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The Intrusion Story and Lessons From the Fantastic: A Cross-Cultural Study

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

by

Fontaine Lien

December 2014

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Wang Shaohua, who never asked when I would receive my Ph.D., and only asked if I was well fed. You are missed.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Intrusion Story and Lessons From the Fantastic: A Cross-Cultural Study

by

Fontaine Lien

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Comparative Literature
University of California, Riverside, December 2014
Dr. Lisa Raphals, Chairperson

Currently, various types of fantasy literature are analyzed primarily as genres within the confines of national literatures. This thesis proposes a cross-cultural approach to fantasy, instead of one in which each "national" genre is analyzed in isolation, and often only with the critical tools and theoretical background of its respective tradition. It argues that there are undeniable parallels between different versions of the short fantasy tale as it has appeared in various traditions, and that studying them together can prove fruitful to our understanding of how fantasy works.

Taking up important collections of fantastic tales by Pu Songling (*Liaozhai zhiyi*), Barbey d'Aurevilly (*Les Diaboliques*) and Rod Serling (*The Twilight Zone*), as well as a number of similar contemporary works, I discuss the ways all of these works function through a similar set of mechanisms, despite their differences in language, provenance, and cultural significance. Each of these authors/creators made liberal use of what I call the "intrusion story," in which what is deemed strange or fantastic in each instance is the overwhelming focus. In the intrusion story, the strange includes the following: dissolved

or destabilized boundaries (between categories that are seemingly mutually exclusive such as life and death, human and animal, inanimate objects and living beings, etc.), marginalized figures of society, and narrative subversion of readers' expectations. By using all of these elements, the goal is to maintain the reader or viewer's attention and to deliver the author or creator's moral message.

This inquiry contributes to our overall understanding of fantasy in two ways: First, it creates a framework for examining fantasy across cultures; second: it points to connections between a diverse array of literary creations, instead of abandoning each work to its traditional designation of either *zhiguai* (strange tale), *conte fantastique* (fantastic tale), or science fiction. The fox spirit, aristocratic coquette, and android model are from different literary traditions, but their common characteristics and purposes show that there are surprising similarities in the way fantasy stories are manufactured for our consumption and edification.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

<u>The Traditional Opposition Between Fantasy and Realism</u>

Ghosts, monsters, constructs of the mind, marvelous realms, and extraterrestrial beings are considered "figments of the imagination" in terms of the rational scientific discourse that permeates most post-industrial societies. In terms of literature, works in which these entities emerge from the domains of personal imagination and spirituality, and become as "real" as any person or object with which the literary characters interact, are usually considered fantasy -- as opposed to realist literature. I believe that this type of literature makes the overall statement that these entities make their presence felt in our world as much as those that can be felt by touch or measured by machine. They should thus, in that sense, be considered as "real" or "natural" as anything that would be considered as such in a positivist view of reality.

In terms of literary significance, this somewhat arbitrary division between the supposedly real and whatever is posited as its opposite has always been one of our primary means of classifying, evaluating, and understanding literature. Romanticism prioritized the expression of interior, intangible, subjective feelings and thus de-emphasized the idea of an objective, impersonal reality (Wolfson and Manning 1999, 4-5). The nineteenth-century fantastic tale in Western Europe is often cited as an easy antithesis to the realist novel from the same period (Sandner 2004, 7; Harter 1996, 1-4). In China, the May Fourth campaign championed realist literature due to its alignment with Western rationalistic values, and its suitability as a vehicle for advocating social and

political reform (Anderson 1990, 27-75; David Der-Wei Wang 2000, xiv-xv). Realism, as opposed to what was viewed as an ornate and obscure classicism, was supposedly the most direct expression of popular society -- the voice of the people (Lee 1993, 362-63). Today, physical and electronic bookstores classify "fantasy and science fiction" as a category entirely separate from "regular" fiction, whatever that may signify. Just as literary theoreticians and critics have used the real-unreal divide as a distinguishing criterion in their evaluation of literature, those in charge of categorization in literary commerce have decided that "fantasy and science fiction" literature warrants its own category distinct from "other literature." In terms of one's individual rapport with literature, a reader might very well decide whether a particular work suits his or her tastes based on its proximity to--or, as the case may be, distance from--whatever version of "reality" he or she already subscribes to.

All this has not been to imply that the "unreal" can be unproblematically demarcated from the "real." I merely point out these two currents in literature have always been defined against each other for scholarly, strategic, or political purposes. Scholars may choose to do so for the sake of convenience, clarity, or argument. Romantic writers chose to explore psychological and exotic landscapes because they sought to distinguish themselves from the rationality and objectivity of the Enlightenment (Wolfson and Manning 1999, 7). Fantasy and realism have always been definitionally intertwined, and literary scholarship has sought to categorize, understand, and analyze the various strains of fantasy as well as their relationship to realist literature. Critical work on fantastic literature has generally posed the following broad questions, with varying

conclusions: Why fantasy?[1] How does fantasy work?[2] What are the main types of fantasy and how are they different from one another?[3] How is fantasy different from realism?[4]

According to *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, a fantasy text is broadly defined as a "self-coherent narrative" that "tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it." Fantasy narratives may also be set in "otherworlds," in which case the otherworld is impossible, but the story is possible according to the rules of that otherworld (Clute and Grant 1997, 337). Critics whose work focuses on some realm of fantasy as such defined often adjust the definition of fantasy to suit their purposes, such that it is difficult to define its contours precisely. Such diverse genres such as fairy tales, science fiction, detective fiction, allegories, and Gothic fiction have all been placed beneath the umbrella of fantasy at one point or another. I will discuss some of the current critical definitions of fantasy, and the precise difficulties of arriving at a universally recognized definition, in chapter 1. For the purposes of this introduction, my definition of fantasy, or fantastic literature, is those works that are broadly considered to be in opposition to--or to have achieved a significant degree of separation from--realist literature.

Broad surveys that seek to define the boundaries of fantasy have their uses, but I propose a different way to examine how the real-unreal binary, as well as its accompanying permutations believable-unbelievable, natural-supernatural, etc., function in conjunction with reader expectations *within* fantastic tales, rather than on a meta-

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[1] For example Todorov (1975), Monléon (1990), and Hume (1984).
[2] For example Todorov (1975), Vax (1965), and Mendlesohn (2008).
[3] For example Mendlesohn (2008), Hume (1984), and Butler (2009).
[4] For example Harter (1996), Hume (1984), and Brooke-Rose (1981).

textual level. I take my cue from critics of fantastic literature Tzvetan Todorov, Robert

Ford Campany, and Judith Zeitlin, who apply similar approaches to works from disparate

cultures and time periods, suggesting the possible creation of a new cross-cultural

category of fantastic literature.

Background: Critical History and Current Discussions

In terms of Western literature, counter-Enlightenment currents such as Gothic and

Romantic literature brought elements of the occult, the supernatural, and the invisible

terrors of human psychology into the foreground.[5] Psychoanalytic theory has since

enriched the critical discussion of fantastic literature.[6] The twentieth century saw fantasy

become, arguably, the dominant mode of literary and artistic expression. In terms of

Chinese literature, elements of the strange and the marvelous have traditionally been

devalued because they played no part in orthodox history. However, they are nonetheless

prominent in many canonical works ranging from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 to *Hongloumeng* 紅

樓夢 (*Dream of the Red Chamber*) and have become even more popular in the twentieth

century. This major mode of literary expression has thus received much attention for the

symbolic meaning of its primary motifs, and for its differences with respect to so-called

realist modes of literature. The most important of these past investigations of fantasy will

be discussed in chapter 1.

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[5] See Harter (1996), Jameson (1975), Prickett (1979), and Siebers (1984).
[6] See Freud (1997) (especially the seminal article on E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sand-Man," "The 'Uncanny'") and Jackson (1981).

Tzvetan Todorov's (1975) conception of what he calls "the fantastic" plays a large role in critical discussions of fantasy today. The fantastic for Todorov is a narrowly defined genre that is characterized by sustained indeterminacy and hesitation provoked in the reader, and "permits us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible so long as we have no recourse to it" (1975, 158). Todorov enumerates the specific taboos being broken as follows: "incest, homosexuality, love for several persons at once, necrophilia, excessive sensuality..." (1975, 159). Presumably, Todorov means that these areas are worth investigating through literature, and for him this could not have happened without the intervention of the supernatural in nineteenth-century fantastic literature. However, at the conclusion of his work Todorov goes on to say that "psychoanalysis has replaced (and thereby has made useless) the literature of the fantastic" (1975, 160), and that because the boundary between the real and the imaginary has shifted--"today, we can no longer believe in an immutable, external reality"--the fantastic has received its "fatal blow" (1975, 168).

Setting aside for the moment Todorov's all-too-brief account of this supposed "reality shift" during the time of his writing, we can say that for Todorov, the fantastic functions and entertains primarily through the mechanism of hesitation, and through this hook important psychological exploration of taboo topics was able to take place. In addition, Todorov prizes nineteenth-century fantastic literature for being particularly analogous to literary endeavors, because by its nature fiction attempts to make real the unreal. Just as fantastic literature approaches and dissolves previously taboo barriers, literature "contests any presence of dichotomy": it "bypasses the distinctions of the real

and the imaginary, of what is and of what is not" (1975, 167). To be clear, Todorov only discusses a small number of works from nineteenth-century Europe. Most critics who write broader considerations of fantasy, while acknowledging Todorov's importance, do not fail to point out that the difficulty of sustaining this hesitation results in too narrow a definition for critical purposes; however, they all tend to retain from Todorov a fascination with the frontier-crossing, illuminating and potentially subversive aspects of fantasy.[7] In addition, Todorov has helped shifted the focus in discussions of fantasy from supernatural motifs to reader response.[8]

Recently, two notable studies of fantasy in the Chinese context have been published. Robert Ford Campany's (1996) compelling account of *zhiguai* 志怪 ("anomaly tales") from early medieval China uses Todorov and Roger Caillois's writings on the fantastic and the supernatural in the Western canon to conceptualize *zhiguai* as a generic category that, like its Western counterparts in this conceptual rubric, "challenges a prior structure of expectation" (1996, 206). Similarly, while arguing for distinct differences between the structures of belief in Pu Songling's early-Qing work *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (1740) and those in the tales analyzed by Todorov, Judith Zeitlin (1993) approaches Pu's collection with binaries such as real-fantasy and possible-impossible in mind, but claims that the boundaries between the two opposing sides are unfixed, and that it is this tension and its subversion of expectations that make *Liaozhai* unique (1993, 6-7).

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[7] See for example Hume (1984) and Harter (1996).
[8] Mendlesohn's (2008) work is an example of the latter; Vax (1965; 1974) is a standard bearer for the former category.

Studies like Campany's and Zeitlin's diverge in their approach to such tales from much of traditional Chinese literary criticism,[9] as well as from other studies that specifically focus on *zhiguai* and its successors. Instead of focusing exclusively on the tales' didactic value, moral content, social criticism, and/or degree of self-conscious fictionalization (where one perceives history-writing becoming fiction-writing),[10] Campany and Zeitlin also discuss at length the stories' effects on the hypothetical reader, just as Todorov builds his conception of the fantastic genre on the degrees of suspense and credulity in its readers.[11] Per their arguments, Chinese medieval *zhiguai*, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, and nineteenth-century European fantastic tales all derive a significant amount of their impact from challenging the existing expectations of their readers with respect to fixed categories such as life and death, dream and reality. In other words, though different readers may have different ideas when it comes to what is considered natural and supernatural, possible and impossible, real and unreal, etc., it is important to the functioning of these tales that *some* sort of preconceived boundary exists and can be manipulated.

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[9] On traditional Chinese attitudes towards, and theories of, literature in general, some examples include Gu (2006), James J. Y. Liu (1975), Owen (1996b), and Anthony C. Yu (1988).

[10] Studies along these lines include DeWoskin (1977), Kao (1994), Barr (1985), and Francis (2004). In addition, Anthony C. Yu's (1987) and Barr's studies are representative of many, many others of their type, which attempts to classify the numerous tales under analysis according to varying criteria such as theme, plot structure, and supernatural elements, etc.

[11] Campany also discusses *zhiguai* in terms of function by framing them in terms of a "comparative cosmographics poetics," wherein the various types of tales are different ways of understanding the world, and/or arguments for a particular worldview (1996, 206-7).

For example, Todorov's rigid schema is only possible and functional because it is predicated upon preconceptions—regarding what is natural versus supernatural, and so on—that must be shared to a large extent among protagonist, author, reader, and critic. Along the same lines, Campany argues that the key feature of *zhiguai* in the narrative mode is the pivot, which marks the arrival of "something distinctly odd" (1996, 225) and is analogous to the events that seem to thrust the reader and/or protagonist into the realm of the fantastic, in Todorov's schema.[12] Once again, there must be a consensus among those participating in the creation and reception of the text for the pivot to function to its full extent. The tale that Campany chooses to illustrate his argument, from the *Shuyiji* 述 異記 by Ren Fang 任昉, is demonstrative in this regard and is quoted in its entirety:

> Beside the river in the western part of Ailanthus City District in Nankang there is a stone chamber called Mengcou Cave 夢口穴. Once there was a boatman [in the area] who chanced upon a man who was completely clad in yellow and was carrying two baskets of yellow melons. He asked for a ride. As the boat pulled up to the bank, the man spat into the till, disembarked, and directly entered the cave. At first the boatman was very angry at the man, but when he saw him enter the cave he began to realize that something strange was afoot (始知異). Looking at the spittle in his till, he saw it had turned completely into gold.... (quoted in Campany 1996, 222)

According to Campany, the pivot proper occurs when the passenger spits into the till and the boatman is prompted by this strange behavior to notice that the spit has become gold (1996, 226). Doubtless, anyone who is not accustomed to other materials suddenly transforming into gold will concur that this qualifies as "something distinctly odd."

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[12] More specifically, "the pivot is often marked by a characteristic cluster of phenomenological terms describing the protagonist's sudden sensory perception of and affective reaction to the anomalous event" (Campany 1996, 226).

However, Campany points out that the impending arrival of strangeness is actually already foreshadowed by the passenger's yellow attire, which would have been extraordinary at the time, and the yellow melons. Contemporary Chinese readers would probably already have associated this color with Daoism and the esoteric arts, and the pivot proper would serve as confirmation of these prior hints and thus gain additional narrative force (Campany 1996, 223).

Zeitlin deliberately tries to distinguish her reading of *Liaozhai*'s stories from Todorov's rules of hesitation by asserting that within the text, "the expectation that the reader must inexorably choose between a supernatural cause or a rational solution is entirely absent" (1993, 10), though she does not address the possibility that the reader might experience hesitation anyway despite the lack of invitation. In addition, Zeitlin still emphasizes author Pu Songling's function as a collector of all tales and anecdotes that seemed--to him, in that time period--comparatively strange and distinct, and argues that "the strange (or the effect of the strange) is often produced in *Liaozhai* through the perception that *conventional* boundaries and categories have somehow been bent or altered even after the *normal* order of things has seemingly been restored" (1993, 195 [emphasis mine]). In other words, the kinds of boundaries that Todorov spoke of are unmistakably present in *Liaozhai*, though necessarily displaced and refracted through different cultural prisms. In Campany and Zeitlin, we have two critics of Chinese fantastic literature who, like Todorov whom they allude to in their studies, interpret their texts through the lenses of reader response and reader expectations.

Methodology

My study will make a unique contribution to the discussion of fantasy by comparing fantastic works from disparate times and places and focusing on how the tensions between the two poles of realism and fantasy function within tales of fantasy. Most of the comprehensive English-language studies of fantasy rarely take into account works that are not American or European. I have already cited as example Todorov's highly influential generic study with an unfortunately self-limiting scope. Other studies focus almost exclusively on American and European fantasy written in English, French, and German. Occasionally, a Russian text by Gogol or Nabokov makes an appearance.[13] Similarly, Chinese-language studies of Chinese fantastic texts sometimes incorporate Western theory as a starting point with which to understand the texts, but do not bring them into dialogue with the very texts studied by those Western theorists.[14] I want to construct just such a dialogue that has thus far been missing from the critical corpus.

In this dissertation, I note the prominence of a particular category of fantasy literature, that which I call the "intrusion story." This type of story appears in late imperial China (*Liaozhai zhiyi* by Pu Songling and similar works), in nineteenth-century France (*Les Diaboliques* by Barbey d'Aurevilly and similar works) and in twentieth-century America (*The Twilight Zone* by Rod Serling). These works share much in

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[13] Among oft-cited representative works on fantasy or fantastic literature, studies that fall into this category include those by Irwin (1976), Rabkin (1976), Jackson (1981), Apter (1982), Bleiler (1985), Attebery (1992), Armitt (2005), and Mendlesohn (2008). I discuss some of these works in more detail in chapter 1. Magical realism from Latin America, of course, is one of the most important literary movements of the twentieth-century, and as such is usually studied as an individual category. On magical realism, see Bowers (2004) and Zamora and Faris (1995).

[14] For example Lei (1990), David Der-Wei Wang (2004), Guo (1985), and Chen (1990).

common in terms of motif, style, format, authorial intent and its perhaps unforeseen consequences. Its major features are: shortness of length, shortness of duration covered by its narrative, highlighting of elements that promote doubt and/or suspense, often until the end of the tale, and the attachment of a concluding moral message by the author. The intrusion story usually makes use of strange situations to engage the audience and maintain their attention, until the author can deliver a memorable and didactic ending. The strange in these types of stories are characterized by the dissolution of traditional boundaries, and the coexistence of seemingly incompatible characteristics in one entity, which I term "hybrid."

As my terminology indicates, all of these works are collections of short tales, most of which are fantastic tales that take place over the course of several days--or hours--in the protagonist's life. The author of the stories serves as curator of the entire collection, while maintaining a strong authorial voice and sustained authorial commentary throughout the individual tales. The tales themselves are exceedingly well-crafted to sustain reader attention and provoke thought, but ultimately the authors argue that their stories are not mere entertainment, but have an educational purpose. In order to guide readers' toward the authors' moral objectives, these texts make frequent use of dissolved or destabilized boundaries (between categories that are seemingly mutually exclusive such as life and death, human and animal, human and alien, etc.), marginalized figures of society, the accumulation of fantastic detail, narrative subversion of readers' expectations, and "twist" endings.

To contextualize these tales using Todorov's terminology, some of them are "marvelous" and some of them approach the "pure fantastic." According to Todorov, a marvelous tale is one in which the supernatural is accepted without question, as in, for example, the fairy tale. A true fantastic tale, on the other hand, does not provide enough clues for the reader to decide whether the events are natural or supernatural. The intrusion stories of which I speak comprise both types, suggesting that the interplay between fantasy and reality can also play an engaging role in stories that are entirely supernatural.

I have chosen the texts to be studied so that they cover a sufficiently broad range of time, place, and circumstance. I focus particularly on the anthology, which Alice Te Punga Somerville describes as a "multiple-author literary collection" that "brings together a range of perspectives from many voices" (2010, 255). Barbara Benedict understands anthologies to be "volumes that contain material selected *self-consciously* for consistency and quality, usually long after the individual pieces within had first been published," but she concedes that there are a wide range of types of anthologies that may deviate from the norm of several authors and one or more editors (2003, 231-32). I agree with her that, in principle, the basic "anthological model" is "a multifarious collection of literary works designed for 'dip, sip and skip' reading" (2003, 232). The key characteristics here are selectivity and variety -- the editorial figure selects texts for his anthology based on predetermined criteria, whether it be strangeness or audacity, and in doing so tries to impose a certain consistency of message: "The stories and figures presented in these texts are out of the ordinary in some way." This is the primary

characteristic of all the anthologies analyzed in my study, be they textual, televisual, or cinematic.

Plan of Dissertation: Chapter 1

Before delving into primary sources, I will begin by surveying the history of critical discussions on fantasy, in order to highlight the opposition between fantasy and realism that has traditionally been used to emphasize the differences between fantastic texts and texts that fall outside of whatever boundary has been established by the critic. Then, I focus particularly on Todorov due to his influence on current critical response to fantasy, and on the readings of Campany and Zeitlin as well. These three critics have inspired my cross-cultural take on fantasy due to their departure from traditional criticism and their focus on fantastic authors' manipulation of reader response, which seems to me to depend crucially on what the reader believes to be "real." However, instead of focusing exclusively on how such mechanics function within each story as Todorov, Campany, and Zeitlin do, I expand my area of study to include the entire collection and discuss how intertextuality between individual tales in said collection influence and manipulate reader response.

Plan of Dissertation: Chapter 2

The locus of my first textual corpus, to be discussed in my second chapter, is literati China during the late imperial period, specifically *Liaozhai zhiyi* and, to a lesser extent and for comparison purposes, the less famous *Zi bu yu* 子不語 (1788) and *Yuewei*

caotang biji 閱微草堂筆記 (1800) by Yuan Mei and Ji Yun, respectively. I will discuss the distinct features of these collections, their status in the Chinese literary canon and in late imperial culture, as well as their enormous influence on contemporary Chinese popular culture. I will also briefly trace their provenance from medieval *zhiguai*, and examine which features have been preserved, transformed, and excised, respectively. Together, these texts form a great, generically identifiable body of fantasy literature in China.

The intrusion story originating from this body of literature features the usual dissolvable boundaries and hybrid entities. In my chapter, I specifically examine stories that feature confusions between dream and reality, and between man and monster. Moreover, the hybridity in these stories is representative of the impulse shared by writers of *zhiguai* to collect, categorize, and to attach a moral to the previously inexplicable. This tension is literalized by the impossible creatures and confusing situations that the writers are driven to depict for moral purposes.

Plan of Dissertation: Chapter 3

As with the corpus covered in chapter 2, the aim of this chapter is to contextualize and evaluate the importance of these works in their own milieu, and as contributors to our understanding of fantasy. As such, I show that the typical nineteenth-century French short story shares much in common with the intrusion story, specifically in terms of length, markers of strangeness which are often supernatural, and the lead-up to an unexpected but instructive ending that serves the author's didactic purposes. Like the Chinese strange

tale, these *contes fantastiques* also make heavy use of destabilized boundaries and hybrid characteristics, which in this case are primarily gender-related.

In this chapter, I focus primarily on Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Les Diaboliques* (1874). As the collection's title suggests, Barbey's focus is on his particular notion of evil, diabolicalness, instead of a broad spectrum of strange material. I also examine two other popular writers of the French short story: Prosper Mérimée and Guy de Maupassant. Mérimée's intrusion stories primarily serve his purpose of venerating the mythological and the primitive that lurks beneath what he views as a façade of false civility. Maupassant, on the other hand, writing after the vogue of the fantastic had already run its courses, uses the supernatural mainly to satirize and critique contemporary behavior.

Plan of Dissertation: Chapter 4

Chapter 4 shifts focus to popular culture of the twentieth century in the televisual medium, where fantasy continues to sustain its popularity. Due to their compartmentalized nature, certain anthological--as opposed to serialized--fantasy television programs particularly lend themselves to comparison with the short fantasy texts discussed in the two preceding chapters. In this chapter, I discuss Rod Serling's seminal series *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), which did much to help popularize fantasy in the medium of television. Although each episode stands on its own, the series' overall tone and message bear the strong influence of Serling's creative leadership.

In Serling's version of the intrusion story, which is strictly circumscribed by episodic running time, the strange is treated with maximum dramatic flourish. The

strangeness of *Twilight Zone* relies more heavily on disrupting boundaries and the dramatic twist than on hybrid characteristics.

In a visual medium, the tools used to draw attention to and emphasize the strange are also different: *Twilight Zone* makes efficient narrative use of music, lighting, editing, and framing to portray the characters' confused and anxious state of mind or to deceive or disorient the viewer for dramatic purposes. Serling himself also takes advantage of the intimacy of television to weave himself and his voice of authority into the lives of the episodes' fictional characters, and to further articulate his moral vision by directly addressing the audience. Unlike the collections examined in the two previous chapters, Serling made use of the strange to hide his personal views from censorship; in the Chinese and French tales, the strange is brought to light for the very specific purpose of instruction.

Serling's twentieth-century televisual contribution adds considerably to our understanding of the cross-cultural phenomenon of the intrusion story. It shows that this type of story has been revitalized by the techniques and popularity of film and television, and transformed by the historical events and technological progress of the twentieth century; it demonstrates that the intrusion story is popular precisely due to its ability to fascinate and instruct.

Chapter 1

Fantasy and Strangeness in Western and Chinese Literature

Before looking the shared characteristics of my primary materials, I want to first take a look at how theorists and critics have understood fantastic literature. I will begin by surveying the history of critical discussions on fantasy in the West, in order to highlight the opposition between fantasy and realism that has traditionally been used to demarcate the boundaries of Western fantasy. Then, I focus particularly on Tzvetan Todorov due to his influence on the critical discourse surrounding fantasy. His conception of fantastic literature depends crucially on the reader's response to the text. Lastly, I discuss the general trend of critical discourse since Todorov and what his influence on it has been.

The last section of this chapter introduces Chinese literature of the strange as an analog to Western fantastic literature. Finally, I discuss Robert Ford Campany and Judith Zeitlin's studies of Chinese literature that take Todorov as a departure point. These last two, along with Todorov, are also the inspiration for my study, which will be focused primarily on how fantastic tales and tales of the strange structure readers' expectations with the interplay between the real and the unreal.

A Brief History of Fantasy in the West

The Oxford English Dictionary traces the origins of the word "fantasy" to Old French *fantasie* (*fantaisie*), Provençal *fantazia*, Spanish and Portuguese *fantasía*,

Italian *fantasia*), Latin *phantasia*, and Greek **φαντασία** (literally "a making visible"),

φαντάζειν (to make visible), and **φαίνειν** (to show). But "fantasy" was only relatively

recently used to demarcate literary modes and genres, as opposed to simply denoting

caprice, illusion, or imagination. Joseph Addison (1672-1719), a British critic commonly

cited as a significant milestone in the development of critical notions of fantasy, spoke

instead of "fancy" as being synonymous with "imagination":

> There is a kind of writing wherein the poet loses sight of nature and
> entertains his reader's imagination with the characters and actions of such
> persons as have many of them no existence but what he bestows on them.
> Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits. This
> Mr. Dryden calls 'the fairy way of writing,' which is, indeed, more
> difficult than any other that depends on the poet's fancy, because he has
> no pattern to follow in it and must work altogether out of his own
> invention. (2004, 21-22)

Here Addison also does not use the exact term "fantasy," but clearly elements of fantastic

narrative ("characters and actions of such persons as have many of them no existence")

are supposedly conjured up by the poet's imagination, i.e. "fancy."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is usually the next significant literary

figure to be cited in discussions of the development of "fantasy" as a literary mode or

genre, for he famously distinguished between "imagination" and "fancy" in his

Biographia Literaria (1817). In Coleridge's terms, the imagination was much more

powerful than mere fancy. "Fancy" was nothing more than "a mode of memory

emancipated from the order of time and space," while imagination is "the living power

and prime agent of all human perception" (1999, 530-31). Coleridge's relegation of

"fancy" to the status of secondary faculty allowed the term "fantasy" to begin evolving

independently as a critical concept, made more robust by its use in debates generated by the realist novel's maturation as a dominant literary form in the eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century, fantasy as a literary genre emerged as a category to be criticized and defended, in opposition to the output of realist works at the time.[15] Both Tobin Siebers in *The Romantic Fantastic* (1984) and Karl Kroeber in *Romantic Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1988) point to Romanticism as an era where the fantasy emerged into cultural awareness. Romantic authors Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) and Walter Scott (1771-1832) both wrote about the supernatural fantastic by utilizing Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime (Sandner 2004, 10). Radcliffe rejects it in favor of terror that can ultimately be explained rationally, while Scott argues that careful use of the fantastic may produce sublime effects (Sandner 2004, 41-55).

At around the same time, Scott himself contributed to the development of *le fantastique* as a critical concept in French literature. Gary K. Wolfe points out that his phrase "the fantastic mode of writing," used in an introduction to a collection of E. T. A. Hoffman tales, was translated to French as "genre fantastique" (Gary K. Wolfe 2012, 10). Charles Nodier (1780-1844), considered a pioneer of the genre, further popularized the term in *Du Fantastique en littérature* (1830), where he describes contemporary fantastic literature as a natural developmental stage after the literature of sensations (primitive poetry) and literature that merely describes ordinary reality (1989, 9-10). The popularity and importance of this genre in French literature has contributed to the confusion surrounding the term "fantastic," which is also used to describe that which is "of

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[15] See Sandner (2004, 6), Kessler (1995, xi), Siebers (1984, 9), and Gary K. Wolfe (2012, 11).

fantasy," a much more unwieldy category. Also known in English as "the fantastic," *le fantastique* designates a handful of French tales of the supernatural that appeared in the nineteenth century. Influenced by Romanticism and Gothicism from and nurtured by the popularity of courtly fairy tales and *contes philosophiques*, these tales by Nodier, Prosper Mérimée, Théophile Gautier, Guy de Maupassant et al. treated supernatural subjects such as phantoms, vampires, the reanimation of corpses, and objects imbued with magical powers. As with English Romanticism, the French fantastic tale is most often interpreted as a literary reaction to rationalist Enlightenment discourse and the increased emphasis on verisimilitude and social realism in the French novel.

Cataloguers of *Le Fantastique*

In the 1950's and 1960's, a line of French critics-- Pierre-Georges Castex, Louis Vax, and Roger Caillois et al.--were engaged in enumerating the sizable list of themes and motifs that were found in *la littérature fantastique*. Their focus was not on the delimitation of genre; they commenced as if their scope was self-evident.[16] The general consensus among these critics was that *le fantastique* comprised the romanticism of E.T.A. Hoffmann, the macabre tales of Edgar Allan Poe, and the impressive number of

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[16] Vax goes to great lengths to avoid explicitly defining the genre (1965, 5-8), arguing that "the questions 'What is the fantastic? The strange?' etc. are less interesting to the specialist than they are to the layperson" (1965, 6 [my translation]). This is the same stance he maintained in an earlier work: "Let us not attempt to define the fantastic" (1960, 5 [my translation]). Castex, on the other hand, does offer a preliminary definition: "It is characterized instead by a brutal intrusion of mystery into the framework of reality; it is generally linked to morbid states of the consciousness which, during the phenomena of nightmare or delirium, projects images of its own anguishes or terrors" (1951, 8 [my translation]).

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French tales that were inspired by these two foreign authors. At times these critics would

venture to say what they thought a certain motif or theme represented, or why it came to

be so prevalent in the fantastic. Vax, for example, finds a limited number of repeated

themes in fantastic literature, which he derives from the genre's typical motifs: the

werewolf, the vampire, disconnected body parts, psychological trouble, play between the

visible and the invisible, alterations in causality and space-time, and regression (1965,

24-34). In *L'art et la littérature fantastiques* (1960), for example, Vax describes the

typical fantastic vampire, then speculates about its metaphorical significance:

> In the theme of the vampire, the desire to rape and the desire to murder
> combine their seduction and their horror. For the woman, the vampire is
> the satyr, fascinating and dreaded. For the man, it is the insatiable female
> … As for the propagation of vampirism, it undoubtedly represents the
> contamination of the cosmos by an evil spell… The transformation from
> victim to monster perhaps also represents the ambivalence that prevails in
> the domains of death and sexuality. (1960, 26-27 [my translation])[17]

This type of "catalogue entry" on individual motifs and themes in fantastic literature is

characteristic of these studies that immediately preceded Todorov.

Todorov and the Fantastic Genre: "Hesitation" as Key

Tzvetan Todorov's definition of *le fantastique* (henceforth "the fantastic"

following the English translation of Todorov's work) as characterized by hesitation is the

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[17] "Dans le thème du vampire, désir de viol et désir de meurtre combinent leur séduction
et leur horreur. Pour la femme, le vampire est le satyre, fascinant et redouté. Pour
l'homme, c'est la femelle insatiable ... Quant à la propagation du vampirisme, elle
exprime sans doute la contamination du cosmos par un maléfice.... Peut-être aussi la
métamorphose de la victime en monstre exprime-t-elle l'ambivalence qui règne dans les
domaines de la mort et de la sexualité."

keystone of most generic discussions of fantasy today, as well as the inspiration for this study. A structuralist critic, Todorov draws upon the brief characterizations of the fantastic offered by his French predecessors mentioned above; however, he points out that he is unsatisfied by the fact that they make no distinction between the reader and the characters' responses to the inexplicable, and by the fact that their characterizations lack nuance. Todorov greatly expands on their arguments to create his own theoretical definition of a true fantastic text, which must satisfy the following conditions:

The reader must remain in a state Todorov calls "hesitation" throughout the duration of the story. He or she hesitates between either a completely logical, rational explanation or an explanation that thrusts him into the world of the marvelous where supernatural causation applies. Once the reader opts for one explanation or the other, he or she leaves the state of hesitation that Todorov defines as essential to the genre of the fantastic. The fictional characters in question may also experience this hesitation, but it is not a necessary condition. In characterizing this hesitation, Todorov paraphrases it as "I nearly reached the point of believing" (1975, 31). He does not seem to allow for the possibility where the reader ultimately decides to *not* choose between the rational and the supernatural, despite any explanations present in the text that might force the decision one way or the other.

Secondly, the text in question must "oblige the reader to consider the world of characters as a world of living characters" (1975, 33). That is, the reader should not interpret the text poetically or allegorically. If the reader does so, he or she will be more interested in the text on a semantic level, and cannot identify with the characters on a

meaningful level. Without this meaningful identification, Todorov believes that the reader will not be prompted to wonder whether the events in the text are situated within the realm of the natural or the supernatural. As Todorov puts it, "[i]f as we read a text we reject all representation, considering each sentence as a pure semantic combination, the fantastic *could not appear*: for the fantastic requires ... a reaction to events as they occur in the world evoked" (1975, 60 [emphasis in original]). This is the case with poetry. With allegory, the literal meaning of the text is much less important than its allegorical meaning.

Based on these criteria, Todorov posits a spectrum of genres that range from the uncanny to the marvelous:

uncanny | fantastic-uncanny | fantastic-marvelous | marvelous

For Todorov, works that are uncanny (*étrange*) feature events that are "in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar" (1975, 46). However, these events are not in themselves supernatural -- they may ultimately be explained rationally. Some texts that are inherently uncanny are more fantastic than others -- they are "fantastic-uncanny." As an example, Todorov supplies Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) where the decaying house, the dying sister, and the titular character's nervous condition all coalesce to produce a shocking and disturbing atmosphere. However, as Todorov notes, the careful reader will find a rational explanation for each of the seemingly inexplicable events in the story. The reason the story is fantastic-uncanny is

because these rational explanations are well hidden. As a result, the reader may very well feel uncertain that they even exist, thus satisfying the condition of "hesitation" that is required by the fantastic.

