

# Themes and Techniques in Eileen Chang's Stories

Stephen Cheng

## I

Eileen Chang started her writing career in the early 1940's in Shanghai, then under the Japanese occupation. Her stories and essays appearing in the newspapers and periodicals there enjoyed wide popularity and were later collected in *Romances* (傳奇) and *Gossips* (流言) respectively. She left Shanghai for Hong Kong in 1952, and while there she published two novels, *Rice-sprout Song* (秋歌) and *Love in the Redland* (赤地之戀), delineating life in Communist China. Both works were received with indifference and their literary merit remained unexplored until several years later. In the meantime she had immigrated to the United States. In the years since her move to the States, she has written only two novels, *Half a Lifetime Love* (半生緣), which is a revision of her early story, *Eighteen Springs* (十八春) written in Shanghai; and also *The Bitter Woman* (怨女), which is an expansion of her famed novelette, *The Golden Cangue* (金鎖記). In addition to the two novels she has translated some of her own works into English. She has also published several articles on the critical and textual studies of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Despite her great popularity in the Shanghai period, hardly any serious critical work has been devoted to her stories. The article by Hsün Yü (迅雨) in 1944 seems to be the only exception.<sup>1</sup> C.T. Hsia is the first critic to rank Eileen Chang among the best of the modern Chinese writers. In his *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* he writes:

Yet to the discerning student of modern Chinese literature, Eileen Chang is not only the best and most important writer in Chinese today; her short stories alone invite valid comparison with, and in some respects claim superiority over, the works of serious women writers in English: Katherine

Mansfield, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers. *The Rice-sprout Song* is already to be placed among the classics of Chinese fiction.<sup>2</sup>

In 1969 all her works, with the exception of *Love in the Redland*, were reprinted in Taiwan, and with the reissue of her works, Eileen Chang has been the focus of attention in recent years.<sup>3</sup> Her works have been the subject of a number of articles, among them, those by Shui Ching (水晶) are distinguished by their thorough understanding, and critical acumen. His *Art of Eileen Chang's Novels* (張愛玲的小說藝術) is already a landmark in the history of literary criticism in Chinese.

The enthusiasm with which critics like C.T. Hsia and Shui Ching endorse her works is not universally shared, however. There are some in the old school who still consider women writers as objects of curiosity and who still prefer delving into her private life, while others cannot forgive her for her impropriety in publishing under the Japanese occupation or insist on chiding her for her lack of revolutionary zeal. None of them, so far as I know, has appraised her works in *literary* terms.<sup>4</sup>

Eileen Chang was a unique figure among her contemporary writers. Whereas most of them in their idealism were of the conviction that all social evils could be eradicated by a perfect social system, Miss Chang, being a confirmed pessimist, averred that all human conflicts rise from the wickedness of the heart, and that malice is not in the monopoly of any class. Thus, while the others were busy in their search for the ideal system, Eileen Chang alone delved into the labyrinth of the heart in her search for the truth, illuminating her stories with her tragic insight. In her relentless exploration she arrives at a harrowing truth about the human world, hence her stories are always imbued with an inherent sadness, and also with a compassion and pleas for mutual understanding.

In this paper we shall attempt to examine Eileen Chang's world with its assorted characters, their lives and loves. We shall also study the imagery and symbols used by her to depict her world and the techniques she employs to bring her world into relief. All page numbers refer to *The Collected Stories of Eileen Chang* (張愛玲短篇小說集), while translated titles follow those of C.T. Hsia wherever possible. Otherwise, translations are my own except where noted.

## II

None of Eileen Chang's stories and novels can be said to be panoramic, and such a lack of scope is acknowledged by the authoress herself:

I cannot write what is commonly known as the "memorials of the times," and I have no intention of attempting it, because there seems at present no such concentration of subject matters. I only write some little things between men and women; also there are no wars or revolutions in my works, for I believe that a man is both simpler and more indulgent when he is in love than when he is in war or revolution. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Thus eschewing the grand subjects and the burning issues of her day, she embarks on her examination of the intricate relationship between men and women. We can confirm the felicity of her decision more than thirty years later, for the bulk of her contemporary writers' production that aspired to become "memorials of the times" have turned into dated period pieces instead, whereas the characters of Eileen Chang are freshly vivid.

Most of her stories then are by design stories about love, yet they are not sentimental or romantic love stories, for in her view, passion is only transient and the human heart always has to contend with its own ego. Truly romantic love that will uplift one's soul, demands the utter abandonment of oneself, which most people are incapable of. She remarks in the same essay:

There are few who are extremely sick or extremely aware . . . . Through these years the human race has endured, hence, mad as it may be, it is also quite careful. Therefore in my stories, except for Ts'ao Ch'i-ch'iao in "Golden Cangue," none of them is an extremist. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Yet love is there in her stories, as incomplete as her characters, with its petty jealousy and hurts and its little joys and delights. Her characters still search for it and sometimes find it, albeit imperfect and compromised.

One form of such love is found in the story, "Lingering Love" (留情). The story opens on a rainy November afternoon, when Gentle Phoenix and her husband, Mr. Mi, are about to leave home for a visit to her aunt. Gentle Phoenix, about forty years old, was once married to the wastrel son of a rich family, a devilishly charming one. She had been widowed over

ten years before she joined Mr. Mi, a prosperous businessman, as his concubine. She is reasonably happy with her marriage, but not overly so, since Mr. Mi is sixty and certainly not as handsome as her first husband. Furthermore, his ties with his first wife (i.e. the principal wife), though weak, are not completely broken; especially now that the first wife is dying, he has to pay constant visits to her to the neglect of Gentle Phoenix.

As for Mr. Mi, he married his first wife, a neurotic Chinese student, while he was studying abroad, and was subsequently separated from her more or less by mutual consent:

These years he had hardly spent any time with her. Even of their most affectionate days he could only remember the constant squabbles and could not recall any memorable happiness. Yet it was those youthful, painful and fugitive months and years that really touched his heart. Now when he thought about them, the wintry drizzle like the floating dust would flit into his eyes, which together with the nose, would feel the sorrow of tears.  
(p. 17)

Before his marriage to Gentle Phoenix he made careful inquiries so as to ensure that the second marriage might compensate for the disappointments in his first; but, "with the other woman it was quarrels and fights, with her (Gentle Phoenix) he sometimes had to say, 'I'm sorry,' sometimes had to say, 'thank you.' The marriage was no more than 'sorry's and 'thank you's.'"

On that day there is a little strain between them because of Mr. Mi's intended visit to his dying wife. To please Gentle Phoenix, he accompanies her to her aunt's place and stays there for some chit-chat. But on account of Gentle Phoenix' coldness, he has to beat a retreat. While staying behind, Gentle Phoenix observes the slow decline and disintegration of her relative's household in contrast to her own fortunes which have been on the rise since her marriage to Mr. Mi. Her newly found sense of prosperity and security contrasted with her loneliness and shabbiness of her widowhood years made her suddenly appreciate Mr. Mi with a feeling of gratitude. So upon Mr. Mi's quick return to retrieve her home, she can hardly conceal her joy at his hasty return to her side. On a note of muted optimism, the story ends:

In this world of ours not a single emotion is without its hundreds of patches and scars. Yet along their homeward way Gentle Phoenix and Mr. Mi were still in love. Stepping on the fallen leaves that were like languishing flowers, they walked by. Gentle Phoenix reminded herself to tell him about that parrot when they should pass across the post-office again. (p. 38)

It is a story of two rather decent peopole who cannot find what they desire, but in their willingness to settle for less, have settled for each other. The result is some patched-up harmony and subdued joys. Love in their world has neither flaming passion nor burning desire, it is only the incomplete sympathy and understanding and ultimately the ability to accept each other as they are. If their love fails to overwhelm, it at least lingers, and this lingering love or grace is sufficient to enrich and redeem their lives.

