

Marital Love in Two Early Chinese Narrative Ballads

—with Analogues from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

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In some early Chinese ballads and narrative poems written between the third and fifth centuries and several of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—two unrelated bodies of literature—we find a fascinating thematic affinity which deserves comparison. The anonymous author(s) of the *yüeh-fu* 樂府 (“ballads” or “songs”) “The Mulberry” (*Mo-shang sang* 陌上桑) and “The Peacock Flies Southeast” (*K'ung-ch'üeh tung-nan fei* 孔雀東南飛), for example, and Chaucer in his so-called “marriage-group” of tales extensively consider marital love and the paradox of love and authority within marriage. In these writings, marital love is viewed as a sociological or psychological force of both order and disorder. Both literary sources reflect given social systems within which the parameters of social ethics and individual behavior are well understood if not always adhered to. It is the conflict within these systems between private emotions and public mores which provides dramatic tension in individual poems and tales.

The “marriage group” of *The Canterbury Tales* consists of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, *The Clerk's Tale*, *The Merchant's Tale*, and *The Franklin's Tale*. The term originates from an essay by George Lyman Kittredge, “Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage,” in which the author argues that in these tales Chaucer presents the problem of the conflict between love and authority in marriage and one solution to that problem.¹ Kittredge's thesis of a debate and his grouping of these four tales have been considered arbitrary and misleading by several scholars. However, these tales do provide interesting analogues to early Chinese ballads and narrative poems in terms of the theme which is the focus of this paper, and I should like to allude to the “marriage group” from the viewpoint of affinity studies. I want to focus most of my attention on the Chinese poems, but to turn to Chaucer's tales to suggest that they deepen our awareness of the treatment of a significant theme in

literature.

"The Mulberry" or "The Ballad of Lo-Fu" as it is titled in Arthur Waley's translation,² is not the profound examination of marriage which we find in "The Peacock Flies Southeast" (hereafter simply "The Peacock"), but rather, it is a delightful vignette of a young bride whose girlish logic, sparkling candor, and fierce loyalty triumph over a would-be suitor. For her, full authority is given to marital love.

The simple technique used to present the heroine of "The Mulberry", Lo-fu, is typical of the *yüeh-fu* genre. At the beginning of the poem, we immediately move from the general to the particular:³

The sun has risen on the eastern brim of the world,
Shines into the high chambers of the house of Ch'in.
In the house of Ch'in is a lovely lady dwelling,
That calls herself the Lady Lo-fu.
This lady loves her silk-worms and mulberry-trees;
She's plucking leaves at the southern corner of the walls.
With blue thread are the joints of her basket bound;
Of cassia-boughs are the loops of her basket made.
Her soft hair hangs in loose plaits;
The pearl at her ear shines like a dazzling moon.
Of yellow damask is made her skirt beneath;
Of purple damask is made her coat above.

日出東南隅
照我秦氏樓
秦氏有好女
自名為羅敷
羅敷善蠶桑
採桑城南隅
青絲爲籠系
桂枝爲籠鉤
頭上倭墮髻
耳中明月珠
細綺爲下裙
紫綺爲上襦

The first section of the poem sets the general scene with a brief description of the morning sunrise, the light of which is seen to be shining on the house of the Ch'in family whose lovely daughter is named Lo-fu. The poem then presents Lo-fu at work picking mulberries "south of the city," and describes in detail her basket. Finally, we have a close view of her hair, jewelry, and dress.

This introduction which swiftly moves from the general to the particular contains all the essential facts about Lo-fu, her family, name, occupation, and appearance. We meet her through the description of an anonymous observer. In addition, we should note two important motifs in this first section which are important throughout the poem: direction and color. We follow the rays of the sun, as it were, which rise in the *southeast*, shine upon the Ch'in house of Lo-fu, and then focus upon her picking mulberries *south* of the city. Later in the poem, we find that the Prefect who comes to court Lo-fu arrives from the *south*. By means of this simple emphasis on a southerly direction, the *yüeh-fu* poet suggests a romantic context within which he presents an attractive image of Lo-fu and the Prefect standing in the warmth of the morning sunlight.