The opposing side of the spectrum is comprised of the fantastic-marvelous and the marvelous. Just as the fantastic-uncanny is more fantastic than the pure uncanny, the fantastic-marvelous contains more elements of the fantastic than the pure marvelous. Marvelous texts are those in which "supernatural elements provoke no particular reaction either in the characters or in the implicit reader" (1975, 54). Included in this category are fairy tales, tales featuring magic and exaggerated claims that are accepted because they are viewed as "natural" contextually or because the claims cannot be verified (*Arabian Nights*), and science fiction. To the left of the marvelous is the category fantastic-marvelous, which are "the class of narratives that are presented as fantastic and that end with an acceptance of the supernatural" (1975, 52). Todorov's example in this category is Théophile Gautier's "La morte amoureuse" (1836). In this story, a monk falls in love with a seductive woman who appears in his dreams. He (and the reader) is unsure whether the dreams are actually real. However, at the end of the tale the monk exhumes his dream lover's corpse, which does not bear any signs of decay. A cleric flings holy water on the body, which immediately turns to dust. As there can be no rational explanation for these events, the story is ultimately revealed to be marvelous at the end. As with the fantastic-uncanny, the reader and protagonist maintain a tale's status in this category by hesitating in the face of supernatural events. At the end of the tale, if they renounce their skepticism and accept that the events are inexplicably supernatural--

instead of discovering a rational explanation--then the tale is fantastic-marvelous instead of fantastic-uncanny.

Todorov and the Pure Fantastic

As Todorov explains in reference to the above diagram, "[t]he fantastic in its pure state is represented here by the median line separating the fantastic-uncanny from the fantastic-marvelous" (1975, 44). Thus the pure fantastic is not even included in the continuum because per his rigid definition, only texts that sustain the implied reader's hesitation to the end qualify as truly fantastic -- that is, these texts must end with the implied reader remaining undecided between an acceptance of the supernatural as-is, and the discovery of any rational explanation for the events that have transpired. The only successful cases are Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and Prosper Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837).[18] Todorov admits that the fantastic is an evanescent genre: it only exists as long as the reader feels uncertain about the status of events.

Todorov and the Themes and Functions of Fantastic Literature

In addition to positing this requirement of "hesitation," Todorov also posits in his latter chapters certain co-occurring thematic elements within fantastic tales such as the emphasis on limits, metamorphoses, and pandeterministic causality.[19] All of these imply permeability between physical/mental and matter/spirit boundaries, and they account for

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[18] I discuss this tale in more detail in chapter 3.

[19] Todorov defines pan-determinism as follows: "everything, down to the encounter of various causal series (or 'chance') must have its cause, in the full sense of the word, even if this cause can only be of a supernatural order" (1975, 110).

the common motifs in Todorov's fantastic such as doppelgangers, telepathy, mirrors, and time/space confusion (1975, 113). In terms of function, Todorov argues that fantastic themes makes possible the crossing of the above-mentioned frontiers that were previously inaccessible. The fantastic can be a subversive means of struggling against social taboos.

Provocatively, Todorov ends his discussion of this theoretical genre by arguing that psychoanalysis has obviated the need for fantastic literature, because the taboos can now be dealt with in the open -- or at least in the psychiatrist's office (1975, 160). Therefore, in terms of genre, Todorov's fantastic is restricted to the period that spans the end of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, beginning with Jacques Cazotte and ending with Guy de Maupassant (1975, 166).

Fantasy as a Mode: Christine Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981)

Todorov's insight into the fantastic genre as he designates it has, unsurprisingly, provoked a spirited discussion that continues to this day. The notion that fantasy is something that brings us to the brink of the inconceivable and the unspeakable has understandably sparked immense interest. One major objection from critics such as Eric Rabkin and Christine Brooke-Rose--who tend to look at fantasy from a broader perspective--is that Todorov's criteria are arbitrary and too strictly applied, which unfortunately results in a largely theoretical genre that Todorov himself admits to be evanescent and limiting (1975, 41, 166). These critics find that the fantastic is more suitably discussed as a frequently occurring mode or underlying feature, rather than as a

26

genre. Rabkin's *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976) and Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981) and are two examples of this type of response.[20]

Brooke-Rose uses Todorov and his contemporary Darko Suvin, a science-fiction theorist, to argue that there is no such thing as a natural opposition between any two genres -- that is, the oppositions between genres set up by Todorov and Suvin are determined by their respective intellectual agendas.

Suvin's axiom is that science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (1972, 375). In his analysis of one the most popular literary genres of the twentieth century, Suvin also compares it to previous genres in literary history, as Todorov did with the fantastic. Per Suvin, though fairy tales similarly estrange readers from the author's empirical environment, "it escapes out of its horizons and into a closed collateral world indifferent toward cognitive possibilities" (1972, 375); its world is of course radically different from the author's, yet is so in a way that does not promote reflection as to how such a world might come to be. Similarly, for Suvin "the *fantasy* (ghost, horror, Gothic, weird) tale [is] a genre committed to the interposition of anti-cognitive laws into the empirical environment" (1972, 375).

The types of tales that Suvin discusses would occupy different positions along Todorov's spectrum, but Suvin groups them all together as "marvelous" in opposition to

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[20] Other critics who attempt to categorize and locate fantasy as a less limited genre, and sometimes as a mode, include Tobin Siebers (1984), Kathryn Hume (1984), and Farah Mendlesohn (2008).

science fiction. Brooke-Rose points out that Todorov treats science fiction as marvelous texts (where the surprising occurrences go unquestioned), whereas for Suvin science fiction is realist fiction that occupies an opposite position to marvelous fiction (Brooke-Rose 1981, 77).

Brooke-Rose provides another example: Robert Scholes argues that science fiction is both marvelous *and* realist, and that it "offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way" (1975, 29). In addition to Brooke-Rose's objection with respect to arbitrary categorization, here one encounters the same problem that also exists in Todorov's account: realism is defined as rationalist and what can only be cognitively apprehended, whereas one might argue that there are many different ways of apprehending the real. Quite rightly, Brooke-Rose argues that "realism" cannot always be taken for granted something universally valid and unproblematic.

Brooke-Rose also points out that the general cognitive state known as hesitation, which according to Todorov is the crux of the fantastic, can also be provoked by texts generally not categorized as fantastic. Brooke-Rose thus inflects her understanding of non-fantastic texts by calling them "a displaced form of the fantastic" (1981, 65). She asks,

> Is not the very condition that defines the pure genre (or evanescent element) [of the fantastic] merely a particular (historical) manifestation of a more general feature (at least two contradictory readings) which can and perhaps should be found in all sophisticated (complex) narrative...? (1981, 71)

28

Another definitional problem Brooke-Rose points out is the problem of distinguishing between a text of Todorovian hesitation and a text of *total* ambiguity, where a reader is faced with not two different explanations (supernatural or rational) but multiple interpretive possibilities (1975, 65). For example, according to Brooke-Rose the *nouveau roman* functions "on a similar balance of apparent over-determination and under-determination" (1975, 124) as a pure fantastic text as defined by Todorov. Because similar insistence on ambiguity and interpretive uncertainty can be found in other postmodern texts, Brooke-Rose finds that the fantastic, thus generalized, is far from being restricted to a historically delimited genre that died the nineteenth-century. It is actually a feature that persists throughout the history of fiction and dominates the modern literary landscape.

Fantasy as a Mode: Eric Rabkin's *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976)

As the title of his study suggests, Rabkin, like Brooke-Rose, views the fantastic as a literary mode rather than a restricted genre. He first argues that literary texts that contradict expectations are fantastic in nature by using Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) as an example (1976, 3-4). In the book, protagonist Alice says to a flower, "I *wish* you could talk" (Carroll 1992, 185), implying that flowers do not normally do so. Rabkin argues that as our worldview coincides with Alice's--that is, we also expect plants to be mute--the novel turns out to be fantastic in nature to us because the flower *does* speak to Alice. However, according to Rabkin, the reader's expectations need not match with Alice's. A reader from a hypothetical world where plants *could*

speak can still experience the fantastic in the novel; what Alice says to the flower signals to any reader that in her world, plants cannot speak. This hypothetical reader could choose not to identify with Alice, but Rabkin points out that such a move would render the entire novel nonsensical (1976, 4).

To Rabkin, *all* literature is more or less fantastic simply by virtue of being fiction. He argues that even realist novels invoke feelings that might be unexpected: surprise, shock, delight, and fear. However, these feelings "[mark] the fantastic, but are not themselves truly fantastic; they are flavored by the fantastic" (1976, 12). Rabkin's geometric metaphor for these varying degrees of the fantastic is slightly belabored,[21] but his essential argument is that certain texts are *more* fantastic than others by virtue of the fact that they *completely* invert expectations toward reality, and it is to this genre that he assigns the capitalized label "Fantasy" (1976, 29).

Rabkin makes essential to Fantasy that which is not of our world, be they elements that are supernatural or marvelous, or impossibly advanced technology (as in science fiction). Under this rubric, Rabkin classifies science fiction that contains a high number of unexpected elements as Fantasy. Unlike other critics who demarcate fairy tales from more modern tales of the fantastic by citing the fairy tales' remote and non-threatening universes, Rabkin does so by explaining that although fairy tales contain elements of the fantastic (diametric opposition, such as the fact that Sleeping Beauty's

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[21] "The truly fantastic occurs when the ground rules of a narrative are forced to make a 180º reversal, when prevailing perspectives are directly contradicted.... Less complete reversals, say a 90º turnabout (like the dis-expected punch line of a joke) or a 120º turnabout (like the highly dis-expected survival of Lemuel Pitkin [from Nathanael West's *A Cool Million*], participate in the complex feelings of surprise, shock, delight, fear and so on..." (1976, 12).

deathlike sleep simultaneously preserves her *life*), they do not continually subvert the ground rules of the narrative world; theirs is a universe that has no problems accommodating such diametric oppositions (1976, 37-38). The fairy tale is thus not a true Fantasy, unlike Carroll's *Alice*. Though Rabkin himself does distinguish works that can be classified as "Fantasy" from other works that contain the fantastic, his is not as strict a delimitation because there are no explicit conditions that must be satisfied. Rather, Rabkin's Fantasy simply contains elements of the fantastic in a higher frequency. The number of elements that tips a work over into the territory of Fantasy appears to be arbitrary and subjectively determined.

A Psychoanalytical Perspective: Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy, the Literature of Subversion* (1981)

Many critics since Todorov have also attempted to describe the various ways in which the fantastic uses its most popular themes and motifs to express truths about the world, whether by design of the author or as an inadvertent expression of zeitgeist.[22] Like the latter half of Todorov's study, their emphasis is not on whether the fantastic is best described as a genre or a mode, but also on *what* the fantastic can do and what it signifies when it appears.

For example, Rosemary Jackson is representative of those who prize fantasy because, at its best, it has functions that realist literature lacks -- for Jackson, those are

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[22] Monleón (1990), Moretti (1982), Twitchell (1985), and Elsaesser (1989) are just a few examples.

transgression and subversion. Jackson also considers fantasy to be a mode, citing Fredric

Jameson's definition:

> [Mode] is not bound to the conventions of a given age, nor indissolubly linked to a given type of verbal artifact, but rather persists as a temptation and a mode of expression across a whole range of historical periods, seeming to offer itself, if only intermittently, as a formal possibility which can be revived and renewed. (Jameson 1975, 142)

The fantastic is thus a subversive *mode*--situated between the marvelous and mimetic

modes--that appears in various different genres of literature; among its features are an

impersonal, authoritative narrative voice, events from a distant past, and low emotional

involvement (Jackson 1981, 33).

Jackson attempts to distinguish her study by valorizing the transgressive and

subversive in fantasy rather than apologizing for its escapism and its transcendence

(1981, 174). She reads these subversive and transgressive texts primarily through a

psychoanalytical lens, arguing that they are the means of blurring the boundaries between

the symbolic and the imaginary, and of disrupting reality (which is dominated by the

symbolic). Thus the many familiar themes of fantasy--doubling, invisibility,

disappearances, and transformations--all serve the purpose of this disruption, a "violent

'opening' of syntactic order" (1981, 22). Occasionally, the subversion can be political or

ontological in nature. Conversely, Jackson entirely devalues that branch of fantasy that

she characterizes as "faery, or romance literature," citing as examples "moral and

religious allegories, parables and fables informing the stories of Kingsley and Tolkien"

(9), that promotes an evasive (instead of transgressive) response to reality via removal,

comfort, conciliation, transcendence. They "move away from the unsettling implications which are found at the centre of the purely 'fantastic'" (1981, 9).

Citing Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929), Jackson traces the roots of subversion in (Western) literary fantasy to Menippean satire, which "broke the demands of historical realism and probability ... conflated past, present and future, and allowed dialogues with the dead" (Jackson 1981, 14). Specifically, the Menippea was for Bakhtin an example of carnivalesque literature: its primary characteristics are, among others, scandal, parody, laughter, the fantastic, the improbable, the anomalistic, and the utopic (Bakhtin 1984, 114-19). Gothic horror represents a milestone in the transition from the marvelous to the uncanny, the "progressive internalization and recognition of fears as generated by the self" (Jackson 1981, 24). That is, it begins to treat the supernatural with skepticism instead of unquestioned acceptance. As opposed to the supernatural in the marvelous tale, the supernatural in Gothic horror often turns out to be representative of subconscious fears and taboo desires. But the Gothic, according to Jackson, "acts out and defeats subversive desires," and is thus not politically subversive (1981, 96-97). *Dracula* (1897) and *Frankenstein* (1818), for example, are prime culprits of this supposed reinforcement of bourgeois ideology (1981, 122). She continues to argue that the intrusion of fantastic sequences within nineteenth-century realist narratives suggests that fantasy remains ever-present but instead camouflaged, and thus should not be read as an "alternative" to realism at all (1981, 123-24). This argument is similar to those of Brooke-Rose and Rabkin in that they all reassert that fantasy is an omnipresent mode that is not be confined to any specific genre from the

nineteenth century. According to Jackson, the Brontës, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charles

Dickens particularly embody the pseudo-conflict between realism and fantasy (1981,

124). In addition, the twentieth-century works of authors such as Franz Kafka, Julio

Cortázar, Julien Gracq, Mervyn Peake, and Thomas Pynchon are modernist fantasies that

infinitely delay, but do not completely rule out, the possibility of signification (1981,

159).

Demonstrating the debt owed to Todorov by recent thinkers of the fantastic,

Jackson does gesture toward his "hesitation" when she argues that "the basic trope of

fantasy is the *oxymoron*, a figure of speech which folds together contradictions and

sustains them in an impossible unity, without progressing towards synthesis" (1981, 21).

She thus acknowledges that the fundamental basis of fantasy is impossibility made

possible, and a forced confrontation with the impossible. As we have seen thus far, this

formulation may be unavoidable when it comes to various characterizations of the

fantastic, whether it is considered a genre or a mode.

José Monléon's Sociohistorical Approach

José Monléon's *A Specter Is Haunting Europe* (1990) is a more recent example of

an approach that, like Jackson's, emphasizes what fantasy literature may signify instead

of how it should be categorized. Taking issue with Todorov's characterization of the

implied reader who experiences hesitation, Monléon argues that Todorov "does not

adequately address the initial epistemological proposition, since surely the characteristics

of such an implicit reader would depend on the *historical* determinants that framed the

text" (1990, 4 [my emphasis]). Monléon thus links the outpouring of fantastic art and literature in late-eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe to the revolutions and upheavals that transpired within the nation-states of Europe, and uses Foucault to discuss the ways society at the time attempted to categorize and manage that which was deemed uncivilized, unfit, and unreasoned. Fantastic art and literature were simply other means of accomplishing the same objectives.

The key Foucault text that Monléon relies on is *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965). Here, Foucault describes the gradual marginalization processes undergone by bourgeois European societies at the end of the eighteenth century. Whereas previously the non-productive or unwelcome members of society (those who were mad, indigent, criminal, or merely unemployed) were simply allowed to exist at the margins of society, they were now being forcibly separated from society and confined in newly created institutions. Foucault argues that the new conceptual distinction between the mad and the reasonable was as much a result of this physical separation and confinement as it was its *a priori* justification (1988, 35-39). Monléon's stance is that Gothic and fantastic literature were literary processes by which this newly created specter of the mad could be summoned and subsequently banished, thus reassuring the reader of his reason.

Unlike Jackson, who gave the role of subversion primacy in her characterization of fantasy, Monléon argues that the fantastic, appearing after the consolidation of bourgeois power, served to "[defend] the status quo and [preserve] economic order" (1990, 14). Of course, the fantastic under Monléon's consideration here is of a much

more limited scope than that of Jackson's; he only considers the post-revolutionary

fantastic texts in England, France, and Spain. According to Monléon, the Gothic was the

first manifestation of the kind of literature that allowed madness and unreason a

controlled area of expression, but it ultimately consigned those sinister forces to the

feudal past (1990, 44-46).

Polidori's vampire and Shelley's creature, in contrast, seemed much closer to the

nineteenth-century present, reflecting the bourgeoisie's fear of its own distorted self-

image. In Maupassant's *Le Horla* (1887) and James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), the

fantastic seemed now to appear in loci of everyday life -- the *unheimlich* had become

heimlich. Monléon argued that these later manifestations of the fantastic represented the

bourgeoisie's "ambivalent reaction to science and progress" (1990, 92). As with previous

manifestations of the fantastic, its monstrosities were created in the image of the

bourgeois man. Such an appropriation of unreason in the fantastic arts, however, is not

the act of subversion it appears to be; it is instead a "formalization of antinomy" because

"the efficient pursuit of economic performance required a rational/reasonable and

scientific approach to material production and an irrational/unreasonable formulation of

human existence" (Monléon 1990, 102). The gist of Monléon's argument against

fantastic literature's subversive potential is that the articulation of madness in bourgeois

literature is precisely a means of managing it and confining it to spheres that do not

interfere with capitalistic production.

Like Jackson, Monléon is an example of critics who focus primarily on what the

fantastic *means* to society rather than what it *is*.

Summary of Western Approaches to Fantasy

As varied as these approaches to the fantastic are, it is clear that these critics share the common goal of highlighting the value and omnipresence of fantasy in literature. Another common ground is the distinction they make between what they individually define as fantasy, and what is thus demarcated as not-fantasy. Todorov barely registers the possibility that different readers might have different ideas as to what is possible and what is not. Monléon associates the "fantasy" in his fantastic texts with madness, and cites historical sources for what was considered to be unreason at the time these texts were being written. Critics like Brooke-Rose, Jackson, and Rabkin may view the fantastic as an omnipresent mode or feature--and this is the approach with which I am more inclined to agree--but the fact that they can label it as such speaks to the fact they have made *some* distinction between fantasy and non-fantasy. Brooke-Rose is also right to point out that the generic borders between various categories of fantasy are easily manipulated according to each critic's personal preferences. I tend to agree that working theses regarding genres are necessary to organize one's thoughts with respect to an extremely broad assortment of texts, but it is also useful to recognize that genres are forever transforming themselves as a reaction against their very contours, which are usually defined tautologically at any rate.

But if each critic simply defines fantasy according to his or her own criteria, which set of definitions are more useful to the reader who seeks to understand fantasy? Or is the fantastic simply a literary genre or mode that, more so than any other, is destined to remain definitionally fluid? Based on the Western critics I have surveyed thus

far, it is interesting to note that each of these critics, despite their implicit claims of impartiality, bring their own personal responses to bear on texts that they consider to be strange, unexpected, and/or subversive -- qualities shared by these various definitions of the fantastic. This seems to me to be one of the most salient aspect of fantasy criticism -- one's personal reaction to literature that one considers to be non-realist somehow due to its capacity to shock, surprise, and subvert. For the purposes of a cross-cultural inquiry, this aspect is important because all literature provokes a response in the reader -- but depending on the reader (or critic's) cultural background, he or she may or may not classify a text as fantastic, or even as strange. Fantasy works--to a greater or lesser degree, depending on context--because it produces this sensation of strangeness, and this quality is shared between Western works of fantasy and the Chinese texts that I will discuss below.

Fantasy in the Chinese Context: The Chinese Notion of the Strange

So far we have established that in Western literary theory, fantasy is that which stands out from any perceived background of reality, or of literary realism. In Todorov's arguments, this is what triggers the reader's hesitation and wonder; for Jackson, it is what makes certain texts more subversive; for Rabkin, it is the essence of a literary mode. To shift the cultural context and examine what might be considered "out of the ordinary" in the Chinese context, I will focus on *zhiguai* 志怪, the literary corpus that most consistently emphasizes this feature, as an alternative to the Western notion of the fantastic. The landscape of Chinese literature has always been populated with ghosts,

gods, demons, monsters, and other creatures of fantasy; however, *zhiguai* makes of the

strange and the supernatural its *raison d'être*. Due to the genre's enormous impact, it is

not possible to fully examine the impact of *zhiguai* on Chinese literature. I will, however,

attempt to highlight the main arteries of its development and influence.

Zhiguai, which literally means "record(s) of the strange" or "recording the

strange" is a genre that was at its most prominent during the Six Dynasties era in China

(approximately 200-600 C.E.), but bears a literary legacy that continues to this day. The

extremely brief and miscellaneous "records" of this era include subjects as varied as the

attainment of transcendence, shamanistic rituals, the appearance of specters, and the

transformation of animals (Guoliang Wang 1984, 1-3). Its most popular themes and

motifs are arguably the sources of, or inspirations for, most Chinese works of fantasy that

came after. Rujie Yu writes that the first authors of *zhiguai*, short tales written in the

classical language and often compiled into collections, self-consciously used the

language of historical writing to re-tell myths and legends (1992, 29-30), drawing

inspiration from historiographical traditions and Daoist and Buddhist thought.[23] *Zhiguai*

also often borrowed from actual events, while certain authors were also court-appointed

historians (Jianguo Li 1984, 21).

According to Jianguo Li (1984, 10) and Guoliang Wang (1984, 1), the term

zhiguai first appeared in the *Zhuangzi* as a source citation for its account of a legendary

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[23] See Rujie Yu (1992, 40) and Jianguo Li (1984, 3). For example, Han Dynasty historian Si-ma Qian's *Shiji* (*Historical Records*) (circa 91 B.C.E.) was not history as we think of it today, but an incorporation of fragments of fact, history, biographies, treatises, legend, and myth into one unified story of China (Owen 1996a, 14, 135).

bird: "The *Universal Harmony* records various wonders [*zhiguai*]."[24] Authors of

miscellaneous records of the strange adopted the term for their collections from the Wei

Dynasty onward; it described the *act* of recording the strange, or the people who

performed such acts, rather than any defined genre (Campany 1996, 151; Jianguo Li

1984, 10). It was during the Six Dynasties era that the term came to be used in the titles

of works that focused on that which was out of the ordinary, whether it concerned ghosts,

spirits, transcendents, demons, or even strange phenomena that were more trivial. *Zhiguai*

thus gained currency as an unofficial generic label (Jianguo Li 1984, 10). This popular

usage enabled the retroactive classification, from the Ming Dynasty onwards, of *all*

similarly themed works as belonging to the *zhiguai* genre (Jianguo Li 1984, 10-11; Wang

Guoliang 1984, 1). Six Dynasties collections of *zhiguai* often focused on a single theme,

such as the lives of notable people, fantastic lands, stories of gods, stories of vengeful

ghosts, etc., and the nature of the collection was almost always indicated by the title of

the collection itself. These *zhiguai* themes and motifs have since reappeared in the wildly

popular Tang Dynasty *chuanqi* 傳奇 genre (marvelous tales that were much more

developed compared to the shorter *zhiguai*, with intricate plots and deftly drawn

characters) which more or less replaced *zhiguai* in popularity. They were also taken up

again in the "reinvented" *zhiguai* written by writers like Pu Songling, Yuan Mei, and Ji

Yun during late imperial China, whose works I will discuss in chapter 2. Though often

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[24] "齊諧者, 志怪者也." The translation used here is by Burton Watson (Zhuangzi 2003, 23).

called *zhiguai* or the related term *zhiyi*,[25] they are actually an amalgamation of the subject

matter of *zhiguai* and the style of *chuanqi* (Rujie Yu 1992, 225).

Chinese Scholarly Treatment of *Zhiguai*

In the Chinese literary tradition, perhaps the most famous injunction with regards

to the supernatural is the following Confucian one, from *The Analects*: "The topics the

Master did not speak of were prodigies,[26] force, disorder and gods."[27] Confucius's

reticence on the matter is usually cited in connection with the historical conceptual bias

against the classical language tale, which was not considered orthodox literature and

highly fictionalized in comparison (Kao 1994, 225n4). In fact, *The Analects* does contain

passages that comment on anomalies and spirits:

> 1) "To work for the things the common people have a right to and to keep
> one's distance from the gods and spirits while showing them reverence
> can be called wisdom";[28]
>
> 2) "Chi-lu asked how the spirits of the dead and the gods should be served.
> The Master said, 'You are not able even to serve man. How can you serve
> the spirits?' 'May I ask about death?' 'You do not understand even life.
> How can you understand death?'"[29]

Read in conjunction with the first quote above, we may draw the conclusion that

Confucius the intellectual figure *did* speak of "gods and spirits," however sparingly, and

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[25] *yi* 異 is a rough synonym of *guai*; both characters can mean "strange," "different," or
"unusual.
[26] The character *guai* 怪 here rendered as "prodigies" by D. C. Lau is alternatively
translated as "anomalies" (Kao 1994, 225n4).
[27] Book 7, item 21 (Confucius 1979, 89).
[28] Book 6, item 22 (Confucius 1979, 84).
[29] Book 11, item 12 (Confucius 1979, 108).

that he thought them worthy of reverence if not of attention.[30] It is simply the case that Confucius, speaking in an intimate setting with his disciples, saw fit to focus on the human realm.[31] Though *The Analects* speak of anomalies and spirits, these passages demonstrate that the work seems to focus positively on self-cultivation and the human realm.

As influential as Confucianism has been in China, James J. Y. Liu unsurprisingly points out that theories that are "based on the concept of literature as a means to achieve political, social, moral, or educational purposes [have] been the most influential ones in traditional Chinese criticism, because they were sanctioned by Confucianism" (1975, 106). And as prominent as gods and spirits have been in Chinese literature at least in terms of popularity--as we have seen with the legacy of the *zhiguai* genre--the evaluation of texts that make them the focus are frequently tinged with the influence of this kind of pragmatic criticism; most texts dedicated to the strange, moreover, were never considered part of the official Chinese literary canon.[32]

The *zhiguai* representative I have chosen for my study is Pu Songling's Qing Dynasty work *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異. The major interpretive strategies surrounding the collection during the Qing Dynasty were: "legitimating the practice of recording the strange"; "understanding the work as an allegorical vehicle for serious self-expression";

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[30] Wangzhi Du has the same understanding of Confucius's attitude here (1968, 10-12).
[31] See De Bary (1996, 27-28), Ying-shih Yü (2003, 57), and Ivanhoe (2003, 225). Amy Olberding observes, "My own sense is that it matters little to Confucius and to his ritual practices whether spirits exist, as the practices themselves have a value for the practitioner in their promotion of ethically valuable attitudes such as, e.g., gratitude or remembrance" (2012, 208n34).
[32] See Zeng (1992, 1), Rujie Yu (1992, 40), and Campany (1995, 128).

"acknowledging the work as a model of stylistic brilliance and as a great work of fiction"; "conventional moral didacticism" (Zeitlin 1993, 16-17). Understandably, its first preface writers also sought to highlight *Liaozhai zhiyi*'s moral and intellectual value (Zeitlin 1993, 17). In recent decades, Chinese-language studies of *Liaozhai* have only just begun to bring attention to the collection's dynamic characters (Ruifang Ma 2001), aesthetic value (Jiucheng Wu 1998), and narrative complexity (Guo 1985). This is not to say that critics never commented on the nature of the strange itself. However, in general Chinese critics did not theorize fantasy to the extent that Western critics did.

Western Approaches to Chinese *Zhiguai*: Robert Ford Campany's *Strange Writing*

The introduction of Western theory has obviously had an enormous influence on the critical evaluation of Chinese texts. Todorov's work has also been frequently cited, critiqued, and applied in the study of the fantastic aspects of Chinese literature, especially his dictum that hesitation is the crux of the fantastic.[33] Though different readerships necessarily have different ideas when it comes to deciding between reality and fantasy, what matters is that such a boundary does exist--for writer and reader alike--and can be manipulated.

One scholar of Chinese literature who took up Todorov to fruitful effect was Robert Ford Campany, who used Todorov's and Caillois's arguments in his discussion of

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[33] "The fantastic therefore implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; the world is defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events narrated.... *The reader's hesitation* is therefore the first condition of the fantastic" (Todorov 1975, 31 [emphasis in original]). Apart from the works to be discussed below, see for example Chan (1998), Francis (2004), and Giskin (2004).

Six Dynasties *zhiguai*. Campany's book, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (1996), is a thorough exploration of the themes, motifs, and the *raison d'être* of *zhiguai* (which he translates as "anomaly tales"). Arguing that *zhiguai* are not to be dismissed as simply fictionalization of myth or exercises in a new kind of historiography, Campany views different types of *zhiguai* as "cosmographic rhetoric" that attempts to argue in favor of different perspectives with which to understand the world: the *fangshi* (master(s) of esoterica) perspective, the Daoist perspective, the Buddhist perspective, the Confucian perspective, and what Campany calls the "Heaven and Humanity" perspective (1996, 237-363). And *zhiguai* authors did so primarily by foregrounding the strange.

Though there are significant differences between Six Dynasties *zhiguai* and the fantastic tales that Todorovian discusses, Campany argues that the two corpora nonetheless share features such as the "pivot" (the moment of entry into the fantastic which causes hesitation), and the deliberate emphasis of the strange even prior to the pivot. As Campany writes, "the medium itself deliver[s] a message" (1996, 206); in *zhiguai* that feature the most narrative, even before the decisive event the story often gives various hints as to what is about to transpire. For example, in the tale from the *Shuyiji*, it is the moment where the boatman is prompted to look at what exactly his passenger had spit into his till (1996, 225-26). Those who are familiar with the genre would have no trouble recognizing the nature of such a tale within the first few moments of the story, given the basic similarities across various modes of *zhiguai*. The genre, in its use of language, setting, and narrative repetition, challenges expectations just as the

Todorovian fantastic does, though what is doing the challenging might be different. Campany characterizes *zhiguai* as persuasive rhetoric while Todorov makes of the fantastic's transgression of boundaries an end in itself; both critics, however, privilege the moments that trigger disbelief and wonderment.

Western Approaches to Chinese *Zhiguai*: Judith Zeitlin's *Historian of the Strange* (1993)

Judith Zeitlin also uses Todorov to shade her study of *Liaozhai zhiyi*, pointing to a deficiency in the previous critical literature surrounding that work (1993, 3). Zeitlin argues that the "strangeness" in Todorovian fantastic tales and in Chinese tales of the strange are qualitatively different. For Todorov, what is "strange" is a narrative event that is impossible in the "lived world outside the text" (1993, 6). However, Zeitlin argues that in *Liaozhai*, the strangeness does not come from the supernatural events themselves but "results when things are paradoxically affirmed and denied at the same time" (1993, 7). Such strangeness is sustained by the tales' constant manipulation of boundaries.

To illustrate her meaning, Zeitlin cites as example the tale "Scholar Chu" 褚生 from *Liaozhai*, in which the protagonist Chen commemorates, by writing on a wall, the time he spent with a ghost courtesan. When he realizes the true nature of his encounter, he seeks verification by returning to that very wall, only to find that his inscription has nearly faded completely. On this encounter, Zeitlin writes:

> It is own writing on the wall that most tangibly registers the crossing of boundaries in the narrative ... Although the narrative carefully roots Chen's experience in his subjective perception, we are not asked to wonder whether it is a figment of his imagination. The point here is that the subjectivity of Chen's vision does not cancel out the strangeness of his

experience but is rather the means by which it acquires a recognizable form. (1993, 9-10)

The supernatural events bring about the sensation of strangeness, rather than acting as objects representative of strangeness themselves, awaiting the judgment of protagonist or reader. In a story like "Scholar Chu," the crossing of the boundaries between life and death and between self and other results in the recording of tangible proof of the adventure, proof that nonetheless threatens to disappear (1993, 8-10).

Todorov and Zeitlin both emphasize expectation and a sense of hesitation in their reading of fantasy literature. Zeitlin, however, argues that Pu was writing during a time where readers' expectations were conditioned not by any consensus reality, but by their familiarity with other literature (1993, 11). A shrewd author like Pu would have consciously manipulated the boundaries established by previous literature of the strange (1993, 199). The hesitation that Zeitlin has in mind is also fundamentally different from that of Todorov's. She argues that stories like "Scholar Chu" do not force us to root around for explanations one way or the other. Chen's writing on the wall is in the process of disappearing, but its very existence serves to confirm the supernatural events that occurred. Thus whereas Todorov's schema points toward *resolution* in the reader despite the value he places on hesitation, Zeitlin values the ontological state of flux maintained by the stories in *Liaozhai*. One could argue that Zeitlin makes of *Liaozhai* a decidedly postmodern text, where ambiguity is never resolved.

Campany's and Zeitlin's work on *zhiguai* and its successors have brought into the conversation Todorov's moment of hesitation and his attentiveness to the reader's experience of fantastic logic. As I have pointed out, traditional Chinese criticism of

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strange tales emphasized their didactic value and moral content. Clearly, the way boundaries and oppositions between categories create tension and meaning for the reader is an area that has recently drawn the interest of those who study the strange in Chinese literature. It offers new angles of critique besides genre delimitation, moral analysis, and aesthetic evaluation. This is the line of thinking I wish to take up in my cross-cultural analysis of fantasy.

Fantasy in Cinema and Television

Mark Nash's article "*Vampyr* and the Fantastic" (1976) is credited as the first to apply Todorov's work to cinematic fantasy (Donald 1989, 21). Nash argues that Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932) is able to recreate the literary effect of hesitation as described by Todorov through the manipulation of "pronoun functions" -- the different points of view from which a story can be told. For example, the film's use of "false" point-of-view shots that do not correspond to any character in the film contributes to the hesitation and uncertainty felt by the cinematic viewer. Nash's application of Todorov to film is a straightforward one, and he argues for a cinematic analogue to the Todorovian fantastic called the "cinefantastic" (1976, 30).

Among other kinds of studies of the cinematic fantastic, Thomas Elsaesser's (1989) work is a rough analogue of Monléon's study of fantastic literature. Elsaesser argues that in the case of German cinema in the silent era, fantastic elements on film are encoded forms of social reality that reveal actual conflict at the same time as they attempt to conceal it. Like Monléon who does so for fantastic literature, Elsaesser emphasizes the

sociohistorical reasons behind manifestations of the fantastic in cinema. Jean-Louis

Leutrat's (1995) work on fantastic cinema, on the other hand, is an enumeration of

themes and motifs, much like the work of Vax, Castex, and Caillois on the literary

fantastique. In terms of television studies, Catherine Johnson's book *Telefantasy* (2005)

is the first to treat fantasy in British and U.S. television systematically, despite the

popularity of fantastic scenarios on television.