The variation of the same theme appears in another story, "Love in the Fallen City" ( 傾城之戀 ), a long tale of romance amid the turmoil of the Sino-Japanese War. The heroine, Miss Tassel Pai, has been divorced for seven years. Since her divorce she has been living with her own shabby-genteel family, whose money has been largely squandered by her good-for-nothing brothers. These two brothers, having also badly invested her share of the property, now wish her departure from their household. With no marketable skill or education she is a woman with no place to go and no one to turn to. Her only asset is her beauty, but it is hardly as negotiable as cash and, given the fact that she is already twenty-eight, hardly of lasting value. As the story beings, Fan Liu-yuan comes into her life, an overseas Chinese playboy-swingar, who, on account of his great fortune, is the target of mothers and match-makers. He is originally invited as a match for Tassel's younger sister, but he falls for Tassel instead. Scheming behind her back, he maneuvers to have Tassel brought to Hong Kong through an intermediary and starts his courtship there. As a worldly man experienced with women, however, he wants her merely as a mistress, a position he knows Tassel will not readily condescend to. So by public display of intimacy and by residing in the same quarter of the hotel as she does, he tries to ruin her reputation in the hope that Tassel will surrender. But equally cunning and calculating at playing the game of love, Tassel refuses to do so in the hope for a better bargaining position for the future. As their game reaches this stalemate, they are perforce separated. Upon returning to Shanghai Tassel finds the family pressure more unbearable than

ever, now that rumors are rife about her relationship with Liu-yuan, and the passage of time even more mercilessly pressing, "in an autumn she had aged two years." So she has no choice but to surrender to him and, with one telegram from Liu-yuan, she goes to Hong Kong to be his mistress. After a brief reunion, Liu-yuan is due to embark on a journey to England, but on the night of his departure, Japanese forces start their attack on the Hong Kong Harbor, and he is stranded in the city with Tassel. Forced to live on a limited budget and to while away the empty days and nights by themselves, they come to find each other indispensable:

In this world of turmoil and tumult, wealth, properties and the like that used to last forever, all became unreliable. What she could count on was the breath within her throat and this man sleeping beside her. She suddenly crawled to Liu-yuan's side and embraced him through the quilt. He pulled out his hand to hold hers, and they saw each other through and through. It was only one flash of complete understanding, but that flash could enable them to live in harmony for the next eight or ten years. He was but a selfish man, and she a selfish woman. In an age torn by wars and bloodshed, individualists have no place to hide, but there will always be a place for an ordinary married couple. (pp. 248-9)

Hong Kong has fallen and hundreds of lives are crushed, yet Tassel emerges triumphant and is properly married, such is the logic of the human world. Yet her triumph is by no means complete, for Liu-yuan is, after all, Liu-yuan. He still has his ribald jokes, but now they are saved for women other than Tassel; at least he treats her as his own woman.

An egotistic man and a selfish woman, chastened by the trials and tribulations of war, finally settle for each other and a share of domestic happiness. As C.T. Hsia observes, "True affection, no matter how arrived at is infinitely preferred to dreams impossible of fulfillment; it is only childishness to chafe under the biological and social limitation of life."<sup>7</sup>

Miss Chang is only too keenly aware of such limitations. On these two characters she has once commented:

Tassel, who has walked out of her decadent family, has not been converted by the war in Hong Kong into a revolutionary female, while Liu-yuan, changed by the battles in Hong Kong, starts a more prosaic life and is finally married. But marriage has not turned him into a saint, making him jettison his past living modes and habits. Hence the ending for Tassel and Liu-yuan,

though quite wholesome, is nonetheless petty and conventional. Under the circumstances they can do no better.<sup>8</sup>

The transience of human passion precludes the possibility of permanent romantic love. The heart, like the world, is ever changing and in a fashion all the more unfathomable, because it is deviously irrational. Others of Miss Chang's stories, such as "Red Roses and White Roses" (紅玫瑰與白玫瑰), "The Youthful Years" (年輕的時候) and "The Blockade" (封鎖) explore such whims and caprices. In the last story, a lonely spinster college instructor and an accountant bored with his family burdens start a flirtation when they are both stranded on a city tram during a Japanese blockade. The spinster is especially flushed with excitement, for tired of being prim and demure, she has for once stepped beyond the bounds of convention for such a venture. After giving him her telephone number in expectations of future dalliance, she is bitterly disappointed to find out, when the blockade is lifted, that he has hidden away from her view to avoid further conversation with her. "She realized his meaning: whatever took place during the blockade never really happened. The whole city of Shanghai had gone into a trance and had a prostrous dream."

Such whims and caprices are held in check by the common sense in most of her characters, however, for this reason they are not extremists in that they make varying degrees of compromise in their search for love. Two outstanding exceptions are Ch'i-ch'iao of "The Golden Cangue" as mentioned earlier and Mr. Gold of "Indian Summer, A Hsiao's Autumnal Lament" (桂花蒸, 阿小悲秋). Ch'i-ch'iao's frustrated love for her brother-in-law prompts her to wield her power for the destruction of all love and intimacy within her environs, and she finally degenerates into a woman of sheer madness, devoid of normal human impulses. In tracing her psychological degradation, Eileen Chang has etched a haunting and overpowering portrayal of a woman corrupted by the social system and her own insane passion.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Gold may also be considered an extremist in that love for him has been reduced only to its carnal aspect. He is a foreign resident in war-time Shanghai, very possibly a draftdodger from his own country. As he first appears:

The flesh of his face appeared only half-cooked, reddish with some bloody streaks. Lately he had started to build a little moustache, making his face look like a half-hatched egg with its newly formed wings in a special nutrient solution. But despite all that, Mr. Gold may pass for *un bel homme*. He had clever grayish eyes and a graceful bearing. . . . As he came out to answer the phone, he coughed first to clear his throat and then asked, "Hello?" His voice then suddenly became exceedingly weak, as he repeated, "Oh, Hello!" His surprise mingled with delight, his voice was in such ecstasy that the words seemed to say, "Is that you? Could it really be you?" Even in the early morning he could be rapt and enthralled with passionate love. (p. 128)

His charming "hello" is intended for any woman who happens to be on the other end of the telephone. Among his numerous paramours there are Miss Li (who seems to be the concubine of a rich man), the blonde woman and a taxi-dancer. Even his own maid servant, A Hsiao, is considered, but found wanting:

This amah who appeared pretty and attractive during the day was not able to make the grade when disrobed. He felt much pleased, because he had never intended to take advantage of her. It would certainly be impolitic to establish a liaison with a servant, making her forget her own station; particularly under the present circumstance, when good servants were in short supply, whereas the supply of women glutted the market. (p. 148)

Stingy beyond reason, Mr. Gold would grudge his servant even a half bowl of left over rice. When entertaining his female guests he always serves the same frugal meal (fortunately they are mostly for different women), and he would gingerly add a dessert, if the guest comes to his apartment for the first time. Debauchery being his daily routine, he becomes increasingly indiscriminate in his choice of sexual prey, and has caught some disease as a consequence:

She [a naked model on a whisky advertisement] was Mr. Gold's ideal, someone he had not yet encountered. Should he meet her, he would merely wish to take some advantage of her. If the affair should prove too complicated, it would not be worth the trouble. For one thing he was already in his late prime and had to economize both his time and money. Besides, he was no longer particular about such matters; after all, women were all more or less the same. He always advocated alliances with housewives, or else, he would supply the amateur romance to the semi-professional call girls, so long as they did not play Robin Hood and divest him of his money. He firmly believed that "too much gambling leads to

less and too much loving ends in sorrow." Hence, he would watch the wind in the love-casino carefully, picking up a little windfall whenever he could, very easily satisfied. (p. 134)

Incapable of any form of loyalty or fidelity, Mr. Gold indulges himself with neither restraint nor moderation. All his affairs, lacking in excitement even to himself, become merely travesties of love.

