A LOVER’S DISCOURSE VERSUS STORY:
SU MAN-SHU’S “THE BROKEN HAIRPIN”

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Prepared for the Workshop on Critical Approaches to Modern Chinese Short Stories sponsored by the Joint Committee on Chinese Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council, 11-19 December 1982, East-West Center, Honolulu.
In formalist-structuralist narratology, the narrative is generally conceived of as a linguistic construct whose distinctive feature lies in the linear distribution of dynamic motifs on the syntagmatic axis. This principle of succession, together with that of transformation, dominates the narrative structure and insures its perceptibility. Transformations can be intentional or modal, from one modal system to another, but the reader’s perception is always under the constraint of the principle of succession. That the reader is initiated into a horizontal reading is due, at least partially, to the writer’s predominant use of historical utterance (*histoire*), and to the reader’s being habituated to the sequentiality of events evoked by historical utterance.

But in many a narrative, the foregrounded utterance is discourse (*discours*) rather than history, emanated from the first person narrator who can be said to participate in the enunciation and a character in the enunciated. In this case, the narrator’s speech act is expected to direct the reader’s perception, because the reader as addressed allocutor is involved, explicitly or implicitly, in the speech act context. This does not imply that traditional narrative, be it mythological or gnoseological, is free from the use of discourse, nor that the distinction between history and discourse is in itself unproblematic. But in narratology, the insertions of the first person narrator’s commentaries into the narrative “proper” have been conveniently described, with implications of their irrelevance, as meta-narration, extra-diegetic amplication, or, in short, *ancilla narrationis*. A casual reader whose perception has been made automatic by the habit of reading narrative as succession of events would ignore these digressions. And an exponent of structural analysis, in order to “neutralize” the narrative, has to excise them. Thus William O. Hendricks argues that “components not contributing to gross plot structure (e.g., meta-narration, scene-setting assertions, etc.)” “that are irrelevant and a source of ‘noise’ which obstructs [the reader’s] perception of the underlying narrative organization” are to be excised.

Although narration admits of both the personal system of discourse and the apersonal system of history, and, as a matter of fact, the latter is already implied in the former, a privileged status is given to historical utterance at the expense of discursive utterance. Roland Barthes notes that language in the West has worked out a whole tense system for the narrative, “designed to eliminate the present of the person who is speaking.” The Chinese language is no exception. Its lack of tense inflections and conventional omissions of pronominals, traditionally construed as producing the illusion of a timeless present, can be on the contrary interpreted as facile devices to eliminate the locutor and allocutor, even though their signs are embedded in the speech act context.

The elimination of the I-thou stance, among other things, enables the reader to focus his attention on the enunciated rather than the enunciation. He becomes
interested in an evoked world in which a *he* does something or something happens to *him*, rather than in the phenomenon that *you* are telling *me* something. But, as Barthes observes, “Today, writing is not ‘telling,’ rather it signified that one is telling, thereby making the whole referent (‘what is being said’) contingent upon this illocutionary act.”

This understood, an analysis that sets to reduce the narrative cannot be expected to reduce the higher level of narration or the signifiers of narrativity. This, of course, by no means imply that the subject of enunciation is unquestionable identified with the “I” represented in the enunciated action. They enter into complex conjunctive and disjunctive relations and, indeed, their identification is called to question by the spatio-temporal process of differentiation. Furthermore, the speaking subject does not have an extra-textual referent, dependent on historical or biographical contingencies. It is a space of the text on which the various codes of the text traverse and intersect, and by virtue of which the plurality of reading is made possible.

Thus a reading of “The Broken Hairpin” focused exclusively on the enunciated referent would produce a story of the “Dedicated Lover,” as described by the editors of the anthology in which the English translation appears. A thematic label like this reflects their belief in writing’s transitivity and their subscription to the ideology of mimesis. But with a reading oriented towards discourse, as I shall propose in the following, the hero as Chuang Chih the “Dedicated Lover” can be reversed as Man-shu the narrator.

