

The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature. By Judith T. Zeitlin. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. Pp. xiii + 296. \$57.00.

In this monograph, Judith Zeitlin sets a new standard for general thematic studies in Chinese literature. In breadth, depth, and incisiveness of her insights, *The Phantom Heroine* clearly deserves to be on every graduate reading list. The texts she mentions range from early poems in *Shijing* 詩經 through recent Hong Kong films; they include poetry, essays, fictional narratives of several forms (*zhiguai* 志怪 or *chuanqi xiaoshuo* 傳奇小說), and plays. In each case her concern is with how the ghosts are represented and with the various degrees of self-consciousness with which conventions of representation are manipulated by the writers she engages. Her sources are rich and varied; her endnotes demonstrate the exhaustiveness of her research and the care with which she advances her arguments. These notes are an important factor in the study's contribution to scholarly literature.

The central image here is the revenant: the woman who is somehow revived or returned from death by the force of passion, generally unfulfilled desire. In its several forms this image has been current in Chinese culture since the Han. Its potency derives from many sources: the power of creative imagination, the fascination with dreams and the strength of human longing, the conviction that emotional relationships do not end at the grave, a curiosity about consciousness after death, and the abiding fear that the dead have the power to interact with the living. Perhaps most potent of these sources is the "common fantasy of male generativity," the man's ability—using his male sexual energy—to bring a helpless phantom woman back to life (p. 37). Horror, that literary staple of other times and places, appears seldom in stories of this type; sex is really at its core.

The Introduction clearly sets out the study's range and its focus. Zeitlin is most concerned with literati writings concerning ghosts that date from around 1580 to 1700. As she explains, this period saw the production of some of the most sophisticated materials on ghosts, a likely consequence of the emphasis on the power of emotion (*qing* 情) during the late Ming period and the very real sense of loss and emptiness experienced after the Ming fall in mid-century. She concludes with the last great play of the literati *chuanqi* 傳奇劇 theatrical tradition, *Changsheng dian* 長生殿 (The Palace of Lasting Life, c. 1688), by Hong Sheng 洪昇 (1645–1704), itself one of the most imaginative uses of the ghostly heroine in all of Chinese literature.

Because her concern is with a *theme* particularly as culminating in the writings of a *period*, she ranges across literary forms from narratives about ghosts to poetry by ghosts. Her range of literary forms and genres allows Zeitlin to discuss *literary representation* rather than rehearse speculations over whether these stories embody informal "literati storytelling" or very deliberate composition. Since all of her materials were written in classical Chinese, questions of sequence or linguistic register are irrelevant. She declines to search for any "original" version of any of these stories in the "popular" tradition; all bear the imprint of the educated élite, regardless of their origins. Likewise, because her emphasis is on the art of writing, Zeitlin wisely avoids earlier concerns with how much any one story reflects "beliefs" of either its author or any particular audience. She does

not discuss here popular forms of “ghost opera,” the many Buddhist plays centring on Mulian 目連, or the exorcist plays of the many *nuoxi* 傩戲 traditions; her concern is instead with literary *texts* and the intertextual relations among them.

In drama, this means *chuanqi ju*, plays designed for and most generally performed in the houses of the wealthiest members of society—or designed to be read by that stratum. In fiction, she examines classical language tales from prominent collections dating from the Tang through the seventeenth century, laying aside whether they are to be identified as *zhiguai* or *chuanqi* in form. And as Zeitlin points out, although ghost stories in their fictional and dramatic forms have enjoyed ever more scholarly attention in recent decades, poetry ascribed to ghost writers has received hardly any, despite its commonness in the literary tradition. Such verse is found in stories about ghosts; it becomes inspiration for arias in plays as well. Thus she does explore verse attributed to ghostly women in a variety of literary contexts.

Zeitlin’s basic questions are these: “What are the literary conventions for portraying ghosts? How and why do they change over time, in different genres, and in different contexts?” (p. 10) To contextualize her texts, she does not ignore the importance of “posthumous matters” in ritual at all levels, in funerary architecture, in the many literary forms addressed to or remembering the dead. As she demonstrates, literature simply confirms what anthropologist James L. Watson observes in studies of ongoing ritual practices, that the exchange between individuals does not cease after death, and that concepts of gender among the living apply to the dead as well. But what makes these literary productions noteworthy against the standards of the anthropologist is that the ghosts in earlier tales are generally strangers, and most are women—neither a protagonist’s ancestor nor a god in the making (the subject of an early genre of novels).

Judith Zeitlin’s discussion of the “gendering” of ghosts in Chapter 1 is among the more nuanced portions of her study. By the seventeenth century, literature regularly plays off the *yin* 陰 character of the ghost against the *yang* 陽 character of the living man. Since the man is already gendered *yang*, the ghostly status of the woman makes her all the more an embodiment of *yin*. Although a few such ghostly maidens do pose a threat to men, their potential victims are the less “manly” scholar types; ghosts are often afraid of more virile swordsman type. In the *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 stories, for example, the “non-threatening young scholar therefore occupies a somewhat ambiguous middle position in which he mediates between extremes of femininity and masculinity; the usual effect, however, is to push him further toward the feminine pole (like the *xiaosheng* [小生], or young romantic male lead in the theater) and to reinforce the shifting, relational aspect of gender roles” (p. 29).

Chapter 2, “The Ghost’s Voice,” investigates poems attributed to the dead that allow a “fantasy inside view of death” (p. 53). Zeitlin distinguishes “ghost” poetry from “ghostly” poetry, the latter being penned by the living about the dead, while the former come to the living through dreams, apparitions, and artifacts from the past. Seeing death as a permanent form of exile (p. 59) informed writers since the late Han *Gushi shijiu shou* 古詩十九首 (Nineteen Old Poems) who wrote evocative verse about the desolation of the grave and the aching loneliness of the soul left behind. Six Dynasties writers such as Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427) wrote of their own anticipated anguish after death in “auto-dirges,”

but by the Tang the growing image of poet Li He 李賀 (790–816/817) firmly equated early death with poetic genius, a theme to be ascribed to late imperial China's women poets.

