

Twelve Towers

十二楼

[清] 李渔 著

[美] Nathan K. Mao 译写
Weiting R. Mao

01 The Reflection in the Water

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12 The Secret Garden

外语教学与研究出版社


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The Reflections in the Water
The Jackpot
Buried Treasure
The Magic Mirror
The Swindler
The Elegant Equestrian
The Crafty Maid
Marital Frustrations
The Stole Lover
The Male Heir
Father and Son
The Hermit



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Foreword

Christopher G. Rea (雷勤风)*

Li Yü (1611-1680) was one of the outstanding literary personalities of late imperial China. An aestheticist and *bon vivant*, he cultivated an iconoclastic persona through a varied writing career in fiction, drama, and essays, flouting the narrative formulas and moral conventions of each. A man of wide-ranging enthusiasms and pursuits, Li took immense pleasure in his own creative capacities, and his writings exude an infectious sense of fun.

One expression of Li Yü's playful ethos that will catch readers' attention is the various types of tricksters we encounter in his stories. Swindlers, confidence men, dubious immortals, and conniving maids were stock comic tropes of Chinese vernacular fiction, but Li was obsessed with them. They are the agents that propel his narratives and shape their myriad twists and turns. "The Swindler" features a man who uses his talents not only for profit but to teach a braggart a lesson, help a prostitute become a Buddhist nun, and divert funds from the rich to build a pair of temples. In that story of redemption, as in others, the ends justify the fraudulent means. The title character in "The Crafty Maid" pulls off a double marital victory for herself and her mistress by outwitting the latter's prejudiced parents. On the other side of the moral balance, even "The Elegant Eunuch," whose venality is punished by having his skull turned into a piss-pot, is a trickster of sorts, as he lures his object of desire into bondage through a

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cunning deception. We come to expect surprises from Li Yü's heroes and heroines as they strategize and improvise their way through sticky situations.

Li Yü's stories celebrate consummate skill in all its forms, not least his own skill as a storyteller. His stories typically include at least one moment when "the magician reveals his trick," drawing our attention to his own narrative ingenuity, either in his own voice or through that of a character. Like P. T. Barnum, Li Yü, as self-appointed ringmaster of the human circus, takes pains to remind us along the way what a great show we're enjoying. Several stories conclude with a denouement (some of which are shortened in this edition) that explains what brought events to their tidy conclusion. The explanation may turn out to be a character's wise actions, as with "The Stoic Lover," or clever insight, as in "The Magic Mirror"; in other cases, the fortuitous turn of events, such as the anatomical miracle in "Marital Frustrations," is attributable to the hand of providence, which in Li Yü's world always sees moral justice done. These various narrative contrivances speak to Li Yü's dedication to the cause of provoking, surprising, and delighting his readers.

The motif that unites the stories of the collection (albeit, loosely), to which Li Yü alludes at the end of "The Hermit," is itself an innovation of form. A "tower" (*lou*, or multi-storied building) plays a role in the plot of each of the dozen stories, and is also the device that links them together into the *Twelve Towers*. (The collection's other title is *Famous Words to Awaken the World*.) Among these stories' other similarities, one worth noting here is their temporal setting. Li Yü wrote these stories in 1657 or 1658, and set all of them during or before the Ming dynasty

(1368-1644),¹ which had fallen to Manchu invaders only a dozen years earlier. Whether or not we detect in this gesture any sentimental nostalgia on the part of Li Yü (who was then in his late forties), by setting the stories in the past he neatly protected himself from any charge that his stories of love, sex, and justice make *direct* comment on the moral authority of the new Qing administration.

Nathan Mao's *Twelve Towers*, which was originally published thirty-six years ago,² remains the only rendering in English of all of the stories in Li Yü's collection, and we have Professor Mao to thank for having first brought them to English-language readers. His approach to adapting them for an English readership, which he outlines in his preface, deserves some comment here.