Suppose “The Broken Hairpin” *were* read as a simple love story, its actantial category projected onto the narrative syntagm in terms of “desire” could be articulated as subject (Chuang Chih) versus object (Ling-fang). Since Chuang and Ling-fang at the same time perform respectively the functions of receiver and sender, their relationship becomes that between subject + receiver and sender + object. Cast in the Greimasian “spheres of action” modified from Propp, Chuang and Liang-fang’s relation in terms of desire is complicated by the intervention of the actant of opponent invested by at least three acteurs, Chuang’s uncle, aunt, and Lien- P’ei to whom Chuang becomes the object (sought-for-person). Such a superficial categorization of actants can be completed by designating the narrator “I” (Man-shu) as the helper to the syncretic subject + receiver. To make Man-shu the helper in narrative syntagm, we have to change the “I” into a “he,” or to separate the enunciated “I” from the enunciating “I ,” thus resulting in the separation of history from discourse. Let us provisionally turn “I” to “he.” We will find the enunciated Man-shu playing an ambivalent role. Rather than a mere helper, he can be inversed as opponent.

In the narrative syntagm of desire invested by subject vs. object, the hero is usually depicted to be in a deprived situation, which he is to ameliorate by gaining the desired object. The function of helper is to provide assistance to the subject in the
course of the latter’s quest. Having met Ling-fang, Man-shu decides not to report to Chuang Chih of the girl’s visit, being unaware of their marriage contract and convinced that “All women in this world are a source of calamity!” (天下女子，皆禍水也) Later on, Chuang confides his love for Ling-fang to Man-shu and requests the latter to speak favorably of her before Chuang’s uncle, who is apparently an obstacle to the fulfillment of Chuang’s desire. As Chuang says to Ling-fang, “I was prevented from seeing you on several occasions,” and as Man-shu ponders after Ling-fang has left, “One could . . . make out that it was the uncle who stood in the way of their love.” But Man-shu decides that the “emotional affair for my [his] friend, a crisis in his life” is “none of my [his] business.” Having heard Chuang’s confession, Man-shu concludes that the uncle’s opposition is not unjustified:

Now I understand why your uncle didn’t want you to meet Ling-fang. It was because he feared that with your honest and trusting nature, you could fall under the spell of her lovely gazes. This clearly indicates your uncle’s loving concern for you rather than his displeasure at Ling-fang. I wonder if you would mind a bit of advice from me? It seems obvious that your uncle and aunt plan to arrange a proper marriage for you. Even though you refuse to change your mind, you are bound to marry Lien-p’ei in the end. Moreover, if in time you could reverse your position and shift your love from Ling-fang to Lien-p’ei, your problem would be resolved most satisfactorily for everyone concerned.

Here we find the confidant’s stance is reversed from helper to opponent. Later when he is told of Chuang’s intention to run away with Ling-fang, he does not approve of the plan: “It would be rash of you to take off like that. I don’t think you should do it.” Together Chuang and Man-shu call on Ling-fang but miss her. The next day, they are having lunch with Lien-p’ei when Man-shu sees Ling-fang passing, but he does not mention it to Chuang. It turns out that Ling-fang is to have a talk with the uncle and let the latter break the hairpin, the “dedicated lovers’s” token of pledge. The only time Man-shu is seen offer assistance to Chuang is shortly before the latter’s death. He asks for permission to see the uncle and alludes to Chuang’s love affair with Ling-fang “in the hope that my [his] intercession might be of some help to his nephew.” But it is already too late to “render service” to his friend now. In this “short” story of dynamic setting Man-shu has had several opportunities before this last one to plead the case of Chuang, but he has failed to do so. Thus by a negative transformation, the helper who fails to help can be reversed as opponent.

