Monsters and Monstrosity in *Liaozhai zhiyi*

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

In *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異, a collection of almost five hundred tales by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715), young scholars fall in love with beautiful fox spirits or meet ghosts in abandoned temples; corpses walk and men change into birds; hideous apparitions invade the home, bodies become unfamiliar, children are born to women long dead, and things are rarely what they first seem. Throughout the collection, the monstrous intrudes on the ordered spaces of the human world, bringing disorder but also the fulfilment of desire.

The collection was written by a man who was trapped in the 'examination hell' of the Chinese civil service system, and in the years since his death has brought him the success he never achieved in his professional life, being read, critiqued, loved, and adapted by successive generations, until the work itself has become as monstrous a hybrid as some of the creatures within its pages.

The *Liaozhai* tales which have received the most critical and popular attention are the tales of enchantment and romance between human men and ghosts or fox spirits. Yet this focus on only certain types of tale has meant that the collection, which is made up of a patchwork of different traditions and influences, is rarely considered as a whole.

This thesis attempts to redress the balance by arguing that the collection is a monstrous hybrid, made out of fragments of folklore, myth, previous stories and pure invention, using different literary traditions and created by the assumed persona of an author – the Historian of the Strange – who is himself as hybrid as some of the creatures in his tales. Because of this textual hybridity, combined with the myriad anomalous figures within its pages, the thesis takes the representation of monstrosity as central to the collection, using Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's 'Monster Culture' as a starting point. His influential work, first published in 1996, argues that the monster is a 'cultural body', containing the fears, anxieties and desires of the culture in which it is born.

I hope that the thematic focus on the monster will allow the collection to be approached as an entity, considering the different types of tale, and the different figures within them, and how they work together or against each other. I argue that an examination of the monster as a 'cultural body' will add to the understanding of *Liaozhai* within the context of early Qing society and culture, in the way it can be seen as paradoxically both subverting and supporting social norms.

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Introduction: Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio

松落落秋螢之火，魑魅爭光；逐逐野馬之塵，罔兩見笑。才非干寶，雅愛搜神；情類黃州，喜人談鬼。

'I am but the dim flame of the autumn firefly, with which goblins jockeyed for light; a cloud of swirling dust, jeered at by mountain ogres. Though I lack the talent of Gan Bao, I too am fond of 'seeking the spirits'; in disposition I resemble Su Shi, who enjoyed people telling ghost stories.'

Liaozhai's Own Preface 聊齋自志[1]

Every time and culture has its monsters. The things that haunt dreams, that hide under the bed; the things that lurk in the unexplored places beyond the borders. Monsters fascinate and they frighten. They threaten the boundaries that we put in place to protect our everyday lives, bringing disorder and uncertainty. However often they are defeated, or shown to be nothing more than a dream, they return, over and over again. They are found in paintings, in religious iconography, in histories and novels and films. They can be made – as found on the news or in political rhetoric. They can be hybrids or shape-changers, animals or aliens or anything that is different or not understood. And they stalk the pages of Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) *Liaozhai zhiyi* (聊齋志異), from the troll that menaces a scholar in a lonely temple, to the beautiful shape-shifting animal spirits that provide romance and wealth; from giant scorpions to men who turn into tigers; from walking corpses to the demons of cattle disease. There are so many kinds of creature in *Liaozhai* that much academic criticism has concentrated mainly on the tales of romance and wonder, treating the collection's ghosts and fox spirits as idealised images of the human. I argue, however, that approaching the collection through the figure of the monster allows it to be seen as a complete entity, as well as providing new ways of understanding the stories and their social and cultural background.

This introduction will provide a brief examination of Pu Songling himself, and of the

1 Pu Songling, *Liaozhai*'s Own Preface, in Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*: *Pu Songling and the Classical Chinese Tale*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1993, p44. For the full preface and translation, see the appendix to this thesis, from Zeitlin, p43-49.

creation of the collection. Throughout the thesis, however, I will approach the tales not through Pu but through his assumed authorial persona, the Historian of the Strange (*yishi shi* 異史氏) who is, as he tells the reader in his preface, 'fond of seeking the spirits'. Writing down his tales at night, 'jeered at by mountain ogres', the Historian nonetheless creates a collection which has been read, loved, studied and adapted through successive generations. Labelled as a pinnacle of writing in the classical language, the *Liaozhai* tales have provided some of the most memorable figures in Chinese fiction, and continue to delight and haunt to this day.

Pu Songling

Pu Songling was born in 1640, four years before the collapse of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). He died in 1715, in the seventy-first year of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), having lived almost his whole life in Shandong Province, in the mountainous north-east of China. He grew up in the small town of Zichuan (淄川) during the unsettled years of dynastic transition, a period in which Shandong was ravaged by battles between the new Manchu regime and local Ming loyalists. Although the Pu family were well-known in the area, owning land and producing, in the past, several generations of scholars, their fortunes were in decline.

Pu's own life was marked by professional failure. For a scholar, the civil service examination system was virtually the only way to achieve success and status, and a professional post. Although Pu made a promising start in the early stages of the system, between the ages of nineteen and seventy-two, every attempt at the second degree ended in failure.[2] The system, supposedly meritocratic, nonetheless trapped many gifted scholars. The pass rate was extremely low, and the selection process open to unfairness and even corruption, leading to the sense amongst scholars that 'the whole system was one gigantic lottery in which they themselves could do little to improve their chances and where they were totally at the mercy of a higher force whose operations appeared random and unpredictable.'[3]

2 The examinations were based upon literary knowledge and formal composition, or 'eight-legged essays' (八股文). First degree graduates were called *xiucai* (秀才), or 'budding talent', which was as high as Pu Songling ever rose. This exam took place every year in each prefectural city. The second stage was the provincial examination, for which Pu qualified, but failed to pass. This was held triennially in the provincial capital and lasted nine days. Its graduates were called *juren* (舉人), or 'elevated men'. The third, or metropolitan examination, was held triennially in Beijing, and was followed a month later by the palace examination. Successful graduates were called *jinshi* (進士), or 'advanced scholar'. John Minford, *Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio*, London: Penguin Books, 2006, p471.

3 Allan Barr, 'Pu Songling and the Qing Examination System', *Late Imperial China*, vol.7, 1. (1986), p100. Barr points out that the excessively heavy workload for examiners led to particular problems within the

So the system produced a growing number of scholars who were socially disenfranchised, unable to achieve an official post.

Locked into this 'examination hell', Pu supported his family by entering the households of wealthy families to act as a secretary or tutor.[4] His family life also had its difficulties. Squabbling amongst the siblings and their wives meant that the family was forced to divide the property and live apart. Pu and his wife, whose own relationship was happy and harmonious, lived for the rest of their lives in a small house with their son, and later their grandchildren.

Despite the disappointments in his professional life, Pu wrote (and read) prolifically throughout his life, producing poems, plays, reference works and fiction. It was his collection of anomaly tales, *Liaozhai zhiyi,* however, published fifty years after his death, that provided Pu with the recognition which he had been denied in life, and continues to be read, translated and adapted into different media today. Numerous film and television adaptations of his tales exist, as do stage productions, as well as various illustrated editions, compilations, and translations into both modern Chinese and other languages.

The result of many years of work, and numbering almost five hundred tales, the collection is written in prose which John Minford, in his recent translation, called 'extraordinarily elegant and extremely demanding', and which has been called the 'pinnacle' of the classical language.[5] Filled with allusions, embellishments, and puns, the tales caused even the famous twentieth century writer Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) to remark that 'ordinary readers may find the language rather difficult.'[6]

Like other writers, Pu followed the tradition of naming his collection after his writing

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examination system in Shandong during the early Qing. A great emphasis was put upon the writing of 'eight-legged essays' (*ba gu wen* 八股文). Scholars were not marked for individuality or substance, and in fact predictable and stereotyped essays were more likely to succeed, partly because examiners tended to choose 'safe' options, as they themselves could be held responsible if they passed essays that their superiors. considered unsatisfactory.

4 See Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China* (Trans. Conrad Shirokauer), New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1981, for a detailed discussion of the examination system and its effects on scholars. See also Chun-shu and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *Redefining History: Ghosts, Spirits, and Human Society in P'u Sung-ling's World, 1640-1715*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998, Chapter 1, 'The Frustrated Intellectual and His World', for a comprehensive background to the writer and his work.

5 John Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* pxvii. The exact number of tales varies, due to inconsistencies within the different editions, which will be discussed further below. 'The pinnacle of the classical language', see Zhang Renrang, 張稔穰, *Liaozhai zhiyi xinshang* 聊齋志異欣賞, Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, p138.

6 Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction,* trans. Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi, p411, quoted in Minford, pxvii. The classical Chinese language is highly elliptical. As Victor Mair describes, in his introduction to the *Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, it 'often omits the subject or other parts of speech in a sentence, and may not specify gender, number, tense, mood and the like.' (Victor Mair, ed. *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, Preface, pxxvii).

studio – *Liaozhai*, which, though difficult to translate, can be understood as the Studio of Leisure or Studio of Conversation. He also created an assumed persona for the author – the Historian of the Strange (*yishi shi* 異史氏) – a wording which recalls that of Sima Qian (司馬遷), the Grand Historian (*taishi gong* 太史公). The collection is prefaced by the Historian's own introduction, '*Liaozhai*'s Own Record' (*Liaozhai zizhi* 聊齋自志), and his authorial comments are appended to a number of the stories.[7]

Throughout this thesis I approach the tales through this assumed persona, rather than the figure of Pu Songling himself. Whilst this approach avoids some of the difficulties inherent in writing critically about an author, it also provides an entry into the collection as a whole; from the angle of a created, hybrid persona.

The stories which make up *Liaozhai* draw on a great variety of sources, historical and fictional, and encompass folklore, myth, superstitions, earlier tales, and pure invention. A distinctive aspect of the collection is its use of different modes or literary traditions of the anomaly tales; both brief narratives of anomalous events in the *zhiguai* 志怪 style, and elaborate, carefully plotted tales in the *chuanqi* 傳奇 style. *Zhiguai* tales, or 'records of anomalies', can be traced back to the Six Dynasties period (222-589 CE). They have been defined as 'collections of brief prose entries, primarily but not exclusively narrative in nature, that discuss out-of-the-ordinary people and events.'[8] During the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) tales became longer and more structured, with more complex plots and characters, and the *chuanqi*, or wonder tales, emerged. The anomalous elements in these tales – whether ghosts, animal spirits or other unexplained events, tended to be secondary to the plot itself. These stories were literary endeavours, as opposed to the *zhiguai*, which often claimed to be real accounts, making, as Zhao Xiaohuan points out, a great point of *shilu* 實錄, or the recording of facts, in order to avoid being accused of *xugou* 虛構, or the composition of fiction.[9]

Because of its focus on the anomalous, which would align it with the *zhiguai* tradition, but also because of the fact that many of its tales have more complex plots and characterisation, Lu Xun described *Liaozhai* as 'a work of *zhiguai* in the *chuanqi* style. (用傳

7 Zhao Fu 赵馥 notes that 194 tales have an authorial comment appended. 'Yishi shi yue zai *Liaozhai* zhiyi zhong de zuoyong ' 異史氏曰在聊齋志異中的作用', in *Pu Songling yanjiu jikan* 蒲松齡研究集刊, 4, Jinan: Qilu Shushe, 1984, p175.

8 Kenneth J. DeWoskin, in Nienhauser, William H., ed. *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature,* vol.1, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, p280.

9 Zhao Xiaohuan, *Classical Chinese Supernatural Tales: A Morphological Study,* Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005, p31-32.

奇法，而以志怪).[10] Yet it should be pointed out, as the well-known *Liaozhai* scholar Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩 highlights, that whilst the collection undoubtedly reworks and re-imagines earlier *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* tales, it should also be approached on its own terms, taking these literary traditions further and adding its own imagination and invention.[11]

The tales – the majority of which are set in Pu's home province of Shandong, though some also reach to the furthest corners of the Chinese empire and beyond – tell of ghosts, animal-spirits, demons, and all manner of other anomalous creatures and events. They also tell of families, children, lovers, monks, merchants, the rich and the poor.[12] The ordinary is juxtaposed with the extraordinary, the familiar is changed, or set against the unknown. From tale to tale, the outcome is unpredictable; there are benign foxes and dangerous foxes; beautiful, fragile ghosts and hideous, malignant ones. Animals can be harmful or helpful. Daoist magicians use their powers both for good and for evil.

The collection has been described as 'a cultural mosaic', and 'encyclopaedic in form and nature.'[13] This encyclopaedic nature allows for different critical approaches, yet it has also made it difficult to study as a collection. Its sheer size is another obstacle to any critical study. Even had the tales displayed more uniformity in style and predictability in content, it would remain difficult to adequately consider every story. Critics, as well as those adapting the tales into other forms, have on the whole dealt with this problem by focusing only on certain aspects of the tales, most often, those tales of benign ghosts and animal spirits and their relationships with human men. This thesis tries to find a different approach, by taking this unwieldy, encyclopaedic aspect of the collection not as an obstacle, but as the very heart of the work. The collection itself, I argue, is a monstrous hybrid, from its creation, to its complex afterlife.

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10 Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略, (A Brief History of Chinese Fiction). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998, p148. Zhao Xiaohuan points out that no fewer than 100 items in the collection are said, through the mouth of the Historian of the Strange, to have been adapted from folktales and legends.

11 Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩, ed. *Pu Songling zhi* 蒲松齡志, Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2003, p130.

12 According to Zhao Qigao, who published the first edition of the work, its original title had been 'Tales of Ghosts and Foxes' (*guihu zhuan* 鬼狐傳). See Zhang Youhe 張友鶴, ed. *Liaozhai zhiyi, hui jiao hui zhu hui ping ben* 聊齋志異: 會校會注會評本, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1962, p27. Zhao Xiaohuan notes that according to the Russian sinologist O.L.Fishman, of the 499 items in *Liaozhai,* 417 are tales of the supernatural, accounting for 84% of the total number of items in the collection, p131.

13 Chang and Chang, *Redefining History,* p182. And see 王恆展, Wang Hengzhan, '*Liaozhai zhiyi* baike quan shu xingshi yu xingzhi qian shuo' 聊齋志異百科全書形式與性質淺說, in Zhang Yongzheng 張永政 and Sheng Wei 盛偉, eds. *Liaozhai xue yanjiu lunji* 聊齋學研究論集, Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2001, p1-15. Various studies have examined the textual background of *Liaozhai*, so for the purposes of this thesis, I will not be examining the tales' provenances in any detail. But the piecemeal character of the collection is nonetheless important to note, because it makes the text itself a strange hybrid, pieced together from other places.

Therefore, although within the time and space allowed by the nature of this research, it is inevitable that a close reading of every tale is impossible, I hope that this approach will allow for a consideration of the collection as a whole; how monstrosity is represented and how it is used; what it brings to the collection itself.

The Creation of the Collection

The writing of *Liaozhai* took place over a number of years, though its beginning has been fixed to the year 1671. The collection progressed slowly in the first decades, but it is thought that the most productive period was between 1690 and 1701.[14] By 1702 Pu's manuscript comprised sixteen *juan*, 卷 or volumes, which was their number on its first printing, fifty-one years after Pu's death, in 1766, although he added a few more tales after 1702, and its final date of completion has been put at 1711. In his lifetime, Pu circulated handwritten copies of the manuscript around his acquaintances, who themselves made copies to circulate, but it was Zhao Qigao 趙起杲 (d.1766) and Bao Tingbo 鮑廷博 (1728-1814) who first edited and published the collection, half a century after the writer's death, in what is known as the *Qingketing* (青柯廳) edition. Zhao made his own changes to the collection, as did subsequent editors, and it is in fact difficult, as Allan Barr remarks, to point to an 'original' version of the manuscript; the text we have today has been altered and amended, again and again, by different editors, commentators and readers, 'who may or may not have shared Pu's vision.'[15]

In this thesis I have used the edition by Zhang Youhe (張友鶴), *The Complete Collated and Critically Annotated Strange Tales of Liaozhai* (*Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao, huizhu, huiping ben*, 聊齋志異會較會注會評本), commonly known as the *San hui ben*, published in 1963. This choice was based upon the number of critical works which have used this edition, including many of the more recent works I reference in this thesis. Another, more recent edition was published in 2000 by Ren Duxing (任篤行). Although this edition may eventually replace the *San hui ben* as the standard academic version of the collection, Zhang's work is

14 Allan Barr, 'The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 44, 2 (Dec. 1984), p515-562, and 'A Comparative Study of Early and Late Tales in *Liaozhai zhiyi*', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 45, 1 (June 1985), for an in-depth examination of the transmission and dating of the collection. The chronological approach which Barr uses for his dating of the collection has been questioned recently (see Chapter Two of this thesis), but Barr's work has proved enormously influential and useful to subsequent scholars.

15 See Barr, 'The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*', and Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai: Pu Songling's Ghostlore and its History of Reception*, PhD thesis. University of Toronto, 2009, p23.

still finding favour with academics.[16] All page references to *Liaozhai* tales in this thesis refer to this edition.

When referencing the stories, I have included the title in pinyin, the Chinese title, and its English translation. Wherever possible, I have used the title as translated by Sidney L. Sondergard. Sondergard's translation is, at present, the only full translation of the tales into English.[17] Although some of his titles are perhaps somewhat clumsy, I hope that this method of referencing will help the reader to locate the tales in such a large collection.[18] As an additional aid to location, I have also included the numbering system proposed by Allan Barr, which corresponds to the Zhang Youhe edition of the tales.[19] An index of all the tales discussed or mentioned in the thesis can be found in an appendix at the end, which also includes page references for the translations by John Minford and Herbert Giles.

In these collated and annotated versions, the stories are embedded with commentaries that circulated with them from their publication. They are juxtaposed with prefaces, colophons and glosses, with Zhang and Ren, like editors before them, adding their own forewords and appendices. As Judith Zeitlin describes, in an illuminating discussion on the reception of the collection, this format derives directly from traditional critical discourse in China, 'which was not simply interpretive but interactive as well.'[20] As a manuscript circulated, readers would record their own comments on the pages, and maybe even comment on those left by previous readers. Zeitlin highlights how these waves of literary activity added to the collection's popularity, as well as to the continuous printing of new editions. They also point to a strong underlying need to interpret and justify the tales.[21] These commentaries provide a fascinating insight into how the collection was read by subsequent generations. Due to the constraints of an academic thesis, and the need to take into account the different social and historical backgrounds of the commentators, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth

16 See Ren Duxing, ed. 任篤行, *Liaozhai zhiyi: quanjiao huizhu jiping* 聊齋志異全較會注集評, 3 vols. Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2000. A table of comparison can be found in the appendix to Frances Weightman's *The Quest for the Childlike in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction: Fantasy, Naivety, and Folly*, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008, p185-190.

17 Sondergard, Sidney L., *Strange Tales from Liaozhai*, 6. Vols., Fremont: Jain Publishing, 2008-2013. (Currently, five of the six volumes have been published.)

18 When quoting at length from existing translations of the tales, however, I have for the most part used the work of John Minford or Herbert Giles, from their translations of, respectively, 110 and 164 of the tales. Whilst the Giles translation, originally published in 1880, is rather old-fashioned, Minford's work provides perhaps the most easily readable and accurate of the existing translations. See John Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*; Herbert Giles, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, Tokyo, Vermont, Singapore: Tuttle, 2010.

19 Barr, 'Index to Entries in *Liaozhai zhiyi*', in 'The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*', *Harvard Journal of East Asian Studies*, 44.2 (1984): p556-562.

20 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p15.

21 Ibid., p16.

centuries, I have chosen not to consider them alongside the stories. However, they are another interesting aspect which adds to the collection's hybrid nature; the research surrounding it, as well as the collection itself.

This thesis is divided into six chapters, each examining a different aspect of monstrosity as it is depicted within *Liaozhai*, from the impact of the monster, to its physical forms and finally to its geographical, spatial aspects.

Chapter One examines recent academic interest in 'Monster Culture', which can perhaps be traced back to the publication, in 1996, of *Monster Theory*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and including his influential essay, 'Monster Theory: Seven Theses'. The chapter focuses on the definitions and uses of the monster, as discussed in Cohen's essay, and on how monster theory can be useful in a critical approach to *Liaozhai*. It also reviews the prevailing scholarly trends regarding *Liaozhai*, justifying the need to find a means of approaching the collection as a complete entity.

Chapter Two examines how the tension between fear and desire, embodied in the figure of the monster, drives the collection, from the Historian's preface and his obsession with collection, to the narrative and characters of the tales. It looks at how the tales of wonder and the tales of horror within the collection work when read together, arguing that *Liaozhai* can be seen as an exploration of both the known and the unknown, reflected in the changeability and unpredictability of its non-human figures.

Moving on from the impact of the monster to the monstrous body, Chapter Three uses the work of the theorist Mikhail Bakhin on grotesque realism to look at the ways in which the human body in the tales becomes monstrous, unsettling established thinking about self and other, order and disorder. The body in *Liaozhai* can be fragmented, doubled, transformed, monstrous changes which bring about new identities and call into question the coherence of categories and norms.

Chapter Four continues the investigation of the ways in which the monstrous body is depicted, looking at how metamorphoses are enacted in the tales, both animal-human and human-animal. It considers how these depictions of metamorphosis go far beyond the representation of the lovely, beguiling fox spirit, and examines how, through this monstrous change, the protagonists' desires and goals can be achieved. Time and again, metamorphosis in the tales moves the narrative towards an ideal, achievable only through this hybridity, or merging of animal and human forms.

Looking more closely at the tales' link between monstrosity and the achievement of

ideals, Chapter Five examines the institution at the heart of the Confucian social structure, the family, and its representation in the tales. It argues that monstrosity in the collection allows for the 'impossible' combination of desire and duty, paradoxically both subverting *and* supporting social norms and expectations.