This book was intended primarily for general readers, and the stories were abridged with them in mind. In "retelling" these stories, rather than translating them in their entirety, Professor Mao has chosen to emphasize the main plot of each while excising much of the "packaging" found in the original. The presumption is that to include all of the chapter-heading couplets, poems, narratorial digressions, and the like might bore or puzzle readers who are unfamiliar with the formal conventions

1. "Xiayi lou" is set during the Yuan (1271-1368), "Hegui lou" and "Shengwo lou" during the Song (960-1279).

2. Li Yü scholarship in both China and the West has proceeded apace since Professor Mao's *Twelve Towers* appeared in the 1970s. While it is not the task of this foreword to update the annotated bibliography that appears in the 1979 revised edition, a few subsequent notable works of Li Yü scholarship deserve mention here: 1) *Li Yü quanji* [Complete Works of Li Yü]. 20 vols. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1991 [revised ed., 2010], which does not in fact contain the full text of *Rou putuan* [The Carnal Prayer Mat]; 2) Patrick Hanan. *The Invention of Li Yü* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); 3) Sara Kile. *Experimenting in the Limelight: Li Yü's Cultural Production in Early Qing China* (Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation, forthcoming).



of traditional vernacular fiction, and thus unable to appreciate Li Yü's clever inversions and deviations without explanatory notes. The present rendering is thus most appropriate for readers looking for entertaining stories, rather than for literary historians concerned with textual history and authentication. Like folktales, these retellings alter the story's form while trying to maintain its core spirit of entertainment and [here, disingenuous] moralizing. That said, Professor Mao retains most of the form of the original; this is no wholesale reworking like Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), which converted the Bard's plays into an entirely different genre.

The Li Yü one finds in this book is accordingly more punchy and less digressive than the one we find in the original Chinese, or in the translations of Patrick Hanan (and his collaborators), who has brought us *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (preface 1657), *Silent Operas* (written in 1655 or 1656), and *A Tower for the Summer Heat*.³ The latter includes six (4-7, 9, 11) of the "twelve towers" and represents a markedly different approach to their rendering: Professor Hanan selects half of the works and translates each in its entirety, including all poems, lyrics, preambles to the "stories proper," chapter-heading couplets, narratorial "intrusions," and post-story critiques (by Li Yü's friend, Du Jun). Professor Hanan has done so in part to preserve the narrator's voice, which he has called "the most distinctive part of any Li Yü story."⁴ Nathan Mao's rendering represents this voice, but, for

3. See: Li Yü. *The Carnal Prayer Mat*. Tr. Patrick Hanan. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990; Li Yü. *A Tower for the Summer Heat*. Tr. Patrick Hanan (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992); Li Yü. *Silent Operas*. Ed. Patrick Hanan (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000).

4. Patrick Hanan, "Introduction." In: Li Yü. *Silent Operas*. Ed. Patrick Hanan (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2000), viii.

reasons mentioned above, does not indulge it as fully as did Li Yü himself.

The two renderings of Li Yü thus pursue different agendas, even as both seek to entertain. Given that Li Yü was a master of self-reinvention, both on and off the page, it seems fitting that we should have multiple Li Yüs in English. In addition to providing English readers an entertaining introduction to Li Yü's world, this bilingual edition is also a great asset to students of Chinese, English, and the art of translation and adaptation. To each, enjoy!



Preface

Among the many esteemed Chinese writers of fiction whose works have remained largely untranslated and, therefore, unrecognized is Li Yü (1611-1680). We have long been impressed by the literary merits and the popular appeal of his TWELVE TOWERS. In terms of realism, plot development, characterization and theme, these twelve stories present vivid and realistic pictures of seventeenth-century Chinese society and its social mores.

