

Over the Wall

—Tales from Ancient Chinese Plays

Adapted by Chen Meilin



Foreign Languages Press

Over the Wall

—Tales from Ancient Chinese Plays

Adapted by Chen Meilin
Translated by Sun Haichen

Foreign Languages Press Beijing

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

墙头马上:英文/陈美林改编. —北京:外文出版社, 1997

(中国古代戏剧故事选)

ISBN 7-119-00342-9

I. 墙… II. 陈… III. 戏剧文学-故事-中国-英文

IV. I247.8

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (95) 第 10168 号

墙头马上——中国古代戏剧故事选

陈美林 改编

责任编辑 贾先锋 杨春燕

装帧设计 朱振安

*

©外文出版社

外文出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄大街 24 号)

邮政编码 100037

北京外文印刷厂印刷

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

1997 年(36 开)第 1 版

1997 年第 1 版第一次印刷

(英)

ISBN 7-119-00342-9 / I·291(外)

02980(平)

10-E-3113P

Contents

Introduction	1
Over the Wall <i>Bai Pu</i>	9
Snow in Midsummer <i>Guan Hanqing</i>	28
The Rescue of a Courtesan <i>Guan Hanqing</i>	54
The Riverside Pavilion <i>Guan Hanqing</i>	76
Romance of the West Chamber <i>Wang Shifu</i>	94
Sorrow in the Han Palace <i>Ma Zhiyuan</i>	135
The Tiger-Head Belt <i>Li Zhifu</i>	153
The Money Keeper <i>Zheng Tingyu</i>	167
The Zhao Orphan <i>Ji Junxiang</i>	184

Li Kui Bears the Rod <i>Kang Jingzhi</i>	206
Zhang Yu Boils the Sea <i>Li Haogu</i>	221
Case of the Chalk Circle <i>Li Qianfu</i>	236
Journey of Qiannü's Spirit <i>Zheng Guangzu</i>	252
Grain Sale in Chenzhou <i>Author Unknown</i>	264

Introduction

Traditional Chinese plays, like Greek tragedies and comedies and the Sanskrit dramas of ancient India, represent the earliest achievements of world drama. Their origins can be traced to early antiquity, and their formative period encompasses hundreds of years in which elements from ancient poetry, story telling, dance, music, painting, sculpture and architecture were incorporated. By the Song and Yuan dynasties, drama had become a full-fledged art form portraying the full range of social life and capable of developing plot and presenting conflicts by means of the words and gestures incorporated into the dramatic roles.

The Yuan Dynasty, which lasted for less than a hundred years, witnessed the flourishing of Chinese drama and produced many talented playwrights. Among them, the names of over two hundred have come down to us. Most of these writers, such as Guan Hanqing, Ma Zhiyuan, Zheng Guangzu, Bai Pu, Wang Shifu, Li Wenwei, Wang Zhongwen, Gao Wenxiu, Zhang Shiqi and Xiao Dexiang, were men of humble origins, either Confucian scholars from impoverished families or physicians and magicians living by their wits and craft. Even a few actors, such as Hua Lilang and Hongzi Lier, are known to have engaged in writing scripts. Altogether, over seven hundred titles are known today, of which only two hundred have survived as complete texts.

Apart from their often ingenious plots, the extant Yuan plays cover a wide range of themes. There are, for instance, the trial plays, which often expose the atrocities committed by the privileged class and sometimes end with an unjust verdict.

Romantic themes are also popular, many related to the lives of courtesans. Some plays depict historical or legendary heroes, of which the most popular concern a group of noble outlaws based on Mount Liangshan in Shandong Province. There are also the mythical plays which sometimes have a strong note of morality.

Some trial plays openly rebuke the unscrupulous behavior of the rich and powerful. *Lord Bao Beheads Lu Zhailang*, for example, portrays a despot riding roughshod over the people in flagrant defiance of the law. Other trial plays are *The Riverside Pavilion*, included in this book, and *Lord Bao Deciphers the Butterfly Dream*, in which Lord Bao, a just official, manages to exculpate a poor scholar who had revenged his father by killing a member of the imperial clan. Lord Bao, the incarnation of law and justice, figures prominently in the trial plays, ten of which extant today have him as the hero. This volume contains two Lord Bao plays, *Case of the Chalk Circle* and *Grain Sale in Chenzhou*.

Some trial plays end in tragedy because of a miscarriage of justice, which was no unusual phenomenon considering the rampant corruption and malpractices such as bribery in the Yuan bureaucracy. Guan Hanqing's *Snow in Midsummer* is perhaps the best known of such plays. Dou E, a young widow, refuses to marry Donkey, a local loafer, who subsequently brings a trumped-up charge against her. With hardly any evidence, the judge extorts a confession from her by severe torture and sentences her to death. Three miracles, predicted by Dou E before her execution, then occur testifying to the sheer injustice of the case. Thus the story not only denounces the malpractice of officialdom but also accentuates the indomitable spirit of the underclass people and points to the existence of a higher order of justice. Also in this category are *Rescue of the Filial Son* and Yang Xianzhi's *Night Rain over the River*.

