

FEMININE FANTASIES AND REALITY IN THE FICTION OF

EILEEN CHANG AND ALICE MUNRO

by

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## Abstract

It seems unwise to compare Eileen Chang and Alice Munro, because at first glance the urban traits of Chang's Shanghai and Hong Kong romances are dissimilar to the rural idiosyncrasies of Munro's southwestern Ontario stories. However, both the female writers describe in their fiction the women characters' romantic fantasies and their interrelationships with reality. In Chang's *Romances*, in the westernized and commercialized cosmopolitan set, a new age is coming, and the traditional patriarchal familial and moral systems are disintegrating. The women try to escape from frustrating circumstances through the rescue of romantic love and marriage. In Munro's fiction, the women attempt to get ride of their banal small-town cultures in order to search for freedom of imagination and expression through the medium of art, although at the center of their quest for selfhood is always their love and hate relationship with men. The women are in the dilemma of "female financial reality" and romantic love; they express their desires and fears through immoral and abnormal love relationships and vicarious escapades in their imagination; their interpretation of life and love is in reference to art in general, but such interpretation is full of disguise. Only in their unbound daydreams and imagination can they express their desires freely. Alice Munro and Eileen Chang's fictional worlds bespeak a sense of femininity.

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## Introduction

Our innermost being, the common substratum of humanity, experiences dreams with deep delight and a sense of real necessity. (Friedrich Nietzsche 420)

To write the story of "The Mermaid," or to be the Mermaid ourselves, thinking the Mermaid's thoughts and aspiring to be old enough to come up to the surface of the water, is to have felt one of the keenest and most beautiful delights that humanity is capable of. (Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living*)

总之，生命是残酷的。看到我们缩小又缩小的怯怯的愿望，我总觉得有无限的惨伤。 Overall, life is ruthless. Seeing our timorous wishes shrinking and shrinking, I always feel infinite sadness. (Eileen Chang)

Reality is not what you see, but what you feel. (Alice Munro)

Perhaps all human beings living in the real world, like the mermaid in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, have a yearning to get out of their old ruts and dream of another world. The women in the fiction of Eileen Chang and Alice Munro are no exception to this rule. The interrelationship of the internal and external—reality and imagination—is a major feature in their fiction.

Women's dreams in Eileen Chang's fiction take place in an environment of old families and values surviving in the modern cities of Shanghai or Hong Kong. The setting of these fantasies is usually small public and private spaces: the suffocating bedroom of a dying patient; a decayed, old-fashioned residence; rooms in old houses stuffed with old furniture; dark attics or balconies. Inside these spaces is the daily life of Chang's fictional world. Drastic competition and repression emerge from inside the world, and this world seems to "beat to a different time scale." The people in it are all pestered by nightmares of romantic problems between man and woman. A

small town in southern Ontario, the setting in Alice Munro's fiction, is more pallid and eerie than Shanghai – “absolutely Gothic,” as Munro once said (Twigg, 248). The sense of terror is ubiquitous and immutable on the decaying farms and mines and in the haunted houses. The surreal landscapes together with the invisible social forces and secret fears collectively project a grotesque ambiance to readers and observers. Within such a background, the women's irrational desires then go out to meet the world of darkness.

While the dreams of Chang's protagonists typically begin after they fall in love, usually in the middle of the story, they start to appear near the beginning of Munro's works, reappearing sometimes at intervals throughout them, and perhaps only at the end do these two worlds become fused or opposed. Most of the time, especially in Chang's stories, the luminosity of dreams dissipates and the protagonists are still entrapped in brutal reality. In Munro's fiction, we see the possibility of dreams continuing into reality. But it is the fantasies that bring ordinary experiences into a fuller light and contribute to their interpretation.

Tragedies occur as cruel reality prevents dreams from coming true; tragedies are even more striking if people still struggle to reach unattainable dreams. To be more specific, the tragedy of Chang's women and men is that “most of her other characters make puny efforts to steer a middle path between romance and tragedy” (Chih-tsing Hsia, 397).<sup>1</sup> This so-called “tragedy” is perhaps the kind of reality that Chang called “amorphous threatening” 惘惘的威胁 – in the uprooted and cosmopolitan set, a new age is coming, while an old and diseased society,

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<sup>1</sup> Hsia, Chih-tsing, the first literary critic put Eileen Chang into the history of modern Chinese fiction, regarding her as one of the best writers in the history of modern Chinese fiction. Hsia mainly uses new American criticism to examine Chang's works, by focusing on the morality and life in the fiction. Hsia, Chih-tsing, *A History of Modern Chinese fiction 1917-1957*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961. 397.

belonging to old fashioned people, is collapsing. As Chang wrote:

An individual lives in a time period, but this time period is sinking like a shadow. The individual feels he has been abandoned. In order to demonstrate his existence and catch a few things real and essential, he has to resort to the ancient memory. ... Between memory and reality often occur embarrassing disharmonies, so here come solemn but slight disturbances, serious but unnamed struggles.

人是生活于一个时代里的,可是这时代却在影子似地沉没下去,人觉得自己是被抛弃了。为要证实自己的存在,抓住一点真实的,最基本的东西,不能不求助于古老的记忆。……回忆与现实之间时时发现尴尬的不和谐,因而产生了郑重而轻微的骚动,认真而未有名目的斗争。(“My Own Articles” 自己的文章, 19)

In a transient society, people have to adjust themselves to a new society, but such a process of adjustment implies only cowardice and disillusion. The consistency of humanity's indecency and limitations common in every different time period is the reality Chang wanted to emphasize.

Munro also has interest in revealing the paradoxical disjunction and continuity between the past and the present. “Time is something that interests me a whole lot—past and present, and how the past appears as people change.”<sup>2</sup> The word “change” encapsulates the peculiarity of her female characters. She describes girls and women of shifting perspectives who are in the process of transformation (Irvine, 101), as “an evocative and instinctive articulation of society in transition, and of women in search of themselves” (Rasporich, 176). While they see themselves as aliens and spies in conventional society, they also celebrate endless female romantic fantasies

<sup>2</sup> see Cara Feinberg, “Atlantic Unbound – Interview”, 4 Dec. 2003, <http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/interviews/int2001-12-14.htm>.

with their urgent sexual desires, their contradictions and disappointments, and their defiance of age and experience (Howell, 6), even though their fantasies always turn out to be “unreliable structures” or “rickety inventions.” Although these fantasies are mere illusions, they are still seductive to the women characters.

Women's craving for love is always the central theme in the fiction of Eileen Chang and Alice Munro. “The big drama of life” Munro sees and represents in her fiction is “the whole subject of what men and women want of each other” (Gibson, 253); to Chang, similarly, people in love are more “unadorned” 素朴 and “unlicensed” 放恣 than in any other situations, including wars and revolution (“My Own Articles,” 20). The writing of women's lives for Chang and Munro means the revelation of the essence of life, because their fictional women are bound up with quotidian life which is eternal in every time period, as Munro says: “I think this is true because women particularly are concerned with the very basic things about life, the food, the physical life, and what men do then seems almost like an indulgence” (Gibson, 260). Chang also concludes that a god is not likely to be a superman, but more likely to be an earth mother, filled with sympathy, mercy, understanding, and peace (“On Women,” 88). “The peace of life has an odor of eternity, and though such peace is often insecure and is bound to be destroyed every so often, it is still of eternity. It exists in all time periods. It is the divinity of human beings, or may be called femininity.” 而人生安稳的一面则有着永恒的意味，虽然这种安稳常是不安全的，而且每隔多少时候就要破坏一次，但仍然是永恒的。它存在于一切时代。它是人的神性，也可以说是妇人性。（“My Own Articles,” 17）

Munro's women characters are often trying to get out of their small-town cultures in order



to search for freedom of imagination and expression through the medium of art, their selfhood and identity, although at the center of their quest for selfhood is always their love and hate relationship with men. The existential quest for selfhood common to Munro's characters is closely associated with self-knowledge, which is shown by their attempts to resist the influence of the older generation and socially-defined identity of women. Elements such as sexual desire, men, death, and ghosts frequently haunt Munro's female protagonists' dreams and imaginations, suggesting the rise of the existential search for self-identity, which not only gives birth to alarming romantic sentiments, but also much space to the tortured relationship between daughters and mothers. Munro depicts the ascent of a cool heroine towards social, economic and psychological independence (Howells, 64).

Unlike Munro's independent or isolated women, Chang's female protagonists dream to escape from frustrating circumstances through romantic love. Chang's characters, regardless of whether they receive higher education or not, seldom dig deeply into the meaning of life and selfhood, and they also lack independence. Most of the time, their desire for love is related to their basic need to survive. Their only concern is how to live in the world, and such concerns are always channeled into their dependence on men, marriages, and by consigning their future wealth and happiness to the fortune of their lovers. Self-indulgence and self-conscious narcissism pervade their romantic fantasies in which they depend upon their beloved men. The reason that they are so overcome with self-pity and posed evasiveness is because they are sentimentally attached to the lovers in their sorrowful fantasies. Romantic love is essential to Eileen Chang's fictional women, but it is either absent or ephemeral in reality. Yet this does not mean that

Chang's fiction is merely made up of traditional female romance formulae. A sense of nihilism permeates the stories, especially after the protagonist experiences disillusionment in her dreams.

Women's reliance on love in Chang's fiction does not indicate a lack of selfhood and identity; rather it means the women feel an even stronger selfhood about themselves. What Foucault says about individuals being overpowered by social forces in order to focus their attentions on themselves and to recognize themselves as subjects of desire (Foucault, 4-5), is not really applicable to Chang's female protagonists; and Munro's heroines' assumption that everyday romantic love, marriage, family, and small town life are embraced by one value system likewise does not quite match the situation of Chang's women. For Chang, love and society are two separate systems. During the years of convulsion, Chang took little interest in the topic of revolution, for she believed that there the individual is subordinated to the discipline of collective action, and revolution implies modifications of human behavior that run counter to her own vision of humanity. Being a revolutionary woman does not bring self-identity but implies a more violent repression within the society; being independent enough to get a job quite similarly does not solve a woman's urgent desire for love. Overall, among Chang's characters, it is only when in love that individuals are "unadorned" and "unlicensed," in subconscious sensations and overt behavior. It is then that their love is seen as a contrast between social and family morality, regardless of whether or not it is an old value system or that of a newly forming society.

Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's fictional women's selfhood is similarly seen in relation to Otherness. "Because of their mothering by women, girls come to experience themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries. Girls come to define themselves

more in relation to others" (Chodorow, 93). Given repressions from mothers, sisters, and women peers, what Chang's women are looking for is not independence, but a more comforting relationship with the others, such as an ideal lover or economic security might provide; what Munro's female protagonists are seeking is independence through the medium of art. And as Lorna Irvine points out, such artistic transformation, for example, in "The Ottawa Valley" and her many other stories, is "a metaphor for the changing mother-daughter relationship" (*Probable Fictions*, 102). Their selfhood in association with the arts is compared by Munro in her story "Barron Bus" to the feeling of being in love. "The images, the language, of pornography and romance are alike; monotonous and mechanically seductive, quickly leading to despair" (*The Moons of Jupiter*, 123). Munro also makes a parallel comment about a love affair between writing and reading. "With a story that I loved, I would go back and read it over and over again. It was a desire for possession. I guess it was like being in love. I could not possess it enough, so I made up my own story that was like it."<sup>3</sup> One wonders if there is any difference between women whose self-identity emerges from being in love with a story and women whose selfhood emerge in relation to romance.

Because the majority of Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's works deal with women's lives and situations in family, love, and society, their fiction seems to represent femininity both in themes and styles. I choose to compare three major aspects of the relationship between reality and fantasy in the women characters in Chang and Munro's stories. The first aspect is the dilemma of "female financial reality" and romantic love in their short stories. The discussion of

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<sup>3</sup>Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "Interview with Alice Munro", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 53 (1989), 14-24.

money and material in literature, although vulgar in some degree, seems to constitute an essential part in the women characters' daily activities and even worldview. In terms of Chinese literary tradition, the recurrent theme of materialism in Chang's fiction is inherited from the tradition of Chinese vernacular novels, especially *Xiaxie Xiaoshuo* 狎邪小说 (pornographic fiction) such as *Flowers of Shanghai* 海上花, *Xiepu Chao* 歇蒲潮, and *A Plum in the Golden Vase* 金瓶梅 that break the taboo of classical literature of magnificence and high-mindedness. Chang's writing about money, food, clothing, and sex, and the worldly-wise and embarrassments in society reflects the reality of a human being's life.<sup>4</sup> Particularly, because the women in Chang's fiction generally are lacking economic independence, financial insurance becomes fundamental, and the dilemma of money and love shows to be a striking theme. Clothing, food, and accessories become an embodiment of their existence. As for Munro's female protagonist, Rose, money is profoundly related to social class and feminine fantasy. The unusual Ontario society in Munro's fiction as James Polk summarizes:

[Munro's] class bias is unusual when one considers how often Ontario small towns are shaped into those safe, bourgeois organisms sustaining clergymen, lawyers and young lovers, just right for slightly academic comedies of manners (Robertson Davies, Stephen Leacock) or lyrical-gothic allegory (James Reaney). In Munro's work we see Ontario social myths from the bottom up; the poverty line runs smack through her part of town and her characters seem curiously estranged from their environment: the men struggle in silence to earn a living, the

<sup>4</sup> Cai Meili 蔡美丽 shrewdly perceives the peculiarity of Chang's modernity: To use philistinism to fight against contemporary society. See her article, "Yi Yongsu Fan Dangdai" 以庸俗反当代, *Hui Wang Zhang Ailing* 回望张爱玲 (Beijing 北京: Art and Culture Publishing 文化艺术出版社 2003)

women—Munro's particular concern—are shown to be troubled by isolation and unfulfilled dreams (Neil K. Besner, 24).

This dilemma, as I see it, is an intellectual woman's necessity to express and develop her own talents and personality in a patriarchal and conventional society and her need to fulfill her desire for love and worship and to be acknowledged in society. The stories belonging to this group to be analyzed in chapter two includes Eileen Chang's "Aloeswood Ashes—The First Burning" 沉香屑——第一炉香, "Love in a Fallen City," 倾城之恋, "The Golden Cangue" 金锁记, and "The Withering Flower" 花凋; Munro's "The Beggar Maid," "Privilege," and "Mischief."

The second aspect in Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's fiction is the women's moral chaos in the marital and family system. Immorality as a recurrent motif seems not only to show the tension between the female self and the familial and social repressions, but also reveals the female self's fears and desires. In Eileen Chang's short stories, the abnormal romances such as adultery and incest are the means for the women to find escape from the familial and social repressions and are the expression of female psychological desires. In Alice Munro's stories, the women not only escape through abnormal love relationships, but more importantly, through vicarious escapades in their imagination and perception, as a revolt from the social banality. This group of stories consists of Chang's "The Red Rose and the White Rose" 红玫瑰与白玫瑰, "The Withering Flower," and "Love in a Fallen City," as well as Munro's "Accident," "Royal Beating," "Privilege," "Wild Swans," and "Mischief." I particularly chose to compare "Love in a Fallen City" and "Accident" due to the similar pattern of "accident as a design." This pattern ironically shows the continuity of the female desire and fear in terms of marriage and life.

The third aspect is art and imagination of the women characters in Chang and Munro's fiction. In this sense, the female characters' interpretation of life, sex, and female self is always in reference to literature, theatre, and art in general. But such interpretation is full of disguise, repression, and disorientation. It seems that only in their unbounded daydream or imagination can they express their desires freely. In dealing with the question, "what will happen, after the operetta?" Eileen Chang and Alice Munro each have different answers, which might reflect the idiosyncrasies of their world perceptions. The third group is made up of Munro's "Changes and Ceremonies," "Baptizing," "Royal Beating," "Wild Swans," and "Simon's Luck;" as well as Chang's "Shutdown" 封锁 and "The Time of Youth" 年轻的时候.

The conclusion of my thesis discusses the stylistic representation of reality and imagination in Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's fiction. Whereas Munro's aesthetic world is as realistic and detailed as a photograph, Chang's writing is impressionistic and symbolic. But a point in common in their fiction is that they both show the reality of life on the surfaces of daily life; that is, the surface of daily life is a reflection of a deeper mystery within the perceiver. Their lyrical and poetic description of a character's innate world is always through the writing of the outside material world, especially through abundant domestic still-life subjects such as food, interior design, female fashion, costumes and dresses. Through a description of a variety of these domestic objects, Chang and Munro have the ability to render the objects with a power of subjective authority. Further, both the writers have the ability to dramatize a particular moment or small event that is at the center of a woman's mind and memory. For Munro such theatrical moments are usually in relation with death, violence, and sexuality, but for Chang, the moments

are often fixed on marital ceremony and romantic enlightenment and disillusion.

The texts I chose come mainly from Eileen Chang's *Romances*, Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* and a few Munro stories from *Lives of Girls and Women* and *The Moon of Jupiter*. Although many of these stories are incomparable in the sense that *Romances* is a short story collection about petty urbanites and *Who?* And *Lives* are the quasi-novels about the heroines Rose and Del's life-long experiences. Yet, as I said before, because these stories are all about a woman's life and situation in society, their romances, marriages, and common friendships, these stories are all variations of a single theme. This theme is about a woman's fantasy and reality. Since the social background and characters' behavior and manners in Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's stories are very different, and to compare such differences seem to be fruitless and meaningless, I try to avoid touching upon the obvious distinction between their styles, but hope to do thematic analysis and close text reading. The texts I choose to compare, for instance, "Aloewood Ashes—First Burning" and "The Beggar Maid," "Love in a Fallen City" and "Accident," and "Shutdown" and "Wild Swans," are generally based on their similar plots, structures, and themes.

Overall, the interrelationship of the internal and external—reality and imagination—is a similar point in the women characters in Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's fiction. The reality includes "the female financial reality," the restraints of familial and social systems, and the metaphysical repression and disorientation from the media of art in its interpretation of life. Chang and Munro's women characters all wish to escape from these confinements via rescue from romantic love, abnormal love relationships, and romantic imaginations or erotic daydreams,

yet in the process of escape they always face recurrent defeats, dilemma, and entrapment, unable to fulfill their romantic fantasies. But, I always find recurrent differences in the end-results of their escapes, which, from my point of view, is due to Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's different vision of the world. For Eileen Chang: romantic love is the ultimate desire for a woman, and a marriage with love is a woman's ideal ending, yet the absence of love in her fiction demonstrates her belief that a human being's ideal is always unfulfilled: "Overall, life is ruthless. Seeing our timorous wishes shrinking and shrinking, I always feel infinite sadness." 总之，生命是残酷的。看到我们缩小又缩小的怯怯的愿望，我总觉得有无限的惨伤. As for Alice Munro, marriage and love seem to be only the traps in a woman's process of pursuing her identity, since they are still engaged in the quotidian life of a community. Their success in escapade through their realization of life and selfhood usually comes as an artistic woman being able to earn life independently, as she said about herself in the interview:

Well I grew up in a rural community, a very traditional community. I almost always felt it. ...

The concern of everyone else I knew was dealing with life on a very practical level, and this is very understandable, because my family are farmers, [...], but I always realized that I have a different view of the world, and one that would bring me into great trouble and ridicule if it were exposed. I learned very early to disguise everything, and perhaps the escape into making stories was necessary. (Gibson, 246)

In the end, I would like to point out that it would be very abrupt to conclude that Eileen Chang is traditional and Alice Munro is modern in the sense that Chang's women characters are never be able to be independent. On the contrary, as I said before, her insistence on the pragmatic



activities and the limitation of human nature, namely, Philistinism 庸俗, bespeaks her poignant sense of modernity, if we place her in the historical context of the 1930s and 1940s China. Many May Fourth writers at that peculiar era felt obliged to translate and write social-political literary works to yearn for the masses and attack the evils, and thus to save the nation. Some others have laid more emphasis on personal interests in terms of literary art claiming that the fulfillment of the individuals was requisite to national strength. Literature, as a vehicle of moral teaching in the May Fourth era is a traditional concept, but its content is anti-traditionalistic and revolutionary.<sup>5</sup> Eileen Chang's persistence on the continuity of human beings' Philistinism is her revolt against the mainstream of the May Fourth writers in the contemporary period. So she would rather not write a Chinese version of the escape of Nora as in Ibsen's *The Doll House*, but instead on a human being's submission to reality and society. Eileen Chang's sense of modernity in the Chinese context is unique:

The train of time is rumbling ahead. Sitting on the train, the places we are passing by are just a few familiar streets, which in the limitless firelight also are heartquaking, but what a pity that when fleeing, we do not even glance at the show windows, but only care about our own shadows reflected on them—we only see our own faces, pale and petty; we are selfish and empty; we are shamelessly stupid—everyone is like us, yet everyone of us is lonely.

时代的车轰轰的往前开。我们坐在车上，经过的也许不过是几条熟悉的街道，可是在漫天的火光中也自惊心动魄。就可惜我们只顾忙着在一瞥及时的店铺的橱窗里找寻我们自己的影子——我们只看见自己的脸，苍白，渺小；我们的自私与空虚，我们恬不知耻的

<sup>5</sup> See *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.

愚蠢——谁都像我们一样，然而我们每人都是孤独的。（“Records in the Ashes” 烬余记，

53)

In this passage, Eileen Chang sees humanity is something transcendent beyond tradition and modernity. “The train of time is rumbling ahead,” implies her nostalgia and fondness for the present, yet because time is in transience, the presence of modernity eventually will become a thing of the past by the force of social revolution and destruction. Meanwhile, she sees herself the same as other human beings in terms of humanity: selfishness, stupidity, and solitude is permanent.

## Chapter I Backgrounds

### A. Background of Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's Fiction

It seems unwise to make a comparison between Eileen Chang 张爱玲 (1922-1995) and Alice Munro (1931- ), because at first glance the urban traits of Chang's Shanghai and Hong Kong romances are dissimilar to the rural idiosyncrasies of Munro's southwestern Ontario stories. The townscape in *Who Do You Think You Are?* is stagnant and bleak, on the borderline of wilderness:

There was one street light, a tin flower; then the amenities gave up and there were dirt roads and boggy places, front-yard dumps and strange-looking houses. What made the houses strange-looking were the attempts to keep them from going completely to ruin.... These were gray and rotted and leaning over, falling into a landscape of scrub hollows, frog ponds, cattails and nettles. (*Who Do You Think You Are?*, 6)

Whereas the urban landscape in Eileen Chang's *Romances* is crowded with human activities:

Out beyond the rear balconies of the tall apartment building, the city [Shanghai] became a vast open wilderness, an endless blur of innumerable red and grey roofs with backyards, back windows, back alleyways everywhere. Even the sky—now a gloomy, featureless expanse—had turned its face away.... Sounds floated up from below: the noise of vehicles of various kinds, of rugs being beaten, of school bells being rung, of workmen banging and sawing, of motors humming. Yet it was all indistinct, as if none of it mattered in the slightest to God, being of no more importance than a gust of wind. ("Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah

Xiao's Unhappy Autumn," *Traces of Love*, 59)

高楼的后阳台上望出去，城市成了旷野，苍苍的无数的红的灰的屋脊，都是些后院子，  
后窗，后巷堂，连天也背过脸去了，无面目的阴阴的一片……下面浮起许多声音，各  
样的车，拍拍打地毯，学校啵啵摇铃，工匠捶着锯着，马达嗡嗡响，但都恍惚得很，似  
乎都不在上帝心上，只是耳旁风。（桂花蒸 阿小悲秋，*Romances*, 381）

In terms of characters, most of the characters in Chang's *Romances* have a very illustrious family background; usually they are the old fogies and leftovers of the last dynasty, living in a decadent gentry family of scholar officials. Her special interest in writing about a decadent family derived from her own illustrious family lineage. Her grandmother Li Ju'ou 李菊耦, was the daughter of Li Hongzhang 李鸿章, a most important political and military official in late-Qing period. Her grandfather, Zhang Peilun 张佩纶, had also been an important late-Qing official. Her father Zhang Tingzhong 张庭众 loved classical Chinese literature and contemporary Western literature. He encouraged Chang to compose classical poems and novels, yet he spent up most of the money he inherited from his ancestors and died from opium addiction. Chang's mother Huang Yifan 黄逸梵 was also from a famous family in Hunan province. Out of grievance and anger, she went to Europe with her sister when Chang's father had a second wife. She advocated women to receive western education, and divorced Chang's father.<sup>1</sup> Most of Chang's stories in *Romances* are inspired by her relatives' experiences. As she says, the stories are

<sup>1</sup> For Eileen Chang's family background, see Eileen Chang, *Traces of Love and Other Stories*, ed. Eva Hung (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong) 14. And *Wo de Zizi Zhang Ailing 我的姐姐张爱玲*, (Shanghai 上海: Wenhui Publishing 文汇出版社 2003)192.

“documentaries.”<sup>2</sup> For instance, “The Golden Cangue” is based on the life of the second son of Li Hongzhang. “The Withering Flower” is based on the love tragedy of her maternal uncle’s third daughter.<sup>3</sup> These are in addition to the gloomy stories from her own illustrious family.