Secondly, we note that what is emphasized in the detailed description of Lo-fu is color: her mulberry basket is bound with "blue thread" (*ch'ing ssu* 青絲), her pearl ear ornaments gleam like the "luminous moon" (*ming yüeh* 明月), and her silk jacket is "purple" (*tzu* 紫). This same color motif recurs at the end of the poem when the Prefect asks Lo-fu how he might recognize her husband. She replies by color references. Her husband has a "white horse followed by a black colt" (*po ma ts'ung li chü* 白馬從驪駒), the horse's tail is "bound with blue thread" (*ch'ing ssu hsi* 青絲繫), its head is bridled with "yellow gold" (*huang chin* 黃金). Her husband looks "white (fair) and bright" (*po hsi* 白晳). She juxtaposes his white complexion with a description of his beard—a colorful, if not startling, black and white image:

A wholesome man, fair, white and fine;
Very hairy, with a beard that is thick and long.

鬚鬚頗有鬚

Lo-fu's naive use of the color motif is childlike in its immediacy and contributes to the poem's charming mood and delightful tone.

Following the initial description of Lo-fu, the second section of the poem introduces her through the eyes of various onlookers:

The passer-by who looks on Lo-fu
Drops his luggage and twirls his beard and moustache.
The young men when they see Lo-fu
Doff their caps and tie their filets on their brows.

The labouring ploughman thinks no more of his plough,
 The hind in the field thinks no more of his hoe.
 When they come home there is temper on both sides:
 "You sat all day looking at Lo-fu!"

行者見羅敷
 下擔捋髭鬚
 少年見羅敷
 脫帽著柵頭
 耕者忘其犁
 鋤者忘其鋤
 來歸相怨怒
 但坐觀羅敷

From the reactions of spectators we have an intimate, however indirect, perspective of Lo-fu—she becomes a desired object—a delightful force of disorder for all those who gaze at her. People passing by drop their luggage, youths readjust their hats, men who are ploughing and hoeing forget their work.

After this introductory description we meet Lo-fu midway in the poem. Here her character is more fully revealed through dialogue.⁴ This section begins with a brief but effective presentation of the Prefect's approach:

The Lord Prefect drives his coach from the south;
 His five horses suddenly slow their pace.

使君從南來
 五馬立踟蹰

Ch'ih-ch'ü (踟蹰 Waley's "suddenly slow their pace") usually means "hesitant," "undecided," or freely: "to pace back and forth." In this context, with the sudden transition from the peasant spectators to the exciting arrival of the Prefect, we might translate this line as: "The five horses halt, prancing in their traces." Such a translation seems to me to be faithful to the image of nervous expectation and excitement conveyed in Chinese.

In the subsequent dialogue between the Prefect and his minister whom the former uses as a go-between, the Prefect learns the name, family, and age of the "beauty" (*shu* 姝) he so admires. Armed with these personal details, he makes his approach: "Would you not care to ride with me?" (*Ning k'o kung tsai pu* 寧可共載不). In Lo-fu's brusque reply, we note two things about her character, childlike candor:

"My Lord Prefect has not ready wits.
Has he not guessed that just as he has a wife
So I too have my husband dear?"

使君一何愚
使君自有婦
羅敷自有夫

and social pride:

"Yonder to eastward a band of horse is riding,
More than a thousand, and my love is at their head."