Finally, Chapter Six looks at the ways in which the collection explores ideas of centrality and marginality. From the very beginning of the collection, in the Historian of the Strange's own preface, these two ideas are blurred, with the Historian positioning himself at the centre, despite his own social and geographical marginality. However, he longs too for communication 'from beyond the dark frontier' of death. Boundary-crossing is key to much of the discussion of monstrosity, both in relation to *Liaozhai* and to monster theory in general, and this chapter looks at what happens when physical boundaries are breached, when the marginal and monstrous enters human space, or when the human stumbles across the threshold and into the margins.

Underlying all these aspects of monsters and the monstrous in *Liaozhai* is the collection's celebrated use of language and its complex, hybrid structure. In my conclusion to the thesis I draw together the threads of the different chapters by looking at how the different representations of the monstrous in the tales are supported by the language and structure of the collection itself. I thus approach *Liaozhai* as a whole, in the light of its own, complex hybridity, arguing that its use of language – playful, metamorphic, and subversive – plays its part in the collection's exploration of the known and the unknown, and its unsettling of established norms and ways of thinking.

Chapter One: Monsters and Monster Theory

Introduction

Although the name *Liaozhai* has become almost synonymous with the beautiful and beguiling ghost or fox spirit, within its almost five hundred tales the collection presents a dizzying variety of representations of the monster. Many of its figures are indeed benign and desirable, bringing wonder and good fortune to the human protagonist. But others are fearful and dangerous. Its monsters can be found in the wild and unknown places, but they also intrude upon human space. From tale to tale, such figures are unpredictable and ever-changing. In order to provide a theoretical basis for the thesis and its examination of the representation of the monster in *Liaozhai zhiyi*, this chapter will first provide an introduction to the growing field of contemporary 'Monster Culture'. Writing on monsters in both Europe and China goes back to some of the earliest written texts, but modern academic 'monster studies' is a more recent development, often seen as having been inaugurated in 1996 with the publication of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's influential collection of essays *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*.[1] In his introductory essay to the collection, Cohen sets out seven theses – seven ways of thinking about and looking at the monster, which will be discussed throughout this chapter. This essay; 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' has proved to be one of the most significant contributions to academic and critical work on the monstrous. Cohen argues that monsters provide a key to understanding the cultures that spawned them, and that the fascination for the monstrous, in different times and contexts, testifies to the continued human desire to explore difference and prohibition; 'Monsters ask us how we perceive the world... They ask us to re-evaluate our cultural assumptions... They ask us why we have created them.'[2]

Earlier research on monsters, such as that of John Block Friedman, tends to be more narrowly focused on Western European literary and artistic representations and responses to strange portents and births, or to the presence of supposed 'monstrous races' in far corners of the world. Friedman himself points out that he was chiefly concerned with malign monsters, 'representing the darker side of nature and culture,' found in places that were dangerous to or uninhabitable by ordinary mortals.[3] However, more recent research has moved to look at

1 Asa Simon Mittman, 'Introduction', *The Ashgate Resarch Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous,* Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, p1.
2 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in Cohen, ed. *Monster Theory,* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p20.
3 John Block Friedman, 'Preface', *The Ashgate Research Companion*, pxxvi-xxvii.

other cultures and their monsters, and also contemplate those which are not malign, but have a more positive cosmological significance.

This chapter will examine what monsters are and what monster theory can do. It will look at why they are 'good to think with': what can monsters teach us about the cultures from which they arise? What threats do they pose to the culture? How are they used? To do this, it examines different aspects of the monster, in different contexts, from medieval European monsters to modern monsters of the mind, highlighting their myriad representations and uses, and discussing in particular the difficulties of pinning down creatures which are, at their heart, outside of categories and classifications.

It then moves on to look at the monster in China, examining how traditional ways of understanding life and death and the natural order contributed to perceptions and representations of the monstrous in early China. It will look in particular at how boundary-crossing, and notions of change and transformation were pivotal to the understanding of the natural world and its relationship to humanity, and how this influenced perceptions of the monstrous.

The chapter then approaches the monstrous in *Liaozhai*. In such a large collection of stories, there are all kinds of creatures that stalk its pages, from fox spirits to giant animals to trolls. And the collection itself is a patchwork of tales from different sources and traditions, held together by the assumed persona of the author. I argue that it is because of this encyclopaedic nature of the collection that monster theory provides a useful theoretical tool in order to approach the collection as a whole. *Liaozhai* is itself a hybrid, beyond classification, bursting with excess and ambiguity.

Part I.

Finding and Defining the Monstrous

What is a monster? From giant hybrid creatures with too many limbs and teeth, to the human perpetrators of terrible events, the spectrum of 'monster' is broad and ever-changing. This section examines how the monster can be identified. Multi-limbed hybrids may be easily recognisable, but what about the shape-changers, who hide under human skin, or the familiar creatures who reveal themselves as stranger than they first appear? To engage with these questions, this section will discuss how the initial way of identifying the monster – by observation – is only part of the answer.

The first definition of 'monster' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is, 'Something

extraordinary'. Further definitions provide a selection of possibilities; a monster is 'a legendary animal combining features of animal and human form', it is 'any creature so ugly as frighten people; any animal or human grotesquely deviating from the normal shape, behaviour or character'; 'any inhumanly cruel or wicked person'; 'any animal or thing huge in size'; 'anything unnatural or monstrous'.[4]

Even this brief consideration of how to define the monster illustrates the difficulties involved in this task. Key aspects of the monster appear to be its excessiveness (whether in size, appearance or behaviour) and its ability to change, to deviate from the 'norm'. But there are problems with these attempts at definitions. First of all, the sheer breadth of definition should be highlighted; a great sweep of possibilities that culminate in 'anything unnatural', opening up the monster to almost any kind of interpretation. Secondly, if the monster is often defined in relation to what is 'normal', what is the norm, and how can it be defined? Particularly when speaking of the monster in different times and contexts, in which ideas of the norm may change considerably, attempting to find and define a fixed norm poses significant problems. These dictionary definitions illustrate that the monster is often known through its embodiment. We can see that hybridity, excessive size, ugliness, or deviations in shape are all ways in which bodies are labelled 'monstrous'. Change and excess are key here – the body as fluid, changeable, capable of transformation, of escape from established categories, whether they are categories of species, size, sex, or many others. But each must be based on some sort of a fixed, 'normal' body.

In response to this, Asa Mittman, in his introduction to one of the most recent and comprehensive studies of monsters and monster theory from around the world, proposes a different approach to finding and defining the monster. Extrapolating from the work of Cohen, Mittman proposes that the monster cannot only be known by its embodiment, nor from its location or its behaviour, (though all these aspects are also important, and will be discussed further in later chapters), but – and perhaps primarily – through its *impact*, its effect.[5]

Mittman is influenced by Cohen's 'monster theses', which take the monster's difference as key; not simply the fact of its difference to the human, but the ways in which difference is used, is understood, is created, and the effect which difference gives rise to.

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4 Oxford English Dictionary online http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121738?rskey=nVgEjL&result=1#eid. Retrieved 19/10/2011.

5 Zeitlin discusses this same issue in her examination of the strange in China; 'It was early recognized in China that the strangeness of a thing depended not on the thing itself but on the subjective perception of its beholder or interpreter'. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p6.

Cohen doesn't define the monster in his theses, he discusses what the monster *does*. He writes that his seven monster theses are 'breakable postulates' – not definitions of but ways of thinking about the monster. The act of defining is impossible, he argues, because the monster is, 'a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system; the monster's very existence is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure.' However we try to classify the monster, it 'always escapes', resisting any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition...'[6] At its very heart, the monster is a rebuke to containment and control, of methods of organising knowledge. It is a way of answering back to the task of definition and pinning-down.

In a similar way, in the conclusion to his recent book *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*, Stephen Asma, the author and professor of philosophy, writes that 'one will search in vain' through his book 'to find a single compelling definition of *monster*... because I don't think there is one.' Instead he calls the term and concept of monster a 'prototype category'. There may be environmentally specific archetypes for the monster, he argues and we might even draw up a general taxonomy of types: 'colossals' (giant creatures), 'hybrids', (mixed-species creatures), 'possessors' (spirits, spectres), and so on. However, there is no one *definition*, he argues, that wouldn't eventually leave some creature out.[7]

This difficulty in defining 'monster' – its escape from categories and boundaries – is key to Cohen's monster theses. It is also central to my argument for approaching *Liaozhai* through the lens of monster theory, as I explain below, due to the hybrid nature of the collection itself. To broaden this theoretical approach, I turn to the concept of 'the strange', and the group of Chinese terms surrounding it. I argue that Judith Zeitlin's discussion of the strange fits closely with the approach to the monster used by recent theorists such as Cohen, and taken up in this thesis. What Zeitlin examines are the terms *guai*, *yi* and *qi* (怪，異，奇), and their various definitions and meanings, all of which are abstract and fluid categories of strangeness – the weird, the fantastic, the wondrous, the abnormal, the freakish, the uncanny (all of which carry their own complex history and meanings). She describes *yi* as having the broadest and most flexible range of meanings, primarily meaning 'difference' or 'to differentiate', with implications of anything that differs from the norm.[8] *Qi*, though 'rather murky', has 'the most consistent history as a term of aesthetic approval', covering a range of

6 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p7.
7 Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p182.
8 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p6.

rare, original, fantastic, amazing, odd, yet also designating a deviation from the norm.[9] The word *guai* has the narrowest span of meanings, and the most negative, in the sense of 'weird, uncanny, freakish, abnormal, unfathomable.'[10] To complicate matters further, they are often used synonymously, or defined in relation to each other, or made into compounds, all of which blur the distinctions between them and make fixed definitions difficult.[11]

Zeitlin's conclusion is to question whether the strange is definable at all; is the key quality of the strange, she wonders, its sheer elasticity, elusiveness, and changeability?[12] The concept of 'the strange', therefore, provokes a similarly complex response to that of the monster. It covers both the fearful and the wondrous, the 'unnatural', the different. What I argue in the thesis, however, is that whilst the strange (and all its different and changing definitions) is an abstract concept, the monster is a concrete 'thing', a body. The monster is a *representation*. Etymologically, the word comes from the Latin *monstrum* – 'that which reveals' or 'that which warns' – meaning a divine portent or warning, from the verb *monere*, to warn. It also contains the meaning of 'showing', or *monstrare*, still seen in the word *demonstrate.*[13] So the monster's body is readable. It thus provides a physical embodiment for the strange. It contains and reflects the complex meanings of the strange discussed above in *guai*, *yi*, and *qi* – meanings which are constantly changing, fusing, and spilling over. And it provides a way of looking at the strange not as an abstract concept, but as different representations, different bodies, and how these changing bodies can threaten established boundaries.

I now turn to look at the impact of this threat to established boundaries and ways of thinking. As stated above, Mittman argues that it is the impact of the monster which provides one way of finding and defining a creature that is, at its core, outside of categories and definitions. Monsters, in their function of revealing, have both emotional and cognitive effects on the observer. The strangeness they contain can cause both fear and wonder, repulsion and

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p5. A similar issue arises in the translation of the word 'monster' itself. In early texts, the ancient Chinese did not always make a clear distinction between types of spirits and demons; characters bearing the ghost radical *gui* 鬼, such as *chi* 螭, *mei* 魅, *wang* 魍, *liang* 魉 refer to powerful spirits, monsters and demons of various kinds. Later, the word *guaiwu* 怪物, or 'strange thing', to use a literal translation, is sometimes used, but there is also the word *yao* 妖, which Anthony C. Yu translates as 'monster, fiend, weird, abnormal.' And the two can be combined to create *yaoguai* 妖怪, 'a monster, a goblin, a demon'. See Yu, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit!' Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction.' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 47 (1987): 397-434.

12 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p6.

13 See *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121738?rskey=nVgEjL&result=1#eid.

attraction. Monsters are thus 'cognitively threatening'.[14] Because they do not fit into established categories, because they are so difficult to define, and because they go against what is known or believed, they threaten established ways of understanding the world, creating what Mittman calls a 'sense of vertigo'; that which 'calls into question our epistemological world-view, highlights its fragmentary and inadequate nature, and thereby asks us to acknowledge the failure of our systems of categorization.'[15]

This is a way of approaching the monster which allows for the different understandings of monstrosity in different contexts. It is also key to the understanding and examination of monstrosity in this thesis. Each chapter looks at the threatening of different categories and boundaries by the monster in *Liaozhai*, and examines its uses and effects; how it questions, subverts, or supports established order and ways of thinking; how it can throw new light on a collection which has been read and studied for so long. Whilst the strange is an abstract concept, the monster is 'a cultural body'.[16] It is always a representation, yet its complex and changeable body has the potential to represent complex and changeable issues, as will be seen throughout this thesis. The monster stands at the interstices of many different discourses; of different emotions, superstitions, beliefs and understandings. Examined within the context in which it is created, it can reveal the anxieties and complexities of its time.

What this understanding of the monster does not necessarily require is for the monster to be evil, or terrifying. This is not a view shared by other theorists of the monster. The novelist China Miéville, one of the foremost contemporary fantasists, argues in his own 'Theses on Monsters' that, 'Monsters must be creature forms and corpuscles of the unknowable, the bad numinous.'[17] But throughout this thesis I argue that the 'sense of vertigo' caused by the monster can be fearful but also wondrous, and that monsters as 'creature forms' are not necessarily dangerous or malign, especially in a context in which, as we will see below, change and transformation were accepted and indeed necessary. Whilst the monster destabilises established methods of ordering the world, it also allows an escape from those

14 Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, London, Routledge, 1990, p34. Carroll, whose work on horror will be examined in the next chapter, uses this same method to define the emotion of horror (or 'art-horror', when it is deliberately provoked by a form of art); 'Novels are denominated horrific in respect of their intended capacity to raise a certain affect', he writes (p14), and this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror. It is not the fact of the strange or horrifying thing or event which is notable, but the emotion it evokes.

15 Mittman, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters*, p8. This method of 'finding the monstrous' shares some similarities with the work of Tsvetan Todorov on the fantastic. He defines the fantastic as, 'that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.' Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975, p25.

16 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p4.

17 China Miéville, 'Theses on Monsters', *Conjunctions*: 59, p142.

methods, and the categories which proscribe our understanding. It not only offers 'potent escapist fantasies', as Cohen puts it, but also opens up new ways of thinking. Whether fearful or wondrous, the monster troubles and worries, but it also challenges and questions. Or as Mittman writes, 'Monsters do a great deal of cultural work, but they do not do it *nicely*'.[18]

Understanding Monsters

In order to more fully understand the representation and use of monstrosity in *Liaozhai,* this section first looks at how monsters have been interpreted and understood in other contexts. Or, from another angle, it looks at how monsters have been *made*. 'All monsters...are our constructions,' writes Asa Simon Mittman; 'even those that can be clearly traced to 'real', scientifically known beings (conjoined twins and hermaphrodites, for example, as seen through pre-modern lenses); through the processes by which we construct or reconstruct them, we categorize, name, and define them, and thereby grant them anthropocentric meaning that makes them 'ours'.[19]

Although literary representations of monsters stretch back to the world's earliest surviving epic tale, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, written in Sumerian around 2000 BCE, it was in ancient Greek culture that written and pictorial depictions of monsters flourished to an unprecedented degree. From the early cosmological encounters between monsters and gods and later between monsters and men, as in Odysseus's adventures, an archetype developed of 'reason and beauty in eternal conflict with the irrational and chaotic'.[20] In the ancient polytheistic world, monsters were 'free agents'. Neither the gods nor the monsters were omnipotent, so they fought indefinitely, with humans in the middle. The monsters of Homer's *Odyssey,* such as the Cyclops Polyphemus, tried to trick, seduce or destroy Odysseus, just as the gods tried to influence him by their own means.

Other monsters were located, by early Greek travellers such as Herodotus, in India and the East, 'which became a new focus... of terrestrial rather than heavenly or chthonic monsters.'[21] As Friedman points out, the races or tribes of men denoted monstrous in appearance or customs or social order and dietary practice, were located far from the Hellenic 'centre', thus conveniently removing the irrational and uncivilised from that centre.

The ancient Romans were just as intrigued by monsters. 'Prodigies and portents' were

18 Mittman, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters,* p1.
19 Ibid.
20 Friedman, in Mittman, pxxviii.
21 Ibid.

perceived to be everywhere, particularly in 'monstrous births', such two-headed babies, hunchbacks, dwarves and giants, which were not only often displayed in marketplaces, for a fee, but also seen as omens. The job of augurs in ancient Rome and soothsayers in Greece was to read the signs provided by prodigies and anomalies, and thus predict the outcome or fate of different events and ventures.

Monotheism, however, changed the understanding of monsters in Europe. Rather than existing alongside gods and humans, each independent of each other, they had to be brought under the control of one universal creator. So monsters, whilst they were 'deviating instances', also had to exist by divine will. Monsters are not, writes the seventh century scholar and archbishop, Isidore of Seville (566-636 BCE), 'contrary to nature, because they come by the divine will, since the will of the Creator is the nature of each thing that is created.'[22] They became intertwined with the theological question, Why did God create evil?

A rich tradition therefore developed in the medieval period that tried to articulate why God had made monsters. Many of the answers manifested themselves in moralising about human behaviour. St Augustine suggests that giants (to take one example of the medieval monster) were made in order to fall; 'It pleased the Creator to produce them, that it might thus be demonstrated that neither beauty, nor yet size and strength, are of much importance to the wise man...'[23] So the point of being a giant, in Asma's words, 'is to over-reach and fail, and in that failure highlight their corruption to others as a cautionary tale and consolation.'[24]

But monsters are changeable, and so is their interpretation, as this thesis will highlight again and again. So the understanding of monsters continued to develop in different ways, from period to period, as beliefs and knowledge changed. In Europe during the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries discussions of monstrosity expanded into several genres, including travel writing, moralistic and exemplary tales, and investigations of anatomy, embryology, and comparative ethnology. But it was the Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, which spans the eighteenth century, which was to bring about a great change in the understanding of monsters. The age was marked by an opposition to superstition and a trend towards scientific analysis, with natural history becoming a particular interest. From this point the supernatural needed to be either explained, or taken as a figment of the imagination. The monster was now a violation of nature, whereas it had once been a part of nature, created by God to play its part

22 See Stephen A. Barney, trans. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, Book XI, p243.
23 See R. W. Dyson, trans. *Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans*, Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p477.
24 Asma, *On Monsters*, p33.

in the world as a sign, a warning, an omen. Noel Carroll argues that horror emerged as a genre in Europe during this period, because this is the first time in which the monster is 'outside the natural order.'[25]

Monsters also began to be seen as the products of social forces, and could themselves be victims, sympathetic, and even heroic and noble.'[26] Following the emergence of the horror genre after the Enlightenment, the nineteenth century saw the transition from supernatural to psychological versions of the demonic encounter.[27] The monster was now not just on the outside, but inside the psyche itself. Marina Warner has talked about monsters' 'double presence': they are both alien *and* ourselves; Doctor Frankenstein and his monster are both parts of each other, equally monstrous, equally human. The aliens, too, in much science fiction and film, are shown to be parts of ourselves, 'monsters from the id,' as the film *Forbidden Planet* describes it.[28]

This is a very brief overview of some of the ways in which monsters have been understood in a European context, intended as background information to the development and use of the monster and monster theory. Below, I will look more closely at the monstrous in China. First, however, I want to look at the question of *why* monsters have been so popular, so widespread, and used in so many different contexts.

'The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body'

Asma writes that monsters 'probably appear and reappear in our stories because they help us (and they helped our ancestors) navigate the dangers of our environment,' and that the fact that the monster archetype seems to appear in every culture's artwork suggests that 'stories about monster threats... provide us with a ritualized, rehearsable simulation of reality, a virtual way to represent the forces of nature, the threats from other animals, and the dangers of human social interaction. Each era expresses different fascinations with monsters – medieval Christians focused on demons, the Gilded Age had a penchant for freaks – but some prototypical qualities unite the family of monsters, albeit loosely.'[29]

The first of Cohen's seven 'Monster Theses' is 'The monster's body is a cultural body.'

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25 Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror,* p57.
26 Friedman, in Mittman, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters,* pxxxvi.
27 Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy; the Literature of Subversion,* London: Methuen, 1981, p108.
28 *Forbidden Planet,* dir. Fred M. Wilcox, MGM, 1956. For examples of doubleness in European fiction see Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* , London: Penguin, 2003; James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.
29 Asma, *On Monsters,* p283.

He here argues that monsters are culturally specific, and must be examined 'within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them.'[30] Just as medieval European monsters need to be examined against their background of Christian doctrine, monsters in early China must be approached from a different angle, that of a world which was understood to be constantly transforming.

In his second thesis, however, he points out that 'the monster always escapes'; it 'turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else.'[31] The thesis that the monster escapes can be read equally as 'the monster returns'. To use Stephen Asma's words, 'although certain aspects of monsters are historically provincial and relative, irrevocably situated in context, some show perennial persistence'.[32] They appear, again and again, in different times and cultures. Cohen asks, 'who is the yeti if not the medieval wild man? Who is the wild man if not the biblical and classical giant?' These recurring aspects, argues Asma, 'reflect more universal human anxieties and cognitive tendencies.'[33] They return because they reflect shared fears, anxieties and desires.

In order to domesticate and tame – or disempower – what a culture finds threatening, the monster is created.[34] And this 'making of monsters' gives insight into what cultures fear, and what they desire. Often, the themes and anxieties expressed by monsters remain quite constant through time; 'the known against the unknown... the rational against the irrational and inexplicable... the masculine against the feminine... culture against nature...'[35] In short, what is often feared are untamed forces that threaten orderly human society, that cross the boundaries that are in place to ensure order.