In re-telling the stories of TWELVE TOWERS, we hope to introduce Li's short stories to two audiences: students of Chinese and general readers. For students of Chinese we have provided a bibliography on the life and works of Li Yü. The notes will clarify obscurities resulting from classical allusions. Except in a few cases, names of persons are transliterated, not translated. Where English equivalents do not exist, Chinese terms have also simply been transliterated. Since Chinese institutional history is not here of prime concern, official titles and honorifics have been freely translated. For the romanization of both Chinese terms and the names of people and places, the standard revised Wade-Giles system has been used.¹

For general readers, we are excited about introducing them to Li Yü's rich stories. For their reading pleasure, we have taken considerable liberties. For instance, we are re-telling the stories

1. 英国人威妥玛 (Thomas Wade, 1818—1895) 以拉丁字母为汉字注音, 创立了威氏拼音法; 后经英国人翟理斯 (H. A. Giles, 1845—1935) 稍加修订, 合称“威妥玛—翟理斯式拼音”。1958年汉语拼音方案公布后, 威氏拼音被取代, 但在国外仍流传甚广。为方便读者, 书后附有威氏拼音与汉语拼音的对照转换表——编者注。

in paragraphs since the original text does not have paragraphs. For readability, some obscure and verbose passages have been omitted. For smooth transition from one paragraph to another we have provided transitional words and sometimes a sentence or two to make the English as vivid and dramatic as the Chinese. The result is, we hope, every reader will find everything that matters in TWELVE TOWERS.

This new bilingual edition was made possible through the generosity of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. This bilingual format allows cross-cultural appreciation.

Nathan Mao
Weiting R. Mao

March 2011

Introduction¹

I. THE MAN

Li Yü's courtesy name was Li-weng, and some of his other names were Che-fan,² Li Tao-jen, Sui-an chu-jen, Hu-shang Li-weng, and Hsin-t'ing k'e-ch'iao. Although his ancestral home was the town of Lan-ch'i in Chekiang province, he was born in Hsia-chih, Hupeh.³ His parents must have moved to Hupeh, probably for financial reasons, in or before 1611, the year of his birth. They were well-to-do at one time but had suffered financial reverses.⁴ No definite evidence exists to show when the family moved back to Lan-ch'i from the middle Yangtze region. Internal evidence in his works indicates that his father died in 1629, that members of his family were stricken with an epidemic of some sort during the summer of 1630, and that his mother took care of the sick.

Li was known as a young genius, well versed in the classics and gifted in writing poetry, drama, and fiction. About 1635, at the age of twenty-four, he passed his first degree (*hsiu-ts'ai*) examination in Wuchow (Chin-hua). His essays on the classics were so good that they were printed and circulated by Hsü Ch'ih, the chief examiner. At that time or shortly thereafter he owned a retreat west of Lan-ch'i, known as Yi-shan pieh-yeh, and was a close friend of many local celebrities.

But his good fortune was soon threatened by political instability. Paralyzed by the misrule of powerful eunuchs, the Ming regime (1368-1644) faced the rebellion of Li Tzu-ch'eng

in the western provinces and the everlooming threat of the Manchus from the north. Turmoil and chaos reigned over much of the country. As early as 1639, in passing Tiger-claw Mountain, Li Yü had been robbed by bandits who spared his life. On another occasion, on his way to Hangchow for the provincial examination, he had to interrupt his trip and return home upon hearing reports of rampant civil disorder and bandit activities. He explained his feelings at the time as follows:

Thinking anxiously of home I was.
Heaven has set my date for return.
Poetry and Book of History are met with death
and confusion.
I shall farm and fish, awaiting peace to come.
The sail is broken, the wind is feeble,
The boat is empty and hollow-sounding;
Waves make noise.
...
What is there to be done?⁵

Since scholars were expected to compete in examinations and, by being successful, to bring fame and honor to their ancestors, his poem conveys his sense of sorrow and regret at having to give up this last opportunity, after having failed in several previous attempts.

When Li reached thirty years of age (by Chinese reckoning, on New Year's Day, 1640), he commiserated with himself in a *tz'u* poem to the tune of "Courtyard Full of Fragrance" (Man-t'ing fang):

Last night and today
Only moments apart
Yet they separate youth from old age.



