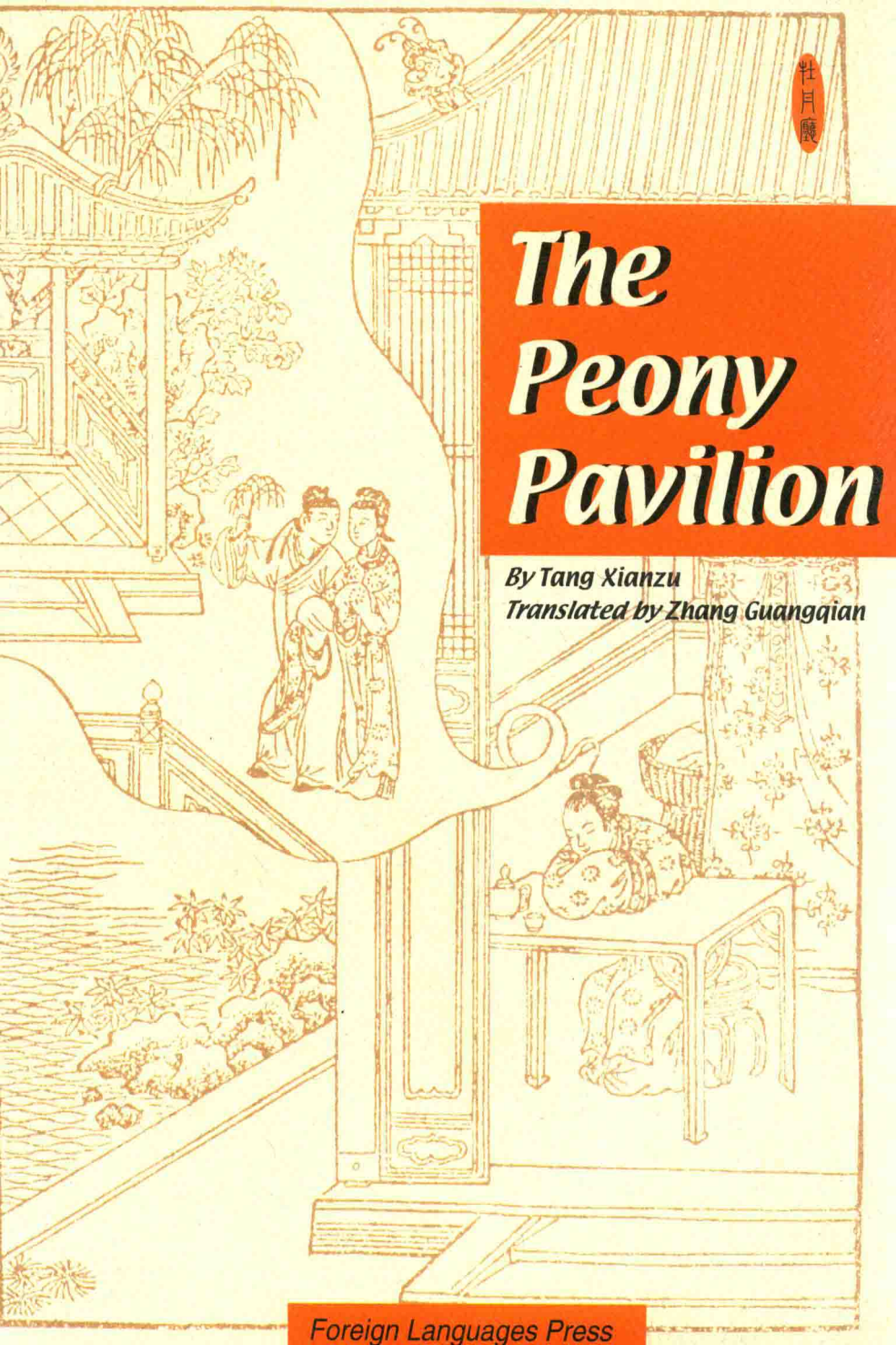

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By Tang Xianzu

Translated by Zhang Guangqian

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

牡丹亭:英文/(明)汤显祖著;张光前译.
—北京:外文出版社,2001
(中国经典译丛)
ISBN 7-119-02692-5

Ⅰ.牡… Ⅱ.①汤… ②张… Ⅲ.传奇剧(戏曲)-剧本-中国-明代-英文
Ⅳ.I237.2

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2000)第 41195 号

责任编辑　胡开敏
英文编辑　许　荣
封面设计　陈　军

外文出版社网址:
http://www.flp.com.cn
外文出版社电子信箱:
info@flp.com.cn
sales@flp.com.cn

牡丹亭

(明)汤显祖　著
张光前　译

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外文出版社出版
(中国北京百万庄大街 24 号)
邮政编码 100037
通县大中印刷厂印刷
中国国际图书贸易总公司发行
(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号)
北京邮政信箱第 399 号　邮政编码 100044
2001 年(大 32 开)第 1 版
2001 年第 1 版第 1 次印刷
(英)
ISBN 7-119-02692-5/I·669(外)
08000 元(平)
10-E-3388P

Preface to the 2001 Edition

I would like to thank the Foreign Languages Press for giving me this opportunity to revise my translation of *The Peony Pavilion* which was actually done in 1986, eight years before its first publication by Tourism Education Press in 1994.

Besides correcting typographical errors and inaccuracies in the previous translation, in this edition I have made a more conscientious effort to improve the rhythm and rhyming of the verse.

The blank verse style is still applied to the translation of the tunes. But in order to improve the musicality of the songs, experimented here is a kind of assonant rhyming, that is, to rhyme on the vowel only. For example, the first song in Scene 2 highlights the /a/ sound. Vowels are most musical to the ear, and rhyming on the vowel instead of the whole syllable makes the task easier. As a translator, however, I have no intention to sacrifice the accuracy of meaning for an elaboration on the sound effect.

In addition to rhyming, much effort has been devoted to the preservation of the tempo and rhythm of the verse. Unlike regulated poems of equal syllables in each line, the songs in a play are composed of lines of varying length according to the tune pattern. As this irregularity reflects the tempo, and therefore the mood, it is imperative to represent it as best as we can in the translation. In Chinese the most common line-patterns are the seven-word line and the five-word line (in classical Chinese, words are mono-syllabic, so one word is just one syllable). Experience shows that pentameter corresponds best to the seven-word line and tetrameter best fits the