While the subject remains a passive character, Man-shu as opponent refraining
from rendering service to his friend is not unmotivated. Not to mention his preoccupation with the trite moral that “All women in this world are a source of calamity,” the narrator is sympathetic towards the opponent uncle’s attitude that “this kind of independence in love and marriage [is] something uncivilized, and hence not to be tolerated.” The uncle, with “blackened fingernails,” a static motif that can be culturally encoded, sticks to “the instructions of the ancients that ‘a coquette is without chastity and a libertine without royalty.’” (衒女不貞，衒士不信) This echoes Man-shu’s earlier meta-narration:

Nowadays, people’s mores and morals change with the times. Womenfolk of a questionable and seductive nature vie with one another in pursuit of lust and luxury. They appear to be obsessed by the idea of women’s emancipation, but what they do is to commit excesses and transgressions in the name of liberation, just like men who scheme for profit and gain in the name of patriotism.

These remarks that seem to bear little on the proairetic code constitute the “discourse” (in the Foucaultian sense) of Chuang Chih’s society. It is codified and institutionalized within the established order of things to hold sway over individuals by formulated prohibitions. In a sense, the uncle, aunt, and Man-shu join to invest in the actantial category of opponent. Chuang’s liberated idea of love can be interpreted as a violation of the interdiction (Propp’s functions 2 and 3 subsumed by Greimas’s futiction 2) that has been socially and morally codified. Put in a different range of vocabulary, the dynamic axiological system in terms of which the questing hero performs some act to acquire value or ameliorate his deprivation gives way to the static deontic system operated by permission, prohibition, and obligation. 7

This does not imply that the sequence of narrated events is under the constraint of only one set of modality. As Professor Doležel rightly points out, long-range textual coherence is explained by global constraints resulting from transformations among different modalities. 8 Indeed a coherent story witnesses the transformation from one modality to another on the syntagmatic axis. But it can be argued that modal transformation does not necessarily take place on the syntagmatic axis from one state to another, as is the case of Bremond’s triads, Todorov’s micro-tales, or Doležel’s atomic stories. There could be virtual transformations among different modalities in paradigmatic oppositions. The reader’s choice of one perspective at the expense of another enters the chosen one and those in absentia into paradigmatic relations. But such a choice can be dismantled the moment a different choice is hazarded. For instance, Man-shu can be said to help or hinder in Chuang Chih’s value acquisition
according to the axiological system, but he serves as the latter’s confidant according to the epistemic system. With the first system, Chuang Chih is the subject of desire; with the second, Man-shu becomes the hero of knowledge. Here we see the contention of Todorov’s two types of narrative, the mythological one dealing with the process from a plan to its realization, and the gnoseological one depicting the hero’s acquisition of knowledge. Whether “The Broken Hairpin” should be read as one or the other depends on the identification of the hero—Chuang Chih or Man-shu.

It is not difficult to identify the hero. One might simply dismiss the question by arguing that the story’s historical utterances in which Chuang Chih is represented are already embedded in Man-shu’s discourse and therefore the story is Man-shu’s story. A quantitative analysis would show that static motifs instead of dynamic motifs, discursive utterances instead of historical utterances, dominate the text of “The Broken Hairpin.” On the syntagmatic axis, the epistemic system centered around the first-person narrator Man-shu is foregrounded. As a matter of fact, it is Man-shu that perceives the events and mediates the narrated world and the reader. I would say that the performative syntagm with Chuang as the subject is given way to the epistemic syntagm with Man-shu as the subject.

The first person narrator-witness’s episteme, as is characteristic of the hermeneutic code, involves his perception of the formulation and solution of an enigma. Among the many stylistic registers is the modalization of verbs of attitude, such as “see,” “perceive,” “think,” a feature we shall discuss later. We shall first concentrate on the enigma. The enigma is posed when Ling-fang first appears to Man-shu (whose personal marker “I” has to be changed to the a-personal “he” on the level of narrative, such as he notices a light boat sailing toward the shore; sees a casually dressed woman; and thinks to himself that the girl is in good spirits). The scene-setting assertion that follows is noted for the posing and answering of questions, which typify the epistemic system, especially in drama, such as Oedipus Tyrannus or Phèdre. “I’ve heard that you are here with Mr. Chuang. Is that true? (Q. 1)” “May I ask if Mr. Chuang is around? (Q. 2)” “Is there any message I could give him? (Q. 3)” The function of this brief scene setting is to pose the mystery, in Barthes’s words, the “proposal” that “designates the hermeneutic genus.” Just like the question “What is Sarrasine?” the hermeneutic question can be encoded as “Who is this woman?” The object of the enigma is twofold: the woman and Chuang, who later prove to be the subject and object (or intersubject) projected on the syntagm of desire.

