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Staging Sincerity in Renaissance Italy and Early Modern China, or Why Real Lovers Quarrel

Abstract: The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in China and the West saw a wave of skeptical approaches to metaphysics, ethics, and the physical sciences, including a related interest in “playing devil’s advocate” for seemingly weak propositions. This paper analyzes two works of musical theater from these geographically remote traditions to argue that use of historically problematic romances to explore the relationship of ethics, emotion, and reason resulted in novel depictions of attachment emotions as neither purely selfless “gut reactions” nor calculating facades. Scenes depicting lovers’ quarrels and morally flawed characters may paradoxically strike audiences as more authentically romantic because they dramatize an aspect of attachment emotions’ functioning recently elucidated by cognitive science, namely that of “body budgeting” (allocation of energy resources by the brain). Monteverdi and Busenello’s *Coronation of Poppaea* and Hóng Shēng’s *Palace of Lasting Life* use contrastive poetic and musical styles to dramatize the “debate-like” quality inherent to such negotiations, further revealing a strong connection between the affective “ingredients” that make up socially mediated emotion states and the mechanisms by which music and prosody affect them.

Keywords: Chinese, Italian, opera, romance, emotion, cognitive, affect, active inference

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in China and the West saw a wave of skeptical approaches to metaphysics, ethics, and the physical sciences such as Wáng Yángmíng’s 王陽明

(1472–1529) syncretic Confucianism, Descartes’s methodic doubt, Lǐ Zhì’s 李贄 (1527–1602) questioning of textual authority and gender roles, Montaigne’s iconoclastic views on education, and Galileo’s observational (rather than aprioristic) astronomy. Around the same time arose a related interest in debate for its own sake, including argument for seemingly weak or absurd positions, manifest in a European vogue for “paradoxical encomium” (Erasmus’s “Praise of Folly” being the most famous early modern example) and a Chinese fashion for composing panegyric “rhapsodies” (*fù* 賦) on objects like mosquitoes and lascivious women (see Miller 1956 and Yang 2009). Both trends likely relate to the democratization of knowledge made possible by booms in commercial printing and were associated with elite and public interest in non-didactic vernacular fiction and drama (see e.g., Ding 2002, Muir 2007, and He 2013).

One object of skepticism and debate taken up by many Chinese and Western proponents and producers of fiction and drama was that of the relationship between reason, passion, and morality. For example, are emotions animalistic obstacles to rational ethical calculus or can they inspire nobility, possibly even superseding reason as a foundation for judgment?¹ Such questions had ramifications not only for the ethical status of fiction and drama as pastimes, but for authors’ and playwrights’ choices of stories and how to tell them. Recent work in cognitive science like Kunda (1990), Damasio (1994), Barrett (2017), and Friston et al.’s (2006) “free energy” (“predictive coding”) model suggests that emotions, like other concepts (including ethical concepts), are goal-oriented predictions aimed at minimizing the gap between reality and our

¹ On the late-sixteenth-early-seventeenth century Chinese obsession with this latter version of this question (the so-called “cult of *qing*”), see Lee 2007: 26–50.

mental models of it.² This paper compares two works of seventeenth-century drama from Venice and China to argue that romanticized treatment of morally flawed historical figures enabled early modern poets and composers to complicate traditional views of emotions as either authentic passions erupting into a reasoning subject's consciousness or else false and calculating facades. Foreshadowing new findings in cognitive science, sixteenth and seventeenth-century Chinese and Western interest in the ethical status of emotion, and in "playing devil's advocate" for unconventional positions, inspired musical-poetic evocations of relationships more vivid than was possible using more "classical" lovers' "prototypes."³ For example, since emotions do, in fact, play a role in rational calculation and vice-versa, the seemingly manipulative sentiments at play in a lovers' quarrel scene may, paradoxically, better evoke a sense of authentic interiority, especially when supported, as in these works, by contrastive musical and poetic features highlighting differences of subjectivity and the negotiated nature of attachment emotions.

The Coronation of Poppaea: Without Passion, Virtue Falls Silent

² For a brief summary of prediction error minimization feedback loops as they relate to interoception (bodily sensations), see Hohwy 2013: 31–34 and Barrett 2017: 57–72. For more on the application of predictive processing to literary criticism, see Karin Kukkonen's essay in the current volume.

³ On the literary critical application of the concept of "prototype," pioneered especially by Eleanor Rosch, see e.g., Hogan (2011).

Claudio Monteverdi's (1567–1643) last opera, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (*The Coronation of Poppaea*), with libretto by Giovanni Busenello (1598–1659) depicts the romance of Emperor Nero and his mistress, Poppaea Sabina, in a positive light, ending with her crowning as empress and a romantic duet. Nero's negative moral and political reputations are well known. Also well known in Busenello's Venice was the fact that, only a few years after crowning her, Nero kicked the pregnant Poppaea to death. This was one of the first major Italian operas to depict historical figures and events, albeit with significant license. Given that they could easily have invented fictional lovers, or selected an historical romance less morally problematic or marred by inevitable, offstage tragedy, why did Monteverdi and Busenello choose this story to tell?⁴ The goal seems analogous to that of the “paradoxical encomium” described above: only by attempting sympathetic portrayal of lovers maximally unsympathetic in terms of the historical impact of their actions can the ennobling power of love and sentimental interpretation be put to the test.

