Thematology East and West: A Survey and Theoretical Exploration*

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In this paper, I want to begin with a survey of the development of thematology in the West and in China, and then by the application of the structuralist method of analysis to sketch a theoretical system and model for certain modes of Chinese and English poetry such as the autumn poems and the carpe diem poems.

Thematology is an outgrowth of the 19th-century German mania of folklore, which has often been taken as the German preserve. The first folklorists went no further than to trace the evolution of legends and folktales; at present, the branch of literary scholarship known as thematology has covered not only the studies of the selfsame myths and legends under different hands but also those abstractions such as friendship, time, parting, utopia, and determinism which are not necessarily related to certain mythic figures. The incorporation of thematics into the domain of comparative literature took place recently.[1]

The term "thematics" or "thematology" is equivalent to the German *Stoffkunde* and the French *thematologie*. In English, whether to call the field "thematics" or "thematology" is still controversial.[2] According to Ulrich Weisstein, the term "thematics" was coined by Harry Levin.[3] To prop up his argument, he cites the following sentence by Levin as the second note of Chapter Six of his book: "If ever a word was set up to be knocked down, it is that forbidding expression, which no dictionary has yet been broad-minded enough to admit."[4] Why is it a "forbidding expression"? For one thing, the term "thematics" is easy to be confused with the adjective "thematic." Besides, even as late as the sixties, people were still not willing and broad-minded enough to incorporate it in comparative literature. For instance, René Wellek, a very erudite and outstanding figure of the American school, still retains the following sentences in the third edition of his *Theory*

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of Literature:

> To trace all the differing versions of, say, the tragedy of Mary Queen of Scots throughout literature might well be a problem of interest for the history of political sentiment, and would, of course, incidently illustrate changes in the history of taste – even changing conceptions of tragedy. But it has itself no real coherence or dialectic. It presents no single problem and certainly no critical problem. *Stoffgeschichte* is the least literary of histories.[5]

On the European Continent, Fernand Baldensperger and Paul Hazard are recalcitrant opponents to this type of studies (but not necessarily to the broadened type advocated by us). Their reasons are simple enough. First, "such studies will always be incomplete."[6] Second, they involve no literary rapports de fait and influences, which are to them the *raison d'être* of comparative literature. The positivist tendency of the comparatists of the French School is intelligible. Yet the American comparatists' rejection of thematology is much more complicated. Perhaps it stems from those deep-rooted prejudices against European affairs. Or perhaps it really springs from their disapproval of thematology's incompleteness. Yet for all these, what we have to say here is that the French and German scholars have made a significant contribution to *stoffkunde*.[7] And the Russian theorists, some of whose works have already been translated into English, also begin to exert their influences on this field of studies.[8]

China witnessed the genesis and development of something similar to Western thematology some sixty years ago. However, the development was not smooth. It almost came to a standstill during the late thirties to the early seventies, and this has often led people to think that we do not possess thematical studies. To be sure, the Chinese scholars did not employ the term "thematology" to designate their researches in the past. The Chinese counterpart *chu-t'i hsüeh* 主題學 remains an obvious neologism which was first used by Ma Yao-woon, John F. Deeney and me very recently.[9] At this juncture, it seems appropriate that I should provide a definition of the field as follows: As a field of comparative literature, thematology concentrates on the study of the evolution of specific themes, motifs, and especially mythical figures, dealing at the same time with different writers' treatment of the same theme or motif to voice out their preoccupations and to reflect their times. Meanwhile recent development in literary methodologies such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, semiotics, and reader response criticism can in one way or another shed light on our motif studies. It is now and only by

now that we are able to approach different authors' consciousnesses toward the same theme and to discuss their variation. Conversely, we can investigate the metamorphoses of the same theme from the readers' reponses. All these are realizable anticipation in view of the fact that the theory and practice of thematology are not yet at all developed and exhausted.

Since we have touched on the development of thematology in China in the preceding paragraph, now let us delve into the subject more thoroughly. In the "Yüeh-lüeh" 樂略 chapter of *T'ung chih* 通志, Cheng Ch'iao 鄭樵 (1104-1162) of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) remarks:

> What the private historians have put down are often things transmitted from mouths to mouths among country folk. Even these are recorded [in *Ch'in-ts'ao*]. Of Yü's Shun's father and Ch'i Liang's wife the chronicles have mentioned only in a few dozen words. Yet these pseudo-historians have developed their affairs into thousands of words.... Don't they really mean to make up false charges like these? Nay, it all springs from their real intention which makes them seek an outlet for their inner feelings.

稗官之流，其理只在唇舌間，而其事亦有記載。虞舜之父、杞梁之妻，於經傳有言者不過數十言耳，彼則演成萬千言……。顧彼亦豈欲爲此誣罔之事乎？正爲彼之意向如此，不說無以暢其胸中也。10

These few words not only illustrate the striking development of folktales among the common people but also register for us for the first time the folk writers' "intention" in using them to voice out their feelings. Consequently, the different versions of a tale are very authentic records and treatments through which we are able to comprehend the writers' states of mind and the spirit of the times in which they were bred. In actuality, Hsiao T'ung 蕭統 (501-531) of the Liang Dynasty 梁朝 (502-557) probably antedated Cheng Ch'iao some six hundred years when he had something to say about the proliferation and gradual betterment of things animate and inanimate in this world (including of course the progress taking place in literature). His words could be explained to have some very remote reference to the proliferation of themes, but not necessarily in our understanding of the word.[11]

Ku Chieh-kang 顧頡剛 quotes Cheng Ch'iao's words in his "Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih te chuan-pien" 孟姜女故事的轉變, which is a very important and rather complete folklore study of the Meng Chiang-nü theme.[12] If Ku had been influenced by the Western folklore studies I have no evidence to verify at present. What is very interesting and fascinating is that

his first attempt and subsequent researches are able to grasp the real significance of Cheng's words and avoid the pitfalls of early Western *stoffgeschichte* which makes the tracing of the evolution of specific themes an end in itself. In demonstrating that "Ch'i Liang ch'i" 杞梁妻 , a poem by the Late Tang poet Kuan Hsiu 貫休 (832-912), marks a great shift in the transformation of the Meng Chiang-nü story, he begins to remark that the poem is "a mirror of Tang times."[13] Then in exploring the complex reasons why "Ch'i Liang was recruited to construct the Great Wall and Meng Chung-tzu 孟仲姿 wailed for her dead husband against the Great Wall," he assertedly ties the tale of the mourning lady to the social milieu by saying:

> In Sui and Tang periods, military maneuvers were often carried out in the frontiers. The Great Wall served as a barrier in those areas. The stationed soldiers would miss their homes, and their mistresses would in turn think of them very much. As a result, the Great Wall became a center onto which their overpowering agony was poured. Ch'i Liang's wife was famed for wailing for her husband and thereby toppling the wall, but incidentally the toppling of Ch'i Wall 杞城 and Chü Wall 莒城 virtually had nothing to do with contemporary people's distresses. It was their emotional necessity that ruled, demanding that she wail and shatter the Great Wall.[14]

What I want to emphasize here is that besides succinctly registering the stages at which she evolves from an anonymous person to Meng Chiang-nü and finally to Meng Chung-tzu,[15] Ku Chieh-kang is able to link the works to their times and then to probe into the embedded intention. Consequently, he was able to eschew the shortcomings often manifested in early Western *stoffgeschichte* studies. For him, the toppling of the Great Wall by Ch'i Liang's wife's wailing "had become in the Tang Dynasty a consensus legend whose forces overrode all classics and cared not a farthing about the errors done to them."[16] Moreover, she had become for the helpless women some weapon or symbol with which to voice out their long-stored animus or to criticize social injustice.

Ironically enough, Ku's successors manifest either one or even both of the following shortcomings: 1) they disregard his contribution; 2) they lack his perceptive mind. Their works are indeed *magnum opus* of textual criticism, but with no regard to the reasons why the tales they have studied vary and proliferate. They and the early Western *stoffgeschichte* scholars are

people of the same like. Cheng Ming-li's 鄭明娳 paper "Sun Hsing-che yü yüan-hou ku-shih" 孫行者與猿猴故事,[17] read at the First Conference on Classical Chinese Literature held on December 8, 1979, stands out as a typical example. This monograph which was excerpted from her dissertation then under preparation examines in some detail the apotheosis process of Monkey. So far as the verification of points and the contention are concerned, this is indeed an excellent work. What puzzles us here is, after reading the piece, there is not the least bit of illumination with regard to the following aesthetic questions: Why do so many authors choose Monkey to be their subject matter? Does the choice merely stem from their whimsicalities? Or do they have some specific "intention" while/in writing? In his comment on Ms. Cheng's paper, Prof. Yeh Ch'ing-ping 葉慶炳, an expert on the *chih-kuai* fiction 志怪小說 of the South and North Dynasties (420-589), remarked that once an animal metamorphoses itself into some human shape, he (or she) often engages in some sexual relationship with a human being. The seminal monkey stories, which perhaps heralded the arrival of later full-blown love tales, served as a strange outlet for people's love then too rigidly constrained and regulated by ethical formalities. Scholars will be able to provide us with much more enlightening results only if they are willing to consider the aesthetic aspects and link the investigated works with their authors and the spirit of the times.

Articles of Cheng's sort now appear in newspaper literary supplements and journals more frequently.[18] Their value we do not in the least decry. However, scholarship in this field still waits for further exploration to make up their "in sufficiency."

Now I want to adduce another more successful article to back up my argument. This is Wang Ch'iu-kuei's paper "The Formation of the Early Versions of the Meng Chiang-nü Story," apparently revised from a portion of his Ph.D. dissertation and published in the *Tamkang Review*.[19] Before Wang ventured on the same undertaking as Ku Chieh-kang, Ku's study of the Meng Chiang-nü story seemed to be already fairly detailed and flawless. After investigating the two Meng Chung-tzu 孟仲姿 stories with mention of her toppling the Great Wall he found documented in *Tiao-yü chi* 琱玉集 (written at the turn of the 7th century) and *Wen-hsüan ch'ao* 文選鈔 (completed 658 to 718), Wang argues that these two pieces, though put down long after the downfall of the Sui Dynasty (581-618), "might have been the results of long oral transmission,"[20] and thus they should be placed into the historical context of pre-T'ang period to see how they mirror the times.[21]

Then after his search through *Pei-shih* 北史, *Pei-ch'i shih* 北齊史, *Sui shih* 隋史, and other chronicles, he itemizes the total mileage of the Great Wall constructed during the North Dynasties and the Sui Dynasty, and the number of soldiers recruited for that specific purpose. Herein lies the contribution of Wang's paper. He not only shoves Meng's toppling the Great Wall backward to pre-T'ang period but also demonstrates that the legend reflects the frontier expansion and exploitation of the North Dynasties and the Sui Dynasty. Thus in a very implicit manner, he revises Ku's saying that "Kuan Hsiu's poem marks a great shift in the transformation of the Meng Chiang-nü story."

The preceding two examples manifest that Wang Ch'iu-kuei's monograph is more illuminating. In spite of the fact that it is not a comparative paper, its study of the aesthetic aspects, nonetheless, is more noteworthy than that of Ms. Cheng's. What Wang Ch'iu-kuei inherits is the tradition established by Ku Chieh-kang and his predecessor Cheng Ch'iao. Jan Brandt Corstius, when talking about the merits and pitfalls of doing thematological researches, once reminded the comparative scholars that "a thematological study can be of value only insofar as it adds to our knowledge of the characteristics of the various periods of Western literature on the basis of the literary works themselves."[22] Harry Levin, in his often quoted "Thematics and Criticism," does take note of the combinations and permutations of literary themes done by different people and in different times:

> Themes, like symbols then, are polysemous: that is, they can be endowed with different meanings in the face of differing situations. This is what makes an inquiry into their permutations an adventure in the history of ideas (see Don Cameron Allen on Noah or George K. Anderson on the Wandering Jew). Our knowledge can be enriched by finding out why certain themes have been chosen at certain periods (the Wagnerian resurrection of the *Nibelungenlled*) or in certain localities (the Virgilian linkage of Rome with Troy) or by certain authors – why should the saintly figure of Joan of Arc have impressed such skeptics as Mark Twain, Bernard Shaw, and Anatole France, while failing to win the sympathy of Shakespeare.[23]

These words of Corstius and Levin should be the cornerstone and shared knowledge of contemporary thematological studies. When some similar notions of Ku. Chieh-kang are juxtaposed with these, his contribution and importance in the field of thematology become glaringly salient. In other

words, Corstius and Levin were irrevocably preempted by Ku by some forty years when the latter began to probe into the relationship between the Meng Chiang-nü story and the social trends of the T'ang period.