Of course, the same debates that seek to pit fantasy against realism have also

taken place in cinema studies. Invented at the end of the nineteenth-century, cinema in its

early history, as pioneered by the Lumière brothers and George Méliès, has often been

read as continuation of the nineteenth-century literary "conflict" between realism and

fantasy. This is because a typical Lumière short is a slice of everyday life, as suggested

by film titles such as *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon* (*Exiting the Lumière factory at

Lyon*) and *Repas de bébé* (*Baby's Meal*). In contrast, a typical Méliès short is highly

fantastic, as suggested by the frequency with which words such as "fantastic"

(*fantastique*), "devil" (*diable*), and "illusion" (*illusion*) appear in the films' titles.[34]

Of course, the same objections with respect to the supposedly rigid opposition

between the fantastic and the realistic in nineteenth-century European literature may be

raised with respect to fictional film and television as well. Are they not all, being fiction

to some degree, of fantasy? Rather than arbitrarily placing different types of films and

series in one category or another, are they not better read as being situated on a

continuum, like the one proposed by Rabkin for the literary mode of fantasy? For Rabkin,

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[34] See Frazer (1979) for a complete Méliès filmography, generally considered the most
accurate (O'Donoghue 2011). For the Lumières, see Aubert and Seguin (1996).

all fiction is inherently fantastic; some, such as science fiction, supernatural tales, and fairy tales, are simply more fantastic than others.

The theoretical landscape of fantasy in cinema has become even more complicated now after more than a century of filmmaking and writing about film. Does the cinematic apparatus itself, as Christian Metz (1981) and Constance Penley (1985) et al. have argued, create an "imaginary signifier," an externalization of fantasy? How does the nature of television, as a much more intimate yet at the same time social medium, impact the reception of fantasy material? And what complications do the ever-evolving ways in which people consume cinema and television--at home through streaming technology, creative re-processing via YouTube "tributes," and new 3D processing--introduce to the problematic?

As scholars struggle with these unceasing questions, film and television products that are predominantly fantastic continue to enjoy great popularity. Consider the top-earning films worldwide in 2010:

1. *Toy Story 3*
2. *Alice in Wonderland*
3. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 1*
4. *Inception*
5. *Shrek Forever After*
6. *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*
7. *Iron Man 2*
8. *Tangled*
9. *Despicable Me*
10. *How to Train Your Dragon*

If one expands that consideration to include the fifty top-earning films of 2010, there are only a handful of films that arguably do not contain any elements of fantasy beyond fictional storytelling (*The King's Speech*, *The Karate Kid*, *Little Fockers*, *Sex and the*

City 2, etc.) ("2010 Yearly Box Office"). Fantasy is definitely here to stay, at the very

least in mainstream and influential Hollywood cinema that is exported around the

globe.[35] And because fantastic creatures such as werewolves, vampires, aliens, and

zombies remain ever popular, they have received much critical attention with respect to

their usage in cinema, the ways in which they make meaning, as well as their connections

with fantastic literary creations in the past.[36] The same can be said of the televisual

equivalent to the cinefantastic, what Johnson calls "telefantasy," which comes with its

own set of interpretive challenges (Johnson 2005, 3-7, 10-12; Flitterman-Lewis 1992,

216-25).

A Reader-Oriented Approach to Fantasy

        Though it would be impossible to try to group all theories, criticisms, and

categorizations of fantasy neatly under one umbrella, I would nonetheless make the

observation that the salient point for all the writings on fantasy discussed thus far is that

fantasy emphasizes that which is thought to be different from a (subjective) normal

experience. Criticism of fantasy literature almost always begins by analyzing its

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[35] See also David Butler's contention that fantasy in general has been on the upswing in
film since the late 1970's, though he makes a distinction between "fantasy films" such as
the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* series and science-fiction films (more popular
than fantasy in the 1980's and 1990's, according to Butler); "fantasy films in the 2000s
enjoyed major box-office success" as well as "belated recognition from the film industry
that fantasy is not just a vehicle for special effects and merchandising opportunities"
(2009, 5).
[36] See Rovin (1977), Slusser and Rabkin (1985), Leutrat (1995), and Tibbetts (2011) for
example. I use "fantasy" here in a general sense, whereas Butler would categorize
creature films as horror cinema and not true fantasy (2009, 12). Pierre Langlais's blog
post (2011) is a good overview of the current immense popularity of typical supernatural
creatures on television.

divergences from some version of the real, whether it is some presumed shared reality between author and reader or among characters, and/or reality as represented in other fiction. Where people who talk about fantasy might disagree is *how* the fantastic text works with these differences, and *to what end*. Some critics do not consider the latter at all and instead focus on delineating genre(s) of fantasy.

For example, many film critics who work on fantasy in cinematic form focus on the distinctive aesthetics of fantasy and on the general effect these aesthetic experiences produce in audiences. Jean-Louis Leutrat, for example, describes a full range of fantastic vocabulary in his *Vie des fantômes* (1995) that comprises blood, doors, mirrors, statues, masks, portraits, musical reprisals, as well as more abstract categories such as contamination. This kind of "vocabulary" study is similar to the literary example of Vax mentioned earlier. In cinema, these studies usually focus on well-defined genres within fantastic cinema such as post-apocalyptic survival or slasher films.

Todorov's book, on the other hand, is a prime example of a study that tries to broadly sketch a theoretical genre of the fantastic, instead of focusing on individual motifs (though he does discuss them in the latter half of his book). Subsequent studies such as those by Rabkin, Jackson, and Brooke-Rose also focus on genre, though they end up deconstructing Todorov's framework as one that is unable to truly include all of what they deem to be fantasy. These still qualify as genre studies because their focus is on differentiating fantastic works from one another and from realist texts, though their area of focus is much broader than that of Todorov's.

Brooke-Rose's study also qualifies as one that approaches fantasy from the angle of merit -- she wishes to claim for a certain subset of fantastic literature the meritorious function of fiction that can disrupt symbolic reality, a task she argues cannot be accomplished by most realist fiction. Certainly this type of "defensive" approach is popular with critics who wish to rescue fantasy literature from what they view as an unfairly devaluated position next to realist works. Campany's work on Chinese *zhiguai* ascribes to them the function of advocating various cosmographical perspectives, while Zeitlin's analysis of *Liaozhai zhiyi* takes a more aesthetic and reader-oriented approach. Most of these studies, of course, cannot be said to belong exclusively to one category or another; often they are a combination of at least two of these approaches.

All of these scholars approach fantasy with the goal of distinguishing it from a general background of realist literature, though the perceived distance between the two categories depends on the approach. Each scholar also focuses on a different set of distinguishing features, the means with which fantastic events call attention to their own importance. What is considered strange, of course, varies according to author, time period, genre, and cultural setting, along with a number of other factors. Thus it is possible to discuss fantasy cross-culturally as fiction based primarily on strangeness and difference -- the "literature of the strange" (*zhiguai* are records of the strange) in China can be discussed in conjunction with what in Western literature is called "fantasy." All such texts have something that distinguishes them from realist literature, whether it be settings and characters that immediately signify fantasy, a turn in the narrative that causes hesitation, or a gradual buildup of hints and clues to the reader. What constitutes

strangeness in fantasy is not limited to Todorov's strictly delineated "hesitation," because often what is strange or unusual in a fantastic text is not dependent on narrative ir/resolution or any conclusion a reader may draw.

My intention is not to continue the debate with respect to how much of fantasy, and what kind, should be present in literature to qualify it as "fantastic" as opposed to "realist." Critics like Jackson, Brooke-Rose, Kathryn Hume, et al. have already thoroughly examined this ground, which is the basis of their genre-based discussions of fantasy. While generic distinctions are useful, I feel that this line of inquiry has already been thoroughly exhausted, in the sense that such discussions almost always conclude with the avowal that genres are constructed arbitrarily and are at any rate always in flux.[37] I am in agreement with critics who are more inclined to see fantasy as a mode rather than as a genre, and I want to instead identify some of the characteristics that make up the tension between fantasy and reality *within* so many fantastic texts.

With these qualifications in mind, the next several chapters will discuss a cross-cultural subset of fantasy that, in my view, contains the following characteristics of fantastic strangeness: dissolved or destabilized boundaries (between categories that are seemingly mutually exclusive such as life and death, human and animal, human and alien, etc.), societal figures that have been marginalized and made vulnerable, the accumulation of fantastic detail, narrative subversion of expectations, and "twist" endings. Though I take up texts from distinctive genres, cultural settings, and historical

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[37] For example, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Brooke-Rose specifically discusses the problem of unstable genre definitions in fantasy literature by showing where Todorov and Suvin's categories overlap and contradict one another (1981, 73-77).

periods, my intention is not to deny their many important differences; rather, I am curious

about why these texts share these common characteristics, and how they make use of

them. I will focus specifically on a type of short-form fantasy that I shall call the

"intrusion story," where some aspect of the supernatural suddenly infringes upon

"normal," everyday life.

This type of story was central to Todorov's analysis, and the appearance of the

supernatural thrusts the reader into the hesitation that is so important to his definition of

the fantastic. However, my view of the intrusion story is that it is *not* limited to the

European nineteenth-century, and that it can be found, among other places, in the strange

tales of China and in twentieth-century American television. Whether the strange

situation is ultimately resolved in favor of rationality or insanity, or left unresolved, this

story type functions because it emphasizes the confrontation between fantasy and the real

to the exclusion of other elements. In the intrusion story, the strange is also inevitably

ephemeral -- the remarkable invention or artifact is destroyed; the cause of the disruption

dies or departs, never to be seen again.[38] I will examine the various iterations of this story

type from three major fantasy collections: Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* (1740), Barbey

d'Aurevilly's *Les Diaboliques* (1874), and the American television series *The Twilight*

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[38] Not unrelatedly, Deborah A. Harter argues that "partialness"--fragments and
fragmentation--is an essential feature of the Todorovian fantastic, and is in turn best
expressed by the short tale (1996, 2). An observation similar to mine must be credited to
Farah Mendlesohn, who defines a subset of fantasy as "intrusion fantasy," wherein "the
world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with
or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (2008, 115). According to
Mendlesohn, this "intrusion" can occur in a long-form fantasy (the White Queen in *The
Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) or stand as a story on its own (the Gothic novel)
(2008, 114-15).

Zone (1959-1964). Their intrusion stories all make use of the strange in a surprisingly similar way, and to excellent didactic effect.

Chapter 2

The Fantastic Short Story in Late Imperial China

The previous chapter's broad survey of theory and criticism that has been written about fantasy literature confirms a conjecture that is easily made: A large portion of these works--as amorphously and tautologically defined as they are--rely heavily on elements of the strange to intrigue, to shock, or to drive home a moral or literary point. The nineteenth-century fantastic tales that Todorov wrote about come immediately to mind, but other types of fantasy do so as well. But what constitutes these elements? Does anything make them by their nature more intriguing, more shocking, and better suited for the authors' purposes than other tricks of the trade in fiction? What similarities are shared among these elements transculturally, if one looks at a comparable cross-section of such works?

Intrusion Stories

In my conclusion to the previous chapter, I proposed to begin answering these questions by focusing on the "intrusion story," a story type that is shared by fantasy texts of various media and provenance. In this type of story, some aspect of the strange (often, but not always, supernatural) suddenly and quickly infringes upon "normal," everyday life – what is considered normal of course depends on cultural context and even genre conventions. Due to the stories' short length, they emphasize the strangeness of the intrusion and the subsequent confrontation between fantasy and the real to the exclusion

of other narrative elements such as description and character development. In the intrusion story, the strange is also inevitably ephemeral -- the remarkable invention or artifact is destroyed; the cause of the disruption dies or departs, never to be seen again. A large number of fantastic tales from nineteenth-century France feature these characteristics – I will show that they are not exclusive to the literary products of that particular cultural era.

Due to its length, the short story places maximum emphasis on the effects engendered by the intrusion, whereas those effects are rendered less striking by frequent occurrences of supernatural events in other types of fantasy literature. One example is high fantasy, which currently enjoys great popularity. In high fantasy, all the action is set in a separate and distinct world, a world in which events that would be considered supernatural in terms of contemporary consensus reality occur frequently.[39] Examples of high fantasy include William Morris's *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894), T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007). In these stories, the supernatural occurs regularly and is treated by the characters as temporary obstacles to their epic quest, rather than a mystery to be solved. In high fantasy, therefore, the protagonists do not waste time questioning why a dragon or sorceress has suddenly appeared in their midst; instead, they accept the event as a natural occurrence that either helps or hinder their cause.

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[39] Sullivan (2004, 436), Clute and Grant (1997, 466), and Gary K. Wolfe (1986, 52) all define high fantasy in terms of this secondary world. Clute and Grant additionally use the term "otherworld."

Fairy tales are another subgenre of fantasy that features many supernatural occurrences. Again, though fairy tales are often equal in length to intrusion stories, they feature supernatural or miraculous events with a much higher frequency. Whereas these events provoke bewilderment and reflection in intrusion stories, the fairy tale world neutralizes their surprising effects by making them the rule rather than the exception. When a reader reads a fairy tale, he *expects* magical spells, ancient curses, and human beings transformed into animals. Not so with intrusion stories.

By immediately focusing on a strange event, then minimizing other narrative elements such as in-depth character development, detailed and nuanced descriptions, and intricate plot entanglements, and, finally, by ushering the reader to a swift but ambiguous conclusion, the fantastic intrusion story highlights the strange as its main focus, and maintains that focus throughout its short duration. All other fictional trappings are subsumed to its purpose, which is to leave the reader or viewer savoring the effects and implications of the strange. This does not mean that intrusion stories never contain character development, nuanced descriptions, or complex plot structures – just that the strange is clearly the most salient quality of the intrusion story.

The intrusion stories themselves thus masterfully utilize the intrusion of the strange to immediately provoke attention, but they also sustain that attention through the duration of the tale by compounding the strangeness. To do so, these texts make frequent use of dissolved or destabilized boundaries (between categories that are seemingly mutually exclusive such as life and death, human and animal, inanimate objects and living beings, etc.), marginalized figures of society, narrative subversion of readers'

expectations, and "twist" endings. All of these techniques, of course, also serve to

maintain reader attention, and are quite common in short stories in general. However, I

note that the strange intrusion story recurs frequently in *collections* of the strange curated

by lone authorial figures with a strong voice. And ultimately, these author/curators argue

that their stories are not mere entertainment, but also have an educational purpose. I will

argue that these claims are well supported by consideration of the collections in their

entireties, and of the themes and motifs that emerge when the individual stories within

the collections are compared against one another.

I will analyze important collections of the strange from Six Dynasties and late

imperial China, respectively, to show precisely how they participate in this kind of

"moralization" of the strange.

Soushenji: Searching for Supernatural Purpose in Six Dynasties China

The term *zhiguai* 志怪 refers to an important literary genre, but it literally means

"record(s) of the strange" or "recording the strange." Rujie Yu writes that the first authors

of *zhiguai*, brief "records" written in the classical language and often compiled into

collections, self-consciously used the language of historical writing to re-tell myths and

legends (1992, 29-30), drawing inspiration from historiographical traditions and Daoist

and Buddhist thought.[40] *Zhiguai* also borrowed from actual events, while certain authors

were also court-appointed historians (Jianguo Li 1984, 21).

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[40] See Rujie Yu (1992, 40) and Jianguo Li (1984, 3). For example, Han Dynasty historian
Sima Qian's *Shiji* (*Historical Records*) (circa 91 B.C.E.) was not history as we think of it
today, but an incorporation of fragments of fact, history, biographies, treatises, legend,

As a genre, *zhiguai* was at its most prominent during the Six Dynasties era in China (approximately 200-600 C.E.), and bears a literary legacy that continues to this day. However, the term *zhiguai* was not always used to designate genre. The *Zhuangzi* first used it in passing to cite a source for its account of a legendary bird: "The *Universal Harmony* records various wonders [*zhiguai*]."[41] Authors of miscellaneous records of the strange adopted the term for their collections from the Wei Dynasty onward; it described the *act* of recording the strange, or the people who performed such acts, rather than any defined genre (Campany 1996, 151; Jianguo Li 1984, 10). It was during the Six Dynasties era that the term came to be used in the titles of works that focused on that which was out of the ordinary, whether it concerned ghosts, spirits, transcendents, demons, or even strange phenomena that were more trivial. *Zhiguai* thus gained currency as an unofficial generic label during this period (Jianguo Li 1984, 10). The extremely brief and miscellaneous "records" of this era include subjects as varied as the attainment of transcendence, shamanistic rituals, the appearance of specters, and the transformation of animals (Guoliang Wang 1984, 1-3). Their most popular themes and motifs are arguably the sources of, or inspirations for, most Chinese works of fantasy that came after.

Shuyiji 述異記, *Shanhaijing* 山海經, *Suoyu* 瑣語, and *Shenxianzhuan* 神仙傳 are some of the major collections of *zhiguai* from the Six Dynasties era. One of the most important is the *Soushenji* 搜神記 (350 C.E.), attributed to Gan Bao 干寶, a court

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and myth into one unified story of China (Owen 1996a, 14, 135).
[41] "齊諧者, 志怪者也." The translation used here is by Burton Watson (2003, 23). See also Jianguo Li (1984, 10) and Guoliang Wang (1984, 1).

historian from Eastern Jin. The collection comprises 464 tales organized into twenty

chapters,[42] and contains a wide variety of material such as omen interpretations,

hagiographies, biographies, folktales, anecdotes and local histories. This popular

representative of Six Dynasties *zhiguai* possesses many attributes that later writers of

zhiguai-like tales and collections would strive to imitate or preserve: a justificatory

preface explaining the rationales and principles of collection, variety in length and type of

tales collected, and supernatural motifs that emphasize hybrid characteristics and

participate in boundary transgressions.[43] The following item is a representative short

entry from the collection.

> 謝糺噆食客, 以朱書符投井中, 有一雙鯉魚跳出, 即命作膾. 一坐皆得
> 遍.[44]
>
> Hsieh Chiu at one time had quite a few retainers whom he lodged and fed.
> He would write out a talisman in red, toss [it] into the well, and a pair of
> carp would jump out of the water. Thereupon he would order the cook to
> prepare them, and these two fish were enough to feed them all.[45]

In this entry, Gan Bao briefly introduces the subject matter (a nobleman who

needs to feed his retainers). Though there is none here, sometimes he also notes the

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[42] On transmission of the collection and different versions of the collection, see
DeWoskin and Crump (1996, xxxii-xxxiv). The twenty-chapter version of the collection,
upon which modern translations are based, is accepted as the most complete extant
version.
[43] Magical objects, extraordinary animals (animal-animal or animal-human hybridity),
animal spirits, Taoist shamans that perform feats of physical impossibility, immortality,
visits to the underworld, resurrection of the dead, acts of divine intervention in the human
sphere, etc., among others.
[44] Chapter 2, item 40. Here I use Guizhou renmin chubanshe's complete edition of
Soushenji, *Soushenji quanyi* 搜神記全譯 (hereafter "SSJQ") (1990, 55).
[45] From the DeWoskin and Crump translation, *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written
Record* (1996, 22), hereafter "ISS." All English cited here is from this translation.

location of the incident or story being recorded. Then, he recounts the extraordinary event that was experienced—here an unexpected transformation of nothing into something aided by the power of magic—and the outcome of that event, in a straightforward manner. He does not offer additional commentary.

However, the collection also contains much longer tales that exhibit a greater amount of narrative complexity and more fictional flourishes. These types of entries bear a much greater resemblance to the more complex strange tales by Pu Songling et al. from late imperial China. The greater complexity is evident from the beginnings of the tales, as Gan is much more specific about the source of the story. Instead of anonymous subjects and places, he introduces people with specific details such as "Huang Shen, from Mi-ts'un in Kou-jung District"[46] or "Wei's Grand Protector of Kuei-yang, Chang Liao (T. Shu-kao) of Chiang-hsia."[47] The specificity lends these lengthier tales greater authenticity compared to the shorter entries.

The longer tales within the collection also take up many motifs of intrusion (of the supernatural or extraordinary into everyday life) that appear regularly in Chinese tales of the strange. Aside from the topics mentioned earlier, a common story trope is the supernatural woman who visits the lonely scholar or official out of the blue and serves as wish-fulfillment.

> 魏濟北郡從事掾弦超, 字義起. 以嘉平中夜獨宿, 夢有神女來從之.[48]

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[46] "句容縣麋村民黃審"; from chapter 18, item 423 (ISS 1996, 219; SSJQ 1990, 497).
[47] "魏桂陽太守江夏張遼, 字叔高"; from chapter 18, item 417 (ISS 1996, 215; SSJQ 1990, 488-89).
[48] From chapter 1, item 31 (SSJQ 1990, 41-43).

> Hsüan Ch'ao (T. Yi-ch'i) was an Attendant in the Ch'i-pei Commandery during the Wei dynasty. One night during the Chia-p'ing era, he had a dream that a goddess came to accompany him in his lonesome bed. (ISS 1996, 16-18)

As in all such tales of supernatural visitation, the woman's uncommon stature is emphasized at every turn. In this particular tale, Gan describes the woman's "unusual beauty" and "transcendent loveliness,"[49] her literary prowess, and her divinatory capabilities. She also announces to Hsüan Ch'ao that she is the Jade Lady from Heaven, clearly signifying her supernatural status. In this story, as in most of its ilk, the male protagonist inevitably discovers that the woman is supernatural and the couple must be separated at the end of the tale.[50]

Although Six Dynasties *zhiguai* collections like *Soushenji* do not contain the amount of narrative embellishment and overt authorial commentary present in later collections of the strange, they are early examples of collector-authors using the collection—rather than just individual stories—to make particular claims. Gan Bao states in his preface that "it is enough to make clear that the spirit world is not a lie,"[51] and further argues for the merits of his collection: "I will count myself fortunate if in the future curious scholars come along, note the bases of these stories and find things within them to enlighten their hearts and fill their eyes."[52] These are clear statements that argue against the reading of *Soushenji* as simply a collection of amusing trifles with no purpose.

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[49] "嘉其美異, 非常人之容."

[50] Additional variations on this story type include: Chapter 1, item 28; chapter 1, item 30; chapter 4, item 76; chapter 4, item 89; chapter 15, item 361; and chapter 16, item 395.

[51] "亦足以發明神道之不誣也" (ISS 1996, xxvii; SSJQ 1990, 559).

[52] "幸將來好事之士錄其根體, 有以遊心寓目而無憂焉" (ISS 1996, xxvii; SSJQ 1990, 559).

If one examines the overall contents of *Soushenji*, it is indeed clear that Gan has

supported his claims by emphasizing the supernatural in his tales, demonstrating that the

spirit world has much guidance to offer.

Liaozhai zhiyi by Pu Songling

Pu Songling's magnum opus *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (1740),[53] a collection of

nearly five hundred strange tales written in early Qing, provides a fitting continuation

point for our investigation due to its immense popularity and the fact that it is a

representative amalgam of two great literary traditions in Chinese history.[54] The first, of

course, is the *zhiguai* tradition of amassing tales of the strange, unusual, extraordinary,

etc. and presenting them as one curated collection. Compared to Pu's work, however,

most earlier *zhiguai* like *Soushenji* were generally much shorter and contained very little

embellishment – in fact, Lu Hsun compares the length of Six Dynasties *zhiguai* tales to

the length of Pu's pseudonymic comments appended at the end of his much lengthier

tales (1982, 260).

Secondly, Pu, like the other prominent compilers of the strange in his day such as

Ji Yun and Yuan Mei, chose to present his work in a format called *biji xiaoshuo* 筆記小

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[53] Translated as *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* by Minford (2006) and as *Strange Tales from Make-Do Studio* by Mair and Mair (1989). On the precise number of tales, tales whose authorship remain in dispute, and the various manuscripts on which modern collections are based, see Chang and Chang (1998, 77-81, 216-17n4), Barr's "Textual Transmission" (1984), and the varorium editions edited by Youhe Zhang (1978) and Ren Duxing Ren (2000), respectively.

[54] On *Liaozhai*'s continued popularity and subsequent adaptations in popular culture, see Chang and Chang (1998, 1-2).

說 ("note-form literature"), a genre of fiction characterized by the heterogeneity and

brevity of its collected entries (Yeqiu Liu 1980, 5; Ma and Lau 1978, xxi). The *biji*

xiaoshuo of late imperial China, including Pu's work, were collections of classical-

language tales that were a combination of the most time-honored supernatural elements

from earlier *zhiguai*, and the intricate narratives—often involving star-crossed lovers and

remarkable coincidences—of *chuanqi* 傳奇, tales of the marvelous.[55] Ji Yun's *Yuewei*

caotang biji 閱微草堂筆記 (1800)[56] and Yuan Mei's *Zi bu yu* 子不語 (1788)[57] were

written after and influenced by *Liaozhai*, and quite similar to their predecessor in terms of

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[55] *Chuanqi* tales flourished during the Tang dynasty, and are differentiated from *biji* and *zhiguai* based on their length and their attention to detail and characterization. Aside from the supernatural, *chuanqi* subjects also include love stories, historical events, and tales of knight-errantry (Ma and Lau 1978, xxi). What makes matters somewhat confusing is the fact that earlier *zhiguai* were also sometimes called *biji* because they were large collections of a heterogeneous nature (Louie and Edwards 1995, xxviii). Nevertheless, Six Dynasties-era *zhiguai* are still primarily known as such, whereas as Louie and Edwards point out, "[by] the [Ming] and Qing dynasties, the *biji xiaoshuo* had integrated *both* the *zhiguai* and the *chuanqi* traditions" (1995, xxix [my emphasis]). Rania Huntington provides a useful overview of the inconsistent manner in which Ming, Qing, and even contemporary scholars employ the labels of both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* in characterizing late imperial tales of the strange in *biji* format (2003, 15-19).
[56] The complete Chinese text of *Yuewei* I consulted is published by Taiwan Shufang in two volumes (2012) and also in *Ji Xiaolan quanji* 紀曉嵐全集 (1935). The title may be translated as *Notes from the Studio of Reading Between the Lines, Notes from the Thatched Hut for Examining the Epigrammatic*, or *Random Jottings at the Cottage of Close Scrutiny* (Chiang 2005, 4; Keenan 1999, xi; Chan 1998, 1). Studies of *Yuewei* include Gao (1985), Lai (1982), and Keenan (1987); for an overview on Ji Yun, see Xu (1981), Zhenyuan Wang (1986), and Zhou (1994).
[57] The entire Chinese original of *Zi bu yu* can be found in volume 4 of *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集 (1993), which is a collection of all of Yuan's works of fiction, poetry, and criticism. It is the version I have used here in my chapter. For an overview on Yuan's life and works, see Yingzhi Wang (2002), Song (1998), and Jian (1988). On *Zi bu yu* in particular, see Yan (1993) or Yuhui Wu (1988). *Zi bu yu* may be translated as *What Confucius Wouldn't Speak About* or *What Confucius Wouldn't Talk About* and is poetically rendered as *Censored by Confucius* in Louie and Edwards's translation (1995).

content and sources. Though the two collections also enjoy great reputations today, they are nowhere near as well studied or as widely translated in the West as *Liaozhai* (Louie and Edwards 1995, xxix). For the sake of comparison, I will also examine a few tales from those collections later in this chapter.

As a collection, *Liaozhai* is also worth studying because its hundreds of stories vary considerably in length, subject matter, and storytelling technique.[58] Its shortest entry is comparable to the typical short *zhiguai* entry, comprising roughly one hundred classical Chinese characters, which in today's printed matter takes up merely a quarter of a page's length, and roughly three-quarters of a page in English translation in standard font size. These "stories" are better compared to encyclopedia or catalog entries, as most of them contain the briefest of descriptions of a supernatural or unusual event, and do not attempt to do much beyond stating the basic facts. The following entry, "Frog Chorus" 蛙曲, is a typical example.

> 王子巽言: "在都時, 曾見一人作劇於市: 攜木盒作格, 凡十有二孔: 每孔伏蛙. 以細杖敲其首, 輒哇然作鳴. 或與金錢, 則亂擊蛙頂, 如拊雲鑼, 官商詞曲, 了了可辨."[59]

> Wang Zisun once told me this story.[60] He was in the capital when he saw a man putting on a performance in the marketplace, with a wooden box divided into twelve sections, each of which contained a crouching frog. Whenever he tapped one of the frogs on the head with his little baton, it

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[58] Barr's article "A Comparative Study of Early and Late Tales in *Liaozhai zhiyi*" (1985) is a valiant and nuanced attempt at organizing the tales and gleaning general trends and stylistic features from tales written around the same time as one another.

[59] *Liaozhai zhiyi quanjiao huizhu jiping* (2000, 863). This is the 2000 varorium edition of *Liaozhai*, cited hereafter as "LZQHJ." Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the Chinese original are from this edition.

[60] The cited translation has a paragraph break here that is not present in the original Chinese text.

began to croak. If he was given money, he would start tapping the frogs' heads in earnest one after the other, producing an orchestral sound like a set of gong-chimes, every note perfectly pitched and clearly audible.[61]

Though the tale is brief, Pu makes sure to include a "source citation" in the form of the ostensible storyteller Wang, just as *Soushenji*'s entries usually began with the protagonist's name and location. In Pu's collection, these citations sometimes increase in complexity along with the tale, with Pu's narrator conveying the information from a second or even third-hand source.[62] In contrast to these "encyclopedia entries," the collection's lengthiest tales sometimes approach the length of a novella, recounting the adventures of multiple characters through multiple generations. In terms of content, tone, and narrative technique, these long tales are most reminiscent of *chuanqi*.

The Universe of *Liaozhai*: Justifying the Supernatural

In terms of subject matter, the universe of *Liaozhai* comprises many of the traditional *zhiguai* story types, and more. Like the Six Dynasties *zhiguai* collections *Soushenji* and *Youminglu* 幽明錄,[63] both of which Pu references in his preface as works he humbly hopes to imitate,[64] *Liaozhai*'s entries cover a variety of topics: supernatural

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[61] From the Minford translation, hererafter "JM" (2006, 324). For subsequent quotations, the translation is mine if no such citation is given.

[62] Tales that contain examples of such complexity include 馬介甫 (LZQHJ 2000, 1081-1105) and 考城隍 (LZQHJ 2000, 3-6).

[63] Compiled by Yiqing Liu 劉義慶 (403-444).

[64] "For although my talents are not those of Kan Pao, I am always fond of exploring the supernatural"; "I piece together my tales, vainly hoping to produce a sequel to the *Yu-ming lu…*" (quoted in Chang and Chang 1998, 163-64). Pu's preface is quoted and translated in full in Chang and Chang (1998, 162-64). The Chinese original reads: "才非干寶, 雅愛搜神"; "集腋為裘, 妄想續幽明之錄" ("Liaozhai zizhi" 2000, 29).

phenomena such as animal and plant spirits,[65] vengeful ghosts,[66] past lives,[67] comparatively mundane accounts of historical figures and neighborhood anecdotes (such as the example provided above),[68] extraordinary feats,[69] and even intriguing court cases resembling detective fiction.[70] Sometimes multiple elements can appear in a single intricate tale of filial piety, karmic retribution, the injustices of bureaucratic institutions both human and supernatural, or the power of friendship or romance.[71] Based solely on the above inventory, one can see that the elements of strangeness vary in both nature and degree from tale to tale, while Pu's writing covers a broad stylistic territory as well.

To what end do authors like Pu Songling emphasize the strange and the unusual in their narratives? Part of it is surely intended to capitalize on the continued popularity of *zhiguai* and *zhiguai*-influenced tales, which have a long-evolving tradition that can be traced as far back as the Zhou Dynasty era (1046-256 B.C.E.) (Jianguo Li 1984, 24-75). Pu, of course, added more intricate storytelling elements clearly borrowed from, or

[65] Examples include 畫馬 (LZQHJ 2000, 1519-20), 竹青 (LZQHJ 2000, 1232-37), 蛇人 (LZQHJ 2000, 67-71), 水莽草 (LZQHJ 2000, 263-69), 黃英 (LZQHJ 2000, 2094-2102).
[66] Examples include 考弊司 (LZQHJ 2000, 1232-37), 申氏 (LZQHJ 2000, 2068-74), 捉鬼射狐 (LZQHJ 2000, 827-30), 尸變 (LZQHJ 2000, 9-12), 噴水 (LZQHJ 2000, 13-14).
[67] Examples include 四十千 (LZQHJ 2000, 128-129), 某公 (LZQHJ 2000, 305-06), 考弊司 (LZQHJ 2000, 1232-37), 連瑣 (LZQHJ 2000, 482-92), 三生 (LZQHJ 2000, 108-112).
[68] Examples include 偷桃 (LZQHJ 2000, 47-51), 種梨 (LZQHJ 2000, 52-55), 口技 (LZQHJ 2000, 392-98), 佟客 (LZQHJ 2000, 1734-38), 小官人 (LZQHJ 2000, 291-92).
[69] Examples include 陸押官 (LZQHJ 2000, 1683-86), 寒月芙蓉 (LZQHJ 2000, 86974), 顛道人 (LZQHJ 2000, 1424-26), 俠女 (LZQHJ 2000, 308-318), 武技 (LZQHJ 2000, 894-97).
[70] Examples include 太原獄 (LZQHJ 2000, 2430-32), 于中丞 (LZQHJ 2000, 1785-87), 詩讞 (LZQHJ 2000, 1668-72), 新鄭獄 (LZQHJ 2000, 2433-35), 折獄 (LZQHJ 2000, 1823-31).
[71] Examples include 聶小倩 (LZQHJ 2000, 238-50), 湘裙 (LZQHJ 2000, 1925-35), 于去惡 (LZQHJ 2000, 1710-19), 蓮香 (LZQHJ 2000, 323-41), 青娥 (LZQHJ 2000, 1384-95).

influenced by, the *chuanqi* tradition.[72] Like *chuanqi*, some of Pu's longer tales contain

surprising narrative twists, familiar tropes from folklore and religion, and happy endings

in which the good receive their due and the wicked are punished. Ironically, supernatural

elements that are on the surface strange and even horrific do not necessarily distract from

this comforting backdrop of familiarity, because they were also common elements in

chuanqi. Unlike *chuanqi*, however, Pu's tales make them the focus and present unusual

takes on them, which entertains and keeps the reader intrigued.

Another straightforward explanation for the presence of the supernatural may be

found in Pu's preface, in which he confesses his passion for collecting and re-telling tales

of the strange:

> 情類黃州, 喜人談鬼. 聞則命筆, 遂以成編. 久之, 四方同人, 又以郵筒相
> 寄. 因而物以好聚, 所積益夥. ("Liaozhai zizhi" 2000, 29)

> [My] temperament is rather akin to that of Huang-chou [Su Shih (Tung-p'o), a famous Sung essayist and poet, 1036-1101] and I [too] love to hear
> people talk about ghosts. Having heard what people say, I would put it in
> writing and subsequently dress it up in the form of a story; thus in the
> lapse of time my friends from all quarters have supplied me with
> quantities of material, which, from my habit of collecting, has grown into
> a vast pile.[73]

In other words, Pu justifies the presence of the supernatural through his personal interest.