Busenello, like Giacomo Badoaro (1602–54), the librettist for Monteverdi's first Venetian opera, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (*The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland*), was a member of a Venetian circle of iconoclastic intellectuals calling themselves Accademia degli

⁴ Muir argues that contemporary Venice's restrictions on patricians marrying outside their class, with the result that many did not marry at all, may have meant that Monteverdi's audience included “hardly any Ottavias but plenty of Poppeas—Venetian courtesans or at least women whose connection to their male companions was irregular” (2007: 114–117). Such an audience would, if anything, be more sympathetic to Poppaea, and also more discomfited by its better knowledge of her fate.

Incogniti (“Academy of the Unknowns”). This group, arguably somewhat similar in outlook to Chinese proponents of “sentiment” (*qíng* 情) as a fundamental ethical principle, like Tāng Xiǎnzǔ 湯顯祖 (1550–1616), was known for its promotion of theatre and willingness to explore non-didactic, even libertine themes in art and literature.⁵ *Poppaea* deploys the medieval device of abstract virtues and vices as characters, yet it does so in a manner that foreshadows the primacy of passion: the work opens with a goddesses of Fortune (Fortuna) and a goddess of Virtue (Virtù) debating their respective powers over humanity, only to introduce the child-like Cupid (Amore), who claims a power greater than them both:

| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Che vi credete, o Dee, | Why do you believe, O goddesses, |
| Divider tra di voi del mondo tutto | That dominion over the whole world |
| La signoria, e'l governo, | Is divided between you, |
| Escludendone Amore, | Excluding Love, |
| Nume, ch'è d'ambi voi tanto è maggiore? | A god so much greater than you both? |
| Io le virtùti insegno, | I teach virtues, |
| Io le fortune domo, | I control fortunes; |
| Questa bambina età | This childish shape |
| Vince d'antichità, | Vanquishes antiquity, |
| Il tempo, e ogn'altro Dio... | Time, and any other God... |

⁵ The group published collections of “amorous” short stories and supported “the most successful opera theater of the 1640s, the Novissimo” (Muir 2007: 71).

Note that Amore does not simply claim to be more powerful than virtue and fortune; he claims to control the realms proper to them. It is not so much that passion is strong enough to *conquer* them, as that virtue and fortune can do nothing without it.

New work in cognitive science supports this view: rather than functioning primarily as an obstacle to rational calculation, emotions play a critical role in decision-making by guiding attention to matters of personal relevance, what Lisa Feldman Barrett calls an “affective niche” (2017: 73). In *Descartes’ Error*, Antonio Damasio famously argued for neurological connections between systems of reasoning, emotional regulation, and the ability to set and pursue goals (see 1994: 78). Going one step further to argue for a “constructionist” theory of emotion, Barrett claims that “affect is... irrevocably woven into the fabric of every decision” and heavily implicated in a process she terms “body budgeting,” that is the regulation of one’s own and others’ pulse, breath, blood sugar, and so on to meet the demands of different situations (2017: 80). Barrett further explains the intensely social, cognitive nature of human body budgeting: “All members of a social species regulate each other’s body budgets—even bees, ants, and cockroaches. But we are the only species who can do so by teaching each other purely mental concepts, and then using them in synchrony” (2017: 196). On this account, emotions are context-specific, goal-oriented predictions (concepts) the mind generates in pursuit of psychosomatic equilibrium rather than innate passions that “happen to” it upon activation of dedicated “emotion centers,” as what Barrett terms a “classical” view would predict (see *ibid.* 81–82). Though “motivated reasoning” suffers a negative reputation, the idea of logical analysis and prudent long-term planning divorced from affective influence may be a chimera, because motivation itself, including the motivation to arrive at accurate conclusions, is a socially mediated desire

heavily implicated in the regulation of one's own and others' bodily resources (see e.g. Kunda 1990).

This may be hard to accept because our subjective experience of emotions is usually as “gut level” events that “happen” to us unbidden, as if upon activation of a dedicated “anger circuit” or “sadness center” somewhere in our brains, whereas the conscious self seems to play a more active role in logical reasoning, thereby giving rise to the ancient intuition of mind-body dualism Damasio aimed to dispel, one in which reasoning belongs to an ethereal mind and emotion to a material body.⁶ The theory of constructed emotion, however, maintains that, while certain basic vectors of experience, like pleasure and pain or sleepiness and arousal, may be purely innate and shared with the animal kingdom, more nuanced experiences, like “joy” and “envy,” though categorizable in terms of orthogonal binaries like the above, are themselves no more “hardwired” to particular neural pathways than experiences like “the color green” or

⁶ On the common notion of amygdala as “fear center” of the brain, for example, see Barrett 17–22. A degree of “folk” (weaker than Cartesian) mind-body dualism may be universal and is apparent in Chinese thought no later than the Warring States period, since when the *xīn* 心 (“heart-mind”), though sometimes referencing a physical organ, more often indicates a metaphysical entity contrasted to the body. Whereas thought, decision making, and more “cognitive” emotions like worry were frequently ascribed to the *xīn*, other emotions and desires were largely believed to reside in the physical body. See Slingerland (2018: 108 note 4 and 231–8).