Chang also depicts the lives of petty bourgeois in the cosmopolitan cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong. Because of the Second World War, she was not able to go to London University, so she spent three years at Hong Kong University as an undergraduate student from 1939 to 1942. She experienced the Sino-Japan war in Hong Kong, and the war brought profound influence on her vision towards the world, making her ponder the relationship between the individual and society. She sees the individual’s continuation of quotidian habits, isolated from the warring society. One of her roommates was worried about clothing and hair style not suitable to the war environment. They were also obsessed with food, eating a kind of carrot pancake on the street, turning a blind eye to the black and blue corpses lying a couple of feet away. She also sees that people out of jobs had to get married early during the war. Her experience and perception in the war is shown intensely in her short story “Love in a Fallen City” 倾城之恋. She actually wrote seven stories in *Romances*, using Hong Kong as its background. They are “Aloeswood Ashes—The First Burning” 沉香屑第一炉香, “Aloeswood Ashes—The Second Burning” 沉香屑第二炉香, “Jasmine Tea” 茉莉香片, “Heart Sutra” 心经, “Glass Tiles” 琉璃瓦, and “Shutdown” 封锁.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Shuijing 水晶’s interview, “Cicada” 蝉, *Zhang Ailing de Xiaoshuo Yishu* 张爱玲的小说艺术, (Taipei 台北: Da di Chuban She 大地出版社 1973)25.

<sup>3</sup> See Zhang Zijing 张子静, *Wo de Jiejie Zhang Ailing* 我的姐姐张爱玲, (Shanghai 上海: Wenhui Publishing 文汇出版社 2003)192.

<sup>4</sup> See her essay “We Are Actually Shanghainese” 到底是上海人 in *Gossip* 流言.

In the environment of cosmopolitan cities of Hong Kong and Shanghai, the urbanites in her fiction are sophisticate and social.

The men sitting near the door, who had just come from their offices, resumed their conversation. One of them snapped open his fan and delivered himself of a pronouncement: "Ultimately, he has only one real problem. He has no social graces and that's why he loses out." Another snorted, and said coldly, "You say he has no social graces. He seems to do a pretty good job of pleasing the higher-ups!" ("Shutdown," 23)

靠近门口的几个公事房里回来的人继续谈讲下去。一个人撒喇一声抖开了扇子，下了结论道：“总而言之，他别的毛病没有，就吃亏在不会做人。”另一个鼻子里哼了一声，冷笑道：“说他不会做人，他把上头敷衍的挺好的呢！”（《封锁》，275）

This passage reveals Chang's sensitivity in urban people's social manners. In "We Are After all Shanghainese" 到底是上海人, she praises the sophistication of Shanghai people: "Everybody says Shanghainese are bad, but they are bad in a proper manner. Shanghainese are good at flattering, good at winning favor of powers, good at fishing in troubled waters. However, because they know the art of conducting themselves, they do not act excessively." 谁都说上海人坏，可是坏得有分寸。上海人会奉承，会趋炎附势，会浑水里摸鱼，然而，因为他们有处世艺术，他们演得不过火(Gossip, 55).

Chang also had inveterate interest in movies and theaters. During her student years she subscribed to such English-language fan magazines as *Movie Star* and *Screen Play*; in the 1940s, she saw every Hollywood film and liked Chinese films and film stars as well (Lee, 276). She was also particularly interested in such Chinese regional operas as Shaoxing opera and Shanghai local

plays. One of her earlier publications was an interesting English essay named “Still Alive” (the Chinese version is “Beijing Opera in the eyes of foreigners” 洋人看京戏及其他) on *the XXth Century* English monthly magazine manipulated by a German journalist Klaus Mehnert. In the essay she relates the peculiarities of Beijing opera with the Chinese people’s quotidian habits and moral concepts. Later she contributed movie reviews in English and Chinese and wrote screenplays for several notable films made in Shanghai and Hong Kong (Lee, 276), such as *Endless Love* 不了情, *Long Live the Wife* 太太万岁, *Nanbei Yijia Qin* 南北一家亲 (1961), *Xiao Er’nǚ* 小儿女 and so on.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, most of Munro’s stories are about small town life based on her experience in her hometown in rural Wingham, Ontario where she grew up in the 1930s and 1940s and where she still lives. She has a Scottish-Irish family background. Her father was a farmer raising silver foxes during the depression years; her mother had been an elementary-school teacher, and she expended her energies during the formative years of the three Laidlaw children in the nurturing of a family under conditions of deprivation and hardship. Munro’s mother suffered from Parkinson’s disease since Munro was about twelve, and her mother died in 1959, a situation indicated in “Royal Beating” in *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Munro spent her childhood in Wingham living in a community of outcasts:

We lived outside the whole social structure because we didn’t live in the town and we didn’t live in the country. We lived in this kind of little ghetto where all the bootleggers and prostitutes and hangers-on lived. Those were the people I knew. It was a community of

<sup>5</sup> See Zhang Zijing, *Wo de Zizi Zhang Ailing* 我的姐姐张爱玲, (Shanghai 上海: Wenhui Publishing 文汇出版社 2003) 96.

outcasts. I had that feeling about myself...I didn't belong to any nice middle class so I got to know more types of kids. (Twigg, 218)

Munro began her school in a two-room country school during the Depression. The school's bleakness is recorded in "Privilege." In Munro's words, "what happens at the school in the book you're referring to is true. Nothing is invented" (Twigg, 218). Alice attended the University of Western Ontario from 1949 to 1951, where she majored in English and began her serious writing. In December 1951, she married a fellow student at Western, James Munro. They shortly moved to Vancouver where she continued with her writing, worked for two years at Vancouver Public Library, and began to raise three daughters. She divorced in 1972, and remarried in 1976. Alice Munro's experience in university and her first marriage corresponds with "The Beggar Maid" and "Providence." Like Eileen Chang, Munro is also interested in writing about the behaviors and habits of the people in her community:

Poverty was not just wretchedness, as Dr. Henshawe seemed to think. It was not just deprivation. It meant having those ugly tube lights and being proud of them. It meant continual talk of money and malicious talk about new things people had bought and whether they were paid for. It meant pride and jealousy flaring over something like the new pair of plastic curtains, imitating lace, that Flo had bought for the front window. That as well as hanging your clothes on nails behind the door and being able to hear every sound from the bathroom. It meant decorating your walls with a number of admonitions, pious and cheerful and mildly bawdy. (*Who Do You Think You Are?* 83)

In summary, Alice Munro is usually defined as a rural literature writer, whereas Eileen Chang is



generally regarded as a writer belonging to a class of urban writers, namely, the “Shanghai School” 海派.

#### B. The Conflict between Rural Literature and Urban Literature in the Chinese Context

The Chinese rural-urban dichotomy always disturbs me in comparing the short stories of Eileen Chang and Alice Munro. This is probably because of the deeply rooted Chinese rural-urban polarity in history as well as in the literary tradition. The mainstream of the May Fourth writers’ strong preference to realistic, historical, and socially pragmatic literary works is based on their humanitarian moral pride in being a social critic, exposing and diagnosing China’s social diseases. In the 1930s, May Fourth writers either expressed nostalgia to the traditional rural China, or shifted from urban-based individual catharsis to sympathetic exposure of the peasants’ poverty and backwardness which is caused by the exploit of “national and foreign capitalists,” “urban-based absentee landlords,” and “corrupt rural gentry.”<sup>6</sup> The rural writers represented by Shen Congwen 沈从文, China’s first “lyrical romanticist,” also expressed deep nostalgia to the traditional rural China and Confucian morality. The mainstream of Chinese writers’ pastoralism and social realistic antiurbanism is in contrast with the “Shanghai school” 海派’s urban sensibility. In the 1930s and 1940s, a cluster of writers and groups in Shanghai produced a number of works of eroticism, decadence, fantasy, and exoticism. Some experimented with Freudian psychoanalysis, some mimicked Boudelaire’s *Flower of Sin* (Ye

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<sup>6</sup> For more information about the rural subject matter and antiurban bias in May Fourth literature, see Michael S. Duke, “Mo Yan’s Fiction of the 1980s”, *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) 43-47.

Lingfeng 叶灵凤 and Shao Xunmei 韶洵美), some experimented with the surreal and uncanny (Shi Zhecun 施蛰存), some developed erotic interests in writing romances, and the New-Sensationalists 新感觉派 created fantastic female bodies as an embodiment of the urban world of modern glitter.<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon later aroused the dispute between “the Peking School” 京派 and “the Shanghai school” in the 1930s. Shen Congwen 沈从文, the writer of “lyrical rural romanticism,” disdained the “Shanghai School” as literary dissipaters and cheaters. Lu Xun 鲁迅 named them “literary hooligans,” and Mao Dun called them “gold worshippers.” Fu Lei 傅雷 even criticized Eileen Chang’s literary works for their cynical hedonism and flowery surfaces, absence of seriousness, sublime and foreordination of tragedy.<sup>8</sup> Shanghai modern literature was always purged from the orthodox canons of May Fourth writers in modern Chinese literary history.<sup>9</sup>

In the western context, however, though antiurbanism and the ideas of rural life form a very strong stream of attitudes in literature of the predominantly urban society, pastoralism still can find its way to meet the urbanism. Raymond Williams in his classical work *The Country and*

<sup>7</sup>The literary groups are *Chuangzao She* (创造社), *Wenxue Yanjiu Hui* (文学研究社), the publisher of the predominantly realist magazine *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (小说月报), etc. The literary magazines are *Xiandai* (现代) initiated by Shi Zhecun; *Xin Yue* (新月), *Yu Si* (语丝), and *Jinwu Yuekan* (金屋月刊). The representative writers, to say just a few, are Mu Shiyong 穆时英, Shao Xunmei 韶洵美, Shi Zhecun 施蛰存, Ye Lingfeng 叶灵凤, and Eileen Chang 张爱玲. For more information about “Shanghai School” writers and groups, see Leo Ou-Fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 120-303.

<sup>8</sup> Fu Lei 傅雷, “On Eileen Chang’s Fiction” 论张爱玲的小说, *Huiwang Zhang Ailing* 回望张爱玲, Beijing: Beijing Culture and Art Publishing 北京文化艺术出版社, 2003. 3-17.

<sup>9</sup> See Shen, Congwen 沈从文, “On the ‘Shanghai School’” 论 “海派” ed. Shanghai Xinxi Chanye Youxian Gongsi 上海信息产业有限公司, 1996, Shanghai, China, 4 Dec. 2003 [http://shanghai.online.sh.cn/fj/wr/wr\\_90.htm](http://shanghai.online.sh.cn/fj/wr/wr_90.htm). Lu, Xun 鲁迅, “The ‘Peking School’ and the ‘Shanghai School’” “京派”与“海派,” ed. Luan Yanshi 栾廷石, 2000, Beijing, China, <http://gd.cnread.net/cnread1/mjfc/luxun/hbwx/04.htm>.

Heinrich Fruehauf, “Urban Exoticism,” *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) 134.

*the City* states the epic English transforming progress from the country of communities and shadows to the city of both darkness and light through examination of English literature. In America, one mode of combining pastoralism and urbanization is that of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. At the end of the novel, the narrator Nick remains obsessive about pursuing the pastoral vision in the dark city after he has realized Gatsby's "characteristically American propensity" to fulfill the ancient pastoral dream on the rich continent, and to suffer the fading of the pastoral hope in an urban industrial society. Urbanization in the Western world becomes an allegory of the whole human being and community, and also a vision for their dreams, a place of light.

Because I was preoccupied by the aforesaid traditional urban and rural dichotomy, I found Eileen Chang and Alice Munro very hard to compare in terms of regional differences, even though the comparison is in a Chinese context. So another angle was to find the similarities between them, despite their strong idiosyncratic differences. The angle I choose, therefore, is a woman's life, but not the life within a region. In this sense, I agree with Alice Munro that the reality of life is beyond the confinement of region:

I don't mind at all if being a regional writer means being someone like Eudora Welty. To me, the region is important just because I feel it so vividly, but I don't think I'm writing experiences that are limited to that region. I think if I had grown up somewhere else on the continent, I would be using that as my setting, and perhaps certain things about the characters would be different. In "Family Furnishings," which is a story that goes back to my childhood and adolescence, certain things that impinge upon that girl are peculiar to the community she lives in. But the story is not. When I read, for instance, Edna O'Brien's stories of her youth in

Ireland, I feel a tremendous connection. I don't really think the main thing about a story, ever, is to bring a region to life. I think it's just to bring what you know of *life* to life. And people have regions everywhere—some regions may not be seen as regions. For instance, another important Canadian writer, Mordecai Richler, who recently died, wrote mainly about Jewish life in Montreal, which is a village. I mean, he was writing about a kind of village, and I think we all have villages.

### C. A Comparison of the Cover Pictures

My curiosity to compare the two writers was first aroused by the recurrent imagery in the cover pictures of Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, and Chang's *Romances*. On the former's cover<sup>10</sup> is a pensive and melancholic young woman in purple leotards climbing the stairs in an ordinary house towards a little purple bird flicking its wings above the wood floor. A scene through the window behind her downstairs is wintry: on the snowy earth, behind the grotesque leafless poplars stands a red-brick house against the background of gloomy forests. This picture contains several meaningful elements. First, the painting is very realistically delineated. The woman's arty theatrical costume is incongruous with the daily domestic environment. The woman in leotards thus is not a traditional image of a housewife managing household affairs. Instead, she is artistic and theatrical. Her pensive facial expression implies her subjectivity is beyond the confinement of the physical presence of the house. Second, the indoor flying bird, as an image of spring and vitality, is at odds with the outdoor desolate landscape. As an image of

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<sup>10</sup> Munro's cover is named "Virago" designed and painted by Monique Oyagi and Valerie Palmer, the experts in women paintings.

nature, it is also at odds with the interior space of the house. This disarrangement seems to convey the idea of entrapment, responding to the woman's incongruent leotards. Third, the woman's body and the distant house, both at the center of the picture, seem to suggest their hidden correspondence and contrast. Winter, as the gloomiest season in a year, seems to imply the transience of time in the Nature, and such transience also can be reflected in the woman's body. The wintry scene thus constitutes a deadly threat to the young woman, implying the ephemerality of her youth. The juxtaposition of these images altogether creates an aura at once realistic and fantastic haunting the cover of *Lives of Girls and Women*.

Similar fantastic aura also lingers on the cover of Chang's *Romances*:<sup>11</sup> an intrusive and unproportionate profile of a modern woman is leaning out a window to peer into a meticulously described boudoir where a lady in Qing style dress is playing solitaire mahjong at a round table, with a maid holding a child watching besides her. First of all, the painting technique employed is not the documentary style as in Alice Munro's painting; the modern woman is abstractly sketched. Second, the two women portrayed inside the boudoir are the typical traditional household women. Their Qing style costumes correspond with the antique furniture. No special identity is suggested as that in Munro's cover. However, although the modern-style woman is phantomlike to the reader, the antique-style woman in the archaic boudoir also looks mysterious and unreal to its modern reader. The time contrast between the modern and ancient times is aesthetically revealed. Furthermore, the boudoir and the stairs to a possible bedroom are upstairs and thus enclosed, private, and lonely feminine spaces where the women are able to

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<sup>11</sup> Chang's cover is designed by her good friend, Yan Ying 炎櫻.

either be absorbed in the game of solitaire mahjong, or in a ballet performance, unaware of their surroundings, and indulge in their fantasies. Chang announces in her preface that this is precisely the atmosphere that she hopes to create. The solitude, meditative, feminine atmosphere in Chang's cover painting is a recurrent aura in Munro's covers. The motif, images, and atmosphere represented in Alice Munro and Eileen Chang's cover paintings suggest a similar feminine universe across the boundaries of time, region, and culture.

## Chapter II Material and Ideal: The Woman in Dilemma

Ellen Moers perceives that "money and its making were characteristically female, rather than male subjects, in English fiction" (67). She uses Jane Austen's fiction as an example to illustrate the so-called "female financial reality." Since a woman in Austen's time and class had only one chance to decide her marriage, which essentially determines the quality of her later life, marriage made money such a serious matter that a woman had to turn a discerning eye on her future husband's economic life. Thus Moers argues that "Austen's realism in the matter of money was in her case an essentially female phenomenon," and "marriageship is one of those literary subjects that must be read imaginatively from the woman's point of view, which here differs from the man's" (71).

Moers' perception of "female financial reality," although derived from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England, in a way is still thought-provoking when applied to the analysis of some of Chang and Munro's female characters who are living in the middle of twentieth century Shanghai and West Ontario.<sup>1</sup> Both of Munro and Chang's characters regard marriage as a means to live by, to ensure economic security, or to enhance one's social status from a lower to a higher social class. Money and materials are fundamental to their existence and even an embodiment of femininity, although love still remains to be a feminine fantasy haunting them.

The women characters economically depend on their natal and husbands' families, having no job or stable income resources. In *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Rose is at first a student

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<sup>1</sup> To say it is thought provoking does not mean that marriageship and money for Chang and Munro's heroines must be read as a female phenomenon that differs from man's, nor does it mean that Austen's female reality perfectly matches Chang and Munro's characters. However, because the female financial realism is notable in the

receiving a scholarship to support herself. Having been aware of the love and worship that Patrick, heir of a department store chain, offers to her, she gets married to him and moves to Vancouver. But their marriage ends in extreme misery because, although, she does not love him, she also does not know how to live without his love and his promise to look after her, and after all, she cannot afford to live independently by herself. It is not until she gets a job and is able to make her own money, by first being a high school teacher then a TV play actress, that they eventually divorce. On the other hand, most of Eileen Chang's female characters do not have a stable job in society. They are housewives, second wives (Dunfeng 敦凤 and Cao Qiqiao 曹七巧), mistresses (Liusu 流苏, Jiaorui 娇蕊, and Jing Baoyan 殷宝滢), or unmarried daughters living in their natal families (Chang'an 长安, Chuanchang 川嫦, Er'qiao 二乔, and Simei 四美), and female students if their families are rich enough to send them to college (Weilong 蔚龙, Chang'an 长安, Xiaohan 小寒, and Danzhu 丹珠). These female characters' economic security heavily relies on their husbands and fathers' income resources. In *Romances*, most of the time, the households of Chang's women characters are decadent, distinguished gentry families that are gradually facing financial deficits (Bai's in "Love in a Fallen City," Jiang's in "Golden Cangue," Zheng's in "Withering Flowers"). Their connubial ideal is a gentleman who returning from overseas either inherits a large family fortune or has a booming income due to his diligence and intelligence (Tong Shifang 童世舫 in "Golden Cangue," Fan Liuyuan 范柳原 in "Love in a Fallen City," Zhang Yunpan 章云潘 in "The Withering Flower," Zhenbao 振保 in "The White Rose and the Red Rose" 红玫瑰与白玫瑰, and Mi Jingyao 米晶尧 in "Traces of Love" 留情). Furthermore, few of Chang's female characters are economically independent: they are



prostitutes (Weilong 蔚龙, Man Lu 曼璐), school teachers and tutors (Cuiyuan 翠远, Luo Zheng 洛贞, Yu Jiayin 虞家茵), maidens (Xiao' Ai 小艾 and A Xiao 阿小), office clerks (Mi Xiya 米西亚, Xinxin 心心) or even a professional spy and actress (Wang Jiazhi 王佳芝). However, whether these girls and women have jobs or not, their natal families always expect them to marry into the rich and privileged class to diminish their economic burden and promote their social status (the families in "Golden Cangue" 金锁记, "Love in a Fallen City" 倾城之恋, "Glass Tiles" 琉璃瓦, and "Seal Off" 封锁). Some money-making marriages have peaceful endings with the dawning of true love between the couple; but more profit-oriented marriages have miserable endings, if love is absent or conflicted within the marriages.

The recurring tension between love and financial reality constructs the main dilemma in universe of each of Chang's characters. Dunfeng in "Traces of Love" and Liusu in "Love in a Fallen City" each get married for financial security, and then attain peaceful, mundane lives, having a loving husband and a stable family, but most other women struggle between the two. Ni Xi 霓喜 in "Interlinked Rings" 连环套 demands both love and economic security, but she cannot keep a balance between the two, so she has to beg money from her divorced husband to make a living. In "The Golden Cangue," Qiqiao's elder brother arranges for her to marry a handicapped man from an illustrious family of scholar-officials. Being from a lowly merchant family, the marriage is for money's sake, but with the absence of love, this "golden cangue" of money tortures her so much that she uses it to cause the death of her daughters-in-law and afflict her own daughter, natal family, and relatives. Chuanchang in "The Withering Flower" craves for a marriage because only through marriage can she possess all kinds of commodities in the cosmopolis, which comprises her entire love and dream for a good life. In "Aloeswood

Ashes—The First Burning,” however, Weilong, in order to maintain her wanton life in the colony of Hong Kong, and her conjugal relationship with Qiaoqi, sacrifices herself to prostitution to make money to provide for him. The recurring motif of money in Chang’s fiction suggests that money-making marriages provide a livelihood for women, but behind this seeming utilitarianism are the women’s unrealizable romantic fantasies.

Love still remains the most important matter in the universe of Chang and Munro’s female characters. The yearning for love among Chang’s women characters is best shown through Gu Manzhen 顾曼桢 in *Eighteen Springs*. Though she works steadily as an office clerk or tutor to support her family, the jobs take so much of her time that she is rarely available to be with her lover. Halfway through the novel, after she has been assaulted by Zhu Hongcai and given birth to a baby, she finds a teaching position in a primary school to elude this nightmare. But in her repressed mind, her desperation to meet her lover Shijun 世钧 is so irresistible that she writes a letter to him: “I want you to know that there is a person in this world who is forever waiting for you, whenever it is, wherever she is.” 我要你知道这个世界上有一个人是永远等着你的，不管是什么时候，不管是什么地方。

Rose in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, similarly never grows out of her romantic fantasy. She marries Patrick not for money’s sake, but for his love and worship of her. In “Mischief” and “Simon’s Luck,” she repeatedly exhausts her strength, within and after her marriage, in two love affairs or fantasies with Clifford, a married violinist, and Simon, a European Jewish classics lecturer, and both eventually founder when the former lover dismisses the affair and the latter dies of cancer of the pancreas. Being trapped in an unattainable romantic fantasy, however, does not seem to be the end-result of her life. Self-identity is a more essential concern. The final meta-fictional story “Who Do You Think You Are?” functions as a retrospective narrative, telling

of Rose's homecoming after forty years. When facing her childhood friend Ralph Gilesie, and then Milton Homer, another childhood friend who was known for always mimicking everything, she is given the chance to reflect on her personal history and reminisces on all her changing identities beginning with childhood. Her final acceptance of herself, along with the cynical question—"Who Do You Think You Are?" seems to mock her hope of escaping her humble origin, and shows that her marriage and love fantasy constitutes only part of her progress towards recognizing her self-identity.

#### **A. Materialism and the Absence of Love in Romances**

For Chang, it seems that love, marriage, and money have consistency. Chang defines marriage as a female profession for women to live by: "to use a beautiful body to please a man is the oldest profession in the world, and also an extremely common female profession. The women getting married to earn their bread may all be entitled to this category." 以美好的身体取悦于人, 是世界上最古老的职业, 也是极普遍的妇女职业, 为了谋生而结婚的女人全可以归在这一项下 ("On Women" 论女人, 90). She also compares a professional woman and a housewife. She elaborates that the earnings of a professional woman in contemporary society are only for household subsidies, but using her husband's money to make a living is a kind of happiness:

To use others' money, even though it is an inheritance from one's parents, is still less carefree than to use the money that one earns by oneself. But using one's husband's money, if she loves him, that then is a kind of happiness. Being willing to think that she is eating his rice and wearing his clothes, that is a woman's traditional right. Even if a woman has a profession, she is still not willing to abandon that right.

用别人的钱，即使是父母的遗产，也不如用自己的赚来的钱来的自由自在。可是用丈夫的钱，如果爱他的话，那却是一种快乐，愿意想自己是吃他的饭，穿他的衣服，那是女人的传统的权利，即使女人现在有了职业，还是舍不得放弃的。（“A Conversation between Suqing and Eileen Chang” 苏青张爱玲对谈记, 267-268)

“If one loves a person to such a degree that one can ask him for pocket money, that is a strict experiment.” 能够爱一个人爱到问他拿零用钱的程度，那是严格的试验（“Guideless Words” 童言无忌, 4). With the existence of love, money-making becomes a manifestation of love.

The theme of relating a women's financial reality to marriage is a prominent trait in Chang's fiction. Chang's belief in the importance of financial security for a woman's marriage and life is best expressed through the conversation between the matchmaker and the heroine Liusu 流苏 in the story, “Love in a Fallen City” 倾城之恋. Having been divorced for seven years and living under her brothers' roof, she harbors a grievance against her quarrelsome decadent family. The scholarly kinship family of the late Qing Dynasty is declining financially: The fourth brother has squandered the family's public savings; the third brother has consumed Liusu's money on their failed stock speculations; and most of all, the social and political turbulence causes the whole city's economic decline. Her brothers', therefore, are unwilling to provide for her any longer due to their fiscal difficulties. The message about Liusu's ex-husband's death exposes the hidden tension in the family with those who ask her to go back to her ex-husband's funeral as his legal spouse again so that she can receive part of his inheritance to survive. The seemingly absurd pretext irritates her, so she asks advice from the matchmaker Mrs. Xu:

“I have not read too many books, can't shoulder or carry things. What shall I do [to earn my living]?” Mrs. Xu said, “Looking for a job is wrong. What is true is to find a man.” Liusu said, “I am afraid that this will not work. My life has already ended.” Mrs. Xu said, “Such words

are only for rich people. People who need not worry about eating and clothing are entitled to say that. For penniless people, even if they want to end their living, they will find it impossible! Even if you shave your head to be a nun, as you beg alms, it is still a mundane fate—inseparable from men!”

流苏道：“……我又没念过两句书，肩不能挑，手不能提，我能做什么事？”徐太太道：

“找事，都是假的，还是找个人是真的。”流苏道：“那怕不行。我这一辈子早完了。”

徐太太道：“这句话，只有有钱的人，不愁吃，不愁穿，才有资格说。没钱的人，要完也完不了哇！你就是剃了头发当姑子去，化个缘罢，也还是尘缘——离不了人！”(53)

Liusu then embarks on her journey to Hong Kong, playing the game of courtship with the wealthy playboy Fan Liuyuan 范柳原, and finally triumphs in marriage.