If one asks how old I am,
 I'm fully thirty years of age.
 Last night I was
 Nine and twenty, still boasting of adolescence.
 Alas, now I can't call myself old;
 I can't call myself young either.

...

My wife too has added one year to her life.
 She prayed that I soon distinguish myself in examination
 halls.
 Awaiting my success, she forgot her birthday.
 Listening to my sighs and seeing me holding a cup in
 my hand,
 She counted with her tiny fingers, knitting her eyebrows
 together.
 Let's never talk about winning honors and rank; but let's
 Stay intoxicated.⁶

The year 1642 was marked by financial difficulties and probably the death of his mother.⁷ In 1643 civil wars raged within China. Li Tzu-ch'eng threatened Peking and captured it in 1644, proclaiming himself emperor of a new dynasty, the Shun. During this period of utter confusion, Li Yü had taken his family and fled to the countryside, as evidenced by the following excerpt from one of his poems:

Cities and towns are dens for war horses;
 Allow me to live in the country.
 One wife and without too many children,
 Only one sack of books and my lute I shall take.
 Though the peach blossoms of Ch'in are distant,
 The flowing waters of Wu-lin smell sweet.

Go I shall and now
And never glance backward to the battlefield.⁸

Reflecting upon that three-year period of voluntary exile (1643-1645), Li wrote in *A Temporary Lodge for My Leisure Thoughts* (Hsien-ch'ing ou-chi):

Between the collapse of the Ming regime and the victory of the Ch'ing, I desired neither academic success nor government position. I withdrew to the countryside and became fond of idling. In the summer I decided to receive no visitors but none came. I wore no kerchiefs, no clothes, and no shoes. As I lay naked among the lotus in the water, even my wife had difficulty in locating me. Sometimes I lay under the tall pines, unaware of the comings and goings of monkeys and cranes; other times I washed my inkstand under running brooks or brewed my tea using packed snow. When I yearned for melons, melons grew outside my house; when I desired fruits, fruits fell from trees. Those years were marked by extreme leisure, and the joys were the utmost in my life.... In reviewing my whole life, those three years were the most enjoyable.⁹

In the spring of 1645 he sought shelter in the house of Hsü Ch'en-chang, also known as Hsü Hsi-ts'ai, a mandarin in the prefecture of Chin-hua, Chekiang province. Hsü, a great admirer of Li's talents, welcomed Li and even provided him with a concubine named Ts'ao, a young widow formerly married to a Ming official. Though grateful to Hsü for his generous gift, Li was rather worried about how his own wife would react to his acquiring a concubine. To his surprise, his wife loved Ts'ao as much as he did, and the two women lived amiably together in



the same bedroom.¹⁰ Inspired by the harmonious relationship between wife and concubine, Li later composed the dramatic play, *Pitying the Fragrant Companion* (Lien-hsiang-pan).

In 1646 the invading Manchus neared Chin-hua, and Li was forced to leave Hsü and return to Lan-ch'i. Accustomed to a good life, he was downhearted at losing Hsü's patronage. In a poem written on New Year's Eve in 1647 he wallowed in self-pity: "I write very little / ... My thin bones make me look like a crane / and sparseness of hair makes me resemble a bald monk. / Every New Year's Eve brings an increase of sighs and sorrows."¹¹

In 1647 Li sold his country retreat in Lan-ch'i and moved to Hangchow, the provincial capital of Chekiang province. Using a pseudonym, "Fisherman of the Lake" (Hu-shang Li-weng), he began writing in earnest. By 1655 he was able to support his family entirely through his literary endeavors, and his fame as a writer endeared him to many local celebrities. In Hangchow, where he stayed for approximately ten years, he wrote many poems and essays, as well as dramas and fictional works.