Another facet of love is seen in the story of "Ashes of Descending Incense, First Brazier" (沉香屑, 第一爐香). It is a tale of the slow entrapment and decline of a young woman. Wei-lung is a middle school student who refuses to return with her parents to Shanghai and, instead, seeks refuge with her aunt in Hong Kong. Her aunt, a notorious woman in the upper crust of the colony, had married a wealthy old businessman in her youth and eventually inherited much of his fortune upon his death. Now holding salon for the junior British officers, French nuns and rich Chinese businessmen, as well as various hangers-on, she avidly collects eligible young men to compensated for her past. However, she is now over fifty and needs her niece, Wei-lung, to serve as a bait for the young men. Wei-lung, being quite clever, quickly realizes her aunt's scheme and is much disenchanted, but she stays on because she is overwhelmed by the luxury her aunt provides for her and, more importantly, because she has fallen in love with George Chiao, a young Eurasian with great charm and suavity (an ex-lover of her aunt). A gigolo by profession, George is, ironically, very honest with Wei-lung about his affairs, and she has been a first-hand witness to his rendezvous with a maid-servant (to her great anguish), yet nothing can abate her flaring passion for him. When she is sick and thinking of returning home to Shanghai:

Then a new life, a new man . . . . A new man? But because of George she had completely lost her self-confidence. She was no longer able to cope with any man. So long as George did not love her, she would be under his power. She was perfectly aware that George was a very ordinary rake, and was nothing to be afraid of. What she feared was her own irrationally violent passion that he had roused. She was lying in her bed, gazing at the sky beyond the window. The noonday's sun shone brilliantly, but the sky was of a metallic chilly white, cutting the eyes like a blade. In the late autumn, a bird flew towards the mountain peak, a black bird in the white sky. When it reached the summit, it screamed as though shaved by the blade, and tumbled to the other side of the mountain. (p. 333)

She decides against going home and soon is wedded to George in a marriage of convenience sponsored by her aunt. Henceforth, she is either busy scheming for money for George, or serving as a procuress for her aunt. She is aware that her marriage can only last so long as she is able to serve in both functions. Nothing would be left of her once she has lost her youth and beauty. On New Year's Eve, she is shopping in Wanchai:

Beside these lamps, people, and goods there were the sadly limpid sea and sky. . . the boundless desolation, the boundless fears. Her future was just like that. . . she could not bear to think of it, for these thoughts could only give rise to the boundless fears. She had no long-range plans. Only in these tiny knick-knacks could her fearful and agitated heart find its momentary rest. (p. 337)

Shui Ching has compared this story to James' *Portrait of a Lady*, matching Wei-lung with Isabel Archer, her aunt with Mme. Merle, and George with Osmond,<sup>10</sup> a very interesting exercise. We may note in passing that despite the semblance in plot, the two heroines are quite different. Isabel returns to the abode of the devious Osmond out of her sense of duty and honor, whereas Wei-lung is mostly a victim of her own excessive vanity and blind passion. In that regard Isabel is a heroine of far greater tragic grandeur.

We may also note a trace of the character of Chao Er-pao ( 趙二寶 ) from *Flowers of Shanghai* ( 海上花 ), a gentle country maiden, albeit naive and vain, who is seduced and corrupted by her city lover and eventually joins the ranks of courtesans to earn a living.

Through Wei-lung, Eileen Chang evinces the dark, perverse power of love. Wei-lung knows that she will forever be in the clutch of George for the simple reason that he will never love her. It is reminiscent of the protagonist in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* in his quest for Albertine. He is passionately in love with Albertine only when she rejects and spurns him. Once she showers him with her affection, he becomes completely indifferent. For both him and Wei-lung love becomes a sickly and wayward obsession with masochistic streaks.

Love is imperfect in Eileen Chang's world, not only because of the constant need to gratify one's ego, but also because of the perversity and unpredictability of the ego itself. Most characters, like Mr. Mi and Gentle Phoenix, or Liu-yuan and Tassel, gingerly find some understanding and

settle for some domestic harmony. Others, like Mr. Gold and George, for whom love has been reduced to pure lust, satisfy their appetites at every opportunity. Still others, like Wei-lung, make sacrifices for a lonely love that can never be reciprocated.

Life in Eileen Chang's world is likewise full of imperfections because of such inherent human limitations. Life with its rich promise and potential as it should be, and life with its squalid reality as it is, provide a poignant contrast that she constantly explores. Even when she was a teenager she remarked in her first publication, "Life is a resplendent robe, covered with bugs."<sup>11</sup> Her stories, then, mostly delineate the frustrations and obstructions one encounters in one's desire, or examine the compromises one makes in order to survive, or depict the intricacy of human relationship with its myriad patterns. To her life is pathetic because the reality of the world allows one to harbor so little illusion, while most of us must still stubbornly cling to some form of dream for our survival. Thus most of her characters cherish the golden mean, a middle course designed to meet both their reluctance to face reality and the practical necessity of doing so. As C.T. Hsia observes, "If their world is still sad, it is not only because life allows for so few unalloyed joys, but because the very process of adjustment implies cowardice and disillusion."<sup>12</sup>

Precisely because of her perception of the inherent tragedy of human existence, she can demonstrate a catholic tolerance or sympathy that accompanies her stories. Even in the case of Mr. Gold's caricature there is only bemusement rather than scorn. Characters such as Mr. Mi and Gentle Phoenix, despite their petty jealousies and other follies, are still likable in that they are memorably human as ourselves. Miss Chang has quoted from the *Analects*: "When you know the truth of the matter, be compassionate, rejoice not" ( 知其情 , 則哀矜而勿喜 )<sup>13</sup> and has exhorted her readers to be likewise. Her own stories are distinguished by their vast sympathies. Yet Miss Chang also assumes a serene and uncynical detachment in her portraits of her characters. It is as though, for better clarity and equanimity, she had moved to another planet to make observations about this world. So despite her great impersonal sorrow over the suffering she has witnessed, her capacity for detachment enables her to avoid the sentimentality that permeates modern Chinese literature. Like other great artists (or scientists for that matter), she has a passion for truth; and no matter how unpleasant or painful, no matter how ugly or sordid

truth may be, its understanding for Eileen Chang transcends such ordinary value judgements, because truth comprehended has become a thing of beauty in itself.

This is not to imply, however, that Eileen Chang has no moral concerns. With all the intrinsic limitations of the human race, there is nevertheless the possibility of happiness, subdued as it may be, should people strive for it. Mr. Mi and Gentle Phoenix' mutual concession after Mr. Mi's brief absence, the flash of understanding between Liu-yuan and Tassel, the moment of softness that prompts A Hsiao to add her own rationed flour for Mr. Gold's dessert, short as they may be, these moments of understanding and generosity make life better for themselves and others. Eileen Chang's stories in their delineation of the universal suffering in the human scene point out the importance of love and sympathy; hence, though she does not exalt the highest ideals of human conduct, in her praise of the little deeds of kindness and acts of grace that perhaps ultimately save and redeem us, she remains nonetheless profoundly moral.

### III

Eileen Chang is likely to agree with Henry James when he says "Don't state, render." Her stories boast a rich array of images and metaphors to convey the nuance and atmosphere of her settings which may range from aristocratic mansions to humble servant quarters. The exuberance of her imagery and her manipulation of it are not rivalled in the forties. It is not until Pai Hsien-yung (白先勇) emerges on the literary scene in the sixties that we witness such splendid imagery in another writer. Hence, she may rightly be regarded as the precursor in this field. C.T. Hsia, in commenting on the opulence and range of her imagery, notes that "Eileen Chang's world is also rich in nature imagery. Its metropolitan character does not preclude the sun and moon, the wind and rain, and that extensive part of vegetation still easily within the reach of city-dweller's eye."<sup>14</sup>

One might also note that in spite of the urban setting, animal imagery also makes frequent appearances in her stories. In "Lingering Love" we find a dog and a parrot, both of which link the present with the past by reminding Mr. Mi and Gentle Phoenix respectively of their previous marriages. As a matter of fact, Gentle Phoenix, at the end of the story,

decides to tell Mr. Mi about the episode of the parrot now that their little squabble is over. "Waiting" (等), a story ostensibly about some middle-aged women gathered in a clinic waiting for their appointments with the massage doctor, is in reality a penetrating study of their "waiting" for the fulfillment of their dreams that can never come true. The gloom in the clinic, the overcast sky in the wet afternoon, the shabby dresses worn by the women, all help to evoke a mood of forlorn pathos; yet a reader is least likely to forget the cat that is spied on the roof across the clinic. As it moves in a snaky motion, "without a glance to the left, nor to the right, it went away by itself. Oblivious to everything else, life passed by." The cat's haughty nonchalance suggests Fate's callous indifference to human suffering.