The idea of associating a divorcee's fortune with remarriage is actually out-of-date compared to other more modern women in China in the 1930's, on the eve of the Sino-Japanese war, since at that time many upper-class intellectual Chinese women in the cities were challenging the tradition-bound values concerning their place in society, and demanding liberation and independence like Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Qiu Jin 秋瑾, the most famous Chinese woman revolutionary, for example, argued in the 1910's that women needed equal rights and education, so that they could contribute to national reconstruction. Another woman writer, Ding Ling 丁玲, also published "Lady Sophie's Dairy" 莎菲女士的日记 to describe a woman's sexual desires and her revolt from the patriarchal society. Actually, Fu Lei 傅雷, the famous contemporary translator of French writers such as Balzac, Romain Rolland and Voltaire, published a critical review on Eileen Chang's short stories in 1944 in which he criticized "Love in a Fallen City" for its vulgarity and flirtatious cynicism. "The urgent materialistic needs make Liusu unavailable to care for her soul" 物质生活的迫切需求，使她无暇顾到心灵 ("On Eileen

Chang's fiction" 论张爱玲的小说, 9). But Chang later argued that a woman like Liusu, born into an old bourgeois family, would not so easily realize her position, adapt herself and change into a revolutionary woman or virtuous saint ("My Own Articles" 自己的文章, 18).

The marital pragmatism of Chang's characters' towards money has three reasons. The first is the Chinese marriage tradition, the second is the nature of humanity, and the third is the characters' love disenchantment. First, marriage for a woman from a bourgeois family is a necessity of life rather than a manifesto of high-minded love. Historically, a Chinese woman is considered to be commodity in the marriage market. Bride price is the woman's exchange value. Her use value or main responsibility in conjugal life is to bear and rear children for her husband's family and to be the main domestic labor within the household. Marriage as a means to survive is pointed out by Bret Hinch: "For most people daily life was ruled by the relentless exigencies of necessity rather than theoretical niceties" (*Women in Early Imperial China*, 10) and "few were able to choose the most important facts about their life: their occupation, home, spouse, or family" (11). Second, although historians attribute the emergence of pragmatism to the simpler and poorer society of yesterday, Chang emphasized more the consistency of human nature and life itself, since she believed that people are merely philistines 庸俗 ("My Own Articles" 自己的文章, 18). Her characters are just like real human beings, "made of muddled, indecent, embarrassed, and disgraceful submission." 不明不白, 猥琐, 难堪, 失面子的屈服 ("On Music" 论音乐, 194). Third, the women characters are conscious of love's unreliability and life's cruelty. The titles of her stories, such as "Aloeswood Ashes—The First *Burning*," "The Golden *Cangue*," "Withering Flowers," "Abstention" 色戒, all somehow give the impression that something is getting crushed out or restrained by force, and it is always love and love fantasy that is fettered

and distinguished. The love disillusion is best summed up by the words of Chang's good friend Su Qing: "I do not have any bias, but in today's society everything is undependable, it seems that only money and children are still somehow concrete and solid" 我并不存什么偏见, 只不过在一切都不可靠的现社会里, 还是金钱和孩子着实一些 (Zhang Ailing Ziliao Daquan 张爱玲资料大全, 270).

On the other hand, although the financial reality is what the women find most urgent, their most intriguing dilemma is that even though love is momentary and even absent to these pragmatists, the illuminating romantic feeling seems always lingering in their fantasies. Love radiates as a flash of Liusu and Fan Liuyuan's mutual understanding during the wartime destruction: "They saw each other perfectly transparent and perfectly bright. It is only an instant of thorough understanding, yet this instant is long enough for them to live harmoniously for eight or ten years." 他们把彼此看得透明透亮, 仅仅是一刹那的彻底的谅解, 然而这一刹那够他们在一起和谐的活个十年八年 ("Love in a Fallen City", 86). Love for Chang'an is a short time of strolling in the park: "On the wide green lawn, many people were running, giggling, and chatting, but the place they were walking was the silent and splendid cloisters—the never-ending silent cloisters." 空旷的草地上, 许多人跑着, 笑着, 谈着, 可是他们走的是寂寂的绮丽的回廊——走不完的寂寂的回廊 ("The Golden Cangue", 39). For Weilong, love is also an unforgettable moment: "Of course, his love to her was just the moment of just now. ... But this little pleasant memory was hers, and no one else could plunder it away." 当然, 他爱她不过是方才那一刹那。……[可是]这一点愉快地回忆是她的, 谁也不能够抢掉它 ("Aloewood Ashes—first Burning", 147). As all these enlightening moments of love are evanescent, everything will return to its old routine track. Yet it is just because of the ephemerality of love,

that it is recalled repetitively by the women in their memories, thus becoming the thing they yearn for: “the very little memory would be put into a glass bottle to look at in the future, holding it with two hands—her very first and also very last love” 不多的一点回忆，将来是要装在水晶瓶里双手捧着看的——她的最初也是最后的爱 (“The Golden Cangue,” 46). Therefore, the absence of love in Chang’s fiction is shown to be the “vanishing reality” that is at once unspeakable and yet indispensable. The more her characters are pragmatic and disillusioned, the more invisible desire breeds inside their suppressed minds.

The tension between women’s pragmatism and love fantasy is best exemplified in “Aloewood Ashes—First Burning.” With the title’s connotations of the fading of youth and innocence (Youth or anything relevant to beauty, symbolized as Aloeswood, is burnt into ashes), “First Burning” highlights a young Shanghai girl Ge Weilong 葛薇龙 from a bourgeois family living in Hong Kong. In order to seek support from her auntie Mrs. Liang for paying off her tuition, she boards in her extravagant mansion. The reason Mrs. Liang provides for her is to make use of her to snare men into the mansion so that she can seize the opportunity to steal their hearts. Weilong is thereupon gradually trapped in Mrs. Liang’s scheme and sensual enticements, and changes her identity from that of a student to a courtesan. But what makes Weilong’s story different from traditional courtesan stories is that another main reason for her moral degeneration is her intense love for George Qiao 乔其乔. She earns money not just to maintain prodigality, but also to sustain her conjugal relationship with George Qiao, who economically relies on her. This ironic inversion of traditional women’s positions in marriage further demonstrates the tension between love and financial reality. Weilong’s story is typical of an ordinary girl indulging in material pleasures while being trapped in her romantic fantasy.

Weilong’s radical transformation from a college student to a prostitute is linked to the



commercialized society of Hong Kong. As the first story published on the Shanghai traditional butterfly and mandarin duck magazine *Violet* 紫罗兰 in 1943, "The First Burning" is one of seven stories<sup>2</sup> using Hong Kong as a background, inspired by Chang's three years spent in Hong Kong University as an undergraduate student from 1939 to 1942. Later, she declares in her essay "We are actually Shanghainese" 到底是上海人 that she is writing these Hong Kong stories from the perspective of a Shanghainese (55). She then immediately praises the sophistication of Shanghai people: "Everybody says Shanghainese are bad, but they are bad in a proper manner. Shanghainese are good at flattering, good at winning the favor of powers, good at fishing in troubled waters. Because they know the art of conducting themselves, however, they do not act excessively" (55). What Chang focuses on in the passage is not only urban behaviors, but also is the differences between Shanghai and Hong Kong. Shanghai people seem to be more sophisticated, refined, and traditional, whereas Hong Kong people are more mercenary, superficial, and less cultivated.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the Shanghai girl Weilong's identity transformation seems to profoundly reflect the idiosyncrasies of the merchandized atmosphere of Hong Kong.

The exotic setting in Hong Kong and the vision of colonialism and Orientalism are strong features in the story. Mrs. Liang's mansion embodies the colonial culture of Hong Kong that rouses the Shanghai girl's discomfort and feeling of alienation. Mrs. Liang's house is of a streamlined and geometrical construction, similar to the most modern cinema palace but is covered with a layer of deliberately archaic green glazed tiles, and furnished with Western and Oriental interior décor:

<sup>2</sup> The seven stories Chang lists are: "Aloeswood Ashes—The First Burning" 沉香屑第一炉香, "Aloeswood Ashes—The Second Burning" 沉香屑第二炉香, "Jasmine Tea" 茉莉香片, "Xin Jing" 心经, "Glass Tiles" 琉璃瓦, "Shutdown" 封锁, and "Love in a Fallen City" 倾城之恋.

<sup>3</sup> For further cultural comparison between Shanghai and Hong Kong, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, "A Tale of Two Cities," *Shanghai Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1999).

Inside the glass door of the corridor was the guest room with three-dimensional western furnishings, but there were also several Chinese décors for both refined and popular tastes. On the stove was displayed an emerald snuffbox and an ivory image of Kwan-yin,<sup>4</sup> and the front of the sofa was surrounded by a small mottled bamboo folding screen, but the presence of this oriental hue was obviously for the sake of foreign friends. The English come all the way to see China, they had to stage some China for them to take a look. But the China here was the China in the eyes of westerners, absurd, exquisite, and ridiculous.

从走廊上的玻璃门里进去是客室，里面是立体化的西式布置，但是也有几件雅俗共赏的中国摆设。炉台上陈列着翡翠鼻烟壶与象牙观音像，沙发前围着斑竹小屏风，可是这一点东方色彩的存在，显然是看在外国朋友们的面上。英国人老远的来看看中国，不能不给点中国给他们瞧瞧。但是这里的中国，是西方人心目中的中国，荒诞、精巧、滑稽。

(113)

The China in the eyes of Westerners not only becomes “absurd,” “exquisite,” and “ridiculous,” but also stays ancient and stagnant, just as the old interior decors suggest a decided sense of anachronism. Hence, the mansion is on the one hand the prototype of the mystified and exoticized China in the imagination of the Occidental gazer, it is on the other hand also the mirror of the colonial people’s awareness of their hybrid identity. That is, the colonial people capitalize Chinese culture as a commodity to sell to foreigners. The mismatched combination of the ancient Chinese and modern western-style furnishing and architecture therefore is an embodiment of the colony: “it was not only were the sharp color contrasts that made the watcher feel dizzy and unreal—everywhere was a contrast, but the incongruous regional features and various atmospheres of the time were all forcefully mingled together, creating a kind of fantastic vision” 不单是色彩的强烈对照给予观者一种眩晕的不真实的感觉——处处都是对照；各种

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<sup>4</sup> Kuan-yin: Goddess of Mercy.

不调和的地方背景，时代气氛，全是硬生生地给掺揉在一起，造成一种奇幻的境界 (112).

Not only is the stereotyped Chinese culture a commodity, the colonial people including Weilong herself are also commercialized. The first time she visits her aunt, waiting outside the corridor, she observes her own reflection in Mrs. Liang's glass door:

She herself was also part of the unique oriental color of the colony. She was wearing the unique uniform of NanYing High School. The bright blue fabric shirt reaching her knees, below were the two narrow trousers, still in the fashion of late Qing period. To dress up the female students in the image of Sai Jinhua<sup>5</sup> was also one of the strategies that Hong Kong authorities adopted to amuse Occidental tourists. Yet Weilong like other girls loved fashions, so she added a wool tank over the fabric shirt, of which a large section was revealed under the short tank, looking even more ambivalent and ludicrous.

她自身也是殖民地所特有的东方色彩的一部分。她穿着南英中学的别致的制服，翠蓝竹步衫，长齐膝盖，下面是窄窄的裤脚管，还是满清末年的款式；把女学生打扮的像赛金花模样，那也是香港当局取悦于欧美游客的种种设施之一。然而蔚龙和其他的女孩子一样的爱时髦，在竹步衫外面加上一件绒线背心，短背心底下，露出一大截衫子，越发觉得非驴非马 (113).

The combination of the traditional Chinese style with the modern fashion in Weilong's uniform shows her to be like those hybrid furnishing belonging to the particular colonial culture. The analogy drawn between the high school female students and the courtesan Sai Jinhua also seems to allude to the thriving prostitution industry in Hong Kong, foreshadowing Weilong's potential courtesan identity of selling her body as commodity to her western customers.

Moreover, although the colonial environmental and cultural observation is by Weilong

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<sup>5</sup> Sai Jinhua 赛金花 (1872-1936), a most famous courtesan in late Qing dynasty who not only enjoyed her fame among Chinese upper-class officials, but also knew European languages, had experience of going abroad for the dynasty's diplomacy, and had intimate relationship with the Chief Commanding officer of the Eight-Power Allied Forces. Her legend-like life experience

herself, it is felt that another hidden gazer is watching behind her in that as a new comer from Shanghai in the beginning of the story, the vantage point from which she views her own mirror image is an outsider's perspective, which is at once sober and cynical. Such sober vision is also prevalent in the early part of the story as the gothic images she perceives in the mansion reflect the diabolic and erotic immorality of Mrs. Liang and her maids. For instance, the first time Weilong pays a visit to her auntie, she notices the greenish thick leaves and blossoms of a cactus propped up on a piano like a green snake protruding its bloody tongue at the moment when the maid Didi emerges in front of her from outside the backdoor. The sight at once sends a shiver down her spine, implying Didi's bestial evilness as the seductive foxes and ghosts in traditional Chinese gothic fables. As Weilong is walking downhill from the mansion, looking back at it, she observes that the lofty white house very similar to an ancient imperial palace. This strange anachronistic illusion causes her feel like a scholar in *Strange Tales from the Leisure Studio*, and when going uphill to visit her relatives, she suddenly imagines the royal house turning into a mountain tomb. She thereupon senses Mrs. Liang's formidable power: "[she] could hold off the grand wheels of time and, in her own world, retain the depraved air of the last years of the Manchu dynasty, acting as a small-scale Empress Dowager behind closed doors." 她看她姑母是个有本领的女人，一手挽住了时代的巨轮，在她自己的小天地里，留住了满清末年的淫逸空气，关起门来做小型慈禧太后 (122). Weilong's gothic vision causes her to feel lost and unreal, which is precisely the reality of her circumstances in Hong Kong.

However, as Weilong becomes accustomed to the merchandized colonial environment, the hidden sober voice behind her disappears until the end of the story, when at the eve of the Chinese Spring Festival, she is elbowing her way through the crowd in the spring market at the

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became a prototype of much Late Qing fiction, among which *The Sea of Sinful Flowers* is the most famous.

bay, and what she can see is just “thick layers of people, thick layers of lanterns, and thick layers of dazzling commodities” 密密层层的人，密密层层的灯，密密层层的耀眼的货品 (156). She is already reluctant to think of her future without any long-term plan in the same manner as the sky and ocean beside the bay, of “boundless desolation and boundless horror” 无边的荒凉，无边的恐怖 (156), so commodities become the things she seeks comfort in: “It is only within these trivial little things in front of her that her craven and untroubled soul could take a short rest” 只有在这眼前的琐碎的小东西里，她的畏缩不安的心，能够得到暂时的休息 (156).

As a contrast, Weilong's Shanghai home, symbolizing love and safety, becomes a distant place that she could never manage to return; it only remained in her memory as fragmentary domestic objects:

Upon recollection, it then reminded her all kinds of stuff, thick and reliable—at her home, the black iron bed she and her sister used to sleep on, the quilt in the bed white in color, decorated with reddish willow branches, the old-fashioned boxwood toilet table, the lovely reddish peach-shaped porcelain in the sunshine filled with toilet powder; and the calendar of beauties nailed onto the wall; on the arm of the beauty, mother added with a pencil the telephone numbers of the tailor, Jiantou Hang, the soy-bean milk seller, the maternal aunt, and the third auntie.....

想起它，便使她想起人生中一切厚实的，靠得住的东西——她家里，她和妹妹和水的那张黑铁床，床上的褥子，白地，红柳条；黄杨木的旧式梳妆台；在太阳光里红得可爱的桃子式的瓷缸，盛着爽身粉；墙上钉着的美女月份牌，在美女的臂上，母亲用铅笔浓浓的加上了裁缝，荐头行，豆腐浆，舅母，三阿姨的电话号码…… (153)

Those domestic objects in Weilong's nostalgia are the ordinary quotidian traces in her bourgeois Shanghai home that still remain to be “the vanishing real” for her, according to Lacan. The iron

bed, old-fashioned boxwood porcelain and calendars are of cozy hues like sunshine, yellow, and red, meanwhile, they are neither in fashion nor out of fashion, they are in use, suggesting the ongoing rhythm of daily life. The relatives and telephone numbers signify quotidian human relations and activities, reminding a real and stable world. Weilong's Shanghai home makes a counterpoint to the Mrs. Liang's Hong Kong stagnant, enclosed and extravagant mansion, symbolizing the contradiction between love and materialism.

Love's deficiency causes Weilong to more earnestly yearn for love. Her change of vision from a sober gazer to a perplexed insider in part is due to her romantic fantasy and headstrong will. Being afraid to be like Mrs. Liang who gets married for money's sake but has a forever love hunger, she is determined to marry George for love and becomes a courtesan to make money for the dissipator, gambling her future happiness on her single-minded imagination that one day he will love her. Her decision proves to be naïve, because Mrs. Liang and George secretly conspire to make use of her and their sexual relationship is underlying. So since the first day of their marriage, George resides in Mrs. Liang's mansion and "Weilong is just like having been sold to Mrs. Liang and George Qiao, being busy all the day, either making money for her husband, or snaring men for Mrs. Liang" 薇龙这个人就等于买了给梁太太与乔琪乔，整天忙着，不是替乔琪乔弄钱，就是替梁太太弄人 (156).

The making of Weilong's tragedy is not because of her materialism, but due to her self-sacrifice, self-delusion, and single-minded determination. Whereas she clearly understands her unfavorable situation, she still sacrifices herself for the sake of love:

George said, "You don't need me to lie to you. You are able to lie to yourself. One day you will have to acknowledge how contemptible I am. At that time, you will regret what you have sacrificed for me...." Weilong laughed, "I love you. It has nothing to do with you. Even a

thousand and tens of thousand of blames should not be put on you. .... The relationships between one and another do not have a thing called justice.”

乔琪笑道：“你也用不着我来编慌给你听。你自己会哄自己。总又一天，你不得不承认我是多么可鄙的一个人。那时候，你也要懊悔你为我牺牲了这许多！……”薇龙笑道：

“我爱你，关你什么事？千怪万怪，也怪不到你身上去。……人与人之间的关系里，根本谈不到公平两个字。” (157)

On the street of China Town as Weilong escapes from a gang of drunken marines who mistake her for a prostitute, she mocks herself that her only difference from real prostitutes is that she is a volunteer. Weilong's romantic tragedy displays the extreme perilous circumstance and predicament a woman faces in marriage in a materialistic society: wealth and love cannot be obtained simultaneously. Sacrificing her body, freedom, and dignity to love is the most naïve fantasy for the pragmatists, and yet love is so desirable for every woman that she is willing to consecrate herself to her fantasy.

Another extreme story about love's absence is "The Golden Cangue" in which Qiqiao is descending into madness as her social status rises. Born into a lower-class family involved in the sesame oil business, Qiqiao is arranged by her elder brother to cohabit with the second child of the illustrious Jiang family of scholar-officials, as a concubine. Her husband was born to be an invalid having osteoporosis and lying in bed all year round. The pain of living with a handicapped body is so unbearable, she becomes vitriolic and grumpy, gets addicted to opium, and falls in love with the masculine young man Jize 季泽, the third child of the family. Dissolute Jize is just a wastrel regularly visiting bawdyhouses, but he is not willing to have an affair with her. So as she courts him, he only pinches her foot, and goes away. After having being despised by the family for fifteen years, she inherits her husband's wealth and becomes head of the

household. But Jize squanders almost all his property, then comes to visit her, courting her,

Qiqiao at this time ponders upon their love:

So many years now, she had been playing hide-and-seek with him and never could get close, and there had still been a day like this in store for her. True, half a lifetime had gone by—the flower-years of her youth. Life is so devious and unreasonable. Why had she married into the Chiang family? For money? No, to meet Chi-tse, because it was fated that she should be in love with him. She lifted her face slightly. He was standing in front of her with flat hands closed on her fan and his cheek pressed against it. He was ten years older too, but he was after all the same person. Could he be lying to her? He wanted her money—the money she had sold her life for? The very idea enraged her. Even if she had him wrong there, could he have suffered as much for her as she did for him? Now that she had finally given up all thoughts of love he was here again to tempt her. His eyes—after ten years he was still the same person. Even if he were lying to her, wouldn't it be better to find out a little later? Even if she knew very well it was lies, he was such a good actor, wouldn't it be almost real? (*Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas*, 356)

这许多年了，她跟他捉迷藏似的，只是近不得身，原来还有今天！可不是，这半辈子已经完了——花一般的年纪已经过去了。人生就是这样的错综复杂，不讲理。当初她为什么嫁到姜家来？为了钱么？不是的，为了要遇见季泽，为了命中注定她要和季泽相爱。她微微抬起脸来，季泽立在她跟前，两手合在她扇子上，面颊贴在她扇子上。他也老了十年了，然而人究竟还是那个人呵！他难道是哄她么？他想她的钱——

她卖掉她的一生换来的几个钱？仅仅这一转念便使她暴怒起来。就算她错怪了他，他为她吃的苦抵得过她为他吃的苦么？好容易她死了心了，他又来撩拨她。她恨他。他还在看着她。他的眼睛——虽然隔了十年，人还是那个人呵！就算他是骗她的，迟一点儿发现不好么？即使明知是骗人的，他太会演戏了，也跟真的差不多罢？(*Romances*, 23-24)

After she has been intoxicated in illusions, she talks about real-estate business with him in order



to find out the real purpose of his courtship. As expected, his only purpose is to defraud her of her money. She soon hits the roof, pouring the sour-plum soup onto him, and chucking him away.

Her last hope of love is wrecked. Thereafter, she uses her identity of mother, as an Oedipal mother, to control her son Changbai 长白, making him addicted to opium and destroying his marriages. What is hidden behind all her seemingly anti-ethic deeds is her suppressed memory of her lover:

Squinting her eyes, she gazed at [her son]. During these years in her life she only had this man. Only him, but she did not worry that he coveted her money—the money eventually was his. However, because he was her son, he even was not equal to half of a man..... Now, even this half of a man also could not be retained—he had got a wife.

眯缝着眼望着他，这些年来她的生命里只有这一个男人，只有他，她不怕他想她的钱——横竖钱都是他的。可是，因为他是她的儿子，他这一个人还抵不了半个……现在，就连这半个人她也保留不住——他娶了亲。(Romances, 32)

Qiqiao's thought on her son is ambushed with sex implications. She then makes use of filial piety in sexually provoking language commanding him to stay with her overnight, serving her at her side with opium. She inquires about his son and daughter-in-law Zhishou 芝寿's sexual life in the night and spreads it to her neighbors and Zhishou's natal family, causing the family to lose face in public. Suffered by her mother-in-law's slanders and husband's unconcern, Zhishou commits suicide and the second wife soon follows. Thereafter, Changbai dares not get married again but only frequents brothels.

Suspecting the men, who intend to marry her daughter Chang'an 长安, of coveting her wealth, Qiqiao prevents her daughter from marriage and forces her to bind her feet when she is

already thirteen. She instructs her to be aware of man:

She suddenly sat up, speaking in undertone: "men ..... are not even touchable! Who does not want your money? The little amount of money your mother has was not easily gained, and also is not easily guarded. If it is passed down onto your hands, I can't look on you swallowing other's baits with my eyes open—I ask you to be alert of it later. Have you heard about it?" .....

Qiqiao's foot was a little numb. She bent forward to pinch her foot. Only at that moment, in her eyes a little tender memory was stirred up. She was reminded of that man who wanted her money.

她突然坐起身来，低声道：“男人……碰都碰不得！谁不想你的钱？你娘这几个钱不是容易得来的，也不是容易守得住。轮到你们手里，我可不能眼睁睁看着你们上人的当——叫你以后提防着些，你听见了没有？”长安垂着头道：“听见了。”

七巧的一只脚有点麻，她探身去捏一捏她的脚。仅仅是一刹那，她眼睛里蠢动着一点温柔的回忆。她记起了想她的钱的一个男人。 (*Romances*, 28)

For the same reason, Qiqiao also succeeds in using filial piety to persuade Chang'an to cancel her marriage with her lover Tong Shifang 童世舫. Chang'an's love fantasy in turn is demolished by her mother.

Qiqiao's raving concern about her money demonstrates that money is her living existence, but such existence is nothing but tragic and even gothic in that she sacrifices all her youth and happiness in marriage in exchange for it. Unlike Weilong, whose sacrifice in the cosmopolis society is voluntary, Qiqiao's marriage in the decadent patriarchal familial system is mandatory. Weilong has single-minded love as her destiny, but Qiqiao harbors revenge in the last half of her life. Different from the traditional widows in the Confucian society, who not only should raise the standing of the family in keeping its harmony, but also should educate their children in terms

of virtue, Qiqiao seems to be more like a Victorian mad woman whose relationship with her children is not really an ethically maternal relationship, but essentially a Freudian gender relationship in view of her sex implication on her son and her ferociously envious inhibition of her daughter's marriage.

Ch'i-Ch'iao lay half asleep on the opium couch. For thirty years now she had worn a golden cangue. She had used its heavy edges to chop down several people; those that did not die were half dead. She knew that her son and daughter hated her to the death, that the relatives on her husband's side hated her, and that her own kinfolk also hated her. She groped for the green jade bracelet on her wrist and slowly pushed it up her bony arm, as thin as firewood, until it reached the armpit. She herself could not believe she'd had round arms when she was young. Even after she had been married several years, the bracelet only left room enough for her to tuck in a handkerchief of imported crepe. As a girl of eighteen or nineteen, she would roll up the lavishly laced sleeves of her blue linen blouse, revealing a pair of snow-white wrists, and go to the market.