Though maintaining a tone of modesty and self-effacement throughout his preface, Pu

nonetheless also suggests that tales of the supernatural may offer their own wisdom

despite their reputation as frivolities. He was aware that his stories may be viewed as

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[72] Zeitlin (1993, 197), Chang and Chang (1998, 91), and Kang (2006, 10) all make this
observation as well.
[73] Quoted in Chang and Chang (1998, 162-63). Supplementary information here was also
provided by Chang and Chang.

lacking in literary respectability, but quotes Confucius in exhorting the reader not to dismiss them without consideration.[74] As mentioned above, Pu also alludes to works such as *Soushenji* and *Youminglu*, thus aligning himself with famous precedents of supernatural storytelling.

Further justification of the supernatural can be found in Pu's comments on 195 of his own tales. These comments are written under the pseudonym *Yishishi* 異史氏 ("Historian of the Strange"), just as Sima Qian commented on his *Shiji* using the pseudonym *Taishigong* 太史公 ("Grand Historian"). Chang and Chang argue that all traditional Chinese scholars felt a particular responsibility toward the writing of history, which in the high Confucian tradition also meant passing judgment on past events (1998, 167). Sima Qian does so as *Taishigong*; Pu does so as *Yishishi*. Due to this sense of responsibility, Pu was on a "historical mission" to collect tales that he felt ought not be neglected.[75] Though these stories contained elements of folk culture and the supernatural, Pu felt that they nonetheless deserved to be recorded for their potential instructional value.

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[74] "展如之人, 得毋向我胡盧耶? 然五父衢頭, 或涉濫聽; 而三生石上, 頗誤前因. 放縱之言, 有未可概以人廢者" ("Liaozhai zizhi" 2000, 29); "Were serious men like these to open my book, I should be a laughingstock to them indeed. However, although the stories heard at the crossroads might … be absurd, yet they might make sense if one views them like the story [of the Monk Yuan-kuan] that leads to the understanding of the three states of human existence. Furthermore, [as Confucius once cautioned us,] never set aside words because of the man who utters them" (quoted in Chang and Chang 1998, 163).
[75] Chang and Chang (1998, 169).

I will provide an example of a fairly standard appended comment from "A Most Exemplary Monk" 僧孽.[76] In this short tale, a man is mistakenly sent to the underworld. There, he sees his brother, the titular monk, being hung upside down and tortured. Back in the realm of his fellow human beings, he discovers that his brother has indeed hung himself upside down, as that is the only means of reducing the physical pain he currently suffers. The story concludes with the monk giving up his addiction to liquor and meat and renewing his devotion to Buddhism. The story itself has not failed to make its message clear, but Pu still feels the need to add a comment: "Evil men reason to themselves that the realm of ghosts is remote; little do they know that what plagues them under the sun is actually their punishment from Hell. How can they not be afraid?"[77] The not-so-subtle admonishment here--to any potential skeptical readers as well as "evil men"--is that one would be unwise to doubt that the realm of spirits has a significant impact on the mortal realm.

In another type of comment, Pu explicitly compares the supernatural characters in his tales to human beings, with the latter often seeming more less wise or less virtuous in the comparison. If that is not the case, then the comparison serves to show that the supernatural beings are not so different from humans. An example of this type of comment appears in "Wang Liulang" 王六郎 (LZQHJ 2000, 39-46), the account of a fisherman who befriends a ghost, the titular Wang Liulang. After a while, Wang has

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[76] JM (2006, 87-89); LZQHJ (2000, 99-100). The original Chinese title literally means "monk's sin(s)."

[77] JM (2006, 89); "鬼獄渺茫, 惡人每以自解; 而不知昭昭之貨, 即冥冥之罰也. 可勿懼哉?" (LZQHJ 2000, 99).

served his time as ghost and is about to be reincarnated, but a young woman must drown and take his place. Wang takes pity on the woman and her infant child and frees her unharmed. As a result of this good deed, Wang is promoted to the position of local god, but he maintains his friendship with the fisherman while serving the local populace. Pu's lengthy comment on this tale begins by asking, "Wang was in an elevated position, but did not forget the poor and the base -- this is the reason that he was made a god. Do today's rich and successful still remember their humble friends?"[78] To further emphasize the comparison, Pu also relates an anecdote about a rich official cruelly turning away a destitute former friend who is seeking help.

Elsewhere, though some of Pu's comments do not specifically allude to the supernatural elements in the tale, the implication is nonetheless that the tales are of didactic value *despite* their unorthodox contents. By glossing over the physical distinctions between supernatural and human beings and instead focusing on what can be learned from the former and their behavior, be they virtuous or immoral, the comments neutralize the strangeness of the tales and make their characters human, in a sense, and easy to relate to. Ironically, what the stories themselves have achieved in terms of establishing and foregrounding the strange is somewhat nullified by Pu's ostensible need to justify the existence of these supernatural elements instead of allowing them to stand on their own.

Thematically, this justificatory tendency works nicely alongside one of the key features of intrusion stories: the ephemerality of the intruding elements of strangeness.

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[78] "置身青雲, 無忘貧賤, 此其所以神也. 今日車中貴介, 寧復識戴笠人哉?" (LZQHJ 2000, 42 [my translation]).

One of the most prominent story types in *Liaozhai* is the male human's encounter with supernatural beauty, after which the strange events are rarely left unexplained. Instead, the supernatural beauty herself usually explains to the male protagonist that she (and, usually, the offspring she bears him) is the reward for his virtue, talent, piety, or performance of a good deed. After his predicament--in the form of poverty, difficulties with other supernatural creatures, or lack of success in his career, etc.--is resolved, the supernatural beauty disappears at the end of the story, restoring the human realm to the status quo. Other types of disappearance are enacted when both partners in a human and non-human union become immortal or spirits of some type, but permanently leave the realm of humanity when their allotted time comes to an end, or when the supernatural woman somehow becomes human through magical interference or mechanisms of reincarnation.[79] In the less common example where the supernatural woman actually remains in the mortal man's life, the story usually explains that the couple has given birth to a normal human child, usually male (*yang*), who thus normalizes the intrusion (*yin*).[80] Stories involving human encounters with objects endowed with magical properties may

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[79] 宦娘 (LZQHJ 2000, 1460-67), 紅玉 (LZQHJ 2000, 405-15), 張鴻漸 (LZQHJ 2000, 1797-1807), 蕙芳 (LZQHJ 2000, 1199-1203), 書癡 (LZQHJ 2000, 2103-10), 畫壁 (LZQHJ 2000, 21-27), 素秋 (LZQHJ 2000, 1962-74), 西湖王 (LZQHJ 2000, 974-87), and 小翠 (LZQHJ 2000, 1481-93) are all variations on this basic story type of disappearance.

[80] For example in 晚霞 (LZQHJ 2000, 2136-43), 花姑子 (LZQHJ 2000, 956-67), and 巧娘 (LZQHJ 2000, 376-89). A notable exception is 夜叉國 (LZQHJ 2000, 507-16) – Not only are the male protagonist and his yaksha wife's children described as half-yaksha, they become successfully integrated into human society, even holding government posts.

also be viewed as variations on the intrusion-connection-disappearance pattern so frequently utilized in stories featuring supernatural women.[81]

Another frequently occurring story type, the brief anecdotal entry on the experience of a supernatural event--a magic trick, for example, or unusual behavior in animals[82]--gestures towards this same ephemerality by virtue of its own classificatory nature, which forever fossilizes the strange event in writing, ensuring its permanence and disappearance at the same time. Because writing--here usually a record of hearsay, no less--can only ever purport to be an approximation of the actual event. Here, as in the other types of stories in *Liaozhai*, there are two contradictory impulses: fascination with the unexplained fantastic that prompts the recording and narration of the story, and the very acts of recording, explaining, and justifying, done in human terms, that normalizes the fantastic to a degree. The strangeness and dissolution of boundaries introduced in the intrusion story are ephemeral, ultimately giving way to the normative demands of sense-making devices such as narrative coherence, justificatory remarks, and marginalia commentary, demands in which studies such as this one inevitably participate.

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[81] For example, 石清虛 (LZQHJ 2000, 2278-83), 八大王 (LZQHJ 2000, 1299-1309), and 鳳仙 (LZQHJ 2000, 1723-33).

[82] Examples of this story type include 偷桃 (LZQHJ 2000, 47-51), 種梨 (LZQHJ 2000, 52-55), 夏雪 (LZQHJ 2000, 1564-65), 小官人 (LZQHJ 2000, 291-92), 義鼠 (LZQHJ 2000, 251-52), 海大魚 (LZQHJ 2000, 2504), 耳中人 (LZQHJ 2000, 7-8), and 噴水 (LZQHJ 2000, 13-14).

Liaozhai Case Study: "Scholar from Fengyang"

Having briefly explored the colorful universe of *Liaozhai* and its stories' didactic aims, let us examine one of its typical intrusion stories, "Scholar from Fengyang" 鳳陽士人 (LZQHJ 2000, 272-77). A short tale like this one, despite its length, can still be packed with strange and unusual details that contribute to the story's richness. A woman, missing her husband the titular character, has a dream in which a mysterious and beautiful woman enters her house and offers to take her to her husband. The pair meets the scholar while traveling, and all three return to the mysterious woman's house, which happens to be nearby. While there, the scholar enters into an affair with the mysterious woman, completely neglecting his wife. Despondent and angry, the scholar's wife is preparing to leave when she meets her younger brother Sanlang just outside the woman's house. Furious on his sister's behalf, Sanlang throws a rock through a window of the house in anger, accidentally killing the scholar. The scholar's wife is seized with despair when she learns that her husband has died; she clings to her brother and refuses to allow him to leave the scene. Sanlang angrily shoves his sister to the floor, upset that she has now changed her mind about her unfaithful husband, which prompts the woman to wake up and realize that she had just been dreaming. The next day, the scholar's wife receives successive confirmations from both husband and younger brother that they all shared the same dream. The fact the mysterious female visitor so swiftly appears in the wife's dream and brings about a series of escalating, inexplicable events, then just as quickly disappears, establishes this tale as a typical intrusion story.

In terms of its utilization of the "intrusion of the strange" motif, "Scholar from Fengyang" is both typical and innovative in comparison with other tales of the strange within the *zhiguai* tradition. A mysterious woman suddenly appearing inside the protagonist's residence unannounced is a device that initiates the plot of many a strange tale.[83] In this instance, the scholar's wife has been tossing and turning in bed when the mysterious woman appears without any preamble: "A beautiful woman wearing a pearl headdress and a bright red dress lifted the curtain and entered."[84] But at the same time as his usage of a storytelling cliché here, Pu is already playing against type because the beautiful, mysterious woman is not offering a wish-fulfillment romance to a lonely scholar. Instead, she is offering to bring a lonely woman to her husband.[85] The device here simultaneously acknowledges the story's *zhiguai* heritage by utilizing a common motif, but also swiftly distinguishes its narrative from that of other strange tales. It is emblematic of the complex and ceaseless intertextual dialogue that all *zhiguai* tales enter into, as their sheer numbers mean that no tale stands completely on its own. The unique motive of the mysterious female visitor is particularly effective in an intrusion story of this type, because an experienced reader would have already been trained to expect a scenario involving the woman seducing a man, or, less commonly, a man seducing a

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[83] See footnote 50 for examples from *Soushenji*. Examples from *Liaozhai* include 沂水秀才 (LZQHJ 2000, 1352-53), 蕙芳 (LZQHJ 2000, 1199-1203), and 紅玉 (LZQHJ 2000, 405-15).
[84] "有一個麗人, 頭上插著珠花, 穿著大紅裙子, 掀起簾子就進來了"; my translation.
[85] As Judith Zeitlin helpfully points out, Pu's tale is actually a reworking of one from *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (978 A.D.) in which it is the man who receives an unexpected dream visit from a woman, in this case his wife (Zeitlin 1993, 157).

woman. The following is a typical beginning to this type of story, featuring a night

setting and a man alone in his home:

> 公夜坐, 有女子往來燈下... 心知其狐, 而愛好之. 遽呼之來... 朱笑而起,
> 曳坐謝過. 遂與親密...[86]
>
> One night, when [Judge Zhu] was sitting alone, he saw a young lady
> pacing to and fro in the lamplight.... He knew instinctively that she must
> be a fox-spirit and, finding himself greatly attracted to her, he ordered her
> to come over to him.... [Zhu] drew her down gently to sit by his side and
> apologized for his brusqueness. They soon became lovers... (JM 2006,
> 233)[87]

In fact, "Scholar from Fengyang" hints at the unexpected at the outset, where we

learn that the husband has promised to return within half a year, but still has not done so

as of his tenth month away. A reasonable conjecture is that something unusual has

happened. Many additional surprising events occur throughout the story, but neither the

narrator nor the story's characters dwell on their extraordinary character, which actually

has the effect of heightening their effects on the reader. For example, while the two

women are walking, the mysterious visitor offers her own shoes to the scholar's wife for

comfort, and they fit exactly. The scholar's wife is able to walk swiftly thereafter, but

does not question this surprising effect or the fact that the shoes are a perfect fit.[88]

Similarly, when the two women chance to meet the scholar on the road, neither husband

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[86] From 汾州狐 (LZQHJ 2000, 374-75).

[87] "The Fox of Fenzhou."

[88] Zeitlin speculates that due to the homonymic relationship between "shoe" (鞋) and
"union" (諧), one that is often exploited to interpret shoes as symbolic of marriage in
dreams, the wife's losing her own shoes is perhaps "the first sign that the promised
reunion will be forfeited because the wife is not the [mysterious woman]'s equal" (1993,
158). Nonetheless, if it is an ominous sign, it is one that neither the woman nor the wife
remarks upon.

nor wife question the remarkably coincidental encounter, and willingly follow the mysterious woman to her house to rest. Such markers of unusualness continue to accumulate in the story—the husband's inexplicably cruel behavior, the mysterious woman's song that echoes exactly the wife's circumstances at the beginning of the story, and Sanlang's accidental murder of the husband with the rock—but we are not privy to any of the characters' reactive thoughts, if there are any.

The story's coda heightens and sustains the effect of the woman's strange dream—inexplicably shared among three people—as it abruptly concludes without any of the three dreamers wondering about it. This lack of curiosity is underscored by the narrative, which states matter-of-factly that the three dreams were the same, but gives voice to a question about one specific detail of the dream: "But they did not know who the beautiful woman was."[89] By highlighting just one oddly specific yet unexplained aspect of the dream, this concluding thought allows the rest of it to remain nebulous and fascinating.

One could also argue that in the universe of *Liaozhai*, where characters regularly have dream visits from vengeful ghosts, dead loved ones or local gods, and/or dreams that turn out to be of a prophetic nature, what is out of the ordinary here *is* precisely the fact that the beautiful woman never provides any explanation of her behavior. Nor does she turn out to be a wronged ghost, deity, or a plant or animal spirit who subsequently appears in the story's non-dream reality to explain the events of the dream. The husband's cruel in-dream behavior also does not have any real-life repercussions. In *Liaozhai*, a

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[89] "但不知麗人何許耳."

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collection whose sheer volume emphasizes both variety and repetition, certain events distinguish themselves not because they are strange or supernatural, but because the outcome is unexpected in comparison to stories within the same collection that roughly follow the same rubric – as in the previous example of "Scholar from Fengyang" distinguishing itself from the familiar story type that features scholars encountering mysterious, supernatural female figures at night. This type of collection fits Barbara Benedict's understanding of the typical anthology, whose characteristics are at the same time selectivity and variety (2003, 231-32). The collector-author needs to impose a consistent message that justifies the existence of the collection while simultaneously ensuring that the reader is not lulled into complacency. A story like "Scholar of Fengyang" serves these purposes nicely in a collection already well populated by the supernatural.

The deliberately mundane nature of the dream and the dreamers' subdued reaction to this extraordinary event also serve to blur the distinction between heretofore separate ontological categories: in the case of this story, dream and reality. The beginning of the story is a fairly typical scenario in which the dreamer does not realize she has fallen asleep, and the narrative gives no overt cues as to the dreamer's state of consciousness.[90] Only when the story has arrived at its denouement does it reveal that the dreamer has actually been dreaming. At the moment of transition from reality to dream, the only hint that anything is unusual is the aforementioned suddenness of the woman's arrival while

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[90] Other stories within the collection that utilize this scenario include 竹青 (LZQHJ 2000, 1232-37), 續黃粱 (LZQHJ 2000, 776-91), 伍秋月 (LZQHJ 2000, 1006-13), 夢狼 (LZQHJ 2000, 1551-62).

the scholar's wife is tossing and turning in bed. Thereafter, for the most part--until the little brother's arrival--there is no overt indication to the reader or to the scholar's wife that the dream is dream. The mysterious woman's behavior is odd, but not so illogical, unnatural, or impossible as to immediately reveal the events' true status as dream.

However, there *are* various hints that might properly be characterized as what Campany describes in his study of *zhiguai* as "advanced signals ... that something anomalous is about to occur"; they are "detectable by the reader but often ... unnoticed by the protagonist" (1996, 225). *Zhiguai* and strange tales such as this one might also contain limens (or liminal markers) of a temporal, natural, or physical nature[91] -- nothing that definitively signals the supernatural, but that which promotes in-text ambiguity and reader anticipation (Campany 1996, 255). The exchange of shoes earlier in the dream is one of these hints. The reader may find it strange that the other woman's shoes fit so perfectly, but nothing in the text indicates that the two women involved have made note of this coincidence. Though the shoes' perfect fit may be nothing more than a coincidence, such a *deliberate* insertion of a coincidental event on the author's part definitely promotes in-text ambiguity and reader anticipation.

The invitation into a supernatural being's abode--thus crossing a physical limen-- is also a trope frequently utilized in strange tales, so it is at least slightly revelatory that the woman, upon reuniting husband and wife, invite them to stay the night at her house. But the dream takes a mundane, even earthly turn when the trio arrives and the scholar

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[91] Campany's list of examples includes "almost any sort of travel[;] sunset, midnight or early morning, sunrise; the approach of a storm; a death; an illness; a dream; drunkenness; a doorway or gate; a shore or bank; a distant land" (1996, 225).

becomes enamored with the mysterious woman, leaving his wife to be consumed by jealousy and indecision. Instead of being presented with supernatural wonders, the protagonist must confront the all-too-worldly reality of a cheating spouse. This kind of grounding in reality only serves to highlight the contrast between the previously described intruding strangeness and the protagonist's earthly concerns.

As befitting a fantastic dream scenario, once the in-dream events have reached their denouement, the dreamer is prompted to awake by a series of events that escalate with dizzying speed. The wife is driven to distraction by her husband's behavior, and her emotional state is mirrored by Pu's compounded descriptions: "At this point, her heart was pounding and her hands trembling. The situation was nearly unbearable. She thought, 'Why not end my life by jumping into the creek?'"[92] The subsequent appearance of Sanlang (the wife's brother) and his sudden and improbable killing of the scholar are additional coincidences that are difficult to explain away, and the woman finally wakes abruptly after she is jostled by her panicking brother. This hectic series of events is in deliberate contrast to the mundane, almost peaceful progression of events in the first part of the dream: a quiet walk in the moonlight, an invitation into the mysterious woman's home, and a leisurely musical performance. The strangeness and speedy development of the dream's final events--as well as the awakening--force the scholar's wife to recognize that she was indeed in a dream state. However, this ontological certainty is once again subverted by the story's coda, where she receives not one confirmation but two in favor of the dream's veracity, confirmation that is itself undermined by the mere fact that her

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[92] "女至此, 手顫心搖, 殆不可過, 念不如出門竄溝壑以死" (LZQHJ 2000, 273-74).

husband is obviously still alive. As previously discussed, the story's final spotlight on the beautiful woman's mysterious nature--instead of on the nature of the dream itself--in effect postpones indefinitely any conclusion with respect to the destabilized boundary between dream and reality.

Liaozhai Case Study: "The Raksasas and the Ocean Bazaar"

To further understand how the storytelling devices that produce strangeness operate in *Liaozhai*, let us take a look at a lengthier tale from the collection, "The Raksasas and the Ocean Bazaar" 羅剎海市.[93] This story follows the 桃花源記 ("Peach Blossom Spring") (421) narrative blueprint in which the usual roles of intruder and that which is intruded upon are reversed to great effect. Tao Qian's influential story, also written during the Six Dynasties era, is about a fisherman who loses his way and accidentally stumbles upon an idyllic village hidden away from the world. In this scenario, the protagonist—the fisherman—is the intruder who suddenly appears and threatens to change the villagers' way of life. The village's inhabitants live in peace and happiness, blissfully unaware of the dynastic upheavals that take place outside the confines of their village. Though the fisherman does tell others of his discovery, no others are able to find their way there. Most collections of strange tales include at least a few stories in which one man accidentally wanders into a realm that is cut off from the rest of

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[93] LZQHJ (2000, 673-90). The English title is from Mair and Mair's translation, cited as "MM" (1989, 139-55).

humanity, but one to which he can never return once he departs. *Liaozhai*'s "The

Raksasas and the Ocean Bazaar" is just one such story.[94]

If one subscribes to Todorov's schema, "Raksasas" and most other stories in

Liaozhai are more properly characterized as marvelous rather than fantastic. That is, the

strange events that occur cannot be classified as natural phenomena—at least not from a

Western point of view—yet those who experience them usually accept the supernatural

aspects with a minimal amount of surprise (Todorov 1975, 54). This is true in *Liaozhai*'s

case because the characters react mostly in response to the disruptions to their lives

caused *by* the supernatural elements, and not in response to the fact that these disruptions

are supernatural. Therefore, because most of the tales in *Liaozhai* are marvelous in

nature, Pu might have engineered "Raksasas" to be even more so as a commentary on the

other tales in the collection. The protagonist encounters not just one representative of the

strange, but an entire country populated with them; he travels to a realm that is distant

and quite different from his own, and spends a much longer time there compared to the

one day or several days that pass in a typical intrusion story.

Whereas a typical love story in the collection involves an intrusion of the

supernatural into the lives of ordinary human beings, "Raksasas" cleverly inverts that

trope and has the human protagonist Ma Jun intrude upon an otherworldly realm when

his merchant ship happens to drift there following a typhoon. The native Raksasa beings

treat Ma as a proper intrusion: "They ran off in an uproar as Ma approached, taking him

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[94] Other tales in *Liaozhai* that follow this rubric include 翩翩 (LZQHJ 2000, 642-49), 蓮
花公主 (LZQHJ 2000, 1014-20), 山市 (LZQHJ 2000, 1275-77), 畫壁 (LZQHJ 2000, 21-
27).

for a monster ... Finding a group of [natives] sitting at table, he rushed toward them and, after they dashed away in fright, gulped down the food they left."[95] Upon his arrival in this strange realm, Ma unwittingly plays the role occupied by the strange creature or ghost in so many other tales in the collection, causing fright due to his appearance amongst others unused to his presence. Throughout Ma's stay in this realm, Pu describes the terrified reactions of the native inhabitants, reactions that belie the expectations created at the tale's outset, where Ma was described as a young man with "striking good looks" who "was given the nickname 'Stunner.'"[96] Pu's subversion of expectations works in two ways here: Ma the human being occupies the role of intruding strange creature, and the reactions he inspires in those around him are not at all those one would expect from Pu's initial physical description.

The narrative may be neatly split into two parts. The first half describes Ma's career advancement in this strange realm despite being viewed as "ugly" from the perspective of the locals: he capitalizes on the their curiosity with respect to his own "exotic" origins, and is willing to put on what he himself considers to be hideous makeup in order to measure up to the locals' standards of beauty. This part of the story may be read as social commentary that satirizes both artificial standards of beauty and the utter capriciousness with which favor is bestowed by those who are in power.

It is also in this first half of the tale that Pu does some of the boundary-dissolving work that facilitates acceptance of the strange. Ma continuously encounters inhabitants

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[95] MM (1989, 139-40); "見馬至, 以為妖, 群嘩而走... 遇飲食者, 則奔而往; 人驚遽, 則啜其餘" (LZQHJ 2000, 673).
[96] MM (1989, 139); "美丰姿 … 有'俊人'之號" (LZQHJ 2000, 673).

that he finds grotesque, one of whom is the prime minister: "... his ears were attached to the back of his head, his nose had three nostrils and his eyelashes covered his eyes like curtains."[97] But because Ma occupies the role of the intruder, Pu invites the reader to re-evaluate the arguably arbitrary criteria with which one separates human from non-human, the normal from the abnormal. As Ma continues to consider those around him "ugly" while he hypocritically covers himself in make-up to make himself look more like them, these criteria look increasingly ridiculous the more Ma is showered with presents, favors, and titles. The native inhabitants are strangely hybrid--simultaneously human in their officious activities that would seem all-too-familiar, and monstrous in their physical appearance. Yet, their interactions with the hypocritical human protagonist invite the human reader to examine his own inherent contradictions.

Because the first part of the story takes place in a realm whose government's bureaucratic structure strongly resembles its late imperial China counterpart, Pu can facilitate the smooth transition of Ma into an even more marvelous realm, the underwater palace of the Dragon Lord. Ma's encounters here are fairly typical: He marries the beautiful Dragon Princess but is forced to leave her and return to the human realm after a certain amount of time.[98] Before his departure, his wife tells him, "Faerie and earth have separate roads,"[99] enacting that boundary between non-human and human realms even as Ma has temporarily dissolved it with his presence in the underwater palace. Her

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[97] MM (1989, 142); "雙耳皆背生, 鼻三孔, 睫毛覆目如簾" (LZQHJ 2000, 674).

[98] Stories in *Liaozhai* that follow this type of narrative include 五通 (LZQHJ 2000, 2062-67), 夜叉國 (LZQHJ 2000, 507-16), and 蓮花公主 (LZQHJ 2000, 1014-20).

[99] MM (1989, 150); "仙塵路隔" (LZQHJ 2000, 679).

pronouncement also has the effect of normalizing Ma's previous sojourn to a degree, situating *that* country as being closer to humanity on the spectrum when compared to her own realm. Yet even in this section of the story, the Dragon Princess reveals her partial humanity: In a later letter to Ma, she references the *human* legends Chang'e and the Weaving Maid, using them to encourage herself in Ma's absence. When Ma returns to his parents' village, their surprise at his appearance cleverly references the beginning of the story in which Ma occupies the role of the intruder, while also enacting the typical ending to this kind of reverse-intrusion story.[100] However, normalcy is only restored to a degree. In the final act of the story, the Dragon Princess visits Ma and their children once more, but disappears in a clap of thunder, reconstituting the boundary between what she had called faerie and earth.

Pu's comment as Historian of the Strange reinforces our reading: "The ways of the world are no different from the way of goblins: both would have us paint our faces to curry favor. ... Alas! Glory and wealth can only be found in castles in the air and ocean bazaars."[101] As he does with so many other tales in the collection, Pu uses the strange here--temporarily constituted as not-strange to ironic effect--to comment on behavior that belongs entirely to the human realm. However, in doing so he nonetheless continues to remind us—first with the standards of beauty that Ma encounters, then with the

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[100] For example, in another *Liaozhai* tale 翩翩 (LZQHJ 2000, 642-49), the protagonist's uncle is surprised and delighted when his nephew, presumed dead, resurfaces after many years with a son and daughter-in-law. 西湖主 (LZQHJ 2000, 974-87) is yet another variation on this formula.
[101] MM (1989, 154-55); "花面逢迎, 世情如鬼... 嗚呼! 顯榮富貴, 當於蜃樓海市中求之耳!" (LZQHJ 2000, 681-82).

introduction of a second marvelous realm—that arbitrary boundaries created by human classification are as easily shifted as they are dissolved or reconstituted.[102]

Liaozhai zhiyi and the Proliferation of Hybridity

Such dissolution or "softening" of boundaries in the worlds depicted by *Liaozhai* is accompanied by the collection's focus on hybrid entities and situations that comprise antithetical or seemingly contradictory characteristics. In the example of "Scholar from Fengyang," the beautiful woman from the dream is at once a figure of good (a benevolent goddess figure who reunites husband and wife) and of evil (a lustful, malevolent spirit that destroys a marital union). The dream itself can be viewed as a hybrid entity, comprising both the reality of the scholar's wife longing for her husband--her feelings and lonely situation at the beginning of the story are echoed once again within the dream by the mysterious woman's song--and the dream scenario of the husband's bizarre death. Though such a mixture of real emotions and unreal situations is inherent in all dreams, the story's focus on these characteristics throughout almost its entire duration only serves to emphasize the fact that strangeness is its main element of focus, and that its message is primarily conveyed through that very aspect of the story.

The beautiful woman behaves in a contradictory manner, and the dream scenario contradicts itself as the story unfolds. Contradiction as a characteristic in tales of the strange, however, predominantly manifests itself in the form of multiple types of "stock"

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[102] I thus disagree with Wai-yee Li's assertion that the tale transitions "from satire to pure wish fulfillment" (1993, 147). Wish fulfillment is but one aspect of the tale and can very well be accomplished by Pu--as he has done in so many other stories--without instituting the unique bipartite structure here.

hybrid entities that are usually supernatural beings: ghosts that carry their markers of death with them (usually the rope on which they hung to death) and yet are vigorously lifelike in their persecution of human characters; ghosts reincarnated into new bodies while retaining the memories from their previous lives; animal and plant spirits that take on or possess human forms--or vice versa--but retain characteristics of their original forms. The Raksasas from "The Raksasas and the Ocean Bazaar" are also hybrids of inhuman (in terms of their physical features) and human (in terms of their bureaucracy and their hypocrisy).

These hybrid beings and situations are wonderfully representative of the conflicting impulses within an intrusion story concerned with the strange. If the classification of nature as represented by the act of collection offers, in theory, some mastery over a bewildering universe through the principles of objectivity and rationality, the fact that the contents of these collections are so strange belies a simultaneous impulse to confront and explore that which is inexplicable. The desire for order is in part represented by the kinds of shorter entries that essentially serve as encyclopedia or catalog items, for which I previously gave an example from *Liaozhai* ("Frog Chorus"). They have been present in *zhiguai* collections from the beginning, though they are not as predominant in late imperial derivations of the genre. The following entry from *Soushenji* and excerpt from *Liaozhai* serve as additional examples:

> Beyond the Southern Sea there are mermen who live in the water and resemble fish, but they can weave and spin, and when they weep, their tears turn into pearls.[103]

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[103] "南海之外有鮫人, 水居如魚, 不廢織績. 其眼泣則能出珠"; chapter 12, item 311 (ISS 1996, 150; SSJQ 1990, 355).

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The alligator has its origins in the region to the west of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. It is dragon-like in appearance, but shorter than a true dragon, and only able to fly sideways. From time to time, it emerges from the river and scours the banks for food -- usually geese and ducks.[104]

Unlike the entry from *Soushenji*, the entry from *Liaozhai* goes on to describe the creature's culinary applications as well as one traveler's experience with the creature, and is thus much longer. Other such entries from the collection append several encounter tales, some of which are quite long, but their basic format resembles that of the *zhiguai* entries that Campany characterizes as belonging to the "descriptive mode." These are entries that describe a creature, place, or even person by listing a temporal or spatial marker, species classification, nomenclature, identifying features, and uses or functions (1996, 214). The *Liaozhai* entries simply build on this basic structure with the addition of a brief story or two, but the entries' main focus is still the identification and description of an object of study, not didactic narrative.

Campany also associates this type of entry with rational scientific endeavors, remarking that this descriptive mode is essentially *Listenwissenschaft*.[105] It is one of the means with which *zhiguai* authors created cosmographies--descriptions of the world--that advocated for various interpretations of human beings' relationship with a cosmos filled with infinite variety. As Campany argues, "[t]hings out of place have a way of clarifying people's perception of the taxonomic space they stand out against; characterizing a range

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[104] "豬婆龍產于西江, 形似龍而短, 能橫飛, 常出沿江岸撲食鵝鴨"; from "The Alligator's Revenge" 豬婆龍 (JM 2006, 205; LZQHJ 2000, 302). The *zhupolong* 豬婆龍 is a legendary Chinese creature similar to the alligator.

[105] Per Campany, Jonathan Z. Swift defines *Listenwissenschaft* as "a science which takes as its prime intellectual activity the production and reflection on lists, catalogs, and classifications" (1982, 47).

of Others can throw readers' views of themselves and of their place in the large scheme

of things into sharp relief" (1996, 274). The catalog entries display just an impressive an

array of "Others" as the narrative entries, and add to the general backdrop of strangeness

against which *Liaozhai*'s best tales operate. Whereas the blurring of boundaries alerts the

reader that he or she is entering the realm of the fantastic, the proliferation of hybrid

entities and creatures is paradoxically also a means of reevaluating what is considered the

norm.

Echoes of *Liaozhai*: *Yuewei caotang biji*, *Zi bu yu*, and the Intertextuality of Strange

Collections

Though Pu's collection is the best known today, he was of course not the only

author working with the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* traditions in his time. To contextualize Pu's

tales and their use of the strange, let us consider two other collections of the strange

written in late eighteenth-century China, *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記 (1800) by Ji

Yun 紀昀 and *Zi bu yu* 子不語 (1788) by Yuan Mei 袁枚. The pair post-date *Liaozhai* in

publication, and in some ways may be read as responses to Pu's utilization of the

strange.[106]

Like *Liaozhai*, *Yuewei caotang biji* contains a great variety of strange tales, most

of which--though not all--are supernatural. Its tales that survey the supernatural landscape

touch on themes similar to those of *Liaozhai*: revenge, love, morality, ritual, and ways to

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[106] On Ji and Yuan's criticisms of *Liaozhai* and Ji's preference for Six Dynasties *zhiguai*
as model, see Chan (1998, 160-67). Ji was essentially against the "aesthetic mode" of
zhiguai writing as exemplified by *Liaozhai* (Chan 1998, 66).

manage the supernatural.[107] In addition, its short catalog items are typical of the

previously described "encyclopedia entries" that populate most collections of the

strange.[108] Compared to *Liaozhai*, however, *Yuewei*'s stories follow a number of different

narrative formulas, as in the example "An Evening of Fox Tales" which has Ji recording

tales told in succession during a small gathering instead of simply narrating the tales

himself from a third-person perspective.[109] The tales also contain less stylistic

embellishment but more commentary from the author *within* the tales themselves (instead

of appending them at the end of the tale), and often end on a note of less certainty. The

following in-story remarks are representative of Ji's conversational and more personal

approach to recording the strange:

> 1) When others include stories about my family, I can know where they
> diverge from the truth. Others cannot know this. Similarly, when I include
> stories about other peoples' families, I base them on what I have heard and
> produce narratives right away. Sometimes they might be false, sometimes

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[107] See Keenan for additional elaboration on the collection's subject matter (1999, xii). For Keenan, Ji's collection also demonstrates "convictions about the deterministic morality of causes and effects, the connectedness of things seen and unseen, and the proximity of different realms of existences" (1999, xii), which I would argue are ideas that most collections of the strange touch upon.

