

**Gender Crossing and Decadence in Taiwanese  
Fiction at the Fin de Siècle:  
The Instances of Li Ang, Chu Tien-Wen,  
Chiu Miao-Jin, and Cheng Ying-Shu**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper uses Elaine Showalter's ideas of gender crossing and decadence in her book *Sexual Anarchy* and applies them to 1990s Taiwan and Taiwanese fiction. I trace the change in notions of gender in the past few decades in Taiwan in terms of globalization and localization and discuss how meanings of gender crossing and decadence in 1990s Taiwan are different from those in England in the 1880s and 1890s. 1990s Taiwanese fiction is both agent and product of the phenomena of gender crossing and decadence in 1990s Taiwan. For my examples, I choose fictions by four female writers, whom I call "daughters of decadence." While earlier Taiwanese fiction tends to condemn homosexuality and female desire and take such condemnations for granted, 1990s Taiwanese fiction, even when they continue to denigrate such desires, are more ambiguous and ambivalent in tone. Thus, Li Ang's *The Labyrinthine Garden* and Cheng Ying-shu's *What Good Girls Don't Do* portray on the one hand how loose women become men's playthings, and on the other how these women's feminist consciousness emerges. Chu Tien-wen's *Notes of a Desolate Man* simultaneously vilifies male homosexuality and implicitly criticizes mainstream heterosexual society by relishing homosexual practice. Chiu Miao-Jin's *Notes of a Crocodile* apparently denigrates lesbianism and male homosexuality, but virtually uses it to express anger at and protest against mainstream heterosexual society. In addition, new, unconventional visions are presented, such as the feminine, narcissistic women, the Material Girls, and the Queen Bees in Chu Tien-wen's

*Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*, the sexually autonomous fat girls ugly women in *What Good Girls Don't Do*, and the beautiful male-to-female transsexual in Cheng Ying-shu's *Humankind Should Not Fly*. Queer gender notions are posited in *Notes of a Desolate Man*, where the male homosexual narrator directly overturns traditional disparagement of femininity and women, and in *Notes of a Crocodile*, where the lesbian narrator asserts violent masculinity. From a larger perspective, the fictional emphasis on female desire signifies that the meanings of female autonomy have extended to the sexual terrain, where women redefine their sexuality by themselves, thereby posing a great threat to men. Meanwhile, the various genders in 1990s Taiwan go well beyond the traditional gender divide: the sexiest woman may turn out to be a male transvestite, and the most masculine person may be a woman.

### KEY WORDS

1990s Taiwanese fiction

Chu Tien-wen

Li Ang

Chiu Miao-Jin

*Notes of a Desolate Man*

*Notes of a Crocodile*

Cheng Ying-shu

gender crossing

queer literary criticism

*The Labyrinthine Garden*

*Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*

Cheng Ying-shu

*What Good Girls Don't Do*

*Humankind Should Not Fly*



In the West, the end of every century tends to stir up apocalyptic expectations about the end of the world and the coming of millennium. As the twentieth century is drawing to an end, similar expectations seem to become popular concerns. Yet such thinking, derived from Christianity, is after all a mysticism whose efficacy and heuristic value are questionable. Adherents like Krishan Kumar often predicate their apocalyptic interpretations of our postmodern age on a reductive reading of history. Kumar claims that the present worldwide political and economic turmoil stems from the collapse of the grand narratives, the dissolution of the European hegemony, and the end of the Cold War. Such reading not only implies a nostalgia for Eurocentrism, but it fails to take into account the complicated factors which affect the political and economic development in specific geographical regions, the interaction and interdependence between different regions and between a particular region and the globe, as well as the unpredictable element that causes change. Such reading also proves Frank Kermode's observation that people of any time and any place may project onto specific dates their own existential anxieties (254). In this essay, then, I will not impose the apocalyptic vision upon my study of Taiwanese fiction at the end of the twentieth century. Rather, I will focus on a kind of "fin de siècle" imagination of decadence and gender crossing that appears in Taiwanese fictions in the 1990s.

According to Elaine Showalter, the term "fin de siècle" was first used in France in the 1880s and then quickly spread to the whole Europe and the United States. It describes the conservatives' panic about what they perceived as the crisis of the world in decadence and degeneration. In the case of England, states Showalter, the 1880s and

1890s were dubbed by the conservatives as decades of “sexual anarchy,” since during this period both the words “feminism” and “homosexuality” first came into use, and New Women and male aesthetes redefined the meanings of femininity and masculinity (2-3).

I think Taiwanese culture in the 1990s also displays a “fin de siècle” imagination, which is both similar to and different from the English culture in the last two decades of the nineteenth century discussed by Showalter. This essay will first compare the cultural contexts of the *fin-de-siècle* England and the 1990s Taiwan, and then examine the representation of gender crossing and decadence in Taiwanese fictions in the 1990s, dwelling particularly on fictions by Li Ang, Chu Tien-wen, Chiu Miao-Jin, and Cheng Ying-shu.

## I. Two “Fin de Siècle”

Gender crossing in England in the last two decades of the nineteenth century challenged the bourgeois hegemony that had been well established in the Victorian period by defying notions of rigid gender roles that aligned masculinity to man and femininity to woman and institutionalized monogamous heterosexual marriage. Despite that English imperialism was at its height in the 1880s and 1890s, notes Showalter, there were fears in England of cultural degeneration and collapse, incited particularly by sexual scandals about male homosexuality and child prostitution and problems of working class unemployment. As a result, gender, racial and class boundaries were reinforced. In such a cultural climate, the New Woman and the male decadent or aesthete were both seen by the conservatives as threatening, since they both blurred the gender divide and jeopardized the bourgeois marriage institution (169). At that time, the women’s suffrage movement was at a relatively stagnant phase. Women writers often portrayed the New Woman as seeking independence rather than conceive marriage as her only option, or critiqued men’s inadequacy through portraying the failure of the heterosexual relationship. There was also a proliferation of women’s literature about female utopia and about how women control their own bodies. Nevertheless, many men,

outraged by what they saw as the New Woman's usurpation of men's role and rights, launched a vehement attack. Magazines such as *Punch* and *The Yellow Book* denigrated and satirized New Women (Showalter 38-49). In many anti-feminist discourses, New Women tended to be negatively depicted as infanticidal mothers, masculine or frigid women, or sluts (Ledger 10-18).

If New Women were perceived as a threat to Victorian notions of femininity, decadent men or dandies stirred up anxiety by undermining Victorian valorization of a robust kind of masculinity. Whereas the Victorian gentleman was deemed virile, the decadent man or dandy was regarded as effeminate. The decadent man's gender crossing was even more defiant than that of the New Woman. Showalter observes that "decadence" is

a notoriously difficult term to define. In one sense, it was the pejorative label applied by the bourgeoisie to everything that seemed unnatural, artificial, and perverse, from Art Nouveau to homosexuality, a sickness associated with cultural degeneration and decay. In another sense, it was a post-Darwinian aesthetic movement that crossed European boundaries. The decadent aesthetic held that nature was "an unfeeling and pitiless mechanism"; religion, a "nostalgic memory"; and love, a biological instinct for perpetuating the species. (Showalter 169)

Thus decadent men rejected all that is natural and biological in favor of exquisite, wonderful, rare art and artifacts as well as the inner life of sensations and imagination. Simply put, decadent men departed from traditional notions of gender and sexuality by stressing art for art's sake. They indulged themselves in all kinds of fetishism and exploration of bodily experience, including prostitution and using narcotics, in search of fresh, rare sensual excitement. Since decadent men linked women to nature, body, and matter, they also tended to denigrate women and female bodies. Moreover, decadence was also a *fin-de-siècle* code term for homosexuality (Showalter 171). The trials

and conviction of Oscar Wilde in 1895 contributed to the emergence into mainstream society of the term “homosexuality,” while they also incited homophobic fantasies, which, in turn, increased the oppression of homosexuality. In this light, decadence was anti-establishment in spirit.