The first scene setting is followed by the narrator’s discursive comment in the form of an interior dialogue: “Where did the girl come from? (Q. 4)” “How would she know my name? (Q. 5)” “And how did she come to know that I was with Chuang? (Q. 6)” “Why did she want to invite Chuang to her hotel? (Q. 7)” “If she were Chuang’s
family friend, why did she come alone to see him? (Q. 8)” “Would she not fear gossip? (Q. 9)” Mediating narrative and reader, the narrator poses these questions on behalf of the reader. His rationalization of the enigma in terms of the cliche “All woman in this world are a source of calamity!” does not in the least answer the questions. As a matter of fact, he sets to solve the mystery the very next day. There is another brief scene setting acted out by the narrator and the innkeeper: “How many people are there in room 6? (Q. 10)” “Three: a young lady, her mother, and a maid.” “Where did they come from? (Q. 11)” “Shanghai.” “How long are they staying? (Q. 12)” “They’re leaving by express train after lunch.” This second scene setting answers Questions 4 and partially 7 but leaves the others suspended. It is interesting to note that there is a transformation of levels of discourse. The narrator’s questions are posed in his monologic commentary, and they are answered, if at all, in the scene-setting assertion. And both commentaries and scene-setting assertions belong to the category of discourse rather than narrative. A guess can be hazarded here that the hermeneutic code is framed entirely on the level of discourse.

This can be borne out by the subsequently introduced bit of information: Chuang has received a letter. This information is, however, not narrated, but reported by the innkeeper. Serving to intensify the mystery, the letter raises another question in the narrator’s discourse: “The letter mentioned by the doorkeeper—could it have come from the girl? (Q. 15)” Earlier than this hermeneutic question, but after Chuang has received the letter, he is found “standing dejectedly . . . [with] tear stains on his face.” A question is directly posed to him in the text’s third scene-setting assertion: “Why are you so deep in thought? (Q. 13)” The answer to this question might unravel the mystery, but “Chuang gave no reply.” The PHYS-motifs and MENT-motifs adopted to describe Chuang only intensify the narrator’s and reader’s sense of curiosity. Another request for answer is persisted the next day: “You have changed a great deal since yesterday. Perhaps you have some hidden grief that has been touched off by something I don’t know about. Why don’t you tell me? (Q. 14, italics mine). We are good friends, and if you were in my place, what would you feel if you had seen ma like that last night?” This last question is not numbered because it is more rhetorical that hermeneutic in function. It is echoed, with perhaps a touch of irony, by another rhetorical question in the narrator’s next commentary: “Why should I let myself be reminded of the agony of love on account of Chuang?” But the second rhetorical question seems to answer by dismissing as trifling all the previous unanswered questions.

After the “digression” into which are inserted a couple of English sentences, a new scene is set up, it is the first time Man-shu and Chuang have some exchange and actually the first time Chuang starts the conversation. Through their questions and
answers, Question 15 raised earlier in the narrator’s discursive commentary is answered, but another character is introduced to complicate the action, namely, Chuang’s uncle. The appearance of Lien-p’ei further complicates the mystery, but at the same time clears up, at least partially, the triangular love relationship, as the narrator reflects: “Even putting aside the question of their relationship with Chuang, you could readily conclude from their disappointment at failing to see him that he must have been the object of their affection.” Now all the questions can be boiled down to two: first, “One wonders . . . to whom is Chuang’s heart attached?” second, what has Chuang’s uncle to do with their love? It takes half a month for the mystery to be unraveled. Chuang confides to Man-shu his love for Ling-fang, alludes to his uncle’s disapproval, and requests his friend for help. Later, upon Ling-fang’s visit, conversation rambles to Lien-p’ei, and all the questions (QQ. 1, 5, 6, 13, 14, 15) are answered. With the enigma deciphered, truth disclosed, the epistemic modality is taken over by the axiological and/or deontic modalities. The dedicated lover Chuang Chih’s inability to revolt and reluctance to compromise join to result in his death.