Similarly the cicada in "Indian Summer, A Hsiao's Autumn Lament," which sings joyously and loudly at the window while A Hsiao and her family are enjoying their afternoon snack of pancakes, serves not only to create a mood, but also becomes a minor symbol of family happiness. Beside the cicada there are also two houseflies which keep on pestering A Hsiao, a woman particularly fastidious about cleanliness; like everything in her sordid and seamy surrounding, they cannot be swept away, much to her vexation.

Then there is the bird reaching for the mountain summit and tumbling to the other side in pain, which appears earlier in the essay concerning the story about Wei-lung (p. 12). It is not at all difficult to see the parallel between the bird and Wei-lung, a young woman tortured by her passions.

Even mythical dragons are visible. In "Love in the Fallen City," when Tassel and Liu-yuan are whiling away the endless night:

Three parallel gray dragons were flying onward in a straight line, their bodies boundlessly stretching with no tail in sight. "Oh . . . Ah . . . Wu . . ." they bellowed. Near the end even the dragons were gone, only a line of weak breath was left, a bridge made of vacuum leading into darkness, leading into the emptiness of emptiness. Here everything was finished, with only some broken walls left behind. The civilized men devoid of memories were stumbling and staggering, groping and fumbling in the twilight, as though in search of something, when in reality, all were lost.

Tassel sat there clutching her blanket, listening to the sad wind. She knew for certain that near Repulse Bay that wall of gray bricks must still be standing erect. The wind had stopped, like the three gray dragons resting on the top of the wall, their silvery scales shimmering in the moonlight. (p. 248)

Two people stranded in a fallen house in a fallen city, isolated, with almost no contact with the civilized world, may well represent to Eileen Chang the quintessence of human condition, desolation. As she remarks in the second edition of her *Romances*, "One day our civilization, whether sublimation or frivolities, will all become the past. If the word that occurs most frequently in my works is 'desolation,' it must be on account of this undefinable fear in my consciousness."<sup>15</sup> When the known social order has fallen into chaos, it becomes only appropriate for the primordial dragons to manifest themselves.

Eileen Chang's two favorite images are the moon and the mirror. Shui Ching has made detailed study of the use of mirror in her stories. For example in one story entitled, "Happy Matrimony" ( 鴻鸞禧 ) he finds mirror mentioned seven times, spectacles five times, glasses nine times and white porcelain three times, making it a world of reflections.<sup>16</sup>

The moonlight likewise permeates in her stories, gleaming sometimes in compassion, sometimes in irony, sometimes in nonchalance. We find the moon may have three functions in her works. In the story, "The Golden Cangue," the moon is serving the first of the three functions, namely the evocation of a certain mood:

Shanghai thirty years ago on a moonlit night. . . maybe we did not get to see the moon of thirty years ago. To young people the moon of thirty years ago should be reddish-yellow wet stain the size of a copper coin, like a teardrop on a letter paper by To-yün Hsüan, worn and blurred. In old people's memory the moon of thirty years ago was gay, larger, rounder, and whiter than the moon now. But looked back on after thirty years on a rough road, the best of moons is apt to be tinged with sadness.<sup>17</sup>

The moon transports the story into a mood of nostalgia, yet at the same time it may represent eternity in the face of vicissitudes of human fortune. In another part of the same story the moon is not viewed by the narrator, but by Ch'i-ch'iao's daughter-in-law, long abused by her husband and Ch'i-ch'iao in collusion. But the mood created by the moon here is very different:

This must be a mad world: her husband was not like a husband, and her mother-in-law was not like a mother-in-law. Either they were mad, or else it must she who was mad. The moon tonight looked better than that in any other night, one lofty round of full moon in the myriad cloudless miles,

like a white sun in a black-lacquered sky. Blue shadows scattered everywhere, it was on the top of the net, and her feet were also in the blue shadow of dead silence. . . . Alarmed, she once more raised the curtain. Beyond the window was still that eerie bright moon which could make one's hair stand; a brilliant sun, small and white in the pitch-dark sky. . . . She slumped back to her bed. Her feet in the moonlight showed not the least human color, only blue, green, purple, the colors of a cold corpse. She wanted to die, she wanted to die. She was afraid of this moonlight. (p. 187)

The moonlight here is reminiscent of that in Wilde's play, *Salomé*, eerie, spooky and grotesque, casting the shadows of death. Not by coincidence the same moon is stalking Professor Empton, on the night he commits his suicide. Professor Empton, the hero of "Ashes of Descending Incense, the Second Brazier," marries the beautiful Susy, an English girl so innocent that she has never learned "the facts of life." On their wedding night Susy mistakes his normal advances as the beastly acts of a pervert, and reports them to the president of the university. The incident, manipulated by Empton's enemies, quickly turns into a full-scale scandal in the colonial society of Hong Kong, a tightly enclosed set with petty moral outlooks. Professor Empton, a most proper and conventional man, overnight finds himself *persona non grata* in his own circles and knows that he will be ostracized in the colonial societies elsewhere in China. Since he has no home base left in England, he is practically ruined for life. After the final blow has struck that evening, he is walking home:

This was the same road on which his wife Susy, during the wedding night, had fled and he had pursued and screamed from behind. Yet it seemed as though that had been many hundred years ago. This was another moonlit night. On the seas beyond the hills floated the black islands with their hills. Beyond these hills there was more seascape, and beyond the sea again the hills. Over the sea, over the hills, over the tree leaves, everywhere there was the pure radiance of the weeping and sobbing flutes. But Roger felt the darkness following him wherever he went. (p. 381)

The second major use of the moon is in advancement of the plot. In "Love in the Fallen City," before Tassel and Liu-yuan have reached their stalemate and separation, Liu-yuan calls her on the telephone from the next room. He begins his discussion with a declaration of love and ends with some insulting remarks. After Tassel has hung up in anger he calls once more:

She could hear Liu-yuan's voice speaking calmly, "Tassel, can you see the moon from your window?" For some unknown reason Tassel suddenly cried, to her teary eyes the moon appeared large, misty and silvery, with its green beams. (p. 235)

On her return to Hong Kong to be his mistress, there is another view of the moon from the same vantage point. Tassel finds him in her room by surprise:

Liu-yuan said, "I have always wanted to see the moon from your window, the view here is clearer than that in the other room." The telephone call that night was indeed from him. It was not a dream, he loved her! This treacherous man, he loved her yet would treat her no better than this! She could not help feeling a chill in her heart and turned to walk towards her dressing table. The delicate moon in late November was merely a sickle of whiteness, like the frost on the glass windows. Still the sea was tinged with the moonlight, and reflected by the window the pale light gleamed on the mirror. (p. 292)

The same moon connects the two events intricately to provide a contrast between Tassel's position before and after her surrender. Furthermore, the moon of summer night has now turned to the chilly moon of late autumn to signify the passage of time. Yet the moon also furnishes a linkage in depicting the solitude of Tassel, a woman utterly alone and helpless; in her defeat and humiliation she has no one but the indifferent moon to gaze upon. We may of course note that the moon here is also functioning in the first capacity, namely the evocation of a certain mood. The cool autumn moonlight, frost-like, matches the chill in Tassel's heart.