Interestingly, despite that both decadent men and New Women challenged traditional notions of gender, their relationship was implicitly tense because of unbridgeable differences. Most New Women at that time duplicated the prejudice of mainstream culture against effeminate men. Aside from that, most New Women, due to their own inability to deal with sexuality under a still oppressively anti-female social climate, felt incapable of approving of the sexual license of decadent men (especially male homosexuals).<sup>1</sup> Male aesthetes, on their part, tended to show misogyny because of their anti-procreation stance, mistakenly aligning women with procreation, while they also displayed anxiety about New Women (Showalter 169-82). Ironically, despite the wide disagreement between male aesthetes and New Women, they were repeatedly lumped together by the conservatives who saw them as similarly threatening and inextricably linked. Six months after Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years’ hard labor for committing sodomy, *Punch* announced “THE END OF THE NEW WOMAN—The crash has come at last.” Sadly, this prediction was confirmed by the dramatic decline after 1895 of mass-market New Women fiction, which had been enormously popular in the early 1890s (Ledger 94). In my opinion, D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, written during World War I and published in 1920, reflected mainstream hysteria about New Women and decadent men.

I think in 1990s Taiwanese culture there also emerges a kind of “fin-de-siècle” imagination, which is both similar to and different from that of English culture in the 1880s and 1890s as portrayed by Showalter. This is because the change of notions of gender in Taiwan has its specific context.<sup>2</sup> Just like the Victorian period in England, Taiwan under martial law—that is, from 1949 to 1987—witnessed the establishment as the norm of bourgeois monogamous heterosexual love and marriage, while traditional notions of gender divide and the

double sexual standard perpetuated the patriarchal system.<sup>3</sup> Whereas these dominant gender concepts were deemed to be crucial to the maintenance of the British Empire at the *fin de siècle* (Hyam, Bristow, Ware), they were subsumed in modern Taiwan under martial law by the monolithic political stress on the overriding aim of recovering Mainland China, hence the concomitant emphasis on diligence, self-denial, and abstinence. The test-based education system, which put a premium on rote, became the main tool of instilling such thinking and values. On the other hand, powerful politicians and magnates retained the patriarchal practice of keeping concubines, while the leisured class and women continued to appreciate and cherish the beautiful. Toward the end of 1970s, with the rise of Taiwan's economy, the relationship between the sexes started to change. The 1980s saw a sharp increase in number of middle-class women entering the job market. Although the great majority of them still regarded marriage as an indispensable option, there also emerged nicknames such as "strongwoman" and "manly woman" for aggressive career women. Increasing rates of single womanhood, pre-marital sex, and divorce outraged the conservatives. In the 1990s, most women uphold the ideal of sexual equality, but daily reports of men's killing of their (ex-) wives, (ex-) girlfriends, and daughters-in-law suggest hostility toward female autonomy. In March 1999, when men gulp viagra as if it were tonic right after its availability as a prescription drug, a survey conducted by the *Elle* magazine shows that many women consider (sexual) love as less important than work and shopping.

Despite that the women's movement in 1980s Taiwan was basically mild in approach, Jeng Ju-huei notes how the activists were stigmatized: "We were imposed on such contradictory images as hag/hussy, licentious/sexually abstinent, radical/conservative, helpless/overbearing. No wonder many supporters of the women's movement chose to acknowledge their support only partially before the mid-80s" (*The China Times Literary Supplement* Sept. 10, 1998). Such backlash against the women's movement has doubly increased since the movement went radical in the early 1990s. After the uplifting of the martial law, the once weak and stagnant women's move-

ment rapidly flourished, promoting sexual equality in law, education, and consciousness. In the early 1990s the varieties of the second-wave feminist thinking were brought in, which found its crystallization in the publication of *Feminist Theories and Approaches*, a collection of essays written by a group of Taiwanese women scholars. Among the approaches, anti-pornography feminism, sexual liberationist feminism, and queer feminism have been especially penetrating in their critiques. While introducing and localizing their specific brands of feminist theories, the three groups of feminists have interacted closely with each other through all kinds of debates and coalitions. Issues of sexuality gradually become the main focus of the women's movement in the 90s, with various debates and controversies keeping in full swing the media's interest in feminism. Pejorative terms such as "shrew" and "slut" are even subverted and appropriated directly, in order to show defiance to patriarchy. The public outrage against the brutal murders of Perng Wan-ju and Pai Hsiao-yen in 1996-97 finally consolidate the view that women's safety is an important public issue. Lamentably, the media also show an increased voyeurism in reports of raped victims. Meanwhile the antagonism between anti-pornography feminism and sexual liberationist feminism deteriorates, culminating in their eventual break-up over the issue of retaining or abolishing legal prostitutes.

The enthusiasm for issues concerning sexuality has been influenced by the wave of global sexual liberation. Widespread interest in female desire can be found in film, fashion, pop music, and cartoon. Apart from the provocative performance of Madonna, Seiko Matsuda, and Sharon Stone in *Basic Instincts*, a trend of female nudity is displayed in the MTVs of Janet Jackson, Alanis Morissette, and the leading singer of the *Cranberry* band. Sexual liberationist (but not necessarily progressive) cultural commodities such as *The Playboy*, *The Penthouse*, as well as porn films made in Japan, Hong Kong, the United States, and Europe become readily available, let alone internet porno. The popularity of nude photo albums printed both at home and abroad blurs the distinction between erotica and porno, while pub hostesses, stripteasers, porno film actresses, and betelnut vending



beauties position themselves in the gray areas between sexual liberation and sexual exploitation. In the past two years, media competition has stirred up keen interest in sexual scandals, as a result of which there have emerged in the discourses controversial female figures such as Monica Lewinsky the outspoken, sexually aggressive mistress, Cho Yu-ko the lovelorn, terrible avenger, and Ho Li-ling the shrewd belle who courts powerful politicians and tycoons.

It is perhaps more significant that lesbian/gay and queer images and music have been brought in. Films such as *The Crying Game*, *Orlando*, *When Night Is Falling*, *Who's the Man*, *Who's the Woman*, and *To Wongfoo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar* valorize lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, and transsexuals. Pop singers like Michael Jackson, George Boy, David Bowie, Prince, k. d. lang, George Michael, Takuya Kimura, and Izam also make queers an important part of popular culture. Taiwan-produced gay films are differently received. Whereas Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* was both a box office success and critically acclaimed, the audience of Tsai Ming-liang's *The River* and Mickey Chen's *Boys for Beauty* split in bitter debate. Some of the savage attacks indicate how mainstream society still regards homosexuals as decadent. Female impersonators were so (expected to be) popular that there were even professional and amateurish dance troupes such as *Red-Hatted Performers*, *Snow White*, and *Red Silk and Golden Powder*. Female impersonation virtually became the hottest show in 1998 Taiwanese TV programs, despite that real-life transvestites, once found, continue to be detained by the police. The *G & L* magazine shifts the interest in female nudes to male ones, while it also becomes one of the mainstays in Taiwanese popular culture promoting gay-positive representations.

Chi Chia-wei was almost the only gay-rights activist prior to 1990, but his activism was limited to AIDS prevention. Lesbian and gay rights activism, however, quickly flourished in the early 90s, when spurred on by the rapid introduction into Taiwan of lesbian/gay and queer discourses. Unable to fully come out, the activists, most of whom were college students, joined the women's movement to secretly promote gay-positive consciousness, and succeeded in obtain-

ing support from both anti-pornography feminists and sexual liberationist feminists. But when they sought to come out and raise gay-rights issues within the women's movement, they were snubbed by mainstream liberal and anti-pornography feminists alike, who were afraid lest they dominated the direction of the movement. A few feminists even had homophobic reactions. In consequence, lesbian and gay rights activists either split off into a separate organization, or inclined toward sexual liberationist feminism, which in turn increased the struggle between sexual liberationist feminism and anti-pornography feminism, triggering highly complicated debates on gender and sexuality. For their visibility in mainstream society, lesbians and gays have depended not only on films and magazines, but also on events such as the wedding of Hsu Yo-sheng and Gray Harri-man, and the awarding of the *China Times* Million-dollar Prize for Novels to Chu Tien-wen's *Notes of a Desolate Man* and to Chiu Miao-Jin's *Notes of a Crocodile*.