東方千餘騎
夫婿居上頭

Her frank response vividly contrasts to the courteous talk of the Prefect and the assistant. For example, when the latter is asked about Lo-fu's age, he is politely indirect: "Twenty years she has not completed, but she is more than fifteen." 二十尚不足 十五頗有餘

When the Prefect presses for more information about his rival, Lo-fu's husband, Lo-fu completely disarms him with a host of laudatory epithets. She begins with a description of the excellence and beauty of her husband's horse. Next she hands the Prefect a saucy insult by referring to her husband's sword which is so expensive that it is priceless—"worth more than a thousand ten thousands" (*k'o chih ch'ien-wan yü* 可值千萬餘). In other words, it is far too valuable for even a Prefect to buy. She then lists her husband's promotions. A minor official at fifteen, at forty he ruled a city. Subsequently, we hear not only about the husband's beauty and virtue, but also about his long hairy beard. Finally, she describes his stately manner of walking in his palace. There, she declares, he sits among thousands who all proclaim his unparalleled excellence.

Several factors are to be noted in this description. The sense of logic and the disorderly development of the presentation certainly represent the mind of a young unsophisticated girl besides giving the reader a vivid picture of Lo-fu's husband. When asked to identify her spouse, she begins with his horse. She then proceeds to his sword, his promotions, his handsome appearance, and the way he walks. Midway in her scattered train of thoughts, she refers to his hairy beard. The dialogue which accompanies Lo-fu's description is more revealing of her than her husband. We have the

unabashed candor and sparkling wit of a young girl, plus the petulant personality of a bride who is proud of her husband's social status, and consequently her own. The fact that she finds it necessary to brag about the cost of her husband's sword suggests that she herself was originally of a lower social level. Finally, in this dialogue we note again that what makes her desirable—her graceful beauty and wit—ironically leads to the suitor's discomfiture. Not only does she refuse the Prefect, but she so insults and ridicules him that he departs in humiliation.

The beginning narrative structure of the poem and the subsequent dialogue present us with the realistic picture of a girl whose character is completely charming. She is a young beauty of some accomplishment who marries into a high social station and flaunts her new found aristocracy in the face of would-be suitors, Prefects included. The attraction of the poem is that Lo-fu's absolute loyalty to her husband is presented through the intimate revelation of her character. She loves the authority of her husband, and will have neither love nor authority from anyone else.

In "The Peacock" we find another vignette of Chinese marriage, but one that takes a tragic turn with the suicides of the two protagonists who cannot resolve a conflict between marital love and parental authority. Two brief passages which depict the heroine's education are keys to the nature of marital conflict which this long narrative poem explores.⁵ As the poem begins, the wife, Lan-chih, speaks to her husband, Chung-ch'ing, and summarizes her life:

"At thirteen I knew how to weave silk,
At fourteen I learnt to make clothes.
At fifteen I could play the small lute,
At sixteen I knew the Songs and Book.
At seventeen I was made your wife."

十三 能織素
十四 學裁衣
十五 彈箏篴
十六 誦詩書
十七 爲君婦

Midway in the poem, when Lan-chih returns to her parents' home in disgrace, her mother greets her in the following words:

“ . . . at thirteen I taught you to weave silk,
At fourteen you could cut clothes.
At fifteen you played on the small lute,
At sixteen you knew the customs and rites.
At seventeen I sent you to be a bride.”

十三 教汝織
十四 能裁衣
十五 彈箜篌
十六 知禮儀
十七 遣汝嫁

The above lines, spoken by two different voices, are formulaic patterns which mirror one another almost exactly, with one significant exception in the fourth line. According to the mother, Lan-chih at sixteen was well versed in “customs and rites” (*li* 禮 and *i* 儀); that is, she had been taught the proper observance of rites and ceremonies and was schooled in the behavior becoming to and expected of a Chinese woman. Lan-chih speaks of “the Songs and Book” (*shih* 詩 and *shu* 書), referring either to the *Book of Songs* and the *Book of History*, two Confucian classics, or else alluding to her ability to recite and compose poetry. In any case, the essential point here is that the two versions have one fundamental difference. In listing her feminine attainments and skills, such as the ability to weave, sew, and play music, Lan-chih includes literary accomplishments. Her statement indicates an important contrast in point of view between herself and members of her family as well as members of her husband’s family. For example, her mother’s stress on the social code is echoed by her mother-in-law who accuses her of not observing “the rules of behavior” (*li chieh* 禮節). When Lan-chih does return home, her mother is overcome with shame for she is certain that her daughter has in some way failed marriage requirements. Lan-chih’s error, everyone insists, is her unwillingness to adhere to the moral code.