Notwithstanding all these, the Chinese scholars' theoretic exploration of thematology, as the matter goes, is still rather weak. Nor can in-depth and considerably exhaustive thematological studies be counted in a great number. In the preface to the first volume of *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi* 孟姜女故事研究集, Ku Chieh-kang made mention of his folklore studies and expectation by saying:

> My study of the transformation of the Meng Chiang-nü story was made haphazardly, not because the materials could be collected in plenty nor because the conclusion could be arrived at easily. . . . Among the so many living tales, the Meng Chiang-nü story does not rank as the most famous and prevailing (I heard about the Chu Ying-tai 祝英台 story when I was only five or six years old, but when I knew something about Meng Chiang-nü I was more than ten years old). I spent more than one year in accumulating the materials used in this paper and believe that those not discovered and collected would probably amount to ten or even twenty times as much as this. If you set about collecting, famous stories such as Kuan-yin (or *Avalokitesvara*), Kuan Ti 關帝, the Dragon King, the Eight Immortals, Chu Ying-tai, and Chu-ko Liang 諸葛亮 the discoveries you would then make would surely be amazing. Since the publication of the *Hsü Wen-ch'ang ku-shih* 徐文長故事, even those sarcastic stories have made people realize that they were told here and there, with their protagonists named differently. . . . If there were people who set to investigate these types of stories and work together, it is possible that they might be able to draw many diagrams showing the areas where the stories were transmitted from mouth to mouth, formulate laws for their transformation, and work out a complete system for the stories. My study of the Meng Chiang-nü story has already provided other researchers with patterns and materials whereas other folklorists might also help me in many other ways. How happy it would be to see that many intricate problems which could not be solved by individuals might well be resolved in this way in the future.[24]

Apart from the Meng Chiang-nü, Liang-Chu, Kuan Ti (Yü), Chung K'uei

stories, the other tales or legends mentioned in Ku's paragraph such as the Dragon King, the Eight Immortals besides Chung K'uei, Chu-ko Liang, and Hsü Wen-ch'ang are not yet fully investigated.[25] Ku's anticipation still falls far short of being fully implemented in spite of the fact that fifty-five years have already elapsed.[26]

The last paragraph of Ma Yao-woon's article "Yu-kuan Pao-kung ku-shih te pi-chiao yen-chiu 有關包公故事的比較研究 published in 1978 runs thus:

> Recently, comparative literature again becomes popular, and people begin to devote their energy to thematic studies. Within the bounds of Chinese literature, topics of such type are numerous, and the Pao-kung story is one of those most conspicuous. The other stories like Meng Chiang-nü, Wang Chao-chün 王昭君, Tung Yung 董永, the Eight Immortals, Mu Lien (or Moginlin) 目蓮, Liu Chih-yüan 劉知遠, Yang Chia-chiang 楊家將, Fu Chia-chiang 呼家將, Ti Ch'ing 狄青, Yüeh Fei 岳飛, and the White Serpent are all very intricate issues, involving long periods of evolution and several different genres. Moreover, they have to be compared and illuminated by means of Western scholars' studies of similar works in the Western tradition. Due to the utmost complexity involved, these problems are more challenging to the investigators than others.[27]

Several of the topics mentioned in this paragraph have already been fully or partially investigated.[28] Only fairly good collections of related materials on Tung Yung and Yüeh Fei are waiting for analysis.[29] The Liu Chih-yüan, Yang Chia-chiang, Fu Chia-chiang, and Ti Ch'ing stories are as yet left untouched. So this is the *status quo* of thematological studies in China with a considerably large area unexplored.

It is certain that Ku Chieh-kang's study of the Meng Chiang-nü "has already provided other researchers with patterns and methodology." But unfortunately, thematology in China seems to have been a "dead body" from the late thirties through to the early seventies. A new life seems to have already been breathed into this dead body in the recent few years by the impact from abroad. In comparison, Western thematology since its initiative study in the nineteenth century also seems to have undergone a period of comparative dormancy from the thirties through to the fifties. Since the sixties, researchers gradually have increased in number, especially in response

to new exploration and advance made in theories. Those who have some knowledge of the field will not by any means come by the names of Levin, Weisstein, Walter Veit, Raymond Trousson, Elisabeth Frenzel, and Boris Tomashevsky without recognizing their contributions in the field of theory. As regards scholarly books, the most noticeable ones are Leo Weisstein's study of *Don Juan* (1959), Dharles Dédéyan's study of *Faust* (1954-61), Trousson's study of *Prometheus* (1964), and Levin's investigation of the myth of the Golden Age (1969), and others. As for individual pieces, one need only browse through the section called "General: Themes and Types" of *MLA International Bibliography* to know that their number has increased ever since the early sixties and that the field as a whole is rejuvenating.