Compared with 1880s-1890s England, 1990s Taiwan sees more complicated and multifaceted discourses on gender and sexuality, due to the influence of the second-wave feminism, lesbian and gay rights movement and queer theory. Whereas very few feminists explored female desire in *fin-de-siècle* England (please see note 1), female sexual autonomy is the main focus of Taiwan's feminist discourse in the 1990s (even though anti-pornography feminism and sexual liberationist feminism define it very differently). Hence women's gender crossing in Taiwan in the 1990s is perceived by the conservatives as tainted with decadence. If New Women provoked anxiety in *fin-de-siècle* England, what causes masculine anxiety in 1990s Taiwan is not just New Women, but also other new types of women such as Material Girls, narcissistic women, wild women, lesbians, bisexual women, and Spicy Girls. For the conservatives in Taiwan, these types of women all seem sexually autonomous and subvert conventional valorization of submissive, passive women who can be reduced to the role of mother/wife; thus, they pose a threat to the institution of marriage and family. Men's gender crossing in 1990s Taiwan is also defined slightly different from that in *fin-de-siècle* England. Even

though Taiwan does not have an equivalent of the Aesthetic Movement in *fin-de-siècle* England, playboys and fashionable men have been present, especially in show business, and within cliques of artists, merchants, and politicians. They do not necessarily seem particularly effeminate, however. Male decadents in Taiwan used to be primarily dissolute men who waste their lives and ruin their family; they are perceived as effeminate because they do not do “the men’s job” of earning the bread. But other types of male “decadents” stir up anxiety with the rise of gay-rights movement in Taiwan. As “queers” like gay men, bisexual men, female impersonators, male-to-female transsexuals, and sissies become more and more visible, the conservatives associate them with both effeminacy and decadence by perceiving them as perverse and artificial. It should be noted that traditionally male promiscuity is often taken for granted, but its practice among male homosexuals implicates quite different meanings and power relations from those in heterosexual practice.

## **II. Gender Crossing and Decadence in Taiwanese Fictions at the “Fin de Siècle”**

Taiwanese fiction writers are not absent in the various discourses on gender and sexuality in the 1990s. As a matter of fact, around 1980, fictions by women writers were both best sellers and winners of literary awards. Although many of these fictions valorize traditional femininity and idealized romantic love, a growing number of them explore the difficulties and failures of heterosexual love/marriage/family in order to critique patriarchal notions of gender. Shih Shu-ching, Liao Huei-ying, Hsiao Sa, Su Wei-cheng, and Yuan Chueong-chueong were among the best writers who portray women’s madness, masochistic self-indulgence, or awakening as a result of patriarchal oppression. Li Ang, on the other hand, is unique among female writers in addressing the issue of female sexuality ever since the 60s, which anticipates its emergence as one of the primary feminist concerns in the 1990s. Moreover, Pai Hsien-yung’s representations of female sexuality in his 1960s stories of Yu-ching Sao,

Ying Shuei-yen, and Mamasam Jin should not be ignored. Pai's coming out a few years after he published the novel *The Outcast Son*<sup>4</sup> draws attention to these early stories pertaining to how he may seek both to sneak in gay men's gender-crossing imagination (Yeh, Chu Wei-cheng) and to participate in feminist discourse.

One of the main characteristics of 1990s Taiwanese fictions is the prevalence of gender crossing and decadence as the theme or subject matter. Fictions delineating female desire and male and female same-sex love are both great in number and frequent winners of fiction awards. Writers who portray female sexuality include Li Ang, Chu Tien-wen, Chu Tien-shin, Cheng Ying-shu, Chen Shuei, Tsao Li-chuan, Lucifer Hung, Chiu Miao-Jin, Chang Yuan, Chi Ta-wei, Ping Lu, Du Shiu-lan, and Chang Yi-shuan. As far as heterosexual relationship is concerned, both Chu Tien-wen and Cheng Ying-shu display anti-romantic sentiments by deriding love as mere fantasy, and by suggesting that love is less tangible than desire. Women writers tend to depict females as narcissistic and practical, while ridiculing or despising decadent men. Even the extremely self-indulgent heroine of Li Ang's *The Labyrinthine Garden* eventually discovers that love is illusory, and the depiction of her awakening underlines her strong female desire. These women writers tend to write from the perspective of the "good" women. Even so, they redefine the "good" women as sexually autonomous, while their attitudes toward loose or "bad" women are ambiguous.

Contrary to fictions about heterosexuality, fictions about female same-sex relationship celebrate love. Writers like Chiu Miao-Jin, Chu Tien-shin, Chen Shuei, and Lucifer Hung delineate female same-sex love as an integral part of the heroine's self-quest. They also portray how, under the pressure of mainstream heterosexual society, female same-sex relationship is troubled and entangled. In fictions by Chen Shuei, Chiu Miao-Jin, Lucifer Hung, Chu Tien-shin, Chang Yuan, Chi Ta-wei, and Chang Yi-shuan, the happiness of lesbian love is often set against the emptiness or insufficiency of heterosexual love. Moreover, in fictions by Chen Shuei and Lucifer Hung, voraciously sensual women sleep around with men without loving them, and are

cured of their incapacity for love only through falling in love with women. Chiu Miao-Jin, Tsao Li-chuan, and Chen Shuei all depict butch-femme relationships. Tsao Li-chuan's "About her Gray Hair and Other Stuff," which touches on the generational differences in Taiwanese butch-femme subculture, seeks to trace the history of Taiwanese lesbianism.

Undomesticated female desire induces male voyeurism or backlash. The male narrator of Yang Chao's *A Dark Alley on a Wild Night* is almost a voyeur of female body parts. Fantasies about invading female bodies are also rife in Lo Yi-chuin's *The Dream of My Wife and Dogs*, where the juxtaposition of a dozen raped or deformed female bodies with enticing female nudes suggests both male voyeuristic desire and masculine anxiety about, if not violence against, the New Woman. Cheng Ying-shu's "The Angel's Eyes" is a horror story about a male aesthete's grisly murder of a pure innocent woman.

Writers dealing with male homosexual subject matter include Chu Tien-wen, Chi Ta-wei, Wu Chi-wen, Lucifer Hung, Lin Juinying, Lin Yu-yi, Tsao Li-chuan, Jiang Shuin, and Shu Yo-sheng. Generally speaking, the male same-sex love they portray is less entangled and troubled than the female same-sex love delineated by the above-mentioned writers, although love remains important to the male same-sex relationships they depict. Both Chu Tien-wen and Wu Chi-wen seek to trace the history of Taiwanese male homosexuality. Whereas Chu portrays gay men's underground sexual paradise, Wu depicts gay men's pallid, meager sexual life. Whereas Chu ambiguously contrasts mainstream heterosexual values and male homosexual communal values through a dissembling gay man, both Chi Ta-wei and Lucifer Hung are defiant and seductive in uncovering the repressed and distorted male same-sex desire and exploring male homosexual utopia in cyberspace (Liou, *Engendering* 43-81). Chi deliberately captures the fluidity and tension of male same-sex desire in the family, on the campus, and in the army.

Writers dealing with the subject matter of transsexuality, transvestitism, and bisexuality include Chi Ta-wei, Lucifer Hung, Cheng Ying-shu, Yang Chao, Wu Chi-wen, and Chen Shuei. Influenced by

feminist and queer theories, Chi and Hung depict the vacillations of sexual and gender identities in cyberspace, which allows for playful possibilities. Both Yang Chao and Cheng Ying-shu set transsexuals in the background of Taiwan, in order to satirize masculinist myths and prejudices against transsexuals in Taiwan (Liou "Queer Sexchanges"). Both Chen Shuei and Wu Chi-wen delineate the social pressure on transsexuals. Chen's "Sleepwalking in 1994," in particular, shows how the butch may feel obliged to take the transsexual surgery at the femme's request.

The intersection of decadence and gender crossing is no doubt one of the phenomena that incites the most moral controversy and anxiety in 1990s Taiwan. Since 1990s Taiwanese fictions are both agents and products of this phenomenon, they constitute important discourses on decadence and gender crossing. Limited by space, this essay chooses to narrow down its discussion to fictions by four "daughters of decadence":<sup>5</sup> Li Ang, Chu Tien-wen, Chiu Miao-Jin, and Cheng Ying-shu. I will examine how their fictions portray gender crossing, how they present the dialectic between love and sex, morality and decadence, and what politics of gender and sexuality their imagination of decadence and gender crossing implicate.