The thrilling scene of her pushing the bracelet up to reach her armpit arbitrates the elapse of time and Qiqiao's youth and innocence. Her changed physical appearance: the contrast of her present firewood-like bony arms and the snow-white round arms in her eighteen, shows how life can cruelly transforms the red-cheek into a money grabber and monster. All of her lunacy is due to the absence of romantic love.

### **B. Social Class and Self-Identity in *Who Do You Think You Are ?***

Munro's novel *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) is a series of linked, but self-contained, stories, about the central character, Rose, who forms a strong theatrical personae as she grows up with her father and stepmother, Flo, in West Hanratty in a place of "legendary poverty". In the first story "Royal Beating" Munro straightforwardly writes the social structure in the small town

society:

There was Hanratty and West Hanratty, with the river flowing between them. This was West Hanratty. In Hanratty the social structure ran from doctors and dentists and lawyers down to foundry workers and factory workers and draymen; in West Hanratty it ran from factory workers and foundry workers down to large improvident families of casual bootleggers and prostitutes and unsuccessful thieves. Rose thought of her own family as straddling the river, belonging nowhere, but that was not true. West Hanratty was where the store was and they were, on the straggling tail end of the main street. ...This was, of course, in the days before the war, days of what would later be legendary poverty. (6)

The book is a rewrite of *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) which "was based on adolescent perceptions of Wingham as remembered from the distanced perspective of Victoria" (Ross, 80). Yet following Munro's return to southwestern Ontario after twenty years in British Columbia, she had a new strong awareness of the class system based on money in the little town. In her own words, Wingham is like the society of West Hanratty in the book *Who Do You Think You Are?*: "We lived in this kind of little ghetto where all the bootleggers and prostitutes and hangers-on lived. Those were the people I knew. It was a community of outcasts. I had that feeling about myself" (Twigg, 218).

Being in the lower social stratum makes Rose bear herself with the behaviors and manners of the lower class and gives rise to her deep humiliation that is intertwined with her complex sense of identity: to be someone else through imitation and such imitation is performed through admiring, possessing, and consuming wealth and material things, while at the same time she also ambivalently falls in compliance with her subjective position and further strengthens her humiliation. It seems that only by pulling faces and by becoming someone else through acting a role can Rose really and only be herself, as Munro commented on the theme of the novel in an

interview:

I find this very interesting and complicated. I think, in the story, the first time someone says 'who do you think you are?' it is a teacher reprimanding a student in class, for trying to shine, to show off. I was brought up to think that is absolutely the worst thing you could do... So "Who do you think you are?" comes the minute you begin to let out a little bit of who you would like to be, as soon as you start sort of constructing somebody that is yourself.<sup>6</sup>

The process of defining one's identity through acting in *Who Do You Think You Are?* in relation with money, food, clothes, furnishing these material ended up in the early sections of *Who Do You Think You Are?*. In "Royal Beating" after the adolescent Rose has been ferociously beaten by her father, hiding herself in the room, she cannot resist herself from the tray of cold cream, chocolate milk, sandwiches, and butter tarts that her stepmother Flo brings in for consolation. It seems it is in her indulgence of consuming the food that she really behaves herself: "she scuffles, resists, loses dignity. ... She will get the malty syrup out of the bottom of the glass with her finger, though she snuffles with shame" (23). In "Privilege," Rose cannot wait to imitate Cora in her high school because she represents her ideal model (or social stereotype) of a mature woman: having plenty of clothes, accessories, and heavy makeup; her eager imitation also comes along with her humiliated behavior: she steals candy from Flo's store to give to Cora. "An idiotic, inadequate thing to do" (41); "no satisfaction was possible, and she knew that what she was doing was clownish, unlucky" (42). In "Mischievous," Rose's performance comes as her marital treachery, having a love affair with Clifford, but the love affair fails not only due to Clifford's betrayal, but also ends up with Rose's plight in economy as well as Clifford and Jocelyn's rise to prosperity and ecstatic celebration of commodity consummation.

Rose's complex sense of identity relating to her sharpened awareness of financial realities is

best represented by "The Beggar Maid." Her image as a real beggar maid for social admiration and advancement is reflected in the painting: "meek and voluptuous," "the milky surrender of her, the helplessness and gratitude" (95). Her perception of class contrast and attempts to get out of her social stratum through marriage is therefore much alike Austen's realism in the transformation of marriage and money, but Rose's latter divorce and failures in other love affairs show the intransigence between love and class in the book because in the epilogue of the book "Who Do You Think You Are?" Rose eventually finds her identity through her conversation with her childhood friend Ralph Gillespie, then "[t]hat peculiar shame which she carried around with her seemed to have been eased, the thing she was ashamed of, in acting, was that she might have been paying attention to the wrong things" (254). Money as related to marriage is no longer Rose's means to find her identity. Materialism is not a final solution for Rose, but constitutes only part of her confusion in the pursuit of her identity.

In "The Beggar Maid," Munro shows more realistic conflicts between the rich and poor in the living spaces and people's correspondent behaviors within such environment. Rose feels resistant and burdensome in living in the rich people's houses. The retired English professor Dr. Henshawe's house overthrows her former attitude toward home: "What Dr. Henshawe's house and Flo's house did best, in Rose's opinion, was discredit each other" (83). Dr. Henshawe's house is "small and perfect; polished floors, glowing rugs, Chinese vases<sup>7</sup>, bowls and landscapes, black carved screens" (82). But inside this house, Rose is under the control of Dr. Henshawe, who always uses imperative sentences to instruct her. Rose has to learn how to eat from fine white plates on blue placemats with a linen napkin on her knee; she has to listen to Dr.

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<sup>6</sup> Wachtel, Eleanor, "An Interview with Alice Munro", *Brick*, 40 (Winter 1991), 48-53.

<sup>7</sup> The Chinese furnishing shown up in the story no longer represents any Chinese cultural identity as in Chang's fiction, but represents Dr. Henshawe's richness and intellectual status.

Henshawe's reading from *Canadian Forum* and *The Atlantic Monthly* and her talks about politics and her instructions on her reading taste. But Rose does not want to follow her. She wants to be an actress rather than a teacher or a librarian as those scholarship girls whose graduation photographs hung on the stairway of Dr. Henshawe's house. Similarly, in Patrick's parents' stony house, Rose feels overwhelmed by the terrible amount of luxury and unease. The quality of furnishing in the house is thick and choking.

Thickness of towels and rugs and handles of knives and forks, and silences.... After a day or so there Rose became so discouraged that her wrists and ankles felt weak. Picking up her knife and fork was a chore; cutting and chewing the perfect roast beef was almost beyond her; she got short of breath climbing the stairs. She had never known before how some places could choke you off, choke off your very life. (103)

In this apparently dramatic and comic paragraph, Rose, on the one hand, is described to be very uncomfortable with Patrick's luxury house, on the other hand, luxury, the good quality of knife and fork and the texture of the perfect roast beef as well as the stairs signifying the house's spaciousness and daintiness become a burden to Rose.

Rose is equally ashamed of the signs of poverty in her home:

Poverty was not just wretchedness, as Dr. Henshawe seemed to think, it was not just deprivation. It meant having those ugly tube lights and being proud of them. It meant continual talk of money and malicious talk about new things people had bought and whether they were paid for. It meant pride and jealousy flaring over something like the new pair of plastic curtains, imitating lace, that Flo had bought for the front window. That as well as hanging your clothes on nails behind the door and being able to hear every sound from the bathroom. It meant decorating your walls with a number of admonitions, pious and cheerful and mildly bawdy. (83)

Munro has an excellent command of writing the lower bourgeois class by catching the various

special nuances they possess, such as sounds from the bathroom; poor people's unnoticed daily manners like hanging clothes on nails behind the door; and the vulgar monetary content of daily conversations. All these details are mosaics that constitute a dismal picture of poverty. Further, it also seems to show that being poor is essentially being fake and imitating, judging from the quality of the furnishing like "plastic" curtains and "imitate" laces, which foreshadow Rose's instinct for imitation as an identity of lower-class people.

The contrasts in different houses naturally arouse Rose's shameful realization of the differences between the rich and the poor. "Before she came to Dr. Henshawe's, Rose had never heard of the working class." Rose feels the terrible pall of eagerness and docility over the scholarship students, not attractive at all. "Poverty in girls is not attractive unless combined with sweet sluttishness, stupidity. Braininess is not attractive unless combined with some signs of elegance, class" (87). Afterwards, comparing the two trips to Patrick's home and her own, she discovers her own people, though vulgar, seem more jovial and content than Patrick's complaining family, yet Patrick's family will not defer and polish themselves because they are rich. They dislike abstract things just as they do not like Patrick's dream of being a historian; his mother has a neutral and emotionless attitude toward her clothes and makeup, and "any interest beyond the factual consideration of the matter at hand—food, weather, invitations, furniture, servants—seemed to her sloppy, ill-bred, and dangerous" (104). However, Rose, on the contrary, is keenly aware of the class difference signs shown by her clothes, accessories, and style. She realizes that a fuzzy peach-colored angora sweater looks "like a small-town girl's idea of dressing up," and her family's Ontario accent often alarms her of her social class status. Her pretense of ease and gaiety in front of Patrick's mother is "as cheap and imitative as her clothes" (104). Rose has a strong self-consciousness of her lowly social status.



It is exactly because Rose's innate revolt from both her Harantty home and Dr. Henshawe and Patrick's family houses that pushes and pulls her back and forth in dealing with her relationship with Patrick. If there is anything different about Rose's fantasy, it is more likely to be Rose's self-centered theatrical personae and her unstable psychological activities. The dramatic tension in "The Beggar Maid" is the incisive tone of Rose's inner revolt against the male and economically-determined reality and her external submission to it, since Rose has strong impulses to act and to hurl herself. "Whether it was off a cliff or into a warm bed of welcoming grass and flowers, she really could not tell" (116).

Rose's impulses can be seen through her frequent shifts of attitudes towards the scholarship students, Patrick, and her family. She disparages the docile scholarship winners, yet she knows that she is as meek as they are. She is ashamed of her ragged, timid but pretentious family and Harantty accent, yet she becomes protective of her unremarkable countryside after hearing Patrick's critical comments. She hates the self-assurance, arrogance and childishness in Patrick and his family, yet she also changes her rural accent and delights in being admired by Patrick and her Harantty people. She dislikes Patrick's mother, yet when the mother is sharing the short stony walls built by Patrick to her, she forces her voice to come out full of false assurance and inappropriately enthusiasm. One reason for Rose's impulses is her innermost beggary for love and worship, and the other is her more worldly side that is attracted by the social prestige that marriage offers to her, "It was not the amount of money but the amount of love he offered that she could not ignore" (95); and "she didn't like giving up being envied; the experience was so new to her" (115).

There are many conceits between Rose and Patrick. Rose in the eyes of Patrick is like the image of the beggar maid in Sir Edward Burne-Johns' oil painting inspired by Tennyson's poem,

"The King of Cophetua and the Beggar Maid."<sup>8</sup> However, his obsession with Rose is a fantasy after all, since she conceals "energy, laziness, vanity, discontent, ambition" (102). Patrick inexplicably falls in love with Rose because he thinks Rose is "The White Goddess" and "the beggar maid," akin to their "meek and voluptuous" images:

[M]eek and voluptuous, with her shy white feet. The milky surrender of her, the helplessness and gratitude. Was that how Patrick saw Rose? Was that how she could be? She would need that king, sharp and swarthy as he looked, even in his trance of passion, clever and barbaric. He could make a puddle of her, with his fierce desire. There would be no apologizing with him, none of that flinching, that lack of faith, that seemed to be revealed in all transactions with Patrick. (95).

Yet according to the imagery shown in the story, the one that is meek and voluptuous, seems not to be Rose, but Patrick himself, who with all his chivalric notions, is after all shy and unmanly. Rose is deceitful in concealing all her power and ambitions, but Patrick is "the most vulnerable person Rose had ever known" (81). The painting seems to suggest that unlike Weilong's solitaire in her imagination, this love affair actually consists of the two persons' separate romantic fantasies intervening and contradicting each other. The crisis culminates after she marries Patrick. The ending occurs ten years later. Their decade-long marriage is a disaster. Finally, Rose leaves her husband and their daughter, Anna, to work at a radio station and, later, to become a television actress. Patrick's love has changed into hate. Rose's indeterminacy has become the principle within the narrative structure as within the relationship between Rose and Patrick. The theme of the painting that spirituality conquers wealth and love transcends the boundaries of class and reason, therefore, comes in an ironic light, since the broken-up marriage of Patrick and Rose

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<sup>8</sup> King Cophetua in the Tennyson's poem was an African ruler who disdains women and love, and promised never to fall in love. Then one day, as he stood by a window in his castle, he glimpsed a beggar woman at his gates, fell in love at first sight and vowed, forthwith, that he would make this barefooted beauty his queen. In his painting,

corresponding to the king and the beggar maid implies a more impossible degree of class transcendence than the ragged spiritual goddess's submissive position to her mundane king.

### C. Materialized Femininity

From a comparative perspective, a striking similarity between Munro and Chang's women characters is that they not only associate their ideal life to money and marriage, but also make the ideal and metaphysics materialize as commodities, food, interior designs, clothes, and accessories. As critic Rey Chow perceives that Chang's woman character's love for the man is primarily through the way she relates to things, and the two kinds of love, the love of objects and the romantic love are of no difference. She attributes Chang's indifference to happiness as derived from the repetitive narcissistic relation with the beloved object. The women's "narcissistic relation" with the beloved objects in Rey Chow's view seems to be their happy memory of love preserved in the objects. For Munro's women characters, similarly, materials carry a woman's emotion and feeling. According to Rasporich, Munro's women's love for materials is represented through "Munro's preoccupation with food, furnishings, and fashion as "material" in her fiction and her positive and pleasurable rendering of them" (*Dance of the Sexes*, 93-99). Therefore, Chang and Munro's characters share a major commonality in light of the coherence between material and love. If there is any difference between Munro and Chang's women, it seems that Chang's women's love for materials is more closely related to their existence, while Munro's is a reflection of their social and psychological status and selfhood.

Both Munro and Chang's women characters are preoccupied with the textures and fabrics of dress. After Weilong moves into Mrs. Liang's house, facing the various dresses for social affairs in the bedroom closet, she realizes she is just like a cocotte bought into a brothel, but she still

convinces herself to stay to experience the excitement, as she is infatuated with the new dresses in the closet and totally engrossed by the rumba music of the loud party downstairs:

Weilong did not ever fall asleep all night, upon closing her eyes she vaguely felt she was trying clothes on, one after another. The fluffy wool was provoking Jazz; the thick and heavy silk was melancholic classic opera theme songs; the slick charmeuse was "The Blue Danube" that is coldly circumventing her and flowing all over her body. [.....] Downstairs the breathless rumba was playing, Weilong naturally thought of that long purple silk dress; as she was dancing the rumba, she kicked and kicked, it rustled and rustled.

薇龙一夜也不曾合眼，才合眼便恍惚在那里试衣服，试了一件又一件，毛织品，毛茸茸的像富于挑拨性的爵士乐；厚沉沉的丝绒，像忧郁的古典化的歌剧主题歌；柔软的软段，像《蓝色的多瑙河》，凉阴阴的匝着人，流遍了全身。[……] 楼下正奏着气急吁吁的伦巴舞曲，薇龙不由想起壁橱里那条紫色电光绸的长裙子，跳起伦巴舞来，一踢一踢，淅沥沙拉响 (126).

Assorted attires as a symbol of upper-class sumptuousness catches Weilong's fancy. Attending parties provides with her chances to show off and satisfy her vanity. By wearing those attires, she herself transforms into a commodity too (like a cocotte bought into a brothel). But, on the other hand, being enamored with clothes are a way for her to temporarily disentangle herself from her misery. As Didi is dismissed by Mrs. Liang for her rebellious selection of a secret Russian lover, she is somber at her situation that Didi's fate represents to her a warning of her similar doom, closet or clothes hence is a refuge for her to disregard her peril, since in the closet it was "timeless," and there was never "that filthy, complex and incredible reality." 肮脏，复杂，不可理喻的现实 (129). At the end of the story, her doom is revealed by her dress being inflamed by the sparkles of New Year's firecrackers. It seems that the burning of her dress symbolizes her fading youth, innocence, and fantasy. Clothes are tightly bound to Weilong's existence.

In another story, "The Withering flower," clothes as well as commodities again associates with the heroine's existence. Chang depicts a miserable tubercular girl, Chuanchang 川嫦, born in a large decadent family, has long been ignored by her turbulent parents and psychologically repressed by her elder sisters. All year long, she only wears old blue gowns passed down from her elder sisters who frequently quarrel for one piece of new cloth; she does not have any chance to wear fashionable dresses such as red and yellow silk stockings and a woolen overcoat because her sisters will make excuses to remark on her inconformity with the fashions. Beautiful clothes for Chuanchang thus become part of her longing for all the niceness in the world. Yet the only way to realize those beautiful dreams for her is to marry a man, since "restrained by the family status, the daughters of the Zheng family could not be a female shop assistant or a female typist; being a 'female marriage worker' was their only resort." 为门第所限, 郑家的女儿不能当女店员, 女打字员, 做“女结婚员”是她们唯一的出路 (257-258). Unfortunately, Chuanchang gets tubercular disease that prevented her marrying the western medical doctor and smashed her secular dreams for happiness.

This tempting world was full of all kinds of pleasant things— in show windows, big menus, and stylebooks; and the most artsy room, there is nothing in it, only the huge glass windows reaching the ceiling, carpets and colorful mats; and a child too—Alas, of course, a child was what she wanted, a western child wrapped inside a sweater and a chapeau of rabbit ears, just like the pictures on those Christmas cards, when it cried she could ask amah to carry it out in her arms.

Chuanchang, herself, also was one of these lovely things; if he wanted her, she then gained all the things she wanted. All of these, she had long been regarding as the bequest under her name.

这花花世界充满了各种愉快的东西——橱窗里的东西, 大菜单上的, 时装样本上的; 最

艺术化的房间，里面空无所有，只有高齐天花板的大玻璃窗，地毯与五颜六色的软垫；还有小孩——呵，当然，小孩她是要的，包在毛绒衣，兔子耳朵小帽里面的西式小孩，像圣诞卡上印的，哭的时候可以叫奶妈抱出去。

川嫦自己也是这许多可爱的东西之一；人家要她，她便得到她所要的东西。这一切她久已视作她名下的遗产。(271)

Chuanchang, a passive thing, is also a thing in the marriage market. In cosmopolitan chaos like Shanghai, her dreams for those pleasant things are totally monetary and materialistic, which might precisely reflect the doom of women like Chuanchang: the women's financial security has to rely on her marriage and husband in that although the living environment is commercialized, the old social, moral, and ethic orders are still predominant in people's minds and behavior. If Chuanchang's marriage does not exist, her ideal symbolized as clothes and commodities become valueless.

In *Who Do You Think Who You Are?*, clothes is a social symbolism, representing a woman's social status, personality, and psychic desires. In "Privilege," Rose considers Cora her high school classmate as her idol, mainly because she has plenty of clothes. But later as she wears ordinary blouses going to work in the Air force, Rose finds her obsession has gone, because "perhaps her personality could not survive the loss of her elegant dresses" (44). In "The Beggar Maid" she envies the affluent students' collegiate blazers, and becomes self-conscious about her own cheap, homemade suit. Later, when Patrick takes her home, she assembles a costume: she borrows a raincoat, which is too long for her, but upon meeting his mother and sisters, she realizes her humiliation as a small-town girl, dressing in "cheap and imitative" clothes. In "Mischievous," Rose falls in love with the violinist Clifford after she has been married for three years. After they have sex by the back door at a party, Rose feels transformed and invulnerable.

She loves him because she wants “tricks, a glittering secret, tender celebrations of lust, a regular conflagration of adultery” (138). But as soon as she takes it more seriously, Clifford only thinks her a flirt at best. In this story, Munro spends more than a page describing how she plans on flying all the way for a rendezvous from Vancouver to Powell River where Clifford is giving a concert. This waiting scene is full of description of clothes and money. Before she goes, she figures out carefully the money she will need, including “plane ticket, the money for the airport bus, from Vancouver, and for the bus or maybe it would have to be a taxi into Powell River, something left over for food and coffee. Clifford would pay for the hotel” (141). In the meantime, she carefully chooses her dress. Then waiting in the chilly October northern Vancouver from four o’clock to seven, she sees her own reflection in store windows (as Weilong sees her reflection in Ms. Liang’s mansion):

[She] understood that she looked as if she wanted to be stared at and yelled at. She was wearing black velvet treader pants, a tight-fitting highnecked black sweater and a beige jacket which she slung over her shoulder, though there was a chilly wind. She, who had once chosen full skirts and soft colors, babyish angora sweaters, scalloped necklines, had now taken to wearing dramatic sexually advertising clothes. The new underwear she had on at this moment was black lace and pink nylon. In the waiting room at the Vancouver airport she had done her eyes with heavy mascara, black eyeliner, and silver eyeshadow; her lipstick was almost white. All this was a fashion of those years and so looked less ghastly than it would seem later, but it was alarming enough. (147)

Rose’s deliberate choice of clothes not only reveals her narcissism, exposes her nervousness on the rendezvous, but also reflects her aspirations for attention and attraction, which is her characteristic idiosyncrasy. While she waits, she meticulously counts the money in her purse again and again: “a dollar and sixty-three cents.” When a van parks outside, she also quickly

goes through her purse thinking it must be somebody suspecting her. Rose's particular gestures coherent with money and clothes seem to imply much more than the words themselves. First, ironically, the money Rose gets to afford her trip is mostly from her husband Patrick, and she only saves thirteen dollars from the Family Allowance checks. Her economic sources suggest her hidden moral discomfiture with the affair, but such discomfiture also serves as an enticement provoking her pleasure in escaping from her marriage. Second, the one dollar and sixty-three cents being left in her purse suggests her miserable plight both in the economic and emotional levels—she cannot afford to live in the cheapest motel if Clifford does not show up, and she also cannot afford her love affair since she is economically dependent. The little amount of money foreshadows the crisis of her romance. As expected, Clifford eventually arrives and asks for separation. His plea arouses Rose profound suffering, smashing her pride and ridiculous fantasy.

Meanwhile, Clifford's success in his music career in Toronto ameliorates the Clifford's living conditions. Spending a fortune to buy new clothes of different textures and domestic electronic appliances for his wife Jocelyn obviously is a sign of social advancement after suffering from a long time of poverty. She shows Rose the clothes she has bought: "an embroidered skirt and a deep-red satin blouse, a daffodil-colored silk pajama suit, a long shapeless rough-woven dress from Ireland" (162), which exhilarates her spirits:

"I'm spending a fortune. What I would once have thought was a fortune. It took me so long. It took us both so long, just to be able to spend money. We could not bring ourselves to do it. We despised people who had color television. And you know something—color television is great! We sit around now and say, what would we like? Maybe one of those little toaster-ovens for the cottage? Maybe I'd like a hair blower? All those things everybody else has known about for years, but we thought we were too good for. You know what we are, we say to each other? We're Consumers! And it's Okay!"



And not just paintings and records and books. We always knew they were okay. Color T.V.!

Hair dryers! (162)

Jocelyn's celebration of consuming commodities here is quite unlike Chuanchang's materialistic aspiration. For Jocelyn, consuming commodities is the artist's change of perception and living conditions: the typical artistic contempt at wealth transforms into his embrace of commodities, but such embrace is not as inherent and urgent as Chuanchang's desperate aspiration because for the Clifford's, commodities are not their whole life. They have art as a means to live on and to devote to, just as Rose's later actress profession; but for Chuanchang, commodities can never be gained from other places except marriage.

As far as Rose is concerned, she is irritated and humiliated by Clifford and Jocelyn, because their rise to prosperity seems is closely related to the change of Rose's relationship with Clifford and Jocelyn. Prosperity replaces her position in their family, leaving her behind, triggering her awareness of her need for men and essentially care, notice, and love: "she found she was looking at men with that speculative hunger, that cold and hurtful need, which for a while she had been free of" (163).

Overall, what Ellen Moers says of the "female financial reality" in Austen's fiction is recurrent in Eileen Chang's fiction and Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* Chang's female characters are "female marriage workers" or *nü jiehun yuan* 女结婚员 in the marriage market. Although the social backgrounds in Chang's fiction for marriage are in Hong Kong and Shanghai, marriage is still a profession for the female characters due to the unchangeable decadent traditional social rules, their pragmatism, and their disillusion of love. Rose, in Munro's novel, is keenly aware of social class divisions and the importance of the role that money and material objects play in people's lives and personalities. In order to get ride of her humble origin,

her marriage to Patrick is for social advancement shown in her moving from the small town in Western Ontario to Vancouver. On the other hand, however; although love is momentary or absent in Chang's women's daily lives, and love slips away from Rose again and again, love, as the "vanishing real" is still demonstrated to be the most alluring matter in Chang's women and Rose's universe. The absence of love gives rise to the women's ceaseless romantic fantasies. For Chang's women characters, their fantasies and ideals are materialistically represented in commodities, clothes, and accessories. Material is their reason for living. For Rose, her realism and fantasies are the progress of her search for selfhood and self-identity. She and other characters are preoccupied with consuming food, clothes, and daily appliances in that they perceive the social division and psychic status through these daily domestic items. The materials and money thus serve to reflect their social and psychological status. The humiliation accompanying her lower social status, shameful intuition to imitate others, and powerless position in love fantasies is never diminished until she eventually realizes her identity. In this sense, Chang and Munro's characters also differ from Austen's. Whereas Austen's "female financial reality" allows possible transformation of money into marital love, in most of Chang and Munro's fiction such transformation does not exist because marriage as a part of the social mores is opposed to the feminine fantasy for love. The happy ending of *Pride and Prejudice* (Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy) that bring together the aristocracy and the shabby country gentry most of the time do not exist in Chang and Munro's universes.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> There are also exceptions. The best examples are Chang's stories "Love in a Fallen City" and "Traces of Love" in which a happy ending is retained based on the female character's money getting attitude toward marriage.