One of the purposes of this paper is to show the rudimentary notion corresponding to Western thematology that Cheng Ch'iao did possess in the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). However, I have also demonstrated in the foregoing paragraphs that modern Chinese scholars are relatively weak in advancing theories in this field. In the concluding section of his 1927 article "Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu" 孟姜女故事研究, Ku Chieh-kang says:

> We discover that a piece of story might follow the cultural center to spread in spite of its minuteness in magnitude. Social trends and customs of different places and different times might at once come to bear on it and affect it. People's feelings and imagination might serve as a catalyst to its metamorphoses. We also find that its different phases were either motivated by the speakers' intention or forged at the demand of the speakers. Above all, through the significance of the tale, we might in retrospect discover in it the diverse backgrounds and the societies that made their stamps on it.[30]

In this passage, the key to the transformation of folktales and the value stressed by recent Western thematology are all taken into account. Meanwhile, we have also to remark that the Chinese scholars have not lost sight of the ingredients of character, incident, and situation when investigating a literary theme. Nor have they neglected the different genres such as poetry, *tz'u* 詞, prose, and fiction that one has to encounter and master when doing thematological researches. What is more, Baldensperger's misgiving about thematology's "incompleteness," Ku Chieh-kang had long ago adumbrated.[31] The trouble with Chinese scholars seems to come from the

fact that they lack more in-depth theoretical exploration. How to implant the alien concept of "motif" into native literary soil presents another more intriguing problem. What is worse, they have as yet not penetrated the relation between theme and character, motif and theme and images, etc., problems often propounded and dealt with in the West.

In comparison, Western thematology is built on more concrete ground. Since the Finnish scholar Antti Aarne published his categorization of Western folktales in 1910 (this seminal categorization was only based on Scandinavian sources),[32] scholars of most of the Western countries and even Japan have striven to work out separate systems for their respective folktales.[33] That is why their use of raw folklore materials is comparatively more convenient. More importantly, Stith Thompson who based his experience on compiling and translating Aarne's *Types of the Folktale* and subsequently worked hard to collect materials and did researches about them finally succeeded in publishing his six-volume *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* in 1932-36, a monumental, exhaustive inventory which lists and classifies motifs (into 23 categories) drawn from over 40,000 tales, myths, fables, romances, ballads, jestbooks, exempla, and other modes of narration. These two scholars' influences were not immediate, though, yet gradual and spectacular. By the application of the scientific, structural method, Vladimir Propp decomposes the fairy tales taken from the Aarne-Thompson story types 300-749, and classifies the fundamentals drawn into thirty-one functions (his "function" is somewhat equivalent to other theorists' "motif" or "constituent element") in his classic work *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). About three decades later, Claude Levi-Strauss applied and extended Propp's method in his study and interpretation of the meaning of myth with great success.

On the Chinese side, since the publication of *Lü Tung-pin ku-shih* 呂洞賓故事, ed. Lin Lan (Shanghai: Pai Hsin Book Co., 1925) and Ku Chieh-kang's own work and edition *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi*, 3 vols. (Canton: University of Dr. Sun Yat-sen Press, 1928-29),[34] the efforts taken to collect folk songs and narratives and then investigation of them were first interrupted by the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and then brought to a standstill by the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Systematic and somewhat exhaustive work modeled on Aarne-Thompson's classification finally appeared in 1978. This is Nai-tung Ting's *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales* where he categorizes Chinese folktales (actually only *märchen* 童話, with the exclusion of legends and myths and other modes of narration) into five main groups and 843 types.[35] Other Chinese scholars might not quite

agree with Ting's execution, especially with respect to his arbitrary exclusion of the other modes of narration from his otherwise satisfactory inventory. Be that as it may, however, we have to recognize that his work marks a very important beginning, especially with reference to Aarne-Thompson's contribution to later folklorists and theorists on literature.

In *The Folktale*, Thompson in an attempt to differentiate type and motif for all folk narratives defines a type as "a traditional tale that has an independent existence," though "it may indeed happen to be told with another tale; a motif, 'the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition.'"[36] Immediately after this, he divides motifs into three classes: First are the actors in a tale; second come certain items in the background of the action, and third, single incidents. The last class comprises the great majority of motifs, and it is this that can have an independent existence. A type "may consist of only one motif or of many.'"[37] Again, in an article published in 1953, he maintains that

> motifs may be simple incidents with a single point of interest (fox persuades bear to fish through the ice with his tail). They may be persons, creatures, or objects (culture hero, gigantic bird, or magic rolling stone) or something memorable in the background of the action, whether place (the other world), social custom (mother-in-law avoidance), or an accepted taboo. These motifs are the stuff out of which narratives everywhere are constructed. It is therefore possible to analyze all stories, simple or complex, into constituent motifs and to make from these a world-wide classification.[38]

One may not give whole consent to Thompson's notion and assertion for some of the elements embedded in his motifs might well be realligned underneath the heading of themes. But where he leaves off may serve as a place where we can start. First of all, "the actors in a tale" may be called "themes" or "motifs" as one sees "them" function in a piece of literary work; those incidents closely related to the actors such as the quest hero's descent into Hades or Meng Chiang-nü tears that topple the Great Wall might well be seen as one of the indispensable elements of literary *themes*. Second, Thompson's theory was set up upon the basis of his folklore studies. For this, which part of his theory do we have to modify and amplify to meet our practical needs if we really want to apply it to analyzing lyrics or some

of the central images in narrative poetry? Last but not the least, his attempt and efforts to reduce all folk narratives into their "constituent motifs" did illuminate and inspire a galaxy of structuralists such as Propp and Levi-Strauss as we have already montioned.

It is important that we include in thematology the study of lyric poetry. Image and *topos* should also play an important role, especially with reference to their active and central function (say, as symbols) in lyrics and other modes of poetry. They serve as motifs, whether simple or complex, the constituent elements of a piece of literary work. They may be visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and the like, and above all a potent container of expected or even unexpected signification.

In the analysis of lyric poetry and especially the Chinese four-line *chüeh-chü* 絕句 (verse), we have to clarify the relation between image and motif. That is to say, do we have to take them as two disparate terms or could they be interchangeably used? In general, scholars and theorists take them to be two concepts with different levels of signification. When talking about the meaning of image, one would think of Ezra Pound's definition of an image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." When we are appreciating a piece of literary work, the presence of such a complex would give us "that sense of sudden liberation" "from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth."[39] The image presents and illuminates for us something self-sufficient before we could think of the signified and signification.[40] In lyric poetry, a line often represents one image, sometimes even two or three. Such an image may sometimes function as a symbol, as is in Blake's line "Rose, thou are sick! " But instances like this in effect amount to only a very small number (the so-called "private imagery"). Our common sense rules that it is only when an image recurs that it begins to assume symbolic significance. The relation between image and symbol is not so close as that between motif and symbol, which is a topic I shall discuss later.