Romance and marriage is another major theme of Yuan plays such as the celebrated *Romance of the West Chamber* and *Over the Wall*. In the typical scenario, the young hero and heroine, both from respectable families, defy social conventions in the pursuit of true love, and in the process are often assisted by people of low social status such as maids or errand boys. The daring young couple are consistently portrayed in a positive light, applauded for their pursuit of marital happiness and their determination to take fate into their own hands instead of succumbing to the dictates of authority figures. In *Romance of the West Chamber*, the heroine, Yingying, finds her ideal mate in the person of Zhang Gong, a scholar yet to make his fortune, despite the disparity in their social status, on which grounds her mother strongly opposes the match. The name of Hong Niang, the cunning maid who acts as a go-between for her young mistress and the lovesick scholar, has entered everyday speech as a synonym for solicitous matchmakers. Free choice in the pursuit of love is also eulogized in *Over the Wall*. Li Qianjin, the heroine, falls in love with Pei Shaojun at first sight and elopes with him that very night. When her father-in-law repudiates her, she stands her ground and fights undauntedly to protect her family. In the final scene, when all ends well with a grand family reunion, she makes a strong case for her elopement by citing examples from history. Compared with Yingying, she was bolder in protecting her rights. In Yuan plays the marriage of widows such as Zhao Paner in *The Riverside Pavilion* is not frowned upon, a reflection of the more tolerant moral outlook of city residents of the time.

Closely related to romantic stories are the tales of courtesans who flourished mostly in cities where the Yuan plays were composed and performed. In spite of their low social status, the courtesans are often portrayed as talented and sincere, yearning to end their disreputable careers by finding

a lifelong mate, an effort which sometimes plunged them into even greater misery. Best known among these plays are *Rescue of a Courtesan*, *Golden String Pond* and *Qujiang Pond*.

Quite a few Yuan plays concern the adventures of a band of noble outlaws in Shandong Province. Living in misery, the common people not only wanted honest officials like Lord Bao to uphold justice on their behalf, but also longed for righteous champions of the good to weed out the wicked. Unlike the novel *Outlaws of the Marsh*, which gives a complete history of these Shandong desperados, the plays usually concentrate on episodic portrayals of their exploits in defeating despots and helping the people. Representative titles include *Li Kui Bears the Rod*, included in this book, *The Black Whirlwind Presents Heads*, and *Rescue of the Chief Clerk*.

These plays, based on historical events and people, lash out at the rulers of that time, express a longing for their native soul and eulogize local heroes. The *Zhao Orphan* is a representative work describing how Han Jue, Gongsun Chujiu and Cheng Ying rescued the orphan of the Zhang family in order to revenge the injustice done to his family. This play attacks the social system of the Yuan Dynasty. Other works of this kind are *Going to the Banquet Alone*, *Meeting of Shengchi* and *The Battle Against Fu Jian*.

The mythical plays are often presented in a very romantic vein, as represented by *Zhang Yu Boils the Sea* and *The Dragon King's Daughter*. In the former, Qionglian, the dragon king's daughter, offers her hand to Zhang Yu, a young scholar, as she becomes enamored of his exceptional talents and sincerity. Determined to be united with her, Zhang Yu lets nothing stand in his way and does not hesitate to boil the East Sea with his newly gained magic powers. This story was doubtless an inspiration to young lovers at the time. The play, adapted into a variety of local operas, is still very much alive on the stage all across China.

To understand why the short-lived Yuan Dynasty witnessed a proliferation of playwrights and the culmination of Chinese dramatic art, we must look at its social and cultural background.

The Yuan Dynasty was established by the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century following their armed conquests of rival regimes including the Song Dynasty. Kublai Khan, the first Yuan emperor, gave priority to agriculture and encouraged the development of agricultural techniques. The vast expanse of this empire demanded the building of a network of post stations from central China to the border areas to enable the court to implement its edicts and get prompt news from everywhere. This resulted in improved facilities for communication and travel. Land and water routes to the West were also in their heyday. As the country recuperated from the aftermath of war, the growth of production and a highly developed transportation network promoted both inland and overseas trade, bringing wealth and prosperity to a large number of small- and medium-sized cities.

The emergence of cities with large populations was a vital factor in the development of urban culture. The entertainment needs of the city residents, including large numbers of handicraft workers, contributed directly to the growth and flourishing of drama during the Yuan Dynasty.