five-word line. Lines of other lengths are translated accordingly. A nine-word line, for example, would most probably be translated into hexameter, for both types sound heavy in their respective languages.

At the same time, I have also made a more rigorous endeavor to keep to the original line divisions. In the following example taken from the beginning of Scene 50, four lines are reduced to the original three, and the meter of the lines is changed from an unvarying pentameter to pentameter-trimeter-pentameter to reflect the original 7-4-7-word line-pattern.

First edition:

Thousands of steeds are spread along the Huai;
wild geese columns above are heading south.
In the direction of my native place,
I stare out of the window of the tower.

Revised:

Columns of wild geese now are heading south
on rows of rolling clouds,
which makes me sick of war and sick for home.

Unfortunately, this accuracy is not always achieved because the associative meaning of the text is sometimes so rich, especially when literary allusions are involved, that the original line can hardly be contained within the space of one single line in English.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have given me advice and support after the publication of the first edition. I am most indebted to Prof. Xu Shuofang for his insightful criticism and persistent encouragement after the publication of the translation. I also benefited from constructive discussions with Mr. Xu Ying, a talented Chinese dramatist, who helped clarify some ambiguities in the original text. My revision of the Mongolian

transliterations in Scene 47 profited from Mr. Fang Linggui's informative book *Mongolian Expressions in Yuan and Ming Dramas*. My special thanks go to Mr. Hu Kaimin, whose cooperation and understanding have always been a valuable source of courage.

Z.G.Q.

PREFACE

The Peony Pavilion, or *The Return of the Soul at the Peony Pavilion* in full, is one of China's most widely read plays of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It was written in 1598 when the seeds of a capitalistic economy were sprouting in the ancient feudal system. New ideological thoughts of a humanist nature started to take root among the literate, and one of the first targets of criticism was the marriage system in which the father had all the say.