Based on my experience in a comparative study of Chinese and English lyrics and nature poetry, I have discovered that several images might perhaps constitute a certain motif (for example, the seasonal motif, quest motif, and carpe diem motif). I use the word "perhaps" to imply that there are exceptions, image clusters that do not necessarily go into the making of motifs. For instance, the seasonal motif embedded in the first two stanzas of Part II of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* which amount to forty-five lines certainly comprises images more than this amount.[41] However, we

have also to concede that there are also images that do not readily go into the making of very specific motifs like this. Four or five years ago while I was writing my dissertation about classical Chinese and English poets' response to autumn, I happened to have worked out the following statistics: After the eighteenth century, when having written one hundred poems, an English poet devoted 0.53% and 0.28% to the treatment of autumn and spring respectively whereas his Chinese counterpart, 5.68% and 1.99%. I made my enumeration according to the following: I considered a four-line poem concerned with either autumn or spring only when two or more of its lines manifested such a motif; mere description of nature did not count.[42] *Topos*, a rhetorical device that did play a considerable role in shaping the literature of antiquity and early Latin Middle Ages, can be taken as a motif when it is either used to depict *locus amoenus* or to express a particular tenor.

In the previous paragraph, I have mentioned that the relation between motif and symbol may be much closer than that between image and symbol. In his work *Man and His Symbols* (1964), Jung maintains that motifs ("single symbols") are equivalent to archetypes ("primordial images").[43] In the aesthetic sphere, Northrop Frye gives the name "archetype" to "symbol" in its phase as a "communicable unit" in *Anatomy of Criticism* where he defines motif as "a symbol in its aspect as a verbal unit in a literary work of art,"[44] and a poem itself as a "structure of interlocking motifs."[45] The traditional definition of *motif* which Levin quoted from the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 5th edition (1798), emphasizes moving in both senses: "That which moves and leads to doing something."[46] In view of the fact that it had long become a part of musical technique, the structural elements of repetition, variation, and elaboration, and so on, its final mingling with the concept of symbol was not wholly unjustifiable. A motif is formed when an image or a cluster of images recurs and persists. And what underlie this denotation are perhaps some overtones and even undertones which are as important as its primary signification. As a whole, the formation and function of a motif correspond to those of a symbol.

Apart from its subtle relationship with image and symbol mentioned above, motif's relation with theme should also be clarified. In thematology, themes are commonly represented by specific personalities, for instance, Odysseus as the crystalization of quest, and Christ or Adonis as an epitome of the mythical pattern of life-death-and-resurrection. A motif, as I have mentioned above, is formed when two or more images recur. Its recurrence,

as often is the case, enables it to be taken as a symbol. Vaselovskij's not very precise definition of motif as "the most elementary narrative unit"[47] might prove helpful for most narrations. A motif (for instance, a four-line poem devoted only to the treatment of spring or autumn) might constitute a theme, but, more often than not, a theme is worked out by two or more motifs. The conceptual frame of motif and theme should not by any means by overlooked. Thompson's definition of motif in *The Folktale* which seems to have passed by this respect is to me a gross error but understandable for his formulation was obtained primarily from folktales and legends. In terms of magnitude, I agree with what Weisstein has said: "motifs are the smaller units, and themes the larger."[48] Besides, theorists generally agree that "motifs relate to situations." What they mean by situation are Thompson's "certain items in the background of the action" and "single incidents." And "themes are linked to characters."[49]

In the previous paragraphs, I have spent quite a lot of space in differentiating motif and image, symbol, and even theme. For one thing, these terms are pivotal in any discussion of thematology. For the other, we are trying to find some common stance for east-west comparative thematic studies. Before advancing my model for Chinese and English nature poetry (at least autumn poems), I should mention Tomashevsky's critical definition of motif because it has something to do with the whole argument in this paper. The practice of this Russian formalist is mostly identical with those of Scheglov and Zholkovskii and other structuralists such as Propp and Levi-Strauss: that is to reduce a literary work to some dominant elements or fundamentals that are like the constructional parts of a sentence: subject, verb, and object. A passage in his "Thematics" where his concept of motif and the basis of his theory stands out most clearly runs thus:

> After reducing a work to its thematic elements, we come to parts that are irreducible, the smallest particles of thematic material: "evening comes," "Raskolnikov kills the old woman," "the hero dies," "the letter is received," and so on. The theme of an irreducible part of a work is called the *motif*; each sentence, in fact, has its own motif.[50]

Practical and lucid as his definition is, his mention that "each sentence, in fact, has its own motif" inevitably links itself with most grammar book

definitions of a sentence. Despite all this, however, his emphasis on the meaning part of a motif is all the more admirable for it can make up for Thompson's deficiency. Each motif or motifs of a poem and its thematic structure is so closely interwoven with each other that to extract the one is equivalent to extracting the other. To *dissect* the motifs (or compositional elements) and then to enable their constituting principles in a work to become *articulate* or salient have for all practical purposes cut into the very kernel of artistic creativity.[51] The contribution of this type of structural analysis to the study of literature is all beyond doubt.