In its third major use the moon is strewn throughout the story as an important motif. In "Ashes of Descending Incense, first Brazier," the moon appears three times in the crucial stages of the story. The first one occurs after Wei-lung's visit to her aunt's house on the hill and her decision to move in there:

At the end of the hill road where the misty trees scattered beguilingly here and there, there was a touch of the shadow of the moon, in watery blue. Wei-lung was walking towards the east, and the more she walked, the more white and bright the moon became. It seemed like a heavy-chested white phoenix, roosting at the corner of the road, nesting on the branches of the

trees. As she walked she felt more and more certain that the moon must be in the deeps of the trees ahead. But when she reached there the moon disappeared. (p. 292)

The moon is mysterious and like the mythical bird phoenix, appears and disappears at will. Wei-lung herself felt like the scholar in *The Strange Tales of a Studio* (聊齋誌異), who found the mansion he had just visited had turned into a grave mound upon his backward glance. If Wei-lung could have discerned the true nature of the house (her future brothel), she could have avoided her descent and entrapment in that world of decadence. But prodded onward by her own vanity, she settles down there and meets George. The moon is again visible on their first encounter in the garden party, as she succumbs to his charm:

By then the day was getting dark and the moon had just risen. It was of a yellow hue, like the little patch on the jade-colored brocade, which was singed by a little incense when it was embroidered. (p. 309)

It is a more sensuous moon, with the singe suggesting the first blossoming of Wei-lung's passion. As the story develops, Wei-lung finds herself hopelessly in love with George; the moon is again present when she surrenders to him:

Yet the weather, like the girls, seemed to heed George's wishes; on that night the moon indeed appeared. George came with the moonlight and left under the moonlight too. The moon was still at the center of the sky, so he moved from Wei-lung's terrace, aided by the tree branches, crawled to the slope of the hill across. The humidity of the bushes had not yet subsided and it was hot as well as humid. The insects were chirping, the frogs were croaking and the whole valley was like a huge pot. The moon was just like the dark-blue fire burning under the pot. The water in the pot was boiling with its pit-pat sound. (p. 321)

Once again the moon is a reflection of Wei-lung's mood. This time it becomes like the fire in the tropical jungle, burning with Wei-lung's desire. The different facets of the moon work together as one continuous motif to provide a rhythm and some texture to the story. Like the omnipresent snow in "The Dead," or the chime of Big Ben in *Mrs. Dalloway*, or the haunting musical phrase of Vinteuil in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, it intricately binds the story together into a homogeneous entity.

On account of her training in classical poetry, and moreover, because of the perspicacity of her observations, Eileen Chang's language evinces rich and variegated metaphors, some of them are almost far-fetched. Many of them may be likened to conceits in poetry and are highly original, rendering her imaginative prose uniquely her own. We shall cite some examples for illustration. The paramour of Mr. Gold, a taxi-dancer of easy virtue, is compared to a translucent perfume bottle wrapped in green paper, when she is lying in his bed. A woman living in confinement and languishing for love is likened to an embroidered bird mildewing on a door-screen. The bridesmaids view the bride as the final brilliant "The End" on a movie screen and they see themselves as the exciting previews of the coming attraction. When Tassel is alone in a state of uncertainty after the departure of Liu-yuan, an interesting passage follows:

Tassel also thought of Liu-yuan and wondered if his ship had left the port or had been sunk. But when she thought of him she only felt bewildered as though separated from him by another world. This stage of her life had not the least connection with her past, like the song on the radio which, half-sung, was interrupted by the static from the inclement weather, exploding into pitters-patters. When the explosion was over, the song would still be sung; but one feared that the song might have been finished by then and nothing would be left to be heard. (p. 244)

An interrupted song becomes the metaphor for the broken life of a stranded woman; the method is uniquely Miss Chang's own.

Having examined her use of the imagery and metaphor, we finally turn to her use of symbols. According to Edmund Wilson the most prominent feature of a symbolist writer is his complete withdrawal from the external world and his absorption with the inner intellectual process.<sup>18</sup> Despite the psychological depth in Miss Chang's stories, they are not stories detached from everyday life, solely concerned with the broodings and dreams of their heroes. In that regard, Eileen Chang is not a symbolist writer, indeed she is much indebted to the classical novels in Chinese in her setting and plots (*Dream of Red Chamber* is especially important in this respect). Nevertheless, like the symbolists, she feels the inadequacy of conventional language and straight narrative to express the various sensations and feelings peculiar to each of her characters, and thus she resorts to the invention of her own symbols to suggest or intimate the nuance of the story. The conveyance of an idea through symbols often

surpasses that expressed directly by regular language, not only because it can be more poetic, but also because there are some ideas which defy simple prose.

We shall select "Lingering Love" as a sample story to examine the symbols and their effectiveness. The story opens with the following passage:

Even though it was only November they had already made a fire in their house. In a little brazier the red charcoals were coated with snow-white ashes. The charcoals were trees that had died. Now through the dark red fire in their inside they were revived. Yet though alive, they were on the verge of turning into ashes. Their first life was light green, their second one dark red. (p. 13)

The two lives of the charcoals hint at the two stages of life for both Mr. Mi and Gentle Phoenix. Both of them were young when they first married, and their relationship with their respective spouses, despite of being more passionate, was a failure. That would correspond to the green stage of their life. Their second marriage with each other is less violent and more cozy, matching with the "dark red" period of their life. Mr. Mi is already past his prime, so that this second stage of his life is also soon turning into ashes.

The telephone rings twice in the story:

Gentle Phoenix was alone in the room and all was quiet. The neighbor's telephone was ringing at a distance, but in the silence of the room, it sounded as though it were next to her ears. "Ding-ling-ling. . . Ding-ling-ling . . .," on and on, on and on. But no one ever went to answer it. The telephone rang as though it had thousands words to say, anxious, pleading, intensely dramatic. For no reason Gentle Phoenix was shaken . . . The phone was still ringing, and slowly desolation descended; even this house seemed to have turned into an empty one. (pp 30-31)

After Mr. Mi's return to take her home, the telephone rings again:

Suddenly she heard the telephone in the next house ringing again, "Ding-ling-ling, ding-ling-ling." She listened with much concern. Quite unexpectedly someone came to answer it. . . . She felt an instant relief. The coarse voice of the old woman servant said impatiently, "Hello?" and cut off the endless unutterable pleadings from the other end. A loud bawl followed of which she could not hear clearly. (p. 37)

The telephone surely stands for the desolation of human condition, with its ceaseless supplications either unanswered or rudely rejected, for the world has really neither certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain. Gentle Phoenix, feeling uneasy and insecure because of the squabble she is having with her husband, quite naturally sympathises with the telephone caller; perhaps she even identifies with it. This explains her agitation with the first ringing and her concern with the second ringing, by then she has reconciled with Mr. Mi.

The next symbol, the rainbow, follows shortly:

Beyond Mr. Mi there appeared in the light blue sky, a faded rainbow, short and straight, a band of red, yellow, violet and orange. The sun was shining on the veranda, and the sunlight on the clay railing was of the color of heavy gold. In another instant there came another ray, equally slow. With his head raised, Mr. Mi was gazing at the rainbow. He thought of his dying wife and the bulk of his life that would die with her. The sorrow and anguish in the life they had shared together would all count no more, count no more! Mr. Mi was watching the rainbow, and his love for this world was more cherishment than love. (p. 37)

The rainbow is easily the symbol for the transience of human life. It has already faded, just as the bulk of Mr. Mi's life has died with the imminent passing of his first wife. All their joys and sorrows are like the sundry colors in that rainbow.