### 1. Li Ang

The decadence of Li Ang's *The Labyrinthine Garden* is all the more sensational, if we read the novel bearing in mind the shocking sex scandals about powerful politicians and magnates in recent years. In a Taiwan society where bourgeois notions of heterosexual monogamy are established as the norm, a "good" woman, even an aristocrat who had studied in Japan and the United States, falls in love with a womanizer/real estate tycoon, thereby experiencing a decadent life accompanied by a series of humiliations, as she gets into emotional, sexual, and power entanglements. She has multiple and mutually contradictory identities: a dependent "little" woman (emotionally), a naive, reckless aristocratic woman, a New Woman (economically), a man's plaything, and a loose woman. Apart from that, the text shifts

back and forth between the heroine's first-person present-tense narration of her wild abandon and a third-person past-tense narration of her awakening. Instead of easily fitting in a radical feminist agenda, such ambivalent and ambiguous vacillation is revealing of the complicated interaction between sexual liberationist feminist, anti-pornography feminist, and patriarchal thinking (see also Wang 181-84). Through this "good" woman/aesthete's sexual adventures, Li Ang both explores and re-examines the significance of love, desire, and self in a woman's life.

There is no question about the heroine Chu Ying-hung's worship of the phallus/penis in her infatuation with Lin Hsi-gung at first. Despite that her strong sexual desire is indeed intermixed with a fetishistic love of his beauty, she is particularly fascinated by his despotic arrogance.<sup>6</sup> An inexperienced young woman, she first meets Lin at a pub among a group of the new rich, and while abominating the cheap casual sex of the nightclub world, she is nonetheless immediately captivated by his beautiful tall figure, his youth, and most importantly his melancholic dark qualities. She is helplessly subjugated by his tyrannical, self-conceited personality, so that she fantasizes about being his little woman. Feeling "an intoxicated, intense sensation, a wild happiness of extreme abandonment," (44)<sup>7</sup> she is "willing to go to any place and do anything with this strong beautiful man" (45). At their second encounter, she associates him with the white phoenix, so he gains an additional mysterious, legendary quality. He then seeks to conquer her by showing off his Rolls-Royce limousine, his ability to fly in first-class airplane cabin to France and the United States for vacation, and his capability of talking to her for hours on international phone calls. Their relationship of master and slave is revealed at the time when Lin suddenly decides to break up with her. He half coerces her into kneeling before him doing oral sex for him, while he flaunts his inflated penis; she, on her part, passively responds, scarcely aware that he treats her as his prey/toy.

Even when Chu acquires a stronger sense of self after she discovers that Lin is a married man who practices casual sex and keeps concubines, she remains hopelessly embroiled in emotional fixation

on him. She naively believes that she will eventually captivate him. Paradoxically, she fails to change his sexual practice; instead, her own sexual practice changes. Provoked by Lin's indifference to her, she dissociates her love from her sex; she remains emotionally faithful to him while having sexual intercourse with Teddy Chang. Indeed, it is her insistence on loving Lin that leads her to make rules for her sexual relationship with Teddy: Teddy must be reduced to a penis, and she must refuse Teddy's embrace and caress after intercourse. Obviously she tries to be the definer of her own sexuality, which implicitly poses a threat to Lin and Teddy, both of whom believe in phallogocentric notions of men's sexual prowess. When Lin finally asks to date her again, right before their meeting she once again has sex with Teddy. Imagining Teddy to be Lin, she mounts on his body, feeling that "she herself is launching the attack" (176), turning Teddy/Lin's penis into her prey, enclosing it. Lin seems to be totally unaware of her relationship with Teddy. Her concealing the fact suggests that Lin treats his women as his playthings, although Chu resists Lin's practice secretly. Teddy, on the other side, feels threatened by her sexual autonomy. When she seeks to resume her sexual relationship with Teddy after jilting him, he humiliates her in ways that reflect his sense of humiliation by her jilting.

Even though Chu is far from being a model feminist, her sexual adventures enable the novel to pursue the dialectic between love and sex: Is it better to have loveless sex (as sexual liberationist feminists would have it), or to have sex based on love (as anti-pornography feminists would insist)?<sup>8</sup> And the answer is rather ambiguous. Chu makes her decadent experiment with Teddy in order to recapture Lin, her love object and her "prey," and to regain sex based on love. Ironically, she soon finds that Lin "has neither Teddy's sexual prowess, nor Teddy's gentle love skill" (226), that "in fact, their sexual love is never so wonderful as she had recalled it so fondly" (226). It turns out that the love in which she has indulged herself is an illusion: Lin's passion cools off very soon, and afterwards he makes love to her rather mechanically, which fails to gratify her. Even more ironically, Lin, who likes to boast about his sexual prowess, has been physically



depleted due to too much sex life. One of the reasons why Lin chooses to have various kinds of sexual games with her at unusual sites (such as in the car, among the weeds, or when they are massaged by a blind masseuse) is because Lin needs more stimulation in order to recover his sexual function. Under the shadow of Lin's impotence, the master/slave, subject/object relationship between them is reticently changed.

On the other hand, conventional codes subject Chu to more social pressure and risks than Lin for her sexual liberation. For all Chu's own belief that her sexual relationship with Lin is based on love, she is generally perceived by people around them as one of the kept women of a womanizer. Masao, the powerful businessman subordinate only to Lin in Lin's enterprise, shows his contempt for her as Lin's kept woman, even equating her to a whore, when he tries to force himself on her under the pretext that he is drunk. She feels more anxious about her unmarried status as she finds herself accidentally pregnant. Eventually she tricks Lin into divorcing his wife and marrying her, only to realize that, given Lin's promiscuity, her status is never secure. Throughout the novel, she compromises herself with patriarchy, but her abortion and her donation of the Lotus Garden, the Chu family garden, signify her autonomy. Toward the end of the book, she calls up her foremother to render Lin impotent as they make love in the Lotus Garden, thereby reversing the master/slave relationship between them. Her act not only manifests a sense of self-identity, but also constitutes a defiant gender crossing.

It is noteworthy that the book portrays several male decadents. Lin is only seemingly decadent, since his promiscuity is partially commercially motivated: he needs to prove through his sexual conquest that he can continue to expand his real estate kingdom, and to compete and build up ties with other men.<sup>9</sup> He practices casual sex partly for the sake of his career. He appears effeminate only when he is in love with Chu or becomes sexually impotent. The real effeminate aesthete in the book is Chu Zu-yen, Ying-hung's father, who displays connoisseurship in managing the Lotus Garden, who also ruins his family by spending all the money collecting expensive cam-

eras, limousines, and hi-fis after he is silenced under political persecution. He is not an ordinary loser, however; his lavish aestheticism is a form of passive resistance to the government and an attempt to keep the ideals of democracy. Aside from Chu Zu-yen and Lin Hsi-gung, a bunch of gay men appear in the prologue canvassing in bars for subscriptions for AIDS-patient Charlie. Though humiliated, they still try to promote the gay-rights movement through canvassing. When the figures of these gay men overlap with the view of Chu Ying-hung donating the Lotus Garden, which is shown on the huge TV screen behind them, the narrator seems to imply the possibility of the coalition between feminist liberation and gay-rights movements.