Because of the ultimate suicide of Lan-chih and Chung-ch’ing, modern Chinese critics on the mainland such as Yü Kuan-ying, Yü P’ing-po, and Wang Yun-hsi, have commonly viewed “The Peacock” as an attack against feudal society.⁶ Others who are committed to Communist Party ideology have often cited the poem as one of the foremost representatives of “Peoples’ Literature” in which the down-trodden cry out against their masters and the oppressive evils in their society. In fact, a doctrinaire Marxist reading of “The Peacock” seems unwarranted. The poem is not so much a people’s assault on the evils of feudalism as it is a somewhat revisionist study of the

abuse of Confucian moral standards and the conflict between private and public values within a given social system. There is much evidence that Lan-chih's suicide is hardly a refutation of *li* or *i* ("customs and rites"). If anyone in "The Peacock" practices the moral code and lives up to ethical requirements, it is she.

The proper observation of rites and customs is assumed to be important in the poem and is never questioned. One recalls the ceremonious behavior of the go-betweens who plead for Lan-chih's hand on behalf of the Prefect's son. The Prefect himself uses astrology and calendars to determine the proper auspicious moment for the marriage rite. There is stress on the ceremony itself in the elaborate preparations, expensive wedding gifts, and richly attired guests. The funeral of Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing is another example of the importance of ritual. Perhaps the best examples of propriety are the numerous formal occasions when Lan-chih or Chung-ch'ing make obeisance to the latter's mother in the great family ancestral hall. The ultimate instance of courtesy is seen in the final confrontation between Chung-ch'ing and his mother when he bows before her and informs her of his imminent death.

What we really find in the behavior of all personages in "The Peacock," with the exception of Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing, is that individual desires displace the moral code while citations of "customs and rites" are merely hypocritical. Chung-ch'ing's mother informs him that Lan-chih must return home because she lacks a correct sense of behavior and propriety, yet she recommends as a replacement Lo-fu, the daughter of a neighbor, whose special virtue is physical beauty rather than moral rectitude. This woman has "the loveliest limbs that ever yet you saw!" (可憐體無比). When Lan-chih arrives home, her mother says:

"I told you not to break your vows;
What now have you done wrong?"

謂言無誓違
汝今何罪過

But her apparent moral conscience is almost immediately subverted with the subsequent approach of prominent marriage suitors. She urges Lan-chih to re-marry, in short, to forget her vows to her husband. What matters is that a woman be married and not live alone. The behavior of Lan-chih's brother is similarly questionable. As the elder brother, he can arrange a

marriage for his sister, but his rationale violates the moral code. He tells Lan-chih:

"You first married a Prefect's clerk,
Now you may marry a young Lord!
The difference between fortune and mistortune
Is like the difference between heaven and earth!"

先嫁得府吏
後嫁得郎君
否泰如天地

He insists on a re-marriage to relieve himself from the burden of caring for his sister, and to elevate his social status by forcing her to improve hers.

Contrary to the opinions of several Chinese mainland critics, the supreme embodiment of the traditional Chinese social and moral code in "The Peacock" is its heroine. Lan-chih is proficient in skills required of a wife, and although her mother questions her virtue, she is the personification of propriety. She is, in a sense, one step ahead of the rule of the social code which dictates that if a wife is unacceptable she may be returned to her parents. When Lan-chih finds that she cannot please her mother-in-law despite complete subservience and obedience, she asks to leave, even before her mother-in-law acts. She dutifully acknowledges an ineptitude and a guilt that are not really hers in order to protect her mother-in-law from shame:

"When I was a girl," the young wife said,
"I was brought up far from any town,
A wild thing, never schooled or taught,
And needs must shame a great man's house.
From you I have taken much money and silk,
Yet was not fit to do the tasks that you set.
Today I am going back to my father's home;
I am sorry to leave you burdened by household cares."

