On the Sources and Motives Behind Ts'ao Yü's *Thunderstorm*: A Qualitative Analysis

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It is evident that when Ts'ao Yü 曹禺 was writing *Lei Yü* 雷雨 (*Thunderstorm*) there were many factors influencing his first major endeavor as a playwright. Primarily, he was torn between his personal desire to be known as a tragic writer, thus intending *Thunderstorm* to be a serious drama of a classic order (i.e., passion and fate), and his obligation as a social critic, a responsibility dictated by the prevalent attitudes of his time. Secondarily, as a writer well aware of his Chinese origins as well as a graduate of the Western languages department of Tsing Hua University, Ts'ao Yü had yet another level of syncretism to deal with, namely, the blending of the traditional Greek theme of incest in a Chinese order which approaches the subject with considerable reticence. Thus, Ts'ao Yü was embarking upon an incredibly ambitious task and it is much to his credit that he was as successful as public enthusiasm for his play would indicate. However, the widespread success of his play does not necessarily reflect total attainment of his aforementioned goals. It is this consideration of *Thunderstorm's* success, or lack of it, in regard to Ts'ao Yü's personal motives for writing the play that forms the basis for this present investigation. Readily admitting to the play's success as a well-made melodrama designed to "capitalize on the stock bourgeois responses to certain decadent and corrupt aspects of Chinese society,"[1] Ts'ao Yü's attempt to realize his own ambitions as a tragic writer as well as appease his social conscience causes both *aspects* to fall short of complete success. As for his borrowing of the familiar Greek situation of incest as the basis for the first Chinese tragedy *per se*, "*Thunderstorm* is Greek only in its extreme superficialities,"[2] though some measure of success is achieved in the character of Chou Fan-yi 周蘩漪

as an obvious counterpart to Eugene O'Neill's Abbie Putnam in *Desire Under the Elms*.

Ts'ao Yü wrote *Thunderstorm* during the period following the May Fourth Movement, which Joseph Lau describes as "an age of transition in which iconoclasm was one of the most fashionable occupations, in which the mere murmur of the word 'modern' would evoke apocalyptical joy."[3] If nothing else, *Thunderstorm* is a ruthless attack upon traditional Chinese morals and social system – morals, in that Ts'ao Yü suggests that Fan-yi should not be blamed for cherishing incestuous passion for her stepson, and social system, in that *Thunderstorm* advocates "a socialist concern for the plight of the workers under capitalist exploitation, and an individual effort to assert freedom and happiness under the crippling weight of patriarchal society."[4] In regard to the former target of attack, Fan-yi resolutely asserts her innocence in a way so reminiscent of Abbie Putnam that Joseph Lau positively confirms the following two dialogues as evidence of this borrowing (both dialogues occur in the respective parlors in which the secret night rendezvous of the couples take place):

Eben: (his face suddenly lighting up with a fierce, triumphant grin) I see it! It's her vengeance on him – so's she kin rest quiet in her grave.

Abbie: (wildly) Vengeance o' God on the hull o' us! What d'we give a durn? I love ye, Eben! God knows I love ye.[5]

萍（痛苦地）：你難道不知道這種關係誰聽着都厭惡麽？你明白我每天喝酒胡鬧就因爲自己恨——恨我自己麽？

蘩（冷冷地）：我跟你說過多少遍，我不這樣看，我的良心不是這樣做的。

P'ing: (in an anguished voice) But surely you realize such a relationship must seem revolting to anyone. Don't you understand that my daily indulgence in alcohol and dissipation is a reflection of my self-disgust, self-hatred?

Fan-yi: (coldly) How many times have I told you that I don't look at it like that? My conscience doesn't feel that way.[6]

In regard to the latter target of attack, C. T. Hsia contends that Ts'ao

Yü's plays "vaunt a superficial leftist point of view, of which only the most rigorous Marxist critic could disapprove."[7] Nevertheless, the characterization of Fan-yi as a Chinese Nora (cf. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*) rebelling "under the crippling weight of patriarchal society" lends itself well to Ts'ao Yü's original intent of combining social comment with a tragic theme. This will become evident later as we trace the development of the traditional tragic figure of Phaedra from Euripides to Racine to O'Neill and, finally, to Ts'ao Yü himself.