[108] Examples include 巨蟒 (YCB 2012, 45 [2:37]), 神馬 (YCB 2012, 52 [3:3]), 大旋風 (YCB 2012, 387-88 [13:34]), 五色水晶 (YCB 2012, 454 [15:5]). "YCB" refers to the 2012 Chinese edition of *Yuewei*. The *juan* and entry numbers are also referenced in brackets where appropriate.

[109] English titles and translations from *Yuewei* are from a selection published under the title *Shadows in a Chinese Landscape: The Notes of a Confucian Scholar* ("SCL"), a title that differs considerably from the Chinese original, which literatally translates into "Notes from the Thatched Hut for Examining the Epigrammatic" (Keenan 1999, xi [n1]). "An Evening of Fox Tales" (SCL 1999, 88-91) is actually a collective title for individual tales narrated during the gathering, which are each recorded as a separate entry in *Yuewei*. They are 紀生說狐 (YCB 2012, 343 [12:18]), 惡少虐狐遭報 (YCB 2012, 343-44, [12:19]), 鬼神弗能奪 (YCB 2012, 344 [12:20]), and 慧狐報恩 (YCB 2012, 344-45, [12:21]). This is not the only instance of tales linked together by Ji in the collection.

they might be true; sometimes they might be incomplete. The others will know which it is, but there is no way for me to know.[110]

2) [The preceding ghost story] was rather strange. Yüan Mei refers to this event in his *Hsin Ch'i-hsieh* 新齊諧 but records it somewhat differently, perhaps because of errors in transmission.[111]

As for similarities to Pu's collection, Ji Yun often ends his tales on a note of justification and moral admonishment, as in the following example from "Handicapping" 鄉人患疫 (SCL 1999, 73-75; YCB 2012, 554-55 [18:7]), a story about divine retribution:

The example above is probably one of [my source's] fables and did not necessarily actually happen. Like Chuang-tzu and Lieh-tzu, which are both largely comprised of fables, the point here is sufficient to encourage good and discourage evil. One certainly need not attempt to verify something of this nature.[112]

As with many of the comments in *Liaozhai*, Ji's remark here simultaneously alludes to the established tradition of *zhiguai*, the act of recording the supernatural, and downplays the nature of the supernatural events themselves in favor of moral purpose.

"Another Fickle 'Fox'" 偽狐女者[113] is one of the stories that gains richness when read in the context of other tales in the collection, and of other tales in the *zhiguai* tradition as well. On the surface, it is a simple tale of intrigue in which a concubine

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[110] From the entry "Corrections" (SCL 1999, 23-25) or 他人記余家二事 (YCB 2012, 684 [24:18]). The Chinese original reads: "他人記吾家之事, 其異同吾知之, 他人不能知也. 然則吾人記他人家之事, 據其所聞, 輒為敘述, 或虛或實或漏, 他人得而知之, 吾亦不得知也."

[111] From the entry "Haunted Cedars" 神柏 (SCL 1999, 119-20; YCB 2012, 16 [1:30]). The Chinese original reads: "此事亦頗異. 袁子才嘗載此事于《新齊諧》, 所記稍異, 蓋傳聞之誤也." Ji is referring to Yuan's *Zi bu yu*, on which see footnote 118.

[112] "此當是其寓言, 未必真有. 然莊生,《列子》, 半屬寓言, 義足勸懲, 固不必刻舟求劍爾."

[113] SCL (1999, 97); YCB (2012, 393 [13:46]).

leaves her lover by pretending to be a fox fairy whose allotted time in the mortal realm has come to an end. The story's stock motifs implicitly reference countless fox-human romances: the protagonist is not only a male scholar, but traveling on the road, where many such encounters happen; the tale emphasizes the concubine's intelligence, which is a mark of distinction often granted to supernatural or immortal women.[114] In addition, the concubine's disingenuous farewell letter is also replete with time-worn tropes: the time she and the scholar are allotted to spend together is limited by divine decree; her romance with the scholar was a repayment of debt from a previous life; she expresses the hope that there may be a future reunion. In a standard fox-human romance, this reunion usually takes place when the spirit is reincarnated or takes over the body of a recently deceased woman who, of course, happens to be young, beautiful, and unmarried.

The rest of the story subverts the expectations created by these markers, revealing that the concubine was not a fox fairy and had instead used the ruse to run off with another lover. The tale's concluding reference to a third person, who is neither the recorder nor the provider of the tale, makes the intertexuality explicit. He remarks, "She was a real fox. Why say she was a fake? Many of the tales in books recording bizarre happenings, especially those in which one first encounters a fairy maiden who stays for a while and then abandons you, belong in this *same category*" (emphasis mine).[115] The commentary's use of the terms "real" (真) and "fake" (偽) points to the set of questions at

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[114] On the many variations of the scholar and supernatural woman romance tale, see Barr (1989) specifically on women in *Liaozhai*, and Zeitlin (1993) on such women in *Liaozhai* and other Ming-Qing narratives.

[115] "是真狐女, 何偽之云? 吾恐誌異諸書所載, 始遇仙姬, 久而捨去者, 其中或不無此類也乎!"

the heart of every *zhiguai* narrative: What is considered true, and what is considered false? Is the "false" worth recording if it contains elements of a moral truth worth expressing? In terms of this tale specifically, why would it be considered of the same category as other "fairy maiden" tales? These remarks have far less meaning if they simply refer to the verity or falsity of the concubine in this story, but gain far greater significance when read alongside other tales in the same collection and within the same tradition.

Another tale titled "Delusions" 東昌書生[116] satirizes those who would unskeptically read such tales for only superficial satisfaction by describing a young man who was "thoroughly familiar with the [*Liaozhai*] tales about [immortals] and longed for such a meeting,"[117] and in his eagerness imagines that he is about to wed a beautiful fairy bride. It turns out, however, that he was simply asked to be the master of ceremonies because he is a "literary man" (文士). As in many other tales of the strange, "Delusions" does not question whether the ceremony encountered by the young man is supernatural, dream, or ruse, but simply makes a statement on the power and dangers of unquestioning belief. It thus does not rule out the *possibility* of a supernatural encounter, and its explicit reference to *Liaozhai* adds to the complex network of interactions between the central narrative encounter, protagonist belief, narrator/marginalia commentary, and reader expectations within the *zhiguai* tradition.

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[116] SCL (1999, 98-99); YCB (2012, 383-84 [13:27]).
[117] "稔聞《聊齋誌異》青鳳, 水仙諸事, 冀有所遇."

Yuan Mei's *Zi bu yu* is another well-known Qing Dynasty collection in the *zhiguai* tradition. Scholars view it as a direct response to the stifling atmosphere of orthodox Confucianism and its "hypocrisy and excessive puritanism."[118] Yuan's 747 stories (1,020 if counting the sequel) comprise a considerable number of themes and motifs that are similar to those found in other collections of the strange, and touch upon contemporary social issues and injustices (Jian 1998, 306). They are also, however, much gorier and much more sexually explicit. These stylistic features and the fact the tales are also much less morally didactic overall, compared to those collected by Pu and Ji, contribute to the scholarly assessment that Yuan rebelled against Confucian moral conservatism (Jian 1998, 22-26). A number of stories, though not devoid of lessons that the reader might extrapolate if he were so inclined, are recounted in a playful tone that is absent from the other collections.

For example, in "Scholar Cai" 蔡書生,[119] a ghost who hung herself tries to trick the titular character into doing the same thing. Cai draws the noose around his foot instead of his neck, and when admonished by the ghost for his faulty method, he replies, "I'm certainly not wrong. You're the one who's doing it the wrong way and that's why

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[118] Louie and Edwards (1995, xxiii); also see Chan (1991). The title *Zi bu yu* was later changed to *Xinqixie* 新齊諧 to avoid conflict with the title of a Yuan Dynasty work, but today the collection is best known by its original title (Louie and Edwards 1995, xxiii [n1]; Jian 1998, 306). I could not locate the reference work cited by Louie and Edwards on this matter.

[119] See *Yuan Mei quanji* ("YMQJ") (1993, 2 [1:2]). As in this example, subsequent references will include the *juan* and entry numbers of the original tale following its page number(s) in the Chinese-language complete Yuan Mei collection edited by Yingzhi Wang. English titles and citations are from Louie and Edwards's translation entitled *Censored by Confucius: Ghost Stories by Yuan Mei* ("CBC") (1995).

you ended up where you are today."[120] In "General Zhao Spears the Cheeky Monster" 趙

大將軍刺皮臉怪 (CBC 1995, 10; YMQJ 1993, 8-9 [1:10]), the general is unsurprised

and undaunted by the appearance of a supernatural creature, but is instead outraged that it

is one that faces him with a smile on its face. He bellows, "How is it that such a cheeky

monster is allowed to exist?"[121] Though both stories may be interpreted as lessons that

supernatural creatures ought not inspire fear but a healthy dose of skepticism, it is also

likely that Yuan intended them simply as entertainment, and set out to demonstrate a

playful attitude towards the inexplicable. This is an attitude that is certainly distinct from

the serious one found in many of Pu's tales.

Though many of Yuan's tales lack overt messages such as those provided by Pu's

explicit commentary, they certainly do not shy away from endorsing a greater degree of

freedom in romantic and sexual relationships. As such, they may also be viewed as

having a moral end, just not one endorsed by Confucian orthodoxy. One such story that

plays against type is "The Immortal Prostitute" 妓仙 (CBC 1995, 83-84; YMQJ 1993,

207-209 [11:7]), in which a man who seeks immortality in the mountains encounters not

a saintly and elderly transcendent, but a beautiful prostitute who was also his former

lover. She in turn became immortal with the help of an older, white-haired woman

instead of the usual male transcendent figure. The protagonist questions how a prostitute

can become an immortal, since immortality is usually achieved through a long process of

asceticism. The woman replies, "Although sex is not an act of propriety, love between

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[120] CBC (1995, 7). The Chinese original reads: "汝誤才有今日, 我勿誤也。"
[121] "世哪得有此皮臉怪耶！"

men and women is the essence of the universe.... Prostitution is no more sinful than a whole range of other human practices."[122] She also reveals that the official who had her beaten for the crime of prostitution was whipped in heaven because "[he] wanted to make an example of me to ingratiate himself with [a conservative neo-Confucian]. Heaven hates that type of behavior most of all,"[123] thus directly valorizing sexuality and romance over the hypocrisy of Confucian "virtue."[124] Again, this type of story draws much of its effect from the fact that readers would have already been familiar with the standard tales of immortality in other collections of the strange, and that their expectations would have been primed by the title's surprising juxtaposition of "prostitute" (妓) and "immortal" (仙). Yuan takes advantage of these expectations to foreground his own moral agenda through the use of the strange.

Conclusion

From our brief look at late imperial China's immensely popular strange tale, we see that a large amount of variety exists when it comes to the manipulation and presentation of the strange and the supernatural for storytelling and didactic purposes. The intrusion story is a particularly prominent story type that emphasizes the strange in

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[122] "淫媟雖非禮, 然男女相愛, 不過天地生物之心... 不比人間他罪難懺悔也."

[123] "且天最誅人之心, 汪公當日為撫軍徐士林有理學名, 故意殺風景以逢迎之, 此意為天所惡."

[124] Jian points out an inherent contradiction in Yuan's philosophy when it comes to women: He does not overlook their beauty and literary talents and thinks them deserving of immortality, yet does not fault men for engaging in the misogynistic and objectifying practices of taking several wives, concubines, and engaging in prostitution (1998, 17). It is needless to say, however, that the latter sort of attitude is hardly uncommon in Yuan's time.

order to entertain as well as educate the reader, but it is just one of the tools available to the strange tale collector. An author who is also a collector can also make use of his status as evaluator to provide commentary on the value of his tales, whether directly through a postscript or indirectly through the words of a character. In addition, as with any other genre, writers who work in the *zhiguai* tradition also make deft use of readers' expectations when it comes to crafting tales that are distinctive and memorable. As Pu's preface shows, his collection works against the expectations that would have been established by the similarities between his tales and earlier *zhiguai* collections such as *Soushenji*; Ji Yun and Yuan Mei did the same as writers of the strange that drew from *zhiguai and* as writers who were writing their collections after Pu's was published posthumously. As David L. Keenan points out, Ji "held strong opinions about how his *Notes* were connected to the narrative tradition ... he professes affinities with certain past writers [and] disapproval of others' efforts" (1995, xiv). Though Yuan may have wished to make a counter-Confucian statement with his texts, we see that he had a limited number of story types to draw upon if he wished to play upon those expectations that worked so well for Pu. These writers were acutely aware of the tradition that their work drew upon, as well as of the fact that their readers' attitudes towards the supernatural and the strange would have been shaped by that very tradition. It was this knowledge, and their complex manipulation of the strange both in terms of the individual tale and the collection, that has produced some of their most masterful tales of the strange.

Chapter 3

The Fantastic Short Story in Nineteenth-Century France

In chapter 2, I have shown how the Chinese *zhiguai* tales ("records of the strange") make use of the strange for didactic purposes, though they are not as aesthetically and narratively complex as long-form fantasy works or the *conte fantastique*. My focus on the intrusion story also showed how such a story type can heighten the effects of the strange in a short tale and place immediate emphasis on that which the author wishes to demarcate as strange. All of these strange elements serve to maintain reader attention and heighten interest, which help the authors effectively deliver their message to a captivated audience. I have also shown that perception of the strange is context-dependent, a characteristic late *zhiguai* imitators/innovators such as Pu Songling, Ji Yun, and Yuan Mei were certainly aware of and utilized to great effect. Not only do many of their tales allude thematically to characters and personalities that appear within the same collection, they also reference--explicitly *and* implicitly--other tales within both the ancient and contemporary traditions.

In this chapter, I will examine a set of tales from nineteenth-century France, which one might initially assume share little in common with the Chinese tales aside from their strange subject matter. I will show that the strange collection—in particular the intrusion story—are powerful storytelling devices that have been utilized by fantasy writers from both China and France alike. As with the intrusion story of the Chinese *zhiguai* tradition, the typical French fantastic tale is structured to lead up to an

unexpected, but instructive and/or surprising twist. The writers I discuss in this chapter, unlike their contemporaries, sought not to simply titillate and frighten their writers, but to promote personal and moral agendas as well: some warned against the dangerous temptations of evil women; some wished to reveal a persistent supernaturalism beneath a rational veneer; some simply found contemporary society worthy of criticism. In order to do so, they made use of precisely the same tools utilized by Chinese writers such as Pu Songling: destabilized boundaries, hybrid characteristics, and endings left deliberately unexplained.

The Intrusion Story in Nineteenth-Century France

In my previous chapter, I pointed out a particular type of tale that is shared by fantasy texts of various media and provenance, what I call the "intrusion story." In the intrusion story, some aspect of the strange (often, but not always, supernatural) suddenly and quickly infringes upon "normal," everyday life – what is considered normal of course depends on cultural context and even genre conventions. Due to the stories' short length, they emphasize the strangeness of the intrusion and the subsequent confrontation between fantasy and the real to the exclusion of other narrative elements such as description and character development. In the intrusion story, the strange is also inevitably ephemeral -- the remarkable invention or artifact is destroyed; the cause of the disruption dies or departs, never to be seen again.

Although the literary world of nineteenth-century France famously produced grand masters of the long-form novel such as Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Emile

Zola, and Gustave Flaubert, it was also a century that saw the novella and the short story flourish, particularly the fantastic tale. Pierre G. Castex (1951) and Louis Vax (1960) describe in their thorough studies of the period a "golden age" of the fantastic inaugurated by the publication of fantastic tales by Jacques Cazotte and Charles Nodier in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.[125] The publication of E. T. A. Hoffmann's and Edgar Allan Poe's tales in France naturally further augmented the popularity of the fantastic tale.[126] P. W. M. Cogman's description of the typical nineteenth-century French short story reveals that it has a lot in common with the intrusion story:

> [T]he tendency to structure the narrative to lead up to a climactic point, and the use in this of what might be termed the narrative prompt. This is the appearance in the frame of an object, incident, or phrase to which someone responds in such a way that another character (often the primary narrator) is provoked into asking what lies behind this reaction… (1997, 81)

As with the intrusion story, the French short story is swift and relentless about directing the readers' attention and structuring his expectations in order to lead him to the desired "climactic point" – in the intrusion story, all the prompting markers are strange, and the climax is often unexpected but instructive.

Within this context, I will discuss three authors in the tradition of the *conte fantastique*--Jules-Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly (1808-1889), Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), and Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893)--to show how they share common features

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[125] Cazotte published the novel-length *Le Diable amoureux* (1772), while Nodier wrote shorter fantastic tales such as *Une heure ou la vision* (1806), *Smarra, ou les démons de la nuit* (1821), and *Trilby, ou le lutin d'Argail* (1822), among others.
[126] On Poe's influence and his reception in France, Léon Lemonnier (1928; 1947) has the definitive studies.

with Chinese tales of the strange, and how tales from both traditions can be classified as intrusion stories. As previously mentioned, the intrusion story recurs frequently in *collections* of the strange curated by lone authorial figures with a strong voice. While I cannot argue that Mérimée and Maupassant published cohesive collections of the strange as Barbey, Pu Songling, Yuan Mei, and Ji Yun did, they did publish their works in collected format after the tales were published individually in literary revues, and it is in this format that we usually receive their works now. Both Mérimée and Maupassant were also more diverse in their writings and wrote tales of psychological realism and satire in addition to fantastic tales. As a result, their fantastic tales can also be read alongside these works, as particularly and differently effective vehicles for their social criticism.

Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Les Diaboliques*

Barbey d'Aurevilly's collection *Les Diaboliques* was published in 1874.[127] Though Barbey has authored many other short stories, poems, and novels, it is this collection that has endured in reputation -- thanks to the trial its publication inspired during which Barbey was charged with immorality, as well as the renewed critical interest provoked by Jacques Petit's (1964; 1974) decade-long engagement with the work and its subsequent re-publications. This collection merits study not only due to its

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[127] One of the stories in the collection, "Le Dessous de cartes d'une partie de whist," was first published in *La Mode* in 1850 – by then, Barbey had already decided to publish a collection of similar stories (Avrane 2000, 128).

notoriety and its acclaimed critical status, but because it offers salient points of

comparison as well as divergence with respect to the other collections in this study.[128]

     To wit: *Les Diaboliques* is also a collection of strange tales, yet it comprises only

six individual tales, all of which are centered on individual "she-devils" (the titular

diaboliques). These subjects of study are the equivalent of a fantastic specimen that might

have appeared in an "encyclopedic" *zhiguai* entry, or one that might appear as the subject

of a much more sustained focus in the elaborate late imperial tales. In comparison,

strange women are only part of the universe portrayed by the Chinese collections --

though, of course, they are an important part. The tales in *Les Diaboliques* themselves are

novella-length, thus offering more room for narrative detail, embellishments, and

obfuscations – indeed, this narrative complexity is probably one of the most scrutinized

aspects of Barbey's work.[129] In terms of extra-textual parameters, Barbey was obviously

working within the constraints of a different language and different cultural and personal

contexts.[130]

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[128] Eygun argues that the fantastic is often evoked by critics who discuss Aurevilly -- though they stop short of calling his work fantastic (1996, 2). Dherbey, for example, points out the supernatural elements in some of Aurevilly's other works--*Une histoire sans nom* (1882), *Une vieille maîtresse* (1851), *L'ensorcelée* (1854)--but applies to them the labels "Aurevillien marvelous" (*merveilleux aurevillien*) and "disquieting strangeness" (*inquiétante étrangeté*) instead of "fantastique" (1990, 575-76). There are certainly very few of those overtly supernatural elements in *Les Diaboliques*, but the collection certainly qualifies as one that is *strange*.

[129] For works that focus on narrative structure and technique in *Les Diaboliques*, see for example Debray-Genette (1973), Giard (1980), Tranouez (1987), Unwin (1988), Rodina (1995-96), and Rossbach (2009).

[130] For comprehensive biographies of Barbey see Avrane (2000) and Boschian-Campaner (1989). On Barbey's devout catholicism, which may have colored his moralistic worldview, see Yarrow (1961), Petit (1964), and Humphreys (2012).

Given these points of comparison, it is interesting to note that Barbey, though coloring his tales with much more of the uncanny than the supernatural, clearly uses some of the same techniques wielded by the strange tale authors we have studied previously. He works to destabilize traditionally unassailable boundaries while constantly drawing attention to strangeness -- a strangeness, however, that persistently evades multiple narrators' attempts at definition. In addition, Barbey clearly writes with an agenda, as he makes clear in the preface to the first edition: "Now the present author, who believes in the Devil and his works, does not laugh at them, and he tells pure souls about them in order to put the fear of Hell into them" (1964, xvii).[131] With his stated objective as well as the heightened complexity of his narratives in mind, I will take a brief look at how Barbey utilizes and builds upon the common tools of the strange tale author: the use of markers of the strange—dissolution of boundaries and hybrid characteristics are the most common—and unexpected endings to create suspense and intrigue. Because there are only six stories in Barbey's collection[132]--as opposed to the unwieldy hundreds in the Chinese collections--I will discuss elements of each tale where necessary, as opposed to focusing on a couple of tales as I have done with the previous chapter's case studies.

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[131] "Or, l'auteur de ceci, qui croit au Diable et à ses influences dans le monde, n'en rit pas, et il ne les raconte aux âmes pures que pour les en épouvanter" (2003, 23). Unless otherwise stated, English translations are from the Kimber translation (1964).
[132] The six tales are "Le Rideau cramoisi" ("The Crimson Curtain"), "Le Plus bel amour de Don Juan" ("Don Juan's Greatest Love"), "Le Bonheur dans le crime" ("Happiness in Crime"), "Le Dessous de cartes d'une partie de whist" ("The Story Behind a Game of Whist"), "À un dîner d'athées" ("At a Dinner of Atheists"), and "La Vengeance d'une femme" ("A Woman's Vengeance"). English titles are from the Kimber translation.

Les Diaboliques: Enhancing the Strange and the Diabolical through Narrative
Postponement

      We have seen that in *Liaozhai zhiyi*'s most successful tales, Pu Songling
emphasizes the strange both by introducing surprising events in such a way that actually
runs counter to a seasoned strange tale reader's expectations, and by a repetition effect
through which the reader is gradually exposed to more and more "markers" of
unusualness that, somewhat surprisingly, go unquestioned by the characters in the story.
These techniques serve to counter any sense of complacency one might develop by being
repeatedly exposed to the supernatural in a collection such as Pu's. The sensation of the
strange comes both from unexpected narrative elements and from the narrative's stubborn
refusal to acknowledge that its very elements are surprising. The effects of the strange are
then sustained through the end of the narrative by a lack of closure or continuation at the
diegetic level: the strange is left unexplained; the supernatural object or creature
disappears from the human realm.

      In contrast, the fact Barbey's narratives are longer results in a different approach.
Not only must Barbey engage the reader's attention immediately, but he must also sustain
it through the length of the entire narrative. He does so admirably by telling each story
through the form of dialogue between multiple groups of at least two conversants and by
constantly shifting the dialogical context, so that the narrative is frequently interrupted by
different voices of surprise and curiosity that echo one another to great effect. This
technique serves to direct reader attention to motifs that Barbey considers important, and
to tease the reader's appetite and heighten his expectations. This approach, which Barbey

himself called "ricochets de conversation" (the original title of the collection),[133] has been

the subject of many exhaustive studies and is featured in all six tales.[134] For an example,

let us first look at "Le Plus bel amour de Don Juan" ("Don Juan's Greatest Love"), a tale

featuring three transfers of *la parole*, a skillful *mise en abîme* with a puzzling enigma at

the center that persists even after the tale's almost anticlimactic close.

The story opens *in media res* with a question put to the narrator by the Marquise

Guy de Ruy: "So he is still alive, that old rascal?" (1964, 46).[135] The conversation, like

most others in the collection, takes place in a quiet, secluded area that promotes

maximum intimacy -- the Marquise's salon. As Eisenberg points out, this type of

environment is ideal for mystery and suspense (1996, 92). The Marquise's question is

posed before any context is provided, implying that an entire fascinating conversation

about this curious subject has driven her to pose the question in surprise. The question

becomes all the more significant when the reader realizes, as the narrator continues his

conversation with the Marquise, that it was asked by "a lady of great piety" who cannot

contain her curiosity about the previously mentioned "old rascal" Comte de Ravila--the

tale's titular Don Juan--despite the fact that she compares him to the Devil and is

contemptuous of the (female) company he keeps (1964, 46-47). The reader would be

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[133] Per Pasco, "Le Dessous de cartes" was first published under the title "Ricochets de conversation, I, Le Dessous de cartes d'une partie de whist." He also suggests that such a title does not do the collection justice, and that "sonata," also considered for use in the title by Barbey, is "more evocative of the multifaceted texture of the narrations" (1996, 99).

[134] See the works cited in footnote 129 as well as Boucher's (1976) exhaustive study of each of the tales in the collection. Mathet gives Barbey's narrative technique the elegant name of "vertige narratif" (1999, 99).

[135] "Il vit donc toujours, ce vieux mauvais sujet?" (2003, 84).

justifiably curious about why this pious lady would have any interest in such a scandalous character. The primary narrator's subsequent remembrance of a dinner party at which Ravila was present will allow a second speaker--Ravila--to take over the narrative, thus superimposing an additional layer of unreliability and obfuscation. In this skillful opening scene, Barbey has already aroused our curiosity about a subject matter whose precise nature is yet hidden; he has also established the tale's central thematic opposition between the angelic (the Marquise) and the demonic (Ravila), as well as the constant struggle between the two forces as seen in the Marquise's paradoxical disposition toward Ravila.

The primary narrator then begins to describe this dinner party in the most hyperbolic and deliberately mystifying terms: it is one given by twelve former lovers of Ravila who "[formed] a chain, like mesmerists round their tub, round that magnetic and compromising individual, the Comte de Ravila de Ravilès" (1964, 48).[136] These ladies "brought all their stores of beauty, of wit and wealth, of magnificence and power, to pour them forth once and for all in this supreme conflagration" (1964, 50),[137] a last hurrah of sorts celebrating an aging Don Juan who later reveals the evening's events to the narrator. The tale is divided into five sections, but it is not until the fourth that Barbey allows Ravila to begin telling the actual story of his supposed "greatest love," which the title and

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[136] "…elles n'avaient pas craint de faire la chaîne du baquet de Mesmer autour de cet homme magnétique et compromettant, le comte de Ravila de Ravilès" (2003, 88). Pasco argues that this party may have marked the occasion of Ravila's newfound impotence (1996, 102).
[137] "Elles y apportèrent tout ce qu'elles avaient de beauté, d'esprit, de ressources, de parure, de puissance, pour les verser, en une seule fois, en ce suprême flamboiement" (2003, 90-91).

opening scene of the tale would have suggested was the primary focus. Instead, the prior

three sections are all devoted to the accumulation of anticipation in the primary narrator's

audience (the Marquise), Ravila's audience (his dinner companions), Barbey's audience

(the reader). There are voluminous descriptions of the atmosphere enveloping the

conversationalists, of the sumptuous setting, as well as of the subtle rapport between

Ravila and the women that hints at the story to come. Finally, Ravila begins to describe

one of his former lovers, another Marquise, but he soon reveals that this description of

her and their relationship was but a prelude to the true focus of his story, the Marquise's

daughter, a "strange child" (1964, 60)[138] who is hostile, sullen, and stubbornly refuses to

talk whenever Ravila is present.

In the last section of the story, narrative control is transferred once more as Ravila

describes the day where the Marquise reveals the truth about her daughter's behavior.

This Marquise begins her story to Ravila with the flourish of a skilled storyteller: "Picture

the scene … I was sitting where we are now," she says (1964, 62),[139] but Barbey is not

done with his narrative feints. It turns out that the Marquise's daughter did not confide in

her directly, but indirectly through a priest, and the priest is the final narrator of the story,

the one who reveals the daughter's final confession to the Marquise, to Ravila, to

Ravila's listener, to the primary narrator, to Marquise Guy de Ruy, and ultimately to the

reader: the Marquise's daughter had informed the priest that she is pregnant. The

Marquise's subsequent interrogation reveals that her daughter believes herself to be

pregnant because she happened to sit in an armchair just vacated by Ravila.

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[138] "Enfant bizarre" (2003, 102).

[139] "Figurez vous ... j'étais assise là où nous sommes maintenant..." (2003, 105).

But no sooner than this final, impossible secret is revealed--to underwhelming

effect due to its semi-humorous and ridiculous nature--does the entire novella conclude in

the space of not even a page, with one of Ravila's listeners commenting on the

foolishness of the Marquise to relate such a story to Ravila, while Ravila himself

discloses nonchalantly, almost as an afterthought, the fate of the Marquise's daughter:

"She was dead—she died quite young, married to somebody in the country—when her

mother told me this story" (1964, 66).[140] At this remark, one of Ravila's listeners falls

into a reverie surely shared by the reader. He or she must consider why an imaginary

pregnancy constitutes a significant portion of Ravila's greatest tale, and for what reason

this Marquise's daughter is one of the "she-devils," the *diaboliques* that defy

understanding. Though there is nothing inherently supernatural or even criminal at the

heart of this story--unless one interprets the daughter's pregnancy as true and later

covered up by her sudden marriage--Barbey plays with the narrative set-up in such a way

as to prompt expectations of an inexplicable and remarkable phenomenon. Barbey wishes

us to view his *diaboliques* and their actions as remarkably *un*natural and beyond

comprehension.

Barbey makes use of the same techniques in all of the stories in his collection.

Narrative control is always transferred at least once; the person who begins the story is

never the one to complete it. In "Le Rideau cramoisi" ("The Crimson Curtain"), the

curtain in question is obviously another metaphor for the narrative obfuscation that

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[140] "Elle était morte, bien jeune et mariée en province, quand sa mère me raconta cette histoire" (2003, 110).

Barbey has in play. He makes this explicit when the primary narrator (the one to begin

the story) muses:

> But ignorance as to why somebody is awake behind the curtains of a
> window, where the light betokens life and thought, adds the poetry of
> dream to the poetry of reality. At least for my part, I could never see a
> window lighted up in the night, in a sleeping town through which I was
> passing, without attaching a whole world of fancies to that light: without
> imagining behind those curtains all kinds of intimate dramas. (1964, 9)[141]

Here the narrator's reverie is even obstructed by a second layer in the form of the window

of his carriage; his discernment is doubly impeded, just as the story he comes to hear is

filtered through the recollection of his interlocutor, a story that, like the one in "Le Plus

bel amour de Don Juan," refuses definitive resolution.

Here, as in the other tales, the narrator (Brassard) of the central *diabolique* story

about a beautiful and mysterious woman (Alberte) is constantly interrupted by his

listener(s) (the primary narrator who opens the text) who casts doubt on the tale, or

attempts to bring it back within the realm of mundanity. For example, when Brassard

describes Alberte's extraordinary *sangfroid* and discretion, the narrator hastens to

demonstrate its ordinariness by mentioning an incident of a woman who passes a note to

her lover in the presence of her husband. Further into Brassard's tale, the narrator

provides another example of a girl who rendezvoused with her lover in her grandmother's

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[141] "Mais l'ignorance de ce qui fait veiller derrière une fenêtre aux rideaux baissés, où la
lumière indique la vie et la pensée, ajoute la poésie du rêve à la poésie de la réalité. Du
moins, pour moi, je n'ai jamai pu voir une fênetre,--éclairé la nuit,--dans une ville
couchée, par laquelle je passais,--sans accrocher à ce cadre de lumière un monde de
pensées,-- sans imaginer derrière ces rideaux des intimités et des drames..." (2003, 37-
38).

bedroom: "Your Alberte, after all, was no cleverer than the girl who…" (1964, 37).[142] At both of these interruptions, Brassard is impatient and insists that his tale, and his girl, are more extraordinary. At these intervals of skepticism, the narrator is a stand-in for the reader who may doubt that Barbey's tales have anything special--or anything *too strange*--to offer; Brassard's rebukes in effect buy Barbey more time to win over the reader, or to repudiate the challenges once and for all. These moments of doubt are all the more powerful because the beginning of the tale in fact shows that the narrator has already been won over by Brassard's tale and deems it worth sharing: "If [Brassard] had not been all that I have just had the honor of telling you, my story would have been less amusing, and probably I should not have thought it worth while to recount it to you" (1964, 6).[143]

As their audience's curiosity and skepticism propel the narrative forward through exchanges and questions, all of Barbey's multiple narrators serve to complete the portrait of, and subsequently indict, Barbey's diabolical women. For Barbey, their diabolical nature is inextricable from their inaccessibility, their refusal to be understood. Aside from the fact that they act in defiance of social norms and seem not to care about the judgment of others, they are made to seem all the more inexplicable and enigmatic through Barbey's narrative tricks. When the narrator in "Rideau cramoisi" continuously interrupts Brassard's narrative to express skepticism or to downplay the uniqueness of Brassard's *diabolique*, only to confess to the reader that he dreams about the crimson curtain still, is it not an implicit validation of the narrative's strangeness, and its central figure's

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[142] "Votre Alberte, après tout, n'était pas plus forte que la jeune fille qui…" (2003, 74).
[143] "Si [Brassard] n'avait pas été tout ce que je viens d'avoir l'honneur de vous dire, mon histoire serait moins piquante, et probablement n'eussé-je pas pensé à vous la conter" (2003, 34).

incomprehensibility? And is not the constant shifting of narrative control and narrative

setting in "Don Juan" an attempt to further withdraw the truth, to give it a strange allure

that is only heightened by the unexpectedly anticlimactic ending, after which Ravila's

tale is so quickly dismissed? As Susanne Rossbach points out, Barbey's habit of abruptly

ending tales--*without* providing closure or additional clarification--was singular among

contemporary French short fiction. Though Barbey's *Diaboliques* share with them the

typically shocking or surprising endings, his tales "mimick the structure of a closed story

yet remain open" because their mysteries remain unsolved (Rossbach 2009, 285). This

subversion of expectations would have further heightened the feelings of estrangement

and discomfort for Barbey's contemporary readers.