昔作女兒時
生小出野里
本自無教訓
兼愧貴家子
受母錢帛多
不堪母驅使
今日還家去
念母勞家裏

The same dilemma which requires that Lan-chih adhere to conflicting values afflicts Chung-ch'ing. While she must be faithful to her husband yet obey the demands of her mother, brother, and mother-in-law, he is caught by the opposition between marital love and duty. Early in the poem Lan-chih complains about her husband's devotion to his work:

"At seventeen I was made your wife;
From care and sorrow my heart was never free,
For you already were a clerk in the great town
Diligent in your duties and caring for nothing else.
I was left alone in an empty bridal-room;
It was not often that we two could meet."

十七爲君婦
心中常苦悲
君既爲府吏
守節情不移
賤妾留空房
相見常日稀

Chung-ch'ing himself refers to his filial duty as an excuse for prolonging his separation from Lan-chih:

"It is not I that would send you away,
It is my mother that has scolded and harried me.
Do you live at your father's, just for a little while,
For I must be going to take my orders in the town . . ."

我自不驩卿
逼迫有阿母
卿但暫還家
吾今且報府

Lan-chih refers to their shared dilemma when Chung-ch'ing, having heard that his wife will re-marry, comes to condemn her. She questions him as follows:

"What do you mean, why do you speak to me so?
It was the same with both; each of us was forced;
You were, and so was I too."

何意出此言
同是被逼迫
君爾妾亦然

The difference between Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing is that only she confronts the ambivalence between values. Through her he discovers that he shares her conflict and is subject to the demands of opposing forces.

The nature of tragedy in the Chinese poem is more than a matter of ambivalent values or a conflict between those who abuse society's moral code and those who exemplify it. The downfall of Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing originates in her independent character and the existence of love between them. If Lan-chih is guilty of any fault, it is that in her confrontations with her mother-in-law, mother, and brother, while humbly acquiescing to their demands, she persists in retaining her identity. It is the one quality which enables her to withstand circumstances and to preserve her sense of equilibrium, but at the same time, it is also the one quality which her relatives try to subvert. Similarly, the love between Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing promotes disorder and tension in "The Peacock." Chung-ch'ing refers to this love before his mother when he begs her to keep Lan-chih:

"The signs of my birth marked me for a humble course;
Yet luck was with me when I took this girl to wife.
Our hair was plaited, we shared pillow and mat,
Swore friendship until the Yellow Springs of Death."

兒已薄祿相
幸復得此婦
結髮同枕席
黃泉共爲友

His mother will not tolerate the existence of such love, and finds it "foolish" (*ch'u-ch'u* 區區). She believes his grief is only over the loss of physical pleasure. When during his final visit to his mother he informs her that he has resolved to die, she cries out: "What! Die for a wife?" (*shang wu wei fu ssu* 慎勿爲婦死). Like Lan-chih's mother and brother, she is oblivious to marital love and sees instead an abridgement of custom and a failure in propriety. Significantly, the principal love images in the poem, "reed" (*p'u wei* 薄葦) and "rock" (*p'an shih* 磐石), symbols of Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing, are unknown to other members of the family. Such private language is indicative of an intimate love which only the couple can understand.

Given the network of social relations and obligations in the poem, the suicides of Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing are inevitable. Within the context of abusive authority and the conflict between values, death becomes the

fulfillment of marital fidelity. The final lines of the poem describe the burial site—a mythic pair of love birds nestle amidst the entwining limbs of trees above the grave. Such an ending with its pointed moral is traditional in Chinese literature, but some commentators consider it a later addition designed to meet with the sentimental demands of Chinese readers for a happy ending.⁷ One could argue that the closing lines are appropriate to the poem, for in the burial of the two lovers in a common grave there is the hint of a reconciliation between families and possibly a recognition of responsibility for the tragedy, an ending faintly reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.⁸