It should be stated at this point that Ts'ao Yü admits absolutely no such borrowing from the west, unless it occurred in the lowest stratum of his subconscious. Joseph Lau considers this absurd, since Ts'ao Yü incorporates the most obvious borrowing into his plays during a time when Chinese literati, whether familiar with western literature or not, were all influenced by it nevertheless. Although one might support Ts'ao Yü up to a point by contrasting such Chinese literary precedents as "K'ung-ch'üeh tung-nan fei" 孔雀東南飛 ("Southeast the Peacock Flies") with *Thunderstorm* in regard to the traditional Chinese theme of generational conflict over whom the son may or may not marry and what his mother has to say about it, there can be absolutely no doubt that the added twist of incest is a direct borrowing, since a Chinese precedent here is not only nonexistent, but much more alien to the Chinese psyche. Also, as stated previously, Fan-yi and Abbie are just too similar to allow any doubt concerning the nature of Ts'ao Yü's borrowing.

According to tradition, "Southeast the Peacock Flies" is based upon a true-life incident which Liu Ta-chieh 劉大傑 considers a powerful condemnation of the evils of the feudal system of family hierarchy and the cruel oppression of power and influence.[8] As Robert Payne explains,

> The commentators relate that during the period Chien-An (A.D. 196-220) the wife of a certain Chiao Tsung-ch'ing, magistrate of Luchiang in Kiangsi, was driven away from the house by her mother-in-law. In sorrow and weariness she drowned herself, and the husband, hearing of her death, hanged himself on a tree in the courtyard, thus avenging her and at the same time putting a curse on the ill-tempered mother. Such an action was hardly Confucian, for it was not one of filial piety. The common people rejoiced in the song, which is probably more famous and enduring than any other ballad composed in China.[9]

Briefly, the parallels with *Thunderstorm* include a son whose character is not as tough or strong as his "lower class" lover, aptly exposing the weak and feeble nature of bourgeois intellectuals, yet whose character does develop somewhat in the course of struggling with the inherent contradictions of his situation. The parallels also include – if one overlooks the step-mother/natural mother differentiation, as well as the incest factor – a very possessive mother who seeks to dissuade the son from having such a "low-class" woman as a wife. In both stories, the mother's only grounds of complaint against the girl is that her son loves her, and therefore she must be expelled from the household. And in both cases, the son reinterates his love for her before a thunderous mother, yet doesn't have the backbone to leave home on the spot with his lover. Rather, he comes up with the following plan:

Chung Ch'ing 仲卿(to Lan-chih 蘭芝):

且暫還家去，吾今且赴府，不久當歸還。

Just for a little while return to your home.. Now I must go to my business in the city: it is not for long; I will return in a little while. And then in a little while I will come to you. ("Southeast the Peacock Flies")[10]

Chou P'ing 周萍 (to Ssu-feng 四鳳):

我先要一個人離開家，過後，再想法子把你接出來。

I will first leave home by myself; later, I will think of a way to bring you over. (*Thunderstorm*)[11]

[Like Lan-chih, Ssu-feng is to return home in the meantime]

At this point, both of these young women urge their respective lovers to be quick about it, for in both cases the alternative is: "I have a father and an elder brother, and both of them are wild as thunder; I fear that they will not let me perform my desires."[12] 我有親父兄，性行暴如雷，恐不任我意. Also, they both fear disgracing their respective mothers and incurring their wrath. Thus, they stand ashamed before their mothers upon returning home; but once they seek their forgiveness, both mothers respond

with deep, heart-felt pity. And the final parallel occurs with the sons' outright condemnation of their mothers before the respective stories culminate in the suicides of each set of young lovers. In sum, the thrust of each story lies in a rather direct attack upon Confucian China taking place at the level of the household which, ironically, Confucius considered a microcosm of the greater society. While one may presume that the remarkable parallels of incidents in these two stories written some eighteen centuries apart are merely coincidence, it is still worth noting the similarities if for no other reason than to further stress that there is indeed a Chinese literary precedent – repeated many times since the Later Han dynasty – which could have provided Ts'ao Yü with a general plot line for *Thunderstorm*. In other words, apart from the incest revelation, a certain common theme is inherent in the Chinese literary tradition which would have been at least existent in the "lowest stratum of the subconscious" of someone as well educated as Ts'ao Yü, if, indeed, not in his conscious mind.