### Chapter III    Escapade and Entrapment: The Woman in Moral Chaos

What interests her is the spirit's resilience and, conditioning apart, the possibilities of escape.

(Nona Balakian, "Books of the Times" 1979)

The nightmares are boundless, and hence there is no escape. 噩梦没有边际,也就无处逃避。

(Fu Lei 傅雷, "On Eileen Chang's Fiction" 论张爱玲的小说)

The tension between human desires and the external forces is crucial in the fiction of Eileen Chang and Alice Munro. Most of their female characters crave for an escape from the community they are bound to. Such escapes are usually filled with moral chaos and ritual performance. However, both Chang and Munro's women characters find defeat in their escapes, not only because their moral values and characteristics entrench them firmly in their origin, but also because outside factors are beyond their control: their lovers are doomed to be unattainable, and the impersonal operation of the unpredictable forces such as war and disease bring inevitable death as an intervention preventing their fantasies from coming true.

#### A. Moral Chaos in *Romances* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*

##### 1. Escape for Romantic Fantasy

In Chang's *Romances*, the social background is the Chinese society of political and economical transformation in the 1940's cosmopolis of Shanghai and Hong Kong. The community Chang describes is the decadent traditional familial system, usually represented as a big gentry family, and its family members are petty bourgeois and *yilao yishao* 遗老遗少 (old fogies and leftovers from the old dynasty). What Chang depicts in her fiction, as critic Gao Quanzhi 高全之 points out, is the Chinese women's situation and resolution in the patriarchal system along with disintegration of the traditional familial mores and ethics in the

commercialized and westernized Chinese society.<sup>1</sup>

First of all, Chang is quite aware of the dreary power that the traditional patriarchal hierarchy and moral values impose on the women characters. For an unmarried woman, the patriarch and matriarch manipulate her marriage, attaching importance to her husband's economic and social status and confining her choices of lovers and husbands. Chang'an, for instance, conforms to her mother's command not to marry Shifang, following the doctrine of filial piety ("The Golden Cangue"). Mr. Yao, as another example, is busy arranging his daughters' marriages for his social advancement ("The Glass Tiles"). For a married woman, love rarely exists in her conjugal relationship, yet she still fulfills her obligations to rear children and fawn on her husband, being submissive and forbearing, even though her husband is disloyal. These obedient housewives are often the antagonists in Chang's fiction, represented as an elder and traditional generation in the family. In "The Withering Flower," Chuanchang's mother, Mrs. Zhen, exemplifies such a type of housewife. "Although she reared many children for her husband, and she was still having babies, she did not obtain romantic love. Meanwhile, she also was a good woman, so she neither had courage, nor did she have chance to get satisfaction elsewhere." 虽然她为她丈夫生了许多孩子, 而且还在继续生着, 她缺乏罗曼蒂克的爱。同时它又是一个好妇人, 既没有这胆子, 又没有机会在其他方面取得满足 (*Romances*, 254).

Second of all, the didactic familial ethical system in Chang's fiction is devastating, which is shown through the family head's decadence and futility and the family's haunting aura of gloom and chaos. The father is addicted to opium ("Jasmine Tea"), the son is a dissipated invalid ("The Golden Cangue"), the husband only knows drinking, gambling, and rearing concubines ("The Withering Flowers"), or the father is frustrated by his failure in controlling his daughters'

<sup>1</sup> For details, see Gao Quanzhi 高全之, "Zhang Ailing de Nüxing Benwei" 张爱玲的女性本位, Huali Yingchen 华丽影沉, ed. Jin Hongda 金宏达, (Beijing 北京: Culture and Art Publishing 文化艺术出版社 2003) 165-180.

marriage for his social advancement ("The Glass Tiles"). These family heads are "the corpse of a child immersed in the alcohol vase" 酒精缸里泡着的孩尸, preserving the decadent moral values and living behaviors that are at odds with the heroines' thoughts.

Thirdly, the families are never in harmony, but full of squabbles, quarrels and gossip, from which the heroines often suffer. Qiqiao's maids disdain her humble origin, and the Jiang family falls apart through house division ("The Golden Cangue"); Er Qiao and Si Mei mock the poverty of their sister-in-law's family ("Great Felicity"); Liusu's brothers and sisters-in-law look down on her identity as a widow; Chuanchang, the clumsiest one among her sisters, never catches the family's attention, and her sisters fight for every piece of stocking. "They were ceaselessly gossiping and whispering, striving openly and secretly. In such predatory and insensate circumstances, although these girls were growing in the splendid boudoirs, they were actually as pungent and capable as the kids who pick coal slacks." 不停地嘀嘀咕咕, 明争暗斗。在这弱肉强食的情形下, 几位姑娘虽然是在锦绣丛中长大的, 其实跟捡煤核的孩子一般泼辣有为。

Possessed by romantic fantasies, the women desire to make an escape from the oppressive darkness.<sup>2</sup> These dreamy women are usually the protagonists in Chang's fictional world. The unmarried women regard marriage as their refuge from the suppressing original families (Chang'an 长安, Weilong 蔚龙, Liusu 流苏, Chuanchang 川嫦, and Cuiyuan 翠远); the married women resort to lovers for a relief from miserable or banal marriages (Qiqiao 七巧, Mrs. Liang 梁太太, and Wang Jiaorui 王娇蕊). But their escapes inevitably find pits in reality, since their lovers are predestined to be inaccessible opponents, and their escapes are immoral in convention. One Freudian daughter inevitably adores her father, then in turn destroys her family

<sup>2</sup> Fu Lei was the earliest critic to point out passions' essential role in Eileen Chang's fiction. For details, see "On Eileen Chang's fiction" 论张爱玲的小说, Huali Yingchen 华丽影沉 (Beijing 北京: Culture and Art Publishing 文化艺术出版社 2003)

("Heart Sutra"); another virago absorbed in money has an irrational mind towards her brother-in-law who is only interested in her inherited land, so she ferociously avenges her hate on her children ("The Golden Cangue"); a third one, an innocent student fancies a cad, then resorts to becoming a prostitute for his sake ("First Burning"); one widow abandons her moral values and courts a flirtatious westernized playboy who has no intention of marrying but cohabits with her ("Love in a Fallen City"). Most of these romances touch upon the theme of morality and ethics, since most of the men that the women characters love are either wanton and never think about marriage, or their kinsmen who are ethically forbidden to marry them, or petty bourgeois who dare not risk breaking the social rules.

The abnormality of ethics in Eileen Chang's fiction reflects two aspects of reality: one is social mores, and the other is human nature. The theme of immorality for Eileen Chang is to reveal reality, as she once clarified:

My intention was very simple: whereas such things exist, I should describe them. Most modern people are fatigued. Besides, the marriage system in the modern time is fallacious. Therefore we have reticent conjugal relationships. Some, afraid of incurring responsibility, only want a relaxing high-minded flirtation; some return to a libidinous animal to go whoring. ... In addition, there is also cohabitation.

我的本意很简单：既然有这样的事情我，我就来描写它。现代人多是疲倦的，现代婚姻制度又是不合理的。所以有沉默的夫妻关系，有怕致负责，但求轻松一下的高等调情，有恢复到动物的性欲的调情，…… 还有便是姘居。（"My Articles" 自己的文章，22）

Whereas Chang sees that the women's passion for love has to violate moral and ethical values, she gives credit to the women who are courageous to violate social conventions because they have "pungent vitality" 泼辣的生命力. In "The Red Rose and the White Rose," Jiaorui is Zhenbao's mistress. Whereas Zhenbao is "the most ideal modern Chinese figure," assuming a

high position in a British spinning mill, Jiaorui is a willful overseas Chinese housewife who likes to “violate the law.” When Jiaorui eventually proposes to divorce for his sake, Zhenbao, afraid of public censure, escapes and determines to be a good man in terms of social ethics, but Jiaorui, stubbornly forces the divorce and remarries. Years later, they encounter on a bus, holding the following conversation.

Zhenbao said, “that guy whose surname is Zhu, does he love you?” Jiaorui nodded. [...] saying, “It was from you that I finally earned how to love seriously. ... Love after all is good. Even though I suffered, I was also be able to love afterwards. Therefore, ...” Zhenbao [...] said, “you are happy.” Jiaorui smiled, “I am just rushing forward. Whatever I encounter is what I deserve.” Zhenbao sneered, “What you encounter are just men.” Jiaorui was not angry, leaning her head a little bit, thought a bit, and said, “Yes, when I was young and looked pretty, perhaps no matter what kind of things I did in society, the things I encountered were always men. Yet later, besides men, there would always be something else, always something else....”

振宝道：“那个姓朱的，他爱你吗？”娇蕊点点头，道：“是从你起，我才学会了，怎样，爱，认真的……爱到底是好的，虽然吃了苦，以后还是要爱的，所以……”振保把手卷着她儿子的海装背后垂下的方形翻领，低声道：“你很快乐。”娇蕊笑了一声道：“我不过是往前闯，碰到什么就是什么。”振保冷笑道：“你碰到的无非是男人。”娇蕊并不生气，侧过头去想了一想，道：“是的，年纪轻，长得好看的时候，大约无论到社会上做什么事，碰到的总是男人。可是到后来，除了男人之外总还有别的……总还有别的……”

Chang through Jiaorui presents an ideal female self who possesses spirits of passion and courage, fearless about breaking the bonds of social conventions. Woman's end-result is still marriage, but if in marriage love exists, marriage is still good.

On the other hand, most of the women's end-results are not ideal at all. They surrender to reality, not just for financial security, but also because of their own moral values that are still

deep-seated in social convention or more broadly, the essence of femininity. Their behaviors are still traditional. Weilong in "Aloewood Ashes—the First Burning," eventually sacrifices her ideal and dignity to be comfortably married. Her behavior of self-sacrifice not only echoes the conventional concept of a virtuous woman, but also reveals the female idiosyncrasy: Chang claims in her essay "On Women" 论女人 that every woman has the spirit of *Dimu Niangniang* 地母娘娘 (the earth mother) like that earth mother in *The Great God Brown* (Eugene O'Neil) who acts as a prostitute, filled with sympathy, mercy, understanding, and peace. (*Gossip* 流言, 88)

With respect to human nature, one sees the overwhelming power desire has on a woman, regardless of her social class, causing a human tragedy in extreme circumstances when the goal is unattainable. Although characters like Bai Liusu who is from a decadent gentry family, Ge Weilong who lives in a gothic mansion, and George Qiao who is of hybrid identity are unique to their billions of bourgeois Chinese readers, the ordinariness in them is human nature: selfishness, materialism, desire, vanity, self-deception, desperation, snobbishness, and incompetence in facing reality. The inefficacy of human desire arouses their profound agonies and nightmares. T. S. Hsia concludes:

In many of the Romances the basic situation is a courtship, flirtation, or affair, but what is involved is more than the expected comedy or pathos of the love game: it is the condition of a soul unpropped by its usual stays of vanity and desire. Miss Chang professes not to abide by the classical formula of tragedy because it is her belief that the sheer weight of habit and animalism precludes the possibility of any prolonged flights of sublimity or passion.

(397-398)



## 2. Vicarious Escapade as ritual performance

In *Who Do You Think You Are*, Rose's Ontario home, West Hanratty, is the uncharacteristic cheerless community, which not only consists of outcasts, foundry workers, idle shopkeepers, and childish adults, but is also full of Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants whose families used to be Anglicans and Presbyterians. Religion in Hanratty is mostly about fights. From Flo's point of view, religion is concerned with money due to poverty. Anglicans and the Presbyterians are snobs and Catholics are two-faced and corrupt once they get money for the Pope (30). So, Flo does not let Rose go to church, and the family does not have many clear-cut moral standards.

Rose firstly learns from her stepmother Flo the idea of what a woman should be:

A woman ought to be energetic, practical, clever at making and saving; she ought to be shrewd, good at bargaining and bossing and seeing through people's pretensions. At the same time she should be naïve intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions, superstitions, traditional beliefs. (55)

Rose, however, is different from the kind of women that Flo represents, in that Rose is unusually clumsy and slapdash. More importantly, she has the need to daydream, as "her whole life was in her head" (55); to show off; and to "pursue absurdities" instead of staying out of trouble (1). So even before she moves to the outside world, becomes a scholarship student and finds doors opening for her, she has a curious impulse to question social and familial customs and "to see what will happen next" (75).

Rose's vicarious escapades often emerge with a degree of moral chaos and destructive force. Such chaos sometimes is accompanied by ritual performance in that "a vestigial remnant of what Flo had herself gone through" (Dahlie, 34). In "Royal Beatings," after receiving her stepmother Flo's warning on her irreverent sing-song, Rose still cannot stop herself from humming the filthy words through, because she feels pleasure and "the spark and spit of craziness" (15). But Flo, as

the instigator of the beating, and Rose's father are uncertain about the legitimacy of their cause, and Rose herself also protests pain more than she actually experiences (Dahlie, 34). Another parallel ritual performance is when Flo tells Rose about Hanratty's past, a world full of violence, materialism, immorality, and oddity. She tells the legendary stories about the wry-necked dwarf Becky who commits incest with her father Tyde, who is then beaten by the horsewhippers to death in the interest of public morality. But public morality seems to be an excuse, as money is the real purpose, and the horsewhippers are free of trial by the authority of the power-holders in the town. No one knows if such stories are true or false, yet Flo and Rose find satisfaction in the dramatization of telling and imagining the past. Similarly, in "Privilege," as she and her schoolmates spy through the cracks between the toilet's boards and knotholes to see Mr. Burns' bum, they jubilantly yell, imagining incest taking place in the toilet. The children's curious moral disarrangement through imagination seems to Rose an astounding and attractive performance.

Half of the stories in the novel deal with the adult Rose's experiences with men in an artsy circle. However, her repeated failures in losing opportunities and lovers reveal "the discrepancy between what she thinks she wants in a relationship and what really motivates her" (Balakian). In "Wild Swans," as she leaves her West Hanratty home, going to Toronto on a train for the first time by herself, she has an ambiguous sexual experience between fantasy and reality. A lecherous elderly minister puts his hand between her thighs under a newspaper, while feigning sleep. But Rose does not reject him, because her sexual desire is burgeoning in her mind as the landscape outside the train window erotically transforms: "[T]here was more to it than that. Curiosity, more constant and imperious than lust – a lust in itself" (75). In "The Beggar Maid," Rose finds the social standard for an educated woman of lower class: "Poverty in girls is not attractive unless combined with sweet sluttish stupidity. Braininess is not attractive unless combined with some

signs of elegance, class" (87). Yet her marriage to Patrick due to her ambivalent psyche of indeterminacy proves to be a disaster, because she seems to not know what she really wants. In her subsequent aberrant sexual experiences with Clifford in "Mischief," Rose feels "transformed and invulnerable" after their sexual encounter, because the thing she desires from the affair is "tricks, a glittering secret, tender celebrations of lust, a regular conflagration of adultery" (138).

Rose's theatrical personae and sexual desires contrast with the conventional moral stance. Yet the moral chaos represented in her successive failures serves to raise the question related to the title, "Who Do You Think You Are?". The literary words spoken by Flo and once by her teacher, Ms. Hattie, are hurled back at her. Rose is aware of their lingering presence:

This was not the first time in her life Rose had been asked who she thought she was; in fact the question had often struck her like a monotonous gong and she paid no attention to it. But she understood, afterwards, that ... [t]he lesson she was trying to teach here was more important to her than any poem, and one she truly believed Rose needed. It seemed that many other people believed she needed it, too. (243)

Therefore, as she returns to her Western Hanratty home decades later, unlike the desperate women in Chang's fiction, she can see Hanratty with "a tone, a depth, a light" that was not there before. Rose's final realization and self-affirmation seem to mock her original attempt to get out of her community, and this further confirms her vicarious voyeuristic escapades and behavioral mimicking, which also constitutes part of her identity.

This kind of compromised moral stance that Rose achieves, as do many of Munro's other female characters, shows that moral tension is inevitable and acceptable. Critic Hallvard Dahlie perceives that this tension also comes from the narrator herself:

A basic pattern in many of these stories reveals the sensitive narrator figure emerging from her experiences to a position where she senses that morality itself is an elusive aspect of

reality, and that human relationships create by their very interaction a perpetually shifting dimension of this morality. (13)

Overall, the moral tension in both Chang and Munro's fiction belongs to the category of family and ethic values, since both writers confine their narration to familial relationship, love affairs, and ordinary friendships—everyday domestic life. The decadent conventional familial system in Chang's fiction possesses more formidable and gloomy power in manipulating the female characters than that in Munro's. Both of the women protagonists in Chang and Munro's fiction have to transgress the social mores in order to escape. For Chang's protagonists, their lovers are predestined to be inaccessible opponents, and the conventional marriage system itself is fallacious in the modern society. For Munro's, because there is no clear-cut moral standard in reality, they imagine a world of maliciousness, violence, and absurdities to satisfy their needs for dramatization. So whereas Chang's female characters still possess the traditional moral values and romantic fantasies, Munro's idiosyncratic protagonist's vicarious escapades are a ritual performance, reflecting her identity.

### **B. Accident as a Design**

As far as the external force is concerned, we find in *Romances* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* two similar facets of the impersonal operation of unpredictable forces: war and death. First, in *Romances*, the invisible social force, war, seems omniscient, affecting and threatening the women's fates from story to story. The Sino-Japan war helps Liusu fulfill her marital plan, inspiring the egoists to true love and forcing their marriage into being ("Love in a Fallen City"); the air raid blocks the street and the two strangers on a streetcar fall in love and then separate after the shutdown ("Shutdown"); on the other hand, the war not only brings the family's financial decline ("The Golden Cangue" and "Love in a Fallen City"), but also ruins a young woman's choice of a husband and devastates her ideal wedding ("The Time of Youth"). In *Who*

*Do You Think You Are?*, war, brings prosperity, but it similarly has some kind of impact of disillusionment on the characters, although it is not at all tragic. As the “legendary poverty” before the war perishes, the school and small town “lost all its evil energy, its anarchic spirit, its style” (“Privilege,” 45). Wartime for Rose means disenchantment because the grotesque aspect of the small-town perishes, shown to be dark shacks that used to be a stage where imaginary incest is renewed, and Cora, who once was Rose’s idol goes to work for the Air Force, losing all her charms.

Second, death and diseases, reflecting the ephemerality of life, have an overwhelming power in destroying the female characters’ fantasies. Chuanchang’s pneumonia shatters her aspirations for marriage, love, and life. The contrast between the fragility of an individual’s life and her isolated consciousness is shocking: “ ‘This kind of leather looks quite firm. It has generally two or three years of wear.’ She died three weeks later.” ‘这种皮看上去倒很牢，总可以穿两三年。’ 她死在三星期后 (*Romances*, 273). In “Simon’s Luck,” the message that Simon has died of cancer of the pancreas several years before ironically smashes her years-long romantic fantasy of waiting for him, and forces her to come to realize the kind of disarrangement: “It was preposterous, it was unfair, that such a chunk of information should have been left out, and that Rose even at this late date could have thought herself the only person who could seriously lack power” (*Who Do You Think You Are?*, 215).

However, there are also exceptions in both Chang and Munro’s fiction that the external forces help to fulfill the heroines’ romantic fantasy and assist them in getting away from the community. Munro’s “Accident” and Chang’s “Love in a Fallen City” both narrate an imprudent romance resolved by an accident or war in marriage. The accidents give rise to a seemingly happy closure of the heroines’ romances—they finally gain their love and get married, living a

peaceful life. But the tension between the women's passion, the romantic plot, and the accidents still exists. Thus, it brings forward the following questions: If life is a design, what is its meaning? Can the female self be expressed through love if love is just a deliberate performance? Must a female self be conceived in resistant to marriage if marriage becomes a result of social force and an event consequence? The different answers from each story is perhaps strong proof of the idiosyncrasies of Chang and Munro's fictional worlds.

### 1. The Suppressed Female Self in "Love in a Fallen City"

In "Love in a Fallen City," the twenty-eight-year-old heroine Liusu as a divorcee has been living in her natal family "Bai residence" 白公馆 in Shanghai with her brothers' families for more than seven years. Due to social and political turbulence, scholarly kinship in the late Qing Dynasty is financially declining. Her brothers therefore are unwilling to provide for her any longer. The message about Liusu's ex-husband's death exposes her hidden tension in the family who ask her to go back to her ex-husband's funeral as his legal spouse again so that she can inherit part of his legacy to survive. The seemingly absurd pretext irritates her to plan to remarry for financial security, and more substantially, for an escape from familial pressure. She subsequently begins an acquaintance with an oversea Chinese playboy, Fan Liuyuan 范柳原 on a blind date with Liusu's seventh sister, which was arranged by the family. Then, she embarks on her adventure to the exotic city of Hong Kong to play a long game of courtship with him from the dance halls, restaurants, beaches to her bedroom. But the old hand at dalliance never talks about marriage with her. Fruitlessly, Liusu returns to Shanghai and continues to suffer from the family's deepening slanders. After a winter's waiting, upon receiving his telegraph of invitation, she compromises and goes to Hong Kong again, consummating their love and acting as his

mistress. But, just before her marital plan fails, the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war helps to give rise to her marital triumph, because when Liuyuan sets off for England, keeping her back in Hong Kong as a mistress, the forthcoming war blocks sea voyages and forces him back to save Liusu from a bomb disaster. They spend the next few weeks staying together, looking for food to feed themselves and walking through the deadly battlefields and deserted streets. The desolate scenes pushes them into true love. They soon get married. In the end the narrator comments:

Hong Kong's defeat had given her victory. But in this unreasonable world, who can say which was the cause and which the result? Who knows? Maybe it was in order to vindicate her that an entire city fell. Countless thousands of people dead, countless thousands of people suffering, and what followed was an earth shaking revolution. ...The legendary beauties who felled cities and kingdoms were probably all like that.

香港的陷落成全了她，但是在这不可理喻的世界里，谁知道什么是因，什么是果？谁知道呢，也许就因为要成全她，一个大都市倾覆了。成千上万的人死去，成千上万的人痛苦着，跟着是惊天动地的大改革……传奇里倾国倾城的人大抵如此。(88)

"Love in a Fallen City" proved to be Chang's most popular story. For many years the comedy published in 1943 has been adapted into plays and movies.<sup>3</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee regards the story as best exemplifying Chang's "aesthetic subversion of the 'master narrative' of history" (301), since it ironically exercises the literary quotation *Hongyan Huoshui* 红颜祸水 (The fair one is a trouble-maker) in the modern society and war; that is, marriage and love are no longer voluntary, but owing to social and familial necessity.

<sup>3</sup> Eileen Chang adapted the story into a four-acts-and-eight-scenes-stage play in 1944. The play was directed by Zhu Duanjun 朱端钧. The leading roles were performed by the most popular movie stars at Shanghai such as Luo Lan 罗兰 and Shu Shi 舒适. The play was shown at Shanghai Xinguang theater 上海新光剧院 for eighty times since December 16<sup>th</sup> 1994, winning passionate applause from the audiences. For details about the play, see Chen Zishan 陈子善, "Zhang Ailing Huaju "Qingcheng Zhilian" Ersan Shi" 张爱玲话剧《倾城之恋》二三事, *Siyu Zhang Ailing 私语张爱玲*, ed. Chen Zishan 陈子善, Hangzhou: zhejiang Art Publishing 浙江文艺出版社 1995, 259-265.

In 1984 Hong Kong film director Ann Hui 许鞍华 firstly adapted the comedy into the film of the same title, and won Hong Kong Golden Horse Prizes 金马奖 for its music and costume design.

To understand that it is an aesthetic subversion of the tradition, we need to trace back into Chinese history. The idiom *qingcheng qingguo* 倾城倾国 (kingdom-toppling and country-topping) is a metaphor for a femme-fatale, originally from the song composed by the court musician Li Yannian 李延年 (? ~ BC90). The song depicts the beauty of his younger sister Madam Li 李夫人, who later became the cosseted imperial concubine of Emperor Hanwu 汉武帝. But in regard to beauty's relationship with war, Chinese literary works on historic events frequently echo this traditional concept of femme-fatales' negative effects on the peace in a country, just like the saying in Greek on the beauty Helen: "a face that launched a thousand ships." King Zhouyou's 周幽王 (?-BC 771) scandal of igniting beacons to tease the seigneurs 烽火戏诸侯 is quite well-known: In order to win his apathy Queen Baosi's 褒姒 rare smile was given when he asked to light up the beacons to play a joke on his seigneurs in the capital and Baosi enjoyed their chagrin at his joke; but later when his real enemies from the northwest, Quanrong 犬戎, Zen 缙, and Lu 吕 intruded his kingdom, he lit up beacons again, but no seigneurs believed him to come to save the kingdom. So he was killed, and West Zhou 西周 was lost. Other typical historical examples are the imperial concubine Yang Yuhuan 杨玉环 (719-756) and Anshi Turmoil 安史之乱 (755-763) in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) as well as the courtesan Chen Yuanyuan 陈圆圆 (1624-1681) and the Qing army's intrusion into Shanhai Pass 山海关 (1644) in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It is not peculiar in Chinese's historical accounts and literary works that individual romances induce political wars, throwing down a whole country or dynasty. In contrast to history, the plot in "Love in a Fallen City" is an inversion of the cause and effect in the traditional view: war is not the effect of love and marriage, instead, it forces marriage and love to happen. Hence, the narrator is ironic enough to



say: "Hong Kong's defeat had given her victory. But in this unreasonable world, who can say which was the cause and which the result? Who knows? Maybe it was in order to vindicate her that an entire city fell." 香港的陷落成全了她, 但是在这不可理喻的世界里, 谁知道什么是因, 什么是果? 谁知道呢, 也许就因为要成全她, 一个大都市倾覆了(88).