When we turn to Chaucer's "marriage group" in the *Canterbury Tales*, we find an extensive corpus of works which, like "The Mulberry" and "The Peacock," is concerned with the theme of marital love and authority. In the debate on marriage between the Wife of Bath, the Clerk, the Merchant, the Host, and the Franklin, we have five different view-points: The Wife of Bath insists on the sovereignty of wives; the Clerk cites one Griselda who is an *exemplum* of patience and a wife who is subject to her husband's authority; the Merchant views wives as lustful faithless creatures who make cuckolds of their husbands; the Host finds that even faithful wives are shrews; the Franklin solves the problem of sovereignty and a conflict between a chivalric code of honor and marital fidelity by the "lawe of love." To elaborate on thematic affinities and contrasts between Chaucer and the Chinese poems, I will make a more detailed summary of the tales from the "marriage group."

The thesis of the Prologue to *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *Tale* itself is that wives should rule their husbands if there is to be harmony in marriage. In the Prologue, she illustrates her thesis by reference to her personal experience with five husbands. In each case, she claims, the marriage was a happy one so long as her husband was subservient. In her *Tale*, she tells the story of a knight who seduces a lady. To escape the punishment of death, the knight is given a year to find out what women most desire. He finally meets an old hag who knows the answer but will only tell him if he promises to marry her. He makes the promise and she informs him that more than anything else women desire sovereignty over their husbands. While this answer turns out to be the correct one, the knight cannot bear to marry the hag because of her ugliness, poverty and lowly status. The witch then offers him two alternatives: he may have her either as an ugly hag who will remain faithful to him, or he may have her as a beautiful woman who will not be

faithful. The knight leaves the choice to the hag with the result that she suddenly turns into a young lady who is both good and beautiful. The moral is clear: if husbands will be subject to their wives, they will have harmony in their marriages.

Cultural assumptions behind "The Mulberry" and "The Peacock" are so different that a satire against male domination would be misplaced. In "The Mulberry" marital harmony does assume fidelity and obedience on the wife's part, thus reversing the Wife of Bath's thesis. But more importantly, Lo-fu's personality is appealing because of her resistance to suitors, rather than because of her domination over several husbands as in the case of the Wife of Bath. In "The Peacock," the contrast is more unique. Authority rests ultimately in the hands of the mother-in-law of the bride, and both wife and husband must be subservient to her.

The next tale in the "marriage group" is *The Clerk's Tale*. As Kittredge notes, this tale about a wife named Griselda who is completely subservient to her husband is the very antithesis of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.⁹ As such, it is a satire directed at the Wife of Bath herself.¹⁰ The tale is about an Italian Marquis who marries a peasant girl, Griselda. To test her faithfulness to him, he takes away her children and leaves her in poverty. Later he further tests her loyalty by informing her that her peasant origin is too lowly for him; he pretends to divorce her and orders her to be the servant of his new bride. The dénouement in the tale occurs when the new wife turns out to be Griselda's daughter. Having successfully withstood the series of tests, Griselda is reunited with her husband.

The story of Griselda with its conflict between values reminds us of "The Peacock" but the tensions are not the same. The primacy of the husband's authority means that Griselda must withstand her natural instincts as wife and mother. Lan-chih's fidelity is similarly tested, but she has to balance different values within one social context, rather than overcome feminine instincts. Griselda's test of patience is more extreme of course for the Clerk is pointing a moral. Not only must she be subservient to authority, she must also lose her personal identity. Lan-chih retains that identity even while hiding her personal desires from her mother and brother. In contrast, Griselda, in order to meet with her tests, cannot have any desires that are not approved by her husband. In comparison to Lan-chih, Griselda's virtue appears exaggerated, basically because it is determined by the requirements of the literary form, the *exemplum*. But the theme of patient love in *The*

Clerk's Tale is none the less effective as the *exemplum* pattern succeeds in outraging the Wife of Bath by contradicting her own thesis on authority. In contrast, what is foremost in the Chinese poem is the vibrant personality of its heroine. The theme, love versus authority, is more hidden, while the conflict is never satisfactorily resolved.