The element of natural imagery in connection with plot line is also nothing new in Chinese literature. Thus, the young magistrate in "Southeast the Peacock Flies" employs such imagery in his words to his mother:

今日大風寒，
寒風摧樹木，
嚴霜結庭蘭。

"Today a great cold has arisen,
An icy wind that scatters the petals,
A cold frost stiffens the orchids. . ."[13]

Likewise, Fan-yi warns Chou P'ing with the words: "Careful! The storm is about to hit!"[14] 小心！現在風暴就要起來了！

Because of the consistency of such imagery in Chinese literature, I find it doubtful that Ts'ao Yü's title for his melodrama is a borrowing, despite the existence of a Russian play by Alexander Ostrovsky written in 1860 entitled *Thunderstorm*, which, incidentally, also culminates in the suicide of a young wife oppressed by her mother-in-law. However, in the Russian play the "thunderstorm" figuratively refers to the action of the drama which explodes suddenly in the final scene (much as a thunderstorm violently clears the air), and not to an actual storm occurring in the background, as in Ts'ao Yü's work. Therefore, despite the figurative use of a thunderstorm in both plays and the limited similarity in plot, the

possibility of borrowing on Ts'ao Yü's part is improbable – though not impossible, since there is a solid history of Russian literary influence on modern Chinese literature (cf. Ts'ao Yü's liberal experimentation in *Jih-ch'u* 日出 (*Sunrise*) with the Chekovian manner based upon *The Cherry Orchard*[15] [Chekov was born the year that Ostrovsky wrote his *Thunderstorm*].

Thus, my earlier hypothesis can now be reaffirmed – that is, the only definite borrowing in Ts'ao Yü's *Thunderstorm* lies in the use of the Greek theme of incest and in the deliberate aim of the author to write a tragedy based on the traditional Greek model via O'Neill. At this point, we will attempt to define tragedy on the basis of the Greek model as perceived by latter day tragic writers and consider the degree of success Ts'ao Yü enjoys in emulating that model. In the process, we shall make a comparative study of the character of Euripides' Phaedra with Racine's Phèdre, O'Neill's Abbie Putnam and Ts'ao Yü's Fan-yi. Inherent in this investigation, of course, is the element of man's free will versus fate, and we will briefly compare the western concept of fate and the Will of God (or gods, in the Greek mythological scenario) with the Chinese Buddhist concept of kharma, cause and effect, and the Will of Heaven.

As is commonly accepted, Oedipus was the first famous tragic hero destined to fall in love with his own mother. We will use this famous model for tragic writing to outline some of the main points inherent in tragedy as seen by modern day writers. The foremost tragic element is the conflict of an inevitable fate with man's attempt to forestall it. Concerning Oedipus, Edith Hamilton writes:

> Apollo was the God of Truth. Whatever the priestess at Delphi said would happen infallibly came to pass. To attempt to act in such a way that the prophecy would be made void was as futile as to set oneself against the decrees of fate. Nevertheless, when the oracles warned Laius that he would die at the hands of his son he determined that this should not be.[16]

The great irony, of course, occurs when the predestined fate is realized as a result of the actions of the one thus fated in trying to alter his destiny. Yet such actions are freewill choices on the part of man in what has been called his 'existential free will.' As Joseph Lau points out concerning Orestes murdering his mother as fated by Apollo (though equally applicable to Oedipus),

> Richard Sewall, for one, contends that the idea of fate in Greek tragedy does not necessarily preclude the freedom of its tragic heroes. "If it (the Greek tradition) stresses man's fate," he observes, "it does not deny him freedom. . . . The spirit with which he acquiesced in his destiny is of a free man who, though fated, could have withdrawn and not acted at all."[17]

In the case of Oedipus, he uses his freedom of choice to pursue the truth regarding his tragic identity. He does so in the noble quest of confirming his innocence of any willful wrongdoing. Arthur Miller calls this quest 'man's tragic flaw':

> Tragedy, then, is the consequence of man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly. In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself [i.e., Oedipus initiating the search for his identity], the tale always reveals what has been called his 'tragic flaw'. . . . Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are 'flawless.'[18]