Li left Hangchow for Nanking in 1657, charging that his books had been pirated by unethical publishers in Hangchow and Soochow. Although this charge had some validity, other reasons might have been that he was in financial difficulties and that Chekiang's coastal cities were subjected to forays from Taiwan led by General Cheng Ch'eng-kung (1624-1662) (known to the West as Koxinga) who was a Ming official retaining his allegiance to the collapsed Ming regime. With the exception of periodic trips to other provinces, Li stayed in Nanking for approximately twenty years. Socially popular, he moved among fellow playwrights and other talented writers, artists, historians, and high government officials.

Among his friends was Chi Chen-yi (b. 1630), a young magistrate of Lan-ch'i. Originally from a very wealthy family in T'ai-hsing, Kiangsu, Chi was a well-known bibliophile, having collected many Sung and Yüan editions of classical works. His collection was probably the best north of the Yangtze. In his household, he kept three troupes of actresses for constant entertainment.

Then there was Yu T'ung (1618-1704), a historian and the author of a *tsa-chü* play, *Chanting "On Encountering Sorrow"* (Tu Li-sao), and of other plays. He was most appreciative of Li's literary accomplishments, for Li had helped him revise some of his manuscripts. Besides Yu T'ung, there was Yü Huai (1616-1696), the author of several works on Chinese inkstones and on tea, and the compiler of the famous *Notes on a Wooden Bridge* (P'an-ch'iao tsa-chih), a work of reminiscences of the lives of singing girls in Nanking. One of his essays entitled "On Shoes and Socks for Women" is included in Li's *A Temporary Lodge for My Leisure Thoughts*. Yü Huai also wrote critical commentaries on, or prefaces to, Li's works. Both Yu T'ung and Yü Huai enjoyed Li's dramatic productions. On one occasion, when Li Yü and his dramatic troupe performed in Soochow, they were so impressed by the productions that they wrote highly complimentary poems to mark the occasion. And when Li staged his revised play, "Brewing Tea," adapted from Lu Ts'ai's (1497-1537) *The Bright Pearl* (Ming-chu chi), the performance did not end until daybreak; but it is reported that no one in the audience noticed how late it was as they had all been completely spellbound. In the audience were several small children, one of whom was Yü Huai's six-year-old son who was already quite familiar with the rhythm and able to follow the castanets' beating time.



Among important officials, Li knew the three Hsü brothers very well. Hsü Ch'ien-hsüeh (1631-1694), Hsü Ping-yi (1633-1711), and Hsü Yüan-wen (1634-1691) had all distinguished themselves in the imperial examinations. Ch'ien-hsüeh and Ping-yi each won third place in the palace examinations in different years, and Yüan-wen won first place (*chuang-yüan*) in 1659. Another friend was the official, poet, and dramatist Wu Wei-yeh (1609-1672). Wu served both the Ming and the Ch'ing regimes but retired to T'ai-ts'ang in 1657 after suffering disappointments in his political career. Li visited him in T'ai-ts'ang several times. They compared notes on literature, feasted together, and Li wrote poems about Wu's villa and the beauty of Wu's flower garden.

Li also knew Wang Shih-chen (1634-1711), the author of the poem "Willows in Autumn," who advocated an intuitionist's view of poetry. Stationed in Yangchow between 1660 and 1665 and in Ch'ing-chiang p'u in 1669 and 1670, Wang admired Li's literary talent and presented him with some of his own publications. And with Chou Liang-kung (1612-1672), Li shared a common interest in compiling anthologies of both selected essays and letters by contemporaries. Chou served as grain intendant in Nanking from 1666 to 1669. Last but not least of Li's acquaintances was Ts'ao Hsi (d. 1684), the superintendent of the imperial textile factory in Nanking in 1663 and 1664, and the great-grandfather of Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in (d. 1763), the author of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.¹²

Personally, Li's Nanking period must also have been satisfying: his earlier fear of not being able to have male offspring proved incorrect. In 1660, at age fifty, his first son was born, and he gave a lavish celebration for his friends. Two