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ENGL 3232-02

3/20/2012

### Peking Opera

*The Qing Ding Pearl* is a very representative play of Peking Opera in Chinese theater. According to its introduction and “The World of Chinese Drama” by Tao-Ching Hsu, Chinese drama, specifically Peking Opera, is very unrealistic. It has dramatic costumes that no one in real life would wear, dramatic movements that people don’t do in everyday life, and dramatic plots that don’t happen (though may be dreamt of) in everyday life. They are also very abrupt plays; they get right to the point and then end as soon as the play finishes its climax.

One way that *The Qing Ding Pearl* shows its unrealistic cultural origins is the names that some of the characters give themselves. Li Chun calls himself “the Dragon that confuses the river currents,” and Ni Jung calls himself “the Curly-haired Tiger.” In the play, it symbolizes their role in society. They are the kind of “Robin Hoods” of their society; they are wild and roam around on their own. However, if someone called themselves “the Dragon that confuses the river currents” or “the Curly-haired Tiger” in real life, they would be either ridiculed or said to be insane (unless they were children).

Another way that *The Qing Ding Pearl* follows its culture is that half the play is sung in hsi-p’i yao-pan. Random parts that any normal person would speak are sung in the play, which is why it is unrealistic. People do not sing to each other in place of conversation in real life. I think

the singing symbolizes transition in the play. Every time they are singing, they are either going somewhere or changing something.

The play also has some very strange phrases that indicate it's unrealistic properties. The Chief Boxer calls Hsiao En an "antiquated rat, licking a cat's whiskers right over its nose and waiting for death." Hsiao En says, "May I expose the seven apertures of my body to fiery flames." Chief Boxer says, "I'll go one better and riddle your carcass with eight holes until it smokes!" And it goes on and on with more strange phrases. I think the over dramatic metaphors are a good symbol of the unrealistic nature of the play because you do not hear those kinds of things in real life.

The other characteristic of Peking Opera was its abrupt endings, which *The Qing Ding Pearl* is a great example of.

HSIAO EN. Here! (*Promptly draws his sword and kills Ting Yua Wai and Kuo.*

*He then says to Kuei-ying*) Daughter, help me to dispose of the rest.

*The four assistant boxers come in and are slain. The Chief Boxer follows, and is likewise put to the sword.*

*(Exeunt the fisherman and his daughter.)*

FINIS.

This is the ending of the play. Hsiao En and Kuei-ying kill everyone, and then it's over.

This is a typical feature of Chinese operas.

*Kanjincho* was very representative of the traditional kabuki play, but also had elements of Noh in it and showed signs of being influenced by *The Kadensho* by Zeami.

In “Style and the Flower” from *The Kadensho*, Zeami talks about the origins of Noh theater, which is very much like most other societies. It came from religion, worship of the Gods. In *The Conventions of Kabuki* on pages 369-372, it is said that Kabuki Theater is more theatrical than literary and that it makes no pretense at realism (like Chinese opera).

In “Style and the Flower” from *The Kadensho*, Zeami tells the story about a child who washed up on the shore of a river and was thought to have descended from heaven. When the child grew older, the prince asked him to perform 66 dramatic pieces, and thus drama was born. The idea of worshipping the gods and respecting them shows in *Kanjincho* when Benkei strikes his master and then feels guilty about it because not only has he (in his mind) defied his master, but he has also defied the gods and feels he has disgraced himself. I think this comes from the long line of religious ideas in drama.

The non-realism is shown in the costumes and the overdramatic movements. You don't see those things when reading the play because it is only the script, but you do see them when you watch the play. The movements are very slow and precise, as is the way they speak. People don't speak slow and move slow in real life, but in the play it is used to portray levels of importance. The more dramatic scenes have parts where the actors actually pose into a *mie*, which is meant to give the audience a chance to take in the full appearance of the character, including their facial expression. The costumes have very elaborate makeup, which is also unrealistic because men with white faces and crazy eyeliner is not something you see every day. They also have big, hard to move in (I would assume) costumes that are also unrealistic.

All plays have their own styles and their own “rules,” but most of them follow a certain pattern. For western drama, it’s Aristotle’s *The Poetics*, but all cultures have their own. Chinese and Japanese drama have their similarities and their differences, but they each follow their own “Aristotles,” Zeami, and Tao-Ching Hsu.