In regard to Miller's point concerning retaliation against one's predestined fate, consider the anxious appeal of Jocasta to Oedipus urging him to stop his ill-fated search for his true identity:

> Why should man fear since chance is all in all for him, and he can clearly foreknow nothing? Best to love lightly, as one can, unthinkingly. As to your mother's marriage bed, don't fear it. Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles, many a man has lain with his own mother. But he to whom such things are nothing bears his life most easily.[19]
>
> [Later when Oedipus is talking to the messenger through whom he hopes to discover his identity]
>
> Oedipus: Jocasta, do you know about this man whom we have sent for? Is he the man he mentions?
> Jocasta: Why ask of whom he spoke? Don't give it heed; nor try to keep in mind what has been said.
> Oedipus: With such clues I could not fail to bring my birth to light.
> Jocasta: I beg you – do not hunt this out – I beg you, if

> you have any care for your own life. What I am suffering is enough. . . . It is because I wish you well that I give you this counsel – and it's the best counsel. . . . O Oedipus, God help you! God keep you from the knowledge of who you are![20]

Outwardly, it appears as if she passively accepts her fate. Perhaps so; on the other hand, however, she most vehemently seeks to deny the result of her fate (i.e., the downfall of both herself and Oedipus). She rationalizes her 'escape mechanism' by asserting their inability to foreknow their fates and by maintaining the point of view that their love with its resultant happiness is the true standard by which to judge life (despite her private suffering from being aware of the impropriety of the relationship). Therefore, by all means, she must keep the truth from Oedipus.

There is an interesting parallel in *Thunderstorm* insofar as Lu Ma 魯媽 also enjoys the terrible knowledge of the truth and seeks unilaterally to forestall any consummation of her son and daughter's love for one another. Upon discovering that Ssu-feng is already pregnant, Lu Ma uses a similar 'escape mechanism', as seen in the following monologue:

> 「啊，天知道誰犯了罪，誰造這種孽！——他們都是可憐的孩子，不知道自己做的是什麼。天哪！如果要罰，也罰在我一個人身上；我一個人有罪，我先走錯了一步（傷心地）。如今我明白了，我明白了，事情是已經做了的，不必再怨這不公平的天，人犯了一次罪過，第二次也就自然地跟著來——（摸著四鳳的頭）。他們是我的乾淨孩子，他們應當好好地活著，享著福。冤孽是在我心裏頭，苦也應當我一個人嘗。他們快活，誰曉得就是罪過？他們年輕，他們自己並沒有成心做了什麼錯（立起，望著天）。今天晚上，是我讓他們一塊兒走，這罪過我知道，可是罪過我現在替他們犯了；所有的罪孽都是我一個人惹的，我的兒女們都是好孩子，心地乾淨的，那麼，天，眞有了什麼，也就讓我一個人擔待吧。」

> Alas, Heaven only knows who has sinned and who has brought about such misfortune! They are both pitiful children who do not know what they are doing. Oh God! If you must punish someone, then punish me alone. I am the one who has sinned. Indeed, it was I who took the first wrong step. (in anguish) Now I understand at last . . . the act is already committed. So there's no use in blaming Heaven for being unfair. If someone commits the first sin, the second time around

> is simply a natural consequence. — (stroking Ssu-feng's hair) They are my innocent children; they ought to live well and enjoy life. Since it is my heart that contains the original sin, I alone should bear its bitterness. If they are happy, who's to say they're living in sin? They're young, and surely have no intentional wrongdoing. (stands up, facing Heaven) Tonight, I will let them go together. I know the sin involved and will assume sole responsibility for it, for I alone brought about this unfortunate Kharma. My son and daughter are good children of clear conscience; therefore, if God has something to deal out, may it fall on me, not them.[21]

As we can see here, Lu Ma desires that those who "sinned" in ignorance (as did Ssu-feng and Chou P'ing, as well as Oedipus) be excused from any punishment since her private suffering should be adequate to satisfy Heaven (cf. Jocasta: "What I am suffering is enough!"). Thus, in both stories it appears that tragedy could perhaps be averted. This is especially true in the case of Oedipus when it appears as if he has not killed his father (thinking that his father was Polybus), thereby supplying an apparent precedent that Apollo could speak falsely.