Les Diaboliques and Incomprehensible Hybridity

Barbey's narrative wizardry is a purposeful way of presenting his storytellers'

perspective on *les diaboliques*, these women who defy male mastery and understanding

and are classified as corrupt, evil, outside the norm. They remain all the more mysterious

through Barbey's narrative obfuscation that filters their stories through multiple layers of

narrative distance and, in most cases, deprives them of the chance to tell their stories

directly.[144] Though there is nothing supernatural about Barbey's misogynistic perspective

here when it comes to the othering and mystification of his *diaboliques*,[145] his collection

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[144] Mugnier-Manfredi (1987) writes about the erasure undergone by female characters in
Aurevilly's works, as driven by Aurevilly's misogyny.
[145] Indeed, Eisenberg argues that the reason for this representation of women was
downright mundane: "Barbey's creative imagination was fired with the theme of
vengeance directed by jilted lovers against the women who spurned their love ... Barbey's

can definitely be characterized uncanny in the Freudian sense, in which that which

arouses dread and horror and that which is supposed to be familiar come together in an

unsettling mix (Freud 1997, 195). This strange hybridity of mutually incompatible traits

is one of the means with which Barbey's highlights the unnaturalness of these women,

while he simultaneously places them within the partially obscured view of his male

narrators, thus never permitting any glimpse at the women's true nature, or allowing them

the chance to tell their own stories.[146]

In "Rideau cramoisi," when Brassard remarks about his lover Alberte, "I must

confess that I was even more surprised at her coolness than at her folly" (1964, 23-24)[147]

and that her advances on him under guise of such an unflinching exterior are "monstrous"

(*monstrueuse*), it is clear that he is simultaneously attracted to and frightened by Alberte

because this young woman from a respectable household does not behave in a way to

which he was accustomed, and not simply because her behavior is aggressive. He further

remarks, "This appeared to me worse than anything I had ever heard or read about

women's skill in deceit, and their ability to conceal their deepest or most violent

emotions. Just imagine!—she was only eighteen! Was she even as old as that?" (1964,

24).[148] Judging by the lengthy paragraphs that Barbey devotes to Brassard's description

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distrust of women and his negative experiences of them inspired his portrayal of female
characters as cruel and diabolical" (1996, 56).
[146] One possible exception is the collection's unique final tale, "La Vengeance d'une
femme" ("A Woman's Vengeance"), in which a female character does have narrative
control. However, the story still opens through the point of view of a male character,
whose encounter with the titular character allows her to tell her story. This tale will be
discussed in further detail later in the chapter.
[147] "J'avoue que j'étais encore plus surpris de son aplomb que de sa folie" (2003, 56-57).
[148] "Ceci me parassait plus fort que ce que j'avais lu, que tout ce que j'avais entendu dire

of Alberte's peculiarities, Brassard finds her behavior and her unexpected silence to be even more fascinating and puzzling than the mystery of her sudden death, after which Brassard leaves town, hastily concluding his narrative as Ravila does. The primary witness to events in "Le Bonheur dans le crime" ("Happiness in Crime"), Doctor Torty, also finds himself most unable to accept not the act of murder, but the way in which the murderess Hauteclaire is able to blithely resume her affair with a married man without the slightest display of guilt. Significantly, though she clearly commits her crime in collusion with her lover, most of Torty's curiosity and incredulity is directed towards Hauteclaire. More than the act of murder, it is Hauteclaire's unnatural masculinity and coldness that fascinate Torty.

Barbey's male narrators only have partial access to the *diaboliques* in question, and though the argument can be made that most of the women's actions *are* immoral, it is clear that the men's horror and fascination are not so much provoked by the actions themselves, but by the ways in which the women defy societal conventions and subvert expectations of standard feminine behavior. While the female ghosts and spirits of *Liaozhai* are strange because of the ways in which they break down ontological categories, Barbey's women, despite their supernatural appellation, are viewed as strange because of their defiance of male-imposed norms. Here, once again, one of the key constitutive features of Barbey's collection of monstrosities is an impossible combination of traits. For example, Brassard cannot reconcile Alberte's brash nightly visits with her

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sur le naturel dans le mensonge attribué aux femmes, --sur la force de masque qu'elles peuvent mettre à leurs plus violentes ou leurs plus profondes émotions. Songez donc! elle avait dix-duit ans! Les avait-elle même?" (2003, 57).

demure demeanor at her parents' dining table; in his presence she is eerily silent, but she

responds calmly and naturally to her parents. His description of her as a "thick, hard

marble cover which had a fire burning beneath it" (1964, 35)[149] is both representative of

her paradoxical personality and behavior, and a foreshadowing of her bizarre death

(turning as cold as marble) just when she ought to be most passionately alive while

making love to Brassard, making her a signifier of both life and death. The most tragic-

comical story in the collection, "À un dîner d'athées" ("At a Dinner of Atheists"),

features a promiscuous woman (Rosalba) who troubles her lover (Mesnilgrand) not

because of her promiscuity, but because she was "astonishingly modest in appearance,

considering what she was" (1964, 196).[150] Mesnilgrand further conjectures that "It must

surely have been [the] Devil who, in a fit of madness, created Rosalba to give himself the

pleasure ... of mingling voluptuousness with modesty, and modesty with

voluptuousness..." (1964, 196).[151]

　　Boucher (1976) has also found that many of Barbey's characters represent an

impossible union of extremes, for example in the androgynous.[152] Barbey was intensely

fascinated by the paradoxical figure of the androgynous dandy, whose nature Barbey

described as "double et multiple" in the essay "Du Dandysme et de George Brummell"

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[149] "...un épais et dur couvercle de marbre qui brûlait, chauffé par en dessous…" (2003, 72).

[150] "…de l'air le plus étonnamment pudique pour ce qu'elle était" (2003, 270).

[151] "C'était sûrement ce Diable-là qui, dans un accès de folie, avait créé la Rosalba, pour se faire le plaisir… du Diable, de fricasser, l'une après l'autre, la volupté dans la pudeur et la pudeur dans la volupté…" (2003, 270).

[152] "Nombre de héros aurevilliens sont par ailleurs des êtres intenses tendant à réaliser en eux la coïncidence des contraires ... c'est-à-dire à s'approcher de l'androgyne ... Comme l'inceste, l'androgyne représente une aberration amoureuse qui ne pouvait que tenter Barbey..." (1976, 11).

(1989, 23); this interest informs the creation of his most memorable characters, and, as Boucher suggests, is reflected in the nature of his narratives themselves, which are characterized by the desire to tease, to entice, and to obscure.[153] We have already seen that Barbey's use of "ricochet" and the prolongation of suspense corroborate this observation.[154] And perhaps no androgynously hybrid figure among Barbey's œuvre has been more closely studied than the murderess Hauteclaire of "Le Bonheur dans le crime," who according to Miranda Gill's (2007) discussion of nineteenth-century dandyism is an example of what was generally considered an impossible monstrosity: she is both a woman and a dandy.

The story contains numerous descriptions of Hauteclaire as having the appearance and comportment of a man;[155] she makes a name for herself and incites curiosity because she is a skilled fencing master like her famous father. Her animal characteristics are also emphasized throughout the story, where she is described successively as panther, fawn, and serpent.[156] Barbey's continual juxtaposition of Hauteclaire's aristocratic demeanor

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[153] "L'esthétique aurevillienne sera pareillement caractérisée .... notamment dans *les Diaboliques* par la recherche conjointe de la provocation et de la dissimulation, dialectique du scandale et du secret..." (1976, 11).

[154] Rossbach has a similar contention, that "the narrative act in *Les Diaboliques* is inspired by dandyism, that it constitutes an artful disguise, a masquerade of sorts that conceals and deceives" (2009, 277).

[155] For example: "For strange to say, in this handsome couple it was the woman who had the muscles, and the man who had the nerves" (1964, 71); "Chose étrange! dans le rapprochement de ce beau couple, c'était la femme qui avait les muscles, et l'homme qui avait les nerfs..." (2003, 116).

[156] For example: "Dark, supple, as powerfully muscular, and as royal in bearing—quite as beautiful in her own way, and with an even more disquieting charm—this woman was like a human panther opposed to the animal panther which she eclipsed…" (1964, 71); "Noire, souple, d'articulation aussi puissante, aussi royale d'attitude, --dans son espèce, d'une beauté égale, et d'un charme encore plus inquiétant, --la femme, l'inconnue, était

with her savage nature points at the animalistic hidden by the veneer of human civilization, and has been studied at length.[157] As has the scene in which Hauteclaire, posing as the maid to her lover's wife, appears in a position of subservience while defiantly flaunting the signs of both her unconventional masculinity and her former profession: she appears with "the threaded needle stuck into her provocative bodice, where she had already stuck a great many others in a solid mass of steel which enhanced her beauty. Even the steel of needles suited that devil of a girl..." (1964, 100).[158] Respaut (1999, 75) and Debray-Genette (1973, 50-51) both point out that her name itself is androgynous: it is the name of Olivier's sword in *La Chanson de Roland*. This creeping intrusion of the masculine also appears in Alberte, who is said to have hands that are "fairly large and strong, like a boy's" (1964, 22).[159] As with Brassard's reaction to Alberte, it is clear that what is shocking to Torty about Hauteclaire is not simply her defiant act of murder, but her unusual hybridity.

Madame de Stasseville, one of the *diaboliques* of "Le Dessous de cartes d'une partie de whist" ("The Story Behind a Game of Whist") is also described with a bestial vocabulary. Her hands "resembled those fabulous claws which the astonishing poetry of

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comme une panthère humaine, dressée devant la panthère animale qu'elle éclipisait..." (2003, 117).

[157] See for example Eisenberg, who discusses in particular Barbey's use of clothing as signs to reinforce the similarities between Hauteclaire and the panther she provokes at the beginning of the story (1996, 30-32), and Respaut (1999).

[158] "Elle vint … ayant piqué l'aiguille enfilée sur sa provocante poitrine, où elle en avait piqué une masse d'autres pressées les unes contre les autres et l'embellissant de leur acier. Même l'acier des aiguilles allait bien à cette diablesse de fille, faite pour l'acier…" (2003, 153). On this scene, Humphreys writes that "[Hauteclaire's] mastery of phallic imagery suggests that she has appropriated authority that is not rightly hers" (2012, 39), another affront to Dr. Torty's masculine worldview.

[159] "… un peu grande, et forte comme celle d'un jeune garçon" (2003, 55).

the Ancients attributed to certain monsters with women's faces and breasts"; she occasionally "[passes] the tip of her viperish tongue over her sibilant lips"; she was "an example of those organisms to be found in every category of nature, which, from choice or instinct, go to the bottom rather than to the surface of things" (1964, 140).[160] Like Hauteclaire, Madame de Stasseville is a composite of animal and human characteristics, and is impenetrable to understanding no matter how many pages the narrator devotes to painstakingly cataloging her outward behavior and appearance.[161] Her--and her alleged lover's--behaviors are ultimately incomprehensible, though her male counterpart in the tale is by and large spared from the animalistic descriptions. The duchess from "La Vengeance d'une femme" is described using a similar vocabulary: her appearance is "monstrously provocative" (1964, 223);[162] her lover Tressignies "shudder[s] at her gestures, her words, and her face, which had become like that of a Gorgon; it seemed to him that he could see around her head the snakes which this woman had in her heart" (1964, 237).[163] Here, too, a panther makes an appearance in Tressignies's internal

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[160] "…ressemblaient à des griffes fabuleuses, comme l'étonnante poésie des Anciens en attribuait à certains monstres au visage et au sein de femme"; "elle passait le bout de sa langue vipérine sur ses lèvres sibilantes"; "une de ces organisations comme il y en a dans touts les règnes de la nature, qui, de préférence ou d'instinct, recherchent le fond au lieu de la surface des choses" (2003, 202).

[161] The narrator states, "It is a story which nobody really knows, and I am trying to shed some light on it by means of a scientific study of her personality such as Cuvier might have made" (1964, 141); "Je raconte comme je peux son histoire, que personne n'a bien sue, et je cherche à éclairer par une étude à la Cuvier sur sa personne" (2003, 204). Georges Cuvier was a famous early-nineteenth-century zoologist who classified both animals and human beings.

[162] "Monstrueusement provocante" (2003, 306).

[163] "Il frémissait de ses gestes, de ses paroles, de sa tête, devenue une tête de Gorgone: il lui semblait voir autour de cette tête les serpents que cette femme avait dans le cœur" (2003, 322).

vocabulary as he observes the Duchess: "Not one of them [the prostitutes of Paris] had a better right to be called a Panther. That evening she had all the animal's suppleness, pounces, bounds, scratches, and bites" (1964, 224).[164]

To be sure, much of the tension in these figures--and the source of their power to fascinate--is derived not simply from the fact that they possess seemingly mutually incompatible traits, but also from the fact that this incompatibility results in deception. Deception is a motif that is persistent throughout Barbey's writing: in these shocking women whose exteriors betray nothing of their supposedly diabolical nature, in the way one must peel back narrative after narrative to arrive at the principle story, in the *salon* gatherings Barbey is so fond of describing in which everyone is playing the game of concealing one's true feelings, and also in the curtain metaphor described at the very beginning of the collection in "Rideau cramoisi." The hybridity of Barbey's *diaboliques* may simply be one of many literary devices used to maintain the reader's interest, but that does not mitigate the fact that hybridity and its deceptive properties are key features that serve to demarcate these women as other and *strange*.

Intrusion and the Difficulty of Containment in *Les Diaboliques*

We have seen that in addition to hybridity that takes the form of unusual combinations of seemingly incompatible characteristics, one the main markers of strangeness in *Liaozhai* is the dissolution, destabilization, or redefinition of categories:

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[164] "…aucune d'elles n'aurait mieux justifié ce nom de panthère... Elle en eut, ce soir-là, la souplesse, les enroulements, les bonds, les égratignements et les morsures" (2003, 307).

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characters freely traverse the boundaries between life and death, dream and reality, man and beast, at times resulting in the rewriting of a new set of rules regarding that which is possible and that which is impossible. For example, a fox-spirit might be granted immortality as a result of her proper behavior in the human realm. Of course, the hybrid creatures and situations themselves are instrumental to this reworking of boundaries; the two motifs are inextricably intertwined.

When we consider Barbey's tales as intrusion stories, we find that the intrusion functions on two levels: the characters in the tales and the readers are both subject to the irresistible fascination of the strange. In creating a fictional world in which his *diaboliques* exist and are considered to be strange, Barbey must necessarily negotiate some of boundaries that might separate the diabolical from the non-diabolical.[165] His preface swiftly sets up that dichotomy by placing the reader squarely within the latter category, no doubt so that he might flatter their sensibilities while giving himself a better chance at escaping censorship. In his preface to the first edition of the collection, Barbey writes that he is telling "pure souls"--his readers--about these horrific creatures in order to "put the fear of Hell into them" (1964, xviii).[166] He warns his reader to not expect "inventions, complications, affectations, refinements, all the *tremolo* of the modern melodrama which is insinuating itself everywhere" (1964, xviii).[167] His thus claims to be presenting tales that are morally true, but they nonetheless must be sufficiently intriguing in order to sustain attention, and sufficiently "diabolical" so that they might instruct.

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[165] On the diabolical in Barbey, see Girard (1986).

[166] "... il ne les raconte aux âmes pures que pour les en épouvanter" (2003, 23).

[167] "… à des inventions, à des complications, à des recherches, à des raffinements, à tout le *tremblement* du mélodrame moderne, qui se fourre partout…" (2003, 24).

In fact, we have already seen that despite Barbey's supposed dedication to unadorned truth, his narratives are full of complications, affectations, and stylistics refinements, even if we accept that his "inventions" are in fact disguised truths. They are artfully so, and deserve all the praise that has been accorded to them by scholars of narrative. As intrusion stories, they function precisely due to all the narrative complexity that Barbey utilizes to enhance the atmosphere of the strange for his moral purpose of illuminating the threat posed by evil women. But in making his tales so alluring, Barbey has created a secondary intrusion that threatens to dissolve the one boundary he wishes to maintain – that which is between the diabolical and the pure. Although he claims to present the diabolical to those whose souls are pure, in that very preface he has already deconstructed the essentialism with which he characterizes those who are diabolical: in fact, he writes that one can be diabolical "to some degree" (1964, xviii),[168] implying that not all of the *diaboliques* are so to the same extent. The necessary corollary to this statement is that if Barbey wishes to establish a dichotomy between those who are supposedly pure and any of the *diaboliques* in question, that boundary necessarily becomes unfixed. No matter how strange these women might seem, there is always the danger that in some cases they might become more similar to, and more closely linked with, those "pure souls" than previously imagined. Barbey's tales seduce us with their narrative intricacy, just as his *diaboliques* seduce the supposedly pure-minded figures in his stories. This is the allure of the strange: just as the Chinese collections of the strange betray a combination of awe in the face of the unknowable, and the rational impulse to

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[168] "A quelque degré" (2003, 24).

collect and classify, so too must Barbey—and his readers by extension—come dangerously close to being seduced by the diabolical.

There is evidence of such a tension throughout the collection. In "Rideau cramoisi," the crimson curtain that is supposed to separate those who belong to the morally safe realm occupied by the readers--in this case, the narrator and Brassard, two men simply passing through a nebulous area of diabolical implications--and those that belong to the realm of mystery and diabolism is easily traversed by Brassard in his narration. The narrator's response to the unknown curtain is at first reverie and vague disquiet that is augmented by Brassard's reaction to the reminder from his past. However, Brassard goes on to reveal in his narration that it was none other than he himself who once occupied that space behind the seemingly sinister piece of fabric, as he tells the narrator: "I lowered, as it is now … the same crimson curtain in front of the same window, which had no shutters then any more than it has now, to prevent the neighbors … from seeing into my room" (1964, 30).[169]

Just as both Brassard and the narrator are inexorably drawn toward Alberte through the act of reminiscence, Dr. Torty is drawn toward Hauteclaire. Confronted with the exoticism and incomprehensibility of Hauteclaire's behavior, he attempts to analyze her using scientific language, the parlance of his domain:

> I could therefore study with as much interest and continuity as if it had been a disease, the mystery of a situation which no one would have considered credible… from the very first day, this mystery aroused my

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[169] "Je baissais, comme le voilà, ce soir ... ce même rideau cramoisi, à cette même fenêtre, qui n'avait pas plus de persiennes qu'elle n'en a maintenant, afin que les voisins ... ne dévisageassent pas le fond de ma chambre" (2003, 66).

ratiocinative faculties, which are the blind man's stick to the scientist, and especially to the doctor… (1964, 88).[170]

Through his description of events as he narrates, Torty reveals that he was much more attentive to the mystery of Hauteclaire's behavior than to the patient that he was actually hired to treat, the wife of Hauteclaire's secret lover the Comte de Savigny. Torty even admits that it is his interest in teratology, the study of physiological abnormalities, that has kept him by the couple's side, despite his revulsion at their behavior, during all these years. Here, then, is a rationalizing impulse that attempts mastery over what the rest of the narrative--even the doctor's own--sets up as completely incomprehensible and hence diabolical. When the narrator exclaims that the couple's happiness is a disorder in nature, Torty's ambivalent reply is: "It's a disorder or an order, whichever you like" (1964, 105).[171]

Furthermore, I argue that in addition to drawing in readers and diegetic listeners alike, Barbey's complex techniques of narration work also further deconstruct the opposition between the non-diabolical self and the diabolical other as instituted in the preface. That is, strangeness is a tool of fascination that cannot be easily contained. The symbolically charged crimson curtain, for example, is at first used by the narrator to separate himself from his conjectured world of mystery (and implied strangeness), and by Barbey to implicitly draw a parallel between that separation and our separation from the text. When Brassard, at first situated with the narrator, seizes narrative control and

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[170] "Je pourrais donc étudier, avec autant d'intérêt et de suite qu'une maladie, le mystère d'une situation qui ... aurait semblé impossible... dès le premier jour que je l'entrevis, ce mystère excita en moi la faculté ratiocinante, qui est le bâton d'aveugle du savant et surtout du médecin..." (2003, 138-39).
[171] "C'est un désordre ou c'est un ordre, comme il vous plaira" (2003, 160).

traverses that curtain into a world of strangeness and evil, the reader's purity seems to be threatened as well. Likewise, the parallels between the two intimate conversational settings in "Le Plus bel amour de Don Juan"--which host a dialogue between the primary narrator and the Marquise Guy de Ruy, and Ravila's great confession at his sumptuous dinner party, respectively--place the pious and holy Marquise in the same position as Ravila's former paramours, as they all seek to unravel the mystery of Ravila's "greatest love." Both of these conversations take place during an aristocratic gathering. Though the number of participants differ, both narrative events are solicited and propelled forward by female curiosity, their momentum sustained by Barbey's techniques of "provocation et dissimulation,"[172] just as they are greeted with female reverie at their conclusion (Barbey 2003, 110).

Perhaps most destructive to Barbey's preferred dichotomy is the collection's strategically placed final tale, "La Vengeance d'une femme" ("A Woman's Vengeance"), wherein the central *narrative* itself is a diabolical, incomprehensible act because it is the only one told by a woman. Here, a Parisian dandy Tressignies finds himself strangely attracted to a prostitute and follows her back to her apartment, only to discover after their sexual encounter that she is in fact the Duchess of Sierra Leone, an aristocrat known for her beauty. After her true identity is discovered, the Duchess launches into her tale of vengeance: "Would you like to know it? Would you like to know my story? Would you? … I for my part would like to tell it to all who come here. I would like to tell it to the whole world. I should be more infamous as a result, but I should be the better revenged"

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[172] See footnote 153.

(1964, 229).[173] The Duchess had fallen in love with another man, Don Esteban, and when the Duke of Sierra Leone learned of their platonic affair, he carved out Esteban's heart and fed it to his dogs. Shortly after, the Duchess escaped and has been prostituting herself ever since, flaunting her nobility and her profession in order to dishonor the Duke's name. Moreover, the Duchess wishes her vengeance to be final and complete: "News of what I am doing may reach him any day, splashing him with the filth of my shame… I would not entrust my vengeance to chance. I have resolved to die of it so that it shall be more certain; my death will both complete and ensure my revenge" (1964, 238).[174] Sure enough, she is buried under both names when she finally dies from the diseases she predicted she would contract: both "Duchess d'Arcos de Sierra-Leone" and "repentant whore" are inscribed on her catafalque (1964, 247).[175] Tressignies is so moved and shocked by this inscription that he copies it out, performing the tripled inscription of her tale of vengeance that is echoed by the Duchess's narrative and the writing on her catafalque.

That Tressignies cannot help but perform this act of writing, despite his clear repugnance at the Duchess's behavior and his initial refusal to help disseminate her tale, is a powerful testament to the contagious effects of narrative, especially those performed by Barbey himself in his own description of *les diaboliques*. The Duchess's tale invites

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[173] "Voulez-vous le savoir...? Voulez-vous savoir mon histoire? Le voulez-vous? ... Moi, je voudrais la dire à tous ceux qui viennent ici! Je voudrais la raconter à toute la terre! J'en serais plus infâme, mais j'en serais mieux vengée" (2003, 313).
[174] "Le bruit de ce que je fais peut l'atteindre d'un jour à l'autre, d'une éclaboussure de ma honte! ... ce n'est pas à un hasard que je livrerais ma vengeance! J'ai résolu d'en mourir pour qu'elle soit plus sûre; ma mort l'assurera, en l'achevant" (2003, 323).
[175] "Fille repentie" (2003, 335).

itself into Tressignies's life through his act of writing, despite her death. In a similar

manner, its infamy threatens to intrude upon the reader's life via Barbey's act of

dissemination. Deliberately or unwittingly, the placement of this tale in a position of

finality echoes preternaturally the propagation of the Duchess's tale via the final

inscription of her life. And was her vengeance not successful? The existence of Barbey's

tale proves, however ironically and metatextually, that it was. Those who echo and retell

her narrative--as Tressignies and Barbey have done--are unwitting participants in her

diabolical act.[176]

Barbey's "Petit musée de ces dames": Author as Curator of the Strange

    Taking a look at both *Liaozhai zhiyi* and *Les Diaboliques* from an authorial

perspective, their respective prefaces share much in common. Both are primarily used by

the authors to deny that their use of the strange and sometimes morally objectionable--

which Barbey considers diabolical--is mere frivolous entertainment. The art of curating a

collection is also invoked by both authors, Pu by referring to his passion for collection

and re-telling tales of the strange, and Barbey by referring to his *diaboliques* as exhibits

in a museum and by alluding to the art of rearrangement practiced by the novelist

(Barbey 2003, 24-25). Even if these tales were to be taken as mere follies or curiosities,

the authors wanted their readership to know that their writing was not an unconsidered

act of regurgitation -- art and reflection were required. And just as Pu invokes Confucius

to justify the tales' retelling, Barbey claims that his tales were written by a "Christian

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[176] I disagree therefore with Humpreys's interpretation that Tressignies's withholding of
the duchess's tale to himself is his own act of successful vengeance (2012, 39).

moralist" (1964, xviii),[177] and that he simply wanted to put the fear of Hell into his

readers. Thus both authors attempt to normalize or "reprocess" the strange--through

collection and re-narration--to some degree, and both claim to do so for a moral purpose.

In addition, Barbey also makes the bold claim that his tales *are* some version of

the truth: "Unfortunately these stories are all true. Nothing in them has been invented.

The author has not named the characters, that is all" (1964, xvii).[178] "La Vengeance d'une

femme," the final tale in the collection, opens with lengthy prefatory paragraphs on the

failure of modern literature--presumably not that of Barbey's, however--to represent the

truth: "Literature, which for a long time had been said to be the expression of society,

does not express it at all… But under the social surfaces, the precautions, the fears, and

the hypocrisies, you could catch glimpses of the truth" (1964, 213-14).[179] Truth for

Barbey here is that which is scandalous and hidden: he cites as examples members of the

aristocracy who engage in incest and self-flagellation, among other sins. Of course, the

implication is that he considers himself one of the bold writers who would dare expose

the truth in order to enlighten the world.

However, prefaces such as these should not be taken at face value. It is difficult to

extricate fact from fiction, and claimed motive from true intentions when it comes to

deciphering authorial intentions. For example, why did Barbey focus so exclusively on

these strange figures and events that he considered so morally reprehensible? Despite the

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[177] "Moraliste chrétien" (2003, 23).

[178] "Ces histoires sont malheureusement vraies. Rien n'en a été inventé. On n'en a pas nommé les personnages: voilà tout!" (2003, 24).

[179] "La littérature, qu'on a dit si longtemps l'expression de la société, ne l'exprime pas du tout... Mais, à travers les surfaces sociales, les précautions, les peurs et les hypocrisies, cela s'entrevoyait..." (2003, 293-94).

neat coincidence between Barbey's socially and religiously conservative background and his demonstrated zeal in exposing the devil's machinations, one might easily guess that he must have been fascinated or even attracted, to some degree, by the very subject matter he was so vigorously criticizing. Likewise, many critics have pointed to Pu's lack of success at the civil service exams as the impetus for his stubborn adherence to the strange,[180] and there is ample reason to suspect that Barbey's frustrations in his personal and professional lives led him to take a stance of rebellion against the status quo and to provoke scandal despite his conservative constitution.[181] More concrete than these conjectures is the overall attitude toward the strange as demonstrated by their works: the attempt to display, categorize, and analyze the strange betrays a certain attraction, certainly, but also demonstrates a desire to understand that which is considered to be alien, unnatural, or unacceptable. As with any other work of literature, these tactics can be viewed as a means of processing the world and reflecting it according to their authors' worldview.

Though both Barbey and Pu focus on what they consider to be strange, Barbey emphasizes depth rather than the breadth of Pu's voluminous collection. The longer length of each of Barbey's tales allows him to dissertate at length, and under the guise of a multitude of voices, on the precise nature of each *diabolique*'s strangeness. In "Le Bonheur dans le crime," for example, Torty's ruminatory, scientific discourse is at first interrupted by the narrator's interjections of skepticism and surprise. As Torty delves

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[180] See for example Chang and Chang (1998, 11-65) and Barr (1986).
[181] On Barbey's frustrations, see Eisenberg (1996, 82) and Boucher (1976, 3-5). Barbey wrote to his friend Trébutien: "Je suis aussi déplacé dans mon siècle que vous..." (quoted in Boucher 1976, 4).

deeper into his tale, Barbey is able to introduce other voices: those from the insulated aristocratic community in which Hauteclaire grew up, and later those that gossip about her disappearance and subsequent marriage to Savigny. Certainly, some of Pu's tales contain comments from other characters besides the protagonist on the nature of the strange, but they are usually brief and relegated to an insignificant position in the narrative; by and large the strongest voices in Pu's tales are that of the omniscient narrator and, sometimes, that of the Historian of the Strange. In contrast, Barbey's tales thoroughly achieve the illusion of polyphony through sustained and equal distribution of narrative attention to various voices throughout the story. The tales of *Les Diaboliques* are in-depth studies on the nature of evil with a single-minded focus on bringing that nature to light, and only the appearance of dialogical interaction between voices and viewpoints. *Liaozhai*, on the other hand, has a veneer of authority due to the Pu's strong authorial voice, his pseudonymic commentary, and the preface's allusion to canon and history. However, the sheer size of the collection means that it cannot pursue one single conclusion as single-mindedly as Barbey does. Although both *Les Diaboliques* and *Liaozhai* are single-author collections, they take a very different approach toward elucidating and engaging with the strange.

Both works however, contain excellent examples of how the intrusion story directs and focuses the reader's attention when it comes to the revelation of the strange. In the shorter tales of *Liaozhai*, Pu effectively alerts the reader both to the fact that the story is not about everyday reality, and to the tale's roots in folklore and the *zhiguai* tradition. The effects of the strange are generated from the friction between what unfolds

in this tale and the reader's expectations as calibrated both by reality and by other similar tales they may have read or heard of. Because Barbey's shocking tales do not have obvious sources, for the most part he must rely much more heavily on artfully created situations and conversational dialogue to engender and maintain interest. To put it more simply, Barbey's tales are more dialogical than descriptive; they rely on dialogue rather than authorial description to relay--and heighten--the effects of the strange.

This does not mean, however, that Barbey shies away from using "markers" to connote and to create anticipation. The singular behavior of Hauteclaire at the zoo--she deliberately provokes a panther by flicking its nose--alerts both narrator and reader, without Torty having to say anything, that this is no ordinary woman. Similarly, "Le Rideau cramoisi" begins with a long preamble full of characteristic markers of the fantastic: darkness, isolation (the narrator and Brassard in the diligence; the location of the small town itself), and the characters' awareness of their unique situation, a "sixth sense" that something unusual is about to happen. All of these markers are neatly encompassed by the narrator's observation during his travels: "The night became as black as an extinguished stove; and, in this obscurity, the unknown towns through which we passed took on a strange appearance, and made us think that we were at the world's end" (1964, 8).[182] Further on in his journey, the narrator also remarks, "Our sleeping diligence resembled an enchanted coach, fixed by a fairy wand in some open glade in the Sleeping

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[182] "La nuit devint noire comme un four éteint, --et, dans cette obscurité, ces villes inconnues par lesquelles nous passions avaient d'étranges physionomies et donnaient l'illusion que nous étions au bout du monde..." (2003, 36).

Beauty's forest" (1964, 12).[183] This explicit reference to not only a fairy tale, but a

magically *fixed* moment in time in a fairy tale, seems to further situate the tale in the

realm of the supernatural or marvelous. When Brassard takes control of the narrative, the

markers of strangeness continue to multiply, sustaining the atmosphere of intrigue.

Describing his boarding room, Brassard recalls "an old bust of Niobe" that is "an

astonishing ornament to find in that common bourgeois house," then wonders, "But

wasn't that incomprehensible Alberte more astonishing?" (1964, 31).[184] Here, he links

Alberte with both incomprehensibility and exoticism, while confining her to her status as

object to be examined and collected.

Barbey is also able to create an atmosphere of both suspicion and superstition

through, surprisingly, the description of a church cloaked in shadow at the beginning of

"À un dîner d'athées." Not only does Barbey draw attention to the ways in which the

darkness, a symbol of fear and the unknown, is able to invade the church despite the

patrons' prayers, he also gives sustained attention to a man who is later revealed to be the

atheist Mesnilgrand, the man who later relates the story of the *diabolique*. The text asks,

"Why, then, had he entered this evening? What feeling, or idea, or plan had persuaded

him to cross the threshold of this door which he passed several times a day as if it did not

even exist?" (1964, 160).[185] The action of entering the church, a mundane action in itself,

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[183] "Notre diligence endormie ressemblait à une voiture enchantée, figée par la baguette des fées, à quelque carrefour de clairière, dans la forêt de la Belle au Bois dormant" (2003, 41).

[184] "… un vieux buste de Niobé d'après l'antique, qui étonnait là, chez ces bourgeois vulgaires. Mais est-ce que cette incompréhensible Alberte n'étonnait pas bien plus?" (2003, 66).

[185] "Pourquoi donc y entrait-il ce soir-là?... Quel sentiment, quelle idée, quel project

is here underscored as strange even before the revelation of Mesnilgrand as an atheist.

The narrator continues, without much subtlety, "When he entered this building … was he struck by the almost sepulchral appearance of the church, which resembles a crypt in construction…?" (1964, 160),[186] drawing an uncomfortable parallel between the spiritual comforts of a place of worship and the aura of death that lingers over the upcoming, as yet untold story. Neither the man's seemingly strange actions nor this pallor of death is fully explained until the tale's horrifying and grotesque climax during which an infant's heart is thrown as a weapon, but they effectively foreshadow the nature of the tale that is to come.

Echoes of Barbey: Mérimée and Maupassant's Treatment of the Strange

As pointed out earlier, the French literary world of the nineteenth century was fascinated by fantastic motifs: madness, hallucinations, ghosts, vampires, and other supernatural creatures. Even authors primarily known for more realist works such as Honoré de Balzac, Emile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant dabbled with the fantastic. But just as Pu Songling's contemporaries Ji Yun and Yuan Mei used similar story ideas to different ends, each French author treated the fantastic differently and to his own unique end. To contextualize Barbey's work, we will consider the fantastic works of two other nineteenth-century French authors, Prosper Mérimée and Guy de Maupassant.

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l'avait décidé à franchir le seuil de cette porte, devant laquelle il passait plusieurs fois par jour comme si elle n'eût pas existé?" (2003, 226).
[186] "Quand il entra dans ce lieu ... fut-il frappé de l'aspect presque tombal de cette église, qui, de construction, ressemble à une crypte...?" (2003, 226).

Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870) is a Renaissance man of sorts – he was not only a writer of novellas, short stories, and poetry, but also a historian, archaeologist, translator, and served as a senator for the Second French Empire.[187] His best known literary works include *Tamango* (1829), *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837), and *Carmen* (1845). Most of his tales appeared individually in Paris revues, but were also later re-published as collections. Compared to his contemporaries and predecessors, Mérimée wrote in a more austere style, and was particularly adept at introducing those "markers" of the strange so important to the intrusion story. In terms of themes, Mérimée was most interested in incorporating elements of the mythological, the primitive, and the exotic, and is often read as an author who tried to re-emphasize these elements as part of the fantastic genre's response to realism and naturalism.[188] *Lokis* (1869), for example, takes place in Lithuania, and describes the horrific traits that an aristocrat is born with after his mother was supposedly raped by a bear.[189] In addition to its essential tale, Mérimée also uses *Lokis*'s professor narrator to discourse at length on Lithuanian linguistics, poetry, and folklore. *Carmen* is well known for its portrayal of an exotic Gypsy woman, and *Colomba* (1840) portrays Corsicans as a people struggling to rid itself of its rites of vengeance, clearly considered primitive by Mérimée.