In my dissertation "Autumn in Classical English and Chinese Poetry: A Thematological Study" completed in 1979, I have coined a term called "topical words and phrases" to designate all those recurrent images and motifs such as *feng-yeh* 楓葉 , *pai-lu* 白露 , and *hsi-feng* 西風 , "cricket," "grape," and "poppy." These words and phrases mostly function as a kind of common indicator or pointer to point straightforwardly to the poems' major concern and thus they are *topical* at once in manifesting the flow of a rhetorical convention and the tenor of a poem.[52] A complicated web of allusions had long been attached to them in different traditions, and these are able to manifest the working of different mentalities. To be more specific, the epithet *pai* 白 "white" in *pai-lu*, and the substantive *hsi* 西 "west" in *hsi-feng* are often something more than merely "a color" and "a direction" respectively in classical Chinese poetry; inextricably interwoven with them in antiquity had been a hierarchy of very complicated and subtle thoughts called *yin-yang* 陰陽 and the Five Elements. The cricket motif (image or *topos*), a recurrent image in classical Chinese and English poetry, exemplifies the working of the different mentalities of the Chinese and English races. In classical Chinese poetry, cricket epitomizes the various facets of autumn such as the transition of seasons, carpe diem, melancholy, and acts as a reminder of, or even as the whole season.[53] In classical English poetry, however, there are also various allusions going with this image, but not so rich. In Keats' "To Autumn," for example, the crickets hide singing among the hedges against the choir of mourning gnats, bleating lambs, whistling redbreast, and twittering swallows, to constitute the "music" of autumn ("Thou hast thy music too," line 24). Their song, besides revealing satisfaction and harvest, demonstrates no more than a sort of magnificent swan song.

At this juncture, I should mention two Russian theorists' practice and show where I depart from it. In their "Toward a Theme – (Expression

Devices) – Text' Model of Literary Structure," Scheglov and Zholkovskii observe that the theme of a literary work is not "a 'digest' for the reader, but a scientific abstraction whose value depends on whether sufficiently convincing correspondences have been established between it and the actual text." In another context, they maintain that "*The theme is the text minus the devices*" (underlining theirs).[54] What they mean by "expression devices" are nothing but a system of "correspondence rules," the way through which the constituent elements are formed. Granting that we are able to grasp the fixed rules followed by a writer, we should be able to penetrate into the world of his creation.

The practice of Scheglov and Zholkovskii is almost identical with that of Propp: In the *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp decomposes and recomposes some hundred fairy tales as if he were treating one and the same tale whereas what Scheglov and Zholkovskii want to assert is that "in a substantial number of cases one author is in a sense saying one and the same thing in his different works."[55] Since what folktales or the works of an author demonstrate is nothing but one or the variants of a single theme, they therefore maintain that we might through a process of decomposition and recomposition work out some "laws of transformation" for them.[56]

In classical Chinese and English autumn poems and poems embodied with the carpe diem motifs, I believe that it is feasible for us to set up for them a system of transformation through the structuralist analysis processes discussed above. What the Chinese autumn poems express as my dissertation indicates are no more than lamentation, melancholy, seasonal transition seen in the cosmic and the microcosmic worlds, harvest, satisfaction, maturity and imminent decadence; and in times of terrible havoc and profound disorder, the poets' feelings are much more prfound. And most of the English autumn poems concentrate on displaying the following themes: time's pressure on man, the mythical pattern of life-death-and-rebirth reflected in seasonal transition, harvest, maturity, contentment, and melancholy. Classical Chinese and English autumn poems, as we have already noted, have a set of formulaic pointers; and how to use these indicators to evince the themes in question belongs to the sphere of literary creativity. What the structuralist is particularly interested in is to figure out correspondence rules for the creative processes involved in "motif or motifs (pointers) – theme" and "theme – text." In order to express the theme of harvest or contentment, classical Chinese and English poets were accustomed to employing the images of gourd, grape, grain or barley harvested

in autumn. Conversely, to evince the tenor of decadence or sadness, they mostly used the motifs of sunset, fallen leaves, autumn cicada, cricket, and west wind to evoke the expected feelings or effect. The processes involved in working out the themes are no more than contrast, intensification, and/or their combination. That is why I am convinced that it is feasible to work out some model for the analysis of Chinese and English autumn poems, or carpe diem poems.

Notes

1. For instance, the frequently-used college textbook *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective*, rev. ed., ed. Newton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971) does not include any critique on thematology; its first edition appeared in 1961. However, in 1968, Jan Brandt Corstius had used a little space to deal with this topic in his *Introduction to the Comparative Study of Literature* (New York: Random House, 1968). The more enterprising Ulrich Weisstein devoted one out of the seven chapters to treating the topic in his *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968). And Harry Levin's classic work "Thematics and Criticism" also appeared in that year, in *The Disciplines of Criticism*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Green, and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 125-45. A little earlier, on the Continent, Raymond Trousson brought out his *Un Problème de littérature comparée: Les études de thèmes* (Paris: Les Lettres Modernes, 1965).
2. In coining the term "thematics," Levin had already noted in advance that its adjective corresponds to that derived from "theme" and this will cause much confusion. See Levin, "Thematics and Criticism," p. 128. In this article, Levin uses this term with its counterpart "thematology" interchangeably, probably in an effort to perpetuate them simultaneously. Other scholars like Corstius and Weisstein stick to the use of only "thematology." The usage of either one of these, it seems, hinges mostly on one's preference, and I don't think that they could be so readily subjected to a unification. Incidentally, Francois Jost makes a very succinct and appropriate differentiation between *Stoffgeschichte* and *Stoffkunde* when he says, "Often thematological studies are restricted to Stoffgeschichte, while thematology actually is *Stoffkunde*, a word that accurately translates thematology, i.e. the science or knowledge of theme, in contrast with Stoffgeschichte, or the history of themes," in his *Introduction to Comparative Literature* (Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1974), p. 291.
3. Weisstein, p. 125.
4. Levin, "Thematics and Criticism," p. 128.
5. *Theory of Literature*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1962), p. 260.
6. See Weisstein, p. 130.
7. Besides Levin, Weissten, and Walter Veit whose articles are written in English, the other theorists mostly employ either French or German in writing. For a bibliography about thematology, the reader can consult Weisstein, pp. 295-96.
8. The Russian theorists' writings are generally very stimulating and enlightening.

Consult, for instance, Boris Tomashevsky's "Thematics," *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 61-95; Yu. K. Scheglov and A. K. Zholkovskii's "Towards a 'Theme – (Expression Devices) – Text' Model of Literary Structure," *Generating the Literary Text*, trans. L. M. O'Toole (n.p.: n.p., 1975), pp. 3-50; and Yu. K. Scheglov's "Towards a Description of Detective Story Structure," *idem*, pp. 51-77.