Chapter 3, "Ghosts and Historical Time," addresses the association of the death of an individual with the demise of a dynasty in the common use of terms and euphemisms such as *wang* 亡 and *bian* 變 for both. A lengthy exploration of *huaigu* 懷古 poetry and the stories that follow this emotive pattern and the Ming fashion for visiting historical ruins reveal the nostalgia of poetry that lament sites of loss, even when ruins had disappeared. Such sentiments appeared in narratives as well. But these emotional responses took on a new poignancy when the fall of the Ming state was still a living memory; the past become feminized and literalized as the palace woman, living or dead, in a number of early Qing texts. Many seek to "come to terms with the recurrent memory of such trauma," to neutralize the latent pain of loss and of transience in general (p. 99). Zeitlin narrows her focus to a series of six stories about a single figure, Lin Siniang 林四娘. A later example from *Liaozhai zhiyi*, however, is specific in its horror; the story gives no relief from the haunting fact of a mass execution of innocent people during the 1662 Yu Qi 于七 rebellion in Shandong not far from author Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 home (pp. 121–30). Its purpose is clearly "not to let the sufferers of history pass into oblivion" (p. 130).

Chapter 4, "Ghosts and Theatricality," is the longest in the book. There Zeitlin discusses the proliferation of ghost plays between 1580 and 1700 as the product of several tendencies within the *chuanqi* tradition, the fashion for the curious (*qi* 奇) and the interest inherent in the doubling of the central character's identity, as human and as ghost (pp. 172–73). The latter allows for metatheatrical commentary on the arts of representation at a time when many literati were engaged in writing these long poetic narratives for reading as much as for the stage. Most "phantom heroines" of the seventeenth century stage were great beauties, victims of their own overwhelming passions (*qing*); of course *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion) was the progenitor of a series of plays in this mode. But critics then and now have recognized that the disappearance of an actor from the stage can parallel loss through death. The liminal space of performance allows both ghosts and the living to enjoy equal reality in the minds of its spectators. This potential can afford the audience an especially poignant understanding of human transience—and present the playwright with the opportunity to create bathos through absurdity.

The volume's final section is a "Coda" devoted to the late seventeenth century play *Changsheng dian*. Zeitlin describes the play as a masterpiece; through her close reading its brilliance comes through more clearly than in any other analysis with which I am familiar. Although Hong Sheng utilized some well-known elements of the ghost heroine story, his Lady Yang (Yang Guifei 楊貴妃) is unique in that she is allowed no contact with mortal humans in her ghostly form. Instead she is wrenched back and forth between the site of her death and scenes she knew in life. The playwright was meticulous in his directions for setting the stage in precisely the same way during parallel scenes in the play's first and second parts, before and after her death—that scene forms the pivot between them. Yang's ghostly existence is a nightmare, presented onstage with unprecedented reality and power. Nor is her "resurrection" as an immortal reunited with her lover the Tang emperor Minghuang the consequence of any overwhelming masculinity (*yangqi* 陽氣) on his part: by the time of her death her lover has been rendered powerless politically and he is advanced in age. Nor is she

the unfulfilled virgin of so many earlier stories. Instead, the play—in this reading—becomes a narrative of one character's self-redemption through loneliness, her contemplation of her own actions, and her recognition of the double nature of the self. It seems that the entire study simply builds toward Zeitlin's interpretation of this play; the depth of her insights could not be fully appreciated without having read her survey of the character type that Hong Sheng so successfully appropriated to his own artistic purposes.

The volume has nearly 50 pages of endnotes, a glossary of the *hanzi* for Chinese names and terms that appear in the text in Romanized form, an extensive bibliography, and a very helpful index. The only complaint that one might raise is about the book's format: it has extremely narrow margins, especially at the top of the page, making the pages look crowded. The typeface is also a bit small, which only exaggerates this appearance. Clearly the Press was maximizing the number of words per page in order to cut production costs. This is an unfortunate reminder of the financial pressures on university presses today, but these physical matters do not seriously detract from this splendid contribution to understanding the artistic richness of late imperial Chinese literature.

In sum, this is an accomplishment of the first rank. Not every reader will be fully convinced by every part of her intricate analysis; Zeitlin by necessity writes with broad strokes in covering such a major segment of Chinese literature over nearly two millennia. One might say that she seems too willing to see parallels between her findings here and ideas posited by a variety of Western critics: Sigmund Freud, Paul Ricoeur, Rey Chow, Richard Schnecher, among others. Likewise, there can be a variety of different interpretations of the complex plays she considers that do not focus on their phantom heroines; she mentions few if any in her notes. But one cannot fail to be impressed by the ease with which Zeitlin ranges across a large number of texts, pointing out commonalities well beyond what we knew from previous studies. And for each text, her new insights will have to be taken into consideration by any serious reader. *The Phantom Heroine* is a major contribution to the study of Chinese literature.

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Thinking with Cases: Specialist Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History. Edited by Charlotte Furth, Judith T. Zeitlin, and Ping-chen Hsiung. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. Pp. xi + 331. \$55.00.

The usual programme leading to an edited volume of scholarly essays is to select a theme or problem and invite a diverse group of scholars to write about that from their different perspectives. For this book the editors have undertaken a rather different project, with wonderfully productive results. They work with a common theme—the formulation and use of specialist knowledge as these develop through the interplay of canon and practice