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### The Yuan Plays

What is known as "variety play" (雜劇) of the Yuan or Mongol period (1260-1368) has been regarded as the beginning of formal dramatic literature among the Chinese. A number of the some 160 Yuan plays extant have been rendered into Western languages; some many times over, like *The Chao Orphan* (趙氏孤兒), *Injustice to Tou O* (竇娥冤) and *The West Chamber* (西廂記). In this and the next issue of *Renditions* we introduce three Yuan plays for the first time in English: the historical drama *Rain on the Wu-t'ung Tree*, page 53; the social drama *Rain on the Hsiao-hsiang*, to be published in the Spring 1975 issue; and the crime case drama *Ghost of the Pot*, translated in full in the following pages.

Of this work Professor Hayden writes: "*The Ghost of the Pot* is one of 26 northern plays that dramatize a crime (usually murder) and its solution in a courtroom setting by a detective, who is either a judge or a court clerk. It is also one of 11 plays featuring Judge Pao, who was famous in his own lifetime and legendary thereafter for his fairness, severity, and wisdom in administering the law. Judge Pao—Pao Cheng (包拯 999-1062), appears in Yuan northern drama sometimes as a central character but often as a figure of secondary importance, as in this play. Invariably he is the agent who solves the crime and metes out sentence. The cases which Judge Pao tries in the drama are either entirely fictional or, rarely, based on earlier historical legend; but in no instance can they be traced to his actual life as recorded in official biographies.

"Northern drama is perhaps unique in Chinese literature for its inventive combination of disparate and conflicting elements: delicacy versus crudeness, to give one example (in this play the protagonist's description of the flower garden contrasted to various speeches of the villain), or the best of human character and situations set against the worst, to give another. *Ghost of the Pot* has all these elements and more; it is at once the most gruesome and the most comic of all the courtroom, or crime case, plays. Its grisly but ingenious method of disposing of a murder victim, and the scarcely refined humour that results from it, have no known antecedents in Chinese writings but did carry over into later versions of the story. In fact, this play is one of the few in northern drama whose plots have survived relatively intact into Ming drama and the theatres of Peking and other regions during the Ch'ing period, as well as into Ming and Ch'ing fiction."

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