“ethical condemnation.”⁷ These latter experiences, because of the rapidity with which our minds construct them, also feel as if they might be “unfiltered” perceptions, rather than conceptual inferences, but are actually heavily influenced by factors like language, culture, and narrative.⁸ In the current volume, for example, Patrick Hogan cites cases where split-second extrapolations about context and expected consequences may strongly shape our emotional reactions and ethical judgments, even those that seem to arise unbidden. In this light, Amore’s claim to control destiny and teach virtue may not be as strange as it seems: does courtier Otho act irrationally or unethically, for example, when unrequited love in the shape of the embodied Amore stays his hand before he can carry out Empress Octavia’s orders to murder Poppaea?

Act 1, Scene III, the first scene with Nero and Poppaea together, offers further perspective on the power of passion. In a musical analysis of the scene from the perspective of Renaissance conceptions of gender difference, Rachel Lewis argues that

⁷ On the “circumplex” model of fundamental binaries of affect pioneered by Russell, see e.g. Russell (2003) and Barrett (2017: 72–77). Barrett argues that animals share “core ingredients” of affect with humans but largely cannot be said to experience “emotions,” which she analogizes to the many sorts of baked good that may emerge from combinations of e.g., flour, butter, sugar, and eggs (see 2017: 35–36 and 252–277). On the experience of color vision, see *ibid.* 129–130.

⁸ Though sense perceptions may feel fundamentally different from abstract mental concepts, the active inference model suggests the former are merely detail-rich predictions with a short time horizon while the latter are detail-poor predictions with a long time horizon; see Hohwy 2013: 62–73. On the contribution of language to variable experience of emotion concepts see Barrett 2017: 103–111.

Busenello's dialogue...implies that this section be set as some sort of recitative. In the score, however, the long opening speeches for Poppea and Nerone are fragmented through transposition, multiple interruptions, and text repetition, as the composer presents us with characters essentially of his own design... Poppea fully exploits Nerone's volatile emotions by repeatedly interrupting his dialogue with her own resolute demands of 'Tornerai?' ('Will you return?'). Nerone, meanwhile, deliberately eludes Poppea's probing questions with an evasive dominant-tonic cadence. He is no match for Poppea, though, whose third exclamation of 'Tornerai?' (b. 157) rises in pitch as she attempts to extract more promises by calculatingly directing the harmony away from D minor to G major, thereby forcing Nerone to respond in that key... (Lewis 2005: 16, 19)

This and many other scenes in *Poppaea* constitute a kind of musical "debate" between two characters, each manifesting an individual, if malleable subjectivity. A duet takes on the character of a game of Chess, each participant trying to "trap" the other in a musical logic that demands he or she accept the other's perspective. Such a dynamic recalls Barrett's conception of emotions as "body budget" regulators: neither Poppaea's longing nor Nero's reticence seem "fake" or calculating in the colloquial sense, but their interplay amounts to a "push-and-pull" dynamic with respect to the emperor's, and, by extension, the empire's resources, as well as Poppaea's personal psychosomatic resources, that is, her affections. Because musical contrasts activate contrastive emotive-conceptual associations in audiences' minds they are an effective artistic choice for dramatizing such negotiations.

If Otho's inability to kill Poppaea represents Amore's power to control Fortuna (an avatar of fate and luck), the strange death scene of historical philosopher and tragedian Seneca the

Younger (Act 2, Scene III) arguably represents the struggle between Amore and Virtù, avatar of stoic morality and reason divorced from passion. In this version of the story, Nero sentences his teacher to commit suicide for what amounts to a refusal to provide ideological cover for the decision to abandon Empress Octavia in favor of Poppaea. Learning of the order among a group of followers (*famigliari*), Seneca expresses his commitment to die stoically, while the *famigliari* implore him not to die by alternating pitiful entreaties set to “jagged,” chromatic music (*Non morir, Seneca, nò*) with tempting evocations of the joys of life set to “jaunty” ritornello (*Io per me morir, non vo...*) (Ringer 2006: 264–5). If Seneca here stands in for Virtù, then the *famigliari* alternate petitions on behalf of Fortuna and Amore. But Seneca does not engage his friends in further debate; rather, he announces his unshaken intention in his powerful bass (associated with gods in Baroque opera and unique to Seneca in this opera) and the scene abruptly ends, to be followed by a lighthearted poetry contest between Nero and a courtier. Divorced from passion and self-interested motivation, abstract morality falls silent.