Tang Xianzu (1550-1616) was born in this period and was strongly influenced by the new trend. Though talented and ambitious, his official career was in no way satisfactory, and came to an end in the year of 1598 when he resigned from office as the head-magistrate of Suichang County in the present Zhejiang Province. He returned to his native place in Linchuan, Jiangxi Province, where he wrote the three plays: *The Peony Pavilion*, *The Dream Under the Southern Bough* (1600), and *The Dream on the Handan Road* (1601), which established his name in Chinese literature. Together with an earlier play, *The Anecdote of the Purple Hairpin* (1587), his plays are known as "the four dreams" because dreams play a vital part in the development of all the four plots.

The Peony Pavilion aims its pungent blows of the suffocating atmosphere of late Ming society, and is a powerful advocacy of free love. The author, however, is fully aware that the feudal system in his day is yet too strong and oppressing for his heroine to break through alone. Therefore, it is only with the leniency of the nether judge and by royal decree that the marriage of Liu Mengmei and Du Liniang can be accepted in the world of reality.

For Chinese traditional plays, highlight is given to the songs rather than to the speeches. Each scene is thus composed of a set of fixed tunes with colloquial speeches of various length within or in between the tunes. The tune places a requirement on the number of lines in the tune and the number of words in each line. The songs are rhymed verses and all the verses throughout a scene keep to a unique rhyme—which, however, is rendered into an irregular blank verse in the translation. The irregularity of the number of feet in the lines reflects an attempt to represent the uneven length, or rather, the tempo, of the lines in the original text, though this task sometimes proves almost impossible. Also, the name of the tune, as indicated by square brackets, has become a mere indication of the melody and word-pattern, and is no longer necessarily related to the theme of the song, though it was originally the title of a verse.

Careful readers may notice that an unusual amount of semicolons are employed in the translation of the verse. The two or more clauses thus combined may be parallel, or may indicate a cause-and-effect relationship, or other kinds of logical relationship. It may be a typical characteristic of Chinese poetry that conjunctive words are omitted. A poem can be said to be a sequence of images. Take for example the poem Chen Zuiliang teaches in Liniang's first lesson. The image of a lone bird making mating calls on an islet "leads to," or "jumps to" as one may feel, the image of a girl ready for marriage.

There are also poems spoken tonefully, which are italicized and placed within double quotation marks. It is conventional for each character to recite a poem as he or she enters and exits. The last poem of the scene is usually a succinct summary of the whole scene, and can be spoken by more than one of the characters.

It is interesting to note that Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare are

contemporaries, and both are champions of a simultaneous flowering period of drama at the opposite ends of the world. In spite of the pronounced difference in the dramatic forms, their plays share a common interest in the freedom of man.

This translation is based on Prof. Xu Shuofang's annotated text, with close reference to Prof. Qian Nanyang's collated text and Mao Jin's punctuated text in *The Sixty Plays*.

CONTENTS

SCENE 1

The Prologue

(Enter MO[1])

【Butterflies Kiss Flowers】

MO:

Thrown out of the bustle of office care
I've retired to a placid life.
Racking my brains to find a way
to drive away the many vacant days,
I set my heart on writing doleful verse,
though feeling proves too tangled to express.
Beyond the windows of my reading room
nights and days in succession pass:
the red candles brighten the mind;
the sunny hills inspire my pen.
If only lovers love with all their heart,
at the Peony Pavilion they unite.

"Du Bao, Taishou[2] of Nan'an,[3]
Had a daughter named Liniang,
Who liked outings in springtime.
Once she dreamed of a scholar young,
Who offered her a willow branch.
Her heart was broken for that man,
And only a portrait was left behind
Of the lone beauty buried deep
In the Plum Blossom Nunnery.
Three years passed.