The last symbol comes at the end of the story:

Walking out of the lane they hardly saw anyone on the street, as though it were an early morning. In this area the houses were all painted in a light yellow, but because of the wet weather the color had turned black. The little wutung trees along the sidewalks were full of yellow leaves, blooming like spring flowers in splendor. Each little yellow tree outlined against the grayish black walls, showed a special loveliness. The leaves at the tip of the twigs started to dance and wave, then flew forth in the path of an arch, rushing ahead of the pedestrians and settling down far, far away. In this world of ours not a single emotion is without its hundreds of patches and scars. Yet along their homeward way Gentle Phoenix and Mr. Mi were still in love. Stepping on the fallen leaf that were like the languishing flowers, they walked by. Gentle Phoenix reminded herself to tell him about that parrot when they should pass across the post-office again. (p. 38)

If, in classical poetry, blossoming spring flowers symbolize the passionate

love of youth, then what can be a more fitting symbol than the glittering leaves for the mellow love of November? Moreover, the fading leaves of autumn indeed have smudges and scars, like all the emotions of our world. The cries of the telephone as desolation in the human scene, effectively as it is, seem nevertheless contrived. Telephone next door is, after all, not an intrinsic part of the setting, but the street scenery with the glittering leaves is very much an integral part of the story. With a symbol and the setting blending so seamlessly, and harmonized with such felicity, the words have been elevated into a work of art.

#### IV

In discussing the narrative techniques of Eileen Chang, we shall follow the definitions outlined by Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate in their *House of Fiction*, in which they have listed the four major methods of narration.<sup>18</sup>

- I, The first-person narrator.
- II, The omniscient narrator.
- III, The concealed narrator.
- III, The central intelligence.

The first and second methods are self-explanatory. The last one is commonly identified with Henry James, since he pioneered this technique. The third one borders between the second and the fourth. It differs from the second in that it plunges into the consciousness of the characters, whereas the second one stops short at the exterior of the characters. Yet the third one also differs from the fourth one in that it possesses several centers of intelligence instead of only one. The narrative method employed by Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* is a good example of this method.

Each of these methods has its strengths and weaknesses. The success of a story depends on the propitious choice to give the best expression to its contents. In surveying the fifteen stories in the collection (we exclude "Days and Nights of China" [ 中國的日夜 ] for the simple reason that it is not a story), we find that Miss Chang dispenses with the first-person narrator all together; this is also true of her novels. In the absence of a direct statement from herself, we can only speculate that her reason stems from her desire to keep the reader in the proper perspective, or to maintain a suitable distance towards her subjects. It is supported by the fact that

authorial comment is nearly always present, though it is kept to a minimum in certain stories. The use of a first-person narrator would, of course, preclude such a possibility.

Five stories belong to Group II, and they are "Happy Matrimony," "Waiting," "Glazed Tiles" (琉璃瓦), "The Withered Flowers" (花凋) and "Blockade." These stories are shorter than the others and they lack a central character. The primary purpose of these stories seems to be the delineation of a nuance or milieu, rather than a central protagonist. Owing to the panoramic nature of the story, the authoress tends to be more aloof and less involved with her characters. As the authorial distance increases, so does the ironic element. As a result, the characters in this group appear to be the least sympathetic.

The mode of this group is lighter and more comic than the others; sometimes the stories seem like vignettes of life sketched on a canvas with broad, impressionistic strokes. In "Glazed Tiles," "Happy Matrimony" and "Blockade" Miss Chang is at her sardonic best in her provoking study of the social and sexual mores and manners in a society undergoing rapid changes. Still, the persistent presence of the ego leaves its stamp in all the stories. As C.T. Hsia points out, they are "primarily essays in vanity. . . in the unpredictable manifestation of pride and malice in the most unlikely places."<sup>19</sup> They might well be assigned to the ironic mode in Northrop Frye's definition of the modes, in contradistinction to the stories in the next two groups, which would belong to the low mimetic mode.<sup>20</sup>

Three stories employ the concealed narrator, and so they are in Group III. They are "Lingering Love," "Indian Summer, A Hsiao's Autumnal Lament" and "The Golden Cangue." In these stories the center of intelligence shifts back and forth among the major characters. Eileen Chang has ample reasons to adopt this approach. In the first story, a chronicle of a day in the mundane, married life of Gentle Phoenix and Mr. Mi, there is not sufficient dramatic interest to sustain the story, if told solely from the wife's point of view, nor for that matter, from the husband's. Only by the careful weaving of the two can the patterns of their marriage be revealed. In "Indian Summer, A Hsiao's Autumnal Lament," the moral worth of the maid can be elevated only in contrast with that of her fay and feckless master, Mr. Gold. This task would be more difficult without delving into Mr. Gold's consciousness (see the discussion on Mr. Gold on pp. 9-11). Besides, A Hsiao, good woman that she is, is still a

simple country woman of limited intelligence, quite incapable of filling the role of central reflector. In "The Golden Cangue," the best known of the entire collection, a multiplicity of centers are resorted to in portraying the slow drive of its heroine towards insanity. The normally logical candidate for the central intelligence, the heroine herself, in this case is disqualified, because no madman can lucidly narrate his own madness. If the story had been transformed into one with an unreliable narrator (with the heroine as the narrator), as is quite the vogue in modern Western literature, it would have been psychologically fascinating, but it surely would have lost the terror and revulsion created by the use of diverse centers of reflectors.

In the last group, Group IV, the one with central intelligence, there are seven stories: "Red Roses and White Roses," "Love in the Fallen City," "Jasmine Tea" (茉莉香片), "The Heart Sutra" (心經), "The Youthful Years," "Ashes of Descending Incense, First Brazier," and "Ashes of Descending Incense, Second Brazier." The advantage of this method was long ago discussed by Percy Lubbock with his characteristic persuasiveness: "The difference (between the omniscient narrator and the central intelligence) is that instead of receiving his (the hero's) report we now see him in the act of judging and reflecting; his consciousness, no longer a matter of heresy, a matter for which we must take his word, is now before us in its original agitation. Here is a spectacle for the reader with no obtrusive interpreter, no transmitter of light, no conductor of meaning. This man's interior life is cast into the world of independent rounded objects; it is given room to show itself, it appears, it *acts*."<sup>22</sup>

Whenever she adopts this method, Eileen Chang derives much dividend from it. With the reader thus confined to the consciousness of the central intelligence, she manages to create suspense and uncertainty which wait to be resolved, heightening the tension along the way. For example, we follow Tassel in every step of husband-hunting scheme; along with the deft tricks of the devious *bon-vivant*, Liu-yuan, and the mysterious arrival of a fake Indian princess as Tassel's rival, the outcome is left in doubt. The reader is thus kept in the dark and waiting always for the next skirmish of her long battle. With this self-imposed limitation of the intelligence, the reader can also be surprised. In "Heart Sutra" the young heroine who has secretly harbored great affinity for her own father, has successfully alienated him from her own mother over the years. Now she does her best to obstruct him from any possible romantic entanglement so

as to ensure his affection to her. Secure in her knowledge of complete possession of him, it comes as thunder from blue that he is having an affair with her close friend. This climax of the story would be destroyed if the story was told in a different way.

Another effect of the central intelligence method which she takes advantage of, is the dramatization of the character's interior. Lubbock in his excellent study of James' *The Ambassadors* and *The Wings of the Dove*, has demonstrated its use in full detail.<sup>23</sup> Though Eileen Chang's stories cannot match the novels of the master in their scope and complexity, it is nonetheless interesting to study her employment of the same technique. In "Youthful Years," a foolhardy young man falls in love with a Russian secretary. Despite his constant efforts to banish reality which intrudes unpleasantly into his courtship, he can't help realizing, albeit slowly, the infeasibility of their alliance. Eventually he learns that she is marrying a good-for-nothing Russian policeman, merely for the sake of getting married. This story resembles Turgenev's novella *First Love*, not only in the theme of the disillusionment of first love (both with more experienced women), but also in the reliance on the portrayal of the hero's emotional states. Their thoughts' convoluted paths are traced with care, and their movements back and forth, instead of physical action, constitute the real drama of the story.

The story of Wei-lung, in a much longer tale, in fact relies even more on the dramatization of the interior. Here it has numerous gradations of feelings, since Wei-lung, in her uncertain reaction towards George, has undergone many a shift and turn. So a story such as this, which would amount to little if dramatized on stage, is felicitously transformed into a rich drama by opening Wei-lung's consciousness to the reader's view and enacting the drama from inside.