These 'untamed forces' can be seen as various kinds of dangerous and threatening 'others'. The monster is used in different ways to deal with these forces, sometimes suggesting that their otherness can be defeated, sometimes that it can be embraced. The monster 'dwells at the gates of difference', writes Cohen, and can function as a 'dialectical other... an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond.'[36] Difference can often be exaggerated into monstrosity; 'Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political,

30 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p4.
31 Ibid., p4-5.
32 Asma, *On Monsters*, p283.
33 Ibid.
34 See Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p7-8, 'Thesis VI: The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference'.
35 D.Felton, 'Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome', in Mittman, p131.
36 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p7.

racial, economic, sexual.'[37] Representations of groups or individuals as monstrous have been used time and again for political and ideological ends. Jews have suffered in particular from this kind of mis-representation. And history, politics and art have created demons for propaganda, such as Richard III, exaggerating his deformity, and giving birth to a monster before our eyes. [38] These monstrous representations enact violence on their subjects, connecting them to the phenomenon of the scapegoat. As René Girard writes, monsters are never created '*ex nihilo*' but through a process of fragmentation and recombination in which elements are extracted 'from various forms' (including – indeed, especially – marginalised social groups) and then assembled as the monster, 'which can then claim an independent identity.'[39]

What changes each time monsters are made, or each time they return, is that when 'the grave opens and the unquiet slumberer strides forth... the message proclaimed is transformed by the air that gives its speaker new life.'[40] The historical and cultural context – the particular issues and anxieties of the time – inevitably influences how and why the monster is represented and used. One example that Cohen uses is that of the vampire, which has been seen again and again in different forms.[41] From early mythological or folkloric creatures who existed by feeding parasitically off other living creatures, to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, to the contemporary re-tellings of Anne Rice and Stephanie Meyer, the vampire has returned many times.[42] Stoker provided for the Victorians a portrayal of the foreign count's 'transgressive but compelling sexuality', providing also an example of how the monster can represent a fearful yet also fascinating subversion of social and sexual values. Anne Rice introduced her homosexual vampires in the 1970s and the fact, 'that she created a pop cultural phenomenon in the process is not insignificant, especially at a time when gender as a construct has been scrutinized at almost every social register.'[43] And now, with the enormous success of the *Twilight* franchise, the vampire has been reborn yet again as the idealised, superhuman love interest, the young adult who never grows up. 'In each of these vampire stories, the undead returns in slightly different clothing, each time to be read against contemporary social

37 Ibid.
38 The recent discover of the bones of Richard III in Leicester has, however, boosted efforts by groups such as the Richard III Society to campaign for a rethinking of his representation and reputation.
39 René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press,1989 p33.
40 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p5.
41 Though the word 'vampire' only became popularised in the early eighteenth century. For a fascinating study of the way the vampire has been embraced by different ages, see Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
42 See Anne Rice, *Interview With the Vampire*, New York: Knopf, 1976, and Stephanie Meyer, *Twilight*, London: Atom, 2006.
43 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p5.

movements or a specific, determining event.'[44] Each reappearance therefore needs to be approached on its own terms, but with the knowledge of the monster's history, as well. This will be relevant in later chapters when I discuss figures in *Liaozhai* such as the ghost, and the 'living dead', versions of which have been seen again and again, in different contexts.

To conclude, the monster can work both within and against dominant cultural values, acting both to uphold and to subvert. Monsters can be made of 'others' who threaten the dominant culture; demons in China were often represented with non-Chinese features, and the homophones 'barbarian' and 'fox' were used as to link the two ideas together.[45] They can also be used as warnings against straying from the established path, or as Cohen puts it, they 'police the borders of the possible', threatening those who stray with the monster, or with monstrous change as punishment. They stand as cautionary tales.[46]

And yet they can also test and threaten the boundaries put in place by culture and society. By their ability to threaten and cross boundaries – both natural and cultural – they reveal not only the boundaries themselves, but also their weaknesses, and they subvert the values they represent. Whilst this can be fearful, it can also present an otherwise unknown freedom, and an enticing opening of possibilities. As Cohen writes; 'The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint.'[47]

Part II.

The first part of this chapter dealt with questions of what the monster – and monster theory – is and does. The following part will move on to look specifically at the Chinese context. Much academic work on the monster has centred on European or American texts or culture, and this can be useful to bear in mind when examining the Chinese context and Chinese works. Whilst stressing the importance of cultural specificity, critics such as Cohen and Asma have also pointed out how the monster 'returns' in very different contexts. Read against creatures from different contexts, new connections may be possible, leading to a deeper understanding of the monster in *Liaozhai,* as well as the cultural background of the collection.

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44 Ibid.
45 Chapter Six of this thesis also examines the intersection of fox *hu* (狐) and barbarian *hu* (胡).
46 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p12.
47 Ibid., p17.

Looking at the monstrous in non-European works can also bring something new to our understanding of the field of monster theory, which, although recent academic works such as the Ashgate Companion have tried to redress the balance, has been largely approached through a Western-centric lens. The different perceptions and understanding of the monster throughout Chinese history and folklore have influenced *Liaozhai*, and a study of this, within the framework of monster theory, can help to form a deeper understanding of the monstrous in different contexts.

The Monstrous in China

This section will deal with ways of understanding the natural order in China, and how this has influenced perceptions of the monstrous. There is a long and complex history of ghosts and demons in China, and I give a necessarily brief overview here, concentrating on the creatures which will be examined in more detail in other chapters of this thesis.

Karin Myhre begins her discussion of monstrous animal hybrids in China by pointing out that; 'While monsters are often conceived as freaks of nature or beings violating natural laws, this notion is a problematic one in traditional China as the inherent order (*dao* 道) was understood to be constantly transforming.'[48] This belief in the constant transformations of nature has wide-reaching effects on how the monstrous has been represented and understood in Chinese culture.

In the European tradition, the boundaries between nature and human culture were thought of as firmly fixed, due in part to the belief in one 'Creator', who made all things. Hybrid or metamorphosing creatures were therefore a greater danger and anxiety, because of their threat to those boundaries. When discussing the body of Richard III, and how in representations he moved between a monster and a man, Cohen raises the question of the extent to which bodies are coherent, and highlights the unsettling nature of this issue; 'At the same time that Richard moves between Monster and Man, the disturbing suggestion arises that this incoherent body, denaturalized and always in peril of disaggregation, may well be our own.'[49] This fear of change and metamorphosis, of not being whole or 'one', can be seen stretching back through European writing, the same fear seen in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as in Kafka's, in the twentieth century (something which will be discussed further in Chapter Four).

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48 Karin Myhre, 'Monsters Lift the Veil: Animal Hybrids and Processes of Transformation', in Mittman, p217.
49 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p9.

However, in China the fact that attitudes towards change and metamorphosis were different, shaped by a universe in which change is constant, gives a different kind of tension to the issue of 'monster' and 'man'. Whilst this belief comes from some of the earliest cosmological thinking, the influence of Buddhist thought, and the spiritual system of karma and rebirth, has also coloured perceptions of the monstrous. As Rajyashree Pandey points out, in the Buddhist tradition there is 'a greater fluidity between human and beast, which mitigates against the monstrous animal being seen as pure alterity.'[50]

Traditional Chinese thought saw 'the natural world as susceptible to moral transformation and changes induced by human behaviour', and pictured 'the world of plants, trees, birds and beasts as a continuously changing physical reality.'[51] It was a perception of the world that didn't insist on clear boundaries, either between human and animal, or the world of spirits and demons. Instead, each was; 'part of an organic whole in which the mutual relationships among species were characterized as contingent, continuous, and interdependent.' [52] Transformation and change were pivotal to the perception and understanding of the natural world, not only in early China but also when *Liaozhai* was written.

Roel Sterckx examines the term *ziran* 自然, frequently associated with Chinese concepts of nature. It can be translated, he states, as 'so of itself', or 'so of its own accord'. 'This term implies an emphasis on spontaneity rather than on physical and objectifiable reality,' he argues. It is in essence an adjectival qualification, describing, 'a state of being rather than an essential quality and is therefore not equivalent to nature as a physical world that exists of itself and by its own laws'.[53] So it is a world of change and mutability. And in fact it is this principle of change and transformation which, developing in the *Zhuangzi* and other proto-Daoist texts, was seen to operate as the 'begetter' of species and new life.[54]

So here transformation and metamorphosis is not anomalous but an essential part of nature, and of generation. Sterkx points out, however, that other meanings and uses existed. Perceptions and understandings of the strange and anomalous were complex and often contradictory, as the above discussion of *yi*, *qi*, and *guai* illustrates. Just as metamorphosis was perceived as necessary to nature, and often wondrous (sages and Daoist immortals strove

50 Rajyashree Pandey, 'The Medieval in Manga', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol 3, 1, 2000, p21.
51 Roel Sterckx, *Animal and Daemon in Early China.* New York: State University of New York Press, 2002, p165.
52 Ibid., p5.
53 Ibid., p15.
54 Ibid., p167.

towards bodily transformation and transcendence), the capacity to assume different shapes also applied to baleful animals, and malignant demons. This complexity is reflected, as I argue below, in *Liaozhai*, in which different understandings and uses of the strange and monstrous can be seen in different stories.

Approaching the theme of monstrosity from a historical angle, some of the earliest and most influential visual representations of monstrous hybrid figures in China were the monster masks (*taotie* 饕餮), which functioned as decorative motifs in bronze vessels cast through the Shang (c.1600 – c.1046 BCE) and Zhou (c.1045 – c.256 BCE) dynasties. Although scholars differ on the significance of these motifs and the meaning of hybrid animal forms in bronzes, Myhre remarks that, 'Whatever the intentions of those producing and using these vessels in the Shang, the notion that the eerie zoomorphic motifs represented monsters is evident as early as the late Zhou.'[55] She points to mentions of *taotie* in the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左传 (*Master Zuo's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*), China's oldest historical chronicle, covering the period from the 7th to the 4th centuries BCE; 'In the past when the Xia dynasty first possessed the Divine Virtue, the distant quarters made diagrams of the strange creatures, contributed metal to the Nine Herdsmen, and cast cauldrons to replicate the strange creatures. Due to this the hundred spirit creatures were fully revealed, enabling the common people to recognize the machinations of the gods and the demons.'[56] So the bronzes functioned as a kind of guide to the dangerous creatures in the wilderness.

Whilst ominous animals had long been appearing in texts, including the *Book of Odes*, (*Shijing*, 詩經), it was only in the *Zuozhuan* that more detached comments on the causes, workings and status of strange appearances in the natural world began to appear. Here can also be found the premise (similar to that described above, in Greek and Roman thought), that it is human disorder and a lack of virtue that can cause the occurrence of prodigies.[57] And it was also here that the principle 'monsters arise from men', (*yao you ren xing* 妖由人興) was first noted; 'Prodigies come forth from man. If people have no pretext for strife, prodigies do

55 Myhre, p218-219, in Mittman. When debating the significance of the *taotie* motif, art historians have traditionally focused on formal aspects of design and its development, whilst historians and scholars of religion have looked instead for symbolic or practical meanings in these remarkable designs. See Max Loehr, *Ritual Vessels of Bronze Age China*, New York, Asia Society, 1968, for the art historian's approach. For other interpretations, see Sarah Allen, *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art and Cosmos in Early China*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).

56 Myhre, p219-220, translation modified slightly and expanded from Donald Harper, 'A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century BC', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45/2 (1985), p279, n.56.

57 Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, p208.

not come about by themselves. When people neglect constancy, prodigies arise. Therefore prodigies exist.'[58]

Sterckx describes the 'canonization' of these portentous metamorphoses culminating in the Han dynasty, in Ban Gu's 班固 (32-92 BCE) 'Treatise on the Five Phases', *Wuxing zhi*, 五行志. The metamorphic imagery in the treatise includes animal mutations and human gender change, sexual union between creatures of different species, miraculous births, and the appearance of hybrids and physically deformed creatures.[59] Rather than spontaneous changes in form according to the rhythms of nature, metamorphoses documented in the treatise are presented as either the results of socio-political changes, or portents of those to come. This pattern became known as 'correlative thinking' – seeking to incorporate anomaly rather than reject it as inconsistent with a natural pattern.[60]

Around the 4th Century BCE, myths and legends began to appear in historical, literary, philosophical, geographical, and 'knowledge-broadening' (*bowu* 博物) works.[61] The most influential and well known of these works was the *Shanhai jing* (山海經) or the *Classic of Mountains and Seas,* which explored the strange beasts and geography found outside the realm, as well as folklore and myths, including figures such as the Queen Mother of the West (*Xi Wang Mu* 西王母), who was described as having a human face, a leopard's tail, and tiger's teeth.[62]

Anomalous creatures in Chinese texts, art, and folklore came in many forms. It should be pointed out that, as in many cultures, there was a mixing of the literary tradition of monsters and the strange that existed alongside folk and cultural practices and superstitions. Monsters were the subject of rituals and exorcism, with ghost masks composed of bulging eyes, long teeth, and sharp horns, used to intimidate and drive away harmful ghosts.[63] Ritual specialists from the Han onwards would transform themselves into animal hybrid monsters to fight off malevolent forces, bridging the boundary between this world and the world of spirits. Monsters also prowled Buddhist scripture. Their likenesses were put up in temples as guardians or protector spirits in the retinue of other, more powerful gods. They were depicted in visual and written sources as both benign spirits and ravaging demons, often with human

58 春秋左传注 *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, p197, in Sterckx, p208.
59 Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, p195.
60 See Charlotte Furth, 'Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth and Seventh Century China', *Late Imperial China*, 9.2 (Dec 1988), p7.
61 See Zhao Xiaohuan, *Classical Chinese Supernatural Fiction,* p22-23.
62 See Anne Birrell's translation, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, London: Penguin, 1999.
63 See Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai: Pu Songling's Ghostlore and its History of Reception*, p32, and Karin Myhre, in Mittman, p224-225 on exorcisms.

bodies combined with the features of animals or non-Chinese foreigners. Offerings were made to court their benevolence, or steps taken to guard against them.[64]

Mythical animals such as dragons were also a long-standing part of Chinese mythology and lore, and were depicted in a variety of ways, which will be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, on animals and metamorphosis. Another anomalous creature frequently appearing in Chinese fiction and anomaly accounts is the fox, which will also be discussed throughout the thesis.

Although Confucius himself was famously unwilling to speak of 'prodigies' – 'The Master did not speak of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders, and spirits' (子不語怪力亂神) – he did not categorically deny the existence of ghosts and spirits, instead saying; 'Respecting ghosts and spirits but keeping one's distance from them – this is true knowing.' (敬鬼神而遠之，可謂知矣). Anthony C. Yu writes; 'Whether this last statement implies a sincere presupposition of their existence or an oblique denial is tantalizingly ambiguous.'[65] What this statement did contribute to, however, was the denial of any real legitimacy to spirits, prodigies, and the strange in Confucian cosmology.[66] So this narrative impulse was instead given rein in the tradition of *zhiguai* tales.

It was during the Six Dynasties (220-618 CE) that *zhiguai* writing began to flourish. Many such tales, which tended to be concerned with subject matters seen as outside the remit of official dynastic histories, simply recounted an anomalous event or an encounter with a monstrous creature, although their material was very broad. The most representative work of this time has been seen as Gan Bao's (died 336 CE) *In Search of the Supernatural* (*Soushen ji*, 搜神記), which was to exert a strong influence on later writers. Whilst the tales of Gan Bao and other Six Dynasties writers tended to be very brief accounts, the *chuanqi* tales which emerged during the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) were longer and more complex.[67] Although

64 Robert Campany has studied how the demonic is portrayed in the 1592 novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西游記). He looks at how the various demons in the novel are subjugated, and considers the Buddhist and Daoist aspects of their representation. 'Demons, Gods, and Pilgrims: The Demonology of the *Hsi-yu Chi*'. *Chinese Essays, Articles, Reviews*, vol. 7, no. 1/ 2 (July 1985), p95-115. See also Campany, 'Cosmogony and Self-Cultivation: The Demonic and the Ethical in Two Chinese Novels.' *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 14 (1986): 81-112.

65 Yu, 'Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit', p403.

66 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai*, p38.

67 For a more in-depth discussion of Chinese *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, see Chen Wenxin 陳文新, *Wenyan xiaoshuo shenmei fazhan shi* 文言小說審美發展史, Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2002. Chen traces the roots of *zhiguai* writing back to early historical and philosophical writings such as the *Zuozhuan*, mentioned above. There is critical disagreement about the fictional aspect of these tales. Kenneth DeWoskin argues that Six Dynasties *zhiguai* mark the birth of Chinese fiction (see Kenneth DeWoskin, 'The Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai* and the Birth of Fiction', in *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*. ed. Andrew H. Plaks,

they dealt with ghosts, fox spirits and other types of anomaly, the monstrous tended to be secondary to the plot, focusing more on the human aspects of the romance than the anomalous nature of the monster itself.[68]

So representations of the strange and supernatural were widespread in Chinese culture, from early pictorial representations, to *zhiguai* tales and the creatures of *Liaozhai zhiyi* and beyond. These representations did not remain static, and depictions and perceptions of monsters changed from period to period, reflecting social and cultural changes, as well as different understandings of the natural world. What the discourse on strange animals, and on ghosts, spirits and demons reflects is the fact that the realms of humans, animals, and spirits were not perceived as being clearly separated, but merged, as Sterkx puts it, 'in varying composite or demonic creatures that prompted interrogation, interpretation, and response.'[69] Another key issue is that the representation and interpretation of the monstrous was made more complex by the Confucian interdiction against speaking of prodigies, a complexity that, as we will see below, was to have an impact on the reception of *Liaozhai zhiyi*.

Approaches to *Liaozhai*

Before discussing the collection in any detail, I turn here to examine some of the major ways in which *Liaozhai* has been approached by scholars. This brief overview will allow for a better understanding of the complexity of the text, and of the ways in which this complexity has been tackled in the critical literature surrounding the collection.

As argued above, the collection has been read, adapted and critiqued in so many ways that the collection itself, taken together with its criticism and adaptations, has become a monstrous hybrid. Other collections of strange tales, such as the two most famous collections

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Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p 21-52.) Robert Campany, however, argues against this idea, highlighting the fact that *zhiguai* from the Warring States period to the Six Dynasties were part of a cosmographic tradition of collecting anomalies from the periphery (Campany, *Strange Writing*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, p162). See the following chapter for more on the issue of anomaly collection.

68 Zhao Xiaohuan, providing an overview of Chinese anomaly tales, writes that, following the Tang, Song (960-1279) *zhiguai* showed a strong influence from the Tang tales, but taken as a whole, hardly attained the Tang level in terms of expression and imagination. After the Song, *zhiguai* production and publication experienced a decline, with few works of supernatural fiction being produced, apart from those which were simply reproductions or recompiliations of earlier tales. The situation improved in the early Ming (1368-1644) dynasty. The Ming was a time when fiction in classical Chinese was for the first time outnumbered by fiction in the vernacular, but the *zhiguai* tradition still continued to develop, and eventually reached its climax in the early Qing with the appearance of *Liaozhai*. Zhao Xiaohuan, p145-146.

69 Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, p206.

to follow *Liaozhai* in the eighteenth century – Ji Yun's 紀昀 (1724-1805) *Random Jottings from the Cottage of Close Scrutiny* (*Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記), and Yuan Mei's 袁枚 (1716-1797) *What the Master Did Not Say* (*Zi bu yu* 子不語) – have received a more unified critical reception. But these are much shorter works, and less encyclopaedic in nature.

Judith Zeitlin, in *Historian of the Strange*, describes the collection as having three 'waves' of reception, from the earliest wave of friends and contemporaries of the author, to the late Qing commentators in the nineteenth century. Although I do not examine the commentaries on *Liaozhai* as part of this thesis, due to the constraints of space, it is interesting to look briefly at Zeitlin's overview, because it gives an idea of the complexity of the attitudes to the monstrous and strange in China. It also illustrates that, although now *Liaozhai* is seen as a high point of classical Chinese fiction, its history is far from simple.

The first wave, 'Legitimating the Strange', defends the tradition of recording anomalies by redefining the strange in human terms, diffusing any threat that anomalies pose to the human order. In this approach, strangeness is bound up within the moral workings of the universe. It is an approach which is tied into the tradition of correlative thinking, described above, in which anomalies were taken as omens manifesting Heaven's will.[70]

The second wave, 'Self-expression and allegory', in the eighteenth century, argues that the collection is primarily a serious act of self-expression – not really about the strange at all, and thus tries to distance it or even remove it from the anomalies tradition. Here the strange content is 'familiarized and excused', used as a 'smoke-screen' for the presence and literary intention of the author.[71] Finally, the nineteenth century commentators who make up the third wave, 'Style and the analogy to vernacular fiction', no longer argue over the meaning of the strange, but instead defend *Liaozhai* on the grounds of literary style and narrative technique.[72]

So the 'discourse on the strange', as Zeitlin calls it, illustrates the complexity of *Liaozhai*'s critical reception, and the different ways in which the depiction of the anomalous and monstrous in the collection was understood and critiqued. Though this is a much simplified paraphrasing of Zeitlin's discussion of this complex process, it serves to illustrate some of the ambiguity regarding the reading and understanding of the strange in fiction, due in part to the Confucian admonishment 'not to speak' of the spirits.

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70 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p22.
71 Ibid., p27.
72 Ibid., p35.

Next, I turn to some of the more recent critical approaches. As the collection has been so widely studied, I concentrate on only certain critics here, as providing pertinent examples of these major approaches. Other critics' voices will be heard throughout the thesis.

One key aspect of *Liaozhai's* critical reception is, perhaps due to the sheer size of the collection, the frequent concentration on only a certain number of stories. Many critics in the twentieth century have looked mainly at the tales of beautiful, benign ghosts and demons, leading to a marked critical imbalance in these stories' favour. Only more recently have the shorter 'horror stories' of the collection begun to receive equal attention.

The Taming of the Strange – The Humanised Monster

When asking acquaintances about their image of a typical *Liaozhai* character, the answer is almost inevitably, 'a beautiful ghost or fox spirit.' As discussed above, of the great number of *Liaozhai* adaptations, into film, television, and other media, many have concentrated on romantic characters such as Nie Xiaoqian and Yingning, to the extent that the public perception of the collection is very much biased towards a small number of these romantic tales.[73] Many scholars, too have concentrated on the romances of ghosts and foxes with human men. Bookshops in China have large sections devoted to *Liaozhai*, full of books with titles such as *Love and Liaozhai*, often lavishly illustrated, with pictures of beautiful women in long, swirling robes.