A young scholar named Liu Mengmei
Arrived at the trysting place.
Soon he brought her back to life
And they became man and wife.
To Lin'an[4] *they went for the Court exam,*[5]
But rebellion broke out in Huaiyang,[6]
Besieging Du Bao in Huai'an.[7]
So worried was the bride
She sent the groom to glean some news.
The Grand Chancellor raged in disbelief:
How could his dead girl have married herself?
Lashes were falling on the young man's back
When he was awarded the laurel crown."[8]

"Du Liniang paints a portrait of herself.
Professor Chen dissuades the rebel Queen.
Scholar Liu carries off a long dead girl.
Premier Du beats the laureate with peach sticks."

NOTES:

1. MO: one of the seven major role types of a *chuanqi* play, which include SHEN, DAN, MO, JING, CHOU, WAI, and TIE. It is usually MO's function to give a brief introduction of the story at the beginning of a *chuanqi* play.

2. Taishou: the title of the chief magistrate of a prefecture.

3. Nan'an: a prefecture in the south of the present Jiangxi Province.

4. Lin'an: the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), now known as the City of Hangzhou.

5. The imperial examination system was divided into three levels. The elementary one was the entrance examination for local public schools. The intermediate one was held every three years at provincial towns, and the advanced was held at the capital the following year and often personally presided over by the emperor in the Court. The number one scholar of the final examination was called the *zhuangyuan.*

6. Huaiyang: an area in eastern China, between the Huai River and the Yangtze River.

7. Huai'an: a town on the Huai River in Huaiyang.

8. To be awarded the laurel crown: i.e. to be the *zhuangyuan.* In Chinese literature, imagery concerning the laurel usually alludes to success in the imperial examination.

SCENE 2

Ambitious Thoughts

(Enter Liu Mengmei)

【A Pearl Curtain】

LIU:

Of all the families east of the Yellow River
Liu was the biggest name.
The star that represents our place
also takes scholarship under her wing.
But generations have worn out the luster of our name,
and now we are trusted to the mercy of wind and rain.
Some say that books will provide you with what you need,
yet, where is the promised beauty, where the gold?
Though poverty has made me gray,
it has tempered my body and my mind.

"The tortoise-shell is burnished by perpetual climb;[1]
Poor scholars should prefer the southern climes.
Thanks to Providence that sustains one's hope,
I still retain a strain of highbrow gift.
What with my skill in boring holes,
What with my art in hanging my hair,[2]
My pen is ready to depict the world of gods;
Yet ,who will credit these talents of mine
Unless I have the laurel on my crown."

My name is Liu Mengmei, and I styled myself Sir Spring. My great ancestor is the famous Tang Dynasty poet Liu Zongyuan. It was he who first established this branch of our family south of

the Five Ridges.[3] My father attained the position of *Chaosan*[4] and my mother held the title of Madame County.[5] (Sighs) It's a pity that they both died early and left me all by myself. What a miserable life I've led ever since! Nevertheless, I'm now over twenty, well-informed and intelligent, and have just passed the intermediate examinations with flying colors. Unfortunately, this success hasn't enabled me to procure an official position, so hunger and cold still keep me company. Well, bless my ancestor Poet Liu, who had a gardener called Hunchback Guo. That Guo was expert in planting and grafting flowers and fruit trees, and he has a humpbacked great grandson who migrated with me to Guangzhou so that we can now make a living out of an orchard. But this is not the way for a promising young man to spend his life. These days, strange to say, my eyelids are heavy with daydreaming. A fortnight ago, I dreamed of a garden. There under a plum tree stood a beautiful girl. She was neither too tall nor too short, and it was difficult to tell from her gestures whether she was beckoning me to go over or simply bidding me adieu. "Mr. Liu, Mr. Liu," I heard her say, "only when you meet me will you obtain love and rank." That's why I changed my name to Mengmei[6] and styled myself Sir Spring. An old saying has it:

"*Long dreams, short dreams, all are dreams;*
Year in, year out, which year is that?"

【The Inner Heart】

Although I've changed my name,
I doubt how she could've known my fate.
Eagerly I look ahead to the fated hour
when I can hold aloft the laurel branch
—it's no vain boasting that my pears taste best.
But I fear Chang Er's[7] jealousy may arise