## 2. Chu Tien-wen

Chu Tien-wen deliberately draws from the European *fin-de-siècle* imagination of decadence and gender crossing. Both the title and the style of her short story "Fin-de-siècle Splendor" refer to decadent writing<sup>10</sup>, though the story is re-located in Taiwan. Her short story collection *Fin-de-siècle Splendor* and her novel *Notes of a Desolate Man* portray aesthetic abandonment, sexual depletion and languor, and gender anarchy. The two books' elaborate, highly ornamented style and oversubtilized aesthetic vision make them classics of feminine aesthetic and fin-de-siècle decadence in Taiwanese fiction. Set in a daily life under the sway of Japanese, American, and European capitalist commodities, the two books have as protagonists decadent men and Generation X women. Even the marriage of an older generation is shown to reverse traditional masculinist mode.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike Chu Ying-hung in *The Labyrinthine Garden*, who shows active sexual desire, some girls/women in *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor* seem soft and passive, like traditional "good" women. But they in fact are aggressive and self-centered. All of them indulge in an aestheticizing imagination, and are highly narcissistic. They seem "drugged" as they immerse themselves in private erotic fantasy, but they do not embark on a no-win love relationship. In "A Daughter of the Nile," Japanophile Lin Hsiao-yang is a rebel and a loner who adores Seiko

Matsuda and herself. Studying at a night school and working part-time at the MacDonal'd's, she despises good students and is fascinated by the love fantasy fabricated by Japanese cartoons. In "Take Me Away, Moonlight!" the apparently delicate, quiet Cheng Jia-wei is actually overbearing and adamant. Working in advertising, she lives in a private dream world composed of advertisements and images. She escapes into her fantasy after falling out of love, even wielding a cutting knife to protect her fantasy from intrusion.

Mia's *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor* is an extreme example of gender crossing and decadence. Like the protagonist in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Mia had been narcissistic, fetishistic, charismatic, and unloving. Paradoxically, Mia's radical femininity made her rather masculine in a sense. A model, she indulged in all kinds of fashion, fascinated by the artificial, the surface, and new styles. Influenced by the androgyny of David Bowie, George Boy, and the Prince, she cross-dressed and captivated a group of girls. She had a quasi butch-femme relationship with her girlfriend Baby. Then she initiated the trend of imitating Madonna, wearing her bras out and having casual sex with a bunch of boys. She became a Material Girl by the age of twenty. Bored with sex, she wanted to be a Queen Bee whose sole aim is making money. At last she becomes the mistress of old Duan, who is married and old enough to be her father. Enjoying the intellectual sobriety, maternal warmth, and unworldly romance that she gets from old Duan, she turns into a witch who lives on her feminine memories of smells and colors.

The male decadents in *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor* are just as defiantly outrageous as their fin-de-siècle European counterparts, although the narrator's tone is slightly critical. The Wallow in the Bitter Sea Gangsters in "A Daughter of the Nile" had been gigolos in a club they ran; they also owned a pub and a boutique selling decadent punk clothes. Ah-shan, one of the gangsters, is shot to death because he takes a rival gang leader's woman. Lin Hsiao-yang, who is secretly in love with him, anticipates his early death when she sees him taking marijuana with a superbly beautiful gesture. In "Take Me Away, Moonlight!" Hsia Jie-fu, an advertisement creative artist from

Hong Kong, has such a heightened aestheticizing temper that he is "against the fashion and the designer's collection" (90). Extremely narcissistic, Hsia looks upon every flirting as an erotic stage on which he "fulfills his desire of performance and self-connoisseurship" (96). In "Buddha of the Body," Little Tong, a gay man in his thirties, encounters Chong Lin in a public bathroom rendered almost vacant after the plague of AIDS. After sex he gazes indulgently at Chong's strong body, calling it "beauty!" "the best thing!" in his thought (56, 53). Having had too much sex, Little Tong often finds himself bored and languid, nauseated by the body. Even so, he still enjoys queering an Indian Buddhist scripture as portraying "an overblown, sensual world" (64); for him, the stories of Buddha's sacrificing his body to feed the tiger and cutting his leg to feed the dove intimate the sex of his gay ancestors. A sexual relationship is no burden to Little Tong. He willingly serves as a Buddha of the Body to a sixteen-year-old gay boy who asks to sleep with him.

*Notes of a Desolate Man* extends the decadence of "Fin-de-Siècle Splendor" and "Buddha of the Body"; though it is more conservative in tone, the novel successfully delineates a fin-de-siècle aestheticism and decadence. Chu Tien-wen adroitly chooses for the first-person narrator a cowardly, dissembling, closeted gay man, who serves as a negotiator between the mainstream heterosexual monogamous family values (which are well established before the lifting of the martial law) and the gay men's promiscuous practice within certain circles. Underneath a basically staunch endorsement of mainstream values, there emerges a yearning for transgression and rebellion, which complicates the novel's vision. At the very outset of the novel, Little Shao states in a tone of regret reminiscent of that of Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "This is a time of decadence, this is a time for prophesy" (9). While on the one hand he upholds Levi-Strauss's theory of kinship structure, thereby vilifying homosexuals as freaks; on the other, he also foresees a sexual paradise in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, imagining that "in a sexual terrain where every obstacle is abolished, a woman and a woman, or a man and a man, explore sexuality with each other, to see how the horizon of sexual

pleasure can be ever expanded. Totally dissociated from the procreative function, sex is sublimated into sex for sex's sake. It is thus a sensual, aesthetic, artistic, and erotic kingdom" (64-65). Certainly a non-reproductive society is doomed to extinction, but the more Little Shao senses the sad fate of the erotic kingdom, the more he savors his aesthetic vision of decadence. Like Little Tong in "Buddha of the Body," Little Shao has reached the state of sexual exhaustion and craves for a stable love relationship. Like Little Tong, too, he remains an aesthete and misses his decadent life in the past despite his denigration of it.

Through Little Shao, the novel celebrates feminine aesthetic, in order not only to challenge traditional disparagement of femininity and woman, but also to assert the legitimacy of gay men. Even more significantly, the novel accounts for the "cruel" sexual practice within certain male homosexual circles by attributing it to the practitioner's aestheticizing temper. While critical of such aestheticizing, the novel reveals how male homosexual promiscuity does not involve the kind of master/slave relationship that powerful heterosexual womanizers take for granted. The effeminate Little Shao sees himself as having "a feminine soul budding in a male body" (99), with a feminine mentality. For him, although not every gay man is as effeminate as he, they all have an aesthetic penchant for matter, physique, and the appearance. Thus they all have an androgynous soul: "We all have a femininity that is gazed at and a masculinity that gazes" (97). Adoring beauty, these male homosexual circles valorize male icons, who are bound to break many hearts. These male homosexual circles uphold the supremacy of desire, but the object of desire is the male icon rather than the magnate. Physical limitation, however, prevents anyone from being always the conqueror of love. "The principles of the [homosexual] underworld" are "the doomed cycles of betraying and being betrayed" (83) and "never love again, lest you get hurt" (144). As sexuality is disentangled from the social network of marriage, family, and reproduction, gay men can enjoy anonymous sex.

The disagreement between Little Shao and Ah-yao constitutes another dialectic in the book between order and decadence, morality

and transgression (see Chang 140-41). Little Shao's refutation of Ah-yao is again shot through with implicit respect and admiration. Little Shao practiced promiscuous, even anonymous, sex after being jilted by his lover; he abandons the decadent life only after he meets Yung-ji. In contrast, Ah-yao, who dies of AIDS, has been promiscuous and militant all his life. When Little Shao was still confused about his sexual identity, Ah-yao was already a happy gay man involved in the gay-rights movement. When the post-AIDS Queer Nation adopts defiant and seductive strategies, Ah-yao, who seems to live in New York, is among the activists who cry out "Act up. Fight back. Fight AIDS" (11). Little Shao, who only wants to have a secure life with Yung-ji, is horrified by Ah-yao's militancy. Shocked by Ah-yao's insatiable sexual desire, he feels sorry that the lonely Ah-yao has to make international phone calls to him after casual sex. Still, Little Shao regards Ah-yao as a hero. Thinking that Ah-yao deserves a panel on the Names Project quilt, in the North American gay communal mourning of those who die of AIDS, Little Shao bursts into a praise: "You are a warrior, Ah-yao" (35). Even when dying, Ah-yao would not convert into any religious belief, for he thinks "Salvation is a worse way of shirking the responsibility. . . . Now that he has had a wanton life, has fathomed the bottom of desire, let him go to hell. Any other alternative is bullshit" (22). In Little Shao's recollection, however, Ah-yao is associated with Buddha: He imagines that "Once Buddha became so skinny that he was just like an AIDS patient" (212); and he finds that, after cremation, Ah-yao's throat bone resembles a man sitting Buddha-wise. Despite that Little Shao returns to mainstream order, thereby denigrating practitioners of promiscuity as lechers, he cannot help respecting Ah-yao for bolstering positive images of gayness. Such images enable him to fantasize that Buddha was gay, to imagine that the crucified Jesus is branded with the kisses of his betrayer, and to have a secret marriage with Yung-ji at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. He also realizes that his monogamous contract with Yung-ji is solely based on the fact that they happen to be highly congenial to each other.