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[187] See Raitt (1970) for an detailed biography of Mérimée. Mérimée's voluminous correspondance is collected under Parturier (1953).

[188] Raitt writes that Mérimée was "fascinated by primitive societies … those modes of life based on strong feeling and which it was impossible to confine within the norms of polite convention" (1970, 187). On Mérimée's personal relationship with, and perspectives on, the supernatural, mythology, and religion, see Rosenthal (1973), Hiller (1982), and Sprenger (2000) respectively.

[189] In the tale's final draft, the rape is but vaguely alluded to due to protests from Mérimée's female friends (Raitt 1970, 331).

La *Vénus d'Ille* (*The Venus of* Ille) is Mérimée most celebrated fantastic tale and features a primitive evil unearthed, and misunderstood, by self-styled men of learning. It is well studied due to Todorov's classification of it as truly fantastic, a category that consists only of Mérimée's tale and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. The basic outline of the story is as follows: an antiquarian (supposedly a stand-in for Mérimée), at the invitation of an acquaintance M. Peyrehorade, visits the town of Ille to study its ancient Roman ruins. While there, he witnesses the unearthing of a ancient Venus statue, an object that is subsequently treated with either supernatural terror or skeptical disdain by the town's inhabitants. Peyrehorade's son irreverently slips his engagement ring onto the Venus's finger, and on his wedding night, the statue supposedly comes to life and embraces her "husband," thus killing him in his sleep.

Throughout the tale and leading up to the son's death, Mérimée characteristically includes many significant details that build upon the tale's accumulation of strange details. These have been well documented in scholarship of Mérimée,[190] but they include the statue's "wicked" (*méchante*) expression,[191] the fact that the statue crashes into one of the diggers and breaks his leg, the statue's indecipherable and mysterious inscription, and Peyrehorade's death and the town's frosted harvests after the statue is melted down and destroyed. Mérimée is careful, however, to never make the "solution" to obvious to the reader, whence the tale's prized status as an example of the fantastic. The narrator, for example, provides the tale's primary rational counterpoint to its seemingly superstitious

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[190] See especially Pilkington (1975) and Rigolot (1997) on *Vénus*. Raitt also discusses Mérimée's use of significant details in his other tales to "enlist belief, to concentrate interest, and to provide a concrete image for the mind to fasten on" (1970, 126).
[191] See bibliography for the URLs of the electronic texts used for *La Vénus d'Ille*.

occurrences. His first close encounter with the statue is symbolic in this respect. When

Peyrehorade proudly brings him to the Venus, the narrator at first begins to describe the

statue with professional terminology; that is, in his capacity as archaeologist, he first

considers and catalogues the statue as an artwork, making conjectures with respect to its

period of origin and artistry. Thus the narrator remarks:

> The upper part of the body was nude, as great divinities were usually
> represented by the *ancients*… The attitude of this statue *reminded* one of
> that of the *mourre* player which is called, I hardly know why, by the name
> of *Germanicus*… I saw *a masterpiece of statuary's best days*… The hair,
> drawn back from the brow, *seemed once to have been gilded*…[192]

This lengthy passage not only serves as a detailed introduction to one of the main

"characters" of the story, it also demonstrates the thoroughly rational attitude with which

the narrator at first approaches the statue.

Even at this early stage, however, the narrator's rationality begins to falter when

he notices the statue's face. His knowledge fails him and he cannot recall a reference

point that will corroborate the Venus's menacing features: "As the face, I shall never

succeed in describing its strange character; it was of a type belonging to no other Greek

statue which I can remember."[193] But even as he is tantalized by the inexplicable, the

narrator attempts to explain this "strange character" with artistic intention, thinking to

himself that it is "a marked intention on the artist's part to reproduce malice verging on

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[192] "Elle avait le haut du corps nu, *comme les Anciens* représentaient d'ordinaire les
grandes divinités... L'attitude de cette statue *rappelait* celle du Joueur de mourre qu'on
designe, je ne sais trop pourquoi, sous le nom de *Germanicus*… je voyais *un chef-
d'œuvre du meilleur temps de la statuaire*… La chevelure, relevée sur le front, *paraissait
avoir été dorée autrefois*…." Italics are mine.
[193] "Quant à la figure, jamais je ne parviendrai à exprimer son caractère étrange, et dont le
type ne se rapprochait de celui d'aucune statue antique dont il me souvienne."

viciousness."[194] In other words, the Venus only *appears* to be ferocious because the artist made her so; she is not some supernatural embodiment of evil. This is the narrator's characteristic response toward the novella's fantastic events as they develop in front of him – he imposes skepticism upon himself even as he begins to be swayed by superstition. Witnessing the nighttime incident where an impudent young man appears to be "punished" by the statue, the narrator tells himself that there is a rational explanation: "It was evident that the stone had rebounded from the metal and had punished the wag for the outrage he had done the goddess."[195] As he stands in front of the Venus, he chastises himself at the mere hint of superstition: "I could not prevent a movement of anger to myself when I felt ill at ease before this bronze figure."[196] He shivers when Alphonse comes to him in fright, believing that the Venus has clenched her fingers, but quickly seizes upon the first rational explanation available to him when he smells wine in Alphonse's breath. The narrator assures himself, "The wretch … is dead drunk,"[197] and immediately becomes calm again. Even at the end of the novella, though he mentions the frostbitten vines that potentially serve as confirmation of the statue's influence, he does so noncommittally, making clear that the information comes from another person—his friend Peyrehorade—and without giving additional remarks that might indicate any conviction on his part.

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[194] "[L'intention] de l'artiste de rendre la malice arrivant jusqu'à la méchanceté."
[195] "Il était evident que la pierre avait rebondi … et avait puni ce drôle de l'outrage qu'il faisait à la déesse."
[196] "Je ne pus me defender d'un mouvement de colère contre moi-même en me sentant un peu mal à mon aise devant cette figure de bronze."
[197] "Le misérable … est complètement ivre."

Compared to other writers of the fantastic, Mérimée's narrators expend considerable effort to rationalize the events that they witness. Narrators comparable to the "learned outsider" in *Vénus* appear in *Carmen*, *Lokis*, and *Il Viccolo di Madama Lucrezia* (1846), though only *Lokis* is thoroughly fantastic in nature. In both *Vénus* and *Lokis*, these narrators witness events that cannot be explained rationally, but are unwilling to commit to a thoroughly supernatural explanation. It was perhaps Mérimée's intention to distinguish his tales even more from his contemporaries, whose narrators were more troubled or were themselves victims of the fantastic events, rather than observers claiming to be impartial. That Mérimée was able to do so in his texts speaks to the relative maturity of the fantastic genre at the time he was active – his tales demand a higher degree of skepticism from their reader, but are effectively more powerful precisely due to their narrators' anticipation of possible objections and doubts. Mérimée was able to leverage this skepticism—well represented in the tales themselves by his narrators—to subtly comment on the superficial trappings of civilization and how easily they can be disrupted by mysterious forces.

Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) is another nineteenth-century French literary figure who is well known as a writer of the fantastic. However, it is interesting to realize that his reputation as such is the result of a singular tale, *Le Horla* (1887),[198] that is often included in anthologies of horror or the fantastic. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Maupassant's more than three hundred short stories, novellas, and novels cannot be

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[198] See Targe (1975) and Dubreuil (1999). A much shorter version of this well known tale was published in 1886. Maupassant is also the author of a tale titled "Le voyage du Horla," in which the titular Horla is a hot air balloon.

categorized as fantastic. Instead, the strength of Maupassant's œuvre lies in his satirical

and at times cynical commentary on contemporary society, primarily conveyed in the

format of short stories that often end with an ironic twist.[199] The well-known "La Parure"

("The Necklace") is representative of this type of story: Mathilde, a common woman who

aspires to the life of a socialite, finally receives a much-coveted invitation to an important

ball. To outfit herself for the event, she borrows a diamond necklace from a friend only

find, at the end of the night, that she has lost it. In order to return a new necklace to her

friend, Mathilde and her husband take out a ruinous loan that severely degrades their

quality of life. The story's twist is typical of Maupassant: After ten years of living in

poverty, Mathilde encounters her friend at the park, who tells her that the necklace she

worked so hard to return was in fact a fake. In these types of stories, Maupassant

describes the characters' actions at the expense of their interior psychology – their actions

and their experiences represent particular behaviors and phenomena that Maupassant

considers worthy of criticism. In "La Parure," he critiques the extravagant lifestyle of the

upper class, as well as those who thoughtlessly aspire to it.

Against the backdrop of the typical Maupassant tale, it is thus interesting to

consider how he treats fantastic motifs when he does decide to utilize them. *Le Horla*

stands out in Maupassant's œuvre due to its length and its unique format – the entire story

is told through one man's journal entries. This intimate form of storytelling allows the

writer of the journal entries, the story's protagonist, to discourse at length about the

horrors that he encounters; it also allows for the possibility that the entire story is

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[199] Vial calls this kind of twist Maupassant's "final whip" (*coup de fouet final*) and praises them for their "dry anectodal precision" (1966, 435 [my translation]).

unreliable and told from the point of view of a mad man. Critics have extensively studied this tightly constructed narrative tour de force, and it is rightly vaunted as one of the best fantastic tales of nineteenth-century France. I am more interested, however, in the intrusion of the fantastic into the French society that Maupassant portrays so thoroughly in his many short tales and often published in the same collections as those realistic depictions of contemporary mores and hypocrisies.

"La Morte" is a prime example of such an intrusion of the fantastic. The story is told from the first-person point of view of a man whose lover suddenly passes away after catching a cold. He visits the cemetery where she is entombed, only to witness the dead rising and re-writing the inscriptions on their own tombstones. As with other intrusions stories, this tale is permeated with markers of the strange. Because it is told from the protagonist's point of view, Maupassant is able to color that point of view with much uncertainty, where the narrator's state of mind alerts the reader to the possibility of a haunting. The story's opening lines certainly already reveal that the narrator is in a state of confusion, as he thinks to himself, "I had loved her desperately! Why do we love?"[200] During the rest of the first section of the tale, while the narrator relates his dead lover's illness and subsequent death, he peppers his narrative with indications that he is still searching for answers: "And that's when she died. How? I do not know, I no longer know";[201] "What happened? I no longer know";[202] "What did we say to each other? I no

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[200] "Je l'avais aimée éperdument! Pourquoi aime-t-on?" See bibliography for URL of text consulted; English translations are mine.
[201] "Et voilà qu'elle mourut. Comment? Je ne sais pas, je ne sais plus."
[202] "Que s'est-il passé? Je ne sais plus."

longer know. I have forgotten all, all!"[203] When he is not asking himself unanswerable

questions, the narrator's descriptions are short, clipped, giving only the briefest

descriptions of what happened. His justification is that "There is only one love, always

the same. I had met her and loved her. That is all";[204] the result is a foggy sketch of the

couple's relationship, with lacunas left to the reader's imagination. Death hangs over the

first part of the story, but how precisely it arrives, and whether anything precipitated that

death, is deliberately left a mystery, teasing the reader with infinite possibilities and

holding the reader's attention.

Just as the reader is primed for an intriguing explanation, Maupassant heightens

expectations by having the narrator describe his visit to the cemetery after a long sojourn

away from Paris. When he returns to the abode he shared with his dead lover, he finds

that her presence still haunts him to the extent that he must escape to the cemetery. These

descriptions, coupled with the cemetery setting, prompts the reader to expect a

supernatural third act, and Maupassant does not disappoint. His use of the ghostly, though

satisfactorily chilling, reveals that his use of the supernatural here serves his typical social

commentary. At the cemetery, the narrator is suddenly interrupted in his reverie by the

dead, in varying stages of decay, climbing out of their tunes and carving new, completely

honest inscriptions on their tombstones. The first re-inscription he witnesses is as

follows: "Here lies Jacques Olivant … He hastened with hardships the death of his father

from whom he desired to inherit, he tortured his wife, tormented his children, cheated his

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[203] "Que nous sommes-nous dit? Je ne sais plus. J'ai tout oublié, tout, tout!"
[204] "L'amour n'en a qu'une, toujours la même. Je l'avais rencontrée et aimée. Voilà tout."

neighbors, stole when he could and died miserable."[205] Returning to his lover's

tombstone, the narrator realizes that it, too, has been re-inscribed, revealing that instead

of "She loved, was loved, and died," it now reads, "Going out one day to deceive her

lover, she caught a chill in the rain, and died."[206] The mystery that Maupassant worked so

hard to engineer in the first section has now been suddenly elucidated in the most cynical

manner; the supernatural atmosphere has suddenly been leavened with an all-too-

common truth. Given the story's place alongside Maupassant's more mundane tales, it is

clear that Maupassant is using the narrative power of popular supernatural tropes in order

to tell a more earthly story. Of course, he may have also chosen this particular type of

narrative to enhance the variety of his output and to prove himself a more versatile

writer.[207]

   Maupassant does the same elsewhere with his other supernaturally themed tales –

with, of course, the notable exception of *Le Horla* and a number of works on the theme of

madness, which do not contain any overt social commentary.[208] Supernatural or possibly-

supernatural events appear in stories such as "La Légende du Mont Saint-Michel" (1882),

"La main" (1883), "Lui?" (1883), "Auprès d'un mort" (1883), "La Peur" (1884),

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[205] "Ici repose Jacques Olivant … Il hâta par ses duretés la mort de son père dont il désirait hériter, il tortura sa femme, tourmenta ses enfants, trompa ses voisins, vola quand il le put et mourut misérable."

[206] "Elle aima, fut aimée, et mourut";"Etant sortie un jour pour tromper son amant, elle eut froid sous la pluie, et mourut."

[207] Bryant points out that Maupassant definitely had variety and potential commercial success in mind as he arranged his collections for publication (1993, 77).

[208] Madness is a fantastic theme that Maupassant worked over more than any others, but in this category of stories—which include *Le Horla* , "La chevelure" (1884), "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), "Un fou" (1885), and "Qui sait?" (1890)—the characters' interior psychology and the anguish caused by doubting one's own sanity is always emphasized over the possibility of the supernatural and its moral lessons.

"L'Auberge" (1886), "L'Homme de Mars" (1887), "Le Noyé" (1888), and

"L'Endormeuse" (1889), but they devote an equal amount of time to examining the

characters' reactions to these events, which more often than not exposed their folly or

their hypocrisy. More so than Barbey and Mérimée, who utilized dialogue to recount the

supernatural at a safe remove, Maupassant allowed his characters to come directly into

contact with the supernatural, in order to further his agenda of critique. But these tales

would not have the fascinating power they do had Maupassant not made use of the most

salient features of the intrusion story to create intrigue and maintain readers' interest.

That the spell is broken at the end of the stories, in favor of the mundane, speaks to

Maupassant's versatility as a writer who can make use of popular tropes without slavishly

following them.

Conclusion

Thus far, we have seen how nineteenth-century French storytellers made use of

popular motifs of the fantastic in order to tell different kinds of stories. Prosper Mérimée

used supernatural elements to warn that the past and the primitive are not so distant from

us as we might think, and Guy de Maupassant primarily used the fantastic to criticize

attitudes and behaviors he saw around him. They sometimes make use of the intrusion

story format in order to engender and maintain a strange and fantastic atmosphere to

further their ends, but authors like Barbey also use narrative complexity—a characteristic

not typically present in Chinese strange tales—to draw readers deeper into the world of

the story. Interestingly, in their dedication to what is considered "strange," both *Liaozhai*

and *Les Diaboliques* have effectively become monuments to the predominant attitudes of their times and circumstances. Barbey wanted to exhibit a menagerie of the bizarre, but the means by which his texts establish and treat the strange have enshrined something else entirely: the socially conservative, aristocratic milieu from which Barbey came. Likewise, the fact that *Liaozhai*--and other works like it--can work with and against certain conventions of the *zhiguai* genre means that its targeted audience was of a literate and reasonably well-off sector of society. This kind of structuring of expectations when it comes to the strange, and its resultant effects, will be complicated when it is deployed through a massively popular medium, as in the twentieth-century televisual anthology *The Twilight Zone*.

Chapter 4

Strange Tales in the Era of Mass Communication: *The Twilight Zone*

I have demonstrated, in my previous two chapters, how authors from vastly

distinct backgrounds highlight the strange and prolong or intensify its effects for their

respective moral (and entertainment) purposes. I showed that many of the collected

Chinese tales, for example, place maximum emphasis on the intrusion of the strange from

the beginning of the story, their authors making skillful use of readers' expectations and

familiarity with conventions as they continually referred to other tales within the same

collection and to shared cultural and folkloric knowledge. The nineteenth-century French

author Barbey D'Aurevilly has an entirely different thematic take on the strange,

choosing to focus on the "malady" of aberrant and threatening female characteristics and

behavior; yet, he utilizes some of the same techniques when it comes to sustaining a

skewed, "strange" perspective throughout his more lengthy and narratively complex tales.

Many stories originating from these two different milieus share a frequently

reoccurring story type: one that I call the "intrusion story." Its characteristics include a

relatively short length, a lack of in-depth characterization and aesthetic complexity, and a

focus instead on emphasizing and compounding elements of the strange to the exclusion

of other narrative content. These elements include, prominently, dissolved or destabilized

boundaries (between categories that are seemingly mutually exclusive such as life and

death, human and animal, inanimate objects and living beings, etc.), marginalized figures

of society, narrative subversion of readers' expectations, and "twist" endings. The

seminal television series *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) makes use of these same tools of the trade, but we will see how their use and effects differ in the twentieth-century, multi-authorial platform that is episodic television.

I chose *The Twilight Zone* as my twentieth-century representative due to its textual status as a collection of strange tales produced in a new medium, the groundbreaking nature of its work in that medium, and the fact that the series is still cherished and watched today. It is critically acclaimed and beloved by audiences, and is an important landmark in the history of television. Building on the traditions of radio shows (which jump-started creator Rod Serling's writing career) and live theater (Zicree 1982, 6; Booker 2002, 50), *Twilight Zone* helped to popularize science fiction and fantasy in the television medium, changing the way it was produced and consumed. Jon Kraszewski points out that before *Twilight Zone*, the majority of science fiction and fantasy on television came from independent Hollywood producers. But Serling, the creative force behind the series, "inhabited a textual form whose use of the fantastic was extremely routinized in terms of production practices and formulaic in terms of narrative strategies" (2010, 152). I would also point out that the independent Hollywood series cited by Kraszewski bear names such as *Adventures of Superman*, *Sky Marshal of the Universe*, and *Rocky Jones, Space Ranger*; these were "melodramas for kids that continually featured morally virtuous heroes capturing intergalactic or earthly criminals" (2010, 154) -- a far cry from the stories of *Twilight Zone*, which highlighted the

everyman and the everyday.[209] The series was also one of the first to feature a

predominantly black cast in one of its episodes, "Big Tall Wish" (Peter Wolfe 1997, 6).

As a cultural production, the series is viewed as a near-perfect encapsulation of its

time (Booker 2002, 53), its various fantasy scenarios and terrifying creations thinly veiled

commentary on contemporary crises such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War,

and traumas from the not-so-distant past such as World War II and even the Civil War.

Of course, the series' science fiction platform allowed for deliberate reflections on the

world-changing impact of the atomic bomb and humanity's explorations of space and

first trip to the moon. All of these events provided an inexhaustible source of inspiration

for the series. Peter Wolfe has also described some of the ways the series' stories

anticipate later contributions to the genre and social issues that would only surface in

popular consciousness in the 1980's – for example, the well being of senior citizens

(1997, 6). The series possesses remarkable longevity and influence: it has been revived

twice on television (in 1985 and 2002 respectively, though admittedly with less success

than the original series), spawned a film, a radio series, comic books, innumerable

parodies and references in popular culture, and even an attraction in Disney theme parks

around the world, thus demonstrating its global impact.

Alongside *Liaozhai zhiyi* and *Les Diaboliques*, the status of *Twilight Zone* as a

collection featuring short tales with characters that do not overlap between tales serves as

an appropriate entry point for analysis. Though here I refer to these works with the same

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[209] As Serling puts it, "Sure, there have been science-fiction and fantasy shows before, but most of them were involved with gadgets or leprechauns" (quoted in Zicree 1982, 96).

word "collection," in television parlance a work like *Twilight Zone* is usually referred to as an "anthology series," as distinguished from more serialized programming of which the most useful example is the soap opera that follows the same characters throughout the entire run of the series, and tells a single, albeit complex, story. This is the format of most primetime dramas today. However, in the early 1960's and before the debut of *Star Trek*, anthology series "were the main site for adult-orientated, primetime fantasy drama," while "episodic series" such as *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *My Favorite Martian*, and *Fireball XL-5* were less serious in nature and aimed at family audiences with children present (Johnson 2005, 75). To make matters even more confusing, a literary "anthology" is usually a collection of tales from *multiple* authors as opposed to one sole author (Somerville 2010, 255; Benedict 2003, 232) -- which might be considered to be the case for *Twilight Zone*.

Through Serling was not the only writer for the show--George Clayton Johnson, Richard Matheson, and Charles Beaumont all contributed a significant number of scripts--and both film and television are collaborative media, the series is most often thought of as being stamped with Serling's authorial voice (Booker 2002, 52). In fact, Serling *was* involved in almost all aspects of production: more than simply writing 92 out of the series' 156 scripts (Peter Wolfe 1997, 18), Serling also served as executive producer and oversaw staff writers, editors, and directors, though producer Buck Houghton took on more of these responsibilities gradually (Booker 2002, 52; Kraszewski 2010, 166-67). Kraszewski classifies Serling, along with fellow television anthology writers Paddy Chayefsky and Reginald Rose, among a group of new writers he calls "new

entrepreneurs" and "institutional mavericks" due to their particular agency and ability to circulate and produce their material in various media during the postwar era, prior to heavy serialization (2010, 1-5). He also points out that because Serling "made himself the defining textual feature" of the series, he effectively transferred authority from the Hollywood producer to the Hollywood writer, giving himself fewer creative limitations (2010, 152). Initially, Serling even insisted that he write ninety percent of the series' scripts, giving himself a work schedule that proved to be unsustainable throughout the course of the series (Kraszewski 2010, 166-68). Whether *Twilight Zone* is considered more of a collaborative effort due to the nature of its medium or the product of a domineering creative mind, it was indisputably a series of consistent tone and message throughout its tenure on the air. As such, it is a unique collection of the fantastic that is worth studying alongside others of a similar nature.

M. Keith Booker argues that Serling strove to make a distinctly literary--and literate--series, while its prestigious status in public perception as such was also cemented by the fact that, as mentioned above, Serling was perceived as the series' "author" (2002, 53).[210] As a literary production, to this day the series demonstrates one of the most effective uses of the twist ending that is so frequently utilized in fantastic stories -- the final unsettling turn in the narrative, or revelation, that destabilizes and calls into question everything that precedes it. Due to the short length of most of the series' episodes and the fantastic nature of its subject matter and storylines, the device, though not unprecedented,

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[210] As a corollary to the series' "literariness," Booker makes a good case for the series as Menippean satire as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin: "the use of fantastic in Menippean satire is internally motivated by the urge to create extraordinary situations for the testing of philosophical ideas" (quoted in Booker 2002, 53).

was highly effective. The twist ending endures as one of the series' most salient and memorable characteristics, and one of the most effective tools it has to offer to the genre of the fantastic intrusion story.

In terms of narrative structure, *Twilight Zone* also serves as a convenient model of comparison for both *Liaozhai* and *Les Diaboliques*. Like *Liaozhai*, each of *Twilight Zone*'s vignettes is centered around a moral conveyed forcefully by the omniscient author's self-inserted voice. As in *Les Diaboliques*, each of these vignettes builds inexorably toward an ironic climax or a revelation that the author attempts to disguise (so as not to ruin the surprise) yet subtly highlights at the same time with the diverse clues scattered throughout the story. Though *Liaozhai*, like all other *zhiguai* ("records of the strange") of its tradition, include markers of liminality throughout its narratives, the revelation of strangeness is treated in an almost matter-of-fact manner. Here, as in *Les Diaboliques*, it is treated with the maximum amount of dramatic flourish. We will also see how the visual (and aural) medium of television impacts both the production and reception of the strange as it is treated in a short fantastic tale.

"You've Just Crossed Over": An Introduction to Rod Serling's Curio Cabinet

The Twilight Zone debuted in 1959, with CBS giving unprecedented creative control to its creator Rod Serling after negotiations with Serling and his agents, who used as a bargaining chip his successful teleplays such as "Patterns" and "Requiem for a Heavyweight" for other anthology series (Sander 1992, 147; Booker 2002, 52). At the time of its broadcast, *Twilight Zone* was critically acclaimed and won several Emmys,

though it was never extremely popular with audiences. However, its popularity has only increased since it went off the air. The series was revived several times in multiple media formats, and was being considered for another film remake as recently as 2008 (Zeitchik 2012).

Today, the series' popularity and cultural significance is acknowledged via references made by enduringly popular, mainstream series such as *Family Guy* (1999-present),[211] *The Simpsons* (1989-present), and *Saturday Night Live* (1975-present). As of this writing, many young people who perhaps retain no particular impression of the Cold War, and to whom space exploration seems routine, are discovering the series on the cable network Syfy. The network also broadcasts a *Twilight Zone* "marathon" annually on July 4. The network's web page for the series praises it thus:

> One of television's most rightly revered series, [*The Twilight Zone*] … stands as the role model for TV anthologies. Its trenchant sci-fi/fantasy parables explore humanity's hopes, despairs, prides and prejudices in metaphoric ways conventional drama cannot … the daring original series [shows] every sign of lasting the ages as the literature that it is.

The series' episodes were black-and-white and generally half an hour in length, save for the anomalous fourth season which featured hour-length episodes as a result of

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[211] In the second-season episode "Love Thy Trophy," the show's main characters, the Griffin family, and their neighbors win a trophy in a contest. However, when the trophy disappears, it becomes the cause of discord and suspicion among the neighbors. After their differences are resolved, it is revealed that it was actually the Griffins' family dog, Brian, who buried the trophy in the Griffins' front yard. The shot then fades into black-and-white as the camera zooms out to reveal a Serling-like figure, forearms crossed and holding a cigarette, standing on the Griffins' front lawn. He addresses the viewer, beginning with Serling's trademark phrase: "Submitted for your approval, a pet with the uncontrollable urge to bury shiny objects in the front yard." "Serling" drones on, only to be suddenly interrupted when Brian reappears and knocks him unconscious with a shovel. The episode's main storyline of squabbling neighbors also bears resemblance to the *Twilight Zone* episode, "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street."

the series' late renewal and the network's subsequent scheduling needs (Zicree 1982, 292-93). Its scripts were initially penned mostly by Serling himself and staff writers Beaumont and Matheson. In later seasons, Serling also hired writer George Clayton Johnson and commissioned scripts from "guest writers" such as Ray Bradbury. These staff writers frequently adapted their own material into scripts submitted for the series. In order to keep up with the demanding production schedule, Serling also issued a general call for scripts midway through the first season, and hired Buck Houghton and Fred Engels to help him find adaptable stories. This was not Serling's preference – he rarely adapted other sources as a freelance writer himself, and was resolved to use fewer adaptations in the second season of the series. However, this was a resolve that did not last (Kraszewski 2010, 168-69).[212]

The resulting storylines from this stable of writers varied from the science-fictional to the strictly marvelous. For example, the episode "Man in the Bottle" belongs squarely in the latter category, as it features an archetypal genie that appears out of a lamp and grants three wishes to a hapless couple who of course squanders them. Other magical objects are also featured, such as the "Most Unusual Camera" that produces photographic images from the very near future. A third type of episode is what I would call "lyrical": these stories contain elements of the strange and inexplicable, but those are highly de-emphasized in favor of a focus on characters' emotional journeys. These episodes feature abundant sentiment, but far fewer scenes of shock or slapstick. Thus

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[212] Kraszewski's book also provides a fascinating account of the plagiarism charges brought against Serling during the course of the series, which he surmises were a direct result of Serling's hectic schedule and careless adaptation process which might have very well resulted in his unintentional borrowing of other writers' ideas (2010, 164-72).

each week the series presented to the viewer a new story featuring a new cast of characters, to borrow a Serlingism, though the series had a stable of character actors whose familiar faces appeared in many episodes throughout the series. Burgess Meredith played the famous myopic victim of irony in "Time Enough at Last," for example, but also appeared in three additional episodes. The stories most often focused on the strange experiences of one individual, though occasionally the spotlight would fall on an entire community.

Perhaps the series' most iconic contribution to popular culture was the image of Serling, source of the voice of wisdom from above, which somehow inserts itself into the story's diegetic universe. CBS asked Serling to appear on-screen more frequently--after the fashion of Alfred Hitchcock in *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-1962)--after the first season garnered mediocre ratings (Sander 1992, 158). His appearances imbue the series' stories with added meaning -- it would not have been difficult to decipher the stories' morals on one's own, as they were often simplistic, but Serling's presence implies an overarching moral continuity that anthology series often struggle to achieve, given their scattershot focus on different characters and situation each week. Serling's voice is the viewer's introduction to this strange universe each week, as he primes the viewer by underlining the fact that he or she is now in a state of liminality. The text of the series' introductory voiceover changed each season, but it essentially always emphasized a state of flux ("middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition"; "between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge") and the fact that the viewer was about to witness the extraordinary events *beyond* everyday experiences

("You're about to enter another dimension"; "a wondrous land whose boundaries are that of imagination").[213]

As mentioned, the series was also memorable for its use of the "twist" ending, in which a final shot sheds new light on—or gives ironic meaning to—all of the events that came before. Series writer Richard Matheson described the format as follows: "The ideal *Twilight Zone* started with a really smashing idea that hit you right in the first few seconds, then you played that out, and you had a little flip at the end: that was the structure" (quoted in Sander 1992, 165). Though by no means a device used in every single episode, it is usually concomitant with the episodes for which the series is best remembered. At the very end of "Time Enough At Last," Henry Bemis suffers the tragic setback of breaking his glasses just when he realizes that he finally has all the time in the world to read. In "To Serve Man," the realization, of course, is that the aliens' treatise is a recipe book rather than a declaration of servitude. Finally, "Eye of the Beholder" also features a famous twist in that the surgical patient treated with pity and solicitude by the doctors and nurses who wish to "correct" her turns out to look beautiful to our eyes. Indeed, this kind of narrative turn was already employed in the series' pilot episode "Where Is Everybody?" in which a ghost town turns out to be the product of a man hallucinating while locked inside a sealed chamber as a government experiment.

As the series' viewers became accustomed to expecting this device more often than not, it served as useful tool of suspense and deployment of the strange in a medium

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[213] Zicree (1982) includes a never-aired version of the introduction in his book's front matter: "This highway leads to the shadowy tip of reality; you're on a through route to the land of the different, the bizarre, the unexplainable . . . Go as far as you like on this road. Its limits are only those of the mind itself."

where the reader (the viewer) usually does not have access to a character's innermost thoughts and can only surmise his or her skepticism or fear based on his or her exterior actions. Of course, certain episodes employ a voiceover narration to convey a character's internal monologues, but those are exceptions rather than the rule.

The Creation and Utilization of Strangeness and Hybridity in *The Twilight Zone*

The expectation of the twist ending is but one of the tools used by *Twilight Zone* to engender suspense and a sense of the strange. We have seen that in *Liaozhai*, the text foregrounds strangeness by using markers of liminality that sometimes only concern the main narrative indirectly--for example, the shoes that belong to the scholar's wife in "Scholar from Fengyang"--and, in intrusion stories, by grouping these markers close together in frequency so that the suspense and confusion is maintained throughout the duration of the short tale. To continue with the example of "Scholar,"[214] these are the series of escalating events that precede the scholar's wife awakening from her dream-turned-nightmare. The former device has the effect of creating suspense, while the latter intensifies it to such a degree that the reader calibrates his expectations for a strange ending that the tale can utilize to maximum effect. In the example of "Scholar," the reader perhaps expects a revelation that the dream's events will correspond to reality -- that the wife will actually discover an extramarital affair. Instead, the story ends abruptly after she, her brother, and her husband confirm to each other that they experienced the same dream. Though a confirmation in reality should have affirmed the strange power of

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[214] For my discussion of this tale, see chapter 2.

dream, this swift ending maximizes the strangeness by not only doing so, but subverting readers' expectations toward such a confirmation by at the same time.

The dream confirmation is a common device in tales of the strange, and in Chinese literature in general. To take an oft-used scenario as example, a victim of circumstances might dreams of encountering a deity who then gives detailed instructions as to how the victim might obtain redress. This might entail visiting a shrine on a certain date, or going to a hidden location where treasures or special objects might be buried. The dream confirmation in these scenarios is usually quite explicit and forceful: when the dreamer follows the dream's instructions and is rewarded, both the dream's epistemological status and its predictive power are validated. In "Scholar," however, only the former is affirmed, and the readers' expectations of an ensuing fallout are subverted.

While most of *Twilight Zone*'s episodes would certainly qualify as intrusion stories from which one could possibly expect similar emphases on strangeness and liminality, the fact that these stories are told in a televisual medium changes the nature of these devices to a certain degree. Instead of underscoring a character's thoughts as Barbey does or aggregating liminal markers as *zhiguai* writers do, television series utilize a number of visual techniques. For example, the close-up is frequently employed to emphasize a character's skepticism or anxiety. Such a framing technique also serves to physically separate a character's individual, subjective experience from objective observers -- the other characters who may or may not be privy to the character's personal, fantastic experience that may or may not be hallucinatory in nature.

A terrific use of this technique occurs in the famous fifth season episode "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet," in which a man recovering from a nervous breakdown, Robert Wilson (William Shatner), is terrorized by a gremlin seemingly visible only to him. The setting of the story is already claustrophobic—almost the entire episode takes place inside a small passenger plane--and is framed as such. As Wilson begins to experience his "visions," the framing of his close-ups becomes tighter and tighter to emphasize his private anxiety and to suggest that perhaps these visions are merely fantasies. Wilson is also framed with decreasing frequency in a two-shot with his wife next to him. Instead, he is frequently shot from the side or from the exterior of the plane, with the dual frames of the plane's window and that of the camera serving to further emphasize his isolation and desperate situation, as he debates whether to warn the plane's crew of the gremlin's existence. The culmination of Wilson's personal nightmare is a shot in which he is literally up-ended by the nightmare scenario, the frame tightly enclosing his expression in a moment of agony. Though Wilson is ultimately carted away in a strait jacket and presumably returned to the mental hospital, his concerns are partially validated by the final shot of the episode which indeed shows that the wing of the plane was sabotaged in a manner consistent with the gremlin's actions. However, this final validation is itself a surprise that references previous *Twilight Zone* episodes in which such a validation from the objective camera's perspective never comes.