This concentration on the romantic aspects of the tales is also often motivated by the humanisation of the supernatural characters. One typical way of looking at the supernatural creatures of *Liaozhai* has been to see them simply as another way of portraying the human. This approach in some ways recalls Judith Zeitlin's description of the second 'wave' of reception of *Liaozhai*, in the eighteenth century, in which the collection was seen or argued as being 'self-expression or allegory.' It has also provided a way of approaching the collection during the periods in the twentieth century when ghosts and superstition were politically dubious subjects. Ma Ruifang, 馬瑞芳 among others, argues that when *Liaozhai* describes ghosts and demons, it is not describing ghosts and demons at all, but real people, and real feelings.[74] Lu Xun remarked in his history of Chinese literature that the non-human figures in the tales are so charming and human, so easy to feel close to, that it is easy to forget that they

73 See Wang Fucong 王富聰. *Liaozhai yingshi pinglun* 聊齋影視評論, Shandong: Shandong wenyi chubanshe, 1993, for a discussion of television and film adaptations of the tales up until 1993.

74 Ma Ruifang, 馬瑞芳, *Jiang Liaozhai*, 講聊齋 Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005, p77.

are 'other'.[75]

Wai-yee Li calls this process 'the taming of the strange', arguing that the collection delights in creating 'enchanted realms', yet feels the need, 'to appropriate the otherworld for mundane reality.'[76] For Li, this mundane reality is the reality of moral law and human emotion. Certainly, several of the most famous stories involve ghost or fox women who have relationships with human men, and who, through their acceptance into the family, and especially through childbirth, become, to all intents and purposes, human. Li goes on to say that; 'The supernatural element is re-evaluated and sometimes dismissed as secondary to moral issues in motivating the progression of events…The defining trait of the immortal is his or her capacity for depth of feeling.'[77] It is through love for the human man, and often through filial piety to his parents, and providing him with heirs, that the monster is accepted, and her anomalous background ignored. This recalls in some ways one of the medieval European interpretations of the monster, in moral terms. It also valorises the *human* above all else.

This is not only a humanising of the creatures in the collection, but an *idealised* humanising. The beautiful fox spirits and ghosts are seen as a more perfect vision of the human (in many cases, of the human woman in particular). And it is the idealised Confucian family which is created by the relationship between human men and supernatural women (who also often provide the man with the professional and financial success he desires). Karl Kao calls this, 'a semiotic *projection* of attributes of the human world, including human desires, onto the *other* worlds, be it the world of the spirits of fauna, flora, and even mineral, or of ghosts and fairies. Images from the other world acquire the status as duplicates of the human world and furthermore become the manifestations of idealised, most desirable beings.'[78]

So this approach can be seen as 'the taming of the strange', to use Li's phrase. It argues that the anomalous in *Liaozhai* is not so strange, after all. Daniel Hsieh, writing about the romantic relationships between human men and supernatural women in Chinese fiction, argues that the harmonious conclusions in the *Liaozhai* stories cancel out any strangeness or

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75 '花妖狐魅，多具人情，和易可親，忘為異類'. Lu Xun, 魯迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe,* 中國小說史略, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998 p147.

76 Wai-yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature,* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993, p94.

77 Ibid., p96.

78 Karl S.Y. Kao, 'Projection, Displacement, Introjection: The Strangeness of *Liaozhai zhiyi*', in Hung, *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature,* Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994, p209.

eroticism.[79]

This humanising of *Liaozhai* is also taken up by critics who argue for an even closer allegorical, socio-cultural reading. The collection exposes society's darkness, argues Lei Qunming 雷群明. It exposes official corruption and other vices, which have been themes throughout history but have rarely been exposed in such a deep and intricate way.[80]

Such an understanding of the collection focuses not on the strange itself, but on how it is used to reflect a longing for an idealised human world, or the darkness within culture and society. This, as with all the different approaches, brings benefits: ways of highlighting certain aspects of the collection, and of the Qing literati world in which the collection was written. (I will look more closely at the theme of idealisation in Chapter Five). However, by seeing only the human in each of the supernatural creatures, their monstrous aspects are lost, and therefore so is much of their impact – the ways they can rend culture, subvert it, or support it. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes; 'Merely to humanize the creature blunts his critique of the systems that exclude him.'[81] As discussed above, the monster does a great deal of cultural work; it questions and subverts, it threatens and reveals. By examining the monster as if it were human, it ceases to be 'cognitively threatening.' It no longer threatens the established boundaries of society and thought. Whilst this can enable the monster to be seen and evaluated like any other human character, it also leads to an over-emphasis on allegorical and satirical readings, and ignores the more subtle 'cultural work' it may be doing; the monster as *monstrum*, showing, revealing, warning.

This approach also tends to disregard many of the less romantic stories and shorter *zhiguai* tales. The beautiful foxes and ghosts can be seen as human, in that they behave in human ways, and enter human society, but what of those less benign creatures? Some can be said to portray the more negative aspects of humanity – greed, or desire for revenge. Others are instead grotesque inversions of human behaviour: in one tale a strange and repulsive woman appears at night, seeming to cook pancakes which turn out, in the morning, to be a pile of beetles; in another, a man pulls out a woman's intestines in front of the eyes of the horrified protagonist.[82] But many of the *zhiguai* tales are so short that there is no space for such a 'taming'. The tales are left unresolved, the reader unsettled, the strange unexplained.

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79 Daniel Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, p92.

80 Lei Qunming, 雷群明, *Liaozhai yu xiezuo yishu jianshang*聊斋與写作艺术鉴赏, Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2006, p22.

81 Cohen, 'Afterword', in Mittman, p462.

82 'Botuo wen' (182) 傅饦媪'The Old Noodle Soup Woman', p632. 'Chou chang' (365) 抽腸' 'Drawing Out the Intestines', p226.

The Renewal of the Strange

Judith Zeitlin, in her book *The Historian of the Strange*, takes a different approach. In this book she explores the collection's *renewal* of the strange as a literary category, looking especially at the relationship between the strange and the crossing of boundaries. I make considerable use of her work throughout this thesis, using her discussion of the strange in *Liaozhai* as part of my own theoretical framework.

As discussed above, Zeitlin examines the different words and concepts surrounding 'the strange', and concludes that perhaps the strange is a category not definable at all – its key feature is its elusiveness and changeability. Her book looks in particular at the theme of boundaries in the collection. Boundary-crossing between different realms (between the living and the dead, the mortal and the immortal, between dream and reality) has always been a feature of tales of the strange in the *zhiguai* tradition. But Zeitlin argues that the strangeness of *Liaozhai* takes this further, in the shifting, erasure, and proliferation of boundaries throughout the collection. She focuses on three categories of boundary-crossing: obsession, gender dislocation, and dream. Each of these themes, she argues, reflects the concerns of Ming-Qing literati culture. She examines especially the mingling of reality and illusion which occurs in the tales, pointing out that the strange in *Liaozhai*, 'often results when things are paradoxically affirmed and denied at the same time. In other words, the boundary between the strange and the normal is never fixed but is constantly altered, blurred, erased, multiplied, or redefined.'[83] In this way, the strange is constantly being 'renewed'.

This approach is useful for its highlighting of the boundary-crossing nature of the collection. Those critics who argue that the *Liaozhai* ghosts and demons are 'simply people', or that the strange is 'tamed', diminish the boundaries that the stories examine, as well as the complexities that such figures contain.

Zeitlin's work has been extremely influential, and her investigation into the category of 'the strange' provides insights that help illuminate any study or reading of *Liaozhai*. However, as Karl Kao has pointed out, in a review of this work, she does not explain the *significance* of boundaries, nor why the writer might have been so interested in them, or why they might have been of particular importance during this time of Ming-Qing transition.[84]

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83 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p7.

84 Karl S.Y. Kao, 'Review: *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* by Judith T. Zeitlin, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 55.2 Dec, p540-556.

Whilst she points out, as discussed above, that it was early on recognised in China that the strangeness of a thing depends not on the thing itself, but on the perception of those who behold it, the *impact* of this perception is not examined. Like the critics who highlight the collection's 'taming of the strange', this approach does not provide any in-depth insight into how the *Liaozhai* monster (as a container for the strange and its elusive meanings) can question and unsettle established norms and ways of thinking.

A Gallery of Grotesques – the Aesthetics of Horror

Whilst many critics concentrate on the romantic aesthetics of *Liaozhai*, Sing-Chen Lydia Chiang takes another approach. Her 'aesthetics of horror' look instead at the short, strange, *zhiguai* tales of hideous ghosts and horrific monsters. Whilst these tales have received much less critical attention than the romantic stories discussed above, Chiang argues for their importance in the collection overall.

In her study, *Collecting the Self; Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*, Chiang concentrates on the grotesque bodies in these stories, as well as in the tales of Ji Yun and Yuan Mei; 'Similar to the monstrous forms representing terra incognita on a pre-modern European map…the figures of grotesque aliens are juxtaposed with stories of marvels in *Liaozhai*. These tales of disenchantment were meant to contrast with, set in sharp relief, and perhaps to reinforce, the centrality of tales of enchantment in the famed story collection.'[85] Chiang looks at the hideous crone, the 'monstrous womb', the failed exorcist, and argues that these figures reflect a crisis in self-hood, and socio-political alienation. The uncanny other is 'the grotesque self', she writes, and the recurrent symbols of threatening or ludicrous aliens in *Liaozhai* mark the borders and fissures of a 'mythic cosmos'.[86] If the figures of the beautiful, benign female ghosts and foxes are set up as the perfect, 'idealised' image of combined wife and courtesan, then the figures of the hideous ghost and other grotesques, 'expose a raw nerve of the male psyche, and reveal a crack in the totalizing schemes of late imperial gender discourse.'[87]

This way of looking at the monstrous creatures of the collection recalls the representation and interpretation of monsters in Europe in the nineteenth century, which was particularly concerned with the monster's 'double presence', representing both the alien but

85 Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005, p82, p124.
86 Ibid,, p86, p88.
87 Ibid., p96.

also the self, alienated from its culture, society or selfhood. The emergence of the field of psychoanalysis had a great influence on the understanding of the 'monster of the mind', and Chiang takes Zeitlin to task for not using Freud's work on the uncanny in her examination of the strange in *Liaozhai*.[88]

However, Judith Halberstam, another critic of the monstrous, criticises modes of interpretation such as the psychoanalytic, which insist on the essential link between psychosexual pathology and monstrosity, arguing that this approach too easily simplifies the monstrous into 'anything repressed' in the psyche.[89] As monstrosity is historically and culturally conditioned, the usefulness of this approach needs to be questioned (though like those discussed above, it can undoubtedly reveal certain aspects and provoke new ways of thinking about the collection).

Chiang's work has revealed interesting aspects of the collection's *zhiguai* tales, and of its use of fear and horror (which I return to in the next chapter). Yet whilst she suggests this different way of looking at *Liaozhai*; one which appears to take the collection as a whole into account – both the tales of romance and wonder, and the tales of horror and the grotesque – her book concentrates solely on the horror tales of the three writers, and goes little further into the approach which she puts forward – taking the horror stories, many of which are found early on in the collection, as 'foundational texts' which introduce the primary themes (such as anxiety and alienation) to be found throughout the tales. The next critical approach to be discussed takes this suggestion a step further, trying to find a middle ground between the two strands of thought – the 'romantic aesthetics' and the 'aesthetics of horror.'

Ghostly *Liaozhai*

In his thesis, *The Ghost of Liaozhai: Pu Songling's Ghostlore and its History of Reception*, Luo Hui has pointed out that, 'Although based on a different group of tales, namely the *zhiguai*-style anecdotes, Chiang's “horror aesthetics” is not fundamentally different from the “romantic fantasy aesthetics” of scholars who focus on the long tales in the *chuanqi* style. Both approach *Liaozhai* from a predominantly human, male point of view, one emphasizing desire and the other highlighting fear.'[90] Luo, however, argues for a less human-centred

88 Ibid., p76. This thesis will discuss Freud's theory of the uncanny in relation to the monstrous spaces of the haunted house, examined in Chapter Six.
89 Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, Durham, N.C; London: Duke University Press, 1995, p11.
90 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai*, p82.

conception of the ghost, combining human psychology with the ghost's own existential dilemma. His approach thus tries to find a way to study both the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* aspects of the collection, taking the figure of the ghost as central.

Luo broadens the definition of ghost to include a spectrum of spiritual manifestations, writing that, 'It is evident that ghosts, foxes, fairies and various human, animal and plant spirits occupy the same terrain of Pu Songling's literary imagination.'[91] He argues that the ghost provides abstract cultural concepts such as the strange, the anomalous, the supernatural, with physical embodiment, and offers a vantage point from which literary representations of the ghost can be treated as characters rather than ideas. The ghost world in *Liaozhai*, he argues, presents a 'constantly evolving discourse on human identities and on human perceptions of the world beyond'.[92]

I follow Luo in using the monster in a very similar way, as an embodiment of the changing and elusive meanings of 'the strange', as well as a representation of complex social and cultural meanings. In using this method of approaching *Liaozhai*, it is possible to avoid a wholly human-centric approach. It allows for a multi-layered reading, one which encompasses both human, monstrous, and allegorical aspects of the characters. His thesis has thus provided useful theoretical tools for my own theoretical framework. By looking at all the *Liaozhai* creatures under one broad label, he is able to make an overview of the collection as a whole, and gather together a multi-layered and multi-stranded reading. He looks at both the tales of wonder and the tales of horror, examining them through the lens of the ghost, taking Chiang's approach a step further.

However, by grouping foxes, animal and plant spirits, and various other supernatural creatures all under the heading of 'ghost', he also opens up several problems. He argues that 'a non-species-based vision of the supernatural world is especially apparent in *Liaozhai*', and to some extent this can be seen to be true – as I have already discussed, it is difficult to pin down the attributes of specific creatures in *Liaozhai*, because they are so changeable from story to story. However, a ghost is a very different creature, I argue, to the fox and animal spirits, who are themselves very different to some of the other demons and creatures within the collection, and who all have different physical, social and cultural meanings, which I will be exploring throughout the thesis. By choosing the ghost as the label for all the *Liaozhai* creatures, he limits and confuses the different meanings these creatures can provide. As discussed above, these creatures are born out of specific times and cultures, and they do a lot

91 Ibid., p18.
92 Ibid.

of cultural work. The label of ghost is therefore a restrictive one. Therefore, although they share certain literary and cultural functions, by looking at all these creatures in the same way, their differences are ignored, and therefore so too are the different discourses and questions they can represent.

The ghost, for all its different interpretations and representations, is still one specific category of creature, with specific cultural implications. Ghosts have to do with the dead; the control of the dead, the insurrection of the dead. Ghosts were once human, and for all their monstrous representations, they still retain this link to humanity, and are thus connected to human fears about death and the afterlife. Judith Zeitlin highlights these differences in her book, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth Century China*. When discussing the *Liaozhai* story 'Lianxiang' (蓮香), which involves a love triangle between a human man, a ghost, and a fox spirit, Zeitlin points out that, 'as is often the case in *Liaozhai*, ghost and fox spirit are not interchangeable. Lotus-scent [Lianxiang] is decidedly *yang* to the ghost's *yin*. Although both are associated, in traditional thinking, with *yin*, and the earthy, the fox spirit in the story is associated with healing, laughter, warmth and wisdom, and the ghost with disease, melancholy, coldness and infatuation.'[93]

So different monsters can therefore suggest and represent different issues. And the varying representations of these creatures in *Liaozhai* provide varying ways of reflecting on the historical and socio-cultural background of the time.

The Monstrosity of *Liaozhai*

All of these approaches highlight ways of reading and interpreting the text, revealing new connections and ways of understanding the historical, cultural and social background of the collection. Throughout this thesis I make use of them all, especially the work of Zeitlin, Chiang and Luo. As discussed above, a key aspect of *Liaozhai* is its encyclopaedic nature. This also makes it difficult to study as a cohesive collection, however, and this is why I argue that the lens of monster theory can provide one of the most fruitful approaches. In this final section I examine more closely how the collection itself is monstrous, and how acknowledging this can reveal new avenues of exploration, which remain hidden when using only the approaches outlined above.

One of the ways in which *Liaozhai* is different to other collections of anomaly tales,

93 'Lianxiang' (69) 蓮香, p220-232; See Judith Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth Century China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007, p17.

and one of the reasons why I argue it is so open to being read through 'Monster Culture', is its authorial persona – the 'Historian of the Strange'. In his preface, or self-introduction, (*Liaozhai zizhi* 聊齋自志), the Historian introduces himself, his literary background, his own life story, and his current situation. He tells us of his 'mania' for collecting strange tales, and his fascination with anomalies. He evokes the atmosphere of the lonely writer's studio at night, the location of the recording of the strange; 'It's just that here it is the glimmering hour of midnight as I am about to trim my failing lamp. Outside my bleak studio the wind is sighing; inside my desk is cold as ice.'[94]

Constructed as an entryway into the stories, the preface, Judith Zeitlin argues; 'above all reveals the author's attempt to control or influence the reading of his book by fashioning himself into a lens through which the book would be refracted for his readers.'[95] But rather than introducing a unified persona, who will guide the reader through the book, it creates a character who is himself a hybrid – excessive and ever-changing. Through his many allusions the worlds of fiction and fact, dream and reality, the dead and the living, are conflated and confused. The Historian evokes the names of Li He 李賀 (790-816 CE) the Tang 'ghost poet' who wrote of strange and unearthly things, of the ancient poet and courtier Qu Yuan 屈原 (343-278 BCE) and of Gan Bao 干寶 (died 336) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101 CE), writers of *zhiguai.* And in his chosen name, he recalls the Grand Historian, *taishi gong* 太史公, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (139-86 BCE), writer of the *Shiji* 史記, or *Records of the Grand Historian.*

At the same time as drawing these parallels with esteemed figures of the past, he also provides a strange tale of his own birth, suggesting that he may be the reincarnation of a Buddhist monk.

His authorial comments further complicate the matter. In these comments it is frequently not the strangeness of the monster or event which he concentrates on, but the 'moral of the story'. [96] But can the authorial comments be trusted? There is a tongue-in-cheek quality to several of them, and others are given a moral spin which in fact seems to subvert the story to which they are appended. As Zeitlin points out, 'his commentary can be as twisted

94 Translation Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange,* p49. See the appendix to this thesis, p184, for the full preface and Zeitlin's translation.

95 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange,* p53.

96 The comments to the tales begin 異史氏曰, or 'The Historian of the Strange says...' The appending of 'XX 曰' began with Sima Qian, in his 史記, following which it could often be seen at the end of texts, in order for the writer to provide a summing up or an extra comment or related tale. (Though earlier writers such as Qu Yuan also added comments). See Zhao Fu, *Pu Songling yanjiu jikan* 蒲松齡研究集刊 4, p175.

and disorienting as the story it purports to interpret'.[97]

So the Historian is monstrous himself – a hybrid who creates a hybrid collection. 'The monster stands at the threshold', writes Cohen, and the Historian himself is a boundary creature, standing at the threshold between the worlds, longing for communication across the 'dark frontier' of death; 'Are the only ones who understand me,' he asks, 'in the green wood and the dark frontier?' He too, like the monster in Cohen's theses, is always escaping, disappearing into what Zeitlin calls a 'vortex of allusions.'[98]

From its very beginning, therefore, the collection's monstrous nature is suggested, a suggestion which is only deepened by the contents of the tales. There are almost five hundred tales altogether in the collection, and the reader of *Liaozhai* follows its human characters in never having the security of knowing what to expect; whether a fox will be wicked or benevolent, whether a demon may be harmful or helpful. All types of monstrosity can be found within its pages, from the repulsive to the desirable, from the harmless and comic to the fearful and fatal. Images of different types of monster are not stable throughout the collection but constantly shift and change. Both the ugly, frightening, malignant ghost and the beautiful, timid, fragile ghost are present; both motiveless, fearful demons and kind and beneficent ones, both the vampiric fox and the loving one.

The sources of the tales are also varied, consisting of both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* tales, of folklore, myth, superstition, hearsay, and the writer's imagination. The Historian references this fragmentary and hybrid nature in his preface, 'Piecing together patches of fox fur to make a robe, I vainly fashion a sequel to *Records of the Underworld*.'[99] He is stitching together, he says, stories and hearsay from all directions, and he includes too details from folktales and legends, as well as rewriting older texts, spending over twenty years working on the collection. The creation of the collection recalls in many ways one of Europe's most famous monstrous creations, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* This is also a novel both monstrous in its form and in its subject. Chris Baldick, in his study of the book and its impact, writes 'Like the monster it contains, the novel is assembled from dead fragments to make a living whole'.[100] It is made up of different narratives, in different voices, and different literary influences. *Liaozhai*, like Mary Shelley's own 'hideous progeny', is created in the night, the result of folly

97 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p104.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p49.
100 Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity and Nineteenth Century Writing,* Oxford: Clarendon, 1987, p30.

and madness, the Historian alone in his cold studio. 'My excitement quickens,' he writes, 'this madness is indeed irrepressible'.[101]

The myriad representations of monsters this 'madness' creates spill onto the page, posing a challenge for any critic and interpreter. As discussed above, partly because of its size, different critical approaches have focused on different aspects of the collection, mainly the romantic, *chuanqi* tales, in which human men fall in love with beautiful ghosts or animal spirits.

In fact, any attempt to study *Liaozhai* recalls Cohen's thesis that the monster is a 'harbinger of category crisis': 'A mixed category, the monster resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition...demanding instead a 'system' allowing polyphony, mixed response... and resistance to integration.'[102] *Liaozhai* itself – a monstrous hybrid – embodies this thesis, demanding its own 'mixed response', defying any classificatory system that tries to categorise it in one certain way.