### 3. Chiu Miao-Jin

Whereas the narrator of *Notes of a Desolate Man* is an effeminate gay man, the narrator of Chiu Miao-Jin's *Notes of a Crocodile* is a butch. They represent respectively stereotypes of male homosexuals and lesbians, while their gender crossing is unintelligible and horrifying to mainstream society. As a matter of fact, homosexuality itself is seen as immoral and perverse by the conservatives, since it disrupts the heterosexual scenario and the procreative purpose traditionally assigned to men and women. But butches and effeminate gay men are doubly discriminated against because they also subvert the rigid gender divide under martial law that aligned man to a robust, virile brand of masculinity and woman to a passive, submissive kind of femininity. The two novels then constitute counter-discourses to some extent, despite that they also contain mainstream notions of gender and sexuality. More directly than Little Shao, La-Tze in *Notes of a Crocodile* critiques the heterocentrism of the mainstream gender paradigm. She sneers at the way mainstream heterosexual society prescriptively equates masculinity with man, and femininity with woman, and the way it reduces sex to a reproductive function, hence anyone not confined by such a paradigm is "de-masculinized and de-feminized and seen as neutered" (51). In other words, since gender is already heterosexualized, lesbians and gay men are perceived as "queer." "Crocodile" is a metaphor for such a "queer" identity. By depicting the melancholia, resentment, and (self-) derision of a bunch of lesbian and gay college students, the book protests against the heterosexual matrix.

Although La-tze seems more militant and angry than Little Shao, paradoxically she is more constrained by mainstream values. Whereas the dissembling but narcissistic Little Shao has no trouble with his gay identity, the angry but self-hating La-tze is overcome with resentment and despair, which affects her love relationships negatively. On the other hand, whereas Little Shao displays his effeminacy and celebrates feminine aesthetic, La-tze manifests her masculinity and proposes a "reverse" decadent aesthetic. If Little Shao seems to sug-

gest that every male homosexual has aestheticizing temper and is hence more or less effeminate, La-tze seems to intimate that every lesbian/homosexual has a violent temper and is therefore more or less masculine. Such violent temper is induced by her/his anger at the institutional violence, her/his incapability to change the system, and her/his helpless internalization of its values. Violent temper is directed toward both her/himself and the system. The lesbians and gay men in the novel all feel intense self-hatred, despair, self-destructive desire due to society's intolerance of their sexual identities. Thus Mong-sheng becomes a drug addict, Chu-kuang attempts suicide many times, Tuin-tuin quits school, and La-tze fools around. La-tze explains to Tuin-tuin how, when she first realized her sexual identity, she felt being put into the closet by the society: It was as if she suddenly bumped into "an absurd wall" (108), the world changed overnight, she was thrown into a totally alien country, feeling herself silently sinking in sheer isolation. Sensitive to the way homosexuality is perceived as felony, she has guilt and fear about her lesbian identity. Images of violence by society come up frequently. The cruelty of heterosexual society makes her feel that being gay is just like being diseased or murdered or raped or put into a mental hospital or a concentration camp. For her, then, life becomes a miserable hell devoid of any hope or goals.

If the rule of the gay underworld in *Notes of a Desolate Man* is casual sex in a sexual paradise, that in *Notes of a Crocodile* is all kinds of sexual dysfunction and inadequacy induced by the oppressively homophobic culture. The book portrays the difficulties of homosexual love by showing emotional entanglements such as inability to show love, fear of sex, fear of being loved, mutual torture, etc. In their sexual practice, lesbians seem more conforming to mainstream values than gay men. La-tze is almost incapable of confronting and showing her own desire; one of the reasons why she runs away from Shuei-ling is because she feels that her desire is dirty. Tzu-jo and Tuin-tuin seem to feel the same. In love with each other, they nevertheless separate and try to become heterosexual but never feel happy. Tzu-jo can never be gratified since her love is dissociated from her



sex: she loves man's body and woman's soul. Although the two gay men Mong-sheng and Chu-kuang can face their own desire, they fear being loved due to self-hatred.

Despite that he eventually becomes a drug addict, Mong-sheng in the first half of the book represents the kind of decadent man that La-tze envies, and is associated with Jean Genet, the French gay writer whom La-tze likes to evoke. La-tze suggests that Genet is an anti-establishment subculture hero when she mentions more than twice that Genet grew up in prison, regarded convicts as his parents, and deliberately returned to prison by committing theft. Mong-sheng seems like a figure from Genet's fiction that is decadently alluring with the assumed wickedness of a motorcycle gangster. (Certainly, his anti-social behavior is more a rebellious gesture of a young literature-lover than really vile.) La-tze feels that Mong-sheng's laughter "is showing off to me how he exercises a certain power over me, as if he could master me" (42). Mong-sheng behaves weirdly and has an aptness for black humor. He sends a packet to her, whom he had met only once before, in red-ink handwriting; the packet contains a stub of a finger, which he claims to be his, cut off because La-tze would not see him. This terrifies her, and she learns only later that it's not true. Mong-sheng is wild and defiantly immoral. In the gay-bar named "Nothing," he sings with a man on the stage and has a hot kiss with him, which makes La-tze vomit. He had also performed on the stage the act of defecating and real-live sex with a man and a woman. Moreover, he runs around in the women's restroom peeing and walks around naked in front of a lesbian and a gay man in the men's dormitory.

La-tze's decadent aesthetic is thus different from that of Little Shao. Rather than privileging the beautiful, hers is a "reverse" decadent aesthetic that valorizes the ugly and the immoral. Such an aesthetic is implied in her account of the French film *Mauvais Sang*: "the hero looks like a lizard, close in blood to the crocodile family. The other men in the film are either fat and short or bald; all of them are ugly old men" (27), but the director is one of the greatest aestheticians of our times. Such a decadent aesthetic is further developed in

her portrayal of Mong-sheng. He is still a “tall beautiful boy” (31) when La-tze first meets him, but she feels that “it’s inappropriate to call him a boy, for I can smell that he has a peculiar power to bend people. Such power makes him aged. Except for his superb ability to joke about everything, he has not a single trace of boyish quality in him” (29-30). Identifying with Mong-sheng, La-tze appreciates his decadent humor; she feels familiar and reassured when she receives his message that says, “Don’t love you. Want to see you only. Would rape you on midnight next Sunday should you not meet me” (42). For her, his decadent mocking “can be drawn to extreme viciousness at one end and to extreme tenderness at the other” (43).

Like *Notes of a Desolate Man*, *Notes of a Crocodile* depicts the drama of betraying and being betrayed, but here the cruelty often comes from the incapacity for self-love and the fear of being loved. Paradoxically, difficulties only enhance the intensity of love. When the ambivalent lovers are entangled in sadist, masochistic, and mutual torturing cycles, their crying signifies not only the pain of love but also a protest against the mainstream society.

#### 4. Cheng Ying-shu

Cheng Ying-shu’s novel *Humankind Should Not Fly* and short-story collection *What Good Girls Don’t Do* also portray gender crossing and decadence. Unlike *Notes of a Crocodile* and *Notes of a Desolate Man*, *Humankind Should Not Fly* focuses on male-to-female transsexuals. By depicting transsexuals, the novel satirizes heterosexualized gender notions and ridicules the filthiness of some decadent men. Delineating the heterosexual relationship, *What Good Girls Don’t Do* is even more critical of decadent men, while it mocks at traditional “good girls,” satirizes the illusiveness of heterosexual love, and shows the danger of heterosexual liberation.

