 張國光
Zhang Sheng 張生 (*ming* Gong 珙, *zi* Junrui 君瑞)
Zhao Ligzhi 趙令畤 (*zi* Delin 德麟)
Zhinü 織女
Zichai ji 紫釵記
Zixiao ji 紫簫記