Intermusical consideration of Monteverdi’s composition history only adds to the incongruous quality of this scene: Tim Carter notes that the “jagged” parts of the *famigliari*’s song are a contrapuntal elaboration of a “rising chromatic line...that [Monteverdi] had associated with the Holy Cross in a five-voice motet, ‘Christe adoramus te,’” yet which he had also used, eighteen years later, for a parodic madrigal, “Non partir, ritrosetta” (do not go, young maiden), in which three lustful, old men implore a beautiful, young woman not to spurn them (2015: 57). Is Seneca here a Christ figure or an object of mockery? This scene is so strange, that even Busenello himself added a new scene with Seneca and Virtù, presumably meant to restore gravitas, in a 1656 libretto, while other directors have chosen to add lines or eliminate it entirely (ibid. 57–8). Yet this scene, praised by later critics as “one of the greatest set pieces in

Monteverdi opera,” represents the ambiguity and tension at the heart of *Poppaea*, evoked by the rapid alternation of starkly contrastive musical styles (Ringer 2006: 264). Nero and Poppaea are not “good” people on any rational appraisal of history, yet their love may still become an object of great aesthetic interest precisely because of its imperfection. The killing of the teacher figure, moreover, arguably parallels sixteenth and seventeenth-century Chinese questioning of textual authority, as manifest not only in iconoclastic philosophies, but in a similar willingness to treat ancient, revered figures and words with levity and sarcasm.⁹ Reason alone cannot raise the love of Nero and Poppaea to the level of timeless romance, but a playful aesthetic sensibility may.

Therefore I lie with her and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

Shakespeare, Sonnet 138

Also raising an historically problematic love affair to the level of timeless romance was Southern Chinese dramatist Hóng Shēng’s 洪昇 (1645–1704) fifty-act opus, *Palace of Lasting Life* (*Chángshēng diàn* 長生殿), completed after over a decade of work, less than half a century after *Poppaea*. Like the roughly contemporaneous *Peach Blossom Fan*, to which it is often compared, *Palace* combines the individual level of romance with the society-level concerns of national politics in a manner unlike most earlier love stories. Unlike *Fan*, however, *Palace* finally privileges the personal over the political.

⁹ On word games recontextualizing classics and related phenomena in late imperial China, see He 2013, esp. Ch. 1.

The romance at the center of *Palace* is that between the historical figures of Táng Emperor Lǐ Lóngjī 李隆基 (685–762), also known as Míng huáng 明皇 or Táng Xuánzōng 玄宗, and his “precious consort” (*guìfēi* 貴妃), Yáng Yùhuán 楊玉環 (719–56), a court lady originally wed to the Emperor’s son, but whom he took for his own after briefly retiring her to a Daoist nunnery. Perhaps because of his long reign periods and devotion to the arts, Xuánzōng’s historical reputation is not nearly as negative as Nero’s. Nevertheless, his myopic devotion to Consort Yáng and her clan (and to music and art) at the expense of politics was frequently cited as a proximate cause of the Ān Lùshān Rebellion (755–63), one of the deadliest civil wars in human history, and a major blow to the long-term stability of the empire. Though Bái Jūyì 白居易 (772–846) romanticized and added fantastic elements to the story in a long ballad poem, *The Song of Lasting Regret* (*Chánghèn gē* 長恨歌), early dramatizations, such as Bái Pǔ’s 白樸 (1226–1306) *Rain on the Paulownia* (*Wútóng yǔ* 梧桐雨), nonetheless included unflattering elements, such as an affair between the Consort and rebellious general, that Hóng Shēng believed marred the purity of the romance. Though not so unprecedented an object of romantic depiction as the story of Nero and Poppaea, the question still arises as to why Hóng chose these complex, even sordid events to “purify,” rather than inventing or selecting a less problematic couple.

One reason may be that stories in which a political-historic reading strongly clashes with a sentimental reading afford opportunities to explore that tension (of particular interest after the fall of the Míng Dynasty), as also happens in *Poppaea* and *Peach Blossom Fan*. An additional reason Hóng may have chosen Consort Yáng as his heroine is her historically attested knowledge not only of song and dance, but also music theory. As Judith Zeitlin (2006) argues, the play thematizes the acts of musical composition and performance, structured by the consort’s witnessing of a performance in Heaven (in a dream), arranging it for performance on Earth, and

finally witnessing a new performance of her own version in Heaven (after her earthly death) with her joyfully reunited royal lover. Zeitlin further notes Hóng's personal relationships with a number of musically-talented women (ibid. 466). Moreover, though *Palace* finally "sublimates" some of the earthier, tragic elements of *Rain* described above, Hóng's Consort Yáng is a much more active, opinionated figure than *Rain*'s, who never enjoys the opportunity to sing, much less quarrel on an equal footing with the emperor.¹⁰ Hóng's Consort Yáng, like Monteverdi's Poppaea, is not a model of passive femininity, but a persuasive poetic and musical force to be reckoned with. As Monteverdi's audience likely included more "Poppaeas" (mistresses) than "Octavias," Hóng's audience may well have included more "Consort Yángs" (musically literate courtesans and concubines) than wives, especially in light of social strictures against elite women appearing in public.