Passionate love in the "marriage group" is found in the adulterous relationships presented in *The Merchant's Tale*. Late in life an old man, January, decides to marry. He seeks both earthly bliss and eternal salvation. He builds a garden for his new bride, May, in which he plans to fulfill his erotic desires in private and, at the same time, he fantasizes that the sacred marital bond will help him make up for his former lusty life. Instead, the garden becomes the location for a love tryst between May and a young squire, Damien, and January ends up a cuckold. This humorous tale of adultery is a radical contrast to "The Peacock" where passionate love exists within marriage and is a sign of its authenticity, yet destroys the couple because it must be repressed to preserve familial authority.

The Franklin's Tale is about a Breton knight, Arviragus, and his faithful wife Dorigen. When Arviragus goes off to England, a squire, Aurelius, seeks Dorigen's favors. She refuses but teases the suitor by saying that if he could remove all the stones along the rocky coast of Brittany, she would welcome his love. Whereupon Aurelius gets a wizard to use a magic trick and the rocks become covered by the sea. When Arviragus discovers that his wife has made a promise, the conditions of which have been fulfilled, he insists that she must honor it. Aurelius is so impressed by the knight's sense of honor that he refuses to accept Dorigen. Hearing of Aurelius' generosity, the wizard requires no payment for his trick.

Like Lan-chih, Dorigen is caught in a conflict between values. On the one hand she must be faithful to her marriage vows, and on the other hand she has made a promise to another man. Her proposed solution of suicide is the same as Lan-chih's, but unlike Lan-chih, she is saved by her husband who himself chooses one value or one ethic over another—the honoring of a promise is more important than his wife's chastity. Of course his solution only creates a further dilemma, and in fact, the solution to the conflict of codes lies outside the codes themselves. Aurelius and the magician freely renounce their respective claims when they see generosity in a husband or a suitor. Furthermore, the couple themselves have prepared the way for the resolution of the problem of sovereignty by vowing to be one another's servant

prior to their marriage. The Franklin's moral is clear: there can be no authority in love that is freely given. In this tale there are two factors which are absent from "The Peacock". The wife, knight, squire, and magician all make a pledge; they each keep it then withdraw their claims when they witness one another's spirit of generosity. A similar conflict between love and authority exists in "The Peacock", but it cannot be happily resolved because sovereignty rests with other members of Lan-chih's and Chung-ch'ing's family. The couple cannot transmute authority as can Arviragus and Dorigen, they can only be responsible to an authority other than themselves, and ultimately they must resolve this conflict through suicide. "The Mulberry" is a closer parallel to *The Franklin's Tale* at least in the sense that the former represents a happier union of love and authority. Lo-fu's love for her husband leads her to proclaim his authority and to entrust herself to it. In "The Peacock", love becomes a force of disorder which destroys a couple. But in both Chinese poems moral codes and social mores remain fixed in place, adhered to by the two pairs of protagonists to the end, and never gainsaid by the machinations of suitors, parents, or in-laws.

While we cannot generalize at this point, we can draw some specific conclusions based on our study of these *yueh-fu* and *Tales*. It is clear, for example, that the varying treatment of a common theme illustrates radically different views of women and their relation to men, while concepts of literary forms seem quite dissimilar. In comparison to the powerful solitaires or meek dependents in the "marriage group," the Chinese wives appear singular and perhaps unaccountable. Lo-fu is a disordering force within her community partly because she gives full authority to marriage. Lan-chih, while upholding traditional conservative mores, is a tragic figure through her affirmation of marital love and her retention of personal identity. The focal point of each tale in the "marriage group" is a couple whose conflict with one another or society can only be resolved through the manipulation of one code against another, or by moving outside the codes entirely. What is of interest in the Chinese poems is a very different sense of order. Romantic or passionate love is found within the marriage relationship. The comic mode in "The Mulberry" is typified by the harmonizing of private and public mores. The tragic mode we find in "The Peacock" ensues from the irreconcilable differences between codes or the sheer willfulness of authorities who subvert them. The Chinese poems do not go outside existing codes as, say, Chaucer's

Franklin does, but instead explore affirmations or denials of what is given. Thus, as we have seen in "The Mulberry" and "The Peacock," personal identity or the existence of marital love may be alternately considered comic or tragic, depending on the relationship between the individual and the larger context of family and society.