*Humankind Should Not Fly* portrays the gender trouble of transsexuals and transgenderists. The two male-to-female transsexuals in the novel show different effects of gender crossing. Jenny, the English transsexual who is as beautiful, “natural,” and androgynous as

Sharon Stone, makes the anonymous first-person narrator confused as to how to distinguish woman from man, while Nicola (in Ma Shu's story, a story within the novel), who deliberately exaggerates his/her femininity, is seen as affected and a satiric parody of woman. Their notions of gender are also different. Nicola regrets having had the transsexual surgery, which she sees as robbing her of the power of man, while Jenny never regrets, even though her bravery toward the end of the novel makes the narrator feel that Jenny remains a man despite the surgical conversion. Jenny's gender crossing both subverts heterosexualized gender and reveals the problem with the effeminate narrator. For the narrator, Jenny the transsexual is a woman, hence his marrying her proves to everyone that he is a man. He is thus puzzled by Jenny's love affair with Gao-sai the gay man, but eventually he comes to doubt that both he himself and Ma Shu may be transsexual or homosexual. One of the jokes in the novel is that the narrator perceives himself as a "standard," "healthy" male heterosexual, but no matter how he tries to prove this through his relationship with women, he is only capable of sisterly affection for them. Even when he has sex with Chien Jong-tze, his female teacher, he only gets his erection through thinking of a gecko. Likewise, Ma Shu sleeps with several women on one single night because he cannot have orgasm. He has sex with penguins when he is a seaman.

*Humankind Should Not Fly* is a double-edged satire: it both satirizes the repression and hypocrisy of heterosexist society and ridicules the meanness and ribaldry of some decadent men. The fetish for sex with animals as shown by the narrator, Ma Shu, and Nick, for instance, seems to be derived from their incapacity both for heterosexual desire and for facing homosexual desire. Perceiving himself to be a good man, the narrator often regards deviation from the heterosexual norms as decadent and perverse, but he also participates in it. The narrator is shocked by Jenny's performance of a mock oral sex with a bottle, but his own fantasy of seducing ignorant pretty teenage girls is even more obscene. Nick, that is, the pre-surgical Nicola, also behaves like a good boy until he tries to prove to his companions that he is capable of sexual desire for girls. He reveals his nastiness in

coercing an Asian-descended girl into doing oral sex for him.

In both *What Good Girls Don't Do*, which deals with the heterosexual relationship, and *Humankind Should Not Fly*, decadence is often banalized or vulgarized and shown to be affected, listless, vile, and mean. The decadent men in "The Doves on the Roof" and "Woman's Ordeal," for instance, are both daydreaming bums: one of them keeps making trouble, of which his wife has to take care, the other tempts his girlfriend into prostitution so he can make money as a pimp. The drunkards in *Humankind Should Not Fly* and "The Monster" despise work, and become either so drunk that they pick fights with strangers, or so poor that they have to sell themselves for money. The first-person female narrator of "The Monster" seduces the fiance of her friend due to lack of money to buy alcohol, and is humiliated by being half coerced into performing oral sex. Jenny's decadence seems more positive; the narrator once has the (wrong) impression that she is the kind of "elegant, decadent English gentleman who wears a pale and scornful smile" (106). After she gets addicted to marijuana and alcohol, however, she also appears dazed.

*What Good Girls Don't Do* even satirizes the reification and violence that an aestheticizing vision may involve. "The Angel's Eyes" is a lurid story, in which a male aesthete uses elaborate, elegant language to celebrate his wife's sweet innocence and his brutal murder of her. He reifies both her terrible death and her physical beauty; in his diseased imagination, "she is his porcelain doll" (60), and only by crushing her to pieces can he show "her heart-breaking beauty" (60).

In Cheng Ying-shu's portrayal of the heterosexual relationship, traditional valorization of beautiful women over ugly ones is overturned, since she depicts the latter as more active and aggressive. The delicate porcelain-doll-like women in *Humankind Should Not Fly*, "The Angel's Eyes," and "The Woman Man Hates" are all vulnerable: one is murdered, another is a battered wife, and the other suffers from melancholia due to an unhappy marriage. The narrator of "The Woman Man Hates" remarks that his mother behaves like the Snow White lying in the coffin, or a ballerina playing the role of the dying

swan, so brittle that she “is a sheer loser” (127). In contrast, ugly women are more autonomous and physically more powerful. The fat girl in “The Woman Man Hates” bares her breasts when doing her workout in her apartment, which both disgusts and fascinates the peeping narrator. The fat woman in “Woman’s Ordeal” is so domineering that she dangles a decadent man’s deflated penis and dumps him like an old shoe. In *Humankind Should Not Fly*, the narrator’s mother changes from a slim fragile woman to a cow-like ferocious one as she becomes the breadwinner.

*What Good Girls Don’t Do* contains a lot of dialectic between good girls and bad girls, morality and immorality, love and sex. The old-fashioned women in “Bad Neighbors” and “Three Women Secretly Punished a Rapist” all transgress spiritually against their own notions of good women. The self-righteous widow, while indignant at the “Spicy Girl” next door, is nevertheless sexually restless after overhearing the girl’s lustful voice in sexual intercourse. The spinster is dazed by the unconscious rapist’s inflated penis, which she holds in her hand; she castrates him abruptly only out of fear that people may suspect that she has had sex with him. “Bad Neighbors,” “Woman’s Trial,” and “SOMEWHERE IN TIME” all satirize the illusiveness of love. In “SOMEWHERE IN TIME,” falling in love is simply an artificial imitation of the characters and the plot of the film *The Bridges of Madison County*; it is ludicrously distanced from mundane reality. The eldest daughter in “Bad Neighbors” has been seeing her boyfriend for a year without knowing what love is; for her, the hero and the heroine of romance fiction are like idiots. In “Woman’s Trial,” A-fu-luo-di (a transliteration of Aphrodite?) is enticed by her boyfriend into becoming a prostitute. While she is physically abused, she foolishly convinces herself that she is emulating the heroine of the porn film *The Story of O*; thus she fantasizes about being “an ascetic for love, a martyr for love” (106).

While questioning traditional constraints on good girls and deriding love as an illusion, *What Good Girls Don’t Do* also shows the traps and temptation of casual sex. Just like what Chu Ying-hung in *The Labyrinthine Garden* comes to realize, love seems to be less real

than desire in *What Good Girls Don't Do*. "Bad Neighbors," "The Monster," "The Secret Room," and "Woman's Trial" all portray lascivious women. In "The Doves on the Roof," the wife who has an extra-marital relationship also seems undomesticated. But "The Monster" and "Women's Trial" suggest that the casual heterosexual relationship, if it involves commercial sex, is potentially dangerous. The female narrator of "The Monster" has a one-night stand with a man because he is rich, but is sexually exploited by him. In "Woman's Trial," A-fu-luo-di moves into her boyfriend's apartment partly because she is homeless, and ends up being sold by him for prostitution and even dumped. Unlike the other women who have or don't have sexual love with men, the fat girl in "The Woman Man Hates" displays an alternative sexual autonomy. She would rather masturbate than fall in love, which, for her, means hurting each other.

While *What Good Girls Don't Do* ridicules good women and has reservations about wild women, it portrays women, whether "good" or "bad," old-fashioned or loose, as generally more active and autonomous than traditional women.