One famous example of the consort's powers of musical persuasion occurs in Scene 18 of *Palace*, "The Willow Catkin Pavilion" (*Xùgé* 絮閣). In this scene, Yáng confronts the emperor, who has just spent a night with an old lover. The emperor and his eunuch servant at first try to deceive her by claiming that the emperor had been feeling unwell and so slept alone, but Yáng's discovery of women's shoes and jewelry betrays them. She continues her song in a tragic vein, attempting to return two love tokens he had earlier given her. The emperor, with some aid from his servant, tries to mollify her through song, at last convincing her, through admissions of guilt

¹⁰ Lee (2018) argues that the heavenly reincarnation of Yáng also functions in the story to legitimate the voluntary nature of the romance: on Earth, Lady Yáng could not practically refuse the Emperor's affections even if she wanted to; the fact that she still loves him in Heaven authenticates her earthly love.

and promises of everlasting love, that she is the only one in his heart. Below are partial translations of five arias from this scene. The smaller font indicates stylized dialogue and extrametrical “padding characters” (*chènzi* 襯字), the latter being part of the arias, but usually more speech-like in their grammar and delivery. The emperor claims that he did not attend early court because he felt mildly ill and was sleeping. The consort rejoins with a pointed supposition seemingly designed to elicit a denial:

[Northern Aria “Breaking Rank”]

I’m afraid it may be Love sickness coiling round your soul,
All for your One true love your heart’s palpitating...

(Emperor): My dear, no need to overthink things. Last night, I...

[Southern Aria: Dripping Water Clock]

Happened to feel a mild dis-ease,
And sought a little time of quiet contemplation.
Your orchid heart and lily spirit,
Shouldn’t let your imagination run wild,
And treat me coldly without cause...

(Consort looks). Oh! Under this royal bed, are these not a pair of phoenix slippers? (Emperor becomes agitated and acts as if to cover face): Where? (Drops a kingfisher hair ornament) (Consort picks up). What, and now a kingfisher hair ornament! These are all ladies’ things. Since your highness has been sleeping alone, how can these things be here? (Emperor looks embarrassed). How strange! Where did these come from? Even I don’t know. (Consort) How can you not know? ...

(Consort sings to Northern aria “Earth Blowing Wind”):

It’s just that The prohibitions on the royal bed are strict and stern.

How could a Goddess come flying in to spend the night?

I ask you These two items: who dropped them? (Throws them on the ground, Eunuch picks up)

(Consort): Last night who served at your highness’s bedside? With what beauty

Did you entwine yourself like a pair of turtle doves,

So that you haven’t been to court though the sun is high in the sky?...

(Consort sings to Northern aria “Water Fairy, Old Version,” (cont.):

Bow, bow, bow, I bow farewell to Your Majesty’s favor, high as Heaven.

(Takes out hairpin and jewel box; speaks): This hairpin and jewel box are the gifts you bestowed as pledge of your undying faith; today I return them to Your Majesty.

(Sings): Take, take, take, Take back, this deep feeling as from before...

(Consort cries sadly, Emperor raises her up): My consort, how can you speak this way? You and I, oh

(Emperor sings to Southern aria, “Double Voice”):

Our love for each other, Our love for each other,

Though it lasts one hundred years it could never be enough.

How can you say, How can you say,

That we could ever part?

It was all my fault, / Please do not be upset.

Seeing Your furrowed brows and tearful eyes, / Makes you all the more charming.

Keep this jewel box and hairpin. If you do not wish to see the flowers, you and I will go to the West Palace for a chat.

(Consort): If Your Majesty truly does not wish to abandon me then I have nothing more to say.

(Sings to Northern coda): I put away the hairpin and the box,

Tonight, as we spend another night behind the warm cotton rose curtain,

I shall again pour out my heart to you as I did when we first pledged our love.¹¹

This scene appears to be full of deception: the emperor lies about what he had been doing and aims to deceive by feigning ignorance of the women's items, while the consort seems to play a manipulative game of "reverse psychology" by suggesting things she hopes are not true, even asking the emperor to do things we assume she does not really want him to do (take back his gifts and end the relationship). Does the emperor really feel contrite, or has he merely calculated a strategy for securing harmony in the women's quarters? Does the consort actually feel the intensity of sadness and abandonment her lyrics suggest, or is she more concerned about the loss of material benefits flowing to herself and her family by virtue of the emperor's favor?