9. Ma Yao-woon 馬幼垣 , "Yu kuan Pao-kung ku-shih te pichiao yen-chiu: san-hsien-shen ku-shih yü ch'ing-feng-cha" 有關包公故事的比較研究－三現身故事與清風閘 , *United Daily*, April 11-12, 1978, p. 12; Li Ta-san 李達三 , *Pi-chiao wen-hsüeh yen-chiu chih hsin-fang-hsiang* 比較文學研究之新方向 (Taipei: Lien Ching, 1978), pp. 315-17; and the Chinese abstract of the present author's Ph.D. dissertation "Autumn in Classical English and Chinese Poetry: A Thematological Study" (Taipei: National Taiwan University, 1979).
10. Cheng Ch'iao 鄭樵 , *T'ung chih* 通志 , collated by Ch'en Chung-kuei 陳宗夔, *SPPY* (Taipei: Chung Hwa Bookstore, n.d.), XXV, 17b.
11. The passage in question reads: "蓋踵其事而增其華，變其本而加厲，物旣有之，文亦宜然 ," in Hsiao's Preface to *Chao-ming Wen-hsüan* 昭明文選 , ed. Li Shan 李善 (Rpt. Taipei: Ho Lo Publishing House, 1975), p. 1.
12. In "Chiao-hou fu-hsieh 校後附寫 " to Vol. I of Ku Chieh-kang's *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu-chi* 孟姜女故事研究集 , Chung Ching-wen 鍾敬文 remarks that Ku's research is "a very successful piece of work" in addition to his stupendous *Ku-shih pien* 古史辨. See *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi*, I (Canton: University of Sun Yat-sen Press, 1928), p. 129.
13. "Meng Chinag-nü ku-shih te chuan-pien," included in *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi*, I, p. 24.
14. Ibid., pp. 46-47. He again takes up the argument on pp. 28-29, 115-16, and elsewhere.
15. For the intricate reasoning process of the evolution in question, see *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi*, I, pp. 34-37.
16. Ibid., p. 32.
17. Included in *Ku-tien wen-hsüeh* 古典文學 , I (Taipei: Student Bookstore, 1979), pp. 133-56; and a slightly revised version appears in her *Hsi-yu chi t'an-yüan* 西遊記探原 (Taipei: Wen K'ai Cultural Enterprise, 1982), pp. 167-86.
18. In order to be fair, I have to point out that Ms. Cheng did dedicate a little space of her book *Hsi-yu chi t'an-yüan* to the treatment of sources and dissemination of the *Hsi-yu chi* story in Oriental countries such as India and Korea, and thus it does smack of comparison.
19. *Tamkang Review*, 9, No. 2 (1978), 111-40.
20. Ibid., 121.
21. Ibid., 121. For how these two pieces reflect their times, see 121, and 123-28.
22. Corstius, p. 121.
23. Levin, "Thematics and Criticism," p. 144.
24. *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi*, I, pp. 4-5.
25. For those themes that have already been either partially or fully investigated, see Ku Chieh-kang, *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi*, 3 vols. (Canton: University of Sun Yat-sen Press, 1928 and 1929); Wang Ch'iu-kuei, "The Transformation of the Meng Chiang-nü Story in Chinese Popular Literature," Cambridge diss., 1977; Chou Ch'ing-hua 周青樺 , *Liang-Chu ku-shih yen-chiu* 梁祝故事研究

(Taipei: Orient Cultural Service, 1974); "Special Issue on Liang-Chu Story, "*Min Su Weekly*, Nos. 93, 94 & 95 (February, 1930); Lo Chin-t'ang 羅錦堂, "Kuan Yü yü Kuan So" 關羽與關索, *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Fung Ping Shan Library, 1932-1982*, ed. Chan Ping-leung, et al (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1982), pp. 150-70; Hu Wan-ch'uan 胡萬川, *Chung K'uei shen-hua yü hsiao-shuo chih yen-chiu* 鍾馗神話與小說之研究 (Taipei: Wen Shih Che Publishing House, 1980); Li Sheng-hua 李聖華, "Kuan Shih Yin p'a-sa chih yen-chiu" 觀世音菩薩之研究, *Chu-t'i-hsüeh yen-chiu lun-wen-chi* 主題學研究論文集, ed. Chen Peng-hsiang 陳鵬翔 (Taipei: Tung Ta Books Co., 1983), pp. 331-49; and Chang Yüan-ch'ang 張沅長, "Kuan Yin ta-shih pien-hsing chi" 觀音大士變性記, *idem*, pp. 351-61.