Figure 1
The framing of Wilson's face as he descends into a private paranoia.
"Nightmare at 20,000 Feet"

The series can also use make use of well-known cinematographic tropes to

deceive and disorient the viewer. Soft focus that results in a blurred field of vision for the

viewer, for instance, is a common visual shorthand that denotes a dream sequence;

though such a denotation isn't deployed consistently in *The Twilight Zone*, its well-

known signification allows an episode like "Perchance to Dream" to use it as part of its

manipulation of the viewer. This episode tells the story of one Edward Hall (Richard

Conte), a man who has developed a heart disease as a teenager that will kill him if he

experiences too much shock or too much strenuous activity. At the same time, Hall has

an overactive imagination and dreams vividly and in sequence. The episode begins with

Hall's visit to a psychiatrist, Dr. Rathmann (John Larch), because he is haunted in his dreams by an exotic woman named Maya (Suzanne Lloyd), whom he believes is trying to kill him by encouraging him to leap off a moving rollercoaster. After an inconclusive conversation with the psychiatrist, Hall attempts to leave but is shocked by the sight of Rathmann's receptionist, who is the spitting image of Maya, and commits suicide by jumping out the window of Rathmann's office. Such an ending would not seem out of place in the *Twilight Zone* anthology, but it is the final twist that makes this episode a classic: the final sequence of the episode reveals that almost all of the events of the episode had been a dying dream of Hall's, and that he had simply passed away in his sleep five minutes after entering the office. Hall's conversation with Rathmann never actually took place.

In retrospect, the episode's cinematography underscores the destabilized boundary between reality and dream in two subtle ways. First, when Hall is ostensibly describing his dreams to Rathmann, the sequence is shot in soft focus, denoting the sequence as dream and Hall's physical location as reality. Dissolves, quick and disorienting cuts, and jarringly loud music are also used – all techniques commonly utilized in dream sequences to distinguish them for a "smoother," more mundane reality. These techniques are later revealed to be deceptive, but as Serling asks in the closing narration, "They say a dream takes only a second or so. And yet in that second a man can live a lifetime. He can suffer and die, and who's to say which is the greater reality? The one we know, or the one in dreams?" For Hall, his conversation with Rathmann was clearly real to him, though it never happened "in reality." Therefore, the fact that he can

recall his dreams as such validates the episode's usage of soft focus and other such techniques; the audience only realizes later that Hall's dreams were recalled within the context of another dream.

Perceptive viewers may have also noticed, or recalled in retrospect, that the episode actually gave a hint as to the change in Hall's reality. When the fatigued Hall first arrives at Rathmann's office, Rathmann offers to let Hall nap on his couch. Hall takes him up on the offer, only to (as the viewer sees) leap up after five minutes and launch into his story for Hall. A visual clue prior to this sequence corroborates the episode's final revelation that Hall never actually woke up, and that the entire conversation with Rathmann was a dream: When Hall lies down on the couch and closes his eyes, the lighting in the room darkens significantly; when he jumps back up, the room gradually becomes brighter again. As there is no indication that Rathmann had dimmed the light and then turned it back on (he is far away from the switch when Hall awakens to a newly brightened room), one can safely surmise that this change in lighting is an indication of Hall's one-way passage into eternal dream. The fact that the light automatically returns when Hall "awakens" is a clue that Hall is still in dream -- he simply imagined that the light was turned back on. This is not only an indication of an uncertain ontological status, but a clue meant to be revisited later by the perceptive viewer, whether through recollection or a review of the episode afforded by current technological capacities.

Figure 2
Dream within a dream and uncertain reality, denoted by soft focus, dissolve, and lighting effects.
"Perchance to Dream"

Of course, a television series has many other ways with which it can create

suspense and unsettling strangeness. These medium-specific tools include musical cues,

dramatic lighting, adjusting the frequency and placement of cuts, and different types of

framing. Hallmarks that the series is known for include Serling's strong authorial

presence, his speeches at the beginning and the end of the episodes prompting audiences

toward certain expectations and conclusions, and the previously described twist endings -

- though that is a technique commonly employed in the science fiction and fantasy genres

and was often already featured in the source texts that were adapted into episodes for the

series.[215] Peter Wolfe points out the fact that Serling appears on-screen for the prologues, but not the epilogues, arguing that this method "showed fine artistic judgment, sustaining the mood evoked by the foregoing action rather than intruding Serling's face" for the ending sequence (1997, 18). This "mood" is also further enhanced by producer Buck Houghton's decision to display the episode's credits against one of the episode's most symbolically significant items – for example, the pair of broken glasses in "Time Enough At Last." Wolfe points out that the "prominence given to the image against which the credits ran could alert the audience to the image's importance and force it to rethink the image's place in the preceding drama" (1997, 19).

Aside from these deft measures, what *Twilight Zone* also does really well with respect to the strange is establish a nuanced view of what it means to be other. Certainly, the characters often find themselves in liminal situations, or confronting beings that are decidedly other. However, the protagonists that the series chooses to focus on are often themselves already on the margins of society. Consider, for example, the bookworm Henry Bemis from "Time Enough at Last," who is chastised both at home and at work for his passion for books. He longs to be separated from his fellow human beings in order to have a quiet moment with his books -- and finally gets his wish, much to his chagrin.

Like Bemis, the character Martin Senescu from "The New Exhibit" isolates himself from human society due to his all-consuming passion for wax likenesses of famous killers, a passion that ultimately leads to his death when the figures seemingly

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[215] For example, one of the series' most famous ironic reversals--the broken glasses in "Time Enough at Last"--was already present in the episode's source text, written by Lynn Venable (Zicree 1982, 67).

come to life and murder Senescu's loved ones and, eventually, Senescu himself. Consider also the example of Robert Wilson, treated with suspicion and exaggerated care by his wife and the flight crew even before he starts to see the gremlin; as someone who was once exiled to a sanitarium, he is considered an "unfit" member of society and treated as such. Unlike Bemis and Senescu, Wilson's marginalization is caused by his ability to see what no one else can.

Robert Duvall's Charley Parkes, from the episode "Miniature," shares characteristics with both Bemis and Wilson -- he is the only one can see that a miniature inside a dollhouse is alive, and subsequently becomes enthralled by her activities. Even before these visions, Parkes was deemed to have a "strange" personality by his family and coworkers; after he falls in love with the figurine, he finally completely withdraws from society and joins the figurine inside the dollhouse. In *Twilight Zone*, those who already see too much or love too passionately are the ones rewarded or punished with liminal experiences.

Elsewhere, the landscape of the series is also populated with ambitious crooks and hapless, unsuccessful individuals. At times the two categories overlap. The former category includes the titular character from "Self Improvement of Salvador Ross," a ruthlessly ambitious young man who inexplicably gains the ability to switch physical characteristics such as age and state of health with others, provided the other party gives verbal consent. Lacking any compunction, Ross uses his ability to swindle others out of their youth and riches until he gets his comeuppance. In the category of luckless, neglected individuals belongs Dingle from the eponymous "Mr. Dingle, the Strong," a

162

terrible salesman who is clearly down on his luck. Dingle then falls prey to alien

experimentation and becomes shockingly strong, then miraculously intelligent. Hector

Poole from "Penny for Your Thoughts" is yet another a pushover who suddenly gains the

ability--via a magic penny--to hear others' private thoughts. Naturally, in the moralistic

Twilight Zone universe, those who use their newfound abilities or magical objects for

unlawful gains or with intent to harm are usually punished, while those who are good-

natured and merely foolish are usually allowed a return to status quo, with the benefit of

wisdom gained from their experiences. Both Dingle and Poole belong to this category,

while Ross is murdered as the ironic final result of trading for the compassion of his

eventual killer.

The series highlights many such categories of marginalization, including the

displaced elderly (a particular focus is the widow who is either childless or feels

neglected by her son after his marriage or the birth of this own child),[216] returning

astronauts who are always marked as different or changed in some way, a topic that

naturally occupied the minds of many creative individuals at the time,[217] and individuals

who are otherwise eccentric or find themselves suddenly not fitting in.[218] In doing so, the

series cleverly positions itself at the middle ground between "too strange" and

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[216] Examples include "Trouble with Templeton," "Long Distance Call," "Nothing in the Dark," "Kick the Can," "The Trade-Ins," "Young Man's Fancy," "The Changing of the Guard," "Passage on the Lady Anne," "Uncle Simon," "Night Call," and "Ninety Years Without Slumbering." Zicree's (1982) book contains excellent indexed synopses of every episode of *The Twilight Zone*; episode summaries are also available on Wikipedia.com.
[217] "When the Sky Was Opened," "Elegy," "King Nine Will Not Return," "Death Ship," "The Parallel," and "Long Morrow."
[218] "Escape Clause," "Static," "Mind and the Matter," "Once Upon a Time," "One More Pallbearer," "The Fugitive," "Hocus-Pocus and Frisby," "The Incredible World of Horace Ford," and "From Agnes with Love."

"uncomfortably familiar." Audiences are able to relate to the individuals they see in the story because they are perceptibly human, with weaknesses and struggles that one can relate to; at the same time, by choosing to focus on characters that dwell on the edges of society, the series avoids giving the average audience member the feeling that he or she is being lectured to, or is being targeted for a lesson in morality. Naturally, when necessary the series is still able to treat the subject of the "average" American citizen, as it does in "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street," with great effect. The episode's strength lies precisely in the impression it gives, that the ruthless confrontations that transpire on Maple Street between formerly amicable neighbors could happen on any quiet residential street in America that allows itself to be seized with paranoia -- an all-too-likely scenario during the Cold War.

In most cases, the series' treatment of these unlikely scenarios results in a nuanced consideration of what it means to be different. The characters who find themselves in these scenarios are in actuality, as noted above, not so alien as to be unrecognizable or incapable of arousing sympathy and empathy. (Of course, it would be nearly impossible for such a character to appear in popular entertainment.) In *Twilight Zone*, then, the twisting denouement does not serve to expand the boundaries of cosmographies and/or Confucian ethics as with *zhiguai* and *zhiguai*-esque tales, or to create a lasting impression of evil as in *Les Diaboliques*. Instead, the final confrontation in *Twilight Zone* is often of self against self, though often to a moral purpose as well.

Just as the residents on Maple Street belatedly realize that they only have themselves to fear, other characters in the series also realize that the other is merely a

distorted version of the self. This motif is played out again and again in the various categories. In the aforementioned "magical ability" tale "Self Improvement of Salvador Ross," Ross is ultimately killed by a man who is essentially a version of his former self, a man who has now lost his compassion. The man obsessed with wax figures from "The New Exhibit" becomes a wax figure--and possibly a murderer--himself. One of the series' most-used tropes reoccurs in the extraterrestrial tale, where again and again that which was made to appear extraterrestrial is revealed to be terrestrial -- of our earth. The most famous example of this trope occurs, of course, in "The Invaders," where the intruding terror is revealed to bear the insignia of the U.S. Air Force. A variation on this trope is spotlighted in "Third from the Sun," in which two families plot to escape an escalating cold war that threatens to destroy their world. The twist reveals that the planet they are fleeing towards has "people just like us" and is called Earth. These types of endings hold up a mirror toward the self and make the ultimate statement that difference should not be taken as face value, and that what is ostensibly different might turn out to be all too familiar.

Figure 3
Confrontations with oneself via mirror image and insignia
"Twenty Two" / "The Invaders"

In terms of the *nature* of the strangeness on display in *Twilight Zone*, the series strives to emphasize liminality in creating an environment where boundaries are frequently dissolved, crossed, and violated. The landscape of the series is populated with hybrid beings and situations that render moot traditional boundaries between the possible and the impossible, the human and the nonhuman (be it animal, machine, extraterrestrial life, or something else entirely), life and death, dream or hallucination and reality, and between youth and old age. An otherwise ordinary man can talk God into exchanging his own life for his son's in the lyrical "In Praise of Pip"; in "The Last Rites of Jeff Myrtlebank," a young man who has been dead for two days can come back to life, marry his fiancée, and raise children with her as if nothing out of the ordinary ever happened in his past. Dream and reality become confused in "Perchance to Dream" as previously discussed; another episode that freely mixes dream with reality and death is "A Stop at Willoughby," where a town that a man repeatedly visits in his brief dreams while sleeping aboard a train becomes his final resting place. In both of these episodes, the

166

dream space is both a place of escape and an ominous final destination. Youth and old age are properties that are seemingly interchangeable. The exchange happens via the most prosaic of mechanisms--a youth serum--in "A Short Drink from a Certain Fountain," while episodes like "Kick the Can" and "Queen of the Nile" choose more mystical methods. While in these episodes the exchange is final, "The Trade-Ins" features a scientific exchange process that can easily be reversed when the main character changes his mind. All manner of characters come into possession of all kinds of magical objects and abilities that can render the impossible possible, but the possession thereof is sometimes ephemeral.

Perhaps the most salient points of disturbance occur on the boundary that divides human beings from those that are defined as not being such, and that which distinguishes hallucination or dream from reality. In addition to the "alien invasion" episodes that point to the other within the self, and the difficulty of maintaining that difference, a handful of episodes also point to the anxiety surrounding the idea of artificial intelligence and the blurring of the line between human being and mechanical creation. In both "In His Image," and "Lateness of the Hour," a character comes to realize his or her mechanical origins and comes face to face with his or her creator. When the truth is revealed, these types of characters inevitably struggle with the revelation that suddenly undermines their previously unquestioned humanity. Conversely, "I Sing the Body Electric" concerns a human girl's struggle to accept a robot nanny who arrives at her household after her mother passes away.

Other episodes deal with the issue in a more simplistic fashion: "Brain Center at Whipple's" features an overenthusiastic manager who replaces all his workers with machines in the name of efficiency and economy; predictably, the central computer decides that the manager is also redundant and must be replaced. "From Agnes with Love" takes a comedic tone, and features an artificial intelligence that becomes jealous and sets out to sabotage her human programmer's brewing romance with a coworker. Taking their inspiration--and sometimes their stories--from one of the most prominent preoccupations of science fiction literature, these episodes interrogate the nature of humanity through its mechanized other. Other episodes do so by examining how one's sense of self can become compromised in relation to forced conformity,[219] whether words and movements comprise humanity,[220] and the ways in which war contrives an arbitrary denial of others' humanity.[221] The hybridity generated in these episodes conforms to the series' ongoing theme of conflict within the self; it is a literalization of that conflict, and of aspects of the other that represent parts of oneself that are not so easy to extricate or marginalize.

The blurring of the boundaries between hallucination and reality, and between dream and reality, on the other hand, is usually mobilized with a view towards disorienting the viewer and ultimately enabling the surprise effect of the twist ending, though of course such a blurring can also represent inner confusion of a moral variety. This strategy is used, for instance, in the previously discussed episode "Perchance to

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[219] "Number Twelve Looks Just Like You" and "Eye of the Beholder."
[220] "The After Hours," "The Dummy," and "Five Characters in Search of an Exit."
[221] "The Shelter," "A Quality of Mercy," and "The Encounter."

Dream." Similarly, another classic episode "The Midnight Sun" establishes a nightmarish

reality in which the Earth is getting unbearably, lethally hot, only to upend that reality

that turns out to be a feverish woman's dream. In the final reality that closes the episode,

the woman's world is actually *receding* from the sun. The nightmare is real, though the

circumstances are different. Like "Perchance to Dream," this episode plays with the

convention of using techniques such as soft focus and dissolves to denote dream -- by *not*

using such devices, the episode is able to temporarily disguise the woman's fever dream

as reality.

A hallucination whose ontological status is unclear, on the other hand, can also

create a temporary effect akin to the Todorovian fantastic in which both fictional

protagonist and viewer are unsure of a fantastic event's reality. This is the case, for

instance, with "Static," in which a broken-down radio suddenly begins to transmit radio

programs from thirty years ago that are only audible for one person. By and large,

however, *Twilight Zone* episodes quickly dismiss this brief uncertainty and move on to

the fantastic event's repercussions. However, the *possibility*, however small, that what is

presented as reality may be hallucination, can make an episode infinitely more rewarding

to watch and speculate about.

The Moral Didacticism of *The Twilight Zone*

It is probably not difficult to speculate about Serling's choice to create a series

full of the strange and the unusual and twisting denouements. In part, he probably wished

to capitalize on the success of prestigious anthology series such as *Playhouse 90*, *Kraft*

Television Theater, and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and bring a unique kind of program to television, something that was, as it were, a hybrid of dramatic anthologies and episodic science-fictional adventures, and distinct from lighthearted 1950's series such as *Leave It to Beaver* and *I Love Lucy*. Perhaps Serling also wished to emulate the pioneering program *Tales of Tomorrow* (1951-1953), the first anthology series to deal with science-fictional topics.

Of course, the history of film and television proves that fantasy material has the ability to captivate audience imagination like no other. In the troubled times of the late 1950's and early 1960's, the general public could have used an outlet like *Twilight Zone* that speculated on, through proxies, the ultimate outcomes of space exploration, the Cold War, and the rapid technological advances concomitant with the invention of weapons of mass destruction (the atomic bomb) as well as sources of mass entertainment (television), just as Serling used the series as an expression of his own moral convictions and fears. And just as the slightly off-kilter characters of the series are meant to be a veiled representation of ourselves, the series' primary goal in creating the strange was to represent a version of reality that has the potential to entertain, inspire, and educate. Before the debut of the series, Serling explicitly stated that he wished to use his fantastic scenarios in order to get around CBS censors:

> I don't want to have to battle sponsors and agencies. I don't want to have to push for something I want and have to settle for second best. I don't want to have to compromise all the time, which in essence is what the television writer does if he wants to put on controversial themes. (quoted in Zicree 1982, 96)

Though late imperial China and twentieth-century United States are just about as disparate in setting as one can imagine, if tales of the strange have taught us anything, it is that differences between self and other, and "here" versus "there," are often greatly overestimated. Like Pu Songling, author of *Liaozhai*, Serling aims for an overall justificatory tone via his comments that open and close each episode. Similar to Pu's comments, Serling's take on a tone of either amusement or admonishment, or a combination thereof, depending on the episode in question. When it comes to episodes that are more comedic in tone, the closing comments amount to nothing more than a casual, flippant, or ironic dismissal. However, these are relatively rare. Serling's comments are usually solemn, either expressing regret or great wonder at the events that have transpired, while at the same time imparting a moral lesson or two. Just as Pu suggests that tales of the supernatural may offer their own wisdom despite their reputation as frivolities, Serling's comments are just as implicitly justificatory in this vein. Final comments such as the one that closes "The Bewitchin' Pool" are typical:[222]

> A brief epilogue for concerned parents: Of course there isn't any such place as the gingerbread house of Aunt T, and we grown-ups know there's no door at the bottom of a swimming pool that leads to a secret place. But who can say how real the fantasy world of lonely children can become? For Jeb and Sport Sharewood the need for love turned fantasy into reality. They found a secret place … in the Twilight Zone.

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[222] As the title and commentary suggest, this episode tells the story of a pair of siblings who discover a secret passageway at the bottom of their pool. While their parents squabble and neglect them, the siblings visit the secret world at the other end of the passageway that features an actual caring adult, Aunt T, with increasing frequency, until the final sequence which suggests that the siblings never return to the world of their parents.

This commentary simultaneously affects a casual dismissal of the preceding events as insignificant fiction, while also suggesting that the imaginary can have real consequences for parents who neglect their children. By extension, this recuperation of the importance of fiction also rescues Serling's creation from triviality, and imbues it with moral significance.

In addition, Peter Wolfe has pointed out the ways in which Serling's visual appearances for the prologues during the series' later seasons take full advantage of television as an intimate medium that ingratiates itself into a household's living room:[223] Usually, Serling does not enter the scene after the fact but is usually revealed to be present all along just outside of the camera's view, and he appears to speak earnestly and sincerely (1997, 19-20). As Wolfe notes, this effectively "increases [Serling's] involvement with [the characters] and the trials awaiting them … he's willing to put himself on the same footing as the needy and the afflicted" (1997, 20). These commentaries woven throughout the series also have the effect of subsuming the entire series, full of independent characters and storylines, into one coherent moral universe: that of author figure Serling, and one in which each receives his or her due.

Like *Liaozhai* and *Les Diaboliques*, *The Twilight Zone* also focuses on the miraculous and inexplicable events that arise and disrupt everyday life. In doing so, the intent of these collections is to take "what if" to the greatest extreme -- but also to remind

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[223] On the subject of television as an "intimate" medium, Flitterman-Lewis writes, "A film is always distanced from us in time (whatever we see on the screen has always already occurred at a time when we weren't there), whereas television, with its capacity to record and display images simultaneously with our viewing, offers a quality of *presentness*, of 'here and now' as distinct from cinema's 'there and then'" (1992, 218).

us that the extreme is not as improbable as it might seem. The stories present to us scenarios that seem at once strange and familiar, full of troubling hybridity and outlandish situations that fascinate yet speak to human concepts of morality on which their authors wished to expound. One might compare the hybrid creatures in *Twilight Zone* to those in *Liaozhai* and *Les Diaboliques*; they are the result of a sustained and intriguing tension between what is possible (or in the case of *Diaboliques*, what is explicable and categorized) and what is impossible (or what defies categorization).

In a tale like *Liaozhai*'s "Yaksha Country" 夜叉國, for example, a man encounters the seemingly impossible (or extremely improbable) when he is shipwrecked on a remote island and kidnapped by a group of yakshas. The markers that precede a strange encounter are of course requisite: a storm on the sea, a foreign land with towering mountains wondrously full of caves. The traveler, Merchant Xu, wishes to encounter a human being, but instead stumbles upon the savagely animalistic: the first sight he sees on the island he lands on is two yakshas devouring a freshly killed deer with their sharp, knife-like teeth. When the two yakshas speak to one another, Xu only hears birdlike cries. Though Xu is initially forced to stay with the them, he becomes completely assimilated into their society as time passes, even taking one as a wife and raising three children with her. When Xu returns home, his entire yaksha family rejoins them there eventually -- and when they do so they begin to wear human clothing, and their skin color begins to grow lighter. Eventually, Xu's wife and children use their martial prowess to win important positions within the Chinese government. The resulting situation is still one that is hybrid, but one that strongly suggests that savagery and the other can be tamed and

civilized. On the other hand, one might also interpret the ease with which the yakshas

assimilate as a statement on the innate barbarity of a supposed "civilized" society -- as

the yakshas win their prestigious positions through battle. Pu's adherence to Confucian

values and his capacity for ironic commentary would allow both readings.

Twilight Zone has nothing to say about yakshas and other such folkloric creatures,

but it has plenty to say about robots, androids, and automatons and the like, for these

were the fantastic creatures that captivated twentieth-century imaginations. An episode

like "Brain Center at Whipple's" embodies the fear that in an increasingly automated

society, human characteristics are no longer valued and will become obsolete. From

another perspective, "In His Image" and "Lateness of the Hour" reassure the viewer that

even robots themselves would value any human characteristics they retain -- they would

even desire to be human. In "In His Image," Alan Talbot the robot somehow recognizes

that his human creator Henry Bryder, Jr.--to whom he resembles identically--must

assume his place at the side of his fiancée, and Bryder realizes that he has made a mistake

in creating a robot without human limitations and the capacity to grow old.

The reverse is also true: a robot, in taking on human characteristics, can err

depending on what those characteristics are. In "Uncle Simon," the episode first

introduces the audience to the bitter and cruel titular character (Cedric Hardwicke) and

his stoic caretaker, his niece Barbara (Constance Ford). It is only halfway through the

episode, after Uncle Simon dies, that his secret project is revealed to us and Barbara -- a

robot that has taken on all characteristics of Uncle Simon, and will terrorize poor Barbara

in his stead. Like Uncle Simon, the robot calls after Barbara incessantly. Like Uncle

Simon, it demands cups of hot chocolate. After the robot has "matured," it takes on Uncle Simon's voice and insulting manner. The robot even walks like Uncle Simon, its wobbling resembling that of his creator when using a crutch. After Barbara pushes the robot down in a fit of rage, the robot even begins to use a crutch, just as Uncle Simon had. This episode, like others that are similarly themed, takes a figure that is seemingly the opposite of humanity and imbues it with human characteristics. The robot stories of *Twilight Zone*, like the yaksha stories of *Liaozhai*, hybridize the alien with the familiar for a didactic purpose.

Seemingly simplistic and straightforwardly marvelous tales about magical objects may also have moral implications. On its surface, *Liaozhai*'s "Stone Pure-Void" 石清虛 is a charming tale about a magical stone that finds its way back to its owner despite the many obstacles and circumstances that divide them; however, per the appended commentary by author Pu Songling, the story is also a tribute to pure friendship. If an inanimate stone, thought to be heartless, can exhibit this kind of devotion, what excuse do human beings have for being cruel to one another? This interrogation works all the more because most of the humans in the story are shown to be scheming and corrupt -- they all seek to take the stone away from its owner through unjust means. In comparison, the stone is noble indeed.

Similarly, the magical objects in *Twilight Zone* are not really presented scientifically; their *raison d'être* is the illumination of human virtues and foibles. Such is the case in episodes such as "Most Unusual Camera," in which the titular camera produces a limited number of photographs of the near future. After using the magical

object to make a considerable sum of money, its owners kill each other while arguing

over how to use the camera's remaining film. Serling's ending commentary makes the

purpose of the camera clear:

> Object known as a camera. Vintage uncertain, origin unknown. But for the greedy, the avaricious, the fleet of foot who can run a four-minute mile so long as they're chasing a fast buck, it makes believe that it's an ally -- but it isn't at all. It's a beckoning come-on for a quick walk around the block -- in the Twilight Zone.

Here he downplays the actual object in favor of its functions, and the role it can play in

the lives of those whom Serling deems "greedy" and "avaricious."

The shop owners who wish on a genie's bottle in "Man in the Bottle" are merely

kindhearted but foolish people, yet they, too, must learn their lesson with respect to riches

too easily obtained. Serling comments at the end of the episode, "A word to the wise

now... to everyone who would try to coax out a miracle from unlikely places: Check that

bottle you're taking back for a two-cent deposit. The genie you save might be your own."

The lesson here seems to be that good, honest work is always preferable to shortcuts or

miracles.

However, the morality of *Twilight Zone* is also the source of its conservatism.

Though Serling invites us to step into a "fifth dimension," to imagine what is "beyond,"

ultimately the series tends strongly to favor the status quo and traditional morality. Due to

the necessity of having a moral message behind the episodes, the wicked need to be

punished and the foolish need to learn their lesson.[224] Peter Wolfe suggests that perhaps

this moralistic bias stems from Serling's experiences during the Great Depression and

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[224] See Quinn (1966, 378) and Ziegler (1987, 34).

World War II, during which bad behavior would have been particularly dangerous, necessitating harsher penalties (1997, 22). In addition, he posits that "Serling belongs in a centrist tradition that puts its faith in the American puritan ethic of hard work, fair play, and respect for one's fellows" (1997, 22).

Despite their focus on the strange, therefore, the stories in *Twilight Zone* are inherently conservative, though they allow for glimpses of the radical. Perhaps large collections of tales such as *Liaozhai* and *Twilight Zone* only permit such glimpses due to the sheer amount of material under its purview, and the sheer number of sources of creative input for the latter. At the same time, the fantasy and strangeness that make series such as *Twilight Zone* so striking cannot function without convention already in place. As television scholar Catherine Johnson points out, while on one hand "the representation of the fantastic implies the representation of that which confounds socio-cultural verisimilitude," it also "depends on the *maintenance* of socio-cultural and generic verisimilitude" (2005, 148). In other words, the fantastic must to a large extent uphold convention and the status quo, lest there is nothing left against which it can distinguish itself.

Conclusion

As the series' episodes accumulated, and as audiences almost certainly began to develop certain expectations toward the series itself, *The Twilight Zone* found itself increasingly unable to continue its effective portrayal of the fantastic -- what was strange before was no longer so. The fourth and fifth seasons of the series, though featuring

177

several brilliant episodes, also saw retreads of several ideas from the earlier seasons: "I Dream of Genie" revisits the subject matter of "Man in the Bottle"; "The Fear," like "The Invaders" from Season Two, features unsuccessful miniature invaders and a twist ending -- in this case, the invaders are revealed to be miniscule in size, contrary to their gigantic disguise. The titular character from "The Dummy" makes another appearance as an object-come-to-life in "Caesar and Me," and disastrous prophecies fulfilled is again the theme in "What's in the Box" as it was in "Most Unusual Camera." The idea that it is futile to try to change important historical events through time travel, from "Back There," is revisited in "No Time Like the Past." Finally, "A Kind of a Stopwatch" basically reworks the story from "Time Enough at Last," where a man finds himself to be the last man on Earth, but unable to do what he loves best. Whereas Henry Bemis loved to read, the protagonist in "A Kind of a Stopwatch" loved to boast of his time-freezing stopwatch, but finds himself with no audience when the stopwatch breaks after he has frozen all those around him. The series also continued to visit the settings of World War II and the Civil War ad nauseam.

As the series began to run out of ideas and was unable to produce novel scenarios or characters, the series' hallmarks--Serling's narration and the twist endings--were no longer sufficiently strange. Although *Twilight Zone* was thus cancelled after its fifth season, its continued popularity in syndication and on DVD and its subsequent influence on popular culture suggest that the strange always requires new audiences, and will thus be renewed by the passage of time. Its success also proves that the collection, as a storytelling format and the means of delivering didactic messages, is as potent in

twentieth-century America as it was in late imperial China and nineteenth-century France. Just as Pu Songling and Barbey d'Aurevilly captivated their audiences with variations on the same themes delivered artfully through the powerful and entertaining vehicle known as the intrusion story, Serling did the same with an updated medium and message.

Conclusions

In response to the current critical literature on fantasy, which primarily treats

fantasy literature as distinct genres within national literary traditions, this thesis

approached fantasy with a cross-cultural perspective. It traced three distinctive variations

on a particular type of fantasy that seems to enjoy universal and timeless appeal: the

strange short tale that I call the "intrusion story." Instantiations of this story type appear

in at least three distinct literatures: the note-form literature of late imperial China, the

conte fantastique of nineteenth-century France, and the anthology television series of

twentieth-century United States.

The chapter on Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* and the similarly voluminous

collections it inspired showed that their authors were self-referential as well as conscious

of the *zhiguai* tradition they were writing in. Tales within one collection echo one another

to create complex, thought-provoking portraits of fantastic creatures and situations; the

authors also inserted explicit references to previous works in order to bolster their

particular vision of the strange. The chapter on the nineteenth-century fantastic tale in

France explored the intrusion story as a vehicle both for Barbey d'Aurevilly, Proper

Mérimée, and Guy de Maupassant's particular brand of social critique, and for their skills

in creating narrative intrigue. The fantastic short story's natural evolution into the

television episode was the focus of the fourth chapter, which analyzed in particular Rod

Serling's highly influential series *The Twilight Zone*, and how that particular collection of

intrusion stories and marvelous tales was a telling reflection of contemporary issues and Serling's authorial vision.

In all three of these chapters, the most common type of story within these collections of the strange was the intrusion story: a short tale that utilizes a set of common tools to maintain attention, deliver its social critique, and sustain mystery even after the tale has ended. Features shared by intrusion stories include: the narrative motifs of dissolved or destabilized boundaries (between categories that are seemingly mutually exclusive such as life and death, human and animal, inanimate objects and living beings, etc.), marginalized figures of society, narrative subversion of readers' expectations, and "twist" endings.

A secondary, though no less important, feature of these collections is the strong, guiding authorial voice. Pu Songling emphasized his point of view through his highly allusive preface as well as through pseudonymic comments, appended to selected tales, that guided readers toward the "correct" interpretation. Barbey's justificatory preface is highly similar to Pu's in nature, while Mérimée often inserted a version of himself into some of his tales. In the television series, Serling's voice set the tone during the opening titles of each episode, while his elegantly attired, confident figure appeared at the beginning and end of most episodes to hint at and reiterate the moral of the story.

Using the intrusion story, these authors were able to combine maximum narrative impact with great variety. Their short, condensed tales held readers and viewers alike in suspense as the stories' twists and turns continually subverted expectations. The repetition and variation of tropes and character types throughout the collections trained

audiences to be attentive to nuances and what they might messages they might convey about the authors' worldview. Despite this variety, however, the collections' curator-authors skillfully adhered to consistent repetition of a number of familiar themes. For Pu Songling, this was the revelation that the spirit world, though seemingly strange, is an instructive reflection of our own world. For Barbey, repetition of the *diabolique* character served to remind readers that no matter how sophisticated the setting, and how convincing the appearance of innocence, evil threatens to contaminate at every turn. Finally, Serling's menagerie of popular science-fictional scenarios hid surprising revelations that always incited self-reflection. All of these curator-authors had a guiding moral purpose behind the creation of their collections, one that was only enhanced by echoes within and beyond the collection.

The Twilight Zone, as a work of fiction, is full of parables about the unexpected power of objects constructed by human beings, and stories told by human beings. The episode "World of His Own," for example, tells the story of a man, Gregory West, who can make his fictional characters come to life through the act of recording his stories on a dictation machine. Conversely, he also has the power to "erase" these characters by destroying the character's corresponding dictation tape. West's final victim is Serling himself, who appears on screen during the episode's closing moments to give his customary conclusion, only to disappear when West tosses an envelope labeled "Rod Serling" into the fire. The episode is an ode to the unexpected powers of creativity, and an affirmation that stories told by the series are not to be dismissed as mere fiction.

Similarly, Barbey's narrative machinations reveal that stories cannot be easily contained – the multiple nested narratives and the narrators' powers of evocation draw both the contextual listeners and extra-textual readers into his world of diabolical lessons.

The spirit world of Chinese collections of the strange is likewise populated by creatures that knowingly reference their brethren from either the same collection or similar ones within the tradition. The typical fox enchantment story, for example, might have started out as an exhortation for either proper respect toward the supernatural realm or moral behavior – but later stories played with variations on this trope for ironic effect. The authors—and by extension the creatures themselves—knowingly gesture toward what is beyond the fictive realm.

As one example of a cross-cultural approach to fantasy, this study left many avenues unexplored. While there are undeniable and understandable differences between Chinese *zhiguai* and note-form literature, French fantastic tales, and American television series, it is still instructive to study their intersections and to examine, on the whole, how the intrusion story uses the guise of entertainment to impart lessons to its audiences. This study found that although Pu Songling, Barbey d'Aurevilly, and Rod Serling had different types of lessons in mind, they found the same type of medium with which to impart it. This is one shared feature of fantasy that has been effective at these distinct times and places – but there are surely many others that remain to be discovered. Instead of classifying texts according to their language and provenance—for example Chinese fantasy as *zhiguai* or *chuanqi*, American fantasy as science fiction, or Latin American

fantasy as magic realism—potentially equally instructive avenues of exploration are available to those who are willing to study fantasy transculturally and investigate their shared features.

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