The possibility of averting the 'ironically inevitable' is a necessary component of tragedy, as Miller makes clear in his aforementioned essay: "The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy."[22] In *Phèdre*, Racine plays on this angle all the more by adding a false report of Theseus' death (a twist in the plot which is nonexistent in Euripides' rendering of the story), thus prolonging hope yet further. However, tragedy would not be tragedy without Theseus' return, Oedipus' discovery, or Fan-yi's sudden entrance just as Ssu-feng and Chou P'ing are about to escape from the tragic arena of the Chou household.

What is the nature of fate, then? Ts'ao Yü in his preface to *Thunderstorm* writes: "What pitiful creatures human beings are; self-satisfied, as if they are masters of their own fate, and yet how frequently different from reality!"[23] Joseph Lau adds: "*Thunderstorm*, then, is to be construed as an attempt to write a tragedy commenting on the 'pitiful creatures' futile struggle against an inexorable fate."[24] Yet no mention is made of man's own responsibility for his fate. In *Thunderstorm* it appears that the tragic end of Ssu-feng and Chou P'ing is the result of some cosmic retribution against Lu Ma and Chou P'u-yüan 周樸園 for creating the bad kharma in the first place. As Miller puts it: "Above all else, tragedy requires the

finest appreciation by the writer of cause and effect."[25]

Undoubtedly, the theme in *Thunderstorm* of "the sins of the fathers visiting succeeding generations" (Exodus 34:7) is found in both Eastern and Western literatures, and often plays an intrinsic role in tragedy. However, Ts'ao Yü calls the deaths of Ssu-feng and Chou P'ing an "indisputable manifestation of capricious fate"[26]: whereas the older generation is directly responsible for the suffering of their offspring, the younger generation appear to be innocent victims. Perhaps these apparent contradictions about the nature of fate can best be summed up in Robert Corrigan's description of Eugene O'Neill's tragic outlook:

> O'Neill's plays appear as a continuous philosophical investigation of the riddle of falsehood at the core of life. . . . He sought to find a meaning for man in a world where the common fate appeared to be a return to nothingness, and he attempted to create an action which would encompass the terror of being on the edge of the abyss. He was painfully conscious of man's inability to fathom the mysteries of life and the ultimate object of the human struggle, and all of his later plays reveal his belief that it is impossible for man to find any protection against the darkness of the night into which he must journey. O'Neill could find no meaning in life, but he had great compassion for man's failures.[27]

Similarly, Ts'ao Yü concludes: "I wrote about the contradictions between the characters in this play with pity"[28] – to which Joseph Lau adds: "What with his understanding of man's helplessness in an indifferent universe, and his relative restraint from using abrasive language to indict the 'bad guys', Ts'ao Yü has attained in *Thunderstorm* some measure of compassion for his characters. . . ."[29]

Let us consider now one such character for whom Ts'ao Yü has the utmost compassion – namely, Chou Fan-yi. Fully aware that his tendentious leniency toward Fan-yi's immoral behavior would draw criticism, Ts'ao Yü anticipates his defense for her in his preface:

> I am most happy to see a woman like her. . . . Her tragic plight stirs my feelings of pity and respect. . . . I am most willing to forgive her, despite her so-called most "heinous crime" for neglecting her sacred responsibility of a mother. . . . Fan-yi

(for her uncompromising spirit) is of course worthy of one's praise. She has a blazing passion and a dauntless heart which pushes her through all obstacles in her life-and-death struggles (with conventional morality).[30]

Fan-yi is a character who has her roots in Greek mythology in the person of Phaedra. Indeed, Phaedra is the progenitor of all women haunted by such socially unacceptable love as incest. Yet, like Jocasta, her real misgivings lie in the disclosure of the love rather than the fact of the love itself. Thus, even after the nurse has apologized for informing Hippolytus of his stepmother's passion for him, Phaedra upbraids her further by saying: "So, that's enough for me? Do I have justice if you deal me my death blow and then say, 'I was wrong: I grant it'?"[31] Consequently, as David Grene points out, "the Greek Phaedra has a sense of the essential rightness of her inmost heart in spite of all."[32] Racine's Phèdre, on the other hand, is already deeply troubled by the sinful nature of her passion long before she herself lets Hippolytus know of it.