26. Incidentally, I read in one of the Chinese newspapers for perusal at the East West Center (Jefferson Hall) last month (Sept. 1983) that the Chinese National Folklore Association re-started its activities in 1978 through the efforts of Ku Chieh-kang, Chung Ching-wen, Jung Chao-tsu 容肇祖, and others. Unfortunately, that short report did not specify any researches accomplished in the past few years.
27. See note 9, April 12, 1978, p. 12.
28. In addition to those documented under note 25, see Huang Ch'i-hsiu 黃綮琇, "Wang Chao-chün ku-shih te yen-pien" 王昭君故事的演變, *Min Su Weekly*, No. 121 (May, 1933), and reprinted in Chen Peng-hsiang, *Chu-t'i-hsüeh yen-chiu lun-wen-chi*, pp. 69-96; Chen Hsiu-ying 陳秀英, "Mu Lian (Moginlin) chiu-mu ku-shih chih yen-chin chi ch'i yu-kuan wen-hsüeh chih yen-chiu" 目蓮救母故事之演進及其有關文學之研究, Taiwan University M.A. thesis, 1978 [a portion of it published in *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsiao-shuo yen-chiu chuan-chi*, vol. 4 (Taipei: Lien Ching, 1982), pp. 47-93]; Hsü Wen-hung, "The Evolution of the Legend of the White Serpent (Part I & II)," *Tamkang Review*, 4, Nos. 1 & 2 (April & Oct. 1973), 109-27, 121-56; P'an Chiang-tung 潘江東, *Pai-she ku-shih yen-chiu* 白蛇故事研究, 3 vols. (Taipei: Student Bookstore, 1981); Tseng Yung-i 曾永義, "P'an Chiang-tung te 'Pai-she ku-shih chih yen-chiu' 潘江東的『白蛇故事之研究』," *China Times*, March 20, 1979, p. 8, also included in his *Shuo Su-wen-hsüeh* 說俗文學 (Taipei: Lien Ching, 1980), pp. 153-57; and Anthony C. Yu, "Problems and Prospects in Chinese-Western Literary Relations," *YCGL*, 23 (1974), p. 52, where he mentions that the experts in Paokung story are Ma Yao-woon and Allen Hayden.
29. The two collections mentioned are *Tung-yung Shen-hsiang ho-chi* 董永沈香合集, ed. Tu Ying-t'ao 杜頴陶 (Shang-hai: Ku-tien Wen-hsüeh she, 1957), and *Yüeh Fei ku-shih shuo-ch'ang chi* 岳飛故事說唱集, ed. Tu Ying-t'ao (Shanghai: Ku-tien Wen-hsüeh, 1957).
30. Included in *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi*, I, pp. 123-24.
31. See Ku's Preface to *Meng Chiang-nü ku-shih yen-chiu chi*, I, p. 4.
32. Antti Aarne's *The Types of the Folktale*, which was published in 1910, was later translated into English, twice revised and enlarged by Stith Thompson. In the 1961 edition, it already contained 2340 entries. They categorize folktales into five types before they further subdivide them into 32 smaller subtypes.
33. According to Thompson, up to the early part of 1950's, about twenty nations had already endeavored to make detailed classifications modelled upon the AT types for their respective folktales; see *The Folktale* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1946), pp. 419-21, and "Advances in Folklore Studies," *Anthropology Today*, ed. A. L. Kroeber (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 591.

34. See Nai-tung Ting & Lee-hsia Hsü Ting, *Chinese Narratives: A Bibliographical Guide* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, Inc., 1975), pp. xii and 17. For bibliographical references about Chinese folk literature, one has at least to consult the Tings' "first systematic effort" (their own words, see p. viii), *idem*; Nai-tung Ting, *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales*, FF Communications No. 223 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1978), pp. 252-79; and T'an Ta-hsien 譚達先, *Chung-kuo min-chien wen-hsüeh kai-lun* 中國民間文學概論 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1980), pp. 447-87.
35. Ting, *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales*, p. 17; see also pp. 10-11 & 14, for reasons of using AT types and excluding myths, legends, anecdotes, etc. from his index.
36. Thompson, *The Folktale*, p. 415.
37. Ibid., pp. 415-16.
38. Thompson, "Advances in Folklore Studies," p. 594.
39. Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts," in *Prose Keys to Modern Poetry*, ed. Karl Shapiro (New York: Harper & Row, Ind., 1962), p. 105.
40. See also Northrop Frye's definition of "poetic images" in *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 81.
41. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon; 2nd ed. revised by Norman Davis (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 14-15.
42. Chen Peng-hsiang, "Autumn in Classical English and Chinese Poetry: A Thematological Study," pp. 15-25.
43. See Levin, "Motif," *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 4 vols., ed. Philip P. Wiener, et al (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), III, 242.
44. Frye, pp. 99, 73, & 366.
45. Ibid., pp. 77 and *passim*.
46. See Levin, "Motif," 235.
47. Cited by Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed. rev. & ed. by Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), p. 12; see also Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch, *Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1978), p. 18.
48. Weisstein, p. 313.
49. Ibid., p. 139; see also Levin, "Thematics and Criticism," p. 144.
50. Tomashevsky, p. 67.
51. Roland Barthes uses "dissection" and "articulation" to describe the whole structuralist process, in "The Structuralist Activity," *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), pp. 1197-98.
52. Che, pp. 4-5; for "topical words and phrases," see pp. 4 and *passim*.
53. In the Oracle-bone-and-shell writings of the Shang Dynasty (1766-1123 B.C.), one form of the ideogram *ch'iu* 秋 (autumn) reads 龝 which according to Kuo Mo-jo 郭沫若 approximates the shape of a cricket. Kuo says:

> 龝从唐蘭釋。唐讀爲秋。卜辭又有龝字，即說文龜字所从出。龜屬絕無有角者，且字之原形亦不像龜。其像龜甚至誤爲龜者，乃隸變耳。今案字形，實象昆蟲之有觸角者即即蟋蟀之類。以秋季鳴，其聲啾啾然，故古人造字以象其形，聲以肖其音，更借以名其所鳴之節季曰秋

> The explication of 龝 should follow T'ang Lan's, which takes it to be *ch'iu* 秋. The Shang language has the character

> 蠆 which is what the word 龜 of *shuo-wen* stems from. The species of *kuei* (tortoise) never carry any horn and the form of the character itself is unlike *kuei*. That it is like *kuei* is due to the standardization of the clerical style. The form of the character demonstrates that it is like some insect with horns, probably crickets which chirp in autumn in a very shrill sound. The ancient people constructed this word to approximate the form and noise of the insects and even employed it to designate the season called *ch'iu* in which they make sharp noises.

These words are quoted by Kao Hung-chin高 鴻 縉, *Chung-kuo tzu-li*中 國 字 例 (Taipei: San Min Bookstore, 1960), p. 227. T'ang Lan's 唐 蘭 explication can be seen in his *Ku wen-tzu-hsüeh tao-lun*古 文 字 學 導 論(Rpt. Taipei: Le T'ien Publishing House, 1970), II, 41a-42a.

54. Scheglov and Zholkovskii, pp. 7 & 27.
55. Ibid., p. 31.
56. "System of transformation" and "laws of transformation" are terms employed by Jean Piaget and Michael Lane respectively. For elaboration on them, see Isaiah Smithson, "Structuralism as a Method of Literary Criticism," *College English*, 37, No. 2 (1975), 145, 147, and *passim*.