Barrett's theories of constructed emotion and body budgeting allow that these questions need not, necessarily, be answered in such terms. As mentioned, emotion concepts not only help us regulate our own blood sugar, muscular tension, and other physical resources, they regulate (and, in turn, help us predict) the bodily states of those around us by sending culturally-mediated social signals. That is, if a couple's respective emotions seem optimized to influence one another's behavior in a manner beneficial to themselves, then they are functioning exactly as

¹¹ See Zhou (1988 [1741]: 6442–9) for the earliest extant musical arrangement of this piece.

emotions usually function. Though knowledge of a culture's socially constructed "vocabulary" of emotional signals may allow one to falsify an emotional experience by imitating its stereotyped manifestations, the fact that an emotional experience seems made-to-order for securing a survival-enhancing outcome for the one(s) experiencing it is not *prima facie* evidence of falsehood. Unmotivated "passion," like unmotivated reasoning, may be a chimera. Moreover, as with Nero and Poppaea's emotional "debate," this is a sort of game that one may "win" even as he or she "loses" it, that is, accedes to the other's demands on psychosomatic and material resources. For example, Hogan describes "attachment" (along with lust) as a fundamental, universal desire or "happiness goal," also arguing that it "enhances the likelihood of emotional contagion" (2011: 33). That is, lovers are typically aware, even before beginning a relationship, that doing so involves ceding, or agreeing to share, a degree of control over psychosomatic resources; only when such "sharing" seems excessively one-sided, cynical, or detrimental to wellbeing does it strike us as unhealthy—indeed, as a social species, some degree of attachment to others, and the resulting vulnerability to "emotional contagion," are likely necessary for health.¹²

But how does an audience know the consort is experiencing a (motivated) desire to be with the emperor and not consciously strategizing? Lisa Zunshine (2012: 143) suggests that singing itself may be a good signal of sincerity because of the effort required to sing and lie at the same time. In other words, a generous body budget "investment" in the manner of communication suggests that the one communicating is not holding anything back. Virtually all

¹² See Rita Charon's essay in the current volume for more on shared realities, "permeable private worlds," and the relevance of such concepts for the practice of medicine.

traditional Chinese opera forms mix song with stylized dialogue, and though there exist examples of deception through song (see Schoenberger 2019), there is nonetheless an assumption, likely common cross-culturally due to reasons Zunshine suggests, of song as a more “unfiltered” expression of genuine feeling than speech.

As in *Poppaea*, the element of debate or emotional negotiation here finds additional artistic expression in the use of contrastive musical styles. The musical and poetic styles of the emperor and consort here strongly contrast in several ways. Firstly, this scene uses a technique popular in late imperial Southern dramas called “North-South Combination Suites” (*nánběi hétao* 南北合套), which interweaves traditional Chinese Southern style arias (*qǔ* 曲) into a suite structure typical of Northern drama. General differences between Northern and Southern aria styles in *Kūnqǔ* 崑曲 (the most popular style of elite opera singing at the time) include a heptatonic scale versus a pentatonic scale; a more speech-like, syllabic, staccato style (including more “padding characters”) versus a more languorous, legato style; and an association with strong or negative emotions and martial themes versus an association with romantic or happy themes, respectively.¹³ Here, the consort sings in the more forceful Northern style exclusively, while the emperor and his servant attempt to mollify her with the more languid Southern style.¹⁴ Yáng’s pieces, musically and poetically, evoke sinking, falling, anger and despair in a manner that contrasts strongly with the emperor’s more upbeat rejoinders. Though early examples of this technique aim more at displaying musical-poetic virtuosity for its own sake, its use here

¹³ See Wáng Shìzhēn’s famous comments on the differences between Northern and Southern arias (1959 [1580] 4: 27).

¹⁴ For more on the use of this technique in *Palace*, see Li (2007).

highlights the conflicting emotional subjectivities of a lover's quarrel in a manner relatively novel within the tradition: most older lovers' duets evoke more consonant emotions, while most older lovers' quarrels (to the extent they even merit the title) are not duets, or even songs at all.¹⁵

Though "Northern" as opposed to "Southern" styles of *qǔ* and "padding" versus proper characters are distinctions particular to the Chinese case, such binaries are ubiquitous in world musical and poetic traditions, most likely because of the contrast dynamics they enable. Like the 1s and 0s of binary code, or the broken and unbroken lines of Chinese divination hexagrams, the specific nature of the difference is not so important as the fact *of* difference, as seen in the strong cross-cultural tendency for more complex divisions to collapse into binaries.¹⁶ In *Kūnqǔ*,

¹⁵ As Haiyan Lee argues in the current volume, most earlier fictional lovers struggle with external forces, like parental opposition, more than with expressing and managing their feelings for one another. For example, the final scene of Tāng Xiǎnzǔ's *Peony Pavilion* uses the same North-South musical suite as *Xùgé* (Hóng Shēng may have consciously imitated it), but it serves primarily to dramatize the union of the Northern, resurrected bride with the Southern, earthly scholar. To the extent the scene dramatizes disagreement it is between a daughter and a father reluctant to accept her reincarnation and unorthodox marriage.