The formulation and solution of mystery are meaningful only to the narrator. He plays at once the role of encoder and decoder of Chuang Chih’s love and death, and to him is the reader’s perception entrusted. The hermeneutic experience he undergoes follows a triadic structure, corresponding to the reading process. When a question is raised, an answer is anticipated. The anticipation can be either fulfilled or proved mistaken. If it is mistaken, a second anticipation is hazarded, which in turn will be fulfilled or corrected by a third anticipation. A recurrent pattern can be observed in “The Broken Hairpin.” With a few exceptions, most hermeneutic questions are posed in the narrator’s scene-setting assertions, they are pondered over and attempted to answer in the immediately following commentaries, but they are not answered until in a subsequent scene-setting assertion. For instance, the narrator is told by the innkeeper of the mysterious letter, he guesses that the letter might have come from the girl, but is told only at a later day that it was really from the uncle.

The alternation of scene-setting assertions and commentaries, both in the category of discourse, covers the major part of the text. A large portion of the text is constructed by the static motifs moving towards a higher semantic level. These should be culturally and symbolically encoded, such as the references to contemporary politics and the cosmopolitan ambience in Shanghai. As to the relatively few dynamic motifs that contribute to the turns of action, (i.e., the proairetic code), an amazingly great number of them deal with Man-shu the narrator’s action, such as his paying visits to friends, borrowing money, buying a gold watch and Manila cigars. These motifs are not even catalytical in function—both catalyses and functions being used in the formalist sense. As a matter of fact, in this story of dynamic spatio-temporal
setting, very few motifs change characters’ physical situations. As is typical of
epistemic story, most verbs have to do with the hero’s perception. In the opening
scene, only one verb changes the narrator’s situation: “I went up immediately after
breakfast to the southern verandah of the inn.” The others are verbs of attitude or
perception, such as “I noticed a light boat . . .” “I saw a casually dressed young
woman. . .” “I thought to myself . . .” “She looked [to me] so uncommonly beautiful
that she seemed [to me] like a fairy.”
Throughout the text, verbs of attitude and perception are extensively used to
describe the narrator’s state of mind. A good example is found in the following
passage:

Upon returning home that night after having witnessed the meeting between
Chuang Chih and Ling-fang, I pondered over it time and again but failed to
make out the exact relationship between the two. I had personally observed
Chuang Chih’s sudden emotional disturbance when he learned from his
uncle’s letter of Ling-fang’s impending marriage to another man. This
proved that Chuang truly loved Ling-fang. I also perceived that during the
short time they were together, the girl had displayed deep feelings of love
for him beyond the few words they exchanged with each other. When she
shook my hand, I recalled her palm was extremely hot—an indication of the
excitement she had felt in her visit with Chuang. From their conversation
one could also make out that it was the uncle who stood in the way of their
love . . . But I didn’t know whether Chuang loved Lien-p’ei as much as he
loved Ling-fang. As I pondered these questions, I suddenly realized how
absurd I had become! . . . Why should I speculate on other people’s love
affairs in my own fantasy?