To say the above narration is ironic is because Liusu in the story is nowhere similar to the ancient femme fatale. Her victory is after all a coincidence, and in reality she is powerless and inferior in the traditional patriarchal familial system and remains disadvantaged in her love game with Liuyuan. In the first place, unlike the glamorous historic beauties, she is merely a disgraceful divorcee neither young nor chaste. Her natal family repels her, in that a divorcee or a widow is dishonorable and inferior in a gentry family of scholar-officials like the Bai family. In the Confucian familial system, once the woman marries into her husband's family, she was supposed to be loyal and submissive to her husband for her whole life, and her own family were no longer obligated to support the daughter. A divorcee was neither chaste nor filial. Even though she got remarried, she would not have as much exchange value as an unmarried daughter. So Liusu's siblings and sisters-in-law consider her a freeloader; the fourth sister-in-law ascribes the family's fiscal decline to her ill fortune; her mother also asks her go back to her husband's family to earn her bread; her decision to remarry causes the family to be a laughing stock. As Liusu argues that law has proved the divorce and going back to her ex-husband's family is illegal, her third brother says: "Law, today it changes; tomorrow it also changes. The heavenly principles and human relationships, the Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues will never change! In this life you are a part of his family; after death you are his family's ghost. [...]" 法律呀, 今天改, 明天改, 我这天理人情, 三纲五常, 可是改不了的! 你生是他家的人, 死是他家的鬼 [……] (49).

In the second place, from Liusu's feminine perspective, not only her divorcee identity makes her inferior, her family's snobbishness, gossip, and selfishness also oppresses her psychic feelings. They are snobbish because they scold her, but they also treat her better with hope that she has a possibility to marry the rich; They are gossipy because whoever makes a tiny defect, they will burst out remarking on it; anything immoral will exhilarate them to comment. The apathy and selfishness in the family are represented in her mother's reticence and her memory of her childhood. As she murmurs that "this house is no longer bearable to live in" 这屋子里可住不得了(52), she desperately falls down on her knees by the bed begging her reticent mother for help, a sudden flashback entering her mind:

When she was merely ten years old.... In the midst of a torrential downpour she was separated from her family. She stood alone on the sidewalk, staring at the people, and the people also staring at her, separated by the soaking wet window panes, as if they were separated by an invisible glass cover—innumerous people. Everybody was enclosed in their own little world that she could not bump into, even though she bruised her head trying.

她还是十来岁的时候,看了戏出来,在倾盆大雨中和家里人挤散了。她独自站在人行道上,瞪着眼看人,人也瞪着眼看她,隔着雨淋淋的玻璃窗,隔着一层无形的玻璃罩——无数的陌生人。人人都关在他们自己的小世界里,她撞破了头也撞不进去。(Romances, 52)

The imagery that each person is enclosed in a private world separated by glass panes not only represents the family's alienation, but in a more general sense states the selfish and solitary nature in human beings. Her mother's agreement with the fourth brother makes her realize that "the mother invoked and her real mother were essentially two persons." 她所乞求的母亲跟她真正的母亲根本是两个人 (52). Sorrowfully, angrily, and helplessly, she despairs for her mother and the whole family, and decides to resort to a new marriage as an escape.

In the third place, without the war, Liusu would have failed in her deliberate and pretended courtship game with the playboy. Liuyuan is sly, unwilling to marry her, simply wanting to keep her as his mistress. He fakes his intimacy with her in public, but in private merely flirts in a gentle manner. Liusu understands that his purpose is to have her voluntarily swallow the bait. Unwilling to fall into his trap, she returns to her Shanghai home, expecting his submission. But the second time he requests for her to go to Hong Kong after half a year, she feels, “after a fall, she had already been old for two years—she cannot withstand aging! ... This time, she had long lost the pleasant feeling of the expedition of last time. She failed.” 一个秋天, 她已经老了两年——她可禁不起老! ……这一趟, 她早已失去了上一次的愉快的冒险的感觉。她失败了 (78). Besides her fear of aging, her subjugation mainly comes from “the pressure from the family – the most painful ingredient.” 家庭的压力——最痛苦的成分 (78).

On the other hand, while Liusu is destitute economically, inferior in the patriarchal familial system, repressed in human relationships, and incompetent in her love game, she has a strong will and independent selfhood. In her deliberate performance in the courtship, she is no longer a traditional divorcee; instead, she dramatically changes to assume a modern female role to carry on the flirtation. Chang seems consciously to interweave the traditional and modern time periods together to show Liusu's change of identity. She begins the story with a performance of *Huqin* (Chinese violin) that connotes time displacement: “A *huqin* story should be performed by a radiant entertainer, two long streaks of rouge pointing to her fine, jade-like nose as she sings, as she smiles, covering her mouth with her sleeve.” 胡琴上的故事是应当由光艳的伶人来扮演的, 长长的两片红胭脂夹住琼瑶鼻, 唱了, 笑了, 袖子挡住了嘴 (48). What immediately follows after this scene is the fourth Bai brother sitting by himself on the black ruined veranda playing a *Huqin*. This implies that the Bai residence is like a quasi-stage of an ancient setting

against a larger background of the modern city of Shanghai. As Liusu is ridiculed by her family and decides to seek her fortune again, she climbs upstairs to her bedroom and looks at herself in the mirror,

Following the undulating tune, Liusu's head tilted to one side, and her hands and eyes started to gesture subtly. As she performed in the mirror, the Huqin no longer sounded like a huqin, but like strings and flutes intoning a solemn court dance...Her steps seemed to trace the lost rhythms of an ancient melody.

依着那抑扬顿挫的调子，流苏不由得偏着头，微微飞了个眼风，做了个手势。她对着镜子这一表演，那胡琴听上去便不是胡琴，而是笙箫琴瑟奏着幽沉的庙堂舞曲。她向左走了几步，又向右走了几步，她走一步路都仿佛是合着失了传的古代音乐的节拍 (Chang, 54)

Mirror as an important image in Chang's stories sometimes reflects the elapse of time and spiritual revelation. This scene shows that she will stage a romance similar to those femme-fatales. As "suddenly, she smiled—a private, malevolent smile—and the music came to a discordant halt. Tales of fealty and filial piety, chastity and righteousness have nothing to do with her." 她忽然笑了——阴阴的，不怀好意的一笑，那音乐便嘎然而止。外面的胡琴继续拉下去，可是胡琴诉说的是一些辽远的忠孝节义的故事，不与她相干了 (Chang, 54). This passage shows how Shui Jing 水晶 criticizes that Liusu is a character who does not fit her surroundings (Shui Jing ) and Edward M. Gunn also agrees that this part leaves Liusu's image too vague for her role to be defined (Gunn, 216). But if we read it in terms of the contrast of modernity and tradition, this fantastic description and the sudden stop of the music seems to be a pause in time suggesting Liusu not only is a ghostlike mystery, but she, unlike traditional beauties, will go to play a new kind of role in her modern life, as Leo Ou-fan Lee points out the importance of such a theatrical scene: "thus, role-playing becomes not merely a structural

ingredient in a screwball comedy plot but, more significantly, a necessary act in Liusu's search for identity" (Lee, 294)

However, my view is that Liusu's role-play is not on her own initiative for identity, but more urgently due to her involuntarily struggle for escape and survival. Thus, her performance and strong consciousness in part derives from her repressed selfhood. As she cynically muses on her theatrical style that Liuyuan discovers, "acting an opera, how can I act solitarily? Who wants to be affected—I'm forced to revolt. Others play tricks. If I don't play tricks...others will make me a fool, and will definitely tease me!" 唱戏, 我一个人也唱不成呀! 我何尝爱做作——这也是逼上梁山。人家跟我耍心眼儿, 我不跟人家耍心眼儿, 人家还拿我当傻子呢, 准得找着我欺侮 (71)! Liusu's self-consciousness is strong as she is acting and gambling her future on the love courtship: "of those words he said to her, she did not believe a single sentence.... She could not be unwary—she was a person who had no kin to depend on. She only had herself." 他对她说的那些话, 她一句也不相信。…… 她不能不担心——她是个六亲无靠的人。她只有她自己了 (59). Liusu's frequent monologues suggest her strong narcissism and repression under her masquerade as a role-player.

Liusu's masquerade is resolved by her passion. In contrast to the scene that Liusu performs like an ancient femme fatale in front of a mirror, in a second mirror scene she is removing her "stage costume:" plucking off the barrettes in front of the mirror in her Hong Kong hotel room. Soon Liuyuan begins to kiss her: "He pushed her into the mirror, they seemed to fall down into it, into another shadowy world—freezing cold, searing hot, the flame of the forest burning all over their bodies." 他还把他往镜子上推, 他们似乎是跌到镜子里面, 另一个昏昏的世界里去了, 凉的凉, 烫的烫, 野火花直烧上身来 (79). Gunn comments on this scene that

“the line between reality and fantasy is again blurred” (Gunn, 216). Leo Ou-fan Lee further points out that this episode indicates “the image of herself as a woman subject is now being ‘transgressed’ as a man pushes her ‘into the mirror.’ But once they fall down into the mirror, they enter another world in which reality ceases to count: it is the shadowy world of desire and desolation” (Lee, 297). Liusu’s former search for new identity in the exotic city is burned up by her passions in the fantastic desolate world where no time, history, society, and gender exist, and where everything turns into desolation, which exactly mirrors the desolate ruins of the war. It is on this boundary between reality and fantasy that she seems to be extricated from the heavy burden of reality, needless to act or search a new identity. Only at this half-fantastic and half-realistic moment, Liusu and Liuyuan’s self-consciousness is more vague and thus freer than in the reality.

In reality, ironically, rather than her strong characteristics and selfhood, it is the Sino-Japan war that dramatically changes Liusu’s fate. As Liuyuan in the Repulse Bay Hotel courts Liusu in the midnight on a telephone, he quotes and explains two sophisticated lines from the *Book of Poetry*: “compared to the force from the outside, we people are so small, so small! But we still want to say: ‘I will be with you forever; we shall never be apart throughout all our lifetime.’—as if we are masters of ourselves.” 生死契阔——与子相悦，执子之手，与子偕老。……生与死与离别，都是大事，不由我们支配的。比起外界的力量，我们人是多么小，多么小！可是我们偏要说：‘我永远和你在一起；我们一生一世都别离开。’——好像我们做得了主一样 (75). His explanation of the poem in the midnight sounds irrelevant to the circumstance, neither does it match his identity as an oversea Chinese who has not received any education on Chinese literature. More likely, it is the narrator Chang’s own sentimental comments on the relationship between the individual and the society: the self is feeble, and their

love does not lie at the hands of personal will, but of the outside force.

The relationship between the individual love and war is again suggested through Liuyuan's flirtatious words besides Repulse Bay Hotel, when he sees her fleshy face against the cold and rough walls of grey bricks of a bridge:

This wall unreasonably lets me recall the kind of words of eternity. Someday our civilization will be utterly destroyed, everything ends—burned out, bombed out, crushed out. Perhaps only this wall will remain. Liusu, if at that time we would meet at the end of this wall... Liusu, perhaps you would be a little sincere to me, and me a little sincere to you.

这堵墙不知为什么使我想到了地老天荒那一类的话。……有一天我们的文明整个的毁掉了，什么都完了——烧完了，炸完了，塌完了，也许还剩下这堵墙。流苏，如果我们那时候在这墙根下遇见了……流苏，也许你会对我有一点真心，也许我会对你有一点真心。(Chang, 67-68)

His poetic words, although abrupt, foreshadow the fall of Hong Kong and the destiny of their love. Soon his prophecy comes true alone with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1941. The war prevents Liuyuan's ship from leaving the harbor for London and thus destroys his plan of leaving Liusu as his mistress in Hong Kong. He then goes back to save her from a bomb. On their way to refuge, they are mentally abnormal; lacking of food, they eagerly search and develop a special interest in cooking. They are totally overwhelmed by the dreary scenes of the battlefield that illustrates the emptiness and darkness of the universe - the doom of human civilization. The dreary scenes echo Liuyuan's previous comment, encompassing them in true love:

Liusu was sitting embracing the quilt and was listening to that woeful wind. She really knew that near the Repel Bay that grey-brick wall must still stand firmly there. Wind stopped, like three grey dragons, entwining on the top of the wall with silver scales shining in the

moonlight. Seemingly dreamy, she came to the end of the wall again. Here came Liuyuan to her end. She eventually met Liuyuan.

流苏拥被坐着，听着那悲凉的风。她确实知道浅水湾附近，灰砖砌的那一面墙，一定还屹然站在那里。风停了下来，像三条灰色的龙，蟠在墙头，月光中闪着银鳞。她仿佛做梦似的，又来到墙根下，迎面来了柳原，她终于遇见了柳原。(86)

Note that this time the image of the ruined wall does not appear in reality, but in Liusu's imagination. It is in her daydream that she meets Liuyuan with true love at the end of the wall. "In this turbulent world, wealth, lands, and all that were eternal were completely unreliable. What was reliable was only this breath in her breast, and this man sleeping beside her." 在这动荡的世界里，钱财，地产，天长地久的一切，全不可靠了。靠得住的只有她腔子里的这口气，还有睡在她身边的这个人 (86). In this tumultuous year, the egoists suddenly understand each other, although such understanding last just for an instant, "this blink was long enough for them to live harmoniously together for eight or ten years." 这一刹那够他们在一起和谐的活个十年八年 (86). As Gunn perceives that the story "places in conjunction the intense longing of the lonely, desperate woman with the ruthless fury of the battle that destroys the world she sees as separating her from her desire, be it the commonplace satisfaction of marriage" (216), the war provides the lonely penniless divorcee a chance to win over her repressed family.

Unlike Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Liusu's triumph in escaping does not result in her rebellion against marriage and the familial system. She still conforms to marriage, in a more comfortable way, since, as a woman, all her knowledge is for dealing with household affairs (80). Her seemingly "immoral" acting in courtship is compulsory; a harmonious marriage is her heartfelt desire.



## 2. The Unaffected Female Self in "Accident"

Compared to the flamboyant screwball comedy "Love in a Fallen City," "Accident" is bitter and dreary. It has two plots. One begins with the love affair between Frances, a high-school music teacher, and a science teacher, Ted Makkavala. The other plot is the cut in of the death of Ted's twelve-year-old son whose sled is pushed under a car one wintry December afternoon in 1943. The death of Ted's son subsequently causes his divorce with Greta and his marriage with Frances. This accident makes her wonder if "there was a long chain of things, many of them hidden from her" (*Moon of Jupiter*, 106). But after thirty years, as Frances comes back from Ottawa for her sister's funeral, reminiscing on her past, she finds that the marriage does not change her at all.

The setting of the story is the small town of Hanratty where Christianity prevails. In the inanimate atmosphere of the glee club is rehearsing Christian songs for a Christmas concert, the narrative voice speaks the gloomy transformation of a town-girl: their freshness and sensitivity will change to the "sacrificial looks" of milkiness, dopiness, and stubbornness as they are growing older and get married. The girl's decay fused with the stagnant religious atmosphere in the town, seems to suggest the persistence of the convention. Such persistence essentially is because of "a dreary sort of sex."

Frances is willing to take a risk to get out of the routine of sex. The reason that she wants to take a chance is because one, her belief in her uniqueness, and second, her fear of aging. First, as she looks into the mirror in the teachers' washroom she is cheered up by her own look because her own face in the mirror is "lucky" and "encouraging," prettier than she thinks. The mirror here is similar to that in "Love in a Fallen City" and reflects the heroine's subjectivity and narcissism. While the ancient femme-fatale is the mirror image of Liusu, Frances also has a counterpart,

Natalie, who people usually confuse her with. Natalie is Frances' alter ego. As she breaks her engagement with Paul, another student at the conservatory says to Natalie: "Well, do you really think you can do that much better? You're not the greatest beauty, you know" (78). Yet Frances thinks "the future had something remarkable in store for her" (81).

Second, Frances fears aging as shown in her mother who is "under the sentence of death." Being paralyzed, her mother's daily activities are reading books that Frances borrows from the library, shuffling around from room to room, and cooking. Frances feels repulsed by her. "She was disgusted with her mother's callousness, self-absorption, feebleness, survival, and her wretched little legs and arms on which the skin hung like wrinkled sleeves" (94). The mother in Frances' world, unlike Liusu's mother, is no longer the shelter or the dominating power, but a symbol of a woman's destiny - death. Bronwen Wallace tells us that "in Munro's development of character, we are never far from the persistent reality of their physical bodies" (56). The motif of a woman's aging through her declining physicality is painfully revealed in Frances' mother.

Frances' vision of self-importance and fear of aging initiate her aberrant love affair with Ted. But the love affair is more or less like a deliberate performance:

Perhaps all she has ever wanted was a chance to take chances. But the thought comes to her sometimes that a love affair can be, not artificial, yet somehow devised and deliberate, and occasion provided, just as those silly performances were: a rickety invention. (79)

Frances' performance is not in the interest of Ted, but for the Harantty people. Her performance is due to her outsider identity, because "it is in imagining her affair to be a secret that Frances shows, most clearly, a lack of small-town instincts, a trust and recklessness she is unaware of" (80). While Ted is a Finnish foreigner to Harantty people, Frances is also an outsider shown in her geographical distance and psychological alienation from Ted and the town. At the beginning of the story she is all alone 'loitering' outside the science room where she has no business to be;

she is alone after the accident when Ted goes with his wife to the hospital to sit by his dying son. For her, Greta is a mysterious and powerful woman in that she is behind Ted as his wife in his family, but Frances is not. She is also an outsider because she has been away from the small town for at least four years in the beginning, and at the end she returns from Ottawa to attend her sister-in-law's funeral. Physically, "she has the outsider's quick movements" (81); psychologically, she has "the outsider's innocent way of supposing herself unobserved as she walks from one place to another around town" (81).

Frances's aberrant relationship with Ted Makkavala is under observation in the community due to the small town people's sensitivity. Almost everybody in the town knows their relationship except Ted's wife, Greta, and Frances' mother. Frances has to "smile into the singing faces" and to "make a humorous assenting face" to her colleagues and students so as to conceal her scandals from the public. As Ted's son, Bobby, is killed by a car accident, she pretends she does not know who Bobby is since "she had developed an artificial vagueness in speaking of any of them." But the irony arises as they are together in the science lab, imagining it as a secret, but the secretary comes directly to knock on the door to inform him of his son's death, knowing they are inside.

In Frances' imaginary performance, she acts a role that functions both in a way to search the self and conceal it, since in her fantasy of the "risky and imprudent" woman is what she desires, but in reality the car accident provides her a chance to inspect her love and life. The car accident enables Frances to see her alienation from Ted and the love she has believed in. The unreligious funeral that Ted arranges for his dead son provokes a quarrel between him and Greta's family. As he grumbles the matter to her, Frances thinks: "He did it all for himself. [...] He wasn't thinking of Greta for a moment. Or of Bobby. He was thinking of himself and his

beliefs and not giving in to his enemies ” (103). So “she wasn’t going to be allowed that any more, that indolence and deception” (103). Further, after learning that Greta knows about Ted and Frances from her sister Kartrud, he quickly yells out his abrupt decision to leave her, quit his job and marry Frances in front of the principle, then goes to Frances to propose marriage in her mother’s old-fashioned living room. Frances does not decline, but she wonders:

If he said it just because he could not bear to have anything being set in motion outside his control—and so wastefully, so cruelly—and because he felt bound to conceal from her how small a part she herself had played in all this. No, not a small part; an ambiguous part. There was a long chain of things, many of them hidden from her, that brought him here to propose to her in the most proper place, her mother’s living room. (106-107)

The chain of accidents makes her marriage to Ted possible. But Frances does not feel happiness, even though at this point it seems to have proven her uniqueness and luck in her life as she had foreseen.

She had been made necessary. And it was quite useless to think, would anyone else have done as well, would it have happened if the chain had not been linked exactly as it was? Because it was linked as it was, and it was not anybody else. It was Frances, who had always believed something was going to happen to her, some clearly dividing moment would come, and she would be presented with her future. She had foreseen that, and she could have foreseen some scandal; but not the weight, the disturbance, the possibility of despair, that was at the heart of it. (107)

At the end of the story, after thirty years she is standing greeting people at the Hanratty Funeral Home, wondering about the other possibilities if Bobby Makkavala had not been killed. She realizes that there essentially is no difference inside her life:

What difference, thinks Frances. She doesn't know where that thought comes from or what it means, for of course there's a difference, anyone can see that, a life's a difference. She's had her

love, her scandal, her man, her children. But inside she's ticking away, all by herself, the same

Frances who was there before any of it.

Not altogether the same, surely.

The same.

I'll be as bad as mother when I get old, she thinks, turning eagerly to greet somebody. Never mind. She has a way to go yet. (109)

France's final realization that she is the same as her mother smashes her long standing exaggeration of her uniqueness in her own mind. This isolated female selfhood, untransformed by love, sex, scandal, marriage, children or the death of others, is only affected by aging and death. Therefore, the barely repressed dread in the subtext is revealed as a crucial theme: the female dread is stronger than the desire for love. It is woman's fear of ageing and the loss of her powers of sexual attraction, which gives urgency to this romantic fantasy script as well as the 'edgy sadness' which Munro commented upon.

### 3. Marriage or Death

In summary, both Eileen Chang and Alice Munro depict a similar story pattern: a seemingly "immoral" love affair is resolved by an accident and transforms into marriage. This kind of pattern is unique in that a majority of Chang and Munro's stories deal with the disintegration of a marriage rather than its inversion. As far as the literary tradition is concerned, the creation of such story pattern seems to overthrow the conventional identification of fiction. In fiction, accidents are merely a literary device, imitating life's randomness and inconsequentiality. According to Aristotle, an accident is "a property of a thing which is no part of the essence of the thing."<sup>4</sup> The capriciousness of fortune does not make a tragedy; in the Renaissance, a tragedy

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<sup>4</sup> "accident" *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Simon Blackburn. Oxford University Press, 1996. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. University of British Columbia. 20 April

comes from the characters' moral effectiveness, which means that the protagonists are more often shown to be responsible for their falls through some "flaw" or "hamartia." In his summary of the six stages of the Romantic Route used the love stories in 1910's China, Perry Link points out the weakness of these superficial mandarin duck and butterfly stories in that, one, the characters have perfect personalities; two, tragedies are formed by divine factors such as chance, fortune, and god.<sup>5</sup> However, the accidents in Chang and Munro's stories play an essential role in revealing the female self's ultimate vision in love, family, and marriage, making them indispensable and crucial to the story themes.

The two female images in the stories share many similarities with each of them having various emphases. First, they are outsiders in the community and love. While Liusu, as a divorcee, is inferior in the Confucian familial system, Frances is an outsider to her small-town community and lover both geographically and psychologically. Second, their love affairs provide them a chance to search for a new identity. Besides the important role that passion and sexual desire play in their motivations, Liusu's anxiety for a new identity is mainly initiated by family and economic pressure with fear of aging also as a factor; Frances' identity seeking is, more largely due to her deep terror of aging, death, and the banality of a routine life. Third, both of them have a strong theatrical personality in the love affairs. Their deliberate performance is a way by which they search for their new identity and at the same time conceal their female selfhood. Coming from a decadent Confucian gentry family, as the traditional divorcee image, Liusu's deliberate performance is meant to find her modern identity in the metropolitan society; meanwhile, under her masquerade is her repressed female self in face of the unpredictable reality.

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2004 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t98.e18>>

<sup>5</sup> The six stages he summarizes are (1) Extraordinary Inborn Gifts, (2) Supersensitivity, (3) Falling in Love, (4) Cruel Fate, (5) Worry and Disease, and (6) Destruction. He points out that ill fate 薄命, like those extraordinary inborn gifts in stage (1), is bestowed from beyond the sphere of human control and will arrive to destroy the talent and beauty. For details, see Link, Perry, *Mandarin ducks and butterflies*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1981).

Frances' imaginary acting to the community contains her desire for uniqueness and escape, but it also reveals her self-conceit in love and life. Behind the conceit in the imagined and even marriage, Frances' female self remains unaffected by the outside factors, because of the inevitability of death.

Eileen Chang and Alice Munro, however, conclude the stories in different ways. The female protagonists' final endings in turn suggest the two authors' different visions towards a female self. In "Love in a Fallen City," Liusu is seemingly quite satisfied with reliving her new marriage, although such marriage is as ordinary as another. But Chang extols Liusu's triumph in marriage, categorizing her as a historical femme-fatale. As she writes "Liusu did not feel that her place in history was anything remarkable. She just stood up, smiling, and kicked off the pan of mosquito incense under the table." The irony arises as Liusu's ignorance of her significance contrasts the narrator's praise of her uniqueness in history. Such tension is the tension between the protagonist's unconsciousness and the narrator's consciousness. Through this tension one sees Chang's unusual vision of the female self: marriage is the destiny for an ordinary woman, and gaining a harmonious marriage is a great female triumph. On the other hand, in "Accident" one sees that Frances's mind becomes consistent with the narrator's voice, thinking a changed fate and a new marriage (even though it is satisfying) is nothing important in the face of aging and death. This further reflects a much darker vision toward femininity in marriage and life in Munro's fiction.