### III. Conclusion

The love and sexual relationship portrayed in fiction often alludes to the social relationship. The ongoing dialectic between morality and immorality in fiction is an attempt to redefine sexual codes. Many Taiwanese fictions in the 1990s deal with the subject matter of homosexuality and/or female desire, indicating an intense interest in gender crossing and decadence. If earlier Taiwanese fictions tend to condemn homosexuality and female desire and take such condemnation for granted, 1990s Taiwanese fictions, even when they continue to denigrate such desires, are more ambiguous and ambivalent in tone. Take for example the fictions I have discussed above. *The Labyrinthine Garden* and *What Good Girls Don't Do* portray on the one hand how loose women become men's playthings, and on the other how these women's feminist consciousness emerges. *Notes of a Desolate Man* simultaneously vilifies male homosexuality and implicitly criti-

cizes mainstream heterosexual society by relishing homosexual practice. *Notes of a Crocodile* apparently denigrates lesbianism and male homosexuality, but virtually uses it to express anger at and protest against mainstream heterosexual society. In addition, new, unconventional visions are presented, such as the feminine, narcissistic women, the Material Girls, and the Queen Bees in *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*, the sexually autonomous fat girls and ugly women in *What Good Girls Don't Do*, and the beautiful male-to-female transsexual in *Humankind Should Not Fly*. Queer gender notions are posited in *Notes of a Desolate Man*, where the male homosexual narrator directly overturns traditional disparagement of femininity and women, and in *Notes of a Crocodile*, where the lesbian narrator asserts violent masculinity. As far as the dialectic between love and sex is concerned, the four female authors seem to affirm the combination of love and sex and are ambiguous in their attitudes toward loveless sex and promiscuity. They portray women's practice of casual sex as an act of rebellion, an act of experiment, or sheer degradation. Paradoxically, heterosexual love often seems illusive, hence the ideal of the combination of love and sex becomes ludicrous. The lesbian relationship in *Notes of a Crocodile*, on the other hand, is difficult and distorted partly due to homophobic social pressure. *Notes of a Desolate Man* seeks to uphold the ideal of the combination of love and sex against promiscuity in the male homosexual relationship. But the book also suggests that, historically, male homosexual promiscuity has a quite different cultural context and involves quite different power relations from those of heterosexual promiscuity.

The fictions of Li Ang, Chu Tien-wen, Chiu Miao-Jin, and Cheng Ying-shu are only part of 1990s Taiwanese fictions and gender discourses. From a larger perspective, the emphasis on female desire signifies that the meanings of female autonomy have extended to the sexual terrain, where women redefine their sexuality by themselves, thereby posing a great threat to men. Meanwhile, the various genders in 1990s Taiwan go well beyond the traditional gender divide: the sexiest woman may turn out to be a male transvestite, and the most masculine person may be a woman. And it becomes more and more

clear that the heterosexual relationship may involve quite different power relations from that of the homosexual relationship. If the dialectic between love and sex, morality and decadence can give us any food for thought, it may well be that we should confront these differences and be more understanding and tolerant of the differences.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In *Sexual Anarchy*, Showalter points out that Karl Marx's daughter Eleanor Marx and Olive Schreiner were two of the few feminists at that time who explored female sexuality, and that unfortunately both encountered emotional and sexual difficulties (53-58). Later, Showalter finds that women writers like George Egerton, Vernon Lee, and Kate Chopin, who were contributors of *The Yellow Book*, the organ of the decadent movement, also explored female sexuality (although Chopin was American). Whereas the male decadents presented images of romantically doomed prostitutes or devouring Venus types, these women writers, notes Showalter, "represent[ed] female desire instead as a creative force in artistic imagination as well as in biological reproduction" (Showalter, *Daughters* xi; quoted in Ledger 97). Showalter then calls these women writers "daughters of decadence," compiling their short stories into a collection under that title (Ledger 97).

<sup>2</sup> Postcolonial Taiwan has an ambiguous and marginal political identity in international relations, which contradicts with its relatively strong economic power. In addition, the conflicts between different ethnic groups over political and economic interests, between pro-reunification and pro-independence camps about national identity further complicate the issue. Anxieties about national identity seep into and get entangled with gender anxieties. Please see Kuei-fen Chiu's important book *Reading Taiwan/Woman*. This essay, however, will not discuss in detail the entanglement between nationality and gender.

<sup>3</sup> But even during this period there were many instances of gender crossing. As far as representation is concerned, performances in



traditional operas such as Taiwanese opera, Peijing opera, Shao-hsin opera offered examples of gender crossing. The enormous success during this period of the film *Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai*, an adaptation from a famous play in Shao-hsin opera, bespoke the popularity of gender crossing. Kung-fu novels and films, moreover, presented swordswomen as widely different from traditional women. The voices and styles of performance of well-known pop singers in the seventies like Oyang Fei-fei, Tsuei Tai-ching, Liu Wen-jeng, Huang Hsiao-ning, Tsai Yi-hung, also provided examples of gender crossing.

<sup>4</sup> All my discussion of Taiwanese fictions refers to their Taiwanese version, even though some of them, like Chu Tien-wen's *Notes of a Desolate Man*, may have an English version already. In order to make my discussion more intelligible to non-Chinese readers, I choose not to transliterate the titles of the fictions. And except for the title of Chu's novel, all the translations are mine.

<sup>5</sup> I borrow this term from Elaine Showalter. Please see note 1.

<sup>6</sup> Chu's infatuation with strong men is intertwined with her Electra complex. As a child, she has great fear of losing her father Chu Tsu-yen, who is arrested and almost tortured to death during the 2-2-8 reign of terror. Even after his release from prison, he is put under house arrest for many years. With his mobility limited and his goals in life smashed, he is emasculated spiritually. Anguished by his melancholia and emasculation, Chu Ying-hung yearns unconsciously for a powerful man. For her, Lin Hsi-gung represents the rising generation of the Taiwanese (in its old definition) elite, who can use their economic power to exercise political muscle in the oppressive society under martial law. Wielding great power, Lin also replaces her father in a sense.

<sup>7</sup> All subsequent references to the texts are based on their Taiwanese version, and all translations are mine.

<sup>8</sup> Here I differentiate Taiwanese sexual liberationist feminism and anti-pornography feminism only expediently and roughly. Taiwanese sexual liberationist feminism emphasizes that sexual freedom should not be confined to heterosexual, monogamous, procreation-

intended sex, that, instead, "deviant" sexualities such as non-procreative sex, promiscuity, one-night stand, homosexuality, commercial sex, sadomasochism, and fetishism should be allowed as well. Taiwanese anti-pornography feminism stresses the sexual equality between the two parties of any sexual relationship. Focusing more on the heterosexual relationship, it critiques men's sexual violence against women, and men's sexual exploitation of women. Besides, it seeks to replace phallogocentric notions of sexuality with feminist ones; i. e., it emphasizes the elements of love and emotion in sexual relationships, and that sexual pleasure may not be confined to penetration.

<sup>9</sup>Chu Ying-hung knows very well that marriage and womanizing have established meanings in the career of a wealthy businessman: "As a rule, a recognized successful man keeps one marriage, so people will not criticize him (for an unmarried man gives the impression that he is too fickle). He will only be envied and complimented for having any more women outside marriage" (268-69).

<sup>10</sup>Ellis Hanson's *Decadence and Catholicism* is an important study on European decadent literature at the *fin de siècle*. As Hanson points out, decadent style "is characterized by an elaborate, highly artificial, highly ornamented, often tortuous style; it delights in strange and obscure words, sumptuous exoticism, exquisite sensations, and improbable juxtapositions; it is fraught with disruption, fragmentation, and paradox; it has a tendency to vague and mystical language, a longing to wring from words an enigmatic symbolism or a perverse irony" (2). Moreover, decadent writing is "commonly defined by its thematic preoccupation with art—not only literature and painting, but also masquerade, cosmetics, and the sartorial and epigrammatic flamboyance of the dandy. Even nature itself is exposed as a work of art" (2). What is most notorious about the decadents is their peculiar interest in all that was commonly perceived as unnatural or degenerate. They are fascinated with "sexual perversity, nervous illness, crime, and disease, all presented in a highly aestheticized context calculated to subvert or, at any rate, to shock conventional morality. Both stylistically and thematically, decadence is an aesthetic in

which failure and decay are regarded as seductive, mystical, or beautiful" (3).

By this definition, Chu's "*Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*" and Pai Hsien-yung's "The Everlasting Ying Shuei-yen" are closest in style and theme to decadent writing.

<sup>11</sup> The short story "Take Me Away, Moonlight!" for instance, uses a comic, mocking, and sympathetic tone to depict the struggle for power between the imperious Mrs. Cheng and the cowardly Mr. Cheng. The highly capable and efficient Mrs. Cheng is a perfect housewife, but she is also impetuous and unbending as the virtual head of the household. In "Red Rose Is Calling You," the promiscuous Brother Hsiang comes to discover that his feminine, passive wife is both self-confident and autonomous. She not only attends early morning exercise with a group of women, but studies Japanese and asks her children to study Japanese, too. Her autonomy makes Brother Hsiang worry if she "would not allow him to place his penis inside her body for just a moment" when they grow old (170).

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