¹⁶ Medieval Chinese poets understood their language to include four tones, for example, yet those four tones collapsed into two more general categories, arguably analogous to long and short, "heavy" and "light," or accented and unaccented bifurcations of other world traditions, for the purposes of most poetry (*Kūnqǔ*, however, makes finer distinctions for the purposes of its melodic ornament). Mair and Mei (1991) argue that this division was intended to imitate a Sanskrit binary between "heavy" (*guru*) and "light" (*laghu*) syllables, but Hongming Zhang

“Northern” and “Southern” aria types came to be the largest single stylistic difference within the tradition, whereas later, in Beijing Opera, it was the two styles called *Xīpí* 西皮 and *Èrhúáng* 二黃 (see Wichmann 1991: 71–130). In Western music, though many others are possible and still occasionally used, the contrast between “major” and “minor” modes dominates, along with many more granular bifurcations, like strong and weak beats and alternation between more “stable” and “unstable” sounding scale degrees (see Huron 2006: 143–174), an idea also manifest in the ancient Chinese bifurcation of *lǜ* 律 and *lǚ* 呂 musical pitches.

Huron (2006) further argues that the value of contrast for contrast’s sake in music relates to the cognitive dynamics of expectation formation and surprise: music with too many unexpected contrasts sounds cacophonous, while insufficient variability fails to hold interest. This relates to the aforementioned basic physiological binaries out of which more complex, culturally-specific emotions arise. As basic somatic ingredients like pleasure, pain, sleepiness, arousal, and the sensation of an accelerating or decelerating heartbeat may give rise to many complex emotional experiences, basic musical “ingredients” like strong and weak beats, presence or absence of syncopation, and “stable” or “unstable” sounding scale degrees, make possible tremendous varieties of musical expression. Such binaries enable a play of tension and release that here also manifests in the debate-like dynamic of two characters with differing perspectives that finally come to accord. Though the finer nuances of musical, poetic, and cultural meaning imbedded in an Italian Baroque or early modern Chinese opera will likely never

(2015) points out that the two categories each constitute about half of the vocabulary of literary Chinese, making them quite suitable as a binary for binary’s sake, regardless of historical influences or phonological qualities.

be fully intelligible to a 21st-century perspective, the fact *of* strong contrast in *Xùgé* is clear, as are some likely affective connotations. These elements not only create a sense of sincerity that survives the characters' potentially selfish motivations, but also of genuine difference between the two personalities, which factor contrasts with older, more "asymmetric" depictions of the same history, like *Rain on the Paulownia*.¹⁷

Conclusions: False Dichotomies of Passion and Reason and Subjective and Objective Realities

In an overview of cognitive approaches to literature as they inform and diverge from other methods, Mary Crane notes that "cognitive linguistic theory resembles psychoanalysis in positing a large role for the unconscious, but differs in arguing that we are not conscious of most brain function not because of repression, but because the processes in the brain that subtend language are so complex, simultaneous, and rapid that we can't register them in real time" (2015: 18). Barrett's theory of constructed emotion similarly suggests that emotional experiences are not purely "gut-level" events that happen to us upon activation of dedicated "emotion centers" in the brain, though they often feel that way because our minds perceive instances of "anger" and "joy," in ourselves and others, as rapidly and automatically as they experience "the color blue" or "the sound of the ocean" (as emergent interpretations of "raw" visual or auditory stimulus "ingredients"). The psychosomatic "ingredients" of emotion concepts (facial movements,

¹⁷ On the early modern evolution of more "symmetric" dramatic structures (interplay among characters of roughly similar narrative significance rather than focus on a "star" role mediated by "witness" characters), see Schoenberger (2019).

perception of heart rate and breath, levels of muscular tension, “goosebumps,” and so on), moreover, have much in common with those of musical experience, including a close relationship with mechanisms governing what Barret calls “body budgeting.” This fact explains why music, with or without lyrics, has such strong emotional effects.

Cognitive approaches may therefore provide a way out of the tendency toward circularity in interpretation of music-language interactions: “here the composer uses a sad-sounding melody suitable to the sad subject matter.” The obvious question (tests of which still produce highly variable results; see e.g., Ali and Peynircioglu 2006) is whether the same melody would still sound “sad” if the context, lyrics, and or cultural background of the listeners were different. Yet even as it insists that the same bodily sensations and musical events may give rise to many different emotional and/or musical experiences (and that similar perceptions may arise in many different ways), cognitive theory also escapes the fully arbitrary hermeneutics of e.g., Saussurean linguistics. There are likely not any cultures, for example, in which loud music sounds more relaxing than the same music played at a lower volume, or that associates sweaty palms and rapid breathing with an emotional experience of serenity. Similarly, though the nature of binaries chosen and their more fine-grained associations may differ greatly among remote cultures, the musical and poetic use of contrastive binaries appears around the world because of the universality of the affective “ingredients” they stimulate.