## Chapter IV Illusion and Disillusion: The Woman in Imagination

For a woman character in Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's fiction, daydreams may happen as she is reading a novel, appreciating a painting, doing an opera rehearsal, or sitting on an enclosed tramcar, looking at the transient landscape outside the window. The theatre of imagination provides a liminal space for the women characters of Chang and Munro to delineate freely the topography of romances, sexuality, and identity. However, a principle theme of such daydream stories seems to be always the question on the tension between the reality and the imagination: "what happened, after the operetta" (*Lives of Girls and Women*, 116)?

### A. Disarrangement of Art and Life

The world of art shows its plural influences on sexuality and artistic imagination in the female characters in "Changes and Ceremonies," which is included in Alice Munro's first novel, *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971).<sup>1</sup> The novel is generally defined as the growth of the central character Del Jordan, "an artist as a young girl," from childhood through adolescence with the setting in Jubilee and the surrounding countryside. It is the grown-up Del's remembering and writing about her major adolescent episodes; that is to say, while Munro is the real author, the

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<sup>1</sup> Many critics more likely treat the book as a collection of short stories. For example, Heather Jackson asserts: "Perhaps the first thing to say about Alice Munro's novel *Lives of Girls and Women* is that it is not a novel. This is not just carping: it seems to me to be such a good collection of short stories that is [sic] would be a mistake to pretend it is anything else. However, for those who like a novel, it must be admitted that all the stories in *Lives* are set in one place, the small Ontario town which is the context of one girl's life, and that they deal with some of the conventional crises—intellectual and social as well as physical—of growing up." (76) Munro herself also admits that she is "essentially a short writer." "This is why any novel that I write will be said, in some quarters, to be short stories" (Metcalf, 61).



grown-up Del is the fictive writer, and the adolescent first-person narrator in the novel with the closing epilogue "Photographer" has her "double vision": a grown-up narrator's memories and explanations of her experience as a young girl. It also shows Del's innate desire to turn her life into a fiction so that she can learn its form. Besner concisely concludes the following about the value of the novel's form of meta-fiction and the interrelation of life and fiction:

Del's strong need to turn events in her life into episodes in a fiction—to transform her experiences into stories that might reveal the significance of both—suggests some of the connections between living a life and narrating a story, between hearing and recounting different versions of stories, and between understanding autobiography as truths about a life and autobiography as a life story. (34)

Because the narrator Del in *Lives of Girls and Women* is a woman writer, her tie to the world of art is strong. In "Changes and Ceremonies," books provide her imaginative sexual and romantic experiences and help her to interpret her life in Jubilee. Further, books provide Del her "first sustained exploration of how art and life both do and do not reflect each other—and of how art both teaches and does not teach her about life" (Besner, 70). Del in "Changes and Ceremonies" begins the story with the polarity between boys and girls in Jubilee: "Boys' hate was dangerous, it was keen and bright, a miraculous birthright, like Arthur's sword snatched out of the stone, in the Grade Seven Reader. Girls hate, in comparison, seemed muddled and tearful, sourly defensive" (98). The dichotomy between the sexes gives rise to the spontaneous hatred between boys and girls in the 1940's small town. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Del's understanding

of the differences between girls and boys in terms of hatred comes from her literary experience: from "Arthur's sword snatched out of the stone" in the Grade Seven Reader. This metonymy signifies that Del's perception of life is related to the realm of literature.

Del further draws from her readings and experiences of reading to interpret her life. She describes the library full of dull and old books in her high school. She delineates that the books "were like people you saw on the street day after day, year after year, but never knew more than their faces; this could happen even in Jubilee" (99). Del by starting describing the realm of books also comments on the social world of Jubilee. The common description of books and her small-town people, "dull" and "old," makes books represent the common social values in Jubilee.

Moreover, for Del, the habit of reading is also a gender behavior. "Reading books was something like chewing gum, a habit to be abandoned when the seriousness and satisfactions of adult life took over. It persisted mostly in unmarried ladies, would have been shameful in a man" (99). Reading in the library not only provides Del her first vision of sexual experience and love, but also transforms her taste differently from Naomi who has "a typical Jubilee attitude" toward books, and this development runs in a rough parallel with the evolution of Del's friendship with her, further triggering her exigent quest for self-identity. She attempts to mollify Naomi by finding her books that deal with various aspects of sexuality and to justify how literature can be practical and fun as most Jubilee people think. The reading of the agonizing scene of Kristin's giving birth to a baby in *Kristin Lavransdatter* confirms Naomi's received wisdom of marriage

that “if a girl has to get married, she either dies having it, or she nearly dies, or else there is something the matter with it”(100). Besides those practical matters, however, Del feels sadness and happiness in reading: “I was happy in the library. Walls of printed pages, evidence of so many created worlds—this was a comfort to me. It was the opposite with Naomi; so many books weighed on her, making her feel oppressed and suspicious” (99). Reading is the starting point from which she distinguishes herself from her community.

Del in “Baptizing” further talks about her differences from Jubilee girls in reality, shown through her confusions on the stereotypical feminine images in the mass media. Whereas Naomi, Molly and Carla are typical small town girls who always talk about “their diets, skin-care routine, hair shampooing methods, clothes, diaphragms” (149), Del feels embarrassedly awkward in front of them, but is still learning how “to emphasize its good points and minimize the bad of her face, as recommended in the magazines” (150). Although she is not capable of capturing people’s attention, she clearly knows what kind of role the society requires a woman to play: “everything from advertisements to F. Scott Fitzgerald to a frightening song on the radio—the girl that I marry will have to be, as soft and pink as a nursery—was tell me I would have to, have to, learn. Love is not for the undeveloped” (150). The advertisements and literature, as the mass media in the society of Jubilee, function as social requirements and disciplines of women, She is equally trapped in the assertions on women’s self-oriented and daydream peculiarities, the quiz on a girl’s potential to be a boy, and the Freudian psychologist’s comments on the distinctive differences between male and female: “sitting on a park bench, looking at the full moon. The boy

thinks of the universe, its immensity and mystery; the girl thinks, 'I must wash my hair'" (150). All these generalizations of gender distinctions are what Del feels alienated from and revolts against. She also cannot agree with her mother's concept that these scientific comments are "maddening male nonsense" either. She "wanted men to love" her, and wanted to "think of the universe" as she looked at the moon. Del's disorientation in the community she lives in suggests her own identity of ambivalence that blurs the socially formulated boundary between boys and girls. Overall, whereas Del finds herself absorbed in literature and art, she is also trapped in the social and conventional requirements of a woman. Her confusion and struggle in literature and art show her idiosyncratic identity and irreconcilable characteristic of revolting against the social convention.

Del's self-transformation comes from her perception of identity conceived in an imagined and formulated performance, an act in her imagination rather than a supposedly long natural and spontaneous identity.

Swiftly formed fantasies boiled up in me. I pictured a lover, stormy circumstances, doomed throbbing glory of our passion. (It never occurred to me that I was doing what the article said women did, with works of art.) Voluptuous surrender. Not to a man but to fate, really, to darkness, to death. Yet I loved most of all *Carmen*, at the end. *Et Laissez moi passer!* I hissed it between my teeth; I was shaken, imagining the other surrender, more tempting, more gorgeous even than the surrender to sex—the hero's, the patriot's, Carmen's surrender to the final importance of gesture, image, self-created self" (153).

Del's imagination of the "self-created" selfhood and her self-importance frequently references works of art. She finds her own position in the intertextuality of self and art. But her body compared to art, always presents a comic and ironic self-depreciation. As she watches Carmen, she knows an even more important destination than sex. As she reads a line from a poem, "mistresses with great, smooth, marbly limbs," and looks at Cezanne's "Bathes," she is examining her own body in front of the mirror, "but the insides of my thighs quivered; cottage cheese in a transparent sack" (153).

A similar ironic effect of the disarrangement between real life and art pervades in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Art serving as a guiding form and a subject for reflection is pervasive in Munro's writing, but the artistic imagination, and its perceptions on female characters, is sometimes shown to be disguises and tricks upon facing the reality of life. In *Who Do You Think You Are?* Rose seems to discover through the ten stories that art in general always creates a false image of life to her, because she always has different experiences or choices from the aesthetic patterns imposed on her. In "The Beggar Maid," she reads a Yeats' play in which a young bride is lured away by the fairies from her unbearable marriage, but her love with Patrick is unlike the traditional romance, but its inversion: "In actual fact she was the peasant, shocking high-minded Patrick, but he did not look for escape" (99). Rose is also unwilling to play the role of Beggar Maid in the painting of "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid," imposed by Patrick, because behind her seemingly meek and helpless imagery, she conceals all her "energy, laziness, vanity, discontent, ambition" (102). As Clifford refuses to continue their aberrant relationship, her ardor

for enjoying an affair is shamefully repressed, contrary to such passionate Romantic programs as Overture, Serenade, and "Pastoral" Symphony in the concert. She equally feels life's disarrangement in her TV plays performance. She hears about Simon's death as she is on the deck of one of the B.C. ferries playing the role of a girl who is about to jump off the boat because of her pregnancy. The irony emerges to show the contrast between reality and the TV series: the director eventually does not let her throw herself into the sea in the scene, because death in a TV plays never threatens to happen to the protagonists, except to peripheral and unappealing characters. The chaos of the unpredictable life ironically contrasts with the ordered design in art.

People watching trusted that they would be protected from predictable disasters, also from those shifts of emphasis that throw the story line open to question, the disarrangements which demand new judgments and solutions, and throw the windows open on inappropriate unforgettable scenery. (215)

Such disarrangement between life and art in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, as Mathews points out, shows that the aesthetic pattern is possibly, and often probably, "false," in the sense that it does not provide an adequate rendering of the full truth of [Rose's] experience."<sup>2</sup> He also indicates that such "new chunks of information" as the use of the epilogue, and the use of characters, situations, and anecdotes, although not necessary to the development of the main strand of the narrative, "seem to bear some thematic relation to it" (185).

In Chang's *Romances*, art functions as a medium of social ethics and conventions. Unlike

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<sup>2</sup> For a complete analysis of the relation of art and life in Munro's novel *Who Do You Think You Are?*, please see Lawrence Mathews, "*Who Do You Think You Are?: Alice Munro's Art of Disarrangement*," *Probable Fiction* (Ontario: ECW Press 1983) 181-193.

Munro's revolting intellectual women, the individuals in *Romances* are more submissive to social conventions. In "The Time of Youth," the German language book details the common standard for social conceptions and moral exhortation. Such a criterion at the same time also restricts the freedom of behaviors. Ruliang in the story coincidentally encounters a Russian lady Misha who has the same profile as the portrait he habitually draws on his textbooks. He soon falls in love with her in fantastic delight.

Afterwards, he approaches her by becoming her language exchange partner, hoping one day to tell her his affection fluently in German. But as he is studying German, he realizes the circumscription of marriage and social conventions:

In the textbook there were such lines: "Why so slow? Why so urgent? When I ask you to go, why don't you go? When I ask you to come, why don't you come? Why did you beat others? Why did you scold others? Why don't you listen to me? Why don't you follow my suit? For what reason are you so indocile? Why are you wrong?" then in the textbook emerged a feeble plea: "I feel like going out for two hours right now, is that ok? I feel like going back home a bit earlier, is that ok?" then the textbook also weakly advised him: "No matter what the situation, never be careless. No matter what the situation, you must never be self-content.

教科书上就有这样的话: "怎么这样慢呢? 怎么这样急促呢? 叫你去, 为什么不去? 交你来, 为什么不就来? 你为什么打人家? 你为什么骂人家? 为什么不听我的话? 为什么不照我们的样子做? 为了什么缘故, 这么不规矩? 为了什么缘故, 这么不正当?" 于是教科书上又有微弱的申请: "我想现在出去两个钟头儿, 成吗? 我想今天早上出去一会

儿，成吗？”于是教科书又怦然告诫自己：“不论什么事，总不可以大意。不论什么事，总不能称自己的心意的。”(*Romances*, 250)

So, upon seeing the post of the Hollywood movie *A Free Soul*, he stops his courtship and hopes he can have some freedom as a bachelor before marriage. In “Shutdown,” the submissive female intellectual, Cuiyuan, is in a predicament: she works as an English Teaching Assistant at her alma mater, following the expectations of her family, but her life is as vapid as the translations of Bible.

Life was like reading the Bible. It was translated from Hebrew to Greek, Greek to Latin, Latin to English, and English to Mandarin. When Cuiyuan read the Bible, she had to translate it once more in her head, into Shanghainese. Something was sure to be lost in the translation.” (*Traces of Love*, 27)

生命像圣经，从希伯来文译成希腊文，从希腊文译成拉丁文，从拉丁文译成英文，从英文译成国语。翠远读它的时候，国语又在她脑子里译成了上海话。那未免有点隔膜。

(*Romances*, 277)

The truth lost in the process of translation is a metaphor of Cuiyuan’s alienation from the reality of life as she plays the social roles in her family and society.

She was a good daughter, a good student. The people in her family were good people. They bathed everyday, they read the newspaper and when listening to the radio, it wasn’t to Shanghai songs or comic Peking opera or things like that, but to the symphonies of Beethoven or Wagner. They did not understand them, but they listened anyway. (*Traces of Love*, 27)



她是一个好女儿，好学生。她家里都是好人，天天洗澡，看报，听无线电向来不听申曲滑稽京戏什么的，而专听贝多芬瓦格涅的交响乐，听不懂也要听。（*Romances*, 277）

Western art constitutes a major portion of the concept of ideal modern life in “Shutdown.”

Cuiyuan’s family makes a strong effort to appreciate Western art in order to meet the social standard of being a good person. The appreciation of Chinese arts such as Shanghai songs and comic Peking opera is out of fashion, meaning uncultured and vulgar. While the third-person narrator soberly knows that a good life does not mean a true life, it concludes, “Good people outnumbered real people in this world.... Cuiyuan was unhappy”<sup>3</sup> (27).

In summary, art in Alice Munro and Eileen Chang’s fiction functions to serve as a guiding form for the women characters. Chang’s characters are rarely intellectual women. An intellectual woman is also obedient to the social ethic conventions and moral standards. Munro’s intellectual women all develop a special interest in reading and appreciating arts. Yet they ironically become disoriented in the world of art. So they have to find a way out of the moral lessons conveyed by literature, mass media, and more general sense of art itself. The women’s experiences probably are also Munro’s real experience, as her novel *Lives of Girls and Women* was removed from the reading list of an Ontario high school. She complains in an interview:

This has been happening in Huron County, where I live. They wanted *The Diviners*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Catcher in the Rye* taken off, too. They succeeded in getting *The Diviners* taken off. It doesn’t particularly bother me about my book because my book is going to be around in the bookstores. But the impulse behind what they are doing bothers me a great deal. There is

<sup>3</sup> The original text is: 世界上的好人比真人多……翠远不快乐（*Romances*, 274）.

such total lack of appreciation of what literature is about! They feel literature is there to teach some great moral lesson. They always see literature as an influence, not as an opener of life. The lessons they want taught are those of fundamentalist Christianity and if literature doesn't do this, it's a harmful influence. (Twigg, 216)

Furthermore, while art has a strict moral influence on people, it is also at odds with real life. Its restraints on aesthetic patterns and conventions disorient the female ego and threaten the existence of their self-identity. Their way to establish their own identity, however, is still to return to literature, imagination, or art itself. Del in *Lives of Girls and Women*, failed to get a scholarship in the end. Returning to the printed word, not in schoolbooks this time but in newspaper advertisements for jobs in the city, Del decides to escape from Jubilee and chooses yet another persona for herself getting on a bus, like girls in movies leaving home, convents, and lovers.

## **B. Daydreams in Theatre and Train**

### **1. "Changes and Ceremonies"**

It is within the fictive confines of the arts that Del discovers more reality than in real life, and it is within the theatrical and melodramatic contexts that Del attempts to seek and maintain her imagined identity that is so important to her. Del in "Changes and Ceremonies" is moved by the tragic character Pied Piper when she participates in the opera's rehearsals and performance. The operetta has her engraft her daydream love to the Pied Piper role player, her classmate Frank

Wales.

In the operetta, "The Pied Piper," in which the boys and girls perform, Del discovers her love for Frank Wales. We should note that the everyday world of the classroom is a "truce area," until the obligatory hatred between the sexes is erased during the rehearsals for the operetta. As she recalls "I love him. I loved the Pied Piper. I loved Frank Wales" (110); she can love both Frank Wales as the character in the operetta, and naturally love Frank Wales who assumes the role of the Pied Piper, and who in the everyday life is just an average boy apart from his terrible spelling, and soon leaves the school for the working world. The operetta, as Besner concludes, is a "testing-ground" for Del to "try on her fantasies, to allow herself to perceive another person in a more complete incarnation than she would allow herself, or be allowed, in the more anarchic, random, dangerous world of stage" (75).

The operetta is an annual event put on in March in the high school of Jubilee, "which brought different forces into play, and changed everything, for a while" (101). The ones in charge of the operetta rehearsals are Miss Farris, the music teacher, and her hypothetical secret lover, Mr. Boyce. A native of Jubilee, Miss Farris behaves not at all like Jubilee people. Like her own "charming and whimsical" little house, which "doesn't look real," she seems enclosed in a world of girlhood or artistic imagination, not being able to pass through it until she dies, and yet art plays such a crucial role in her life that the boundary between her real life and art becomes ambiguous. She makes herself intricately decorated clothes in addition to the girlish velvet skating costume:

She made all her own clothes. She wore high necks and long chaste sleeves, or peasant drawstrings and rickrack, or a foam of white lacy frills under the chin and at the wrists, or bold bright buttons set with little mirrors. People did laugh at her, though not so much as if she had not been born in Jubilee. Fern Dogherty, my mother's boarder, said, "Poor thing, she's only trying to catch a man. Everybody's got a right to do it their own way, I say." (102)

Miss Farris's world in the eyes of Jubilee people looms girlish and erotic. There are rumors about her goal to "catch a man," Mr. Boyce, and hypothetical scandals between them circulating in the town.

However, Del sees Miss Farris as sexless and theatrical. As she reads Miss Farris's face-- "self-consciously rouged and animated, with flickering commas at the corners of her mouth, bright startled eyes" (103)—she thinks, "whatever she was after, it could not be Mr. Boyce. Fern Dogherty notwithstanding, it could hardly even be men" (103). What Miss Farris is after is such a theatrical worlds of *The Pied Piper*, *The Gypsy Princess*, *The Stolen Crown*, *The Arabian Knight*, *the Kerry Dancers*, and *The Woodcutter's Daughter* that she directs, representing the life she assumes her fate belongs to. These operettas are more real to her than the real world as the souls and events she recalls are only relating to the operettas. As she exhilaratingly recalls Pierce Murray in 1937 playing the captain in *The Gypsy Princess*, she seems to ignore the fact that he is killed later in the Air Force, since for her nothing is important except operetta. Miss Farris's ignorance of war is a resonance of the new identity of Mr. Boyce, the English school teacher who has experienced the war and survived the sinking of the *Athenia*. On the stage of Jubilee and

Miss Farris's operetta, people hide behind their former experiences and memories, and time has ceased. It seems that like Miss Farris's house, in the world of art there are "no secrets, and no contradictions." Del sees that "all [Miss Farris's] stage directions, dancing directions, were willfully, splendidly exaggerated, as if she thought to amaze us into self-forgetfulness" (109). No matter whether the self-forgetfulness Del means is real or just ironic, it seems such selfhood has nothing to do with gender, sexuality, or time, since Miss Farris's passion toward operetta has freed people from the routine of their lives, and more importantly, transcended beyond what obsesses the adolescent Del in the operetta, love. Del's imagination and experiences of the relations between life and art in "Changes and Ceremonies" will develop later into "her insights into the connections between her life in Jubilee and her own art as a writer" in "Baptizing" (Besner, 69).

Similarly, Del in "Changes and Ceremonies," following the staging of the operetta, returns, with some relief, to her routines. But Del recognizes that she has already changed her perceptions to reality. One comical sign of this in the classroom is the janitor's removal of an old sock, long thought to be a condom, from one of the hanging lights. As Del reflects in an observation that takes in more territory than this episode, it "seemed to be a time for dispelling illusions" (117). The aura of brutality, mystery, and danger surrounding sexuality has begun to disperse, and the romantic and melodramatic veils suspended over love have also begun to lift. Even the change of season from winter to spring helps to reveal the ordinary aspects of Jubilee and the surrounding countryside. Del conceives of winter as an enclosing season in which, as in the operetta,

“fantastic hopes might bloom” (117), so that it is winter, and not spring, that seemed to her to be the season for love. But this illusion, as well, has been dispelled in the very process of identifying it. Reality intervenes in other, more predictable ways to dispel what Del now calls her “daydreams,” as Frank Wales leaves high school and goes to work for Jubilee Dry Cleaners. It takes Del some six months to grow out of her attraction to Frank Wales, but after “three or four years” when “Miss Farris was drowned in the Wawanash River” (117), her death also arouses people’s interest so that people doubt if “she had broken out to commit this act” (118). “She sent those operettas up like bubbles, shaped with quivering, exhausting effort, then almost casually set free, to fade and fade but hold trapped forever our transformed childish selves, her undefeated, unrequited love” (118).

## 2. “Wild Swans” and “Shutdown”

Intriguingly, I find two similar daydream-on-a-bus stories in Eileen Chang and Alice Munro’s works. One is Chang’s “Shutdown” in *Romances*, and the other is Munro’s “Wild Swans” in *Who Do You Think You Are?*. The train or tramcar both provide a liminal space for the heroines to daydream in the ambiguous area that lies between fantasy and reality, since we are not sure if it is an imagination being created in the heroine’s consciousness or a reality happening abruptly. Moreover, Eileen Chang and Alice Munro both relate the woman’s romantic or sexual experiences on the train to the larger and transforming landscape and cityscape.

In “Wild Swans,” Rose is going to Toronto on the train for the first time by herself. In the story, a United Church minister in uniform came and sat besides her and began talking about a

flock of swans. Soon Rose feels a hand touching her leg. She is uncertain that "her imagination seemed to have created his reality, a reality she was not prepared for," yet the reality of the man is tangible enough, with "something crude and pushy and childish about him" (*Who Do You Think You Are?*, 64). As the man's hand is moving, we also witness its relationship with changes from landscapes to cityscapes as seen through the window as the train crosses the Niagara Escarpment:

... as they looked down at the preglacial valley, the silver-wooded rubble of little hills, as they came sliding down to the shores of Lake Ontario, she would make this slow, and silent, and definite, declaration, perhaps disappointing as much as satisfying the hand's owner. He would not lift his eyelids, his face would not alter, his fingers would not hesitate, but would go powerfully and discreetly to work. Invasion, and welcome, and sunlight flashing far and wide on the lake water; miles of bare orchards stirring round Burlington. (76-77)

The experience is over along with the train's arrival at the city. "Victim and accomplice she was borne past Glassco's Jams and Marmalades, past the big pulsating pipes of oil refineries" (77). And as the train is gliding into the suburbs, in an unrealistic vision, Rose sees the bedsheets and towels "used to wipe up intimate stains" flapped leeringly on the clotheslines. She sees the children "frolicking lewdly in the schoolyards," and "the truckdrivers stopped at the railway crossings must be thrusting their thumbs gleefully into curled hands" (77). Rose's emerging vicarious escapade ends when the minister silently gets off the train. Yet Rose still remains suspended in the moment of transformation and feigning. She pretended to be the movie star

Frances Farmer and booked herself in to Georgian Bay under the name of Florence Farmer, giving everybody the idea she was really Frances Farmer on vacation, not wanting to be recognized (79). She is eager for such kind of metamorphosis “to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named, skin” (79).

In “Shutdown,” at the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the railings of a tram bus with the use of “simile,” comparing the railings to the two earthworms: “They stretched and contracted, stretched and contracted, making their way forward, slippery-smooth – on and on they stretched, without end”<sup>4</sup> (22). By using this simile the railings become at once real and imaginary, since the endless earthworm seems to imply not only the infinity of space, but also the continuity of time. The narrator continues:

If not for the shutdown, the tram could have gone on for an eternity. Shutdown! Bells rang:

“Ding-ding-ding-ding...,” every “ding” a cold dot in the air. Dot after dot, the sound of the bells cut a dotted line through time and space.

The vast city dozed off in the sunlight, its head resting heavily on people’s shoulders. Its drool trickling down their clothes. An unimaginable heaviness pressed down upon every person.

(22-23)

如果不碰到封锁，电车的进行是永远不会断的。封锁了。摇铃了。“叮铃铃铃铃，”

每一个“玲”字是冷冷的一小点，一点一点连成了一条虚线，切断了时间与空间。

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<sup>4</sup> The original text is: 抽长了，又缩短了；抽长了，又缩短了，就这么样往前移——柔滑的，老长老长的曲蟾，没有完，没有完……



这庞大的城市在阳光里睡着了，重重地把头搁在人们的肩上，口涎顺着人们的衣服缓缓流下去，不能想象的巨大的重量压住了每一个人。（*Romances*, 274）

The “ding” sound of the bell with the use of synaesthesia turns into a visual sign that cuts off time and space, and the city is personified as a dozing person, so the particular “real” city and tram bus in the period of shutdown become an allegory that provides a particular imaginative background for the protagonists’ romantic fantasies to take place. Within such an atmosphere, a man in his thirties nudges his way and sits next to the young English teacher Cuiyuan on the tram car in order to hide from his nephew on the same car who wants to marry his daughter for money. They start a flirtatious conversation, and soon fall in love, because it is only on the tram car that they can remove their social and familial masks to feel true emotions between the sexes.