余既別莊湜，靈芳二人而歸，輾轉思維，終不得二子真相。莊湜接其叔
書，謂靈芳將結繋他姓，則心神驟變，吾親證之；是莊湜愛靈芳真也。
余復思靈芳與莊湜接時，雖寥寥數語，然吾窺伺此女有無限情波，實
在此寥寥數語之外。余又忽憶彼與余握別之際，其手心熱度頗高，此證
靈芳之愛莊湜亦真也。據二子答問之言推之，事或為其叔中梗耳。⋯⋯
第未審莊湜亦愛蓮佩如愛靈芳否？蓮佩亦愛莊湜如靈芳否？既而余愈
思愈見無謂，須知此乃莊湜之情關玉扃，並非屬我之事也；又奚可以我
之理想，漫測他人情態哉？

The English verbs are underlined here and the Chinese original serves as reference.
Although tense inflections are not found in the original, the epistemic modality
remains the same as in English.

In the above passage we notice the verb "recalled" (憶) is used with a slightly different function from the other verbs denoting the narrator’s perception. It suggests two different moments: the moment of recalling, or the moment at which Man-shu as a character in the enunciated referent is speaking, and the moment of what is being recalled. There is already a temporal gap between these two moments in the enunciated. But what the verb signifies is more than the gap in the evoked world, it reveals a third moment, namely, the moment of enunciation that is exterior to the moment of enunciated. In the isolated enunciated world, Man-shu is recalling a previous event, but there is another Man-shu who is recalling (in the enunciation) that a Man-shu, his previous self or a he, was recalling (in the enunciated) a still earlier event. Thus the narrator’s experience is ruled, as it were, by reflexivization: Man-shu confronts himself in autobiographical discourse. The autobiographical dimension of the text is significant though it cannot be dealt with here.

The discourse comprises two levels, respectively deployed on enunciation and enunciated. The latter level in turn subsumes at least four language devices: 1) commentaries of evoked Man-shu, 2) his description of the evoked world, 3) scene-setting assertions, and 4) narrative. Again, the distinctions are only provisional because all four devices, especially 3, are subsumed by the enunciative act. We have already shown the interaction of commentaries and scene-setting assertions, we have casually referred to a few descriptive elements (most of which can be coded as semic, or symbolic, such as the descriptions of the West Lake and Lien-p’ei), and we have analyzed the narrative according to the epistemic system. The only thing we have failed to do is the dialectics of the two instances in terms of their relations to the enunciative act. While in the enunciated, events are so situated as to produce an illusion of their being isolated from the present and the I-thou stance, in the enunciation, references are made explicitly or implicitly to the present speech act context in which the I-thou relation is involved. The difference in morphomics in Chinese is not a question, because there are always anaphoric and deictic elements to suggest the discursive time. In the first paragraph of the English translation, the two distinct instances are already suggested. The first three sentences are registered in the past. But the deictic demonstrative “this” (今) that starts the last sentence is a clear indication of the dialectic of now and then, though it is used in the sense of then (that time 彼時). The same is true with the following sentences: 1) “Chuang asked me one day (一日),” 2) “Not long afterward (亡何), about late autumn or early winter, Chuang packed his luggage . . . .” 3) “Alas (嗟乎)! This (此) was my friend’s first meeting with Ling-fang, and it was also to be their last!” 5) “At that time (時) a maidservant came in and laid on the rattan side table a tea service.” In these
and many other sentences, the adverbs of time and demonstratives, not to mention the exclamation in 4, can only be defined by the moment of enunciation. These are the instances that attempts fail to hide the conditions of enunciation from the enunciated.