Therefore, I argue that the monster – and Cohen's monster theses as a theoretical framework – is a way of approaching the collection as a cohesive entity. Cohen's monster theses acknowledge that the monster will not fit into neat categories. They acknowledge a complex cultural context and the incorporation of conflicting emotions and ideas. Looking at the monster in this way, using Cohen's theses, allows for ambiguity, for doubleness, for something being two things (or more) at once. It allows for the different and changing meanings of 'the strange' that the *Liaozhai* monster contains. It takes the hybridity of the collection as central, reflecting the importance of the heterogeneous structure of the collection in a way in which other critical approaches, with their narrower focus on only certain *types* of tale, have been unable to do.

Using Cohen's theses as a framework, throughout this thesis I will be looking at how the *Liaozhai* monsters can represent prohibitions, desires, fears, and difference. They can be a warning not to stray from the path, as in the stories of monstrous punishment, in which human bodies are changed and mutated, or in tales of the strange creatures that dwell outside civilisation. They can be idealistic, as Karl Kao points out, in the section above on 'the taming of the strange' – ghosts and animal spirits can offer romantic relationships or wealth and success. But what the 'taming' approach does not examine in depth is that these same creatures that seem to provide idealised visions of the perfect woman or family can also be subversive – the ideal family, or the coveted official position is only gained by crossing

101 Ibid., p44.
102 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p7.

boundaries, by accepting or becoming monstrous.

So within the collection, as Judith Zeitlin discusses, boundaries are unstable; crossed, blurred, erased or re-inforced. Established ways of thinking, and of ordering the world, are questioned repeatedly. So both reader and protagonist suffer from a 'sense of vertigo'. Lydia Chiang argues that the Qing collections of strange others are attempts to reconstruct 'cosmic order' through literary means.[103] It was a transitional time, in which both social and cosmic order were being unsettled. Cosmological views were changing; traditional correlative thinking was being challenged.[104] Memories of the difficult Ming-Qing transition were still fresh. And the literati were undergoing a crisis of confidence, due in part to the tension that existed in their professional lives, trying to find a position under an alien government; trapped by the exam system and the strictures of Confucian society. But *Liaozhai* seems to delight in *disorder*, subverting expectations in story after story, through narrative means and sometimes through the comments of the Historian of the Strange. I argue that in its repeated creating of alternative narratives and possibilities, it is a search for redefinitions and rethinking; for different ways of finding the ideal and the authentic, articulating a longing both for the things that the Confucian order stands for, and also the things it denies, and suggesting that the world is more complex and more wondrous than can be properly understood.

In the end, I argue, this search is an unresolved process. No conclusions are drawn from the myriad tales within the collection, and no certainties arrived at. But as He Manzi 何滿子 writes, when discussing the aesthetics of *Liaozhai*, it is not complete, perfected beauty but the *pursuit* of beauty which is the key to the writer's aesthetic project.[105]

Conclusion

It has always been a human desire to order the world – to categorise, to understand, to put things in their place. From Aristotle's endeavours to order natural history, to the early Chinese collecting of anomalies, to the Victorian project of categorisation, different eras have attempted to order the world in their own ways. By drawing boundaries, by categorising, humans have tried to understand and control the self and the other, the stable and the chaotic.

The monster reveals these boundaries. It can threaten them, cross them, stand at their

103 Chiang, *Collecting the Self,* p246.
104 The following chapters will discuss these changing cosmological views further.
105 He Manzi 何滿子, in Gu Meigao 辜美高, ed, *Guoji Liaozhai Lunwenji* 國際聊齋論文集, Beijing: Beijing shifan xueyuan chubanshe, 1992, p56.

threshold. Some create or strengthen social boundaries, or boundaries between classes or races; monsters born of 'political expedience and self-justifying nationalism,' which function as 'living invitations to action.' Other monsters – the monsters of prohibition – police 'the borders of the possible, interdicting through its grotesque body some behaviours and actions, envaluing others.'[106] And yet others threaten or destroy boundaries, crossing between worlds or species.

As a 'cultural body', the monster reveals patterns of order and disorder within the culture in which it is born. Throughout this thesis I will look at the different ways in which the monstrous is used and perceived in the collection – how it is feared and desired, how it can provide strength and freedom, how it can be a punishment or a gift – and examine how it is influenced by its cultural and historical background. I will look at how the monster simultaneously supports and subverts the established order in *Liaozhai* – how this is achieved, and what effect it has; how it explores new ways of thinking and being, allowing for re-definitions and re-conceptions of the world and the human place within it. I approach the collection through the monster as a *representation*, not only of 'the strange' but of other, sometimes contradictory, discourses.

The fact that *Liaozhai* has travelled so well in time – being read, critiqued and adapted over and over again since it was first published – suggests that it is not only the ordered, Confucian world in which the monster plays its part in exploring and questioning, but that it also encompasses broader issues, that are still meaningful to readers in different contexts and times. The enduring popularity of these tales of romances between monsters and men, of ghostly intrusions into the home, of demons and strange metamorphoses, suggests that issues such as the anxieties about the self and other, the contradictions between control and desire, and the tension between social expectations and individual happiness are as important and complex now as they were within the Confucian order during the Qing.

106 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p13.

Chapter Two: Monsters and Fear in *Liaozhai*

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that *Liaozhai* itself is a monstrous hybrid, 'patched together' out of fragments of folklore, previous tales, religious thinking, and the rich imagination of the Historian of the Strange, the assumed persona of the author who holds the collection together. It is this textual hybridity, alongside the monsters in its pages, which makes the work of 'monster theorists' such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen a fruitful way of approaching the collection. I argued that a great variety of different monsters are used in a great variety of different ways in *Liaozhai,* creating stories both enchanting and horrifying. Because so much scholarly work has concentrated on the enchanting tales rather than the horrifying, and because monstrosity – both in popular culture and in academia – has been so frequently linked to the emotion of horror, this chapter tries to redress the balance by looking at the extent to which fear and horror are used in *Liaozhai*, and the part they play overall in the collection. It discusses in particular Cohen's first 'monster thesis' – that the monster's body incorporates both fear and desire, fantasy and anxiety.

The most famous *Liaozhai* stories are those in which a human man falls in love with a supernatural woman. The romance of Ning Caichen and Xiao Qian, the laughing Yingning, the love triangle of man, fox and ghost in 'Lianxiang' (蓮香) have all appeared again and again not only in academic papers but on film and television screens (and even, more recently, in a stage musical).[1] These stories are well known and well loved, and for many, they define *Liaozhai* itself. The way in which the author uses these characters – ghosts, foxes, demons – to expose human feelings, human failings, and human relationships, has been justly praised.

However, there is another side to the collection which has been focused on much less. In each of these three stories is a glimpse of the more sinister side of these famous characters. Xiao Qian, possessed by an evil demon, has harmed many men before Ning Caichen arrives to save her. Yingning, whilst lovely and laughing, also lures her neighbour to a painful (and deadly) meeting with a scorpion, to punish him for his lust. And Sang, the protagonist of

1 'Nie Xiaoqian' (49) 聶小倩 'Nie Xiaoqian', p160-168 ; 'Yingning' (48) 嬰寧, 'Yinggning', p147-159; 'Lianxiang', p220. The stage musical was entitled *Liaozhai Rocks!* and performed by The Theatre Practise company in Singapore in 2010.

'Lianxiang', almost dies when his relationship with the ghost Li harms his health. So the fearful, dangerous side of the supernatural is glimpsed, but in these cases the stories transcend it, their human characters finding successful relationships with the supernatural women.

However, whilst fear and danger are hinted at then overcome in these stories, in others it is a much greater part of the tale. These are stories of walking corpses and hideous ghosts; of demons and trolls and dangerous magic. These stories, though often brief, play, I believe, an important part in the collection, though they have been largely dismissed or ignored. They do not involve beautiful fox spirits, or supernatural romance; they do not seem to provide a new way to look at 'real people and real feelings'; they would not, for the most part, provide the love and tragedy demanded by television and film. However, below, I discuss the different ways in which these stories work within the collection; how they are juxtaposed with the stories of enchantment, and how both kinds of tales can be read with and against each other, making up the hybrid nature of the collection.

The chapter first looks briefly at the main ways in which the horror tales in the collection have been approached, arguing that both approaches set the horror tales and tales of enchantment in opposition to each other, rather than looking for the connections between them. In order to illuminate these connections, I begin with a consideration of the definitions of fear and horror, in order to better understand what a 'horror tale' is. And in order to engage fully with contemporary critical thinking on the horror genre, I use the work of the theorist Noel Carroll, whose book *Paradoxes of the Heart: Or, the Philosophy of Horror* is one of the most influential texts on the genre. As I argued in the previous chapter, rather than examining *Liaozhai* solely within the tradition and context of Chinese supernatural fiction, reading it alongside the work of critics on horror and the monstrous situates it within a broader cultural and historical background, allowing for new insights to be gained.

Having examined the concepts of fear and horror, and the ways in which the *Liaozhai* tales fit into the genre as a whole, I then link what Carroll argues is the impulse behind the horror genre – curiosity; the drive to cross boundaries, to discover and explore the unknown – to the project of anomaly collection in China. I discuss collection as a way of discovering and ordering the world that partakes of both a fear and fascination with boundary-crossing. The periphery as wild and uncontrolled, as outside the reach of social norms, is both feared and desired.

And in *Liaozhai,* the collector is the Historian of the Strange, whose longing for boundary-crossing is articulated in his preface, a piece of writing which is foundational to the collection as a whole, introducing the conflicting emotions which are to be played out in the

tales.

The remaining sections of the chapter look more closely at the *Liaozhai*'s horrific monsters, and how they are juxtaposed, in the collection, with the enchanting, romantic monsters. Rather than approaching them as belonging to clearly opposed categories, I argue that their monstrous bodies contain fear and desire, anxiety and wonder.

Horror in *Liaozhai*

In one of the most famous *Liaozhai* tales, a hideous demon rips out the beating heart of the protagonist. Elsewhere, a man is forced to watch as a ghost enacts its own disembowelment; a scorpion demon takes its bloody revenge; sleeping men are attacked in their own homes; a corpse rises and begins a deadly pursuit. And yet some critics deny that horror plays any part in the collection at all. Whilst a greater concentration on the tales of enchantment is understandable, given that the short, horror tales make up a much smaller proportion of the whole, and that their brevity does not necessarily allow for in-depth examination, a complete dismissal or neglect of the horror tales appears to ignore a striking aspect of the collection.

Even Zhang Guofeng, who looks closely at the shorter, *zhiguai* tales, appears to allow only for 'The Restless Corpse' (尸變) to be called a true 'horror tale', arguing that, 'Although *Liaozhai* speaks of foxes and ghosts, the stories which truly have to do with horror are very few.'[2] Others allow for marginally more – Allan Barr comments that, 'within their modest aims they succeed superbly in capturing the reader's imagination by the use of telling detail.' However, he goes on to write that, 'These short tales concerned with a life-and-death struggle between man and supernatural adversary rarely attract comment from modern critics of *Liaozhai*, who are keen to find greater literary significance than simply a good horror story.'[3] The phrase 'simply a good horror story', is telling, and perhaps reflects the regard in which the genre of horror has been held by many critics and academics, though the situation is changing, and recent academic work has taken the genre more seriously, helped by scholars such as Cohen and Carroll.

Barr goes on to argue that in the writing of *Liaozhai*, 'interest in the simple story of a terrifying confrontation was not sustained beyond the early period.'[4] In his study of the

2 Zhang Guofeng 張國風, *Hua shuo Liaozhai* 話說聊齋, Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2008, p6. 'Shi bian' (3) 尸变, 'The Restless Corpse', p5-7.

3 Barr, 'A Comparative Study of Early and Late Tales in *Liaozhai zhiyi*', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 45, 1. June 1985, p160.

4 Ibid.

sequence of early and late tales by an in-depth analysis of the dating clues found within the collection, relating, for example, to verifiable historical events and figures, Barr finds that the majority of short, horrifying tales are found only in the earliest volumes of the collection. However, Sing-chen Lydia Chiang has recently argued against these views. She begins by contradicting Barr's dating arguments, stating that, 'Recent studies by Wang Zhizhong (1982), Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang (1998), and Ren Duxing (2000) rule out a correlation between the dating clues of the *Liaozhai* stories and the sequence of volumes, pointing out that among the datable stories, some later ones have been found in the first volumes, and early ones in the latter volumes.'[5] She argues that these stories were written throughout the creation of *Liaozhai* and believes that the writer in fact, 'never lost interest in the stylistic minimalism and the implied mythic worldview of the perennial *zhiguai* form.'[6]

So, far from dismissing the horror stories as simply a brief phase in the writing of *Liaozhai*, Chiang, unlike many critics, argues for the importance of the stories to the collection overall. Her argument is that they act as a kind of guide, introducing the main themes of the collection and pointing the reader along the path to understanding. She argues that Barr's discovery of the greater concentration of horror stories early on in the collection points not to a chronological structure but to a significant *thematic* structure; 'If the sequence of the stories was not necessarily arranged according to the dates of writing…the group of horror stories that confront the reader at the outset of *Liaozhai* may be considered foundational texts which introduce the primary thematic issues to be explored throughout the rest of the collection: crisis in selfhood, sociopolitical alienation, anxiety over the breakdown of the patriarchal order and one's own uncertain masculine identity within it.'[7]

However, as argued in the previous chapter, both of these approaches – dismissing the horror tales, or taking them as central to the collection's themes – are perhaps too totalising. Both divide the types of *Liaozhai* stories along the clear lines of either *chuanqi* or *zhiguai* tales, with the 'romantic aesthetics' approach concentrating on the *chuanqi* tales of enchantment, and the 'horror aesthetics' approach concentrating on the horrific *zhiguai*. In this chapter I will argue against the first approach – the denial of the use of horror in *Liaozhai* – by examining the tales against Noel Carroll's framework of horror, in order to show how they can indeed be seen as a part of the horror genre (though I also expand on his framework, suggesting that it needs to be broadened in order to encompass different cultural contexts). I

5 Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, p81.
6 Ibid., p82.
7 Ibid.

also argue that the second approach – taking the horror tales as central – concentrates too narrowly on male anxiety and alienation, ignoring the ways in which the myriad different monstrous figures in the collection suggest a more complex understanding of the ways fear and desire can work in combination.

Instead, I follow Luo Hui, who argues that, instead of setting the tales in opposition to each other, a juxtaposition of the two modes can yield, 'surprising connections between the two', and that, 'both are necessary for making sense of the conflicting emotions of fear, anxiety, desire and fantasy' in *Liaozhai*.[8]

Fear and Horror

In order to examine the issue further and look at how these stories of fearsome creatures and hideous ghosts fit into the collection overall, I look more closely at the terms 'horror' and 'fear', before examining Noel Carroll's influential framework of horror in his book *Paradoxes of the Heart: The Philosophy of Horror*. Although there are aspects of Carroll's work that prove too narrow when applied to the Qing Chinese context, his discussion of the drives behind the continued popularity of the horror genre will prove enlightening.

Turning first to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'fear' is defined as, 'the emotion of pain or uneasiness caused by the sense of impending danger, or by the prospect of some possible evil.'[9] It is an emotional response to a known or definite threat. In fiction, the emotion of fear is often evoked by the creation of a feeling of foreboding, and an intensity in atmosphere, using imagery and sensory details; a temple in the wilderness, hung with cobwebs; an inn, at night, where the recently dead await burial; a sudden coldness in the air.

Horror, on the other hand, is the feeling *after* something has been seen or experienced. The word horror comes from the Latin verb *horrere*, meaning (for one's hair) to 'stand on end' or 'bristle'. It is 'a painful emotion compounded of loathing and fear; a shuddering with terror and repugnance; a strong aversion mixed with dread; the feeling excited by something shocking or frightful.'[10] So as one suitably gothic description has it, the difference between them, 'is the difference between awful apprehension and sickening realisation: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse.'[11]

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8 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai*, p12.
9 OED Online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68773. Retrieved, 23/11/2012.
10 OED Online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88577 . Retrieved, 23/11/2012.
11 Devendra Varma, *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England: Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration, and Residuary Influences*, New York: Russell and Russell, 1966, p10.

Carroll makes a further useful distinction by splitting 'art-horror' from horror caused by what we read in the news, or see in real life. Art-horror is specifically the emotion caused by fiction or works of art (and is what is referred to here, unless otherwise stated).[12] He highlights the figure of the monster as the root of the emotion of horror. Monsters do not have to be horrifying, he argues (as do I, in this thesis), but horror needs the monstrous. A non-horrifying monster can cause the mixed emotions of fear, anxiety, and wonder, by its threatening of established ways of thinking (thus causing the 'vertigo' discussed in the previous chapter.) To cause the emotion of horror, however, the monster must not only be cognitively threatening, but also physically threatening.

Carroll argues that horror as a genre in Europe emerges during the Enlightenment with the genre known as the Gothic, because, as discussed in the previous chapter, this is the first time in which the monster becomes seen as being, 'outside the natural order'.[13] When, previous to this, demons, witches and other supernatural forces were truly believed to exist, when there was a genuine fear of meeting them or being touched by them, 'the sense of natural violation that attends art-horror is unavailable.'[14] So the Gothic monsters of Europe were terrifying because it was known that they *could not* exist.

From this point of view, the emotion of art-horror was unavailable in Qing Dynasty China because of the continued belief in the existence of the supernatural and the threat it posed to human life.[15] Carroll's framework allows that only what is known to be against nature can create repulsion, which must then be combined with fear to create horror. However, I argue that this view, for all its helpful insights, needs to be expanded in order encompass a broad cultural and historical canvas. As both Rania Huntington and Judith Zeitlin argue, it is possible in the Chinese context for a monster to be both a creature of the imagination *and* to exist in the natural order. 'There was no contradiction between a belief in the supernatural and a belief in its psychological origins,' writes Huntington.[16] A supernatural creature could be accepted both as a dream, *and* as real. As discussed in the previous chapter,

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12 Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, p15.

13 Ibid., p57.

14 Ibid. Gothic literature takes its name from the medieval German – Gothic – setting of early works such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Its stories were set in crumbling castles and old houses, featuring trapped heroines and villainous anti-heroes, and it emphasised both fear and romance. Through the nineteenth century, the Gothic mode produced some of literature's best known monsters, such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Chapter Six of this thesis looks more closely at this mode of fiction, using the work of Li Weifang 李偉昉, whose dissertation examines the Gothic beside Six Dynasties *zhiguai* tales.

15 See Barend J. ter Haar, *Telling Stories; Witchcraft and Scapegoating in Chinese History*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, p17.

16 Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003, p233, and Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p7.

Zeitlin's discussion of the strange and my approach to the monster both hinge on the fluidity of boundaries, both abstract and physical; on their changeability and ambiguity – boundary-crossing could be seen as both 'ordinary' *and* as breaking normative categories. Monstrous creatures such as ghosts, were-creatures, and demons were feared as a genuine threat, even though they were also feared as boundary-crossing violations of the natural order.[17]

So both art-horror and 'real life' horror are combined in *Liaozhai*, whose context in fact provides fertile ground for the manipulation of these emotions. The early Qing was a time of social and epistemological changes. There was uncertainty amongst the literati about their place in society, particularly in a world of increasing social mobility, and in the wake of a difficult dynastic transition. But there was also a growing uncertainty about the wider world and cosmos, as discussed by John Henderson who suggests that, during the Qing, there was; 'a heightened awareness of the diversity and complexity of the phenomenal world.'[18] Previously, during the Song and Ming there was a belief in the correlative mode of thought, which placed both human and natural phenomena into correlative relations, emphasising the unity of the cosmos. Beginning in the Qing, however; 'the unity and synthetic homogeneity of the Song view of humanity gave way to views that acknowledged the plurality and diversity of all-under-heaven...and indeed manifested an acute awareness of anomaly, division, and limits.'[19] So *Liaozhai* was written at the cusp of this change, from Neo-Confucian certainties to the acknowledgement of the unknowable plurality and diversity of the world. Anomalies were accepted as integral parts of the cosmos that could not be known. Or as Henderson writes, there was a growing belief that; 'a certain indeterminacy is woven into the fabric of the cosmos, and a corresponding imprecision into man's knowledge of the world.'[20]

The 'plurality and diversity of the world' are mirrored in *Liaozhai's* own dizzying diversity. In the early Gothic novels of Carroll's framework, horror comes from the disturbance caused by creatures such as Dracula to the order which the protagonist and reader knows to be natural and scientific. Dracula, they know, cannot be, and yet he causes horror because he is both dangerous and a violation of nature. Monsters break the illusion of an understandable and coherent natural world. In *Liaozhai*, however, monsters mirror a world already suspected of being beyond understanding and full of anomaly. It is the uncertainty

17 Other theories have the same problem, such as Tsvetan Todorov's celebrated theory of the fantastic, which hinges upon the hesitation as to whether or not something is real or imaginary, possible or impossible. See Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.*

18 John Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, p19.

19 Ibid., p20.

20 Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology,* p246.

and unknowability of the world which they embody, creating a greater horror: that of the possibility of fears coming true. Dracula and the other Gothic monsters are kept safe within the pages of the novel; the rational world view knows that they are an impossibility. The walking corpse of *Liaozhai*, however, may really be a danger to those stopping the night at the place of a recent death.

Setting the Scene

Having discussed the emotions of fear and horror, I now turn to the ways these emotions are used within the collection, highlighting their repeated juxtaposition with the emotion of *desire*. It was a time of uncertainty, and the collection plays upon both the anxiety and the wonder that this entails. The strangeness and unknowability of the world are feared, and yet they are also a source of fascination. This tension between the fear of what is beyond the boundaries of the known, and the desire for it, begins even before the tales themselves, with the figure of the Historian of the Strange, and his preface.