For eighty years after they took control of China, the Mongols discontinued the civil service recruitment examination in order to block the Han people from officialdom. Even after the examination was restored, discrimination against the Han persisted. A Han scholar had little chance of getting an official post through the examination; even if he succeeded, he would find it hard to get a subsequent promotion. This explains why a great many scholars steeped in classic learning chose to write plays aimed at the underclass.

The Yuan plays drew extensively from traditional enter-

tainment genres such as song and dance performances and the talking-and-singing shows, in which story telling was intermixed with singing to the accompaniment of musical instruments. On the other hand, classic and folk literature also offered a source of inspiration for playwrights, who could base their plots on short stories and oral tales from the Tang and Song dynasties, or enhance their work by adapting lines from classic poetry.

Another factor contributing to the flourishing of drama was the preference for song and dance performances by the Mongols and other nomadic peoples from the North. The Yuan plays, rich in song and dance, were thus able to secure a creditable position in society. In the Yuan bureaucracy, a court official of the third rank headed the Music Office, the ruling body for performers and official endorsement generally went a long way toward promoting the development of Yuan drama.

The Yuan plays hold a prominent position in the history of Chinese literature, marking the pinnacle of narrative art. Previously, Chinese literature was dominated by the lyric tradition represented by poetry and lyric prose. The Tang and Song dynasties preceding the Yuan saw the emergence of short stories written in classic style, and story-teller's scripts, as well as some short, immature plays. It was not until the Yuan that drama became a dominant literary genre with comprehensive plots and fully developed characters, exerting a far-reaching influence on the development of narrative art. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *Journey to the West*, the three major novels of the Ming Dynasty, are all indebted to the Yuan plays to varying degrees. Many short stories of the Ming and Qing dynasties were also adapted from Yuan plays. For instance, *Tale of the Gold Lock* was based on *Snow in Midsummer*, and *The Eight Righteous Men*, on *The Zhao Orphan*. Yuan plays adapted into various styles of local operas

remain part of the repertoire of theatrical troupes to this day, and characters such as Hong Niang and Dou E have become household names.

In the history of world literature the Yuan plays also lay claim to a place of honor. As early as 1735, the Frenchman R. P. De Premare published a translation of *The Zhao Orphan*, and an Englishman, J. F. Davis, translated *A Son Begotten in Old Age* and *Autumn Moon over the Han Palace* in 1817 and 1829 respectively. Other translated plays included *Romance of the West Chamber*, *Snow in Midsummer*, *Case of the Chalk Circle*, *Journey of Qiannu's Spirit*, and *The Street Vendor*.

It is not unusual for great dramatic works to be adapted into story form. Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* is considered a masterpiece in its own right. The works of Moliere have also been adapted into stories. A well-adapted story can be a literary creation affording great delight to the reader, just as the original play is to an audience.

The Yuan plays lend themselves particularly well to literary adaptation because they have good story lines and interesting, true-to-life characters, the key elements in creating a good read. In selecting the fourteen titles for this book, which account for nearly one-tenth of the extant Yuan plays, the editor has tried to include works of different periods and themes from a dozen authors including, besides the four greatest Yuan playwrights (Guan Hanqing, Ma Zhiyuan, Zheng Guangzu and Bai Pu), several less famous but equally excellent writers as well as one anonymous author.

OVER THE WALL

Bai Pu*

Li Zhi, known as Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty, ruled the empire in peace for over a dozen years after his ascension to the throne. He was able to spend his days drinking wine, watching flowers, and indulging in sensual pleasures. On a fine spring day in the third year of the Yifeng reign (A.D. 679) the emperor, accompanied by his entourage, went to the west imperial garden to enjoy the blooming flowers. To his disappointment, the flowers in the garden, though numerous, were too commonplace for imperial taste. When he held an audience the following day, the emperor ordered the Minister of Works to leave for the city of Luoyang, the homeland of peonies, to search the local gardens—either private or public—for strange and exotic flowers and bring them back to the capital, Chang'an. He was also to buy some seedlings of unusual species and cultivate them in Chang'an, so the emperor could have something to feast his eyes upon the next year.

The Minister of Works, Pei Xingjian, was married to Liu Shi, and the couple had a son named Pei Shaojun who learned to read and write at an early age. A handsome lad of twenty-one, he remained single and didn't seem to pay much

* Bai Pu (1226-c. 1306) is regarded as one of the four great playwrights of the Yuan Dynasty. He declined official appointments and chose to entertain himself in the country, drinking wine and composing poetry and plays. Of his sixteen plays, only three survive: *Over the Wall*, *Rain on Parasol Trees* and *Romance of the East Wall*.

attention to wine and women. Pei Xingjian was an old man unequal to the hardships of a long journey, so he asked the emperor to allow his son to take up the mission on his behalf. The emperor, taking pity on him, agreed. Thus Pei Shaojun set off for Luoyang accompanied by a servant named Zhang Qian, selected by Pei Xingjian for his capability.