Phèdre: . . . . Know Phèdre, then; let all her madness speak.
I love thee. Do not think that while I love,
Spotless in mine own eyes do I approve
Of what I am; nor that of the perverse
Passion that shakes my reason, I did nurse
The poison by an abject yielding. – Nay,
Of heaven's wrath the miserable prey,
More than thou loathest me do I abhor myself.[33]

[Later, before Theseus upon his return]

. . . Unworthy now to stand beside thee or to share thy bed,
Henceforth should I but seek to hide my head
Theseus: What does this strange reception mean, my son,
Given to thy father?
Hippolytus: Phèdre can alone explain that mystery.
But if I aught avail my fervent prayers,
Oh, suffer it that I shall
Never again behold her anywhere!
Suffer Hippolytus to disappear
For ever from the home where she doth live![34]

Chou P'ing and Hippolytus obviously share the same repulsion for their respective stepmothers' love for them – however differently their stepmothers view their own lust. Racine creates a Phèdre so preoccupied with sin that there is no question concerning the nature of the freewill choice she made. Fan-yi also asserts her freedom of choice when she says: "I don't regret what I did. It is not my habit to do things and to regret having done them later" 我不後悔,我向來做事沒有後悔過.[35] Likewise, it should be pointed out that Euripides' *Hippolytus* is also the story of a woman who has determined her own fate (even though it is the nurse and not Phaedra who does the disclosing), as Lacy Lockert states in no uncertain terms:

> When one great dramatist so obviously builds upon the work of another great dramatist and so deliberately vies with him, comparisons are inevitable. It must be clearly understood at the outset that one difference between the *Hippolytus* and the *Phèdre* is not, as some French critics assert, that the subject of the former is a contest between two goddesses, between Aphrodite and Artemis, in which the human characters are but irresponsible puppets, instead of free agents as in the play of Racine.[36]

Although Fan-yi does not suffer the self-loathing of Racine's Phèdre as a result of her passion for her stepson (undoubtedly influenced by Abbie Putnam in this regard), *Phèdre* does come a step closer to *Thunderstorm* than Euripides' *Hippolytus* in introducing Hippolytus' young lover Aricia. Hippolytus' desire for her pure love in contrast to his revulsion for Phèdre's love seems an obvious precedent for Chou P'ing's feelings toward Ssu-feng and Fan-yi. And just as Abbie's first response to Eben's denial of her love is to seek revenge (cf. "Abbie [enraged beyond endurance – wildly vindictive]: 'An' his lust for me! Kin ye find excuses for that?'"[37]), Fan-yi and Phèdre also react with a similar impulse for revenge, though Fan-yi's instinct for self-preservation precludes suicide as a means of obtaining that revenge (but *does* include sacrificing her son Chou Ch'ung 周冲 as an instrument for revenge).

This brings us to the next "Phaedra" to emerge upon the western literary scene: Abbie Putnam. As stated earlier, she shares Fan-yi's self-assurance when confronted with the moral question of her incest; she can not, however, make Fan-yi's statement about never regretting any previous action, at least

regarding her murder of Eben's baby – an action which, at first, produces just the opposite result from what she intended. Later, she accepts her guilt and submits herself to the law for her act of smothering the baby, thus demonstrating in unequivocal terms her respect for the fundamentals of social order. However, concerning her passion for Eben, she says: "(lifting her head as if defying God) 'I don't repent that sin! I hain't askin' God t'fergive that.' "[38]

Along these lines, Joseph Lau points out: "The God that Abbie defies is the God that Ephraim Cabot often invokes in his defense – a God that is 'in the stones', twisted to his own image, 'hard', 'lonesome', unforgiving, unloving and unlovable. [In this regard it is interesting to note Chou P'u-yüan's practices of abstaining from meat, chanting Buddhist mantras, etc., which bestows upon him an aura of righteousness despite his bastardly deeds.] Thus, Abbie's defiance can be more accurately described as an act against man, or against man-made values of American Puritanism, rather than against God."[39]

Lau further comments upon Fan-yi's situation vis-à-vis Chou P'u-yüan:

> In this connection, it should be pointed out that the Chinese patriarchal family system is as stifling as was Puritanism in America to the emotional growth of individuals. Chou P'u-yüan, with his moral euphoria and obsession with self-righteousness, is Ephraim Cabot reincarnated. . . .[40]

Cabot's hypocrisy actually reaches comic proportions when he accuses Eben of lust while suffering from all kinds of desire himself: "Cabot (rather guiltily): 'He's a sinner – nateral-born. It's lust eatin' his heart.'"[41] Of course, the tragic irony is that both Ephraim and Chou P'u-yüan through their efforts to maintain certain stifling traditions in the name of morality are actually the initiators of the ensuing crises, starting the tragic snowball in its downhill course in the first place and watching its size ever increase as the consequent action develops.

Actually, a closer parallel to Chou P'u-yüan might be Sophocles' Creon. David Grene comments on his role in *Antigone* as follows: ". . . the tragic irony is . . . in the fact that Creon, acting always in the belief that he is sacrificing himself for the good of the community, gives way, but too late to save Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice, who need not have died at all. . . ."[42] Compare this with Joseph Lau's estimation of Chou P'u-yüan: "Cold, tyrannical, self-confident and self-adoring, Chou is seen in the play

not only as a fearful symbol of the power absolute in the Chinese patriarchy, but also an enemy of the people contemptuous of the complaints of his hirelings."[43] Moreover, Chou's intercession in the last scene of *Thunderstorm* is likewise too late to save the lives of three persons whose deaths he is ultimately responsible for bringing about; however, this parallel does not enjoy the same certainty as the one between Fan-yi and Phaedra via Abbie Putnam.

As noted above, comparisons are inevitable "when one great dramatist so obviously builds upon the work of another great dramatist and so deliberately vies with him."[44] For the most part, this paper has dealt with comparisons on the basis of similarities, especially in terms of the respective tragic heroines. But perhaps the greatest *difference* between Abbie and Fan-yi lies in O'Neill's very certain characterization of Abbie as a passionate woman thoroughly attached to Eben while suffering no particular moral guilt, whereas Ts'ao Yü's vague characterization of Fan-yi results in a heroine who doesn't come off either as a wife, a mother, or a frustrated mistress. Indeed, she even offers to share Chou P'ing with Ssu-feng (albeit as a last resort for keeping a part of him for herself): a notion which would send Abbie into a jealous rage.

Perhaps Fan-yi is nothing more than a social rebel who adheres to no values, abides by no law, and honors no commitment as a mother. At least Abbie has maintained a balance between society, as seen in her willingness to go to jail for killing her baby (an act which Lau calls "a paradox of a moral: that the sincerity of love can be verified only at the sacrifice of a human life"[45]), and the self (i.e., her regard of passion not only as a raison d'être, but "as a religion in itself"[46]). One gets the impression, therefore, that Fan-yi's alleged defiance is nothing but moral anarchy, and that Ts'ao Yü's attempt at tragedy (despite some success with observing the unities of time and action and employing a Prologue and Epilogue to approximate "the function of a Greek chorus as a veil of emotional distance so as to mitigate the intensity of the emotional and rational shock"[47]) comes off as, rather, an hysterical treatment à la Alfred Hitchcock.[48]

In conclusion: Ts'ao Yü's idea of "capricious fate" is inconsistent with the tragic stature of an Abbie or an Eben who, through the course of much suffering, are "a classic demonstration of the process of Eros redeemed by Agape."[49] What one finds in *Thunderstorm* are the deaths of the innocent and the survival of the villians: a point which Lau feels Ts'ao Yü keeps harping on "to force an appearance of the tragic, but these are, despite

their persistent claims, tragic only in the newspaper usage of the word."[50] As Miller points out: "Pathos truly is the mode for the pessimist. But tragedy requires a nicer balance between what is possible and what is impossible."[51]

Eugene O'Neill achieves this "nicer balance" in the characters of Abbie and Eben: tragic heroes who have gained stature as a result of their willingness to battle for their rightful place in the world. Despite Ts'ao Yü's assertion of Fan-yi's "blazing passion and dauntless heart," there is very little of a redeeming nature to be found in her development as a character throughout the play. Perhaps this is what C.T. Hsia is alluding to when he speaks of Ts'ao Yü's "lack of a personal tragic vision."[52] Thus, *Thunderstorm* will always be remembered more for its ability to "pack the movie houses" than for its dubious literary merit.