'*Liaozhai's* Own Preface' (*Liaozhai zizhi* 聊齋自志) – the Historian of the Strange's introduction to himself and to the collection, sets the scene for the chilling tales to come. An atmosphere of foreboding is evoked from the very start, in the Historian's imagery:

> 'I am but the dim flame of the autumn firefly, with which goblins jockeyed for light; a cloud of swirling dust, jeered at by mountain ogres.'[21]

He goes on to describe himself as writing alone in his studio at, 'the glimmering hour of midnight', his lamp failing, the wind sighing outside. Here is the setting for what is to come, the visceral elements of fear – isolation and darkness. All the details, as Zeitlin points out, 'seem to augur death'.[22]

The final lines of the preface are a question; 'Are the only ones who know me 'in the green wood and the dark frontier?" Zeitlin points out that the syntax of the phrase not only echoes Confucius's cry in *The Analects:* 'Is the only one who knows me Heaven?', but that the words also follow Du Fu's poem sequence, 'Dreaming of Li Bo' (*Meng Li Bo*): 'When your soul came, the maple wood was green yet;/ When your soul returned, the frontier pass was dark with night.' In the poem Du Fu sees the dead Li Bo in a dream, and thus presents himself as Li Bo's true friend and reader. As Zeitlin remarks, the allusion in the preface; 'might be understood as a plea: I need someone who will be my true reader just as Du Fu was for Li

21 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p50. All translations of the preface are Zeitlin's.
22 Ibid.

Bo...' But for the Historian of the Strange, the relations governing the original poem are reversed; 'it is no longer the living who are the true readers of the dead writers of the past. Instead, his true readers are wraiths, disembodied spirits, inhabiting the shadowy world of the dead and of dream...'[23]

Though the imagery of the preface is chilling and fearful, suffused with premonitions of death, the Historian in fact longs for boundary-crossing, for communication beyond the 'dark frontier' of death. It is boundary-crossing – the relations with the other world, that can ease his 'lonely anguish' (*gufen*, 孤愤). So the preface encompasses the ambiguity of boundaries in *Liaozhai* – not only their fluidity, but the way they are both feared and desired. It sets the scene, from the very beginning of the collection, for the juxtaposition of fear and enchantment, of horror and wonder.

Plotting Horror

The setting of the Historian of the Strange's preface contains images and atmosphere typical of the literature of fear – auguries of death, the isolation of the protagonist, the evocation of monsters. This section looks at the tales themselves. It discusses the type of plots which are used in the short, *zhiguai* tales in the collection, placing them against Carroll's framework of the typical narrative structures of the horror genre in order to better understand how the figure of the horrifying monster functions in the collection.

First of all, it is useful to look briefly at the structure of a typical *Liaozhai zhiguai* tale, and how this provides the backdrop for the intrusion of the monstrous. The previous chapter asked how a monster could be defined. What is monstrous, or anomalous, or strange, needs to be based on an assumption of a fixed 'norm', but this is itself difficult to define. So the monster, I argued, is known by its impact, its effect, something which, as Judith Zeitlin points out, was readily understood in China; 'It was early recognized in China that the strangeness of a thing depended not on the thing itself but on the subjective perception of its beholder or interpreter'.[24] One of the ways in which the *Liaozhai* tales (both long and short) allow for both horror and wonder – for the beholder to perceive some 'strangeness' – is in the backdrop they create of an ordered world at the beginning of a tale. Continuing the traditional structure of early anomaly tales, discussed in the introductory chapter, a typical tale may begin, 'An old gentleman of Changshan County...', or 'In... there lived a certain scholar'. The

23 Ibid., p51.
24 Ibid., p6.

protagonists are often introduced by their position – a scholar, a merchant, for example, or sometimes by their character – a hard-working man, a licentious man. The repetitious nature of the protagonist grounds the stories in his world – an ordered Confucian world of small towns, nosy neighbours, temples, the local yamen, family and marriage. It is a world of controlled, separate spaces, contained within walls and within social structures; a fixed, and ordered, backdrop. Into this world, the monstrous intrudes. The following chapters will look more closely at the different kinds of monstrosity in the collection. Here, I look specifically at the disorder the horrific monsters bring to this ordered world.

Although I argued that Noel Carroll's framework of horror needed to be broadened in order to encompass different cultural contexts, it is interesting to see the extent to which his discussion of horror plots mirror the *zhiguai* plots of *Liaozhai*. Carroll points out that one feature of the horror genre is the repetitive nature of its plots. Although stories of striking originality do exist, overall certain structural patterns appear again and again.

According to Carroll, most of the characteristic horror plots can be found in some combination within what he calls the 'complex discovery plot'.[25] Broken down simply, this plot contains four elements: onset, discovery, confirmation, and confrontation. Each of these can exist on its own in a more simple tale, or be combined with others to involve varying degrees of complexity. Firstly, the *onset* function establishes the monster's presence for the audience, allowing the audience to learn about the monster, either before, or alongside, the protagonists. The second function is *discovery*, in which, after the monster has arrived, an individual or group learns of its existence. After this comes *confirmation*, in which the discoverer of or believer in the monster convinces another individual or group of its existence, and the danger it poses. Finally, the complex discovery plot ends in *confrontation*, in which humanity and the monster meet. A very brief consideration of some of the classic cases of the genre shows how this scheme can be applied; Carroll uses examples such as the film *Godzilla*, but others immediately spring to mind, from fairy tales, to Victorian Gothic such as *Dracula*, to Stephen King novels and contemporary horror cinema.

Carroll also discusses examples of variations of this structure – stories which are all onset, for example. Applying this narrative framework to *Liaozhai* stories, we can discover that very similar structures exist. I first take the story 'Squirting' (喷水) as an example. In this tale, a woman and her maid are killed when they spy an old lady in the courtyard, 'prancing around like a crane... an endless stream of water spurting from her mouth.' The crone spits at

25 Carroll points out that he does not attempt to approach every plot; only the most widespread.

them, and they fall down dead. Later, the woman's husband digs up the ground where the crone was seen, and finds the remains of an entire corpse, its face still covered in flesh. When the corpse is struck, the flesh and bones fall away – beneath the skin the corpse is all rotten, consisting of nothing but water.[26]

The story may be seen as first containing onset and discovery together: the hideous apparition appears, spitting water at the wife and maids. Then comes confirmation: one of the maids survives, and describes the old woman she saw spitting water in the courtyard. Finally, confrontation; in this case, by digging where the apparition was seen, and destroying the corpse which is found there.

In 'The Mountain Spirit' (山魈) a hideous troll-like creature appears to a scholar who is studying at a temple. The onset of the story begins when the scholar has returned to the temple after brief stay at home. Although he has only been away ten days, his lodgings are thick with dust and cobwebs. At night, the wind roars and doors bang. At last, confirmation, as the monster appears:

> '…the door of the alcove itself flew open, and there it was, a great troll, stooping down at first as it approached, then suddenly looming over the bed, its head grazing the ceiling, its face dark and blotchy like an old melon rind. Its blazing eyes scanned the room, and its cavernous mouth lolled open, revealing great shining fangs more than three inches long. Its tongue flickered from side to side, and from its mouth there issued a terrible rasping sound that reverberated through the room. [27]

Finally, in the confrontation part of the tale, the protagonist stabs the creature in the belly, driving it out of his room. The next morning, he leaves the temple and returns home.

The confrontation does not always end well for the human protagonist, however. In the tale 'The Scorpion Vendor' (蠍客), onset comes when the vendor dreams that the scorpion demon is coming to take revenge for all the scorpions the vendor has killed.[28] Confirmation of the existence of the demon comes when the vendor seeks shelter in an inn, and the innkeeper hides him in a barrel, just before the demon arrives, its face yellow and hideous. The confrontation ends, however, with the death of the vendor when the demon discovers him in the barrel, and leaves nothing but a pool of blood.

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26 'Pen shui' (4) 噴水, 'Squirting', p8-9.

27 'Shanxiao' (7) 山魈, 'The Mountain Spirit', p18-19. Trans., Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* p28-29.

28 'The Scorpion Vendor', p1602.

Other *Liaozhai* stories are what Carroll would call pure onset and confrontation plots; tales in which the monster appears (thus, onset and discovery happening at the same time) and, as in 'The Troll', the protagonist must confront it in order to save his own life. 'Biting the Ghost' (咬鬼) and 'The Ghost's Saliva', (鬼津) are examples of this plot, stories in which a monster appears without warning and confronts the protagonist in the apparent safety of his own bedroom.[29] 'Drawing Out the Intestines' (抽腸) is even simpler in its details. In this tale, a man sees two figures enter his room – a man, and a woman who appears to be hugely pregnant.[30] To his horror, before his eyes the man takes a knife and cuts open the woman's belly, draping her entrails around the room, and around the protagonist himself. He screams for help, but when members of his family arrive, nothing is left of the strange figures, nor any trace of the entrails. In this brief tale, the protagonist is wholly passive – all he does is watch helplessly as the horrific scene unfolds.

Often, the confirmation part of these plots are left unresolved – all that is left is a stain, a smell, the protagonist's word against a vanished creature. They are very private confrontations with the monster.

Looking at the short, *zhiguai* plots through this lens, the similarities in plot structure are striking. However, Carroll's aim in discussing these structures is not only to examine the ways in which these tales are organised, but also, 'to suggest, in part, something of the origin of pleasure that horror aesthetes find in the genre.'[31] What emerges through the examination of plot is the fact that cutting across the majority of horror stories (both those Carroll discusses, and the *Liaozhai* tales) is the theme of *discovery*.[32] The plot draws the audience on through its structure of onset, discovery, confrontation, and although the story causes the emotions of fear and horror, the reader (or spectator) is involved by the desire to know more, to discover the unknown or the unthinkable.

Carroll makes it clear that he is not just talking about narrative plots, but also that the 'objects of art-horror (the monsters) in and of themselves engender curiosity as well.'[33] Monsters, as the preceding chapter discussed, have been the objects of both horror and fascination since some of the very earliest works of art and literature. Cohen invokes the, 'simultaneous repulsion and attraction at the core of the monster's composition', in his thesis

29 'Yao gui' (8) 咬鬼, 'Biting the Ghost', p20-21; 'Gui jin' (274) 鬼津, 'The Ghost's Saliva', p945. Chapter Six of this thesis will look at this type of monstrous invasion in more detail.
30 'Drawing Out the Intestines', p1226.
31 Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, p98.
32 Ibid., p125.
33 Ibid., p187.

that, 'Fear of the monster is really a kind of desire.'[34] We desire monsters for their link to the unknown, for the way they represent freedom from the boundaries of the accepted and the everyday, from the imprisoning order of the world. And we desire, perhaps most of all, the *unknowable*, that which is outside of any conceptual scheme or established way of thinking, outside the ordered world. It is this which is at the centre of Carroll's 'paradox of horror', which is a variant on the more general narrative motivation: that which motivates a reader to invest in and be moved by a narrative they know to be fiction. In the horror genre, the feeling of disgust (which would not seem to be a pleasurable emotion) is, 'a predictable concomitant of disclosing the unknown, whose disclosure is a desire the narrative instils in the audience and then goes on to gladden.' Or, in other words; 'art-horror is the price we are willing to pay for the revelation of that which is impossible or unknown, of that which violates our conceptual schema.'[35] It is the price to pay for the 'vertigo' which the horrifying monster causes, the questioning of epistemological certainties, of ways of being in the world.

Collecting the World

The Historian of the Strange is a collector. His 'madness' for this act of collecting is, as he says, irrepressible, though he claims he cannot hope to equal the talent of Gan Bao, and other collectors of the strange, and he fears he will be 'laughed at by serious men'.[36] This assumed persona is foundational to the text as a whole. His collecting of anomalies, the way in which he both takes part in and subverts the collecting project, can illuminate the questions of order and disorder, fear and fascination, discussed above.

The act of collecting anomalies can be linked with Carroll's discussion of 'the paradox of horror' – the question of how horror can be pleasurable, as well as fearful – because it too is driven by the impulse to discover and explore both the known and the unknown world. In his book *Strange Writing,* Robert Campany looks at early accounts of the strange in China. He discusses how collection can be seen as part of a cosmographic project; 'writing down the world'. A key point for him is that of the relationship between the centre – the city, or urban centre – and periphery – the wilderness, the places far remote from the centre of power. The city provides the ordered centre. On the periphery lies the disorder of the wilderness. To put

34 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p16.
35 Ibid., p182-186.
36 In fact, this madness or obsession for collection was something which, beginning in the Ming dynasty and continuing into the Qing, was glorified, standing as the mark of a scholarly gentleman. Chapter Four will discuss Judith Zeitlin's examination of the glorification of obsession.

order onto the disorder of the periphery, the collector travels away from the centre and brings back part of the periphery, whether it is in the form of stories, reports, objects or images. As Campany points out, this act of collecting, this entering of wild, undomesticated terrain, and returning with evidence, has been a part of all societies with urban centres.[37] Chinese dynastic rulers sent out collectors into the periphery, just as European explorers brought back evidence of marvels and wonders to the courts of European kings and queens. Here, 'to rule the world was to collect the world.'[38]

What is brought back from the periphery is that which is considered most noteworthy or anomalous, and when they are brought back these objects or stories are changed by being put on display, often as the embodiment of the centre's symbolic power over the periphery, over nature, over the anomalous. As Campany puts it, 'Agents of the center strive through cosmographic discourse...to 'encompass', 'domesticate', or somehow 'cope with' the periphery and thus subsume anomaly under order.'[39]On the other hand, their dazzling variety and strangeness could be emphasised, as in the case of the European *wunderkammern*, or 'wonder cabinets' which, from Renaissance Europe onwards, were often arranged in order to heighten the sense of heterogeneity amongst the objects, and to emphasise category confusion.[40]

The collector of strange tales plays a part in this same cosmographic project. Whilst emperors may command the collection of anomalies from the periphery as part of their rule, writers played their own role, recording the existence of the strange and inexplicable, not only as records but as ways of understanding the world.

By the time *Liaozhai* was written, anomaly accounts were literary endeavours (despite the claim towards hearsay made in the preface, and in certain of the stories.) But many of the same factors that drove the earliest *zhiguai* collections were also at work hundreds of years later. Just as during the Six Dynasties *zhiguai* writers sought to collect together anomalies in order to understand their 'strange new world' and to construct, in Campany's words, 'alternative cosmologies to the defunct Han imperial worldview', the early Qing world was equally disorienting.[41] As discussed above, it was a time of uncertainty, which *Liaozhai* can be seen to reflect in its use of fear, horror and conflicting emotions.

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37 Campany, *Strange Writing*, p10.

38 Ibid., p124. Means of collection included the Tribute system, the Portents system, the Music Bureau and the Tour of Inspection.

39 Campany, p9. Though he points out that he uses 'collection' as a general term for, 'all such acts of emplacement.'

40 See Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*, New York: Zone Books, 1998, Chapter One.

41 See Campany, 'Ghosts Matter: The Culture of Ghosts in Six Dynasties *Zhiguai*.' *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 13 (1991), p15.

The Living and the Dead

Of all the boundaries which are explored in anomaly accounts, and of all the fears that the horror genre exploits, it is the boundary between the living and the dead which is perhaps both the most fearful and the most fascinating. *Liaozhai*'s own communion with the dead begins before the tales have started, with the Historian of the Strange longing for communication from beyond the grave; 'Are the only ones who know me 'in the green wood and at the dark frontier'?

Dealings with the dead have always been a part of anomaly accounts. The project of collecting, as well as seeking to discover and control the strange and unknown in the periphery, extended also to the otherworld, with tales of what Karl Kao calls 'necromantic communion' playing a central part in *zhiguai* fiction.[42] Ghosts stalk the pages of these collections, some seeking redress for past wrongs or for the wrong rites or burial when they died, others returning to repay a debt, or because they cannot leave a loved one or friend. 'Necromantic communion' was, from the earliest accounts, an important working out of ways of understanding the boundary between life and death, and its traversal – a boundary which was by no means fixed. Robert Campany points out that *zhiguai*, from their beginnings; 'are the first attempts to chart in written media certain strange, new cultural and religious terrains.'[43] He emphasises the new types of concerns regarding the relationship between the living and the dead, influenced by changes within the Buddhist and Daoist traditions, which had developed new rituals to encompass the souls of all the dead – not just those of one's own ancestors, as earlier ancestor worship had done.[44] There are two boundaries, he writes, whose crossing constitutes the main tension of the narratives; firstly, the boundary between the two realms of life and death; and secondly, the boundary separating one kinship group from another, 'which had, since ancient times, kept the rule that one's proper relations with the dead were restricted to one's own lineage members.'[45] It was to members of one's own family and

42 See Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic; Selections from the Third to the Tenth Century*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, p8, for a further discussion of the major constituent types of *zhiguai* tales.

43 Campany, 'Ghosts Matter', p17.

44 Wang Fenling 汪玢玲, in *Guihu fengqing*; *Liaozhai zhiyi yu minsu wenhua* 鬼狐風情; 聊齋志異與民俗文化, Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2003, p128, discusses the ways in which rituals of ghost worship were, over time, mixed and absorbed into ancestral worship during the Shang period. This reinforced the ambiguous relationship between ghosts and deities that existed in China, especially before the arrival of Buddhism from India.

45 Campany, 'Ghosts Matter', p17. As Meir Shahar and Robert Weller write, ghosts are outside of the Confucian kinship system, 'the departed souls of people who died prematurely, leaving no descendent kin to provide for

lineage that sacrifices were offered, and contact made. In *zhiguai* narratives, however, 'it is suddenly ghosts – other people's ancestors, and not their own – with whom living protagonists primarily make contact.'[46] These non-ancestral ghosts are unpredictable, their own fears, desires and ontological crises spilling over into the human world. Some have suffered a failure or breach of rite in burial. Others have suffered wrongs at human hands. Still others are the ghosts of young women who have died before marriage and children, and have therefore been left outside the kinship system, with no-one to worship their deceased spirits.

Liaozhai, like other collections of anomaly accounts, depicts various kinds of ghosts, ancestral and non-ancestral, and their different means of boundary-traversal.[47] The next chapter will examine how some reveal themselves only as dismembered limbs. Others, as discussed below, appear as beautiful, fragile 'phantom heroines', in need of protection and help. And still others, as discussed here, are hideous and fearful.

What increases the horror in tales of malignant non-ancestral ghosts is the random nature of their attack. In several tales ghosts come to wreak revenge for past wrongs, or to beg for help from the human protagonist. Tales such as 'Yao'an' (姚安) and 'The Ghost Wife' (鬼妻) feature fearsome, horrifying ghosts, but their anger and their return from the dead is aimed at the protagonist for a specific reason (for a man's murderous and selfish urges in 'Yao'an', and for his infidelity to his deceased wife in 'The Ghost Wife'.)[48] The more horrific figures are those whose motivations are unknown, the ones who appear to intrude and attack for no reason.

The fact that the innocent and virtuous have nothing to fear from ghosts is a long-standing belief in China. But the *Liaozhai* tales gleefully show this to be untrue. (In fact, in one tale, in which an honest and honourable magistrate is killed by a thunderbolt, the Historian comments, with a certain grim satisfaction, 'I have heard, too, that thunder strikes only the guilty man; if so, how could a virtuous official be visited with this dire calamity? Are not the inconsistencies of Heaven many indeed?'[49]) The horror stories emphasise this alarming fact: that anomalies, and the ways of heaven, cannot be understood, that even the

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them in the netherworld.' See Shahar and Weller, *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996, p11.

46 Campany, 'Ghosts Matter', p18.

47 Sheng Zhimei 盛志梅 comments that over one hundred of the nearly five hundred tales in *Liaozhai* deal directly with ghosts. Sheng Zhimei,' '*Liaozhai zhiyi* de gui xiaoshuo wenhua jiedu'聊齋志異的鬼小說文化解讀, *Pu Songling yanjiu*, 蒲松齡研究 3 (1998), p42.

48 'Yao An' (325) 姚安 'Yao An', p1123-1124; and 'Gui qi' (300) 鬼妻, 'The Ghost Wife', p1044-1045.

49 'Long xi zhu' (290) 龙戏蛛, 'The Dragons Trick the Spider', p1015.

virtuous are not necessarily safe from the unquiet dead. This is particularly fearful in the Chinese context, in which, traditionally, nature and humanity were seen as existing in moral unity.[50] In both 'Biting the Ghost' and 'The Ghost's Saliva' it is the helplessness of the protagonist which is emphasised. He is shown as truly defenceless – alone in his room and unable to move in order to save himself.

Tales of other, non-ghostly creatures, such as 'Something Strange in the Buckwheat' (蕎中怪) also emphasise the 'inconsistencies of Heaven'.[51] Here, it is an innocent farmer who is simply unlucky enough to be attacked by the hideous creature who lurks in the buckwheat. The tale tells us that the monster was never seen again, 'Nobody could even agree what kind of creature it was.'[52] In those mentioned above, the monster is depicted as a type of ghost – pale faced, and with long, dark hair. In 'The Troll', the monster is named as a shan xiao, a creature known from folklore to dwell in the mountains. But the tales also portray monsters who have neither name nor motive, who are truly, it seems, beyond categorisation.

The brevity of these *zhiguai*-type tales adds to their impact. There is no space in their brief pages, or sometimes even paragraphs, for any explanation or conclusion – there is simply, as discussed above, 'onset', and often, 'confrontation.' There is rarely a comment appended, and the reader is left without closure. The non-ancestral ghost, the unnamed monster, has intruded suddenly into the human world. Disorder has been brought about, but order has not been regained by the end of the tale, making these stories deeply disturbing.

What the monsters in these tales provide is both a cognitive and a visceral shock. As described in the previous chapter, the monster causes 'vertigo' – a questioning of epistemological certainties. In their crossing of categorical and physical boundaries they are cognitively threatening, even when they are not physically threatening to human life. The repulsive monsters of these horror tales, however, truly provide what Noel Carroll counts as essential to horror – both a threat to ways of thinking but also a threat to physical safety; not only cause a questioning of ways of thinking about social, cultural and natural boundaries, but also a shudder of repugnance.

Illustrative of this is the use of physical and sensory details. Zhang Guofeng points out the importance of all the senses to the stories, which provide vivid physical details to even in the briefest of tales, using not only visual descriptions but also touch, smell, and

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50 See Chapter Four of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of the doctrine *tian ren he yi* 天人合一, the 'unitary view' which envisages continuous interaction between Heaven and humanity.