At that time there lived in Luoyang a man named Li Shijie who was a member of the imperial clan. Formerly, while serving as governor of the imperial capital, he had offended the ruling empress, Wu Zetian, by his criticism and was demoted to supervisor of Luoyang. He and his wife, Zhang Shi, had a young daughter. Being a virtuous woman, Zhang Shi never complained about his demotion. Their daughter, Li Qianjin, was not only endowed with extremely good looks but also conversant with literature as well as needlework. At eighteen, she was still unbetrothed. It was not that her parents were not eager to secure her future; her father's unfortunate demotion and banishment was responsible for the delay. As the family settled down in Luoyang, Li found that his official duties did not take up much of his time, so he often went around visiting his fellow officials. In the meantime, mother and daughter stayed home behind a locked gate.

It is well said that "a full grown man should take a wife, and a full-grown girl should take a husband." Li Qianjin, coming of age in her secluded maiden's chamber, began to grow languid over her dim prospects for marriage. Fortunately her maid, Meixiang, was a smart and sympathetic girl who tried every means to comfort her, with partial success. Still, a fine spring morning or a moonlit night often found her lamenting the passing of time and the transience of her youth and beauty.

One spring holiday in the third lunar month, peonies were in full bloom all across the city of Luoyang. It was customary on this day for young people to take excursions to

the hills and streams and enjoy the spring scenery. Forbidden to leave the house, Li Qianjin could only sit before her dressing table and stare at the decorated screen by the bed. One morning when Meixiang came into the room, Li Qianjin remarked, "Meixiang, look at the picture on this screen! These couples of young scholars and their pretty companions—what a fine sight they make!"

Meixiang had no trouble guessing what was on the young mistress's mind. "I know what you are thinking about," she said jokingly. "You are longing for a fine husband." Though brought up in an aristocratic family, Li Qianjin was a very forthright and independent-minded girl. To Meixiang's remark she responded unabashedly, "Yes! If only I had a fine husband, who loves me dearly and who spends his time by my side, I would not feel so lonely and deserted, nor would I have to endure such long, cold, sleepless nights!" Meixiang then suggested, "When the master comes back, we must ask him to arrange a marriage for you! You have grown so thin these days. Please take good care of yourself!" Li Qianjin knew only too well that her emaciation was not caused by any ailment and would not respond to any medicine. She found her daily meals tasteless, and would gladly find refuge in sleep, but sleep did not come easily to her. She seemed to be living in a daze, unable to concentrate on anything, and all because of uncertainties about her future! A few days earlier a matchmaker had called. Not knowing if the young man suited her, and too shy to inquire about him, she ended up turning down the proposal for fear of ruining her life by a wrong choice. The memory of this incident added to her melancholy. She heaved deep sighs as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Meixiang hastened to comfort her. "Mistress! It is a holiday today, and all the young people of the city are riding horses or carriages to the suburbs to enjoy the spring scenery. Though we can't leave the house, why don't we take a walk

in the rear garden?" Urged by the well-meaning maid, Li Qianjin left the room with her and headed for the garden.

They walked down the winding veranda and came to the fish pond. At the sight of the dancing butterflies, mandarin ducks swimming in pairs, and bees and dragonflies flying and darting merrily all over the place, the young maiden felt more lonely than ever.

Suddenly she heard the neighing of a horse and someone shouting just outside the wall. Looking up, she saw a young man on horseback staring at her hungrily. This was Pei Shaojun. Since his arrival in Luoyang, he had visited many famous gardens and scenic spots in search of unusual flowers. He was passing Supervisor Li's rear garden when some apricot trees in blossom caught his eye, so he stopped by the wall to take a look. To his surprise the garden not only boasted flourishing flowers but also a ravishing beauty, who enchanted him so much that he could not take his eyes off her. She had eyes as bright as the stars and a face as pretty as spring flowers, appearing to be an immortal girl descended from heaven. "What a fine maiden!" he exclaimed. Hearing this, Meixiang whispered to Li Qianjin, "Someone's watching you over the wall!" Actually, Li Qianjin already saw the young man and did not mind his staring at her. He looked so handsome and elegant. "What does that matter?" she said defiantly. "Let him watch to his heart's content! I would not mind having such a fine young man for my lifelong companion and offering him everything I have! Why should I mind his watching me?" However, Meixiang thought it necessary to warn her young mistress. "You may cherish tender feelings for him, but does he feel the same for you?"

While the two girls were thus conversing in a whisper, Pei Shaojun kept staring at Qianjin as if glued to the spot. Afraid of getting into trouble, Zhang Qian tried to talk his young master into leaving. Lost in thought, Shaojun did not hear