The method of central intelligence also lends itself to a feeling of immediacy, and with immediacy come the vividness of the characters and a strong involvement on the part of the reader. Let us take a passage from "Ashes of Descending Incense, First Brazier" for the illustration of the first effect. The scene takes place in a morning picnic, after Wei-lung's first hint of her love to George, while she is waiting for some favorable answer from him:

. . . George whispered, "Wei-lung, I can't promise you marriage, I can't promise you love, I can only promise you happiness." This was so far from what Wei-lung had expected that she felt as though she stumbled backwards by several yards, and so was somewhat dazed. Placing her hands on her forehead, she turned and smiled slightly, "What a miser!" George said, "I give you happiness, what on earth could be more precious than that?" Wei-lung replied, "You give me happiness. Indeed! More than anyone else, you torment me!" George said, "Do I torment you? Do I torment you?" He pressed his arms tightly around her, heavily kissing her lips. At that moment the sun suddenly came out, splashing its rays burningly on their faces. George shifted his position and put on his dark glasses, which he had taken out of the pockets of his trousers. He smiled to her and said, "Look, the sky is clear now, there will be a moon tonight." Wei-lung held tightly on to the collar of his coat, and raising her eyes, beseechingly gazed into his face. Desperately she searched for his eyes through his dark glasses. But she could only find her own reflection in the glasses, shrunk and deathly pale. For a long while she stared at him in a stupor, then suddenly she bent her head. George stretched his arms to hold her shoulders, and she pressed her forehead against his chest. He felt her tremble uncontrollably, even her teeth were chattering. So he asked softly, "Wei-lung, what are you afraid of? What are you afraid of?" Wei-lung stammered, "I . . . I am afraid of myself. Maybe I have gone mad!" (pp. 320-21)

The authoress has prepared for this scene by informing us prior to it that Wei-lung, in despair over her aunt's repeated attempts to exploit her, has sought a way out of her quandary and has settled on the marriage with George as the best exit. Now we watch her as she gives a hint of love, is dazed at his callous answer, recoils from him, recovers, then searches desperately once more for a sign of love. Unable to find it, she becomes hysterical. In a short scene many shades of emotions are encompassed. Its success is surely a testimonial to Miss Chang's craftsmanship.

By constantly locking the reader in the hero's point of view, this technique often creates empathy, or even identification on the reader's part, especially when the protagonist is in an isolated position. Tassel, in "Love in the Fallen City," is a case in point. Shortly after the story begins, we are informed that her relatives desire her departure from their house, and that she has no friend to turn for assistance. That knowledge guarantees our sympathy for her, just as, in Katherine Anne Porter's "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Malinda, by virtue of her isolation and the ridicule of her fellow workers, engenders a tender feeling from the reader, even though he may not share her pacifist views. But there is also a drawback in this

method, in that it might inadvertently produce a sentimentality not desired by the author. To circumvent this trap, so that the irony of the story can be maintained and the readers can be kept from identifying too closely with the heroine, Eileen Chang intrudes into the story with her authorial comment, "He is but a selfish man, and she a selfish woman. In an age torn by wars and bloodshed, individualists have no place to hide, but there will always be a place for an ordinary married couple" (p. 249).

Furthermore, the prologue reads: "In the night of the myriad lights, the *hu-chin* rasped with its endless desolate tales, while its bow was drawn to and fro." An identical passage appears at the end as the epilogue. The story is thus enclosed, as it were, by an artificially designed framework which serves as a reminder of its fictitious nature. This device is taken up in four of the seven stories in Group IV. Not by coincidence, the central intelligences in these stories are more isolated figures and invite more sympathy than characters elsewhere. By resorting to this device, Eileen Chang can ensure the proper perspective for the reader.

Sometimes by occasionally closing the consciousness of the central intelligence and reporting objectively instead, she offers two views of the same story and provides a bifocal picture of it, in the process bringing the irony into the maximum relief. It is especially needed, since the central intelligences in her stories, unlike some in Henry James' works, are eminently lacking in intelligence. Wei-lung may be clever, Tassel may be shrewd, but neither possesses the intellectual capacity for objective self-analysis. So Eileen Chang is perforce adding one more dimension to her story by her own presence, to round things off, so to speak.

Having discussed the three methods Eileen Chang employs for her narration, we may finally turn to the distinction between scenes and pictures in her stories. The scene clearly holds the place of honor in her stories, as is true with many a novelist, since the scenes are the readiest means to create an interest in the reader and at the same time to develop the characters. They also serve as the climax points of the story. The pictures (or summaries) are kept at a minimum in her stories. By and large the pictures take up no more than ten percent of the story, as supplementary and preparations for the scenes. We shall take "Ashes of Descending Incense, First Brazier" as an example. The ten-month span is covered by about fifteen scenes with varying length. The two longest ones are reserved for the first interview between Wei-lung and her aunt, and the first

encounter between Wei-lung and George, each slightly longer than one fifth of the story. Between the scenes there may be a brief summary, but sometimes one scene follows right after the other. Each scene is well-prepared, so that the action is ripe and tension waits to be resolved. As the scene advances we see the resolution of one aspect of the drama, while another one appears to be mounting on the horizon. With a quick and sweeping summary following, we are then ready to move into the next scene, and the drama keeps on unfolding in this manner.

Besides rendering the story more dramatic, the scenic method also enables the characters to reveal themselves more readily than the picture method. Let us present the last scene in the selected story and see how it delineates the relationship between Wei-lung and George. It takes place during their visit to the Wanchai Market, shortly after their wedding:

George said suddenly, "Really, Wei-lung, I always love to lie, but I have never lied to you once. That fact even puzzles myself." Wei-lung said with a smile, "Still thinking about that!" George pressed her, "I have never lied to you, have I?" Sighing, Wei-lung replied, "No, never, never. Sometimes you know perfectly well how happy you can make me with just a little lie; but no, you wouldn't bother." George said, "Why do you need me to lie to you, when you are so good at lying to yourself. One of those days you might have to admit to yourself what a despicable wretch I am, then you'll regret all the sacrifice you've made for me. On the spur of that angry moment you might just want to kill me. Of that I'm really scared." Wei-lung said, "I love you, and what has that to do with you? I may blame it on everything and everyone, but I'll never blame you for it." George said, "Still, our present arrangement of duty and privilege is far from fair." Wei-lung arched her eyebrows and smiled a little, "Fair? Is there such a thing as fairness between two human beings? But I do want to ask you, how is it that you've discovered your conscience all of a sudden?" George smiled, "Because I noticed how happy you are, celebrating the New Year like a child." Wei-lung said, "Anytime I am happy, you would have to say something to upset me, wouldn't you?" (pp. 337-338)

As they continue their stroll in the market, they notice many young streetwalkers, gathered in crowds and flirting with their sailor clients. A bunch of drunken sailors start to chase Wei-lung with firecrackers, and the couple run back to their car to drive away from Wanchai:

George laughed and said, "Those damn drunks, what did they take you for?" Wei-lung said, "But really, what's the difference between those girls and myself?" George, with one hand on the wheel, covered her mouth

with the other, "If you don't stop talking nonsense. . . ." Smiling, Wei-lung asked for his pardon and said, "All right, all right, I admit my mistake. Of course there is a difference. They are forced into it, and I am voluntary!" When the car had passed Wanchai and the cracking explosions of the firecrackers had gradually died down, the red and green traffic lights flashed briefly on the front car window and quickly disappeared one after another. As the car rode into the dark avenues, George did not turn to look at her. Even if he had turned, he could not have seen her face, but he knew for certain that she must be crying. (pp. 338-39)

The final scene lays bare the ruin of Wei-lung's marriage and the void of her future, since it exposes George's parasitic nature completely. We also see Wei-lung's self-realization of her pathetic condition from the poignant confession that she is no better than the streetwalkers. It is made all the more touching, because it comes from herself through the authoress' dramatization.