Notes

1. Hsia, C. T. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction: 1917-1957* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 318.
2. Lau, Joseph S. M. "Two Emancipated Phaedras," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, XXV, No. 4 (August 1966), p. 707.
3. Ibid., p. 710.
4. Hsia, op. cit., p. 318.
5. O'Neill, Eugene, "Desire Under the Elms," *Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. 243-44.
6. Ts'ao Yü 曹禺 . *Lei Yü* 雷雨 (*Thunderstorm*) (Shanghai: Cultural Life Press, 1933), pp. 198-99; translated by Joseph Lau in his book *Ts'ao Yü: A Study in Literary Influence* (Hong Kong University Press, 1970), p. 21.
7. Hsia, op. cit., p. 318.
8. Liu Ta-chieh. 劉大杰 *Chung-kuo Wen-hsüeh Fa-chan Shih* 中國文學發展史 (*The History of the Development of Chinese Literature*) (Shanghai, 1972), p. 225.
9. Payne, Robert. *The White Pony: An Anthology of Chinese Poetry* (New York: The John Day Company, 1947), p. 117.
10. Ibid., p. 118.
11. Ts'ao Yü, op. cit., p. 85.
12. Payne, op. cit., p. 118.
13. Ibid., p. 124.
14. Ts'ao Yü, op. cit., p. 134.
15. Cf. Lau, Joseph S. M. "Ts'ao Yü, the Relunctant Disciple of Chekov: A Comparative Study of *Sunrise* and *Cherry Orchard*," *Modern Drama*, 9, No. 4 (February 1967), pp. 358-72.
16. Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology* (New York: Groseet and Dunlap, 1940), p. 375.
17. Lau, "Two Emancipated Phaedras," op. cit., p. 700.
18. Miller, Arthur. "Tragedy and the Common Man," *New York Times* (January 15, 1949), p. S1.
19. Grene, David. *Greek Tragedies*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago

Press, 1960), p. 152.
20. Ibid., pp. 156-57.
21. Ts'ao Yü, op. cit., pp. 221-22 (my translation).
22. Miller, op. cit.
23. Ts'ao Yü, op. cit., p. iv (translated in Lau, *Ts'ao Yü*, op. cit., p. 7).
24. Lau, "Two Emancipated Phaedras," op. cit., p. 700.
25. Miller, op. cit.
26. Lau, "Two Emancipated Phaedras," p. 699.
27. Corrigan, Robert W. *The Modern Theatre* (New York: MacMillian Co., 1964), p. 1073.
28. Ts'ao Yü, op. cit., p. iv (translated in Lau, *Ts'ao Yü*, op. cit., p. 7).
29. Lau, "Two Emancipated Phaedras," p. 699.
30. Ibid., pp. 706-07.
31. Lockert, Lacy. "Introduction to Phèdre," *The Best Plays of Racine* (New York: Dover, 1933), p. 252.
32. Grene, op. cit., p. 262.
33. Lockert, op. cit., p. 212.
34. Ibid., p. 263.
35. Ts'ao Yü, op. cit., p. 88.
36. Lockert, op. cit., p. 210.
37. O'Neill, op. cit., p. 222.
38. Ibid., p. 266.
39. Lau, "Two Emancipated Phaedras," p. 705.
40. Ibid.
41. O'Neill, op. cit., p. 222.
42. Grene, op. cit., p. 179.
43. Lau, "Two Emancipated Phaedras," p. 705.
44. Lockert, op. cit., p. 210.
45. Lau, "Two Emancipated Phaedras," p. 704.
46. Lau, *Ts'ao Yü*, p. 26.
47. Ts'ao Yü, op. cit., p. xii (translated in Lau, *Ts'ao Yü*, p. 7).
48. Cf. my article "Ts'ao Yü: China's 'Alfred Hitchcock' of the Stage" in *Monsoon Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (June-July 1978), pp. 47-50.
49. Lau, "Two Emancipated Phaedras," p. 703.
50. Ibid., p. 707.
51. Miller, op. cit.
52. Hsia, op. cit., p. 318.