While the afore-cited deictics serve to indicate the spatio-temporal situation of the speaker, there are several discourse registers that make us aware of his stance, especially his attitude towards the enunciated world. We have noticed the use of the exclamation “Alas!” in 4, an example of the emotive style. A conspicuous register is the text’s profuse use of evaluative style. It ranges from a brief description like “she looked so uncommonly beautiful that she seemed like a fairy (此女風致，果如仙人也)” to lengthy moralizing passages, such as the quotation on p. 6 above. The narrator is found twice burst out into the cliche: “All women in this world are a source of calamity!” But a question must be raised here. The evaluative remarks could be intentionally coded in the enunciated (expressed in the past tense) rather than in the enunciation (expressed in the present tense). To identify on which level are they coded, we can resort to the speaker’s modalization, namely, his attitude towards his own discourse. This is a feature found frequently found in autobiographical discourse, but it is not apparent in this text. I suspect this absence misleads the translator to render problematically some evaluative remarks in the evoked world as if they were being enunciated now. In one of his reflections (on the level of enunciated) Man-shu the character he is reported by Man-shu the speaker (I) to be saying (in the past context) “Love was the hardest knot to untie.” But the translation reads: “Alas! Love is the hardest knot to untie (夫天下最難解決之事，唯情耳).” With the exclamation “Alas!” and tense inflections added, a statement on the level of enunciated is transposed to that of enunciation. The example might sound meticulous, but the point is that the two Man-shus representing different levels of discourse and temporality cannot be so readily identified.

On the enunciation level, the speaker is seen engaged in an express relation with the reader. He is conscious of the latter’s presence, and occasionally addresses or appeals to him. For instance, the evening after Man-shu has witnessed the meeting of Chuang Chih and Ling-fang, he (a character in the evoked world) has a dream, which the speaker relates to the reader after a transposition from the enunciated to the enunciation: “So let me relate to you my (?) dream (茲請言吾夢).” Shortly before the lovers’ tragic outcome, the reader’s sympathy is appealed to the effect that “The reader, probably, will come to sympathize with her [Lien-p’ei] (讀者或亦有以恕蓮佩之處).”

The message which the speaker sends to the reader is not restricted to these two sentences, but the whole enunciated world embedded in the speaker’s various levels of discourse. The love story the character Man-shu encoded and decoded serves but as
a parable to illustrate the speaker’s attitude towards love, which is to some extent formulated in the cliche that “All women in this world are a source of calamity.” This phrase is not the conclusion drawn from Man-shu’s observation and survival of Chuang Chih’s love and death, but proposed in the first commentary before he knows anything about the story. As Man-shu says, “I myself had long been nurtured in affliction. Why should I let myself be reminded of the agony of love on account of Chuang?” This comment on love is immediately echoed in English on a different level of discourse by a Westerner they come across on Solitary hill: “Sorrow is the depth of love.” Like the story itself, the English sentences uttered here and later in the theatre are the speaker’s fictional constructs to comment on love. On the enunciation level, we could say the speaker becomes the sender, his philosophy of love the object, and the reader the syncretic actant of subject + receiver. The doubling Man-shu, to whom the reader’s belief is entrusted, plays the role of a text-inherent observer participating in the enunciated, mediating it and the reader, but always standing at the vantage point of the enunciative moment that is present.

A final word must be said of the text’s language. As one of the transitional works in the history of modern Chinese stories, “The Broken Hairpin” is coded in classical Chinese at a time when it has ceased to be the sociolect. One could parody Derrida by saying that writing is forgetting of the self and writing in such language is turning oneself to anonymity. That is, the author whose name the “subjective” narrator bears can be effaced together with his moment of enunciation. There is at least one reason for this effacement. The text’s signification is only supplementary for it enters into polyvalent relationships with numerous traceable and untraceable texts prior to it. Any reader familiar with traditional Chinese stories would agree that the text of “The Broken Hairpin” is but an intertextual space of déjà lu. An accomplished writer in many ways, Su Man-shu is however fighting a losing language battle of rememberance of things past, not unlike what the subjective narrator is doing in the text. A differently defined project could probe into the dialectics between the author’s idiolect and the sociolect in which the former is situated. But let me conclude this paper by quoting the last sentence in the English translation, which unfortunately betrays a misreading: “But this is something about which I am unwilling to speculate (然而難也).”
Notes


5 Ibid., 263.


8 For an application of modal transformation, see Lubomir Doležel’s analysis of Wolfgang Borchert’s “Die Hundeblume” in “Die Hundeblume,’ or: Poetic Narrative,” *PTL*, 1 (1976), 467-488.