## V

In the conclusion to his survey, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, C.T. Hsia states succinctly, "A literature is to be judged not by its intention but by its performance: its intelligence and wisdom, its sensibility and style. And by that test the majority of modern Chinese writers, like *engagé* writers everywhere, are seen to suffer from a moral obtuseness, a lack of style and ambition, a conformity of vision and opinion, which are the obvious debilities of too much cultural uniformity and literary cliquism."<sup>24</sup> Most modern Chinese writers, in their obsession with the ideal, paid scanty attention to social manners and failed to ground their work with first-hand observation of the human scene. These deficiencies, together with their indifference to the intricacy of psychology, have reduced most of their characters to two-dimensional cardboard figures. It seems as though their reluctance to be enchanted with the mundane and familiar is only exceeded by their proclivity for creating the sensational and implausible; consequently their estranged faces have missed many a splendid thing. True, the state of China was then chaotic, the time for maturity of modern literature was short, and the pressure to conform was overwhelming; all these factors worked against the writers in their search for excellence. Yet since most of the novelists betrayed a disturbing lack of discerning

intelligence and discriminating taste, one doubts that more masterpieces would have been produced, had these adversities been absent.

It is precisely in these areas that Eileen Chang, along with two or three best writers of the period, excelled. In her penetrating study of the social condition and her delicate probing of the psyche, she has consistently demonstrated a keener intelligence and finer sensibility. In this essay we have attempted to evince her literary merit by examining her exploration of the language and her narrative techniques. We have found that her visual imagery boasts both richness and originality, while the wide range of symbols captures the different ambiance of her setting. We have also found that she is a disciplined writer with much aesthetic concern for the form and style of her work, so that they will be proper vehicles for her stories.

Yet the fact that the world created by Eileen Chang is uniquely her own is surely not explicable just in terms of the superiority of her linguistic and narrative skills; it is also the acuteness of her vision of our world, her tragic insight into the frustration and compromise that beset one's life, and the desolation that ultimately befalls all human destiny. On that point Eileen Chang says even better herself, "Our lives, though different from the ignoble, sordid, embarrassing and humiliating submissions encountered by my characters, remain nonetheless desolate submissions."<sup>25</sup> Therefore Eileen Chang's triumph lies in her capacity for relentless, unflinching, yet uncynical probing into the lives and loves of the human world; for she no longer looks through the glass darkly, but confronts, face to face, the heartbreaking truth about ourselves.

## Notes

1. See bibliography under Hsun Yü in section C.
2. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, p. 389.
3. See the article by Stephen Soong.
4. T'ang Wen-piao's (唐文標) book, *Eileen Chang's Chop-suey* (張愛玲雜碎), is better than most in that school. At least he furnishes a detailed listing of the magazines and journals where Miss Chang's stories originally appeared, for which all students of Eileen Chang should be thankful. Yet his book sheds far more light on his own taste in literature than on the understanding of Eileen Chang's works, and his proclivity for the selection of the worst of her stories (some of

which she abandoned before completion) as representatives of her works is a sad reflection on his judgement (or lack thereof). His primary objection to Eileen Chang's works seems to be based on the fact that her works make little direct and positive contribution to society, a fact one can readily agree with. Yet if we adopt his utilitarian approach to literature, James Joyce, Henry James, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, not to count the numerous writers East and West, would all fail to make the grade. It is difficult to see how this simple-minded "theory" could be of service in the understanding of literature, let alone in benefiting society at large.

5. Eileen Chang, *Gossips*, p. 22.
6. *Ibid*, p. 21.
7. Hsia, p. 414.
8. Eileen Chang, *Gossips*, p. 20.
9. Shui Ching, *The Art of Eileen Chang's Novels*, p. 61 ff.
10. Since C.T. Hsia has discussed that story in consummate detail, I shall concentrate my effort on Mr. Gold only.
11. Eileen Chang, *Chang's Outlook*, p. 178.
12. Hsia, p. 413.
13. *Analects*, 40/19/19. It appears in *Collected Stories of Eileen Chang*, p. 7.
14. Hsia, p. 396.
15. *Collected Stories of Eileen Chang*, p. 9.
16. Shui Ching, p. 129 ff.
17. Translated by E. Chang in *Twentieth Century Chinese Stories*, ed. by C.T. Hsia.
18. Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, p. 265.
19. Gordon and Tate, *House of Fiction*, pp. 437-45.
20. Hsia, p. 415.
21. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 34 ff.
22. Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, p. 143.
23. *Ibid*, p. 156 ff.
24. Hsia, p. 506.
25. *Collected Stories of Eileen Chang*, Hong Kong edition, 1954, p. 6. It did not appear in the Taiwan reprint.

## Bibliography

- A. Eileen Chang's Works in Chinese  
 張愛玲短篇小說集 (The Collected Stories of Eileen Chang). Taipei: 皇冠出版社, 1969.  
 半生緣 (Love of a Half-life Time)  
 秋歌 (The Rice-sprout Song)  
 怨女 (The Bitter Woman)  
 沉香 (Gossips)  
 All the above titles are reprints by 皇冠出版社 in 1969.  
 赤地之戀 (Love in Redland). Hong Kong: 天風出版社, 1954.  
 張看 (Chang's Outlook). Taipei: 皇冠出版社, 1976.

B. Titles of Stories in *The Collected Stories of Eileen Chang*

- 留情 (Lingering Love)  
鴻鸞禧 (Happiness of Matrimony)  
紅玫瑰與白玫瑰 (Red Roses and White Roses)  
等 (Waiting)  
桂花蒸阿小悲秋 (Indian Summer, A Hsiao's Autumnal Lament)  
金鎖記 (The Golden Cangue)  
傾城之戀 (Love in the Fallen City)  
茉莉香片 (Jasmine Tea)  
沉香屑第一爐香 (Ashes of Descending Incense, First Brazier)  
沉香屑第二爐香 (Ashes of Descending Incense, Second Brazier).  
琉璃瓦 (The Glazed Tiles)  
心經 (The Heart Sutra)  
年輕的時候 (The Youthful Years)  
花凋 (A Withered Flower)  
封鎖 (Blockade)  
中國的日夜 (Days and Nights of China)

C. Eileen Chang's Works in English or Translations in English

- "Stale Mates." *The Reporter*, 15, No. 4, Sep., 1956.  
*Naked Earth*. Hong Kong: Union Press, 1964.  
*Rice-sprout Song*. Hong Kong: Dragonfly Press, 1963.  
*The Rouge of the North*. London: Cassell Co., 1967.  
"The Golden Cangue," *Twentieth Century Chinese Stories*, ed., C.T. Hsia. New York: Columbia University Press, 1972, pp. 138-91.

D. Critiques

- Hsia, C.T. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.  
Hsun Yü ( 迅雨 ) 論張愛玲的小說 (On the Stories of Eileen Chang). 萬象 (*Variety Magazine*) (May, 1944), 48-61.  
Hu Lan-cheng ( 胡蘭成 ). 今生今世 (This Life in This World). Nagoya: ジャーナール社, 1958.  
Shui Ching ( 水晶 ). 張愛玲的小說藝術 (The Art of Eileen Chang's Fiction). Taipei: 大地出版社, 1975.  
Soong, Stephen ( 宋淇, under the penname of Lin I-liang [ 林以亮 ] ). 私語張愛玲 (Whispered Words about Eileen Chang). *Ming P'ao Monthly* (March, 1976), 19-23.

E. Others

- Bates, H.E. *The Modern Short Story*. Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1971.  
Brooks, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Fiction*. New York: Crofts & Co., 1943.  
Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.  
Edel, Leon. *The Modern Psychological Novel*. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1972.  
Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1973.

- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- Gordon, Caroline and Allen Tate. *The House of Fiction*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960.
- Hanan, Patrick. "The Technique in Lu Hsün's Fiction," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 34 (1974), 53-96.
- Hightower, James. *Topics of Chinese Literature: Outlines and Bibliographies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- James, Henry. *The Art of the Novel*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950.
- Lubbock, Percy. *The Craft of Fiction*. New York: The Viking Press, 1973.
- Scholes, Robert and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Tindall, William. *The Literary Symbol*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1955.
- Wilson, Edmund. *Axel's Castle*. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1969.