In closing we may say that thematic affinities between the Chinese and English poems present the reader with dramatic contrasts which can only be understood in terms of cultural and historical differences. It is perhaps the nature of thematology to lead us from the literary text to questions about culture and society, questions which we should like to explore at a future date.

Notes

1. George Lyman Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage," *Modern Philology*, IX (1911-12), pp. 435-70.
2. Arthur Waley, "The Song of Lo-Fu," in *Chinese Poems* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946), pp. 65-67. I use Waley's translation of this poem and "The Peacock" (pp. 89-100) except for minor emendations.
3. For another excellent example of this progression from the general to the particular, see the *Kü-shih shih-chiu shou* 古詩十九首 especially "Ch'ing-ch'ing ho-p'an ts'au" 青青河畔草 ("Green Green the Grass by the River Bank").
4. Dialogue is often used in the *yüeh-fu* to mark swift changes in mood. See for example "yu suo ssu" 有所思 and "tung-men hang" 東門行 and in particular Wang Yao's reference to these poems in his essay, "Yüeh-fu shih" 樂府詩 in *Yüeh-fu shih yen-chiu lun-wen-chi* 樂府詩研究論文集 (Peking, 1957), p. 3.
5. Yu Kuan-ying 余冠英 observes these lines are characteristic of *yüeh-fu* narrative verse—the immediate presentation of the most important feature, "k'ai men chien shan" 開門見山. See "Chieh-shao 'K'ung-ch'ieh tung-nan fei'" 介紹孔雀東南飛 in *Yüeh-fu shih yen-chiu lun-wen-chi*, p. 181.
6. See Yü kuan-ying, *op. cit.*, p. 184. Yü P'ing-po "Man-t'an 'K'ung-ch'ieh tung-nan fei' ku-shih ti chi-ch'iao" 漫談孔雀東南飛古詩的技巧 in *Yüeh-fu shih yen-chiu lun-wen-chi*, *op. cit.*, p. 142, Wang Yun-hsi, "Lun 'K'ung-ch'ieh tung-nan fei ti ch'an-sheng shih-tai, ssu-hsiang, i-shu chi ch'i wen-ti," 論孔雀東南飛的產生時代思想藝術及其問題 in *Yüeh-fu shih lun tsung* 樂府詩論叢, pp. 95, 98, 104.
7. See for example Wang Yao's essay "Yüeh-fu shih," *op. cit.*, p. 4.
8. This study of theme in "The Peacock" does not allow space for analysis of narrative technique. Here I should note motifs which develop the theme. The opening refrain is an emblem of tragedy: Chung-ch'ing hangs himself on the "southeast" branch of a tree. The "k'ung-ch'ieh," or "peacock," a bird of extravagant

beauty, is a symbol of the transient beauty and love of Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing. Along with the refrain, there is a cyclic movement throughout the poem symbolized by the circular flight of the peacock, the recurrent use of dialogue, the similar attitudes of the mother-in-law, Lan-chih's mother and brother, and the repetitious scenes where Lan-chih and Chung-ch'ing confront their parents and one another. There is much repetition of identical lines, phrases, and words. These repeated phrases and words provide unity in that they appear in different contexts and are often spoken by different persons. There are other recurrent motifs, such as banging on the bed in anger, making clothes, putting on and removing slippers. All of these repetitions are first invoked by the opening refrain.

9. Kittredge, *op. cit.*, p. 446.
10. Kittredge, *op. cit.*, p. 448.
11. Kittredge, *op. cit.*, pp. 457-467.