Cuiyuan, who receives higher education as demanded by her family, is a “good” daughter, “good” student, and “good” teacher in society, but not a “real” woman. As the very few female intellectuals in Chang’s stories, Cuiyuan is an image of tediousness and obedience. She looks like one of those churchy matrons, wearing a white linen cheongsam embroidered with thin blue piping; her face is flabby and shapeless; her hair style is nondescript. Cuiyuan in the eyes of Zongzhen is like “the white of toothpaste squeezed from the tube” (29). Real feelings such as anger and love hence become Cuiyuan’s innermost aspiration. So as Cuiyuan meets Zongzhen, she soon becomes pleased and falls in love with him because he is a real and live person, “Not very honest, nor very bright, but a real, live person”<sup>5</sup> (30)!

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<sup>5</sup> The original text is: 不很诚实，不很聪明，但是一个真的人！

The contradiction between the social role-play and true love is also seen in Zongzhen:

In usual life he was an accountant. He was a child's father. He was the housemaster. He was a passenger on the bus. He was a customer in stores. He was a citizen. But to this woman who did not know any background details about him, he was only a simple man. (*Traces of Love*, 31)

平时，他是会计师，他是孩子的父亲，他是家长，他是车上的搭客，他是店里的主顾，他是市民。可是对于这个不知道她的底细的女人，他只是一个单纯的男子。

However, as they begin to talk about the possibility of marriage, they still have to worry about societal and family background restrictions; their marriage is just like a bubble. A few hours later, as the air raid is lifted, the tram starts again. The story ends.

The tram lights were switched on. She opened her eyes and saw him sitting far away in his old seat! She was shocked—he had not gotten off, after all! She understood now. Everything that had taken place during the shutdown hadn't happened at all. The whole of Shanghai had fallen asleep and dreamed an absurd dream. (36)

电车里点上了灯，她一睁眼望见她遥遥坐在他原先的位子上。她震了一震——原来他并没有下车去！她明白他的意思了：封锁期间的一切，等于没有发生。整个的上海打了个盹，做了个不近情理的梦。(284)

The crucial point of this ending, like the story's beginning, is to make the heroine's romantic fantasy an allegory of the whole city's seal-off. Cuiyuan's disillusion comes as soon as the air

raid lids off. She does not have any control over her romance, as the shutdown is unpredictable. The social ethics and the war are an invisible threatening force haunting the city and controlling the individual. On the other hand, however, without this metropolis, its tram cars, the air raid, and the modern material society as a background of the story, the protagonists' daydreams for love would have been impossible, as Rey Chow remarks that this aesthetic space in the tram car gives the heroine the freedom to imagine a romance that does not exist in reality.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of writing style, the protagonists' daydreams are not presented through the use of stream of consciousness or montage, but a similar effect is achieved by Chang's prose style. Her use of third person narration gives a big chunk of information ancillary, but thematically related to the story. The metaphors of the Bible and toothpaste, the personification of the city of Shanghai, the ironic description of the social roles that the protagonists are forced to play, all these seemingly casual depictions furnish the common romantic plot of love at first sight, providing rich and allegoric meanings to its readers. The daydream is ephemeral, and what follows is the permanence of this material society, class divisions, social mores, and the threat of war. "The tram driver raised his voice to sing: 'Have pity! Have pity! Pity a poor penniless soul--' A poor old seamstress in a panic ran across the road in front of the tram. The driver shouted at her: 'Pig!'"<sup>7</sup> (36)

If we compare "Shutdown" and "Wild Swans," we see that the heroines both encounter

<sup>6</sup> For details, see Rey Chow 周蕾, *Techniques, Aesthetic Space, and Women Writers*, 技巧、美学时空、女性作家, Reading Eileen Chang 阅读张爱玲, ed. David D.W. Wang (Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Company 麦田出版股份有限公司 1999) 161-177.

<sup>7</sup> The original text is: 开电车的放声唱道: "可怜啊可怜! 一个人啊没钱! 可怜啊可——" 一个疯穷婆子慌里慌张掠过车头, 横穿过马路。开电车的大喝道: "猪猡" (封锁, 284)!

particularly sexual or romantic experiences in a moving and enclosed space. In this unaffected space between fantasy and reality, out of the restraints of social mores and conventions, the heroines are completely indulged in their experiences, because they are eager for them. For Cuiyuan, she desires an impassionate romance with a real and unmasked man, rebelling from the social and familial requirements imposed on her. For Rose, she needs a vicarious escapade, not only to escape from her rural Ontario town to the big city, but in a more preposterous way: to enjoy shameful adultery and humiliation, and to enter on adventures in disguise and impersonation. Yet after the heroines' daydreams are over, we again see Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's different treatments of story endings. In "Shutdown," a daydream will never last long. The overwhelming power of the social pressure is always dragging people back to the cruel reality. The protagonists are not courageous enough to break through the system, since they are merely common and feeble individuals. In "Wild Swan," however, we see the continuity of Rose's adventure from the train to the society. Rose's constant impersonation and transformation is derived from her innate disposition to imitate and act. Her ability to continue her daring and unconventional behavior demonstrates her persistence, shedding light on her success in finding her own identity in the future.

## Conclusion    Femininity

It seems to me very important to be able to get at the exact tone or texture of how things are. I

can't really claim that it is linked to any kind of a religious feeling about the world, and yet

that might come closest to describing it. (Alice Munro, Gibson Interview, 241)

I always like the story I'm trying to write at the moment the best. (Alice Munro)

While it is doubtless easy to say that the word "fantasy" denotes delusive imagination, hallucination, or a day-dreaming arising from conscious or unconscious wishes, the word "reality" is rather ambivalent in the fiction of Alice Munro and Eileen Chang. Both tendencies, the inner life of the mind and reality, penetrate each other. As Virginia Woolf notes "what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates."<sup>1</sup> "The skin of the day," being a vital element in their work, provides the list of realistic details that ground readers in the surface of the reality of daily life. The less visible kind of reality, the reality of the mind and emotions, or the psychological and metaphysical reality, as a well-preserved kernel, sheds its powerful light on "the skin of the day."<sup>2</sup>

Alice Munro's works have been hailed by various critics as "realism" (Bowering 4), "super-realism" (Gervais 9), "heightened realism," and "visionary photographic realism"

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<sup>1</sup> I cannot find the origin of the quotation.

<sup>2</sup> In this opening part I borrow some structures from Eunice Glenn's article, "Fantasy in the Fiction of Eudora Welty," since both Eileen Chang and Alice Munro are compared to Eudora Welty by some critics. The article is included in *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction 1920-1951* ed. John W. Aldridge, (New York: The Ronald Press Company 1952) 506-518.

(Mallinson 70).<sup>3</sup> Each term is related in some way to realism, and yet each term suggests a widely differing connotation, since the art of “double vision” represented in her works has “deepened the channel of realism.” In interviews, she has often been quoted as saying that she is very concerned with the surfaces of life. Her fiction has been compared to a documentary movie, the paintings by the magic realist painters like Edward Hopper and Alex Colville, or the grotesque photographs of Walker Evans and Diane Arbus.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, she wants to present ordinary experience with such intensity that it stands revealed as something extraordinary. Eileen Chang’s works have been referred to as “realism,” “intimate boudoir realism” (Hsia 396), “symbolism” (Hsia 396), “gothic romances” (Tang Wenbiao 唐文标), and “feminine gothic realism” (Wang, 376). To say her works are “realism” is because she never tires of describing details in material environments. Her psychological descriptions are heavily dependent on the figurative analogies of the material world (Wang, 337). As for “boudoir realism,” Hsia indicates that the world of Eileen Chang is full of rich imagery of nature, mansions, clothing, colors and smells, and her visual imagination “rises on occasion to a Keatsian opulence” (396). Chang is also “the foremost symbolist” among Chinese writers of fiction because the imagery in her fiction such as moon and flowers reflect various emotional nuances. Tang trenchantly points out that Chang’s fictive world is an enclosed “desolate, dark, and dead” world of the past, of the culture of decadence. In the society of transience, old-fashioned people still persist on their own

<sup>3</sup> York, Lorraine M., *The Other Side of Dailiness*, (Toronto: ECW Press, 1988) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Struthers, J.R., “The Real Material: An Interview with Alice Munro,” *Probable Fictions*, ed. Mackendrick, Louis K. (Ontario: ECW Press 1983) 2.

moral values and religions, living enclosed like ghosts with hopelessness and desolation,<sup>5</sup> whereas David De-wei Wang places Chang within the tradition of gothic feminism. Her fiction's interior feminine boudoir and bedrooms reflect women's psychic complexity in the patriarchal world of chaos and turbulence.<sup>6</sup> Among Western landscape paintings, Chang favors the postimpressionist, Paul Cézanne's "The House with Cracked Walls;" Munro, however, prefers the ordinary photographs of the middle-class suburban backyard to an extreme grotesque picture, as she believes a simple picture can have "a powerful effect that cannot be analyzed."<sup>7</sup> Overall, a point in common in the fiction of Alice Munro and Eileen Chang is that they both show the reality of life on the surfaces of daily life; that is, a surface is not merely a surface; it is a reflection of a deeper mystery, either in the perceived world, or more often, within the perceiver.

#### A. Surface of Life: Details

The two female writers, Chang and Munro, artistically formulate the material world under the surface of reality, especially abundant domestic still-life subjects. The women characters and the writers are particularly obsessive with the small things around them, food, interior design, female fashion, costumes and dresses. Through a description of a variety of these domestic objects, Chang and Munro have the ability to render the objects with a power of subjective authority. For example, in "Royal Beating," while describing the scene where Rose's father was

<sup>5</sup> For a complete analysis of Tang Wenbiao's criticism, see "Yiji yiji zouxiang meiyou guang de suozai" 一级一级走向没有光的所在, *Huali Yingchen* 华丽影沉, ed. Jin Hongda 金宏达, (Beijing 北京: Culture and Art Publishing 文化艺术出版社 2003) 98-126.

<sup>6</sup> For a complete analysis of the influence studies in the tradition of feminine gothic, see Wang, De-wei David, "Nu zuojia de xiandai guihua," 女作家的现代鬼话, ed. Jin Hongda 金宏达, *Huali Yingchen* 华丽影沉 (Beijing 北京: Art and Culture Publishing 文化艺术出版社)

<sup>7</sup> Struthers, J.R. (Tim), "The Real Material: an Interview with Alice Munro," *Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts*, ed. Louis K. Mackendrick, (Downsview: ECW Press, 1983) 6.

going to beat her, Munro depicted the furnishing of the house, showing a theatrical moment in daily life:

She tries again looking at the kitchen floor, that clever and comforting geometrical arrangement, instead of looking at him or his belt. How can this go on in front of such daily witnesses—the linoleum, the calendar with the mill and creek and autumn trees, the old accommodating pots and pans? ... Those things aren't going to help her, none of them can rescue her. They turn bland and useless, even unfriendly. Pots can show malice, the patterns of linoleum can leer up at you, treachery is the other side of dailiness. (*Who Do You Think You Are?*, 20)

In "Simon's Luck," Rose's exhausted psychological state, her failure in love, is explicitly reflected through her disappointment at the empty dishes in the restaurant: "It was those dishes that told her changed state. ... All she could have said was that she saw them in a way that wouldn't be possible to a person in any stage of love" (212). These domestic furnishings and dishes in Munro's fiction suggest a woman's psychological status. As Beverly J. Rasporich perceives, Munro's fictional world is very often both *internal* and *external* surface: when the whole scenery was illuminated like a Chinese nightlight, it animatedly refracted the internal psychological life of a female protagonist.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, in Eileen Chang's fictional world, we see abundant details as domestic privacies that are records of time past, emotions, arts, and memories. As Chang'an sorrowfully declines the

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<sup>8</sup> Rasporich, Beverly Jean, *Dance of Sexes* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 1990) 130.



marriage proposal of Tong Shifang in “The Golden Cangue,” Chang describes the moment she bids him farewell at the gate by portraying the trees in the courtyard and the embroidered flowers on her sleeves:

He went through the patio of bricks. A tree was growing inside the courtyard. The dead branches of the tree all imprinted highly on the natterblue sky, looking like the cracks on the porcelain wall. Chang'an quietly followed behind him, sending him off. On the dark blue long sleeves of her cheongsam were printed the light yellow daisies. She clasped her hands together. Her face showed a kind of unusual softness.

他穿过砖砌的天井，院子正中生着树，一树的枯枝高高印在淡青的天上，像瓷上的冰纹。

长安静静的跟在他后面送了出来。她的藏青长袖旗袍上有着浅黄的雏菊。她两手交握着，脸上现出稀有的柔和。(Romances, 46)

The natural image of the dead tree and the artificial images of the cracks on the porcelain wall as well as the chrysanthemums on her sleeves overlap together, showing a sense of subtlety and emotional nuance. The image of the dead implies the end of the romantic love.

Further, the domestic details and the artificial items in Chang's fictional world are not only real objects, but also frequently appear as images of metaphors as Chang describes natural landscapes, people, and emotions. The sky and sea in the night is metaphorically described as a kind of white cipolin Chinese screen 云母石屏风 (“Jasmine Tea”); the sunset scenery is “a logo picture on the lid of a humidior” 雪茄烟盒盖上的商标画 (“Aloewood Ashes—First Burning”); the moon is like “a theatrical mask” 戏剧化的脸谱 (“The Golden Cangue”); a loving woman

character is “a butterfly specimen in a glass box, bright and bleak.” 玻璃匣子蝴蝶的标本, 鲜艳而凄苍 (“The Golden Cangue”); a married woman is “a final snow-white and dazzling ‘the end’ on a movie screen” 银幕上最后印出的雪白耀眼的“完”字 (313); but an unmarried woman is “a wonderful movie preview” 精彩的下期佳片预告 (313). A married woman is “a bird embroidered on the screen—on the melancholic purple silk screen, a white bird in the golden clouds. Throughout the years and months, its feathers became darker and moldy, being eaten by moths. If it died, it could only die on the screen.” 她是绣在屏风上的鸟——悒郁的紫色缎子屏风上, 织金云朵里的一只白鸟。年深月久了, 羽毛暗了, 霉了, 给虫蛀了, 死也还死在屏风上 (“Jasmine Tea,” 98). The recurrent images of domestic trivialities, no matter whether

they are in the fictional space or in the language, seem to bear an emotional subjectivity, as Leo

Ou-fan Lee summarizes:

Chang uses clocks frequently in her stories, together with old mirrors, antique screens, curtains old photo albums, dried flowers, and various other objects, to punctuate the special poignant moments in the lives of her transitional characters—moments in which they must wrestle with their emotional entanglements with memories of the past in an attempt to face new realities. (275)

## B. Theatricality: Dramatization of the Moment

David Helwig gives criticism on Munro’s ability to focus on the minute things: “her work consists of an expansion inward rather than outward, the discrimination of tone and language that makes the small event in a provincial society an important human matter. It is perhaps essentially

feminine art" (128). The small event in her fiction will usually become a ritual ceremony, at the center of the story, as Catherine Sheldrick Ross notes:

At the centre of a story by Munro is quite likely to be a ceremonial event such as a school play, an annual party, a dance, a first date, a home-coming, or a memorial service. The encounter with death and the initiating into sexual roles are the two most important ritualized events used, and they are repeated with variation in the first four books." ("At least Part legend," 113)

In "Privilege," for instance, Munro depicts a game of funerals:

Cora lay heaped with flowers, lilac, and wore her rose crepe dress. Also some beads, a brooch that said her name in green sequins, heavy face powder. Sadly singing, laying down lilacs, Rose was close enough to commit some act of worship.... She could only pile up details to be thought over later... when she thought of Cora she had the sense of a glowing dark spot, a melting center, a smell and taste of burnt chocolate, that she could never get at. (*Who Do You Think You Are?*, 41)

The game of funerals becomes Rose's worship ceremony toward her idol Cora. The dramatization of the details about Cora bespeaks Rose's feeling of worship. The particular moment that lingers in Rose's memory is also related to the fragmentary details of the event.

Eating food in "Royal Beating" also seems to be a theatrical event for Rose, who has been beaten by her father.

She will turn away, refuse to look, but left alone with these eatables will be miserably tempted, roused and troubled and drawn back from thoughts of suicide or flight by the smell of salmon, the anticipation of crisp chocolate, she will reach out a finger, just to run it around the edge of one of the sandwiches (crusts cut off!) to get the overflow, get a taste. Then she will decide to eat one, for strength to refuse the rest. One will not be noticed. Soon, in helpless corruption, she will eat them all. She will drink the chocolate milk, eat the tarts, eat the cookies. She will get the malty syrup out of the bottom of the glass with her finger, though she snuffles with shame. Too late. (Who Do You Think You Are?, 23)

Eating food here is dramatized as an event that is also filled with various details about food. It shows Rose's emotional desire for pleasure and luxury. The celebration of food-eating in context further shows Rose's sense of shame and humiliation.

The theatrical events in Chang's fiction generally is represented as her employment of theatrical and film techniques, which makes her characters and stories seem like "putting on a show." The staged show has its implication on the change of tradition and modernity. For example, the beginning of "Love in a Fallen City" is like a staged play in the style of the local Shanghai opera. Liusu mounts the stage like a theatrical actress playing an ancient femme-fatale, and the background music is the performance of *Huqin* (Chinese violin):

Following the undulating tune, Liusu's head tilted to one side, and her hands and eyes started to gesture subtly. As she performed in the mirror, the huqin no longer sounded like a huqin, but like strings and flutes intoning a solemn court dance...Her steps seemed to trace the lost rhythms of an ancient melody.

依着那抑扬顿挫的调子，流苏不由得偏着头，微微飞了个眼风，做了个手势。她对着镜子这一表演，那胡琴听上去便不是胡琴，而是笙箫琴瑟奏着幽沉的庙堂舞曲。她向左走了几步，又向右走了几步，她走一步路都仿佛是合着失了传的古代音乐的节拍。

(*Romances*, 54)

The staged scene is related to the connection between tradition and modernity, implying the traditional heroine's search for modern identity. The following scenes of the story in Hong Kong with her abundant sophisticated flirtations, as Leo Ou-fan Lee perceives, are a kind of mimicry of Hollywood screwball comedies, and the whole story could be easily transformed into a screenplay with various film shooting techniques.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, a theatrical moment in Chang's fiction also shows an epiphany. That is, the particular moment, usually a marriage ceremony or a sorrowful scene, embraces a kind of spiritual or metaphysical light from a seemingly gothic world. Mi Xiya's wedding in "The Time of Youth" is theatrical and gothic. Mi Xiya's new husband is Russian constable, and a blundering and spoiled alcoholic and these incapacities suggest the hardship in her marital life. She solemnizes her marriage in a Russian chapel, yet it is badly organized. The monk in the ceremony is like a ghost. "Not the ghost in the Chatting Studio, but the ghost swarmed with termites in the tomb of righteousness." 不是“聊斋”上的鬼，是义冢里的，白蚂蚁钻进钻出的鬼。Yet, regardless of these negative elements, Mi Xiya is still immersed in her wedding ceremony as if she is performing a solo:

<sup>9</sup> For a complete analysis of "Love in a Fallen City" in terms of film techniques see Leo ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2000) 289-303.

She seemed to have determined to create a little beautiful memory for herself. She held the white candle in her hands, piously bending her head. ... She fabricated for herself the mysterious and dignified aura that a bride should have, although the priest was spiritless, the monk was extremely dirty, the groom was impatient, and her costume was rented or lent. She had only this one day from the cradle to the grave. There should be something worth remembering when she was in her old age.

她仿佛是下了决心，要为她自己制造一点美丽的回忆。她捧着白蜡烛，虔诚地低着头，脸的上半部在障纱的影子里，脸的下半部在烛火的影子里，摇摇的光与影中现出她那微茫苍白的笑。她自己为自己制造了新嫁娘应有的神秘与尊严的空气，虽然神甫无精打彩，

虽然香伙出奇的肮脏，虽然新郎不耐烦，虽然她的礼服是租来的或是借来的。她一辈子

就只这么一天，总得有点值得一记的，留到老年时去追想。(Romances, 252-253)

This marital ceremony for the heroine is an unusually dramatized moment, since Mi Xiya has to act as an ideal bride in her imagination for the sake of her fading youth, essentially, for herself.

Mi Xiya's wedding is a recurrence of Yuqing's wedding in "Great Felicity" 鸿銮禧. The décor of the Xiangyun Clothing Emporium is complete with gold dragon reliefs, but "there was a kind of egalitarian and inhuman cheer about the little vermilion room." 朱红的小屋里有一种一视同仁的，无人性的喜气 (314). As she prepares her dowry, she buys whatever she sees.

Yuqing had also bought a satin embroidered night-dress, a matching embroidered robe, a silk padded morning gown, embroidered padded slippers, a cloisonné compact and a purse mirror with its own zippered suede cover. She believed that a woman only had one chance in her life to indulge herself, and she should make the most of it. Whatever she saw, she bought, as if

there was no tomorrow. There was a kind of valediction and desolation in her heart. Her

sadness as she shopped for her trousseau was not entirely put on. (*Traces of Love*, 41)

玉清还买了软缎绣花的睡衣，相配的绣花浴衣，织锦的丝棉浴衣，金织锦拖鞋，金珧琅粉镜，有拉链的鸡皮小粉镜；她认为一个女人一生就只有这一个任性的时候，不能不尽量使用她的权利，因此看见什么买什么，来不及地买，心里有一种决撒的，悲凉的感觉，所以她的办嫁妆的悲哀并不完全是装出来的。 (*Romances*, 314)

The feminine clothing and accessories for a wedding listed here seem to show a sense of desolation, foreshadowing the pessimistic future of a woman's marriage. In the wedding,

The magnificent procession of bride, groom, groomsmen and bridesmaids marched slowly in.

In that moment of breathless anticipation, there was goodwill and poetry: pink and pale yellow bridesmaids were like the colorful clouds of dawn. The black-jacketed men were like swallows, dark shadows gliding through the clouds. The white bride with her half-closed eyes was like a corpse who had not quite awakened at the dawn of its resurrection—her glow was understated. (*Traces of Love*, 53)

新郎新娘男女宾相的辉煌的行列徐徐进来了。在那一刹那的屏息的期待中有一种善意的，诗意的感觉；粉红的，淡黄的女宾相像破晓的云，黑色礼服的男子们像云霞里慢慢飞着的燕的黑影，半闭着眼睛的白色的新娘像复活的清晨还没醒过来的尸首，有一种收敛的光。 (*Romances*, 322)

The seemingly gothic aura surrounding the bride and the wedding suggests once more the narrator Eileen Chang's pessimistic view towards marriage.

The last gothic moment I would like to provide as an example is the moment when Qiqiao in

“The Golden Cangue” looks through out the window as the man she loves storms away in anger. The window as part of the interior space seems to be an imaginary space revealing an individual’s metaphysical mind, as Marilyn Julian notes. “Fascinating are the windows in these stories. Characters peer out of them or stare into them. ... Romance, Ideals, Disillusionment. Attempted Escape. Reality. ... Always there is the figurative shattering of window glass.”<sup>10</sup>

She reached the window and pulled aside the dark green foreign-style curtains fringed in little velvet balls. He was leaving the alley, his gown slung over his arm. Like a flock of white pigeons, the wind on that sunny day fluttered inside his white silk blouse and trousers. It penetrated everywhere, flapping its wings.

The tiny shrunk image of a policeman reflected faintly in the top corner of the window glass ambled, swinging his arms. A rickshaw quietly ran over the policeman. A little boy with his long gown tucked up into his trouser waist ran kicking a ball out on the edge of the glass. A postman in green riding a bicycle superimposed his image over the policeman as he streaked by. All ghosts, ghosts of many years ago or the unborn of many years hence... what is real and what is false?” (“The Golden Cangue,” 585)

她到了窗前，揭开了那边上缀有小绒球的墨绿洋式窗帘，季泽正在弄堂里往外走，长衫搭在臂上，晴天的风像一群白鸽子钻进他的绸裤褂里去，哪儿都钻到了，飘飘拍着翅子。

玻璃窗的上角隐隐约约反映出弄堂里一个巡警的缩小的影子，晃着膀子踱过去，一辆黄包车静静在巡警身上辗过。小孩把袍子掖在裤腰里，一路踢着球，奔出玻璃的边缘。绿

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from Beverly J. Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1990) 144.



色的邮差骑着自行车，复印在巡警身上，一溜烟掠过。都是些鬼，多年前的鬼，多年后的没投胎的鬼……什么是真的，什么是假的？(*Romances*, 26)

Through the eyes of the heartbroken heroine, the window leads to another world, a world that is near but also remote from her, a world where her lover lives and gothic phantoms flit, a world that mingles the transparent past and future with the opaque present.

Overall, in both of Alice Munro and Eileen Chang's fiction, the reality of the inner mind and the reality of everyday life transcend each other. Domestic privacies such as food, clothing, accessories, and furnishing bespeak a distinct hallmark of the ideology of femininity. Since Chang and Munro make use of these quotidian details to reflect the subtlety of a woman's psychological, emotional, and metaphysical reality, as critic Brownmiller comments:

This recording of time past, the formulation of art as subjective, emotive memorabilia, is also very much a feminine accomplishment. That longstanding equation of femininity with emotion and feeling, and masculinity with intellect is practiced through women being "keepers of heart, keepers of the sentimental memory. In diaries, packets of old lover letters, and family albums, in slender books of poetry in which a flower is pressed, a woman's emotional history is preserved. Remembrance of things of past—the birthday, the anniversary, the death, is a feminine province. (Brownmiller, 215-216)

The dramatization of a moment or a small event in their fiction, such as a marriage ceremony, the process of eating food, a small game of funerals, a sorrowful moment of separation, all these small events are dramatized as if there is a column of light from the other gothic world or the

world of ritual order shedding on them. These particular theatrical moments in their fiction not only embrace a kind of feminine sensibility and emotional nuance, but also are the highlights of their fiction, distinguishing Eileen Chang and Alice Munro's fiction, and filling it with an aesthetic sense of beauty and transcendence.

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