In the particular comparison under consideration two sets of composers/playwrights chose to probe the question of the limits of sentimental reading of politically problematic figures. In so doing they dramatized the debate-like dynamic not only of lovers’ quarrels in particular, but of body budgeting in general, thereby revealing the negotiated nature of attachment emotions themselves, which can be both goal-oriented and yet still sincere. Quarrels among fated lovers

who may even seem to dislike one another at first are now staples of romantic genres in China and the West, from *Story of the Stone* to *French Kiss*. But as Haiyan Lee argues in the current volume, it was not always the case that fictional lovers struggled with their feelings in this way; cross-culturally, older romances tend to depict lovers struggling against external forces like parental opposition, class strictures, duty, and natural and man-made disasters, while their feelings for one another are less often in doubt. Though not aware of the latest theories in emotional cognition, sixteenth and seventeenth-century Italian and Chinese dramatists, interested in exploring the limits of romantic reading and debate for its own sake, ended up creating a kind of romance that, far from striking audiences, then and now, as manipulative or fake, instead feels more true-to-life than earlier similar depictions by virtue of reflecting a genuine aspect of attachment emotions' functioning. That is to say, "real(istic) (fictional) lovers quarrel" not just because no real relationship is perfectly harmonious all the time, but because including scenes that dramatize emotional negotiation provides a chance to explore the tension, release, and other body-budgeting dynamics inherent in attachment emotions themselves rather than taking attachment as a given and relying on external forces to create the tension necessary to hold audience interest. The use of musical contrasts to dramatize conflicting subjectivities paradoxically resulted in the breakdown of false dichotomies and a nuancing of portrayal.

Detailed evocation of emotional negotiation in lovers' quarrels may be a fairly recent (roughly seventeenth-century) development in Western and Chinese literature and drama, but evocation of other types of feelings is likely as old as art itself. From their beginnings, Chinese and Western critical traditions have focused heavily on emotion, perhaps due in part to notions of e.g., "the literary" as precisely that which words cannot accurately summarize: what poet and calligrapher Ōuyáng Xiū 歐陽修 (1007–1072) called "the meaning outside the words" (言外之

意; there are analogous Chinese expressions about music, painting, and other arts as well).

Prominent philosophers like Peter Kivy (2007) similarly argue that instrumental music is inherently meaningless (“expressive” but devoid of semantic content). But what does art express if not meaning? A traditional answer might be “feeling” or “subjective reality.” Yet “meaning outside the words” is a good description not only of the artistry of poetry, but of many everyday social interactions, especially so-called “phatic” communications: in American English “how’s it going?” does not usually mean “I am curious about your recent state of health”; rather, it communicates something like “I recognize you as a friend/colleague; all is well between us.” “I still like you” might be termed a “feeling” or “subjective reality,” but equally is it a fact about the world with ramifications for whether or not you can count on me to help move your sofa.

Taruffi and Koelsch (2014) argue that the social mechanism of empathy may help explain the paradox of people who enjoy “sad” music even though they do not enjoy feeling sad (in fact, many people enjoy “sad” music *especially* when they feel sad): pace Kivy, music may, even without lyrics, communicate to the listener something like: “others, too, have felt this way.”¹⁸ That is, much artistic experience may be a “negotiation” between artist (and any fictional personalities he or she creates) and consumer, not just in the poststructuralist sense of “death of the author,” but in a more literal, “embodied” way as well: as everyday interactions are replete with body budgeting social signals structured by emotion concepts, so art may affect emotions through related pathways. “How’s it going?” may not be poetry, but much of what makes poetry different from a legal document may lie in its ability to activate such concepts. If “how’s it

¹⁸ For more on the implied “metamessages” of literature and painting see Elaine Auyoung’s essay in the current volume.

going?” communicates “I consider you a friend and might help move your sofa,” then singing may communicate “I’m not holding anything back,” a clever turn of phrase might communicate something about a character’s intelligence (as Simler and Hanson (2017) argue, the purpose of *much* conversation may be to send the social signal “I am a useful ally”), and music with a rapid beat may prime emotion concepts, like lust, used to interpret a rapid heartbeat (worries about music-inspired immorality date back to Confucius, at least).

The idea of emotions as “body budgeting concepts” may therefore collapse many apparent contradictions between “subjective reality” and “facts about the world.” It would be strange to describe “how’s it going” as “inauthentic” just because it means something other than it purports to. By the same token, a wordless but jovial smile and pat on the back, though seemingly devoid of semantic content, *could* strike us as “dishonest” if it serves to mask the fact of a hidden grudge. The dramas considered in this paper explore the possibilities of collapsing one such contradiction by evoking love that is both genuine and materially self-interested, but a similar approach could reveal much about how other works “speak” to us as well. If art expresses emotion, and emotions are predictive models about our own and others’ blood sugar, heartbeat, facial muscles, and so on, then that means reactions to art *are* predictions about the world, albeit a part of the world to which one person has privileged access (but not exclusive access; see Charon’s comments on breaking down binaries of inner and outer and subject and object in the current volume). Therefore, rather than viewing signals and negotiations about physical and other resources as somehow separate from, or even inimical to, expression of authentic feelings, it may be more accurate to view such interplay, between artist and consumer and, in literature, among fictional characters, as an important part of how and why art functions.

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