51 'Qiao zhong guai' (10) 蕎中怪, 'Something Strange in the Buckwheat', p23-24.

52 Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p39.

sound.[53] We are told of the cold skin and chill breath of a ghost, of rotting flesh and bone, of the stench left behind by a monstrous encounter. They are details calculated to cause repulsion. After being attacked in his room by the grotesque ghost, and fighting it off by biting down on its face, the old man in 'Biting the Ghost' (咬鬼) is made sick from the stench the ghost leaves. Mr Li, in 'The Ghost's Saliva' (鬼津), cannot eat, and is finally forced to induce vomiting, after a ghost has forced its saliva into his mouth.[54]

What is left when these tales are finished is not explanation and understanding, but unexplained horror; attack by the horrific monster is unpredictable, the ways of Heaven are unknowable, nowhere is safe.

'The Cold Touch in the Midst of the Familiar'

This fearful unpredictability is itself unsettling, but the collection goes even further in bringing horror, quite literally, home. This begins with the Historian's own preface and how he positions himself in relation to the 'centre'. In his preface, he describes how his collection came about – through hearsay, committing what he heard to paper. But further, 'After some time, like-minded men from the four directions dispatched stories to me by post...'[55] This, as Zeitlin points out, is in fact an inversion of the conventions of collecting. Rather than the author travelling to the periphery in search of the strange, it is the stories who make the journey to him. And through this claim, he effectively, 'places himself in the center, with all its canonical associations of orthodoxy and authority in the Chinese historical tradition; his pivotal position is inscribed by the stories themselves, which arrive 'from the four directions.'[56]

This symbolic centre is a lonely place, which, as already discussed, the preface goes on to make clear. The Historian is alone in his studio, surrounded by monsters and the night, longing for communion with the dead. And it is from here that he is able, as Zeitlin argues, to invert and destabilise the categories of the familiar and strange; the point he is making to his readers is that, 'the strange is not other; the strange resides in our midst. The strange is inseparable from us.'[57]

The stories themselves work to emphasise this point. Whilst some are set in lonely

53 Zhang Guofeng, *Hua shuo Liaozhai* p175.
54 'Biting the Ghost', p21; 'The Ghost's Saliva', p945.
55 Zeitlin's translation, *Historian of the Strange,* p44.
56 Zeitlin, p46. The ways in which the collection deals with issues of home, and of centrality and marginality, will be dealt with further in chapters five and six of this thesis.
57 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange,* p47.

temples and remote mountainous regions, others take place in more familiar places – in the urban centres, in named villages close to the Historian's own home town, and in domestic spaces. 'The Restless Corpse' tells of four travellers who stop at a roadside inn, and their encounter with the landlord's recently deceased daughter, who rises from the dead, kills three of the travellers, and chases the fourth from the inn and all the way through the village, before finally stopping her deadly walk at a tree outside a temple.[58] The tale is not set in some far flung corner, but, according to the Historian, in 'Cai Village, just a few miles from my hometown.' And in 'Squirting', the house which suffers the attack from the hideous crone is not in a remote village, but in the capital itself.

This closeness to 'home' works to particularly strong effect in the horror tales – the monster is not somewhere 'out there', far enough away to be fearful but not immediately threatening; it is here, within the confines of familiar village life or the safe domestic space of the home. The Historian's positioning of himself therefore increases the impact of fear and horror in the stories, taking away the distancing effect of the early collections of anomaly tales, in which the strange or horrific was found in the periphery, and which, collected, could be ordered and made safe.

The structure of *Liaozhai*, however, does not allow for such re-ordering. Here, disorder is shown to be brought to the centre – the safe and familiar places, the place of order. And what truly horrifies is, as perhaps the most famous of contemporary horror writers has stated, 'a cold touch in the midst of the familiar.'[59] It is the familiar made unfamiliar, the ordered disordered, the home unhomely. Everything about *Liaozhai*, as discussed in the previous chapter, appears at first to be familiar – the tradition of anomaly collecting, the Historian's modelling of himself upon the Grand Historian, Sima Qian, his authorial comments appended to the tales, the basic plots of the tales themselves, the well-known figures of the beautiful ghost, the brilliant fox spirit. And yet, starting from the preface itself, this familiarity is constantly de-familiarised. I argued in the previous chapter that the collection itself was monstrous – and the monstrous, as Cohen writes, 'always escapes', it always 'rises from the dissecting table', after each attempt at understanding, at pinning it down. *Liaozhai* plays with this category confusion, this subversion of expectations. It constantly reminds its readers that what they understand of the world cannot be trusted.

So far, this chapter has argued that the emotions of fear and horror in *Liaozhai* are a part of

58 'The Restless Corpse', p5-7.
59 Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981, p299.

the collection's exploration of the unknown, which is found not only on the periphery but also much closer to home. In the project of collecting, fear and horror are combined with wonder, with the desire to explore and to discover. The final part of the chapter will look at one particular way in which the tension between fear and desire is manipulated and subverted in the collection – through the different representations of the monstrous woman. It will examine the influence of the late imperial cult of *qing* (情) – feelings, desire, sentiments – on *Liaozhai* and argue that through the monster, the collection makes qing part of its exploration of the unknown. The idealised, enchanting figure and the fearful, dangerous figure can both be seen as part of this exploration, as can the representation of desire as active, as the catalyst for monstrosity.

Monstrous Women: Desire and the Male Gaze

Whilst there are a great many different representations of the monster in *Liaozhai*, a large number, particularly of the ghosts and shape-shifting monsters, are specifically represented as female, drawing it into line with other anomaly-tale collections. Whilst both enchanting and fearful female monsters are depicted, the beautiful, benign monster is in the majority.

Luo Hui looks at some of the reasons why the 'hybrid identities' in anomaly tale collections are predominantly female. He writes that, 'On one hand, the patrilineal basis of Confucian ancestral worship has meant that the non-ancestral ghosts are by default female.'[60] As discussed above, like any person who died without leaving behind any family, a young woman who died before marriage, with no children to worship her deceased spirit, would become a ghost who wandered outside the Confucian family system, left as nobody's ancestor. Luo goes on to remark that, 'The proliferation of non-ancestral ghosts in the minor genre of *zhiguai* could be a genuine attempt to address the ontological issue of the ghost. On the other hand, projecting the feminine onto the wild and the dangerous, as evidenced in the appearance of beautiful, sexual and female ghosts, reveals a subconscious male desire to subjugate the female body with patriarchal power, and thereby symbolically place the wild and the dangerous under human control.'[61] As Judith Zeitlin discusses, the female ghost undergoes numerous transformations throughout the Chinese literary tradition, 'from frightening, malignant, sexually predatory agents of disease and death to timid, vulnerable,

60 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai,* p110.

61 Ibid., As discussed in Chapter One, Luo gathers up foxes and other creatures in *Liaozhai* under the label of 'ghost'.

fragile creatures in need of male sympathy, protection, and life-giving powers.'[62]

Certainly, the collection as a whole is refracted through the male point of view. The Historian of the Strange is, as already discussed, positioned physically and symbolically at the centre. And although a large number of the tales are named after the female character within them, and, as critics such as Chun-shu and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang point out, the depiction of female characters in *Liaozhai* is nuanced, creating individuals out of the female characters, it is through the male protagonist's point of view which we see them, and the collection is nonetheless a product of its time, reflecting the prevailing patriarchal social structures.[63] In fact, the myriad different portrayals of the beautiful, alluring figure has led the critic An Ning (安寧) to remark that the collection displays an obsessive interest in the female, and female beauty.[64]

It is interesting to note that certain tales in fact deal specifically with the idea of the male gaze upon the female, and its monstrous consequences. In Chapter Three I will discuss tales in which the body becomes monstrous; one such tale involves a man who is used to leering at beautiful women. When a woman, angry at his staring, throws dirt in his eyes, he first becomes blind, then finds that a tiny man has taken up residence in his eye.[65] This tale depicts monstrous punishment for the lascivious gaze. In another tale, 'Pianpian', (翩翩) the young woman who saves Luo Zifu from his dissolute life gives him clothes made out of leaves, which become as smooth as satin when he puts them on.[66] However, when he begins to stray again, his attention caught by the beauty of Pianpian's friend, his clothes turn back into withered leaves, only becoming soft again when he promises to behave himself.

Stories such as these in fact seem to problematise the act of looking, something which is of particular importance in tales of monstrous transformation, of the changeability of surfaces. Surfaces are rarely what they seem in *Liaozhai*, and as this chapter emphasises, it is their unpredictability that helps to provide narrative tension from story to story. It is impossible to trust the male gaze, because the protagonist himself may not know what he is seeing.

Yet this gaze is also immensely powerful. Chapter Four will examine how monstrous

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62 Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p24.

63 Chang and Chang, *Redefining History*, p86. Chapter Five, looking at the portrayal of the monstrous family in the collection, will discuss this topic in more depth.

64 An Ning, 安寧 *Liaozhai wushi hu* 聊齋五十狐, Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010, p1.

65 'Tongren yu' (5) 瞳仁语, 'The People in the Pupils Communicate', p10-13. The Historian of the Strange adds his own comment to the tale, relating another story in which a man embarrasses himself when the young woman he is chasing turns out to be his daughter-in-law.

66 'Pianpian' (126) 翩翩, 'Pianpian', p432-436.

metamorphosis may be enacted through desire; through wanting something badly enough. In 'The Frescoed Wall' (畫壁) a man visits a monastery, and seeing a woman in a wall painting, falls so in love with her beauty that he is transported into the world in the wall.[67] Here, the gaze changes the surface. The gaze reflects desire, and the desiring gaze in *Liaozhai* is active. It leads to transformation. By the end the encounter has permanently changed the painting – the young girl is now wearing her hair in the style of a grown woman.

The emphasis on desire in *Liaozhai* reflects one of the most influential trends in imperial China, the cult of *qing* (情). As Martin Huang writes, the concept of *qing* does not have a precise English equivalent, but has been variously translated as 'feelings', 'love', 'romantic sentiments' and 'passions.'[68] Judith Zeitlin remarks that this trend fuelled much of the literary energy of the period, and Huang points out that late Ming writers made *qing* into a central issue in fiction 'by promoting it as a supreme human value worthy of celebration.'[69] The Ming playwright Tang Xianzu (湯顯祖,1550-1616 CE) writer of *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹停), was one of the most influential exponents of qing. In *The Peony Pavilion*, love brings the heroine, Du Liniang (杜麗娘), back to life. The play was to have a strong influence on writers in both the Ming and the Qing, with *qing* manifesting its power through the female ghost, 'whose quest for love compels her to revisit the human world in search of her beloved and whose undying passion leads to her resurrection or rebirth, usually through the sexual agency of her male partner.'[70]

I follow Maram Epstein in arguing that the ambiguous portrayals of women in the Chinese fiction of this time can be better understood when approached through the lens of *qing*. She argues that the cult of *qing* and the debates on desire and the emotions in human nature which it catalysed were so influential in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that it

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67 'Huabi' (6) 畫壁, 'The Frescoed Wall', p14-17. He stays with her for several days, before being called back to his own world by a monk from the monastery. The painted wall remains, but the young girl, whose hair had originally been hanging loose, is now dressed in coils on her head, a young woman's hairstyle, rather than a girl's.

68 Martin W. Huang, 'Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, vol. 20 (1998), p153. Judith Zeitlin translates it as the 'cult of feeling'. *Historian of the Strange,* p47. Keith McMahon discusses it as, 'a type of passionate resolve that defies the lie of the orthodox mask.' (McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*: A Theorization of *Qing*' in Paolo Santangelo and Donatella Guida, eds. *Love, Hatred and Other Passions: Questions and Themes on Emotions in Chinese Civilization,* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishing, 2006, p212). As the issues surrounding *qing* as emotion and its relationship to sexual desire are more complex than can be adequately discussed here, see Huang's article, as well as his work *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late-Imperial China,* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2001, for a more in-depth examination. Wai-yee Li provides a comprehensive background to the Ming philosophical influences underlying *qing* in literature, in *Enchantment and Disenchantment.*

69 Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine,* p7. Huang, p161.

70 Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine,* p7.

is necessary to read the sometimes conflicting images of women and the feminine within the context of this movement.[71] *Liaozhai* reflects the cult of *qing* in its depiction of the benign, enchanting monstrous woman. What Judith Zeitlin describes as 'the phantom heroine' has been at the centre of much of the *chuanqi* genre, but reached its peak during the Ming and the Qing. This is the beautiful, fragile ghost, in need of male protection, and seen in *Liaozhai* figures such as 'Liansuo' – who appears to the protagonist at night, singing sweetly, and who needs him to save her from a bullying monster; Li Shi, in 'Lianxiang' (蓮香) who is fragile and charming, and the beautiful ghosts in 'Xiaoxie' (小謝).[72]

As well as these more fragile figures, the 'remarkable woman', to use Keith McMahon's phrase, is also a popular figure at this time. She may be mortal or immortal, but rather than the timid phantom heroine, she is 'a model of moral strength and resolve', typically stronger than the male protagonist, and capable of leading and directing.[73] This figure can be seen in *Liaozhai* in characters from the beautiful, brilliant, fox spirit Lianxiang, cleverer and more accomplished than the human male protagonist, to the female warrior who takes the head of her enemy and leaves her child behind.[74]

So there are different visions of the feminine within the enchanting, benevolent figures in *Liaozhai*. These different visions seem to be driven, at least to some extent, by different aspects of *qing*; both the emphasis on feelings and emotions, but also the search for an alternative channel of strength and authenticity.

In his analysis of the *Liaozhai* tales of remarkable women, McMahon concentrates on what he calls 'the radically transformative effect of *qing* moments...moments of miraculous unhinging and magical discontinuity.'[75] They are tales in which the key point is the entrance of the remarkable woman and her meeting with the human protagonist. In fact, McMahon argues that the collection obsessively visits and re-visits this point of contact between lovers. These instances of the fox spirit appearing in a man's home, of ghosts visiting, of the spirit of a flower appearing as a beautiful woman are what he calls *qing* moments, because of the remarkable woman's embodiment of this 'passionate resolve', as he describes it. Desire drives these appearances. In some tales it is the monster's own desire. In others, it is the human

71 Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2001, p5.
72 'Liansuo', p331-337; 'Lianxiang', p220-232; 'Xiao xie' (224) 小謝', 'Xiaoxie' p772-779.
73 McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in *Liaozhai zhiyi*,' p212.
74 'Lianxiang', p220-232; 'Xia nü ' (57) 俠女, 'The Swordswoman', p210-216
75 McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in *Liaozhai zhiyi'*, p213.

protagonists'.[76]

Throughout this thesis, I will look at ways in which desire in *Liaozhai* is active. Wai-yee Li writes that the *Liaozhai* tales deal with the 'recontainment of desire... the reappropriation of the otherworld for mundane reality.'[77] But I believe that the stories present an exploration of desire, embodied by the monster. They explore the way desire finds form in the monstrous woman, and the way in which desire is active, able to bring about transformation, as I will discuss in Chapter Four. However, the tales also explore another side to the cult of qing – the darker side of desire. This chapter began by pointing out that it is the kind and enchanting monster, and her romances with the human male, which have received the most critical attention. But in order to fully understand this figure, other representations of the female monster also need to be examined.

Fear, Enchantment, Desire

These fearful figures often behave in ways which horrifically invert female behaviour; the fearful 'kiss' of the ghost in 'The Ghost's Saliva', (鬼津) the grotesque inversion of childbirth in 'Drawing Out the Intestines', (抽腸) the literal stealing of a man's heart in 'Painted Skin' (畫皮).[78] For Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, it is these uncanny female figures who are at the heart of the horror of *Liaozhai*, a fear of the feminine allied with an estrangement from the writer's own male self. She writes that, 'The recurrent nightmare of *Liaozhai* reminds the literati reader of his own darkest fear: that despite the best efforts of the culture, the feminine is ultimately beyond male comprehension and containment.'[79] Stories such as 'Biting the Ghost' and 'The Ghost's Saliva' are therefore given a reading which emphasises the male protagonist's horror at and helplessness against a woman who examines, explores, and takes control of his passive body.[80]

This portrayal of fearful women is not unique to *Liaozhai*. Early anomaly tale collections such as *Soushen ji* (搜神記) feature malignant female ghosts and foxes, and writers such as Elizabeth Bronfen and Barbara Johnson have written about the obsession with

76 The following chapters will look more closely at this. Chapter Three will examine instances of desire turning to obsession, and how obsessive love can bring about the entrance of the monster as the focus of this desire. Chapter Four will look at how desire can drive metamorphosis.

77 Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment,* p44.

78 'The Ghost's Saliva' ,p945; 'Drawing Out the Intestines', p1226; 'Huapi' (40) 畫皮, 'Painted Skin', p119-124.

79 Chiang, *Collecting the Self,* p97.

80 Ibid., p90.

dead or uncanny women in European and American literature; 'Woman's body is seen as polluted, as fatal to the masculine touch, an agent and carrier of death...'. She is seen, Bronfen goes on to say, along with death, as the fear of an ultimate loss of control, of a disruption of boundaries...of a dissolution of an ordered and hierarchical world.'[81] Like Chiang's argument that the feminine in the work of late imperial Chinese writers is seen to be 'beyond containment', the female monster is represented in other contexts as fearful and uncontrollable, reflecting what Cohen calls 'an array of anxious responses throughout culture.'[82] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their influential study of women writers in the nineteenth century, write that 'The monster-woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author's power to allay 'his' anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained 'place' and thus generates a story that 'gets away' from its author.'[83]

Rania Huntington writes that in both Europe and China, 'women themselves already straddle the boundary of humanity.'[84] Whether baleful or benign, their boundary-crossing nature provokes both fear and desire. This boundary-crossing aspect leads to ambiguous and often contradictory portrayals of the feminine, something which *Liaozhai* reflects in its monstrous women, both fearful and benign.

The tales of beautiful, benign monsters could be read as adding up to a male fantasy of beauty and the feminine; a reflection of the glorification of desire and feelings. The driving force, it seems, in these tales, is love, enchantment, beauty. The horror tales, in these readings, are in clear-cut opposition to these stories. When the two are juxtaposed, however, other insights can also be made, illustrating that the tales apparently driven by fear and horror, and those driven by love and enchantment, in fact work in similar ways. The figures which McMahon examines are the immortals Chang E (嫦娥), who is banished from the moon to earth, and 'The Spinning Woman' (績女), as well as the woman warrior in 'The Swordswoman' (俠女).[85] Yet his labeling of these figures' entrance as 'moments of magical discontinuity' can perhaps apply equally to the tales of horror discussed in this chapter.

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81 Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body; Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, p67, p182.

82 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p9.

83 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979, p28.

84 Huntington, *Alien Kind,* p339.

85 'Chang'e (315) 嫦娥, 'Chang'e', p1069-1079; ' Ji nü' (363) 績女, 'The Spinning Woman', p1221-1224; 'The Swordswoman', p210-216

As I discussed above, a typical horror plot in *Liaozhai* can be seen as one variation or another of what Carroll calls the 'complex discovery plot', in which the monster appears, and is then discovered and/or confronted by the human protagonist. Many of the longer tales of enchantment also follow this structure, though the 'confrontation' point, rather than being the physical, life-and-death struggle of the horror tales, is often the point in which the male protagonist crosses the line which the monstrous woman has drawn as to her own background or her wish to remain secret.[86]

The 'onset' part of Carroll's framework of plots could be seen as corresponding to these *'qing* moments' in the romance plots – the entrance of the monster. In all of these tales, whether of horror or enchantment, the monster's entrance marks a transformative moment – the point of 'vertigo', to return to my original discussion of monstrosity. Looked at in this way, it suggests that the horror tales mark the other side of *qing*, the darker aspects of desire. In the figure of the monster, argues Cohen, our darker, secret desires and anxieties can be given life. Here is another instance of the collection's exploration of the unknown and unspoken. As Luo Hui writes, 'Although these ghost narratives do not always conform to the scenario of male sexual fantasy, a sexual overtone is clearly present, suggesting the female ghost's desire for human contact'.[87]

McMahon goes on to say that, *'Qing* functions as a kind of principle of non-universality, that is, as something which undermines the Master's desire to impose a universal order.'[88] In other words, the entrance of the monster as the embodiment of *qing*, in both its positive and negative aspects, is what brings disorder, unpredictability, horror, wonder – all are found within the figures of both the horrifying and the enchanting monsters.

Turning to look at one particular *qing* moment can illuminate this discussion. In the story 'Liansuo' (連鎖), Yang Yuwei sits alone in his studio, in the wilds, surrounded by old graves, and the sound of the wind in the trees. It is night, and Yang is alone, and lonely. The scene is set for a horror tale to unfold, all the imagery of fear is present:

> 'Yang Yuwei went to live on the banks of the Si River, in a studio out in the wilds. There were numerous old graves just beyond the wall of his property. At night he could hear the wind soughing in the populars, like the sound of surging waves.'[89]

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86 For example, tales such as 'Ge Jin' (葛巾), p1436, in which a peony spirit leaves her human husband after he begins to investigate her family background, and 'Hu si xianggong', (胡四相公), p559, in which a fox leaves when the human protagonist wants to introduce her to his friends.

87 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai,* p91.

88 McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in *Liaozhai zhiyi*', p226.

89 'Liansuo', (97) 連鎖, 'Liansuo', 331-337, trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* p280.

But when Yang hears a woman's voice, singing melancholy lines, he is not afraid, but intrigued. Even when he realises that this must be the chanting of a ghost, he goes to seek her out. The scene strongly recalls the similar setting of the Historian's own preface. The Historian, though, remains alone, longing for communication beyond the grave, whilst in 'Liansuo', this hope is fulfilled. Yang begins a relationship with the beautiful and cultured ghost, Liansuo, but she is timid and nervous. When she suffers the bullying of another ghost, it is Yang and his friend who must protect her.

This is a tale which hinges on the tension between fear and desire. However, Liansuo embodies fear in a different way to the horrifying monsters discussed above. In the stories of ghostly romance such as this, the psychology of fear is inverted. Instead of the protagonist horrified by a hideous creature, the emotion is projected onto the ghosts themselves. It is the monster who is fearful, not feared. This tale is an inversion of the stories in which the horrific ghost enters the human home. Here, Liansuo is unwilling to begin a relationship with Yang, because she is afraid she will harm him. In the end, however, it is, 'the seed and blood of a living man' which allows her to become human again. This image of the monster taking the blood and essence of a human is, again, a typical trope found in horror tales, recalling vampiric creatures of various kinds, from the vampire itself, to the succubus, to the parasitic fox in Chinese fiction. But here, although Liansuo fears for Yang's safety, he gladly helps her, and instead of losing his own life, it is she who is brought back from the grave:

> '"You have given me so much affection," she began. I have received from you the breath of the living. I have eaten your food. All of a sudden my blanched bones seem to feel life stirring in them once more. But I need the seed and blood of a living man if I am to be truly born again… After we make love," she said, "you will be gravely ill for three weeks. But with the right medicine you can be cured."'[90]

The horrific images of monstrous union – of the dead feeding off the living – and of the dead returning, are here used to enchanting effect.

Finally, no discussion of horror in *Liaozhai* can be complete without mention of 'Painted Skin' (畫皮), one of *Liaozhai*'s most celebrated stories, and one in which combines fear and desire in the figure of the monster to striking effect. In this tale, the protagonist, Wang, meets a beautiful young woman, whom he invites into his house.[91] One day, however,

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90 Tran. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p288.

91 'Painted Skin', p119-124.

he peers into her room, and sees that she is not a young woman at all but a hideous demon, 'a green-faced monster, a ghoul with great jagged teeth like a saw', and she is touching up a human skin with a paint brush. When she puts on the skin, like a cloak, she is transformed into the beautiful woman he had fallen in love with. Realising she has been discovered, the demon tears open Wang's chest and rips out his heart, before fleeing the house. The story ends happily, though, thanks to the efforts of Wang's loyal wife, with Wang revived and the demon defeated.

In his thesis on *Liaozhai's* ghosts, Luo Hui describes the tale as '*chuanqi* in style but *zhiguai* in spirit', and points out that it is unusual in *Liaozhai* in that it contains both of the stock images of the female monster in one – the beautiful, fragile supernatural woman, and the hideous, dangerous creature.[92] In most other tales of shape-shifting creatures in the collection, the non-human aspect of the monster tends to be found in the shape of an animal, and even this animal aspect is not always seen.[93] The creature in 'Painted Skin' perhaps suggests the danger of *qing*. Desire can be fearful, just as the fearful – the unknown – is desired. The tale plays upon the same tension that the collection itself manipulates to such effect; that the world is unpredictable, that monsters can be found close to home, and that they are rarely as simple as they seem.

Conclusion

In the bodies of these different characters, therefore, can be seen the truth of Cohen's first 'monster thesis', that the monster's body, 'quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy... giving them life and an uncanny independence.'[94] This tension between fear and desire, embodied in the figure of the monster, drives the whole collection, from the Historian's preface and his project of collection and creation, to the tales' plots and characters. Boundary-crossing, a key aspect of monstrosity, is shown in the Historian's preface to be both fearful and desirable. Surrounded by the fearful imagery of death, he contemplates 'the dark frontier', and longs for communication across it. Already, conflicting emotions have been evoked. Sing-chen Lydia Chiang argues that the horror tales are 'foundational texts', which

92 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai,* p250. Although other tales do contain similar figures, of fearful monsters hiding beneath human skin, it is in this story that the theme is most developed. I return to this issue in Chapter 4.

93 One exception to this rule is in the tale of 'Qingfeng' (青凤), p112, a fox spirit who reveals herself in a terrifying aspect in order to frighten away the protagonist from her home, but who subsequently shows only her benign side.

94 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p4.

guide the reading of the collection, but it is the preface, and the Historian himself, that is a better key to its understanding, in the way in which these emotions are introduced. It is preparation for the hybrid nature of the collection, its use of both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* tales, and for the myriad different depictions of monstrosity within them.

Liaozhai, as part of the genre of anomaly writing and therefore also the project of collecting, has discovery and curiosity at its heart, as does the horror genre itself. Carroll argues that the feeling of horror is 'the price we pay' for this exploration of the unknown, an exploration that horror pushes further than perhaps any other genre, in its fascination with the fearful and dangerous. So the horror tales, though brief and fewer in number compared to the tales of enchanting, benign monsters, nevertheless play their part in the collection overall, which seeks, in its countless representations of the figure of the monster, to explore the known and the unknown.

Chapter Three: Becoming Monstrous

Introduction

In 'Painted Skin', Wang quite literally loses his heart to the demon who hides beneath the skin of the beautiful young woman he befriends.[1] And yet, as so often in *Liaozhai,* death is by no means the end. Thanks to his loyal wife, Wang's body is revived by a heart created from the spit of a mad beggar. This figure drips with mucus and sleeps on a dunghill, but Wang's wife, Chen, approaches him all the same, having been told by a Daoist priest that he may be able to raise the dead. She withstands humiliation at his hands – as a crowd gathers around them he taunts her, beats her with a stick, and finally makes her eat his phlegm. In consuming this, Wang's wife consumes part of the beggar's monstrosity. Later, as she weeps over her husband's dead body, 'she felt the lump of phlegm rising in her gullet and brought it up, so suddenly that she had no time to turn away, but spat it directly into the gaping wound in her husband's chest. She stared aghast: the phlegm had become a human heart and lay there throbbing, hot and steaming.'[2] The beggar's monstrosity has been transferred from her to her husband, transforming itself into part of his body and bringing him back to life.

Zhou Jianming 周建明 points out that in stories such as 'Painted Skin', the lines between human and monster, beauty and ugliness are not clear; 人鬼不分，美丑不明.[3] He is referring to the monster disguising itself under human skin. And yet by the end of the tale it is equally difficult to tell apart human and monster. The bodies of Wang and his wife have been changed by monstrosity, and Wang has been transformed at the site of what could be seen as making us most human – the heart.

When it comes to anomalous bodies in *Liaozhai*, much scholarly work has tended to concentrate on the feminised body of the ghost or animal spirit. Less attention has been paid to the human body in the collection, and the transformations it undergoes. The previous chapter discussed how the collection's tales, and the monstrous within them, embody both fear and wonder. The present chapter will build upon this, examining the different ways in which bodies – like Wang's – are changed and made monstrous, how they are broken down or fragmented, becoming what Cohen calls an 'unstable category' in their breaking of their own

1 'Painted Skin', p119-124.
2 Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* p132.
3 Zhou Jianming 周建明, in Zeng Yanbing 曾艷兵 *Kafuka yu Zhongguo wenhua*, 卡夫卡與中國文化, Beijing: Shoudu shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006, p96.

boundaries. These changes happen in a variety of ways, covering several typical aspects of monstrosity, though two major aspects are lack and excessiveness. Dismemberment, in certain tales, leads to bodily lack, whereas other tales depict the body becoming multiple, or excessive – tiny beings coming out of eyes, ears, or noses, or changes being written on the skin. I will also consider tales in which the body changes after death, in stories of the monstrous, walking corpse.

Throughout the chapter I consider the different catalysts for the human body becoming monstrous, from moral failings, to excessive passion, to the random workings of fate. I look at how these monstrous changes explore questions of self and other, order and disorder.

To approach this aspect of monstrosity in *Liaozhai* I borrow the framework of 'grotesque realism', made famous by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his work on the French Renaissance writer Rabelais.[4] A term originally used in the visual arts, and frequently linked with monstrosity, the grotesque is the body turned comically or repulsively distorted. Similar to the previous chapter's argument that both fear and wonder play their parts in *Liaozhai*, sometimes within the same body, the grotesque often involves combination and hybridity, both of forms within the body, and of horror and humour. It is helpful to examine the idea of the grotesque alongside the monstrous because it allows for a focus on the human body changed in a particular way. Bakhtin's work on grotesque realism examines the body degraded and 'brought down to earth', and how this reflects the bringing down of all that is high, or official, thus subverting official discourse and the status quo. Throughout the present chapter I examine how this change and degradation work in *Liaozhai* as another form of monstrous representation; of the monstrous body as revelation.

The Body

Any change to the human body provokes and suggests anxieties and deeper meaning. To use the words of Rosemarie Garland Thomson, 'the extraordinary body is fundamental to the narratives by which we make sense of ourselves and our world...The unexpected body fires rich, if anxious, narratives and practices that probe the contours and boundaries of what we take to be human.' [5]

4 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolskly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

5 Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, New York; London: New York University Press, 1996, p1.

In order to understand any representation of the extraordinary, monstrous body, it is necessary also to understand the ways in which the body is perceived and conceptualised within a certain context. As discussed in the previous chapters, boundaries – both physical and abstract – are a key aspect of monstrosity and of its portrayal in *Liaozhai.* In Chapter Two I discussed how boundary-crossing in the collection is both desired and feared. I will here concentrate particularly on traditional thinking about the boundaries of the body in China; what these boundaries are, how they are guarded, and what happens when they are breached. Particularly important is the way in which the control and containment of the body, and bodily boundaries, was seen to mirror control and containment in society, and the clear link between morality, physical health, and an ordered society.

Time and again in *Liaozhai,* however, this order is called into question by the 'uncontained', or changing, body. The chapter will look in particular at the tensions this may reflect, and the way in which it 'probes the contours and boundaries' both of the human, and of the wider society which the human body was thought to mirror.

When discussing understandings of the body in late imperial China, Francesca Bray emphasises that 'the body' is not a single 'Chinese' body, but a heterogeneous package: 'The phenomological body (the physical package of flesh and blood, bones and sinew, vital organs, nerves and senses – perhaps incorporating, perhaps distinct from an immaterial mind, soul or spirit – through which we exist and know ourselves to exist in the world) is differently constituted and organized in different societies, and even within the same society it will be understood and experienced differently by different people.' [6] So to understand the 'extraordinary', or monstrous body, the specific context out of which it appears has to first be understood. As Cohen writes, the monstrous body is a *cultural* body.[7]

In China, 'bodies were (and are) thought of as a complex network of energized matter known as *qi*', writes Angela Zito.[8] The body was conceived of as a dynamic force, possessed of a transformative energy. As discussed in the previous chapters, notions of change and transformation had been key to understanding the natural world in China from some of the very earliest texts and continuing through the time in which *Liaozhai* was written. The collection reflects the complexity of perceptions and understandings of nature, of human and animal bodies and the natural world; changes could be seen as anomalous at the same time as

6 Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1997, p297.

7 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p4.

8 Angela Zito, 'Silk and Skin: Significant Boundaries', in Barlow and Zito, eds. *Body, Subject and Power in China*, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p110.

being accepted as part of nature.

So the boundaries of the body were, as Nathan Sivin discusses, conceived of differently to European ways of thinking about the body. In order to understand these boundaries and how they were connected to the wider social and cosmological environment, he examines early medical texts such as the *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經). These texts describe the body as an ensemble of functions, defined by an intimate, dynamic relation with its environment.[9] Written around the 1st Century BC, and remaining influential until late imperial times, the *Inner Canon* examined ideas of *qi,* (氣) *yin-yang* (陰陽) and the Five Phases (五行) – cosmological concepts which were also used to understand the human body. The *Inner Canon* describes the body 'not as skin, flesh, sinews and bones', but as 'the free travel and inward and outward movement of the divine *qi.*'[10] The same *qi* that governs heaven and earth also governs the body. Thinking about one inevitably involves thinking about the other.

Further associations were drawn between body and cosmos. The *Inner Canon* states that, 'In the year there are 365 days; human beings have 365 joints. On the earth there are high mountains; human beings have shoulders and legs. On the earth there are deep valleys; human beings have armpits and hollows in the back of their knees.'[11] It was also seen as no coincidence that humans had four limbs, to match the number of seasons and directions.

Sivin goes on to point out that, 'Since the body is a dynamic system interacting with the cosmos, the permeability of its boundaries was an important issue in medicine.'[12] The body, like the universe itself, needed to be balanced. To be healthy, it needed to be neither completely open nor completely closed. What went in, and what came out, needed to be carefully regulated and contained. This referred not only to food and *qi* which entered the body, and waste which came out, but also to behaviour and emotion.

The *Inner Canon* describes the body not just as a microcosm of the universe, but as a metaphor for the state and society, in the body of the emperor: 'Whether sovereign or common fellow, everyone desires to keep his body intact.' [13] It makes clear that, in both the human body and the 'body politic' of imperial power, a lack of balance and regulation can lead to disorder – disorder of the physical body, leading to illness, and disorder of the social

9 Nathan Sivin, 'State, Cosmos, and Body in China in the Last Three Centuries B.C.' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 55, 1 (June 1995), p14.
10 Ibid., p14
11 Ibid., p18.
12 Ibid., p15
13 Ibid.

body of the state, leading to breakdown and chaos. Linking the two together, the well-being of the body was therefore not only a physical issue, but also a moral issue. In the sections below, I will consider how both personal, and social and political monstrosity can be read in *Liaozhai* through the fragmented and disordered human bodies in the tales.

This linking of body and state had a long-lasting influence in China, on social norms and morality, and on how these were reflected in literature.[14] As Keith McMahon remarks, in his study of seventeenth century vernacular fiction, all boundaries 'can be reduced to the surface of the body itself, with its several 'apertures', *qiao* (竅), above and below. The rule for all such openings is that as long as they are properly contained, the family and the body will maintain a state of moral well-being.'[15] Like the physical boundaries of doors and walls, which will be examined more closely in Chapter Six of this thesis, the boundaries of the body also need to be guarded. Good health means the balancing not only of body and environment, but also of behaviour, and of emotion.

Cosmological thinking therefore created boundaries within boundaries: if the boundaries of a state are well governed, its people will be healthy; if the boundaries of one's home are well governed, one's family will be healthy; if the boundaries of the body are well governed, the body will be healthy. Hundreds of years after the writing of medical texts such as the *Inner Canon*, politics, medicine and morality were still linked, in the body's microcosm of society and cosmos. Although in the seventeenth century there was an increase in the spread of medical knowledge, due in part to the flourishing of printing from the late Ming (from the late Ming onwards, many household encyclopaedias were printed that included chapters on medicine and the body), much of this knowledge was still based on centuries-old roots such as the *Inner Canon*.[16]

Judith Zeitlin also points out that interest in the strange, and in the anomalous body, was particularly prevalent during the time in which *Liaozhai* was written, with previous collections of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* being widely re-edited and reprinted, and many new collections of 'strange events' compiled and published.[17] This interest in the strange

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14 This linking of the body to wider social and cosmological significance was not limited to China, however. As Mary Douglas has argued, in many cultures, society strictly polices the boundaries of the individual body, which serves as a metaphor for the social body. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo,* London: Routledge, 1966, Introduction, p1-6.

15 Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth Century China*, Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1994, p35.

16 See Qianshen Bai, 'Illness, Disability and Deformity in Seventeenth Century Chinese Art' in Wu Hung and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture,* Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2005, p162.

17 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p4.

penetrated into other fields of Ming and Qing learning – including medicine. Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518-1593) included a whole chapter on human anomaly in his *Classified Materia Medica* (*Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目), discussing strange transformations, monstrous births, and metamorphoses. As Zeitlin points out, his proof-texts were in the main culled from accounts of the strange, exhibiting the circularity of reference and fiction.[18]

The Grotesque

One recent exception to the critical trend of focusing on the beautiful fox or ghost in *Liaozhai* is Lydia Chiang's *Collecting the Self*, in which the anomalous body is front and foremost. She turns around the idea of the stories portraying male fantasy, and concentrates instead on male anxiety. Rather than looking at the idealised bodies of female ghosts and fox spirits, she examines the grotesque body – the horrific ghost, the 'walking dead', and others. To these fearful figures she applies a psychoanalytic reading, arguing that they represent the alienation of the male scholar from women, society, and his own self.

However, whilst this approach can yield new insights, and considers certain tales which are often neglected, in its focus on the anxiety which the monstrous body represents it ignores other possible understandings. In its psycho-analytical framework it also takes for granted a framework of sexuality and repression that cannot necessarily be applied to this context. (I will discuss this further in Chapter Five).

As discussed in the previous chapter, a feature of *Liaozhai* is its combination of fear and wonder, horror and romance; within the collection as a whole, within specific stories, and even within a single character. So in this chapter I approach the monstrous human body through a mode which emphasises the mixed nature of representation – the grotesque. Whilst Chiang applies this description to the fearful *Liaozhai* figures, she doesn't expand on her use of the term. Its relation to my framework of monstrosity, however, can serve to illuminate aspects of the monstrous within *Liaozhai*, particularly in relation to the human body and its changes.

The term 'grotesque', denoting something comically or repulsively ugly or distorted, comes from a word to describe a style of painting or sculpture 'resembling that found in a

18 Ibid., She also points out that we know that Pu Songling was familiar with Li Shizhen's work: he compiled a brief pharmacopoeia entitled *Prescriptions for Evil Influences (Yaosui shu),* whose prescriptions were adapted from *Classified Materia Medica*. Zeitlin, p222, n9. See also Hong Liu 洪流, 'Pu Songling yu Bencao gangmu' 蒲松龄与本草綱目, *Pu Songling yanjiu* 蒲松齡研究, 2, 1996, p96-100.

grotto', in which human and animal forms are interwoven with flowers and foliage.[19] 'Grotto-esque' became 'grotesque', and grotesque bodies are, like the art from which they take their name, hybrids, mixtures of human, animal, plant, or other objects. The grotesque as an aesthetic category evokes conflicting feelings – horror and derision, amusement and fright, all at once. Like the collection as a whole, it is a *mixture* of contradictory feelings and effects.

David Williams points out that the terms 'monstrous' and 'grotesque' are often used interchangeably.[20] However, as noted, the grotesque was originally used in relation to the visual arts. As Marina Warner writes, regarding the distinction between the grotesque and the monstrous, 'one belongs to the order of representation, the other to the order of nature...Two ways of experiencing the world.'[21] The combination of human and animal bodies gave rise to the connotation of the grotesque as 'the monstrous'. The monstrous, however, as I discuss in Chapter One, need not necessarily be repulsive or ugly. The grotesque is just one aspect of the monstrous, but one which plays a key part in *Liaozhai*. Because of its mixed nature and the conflicting feelings it evokes, the grotesque is an apt description for many of the monstrous human bodies in the collection, which, in their monstrous changes, still retain their human form, but undergo different changes.

In order to consider these bodies, and the part they play in the collection overall, I use Mikhail Bakhtin's work on 'grotesque realism'. In his influential work, Bakhtin takes as a basis for his arguments the writing of the French Renaissance writer Rabelais, whose work was concerned with fantasy and satire and in which images of the human body play a predominant role. For Bakhtin, the grotesque refers to and celebrates the body and bodily excesses. He sees the carnival, that favourite popular arena for the indulging of physical excess, as the grotesque event *par excellence*, the place where the common people abandoned themselves to exuberantly obscene excesses of a physical kind.[22]

Grotesque realism is the representation of the grotesque in fiction. In the work of writers such as Rabelais can be found the laughter, monstrosity and subversion of the Carnival, in which the body is represented as 'comically grandiose' and degraded; 'The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high,

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19 Oxford English Dictionary online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/81794rskey=RtSt44&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid. Retrieved, 18/03/2013.

20 David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature,* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997, p16.

21 Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock*, London: Vintage, 2000, p251.

22 See Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque*, London, Methuen, 1972, p56, for a discussion of Bakhtin's arguments.

spiritual, ideal, abstract... (all) forms of grotesque realism turn their subject into flesh.'[23] The grotesque body is opposed to perfection and purity, to order and clarity – to the classical bodies represented during the Renaissance in Europe, or the contained, Confucian body in imperial China. As discussed above, this ideal, Confucian body was thought to mirror the wider society and cosmos. An ordered society was reflected in an ordered, contained body, and vice versa. The 'conceptual goal' of the grotesque, however, is the negation of order, achieved through the abnormalisation of the body.[24]

Daria Berg looks at carnivalesque motifs in the anonymous, seventeenth-century novel, *Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World* (*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳), looking in particular at its images of sickness and healing. What is particularly interesting about her argument, linking it to the theme of this chapter, is her point that, 'The theme of a world in dire need of a cure, reform, and salvation strikes a keynote in the narrative.'[25] She highlights that the text links the image of healing with that of governing, and that illness in the human body exposes short-comings in society; 'Decadence and moral decay in turn result in physical breakdown. Sin and vice cause disorders in the individual as a microcosm and also imbalances in the macrocosm of the world at large.'[26] Through a consideration of the grotesque body in *Liaozhai*, turned monstrous through illness or cure, I will examine the extent to which a similar link between monstrosity and disorder in society can be seen in the collection.

Becoming 'In-Between'

In 'Painted Skin', Wang's human heart is replaced by another, monstrous heart. In another tale a corpse rises and, neither wholly human nor wholly dead, begins a deadly pursuit. Other stories feature disembodied limbs, tiny people taking up residence in eyes and ears, and strange creatures spilling out of a man's body. These images not only tread a fine line between the horrific and the humorous, but also between one thing and another – between human and not-human, between alive and not-alive.

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23 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* p19-20. Rabelais' most famous work, discussed by Bakhtin, is *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, a bawdy and satirical tale of two giants, published between 1532 and 1564.

24 Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, p109.

25 Daria Berg, *Carnival in China: A Reading of the Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan,* Leiden: Brill, 2002, p356. As Maram Epstein points out, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), tentatively suggested Pu Songling as the author of this work, but she remarks that the attribution is largely circumstantial and refuted by recent scholars. See Epstein, *Competing Discouses,* p122.

26 Ibid., p356.

The grotesque body is that which is caught between forms, its wholeness broken down, so that it becomes fragmented, multiple, or hybrid. It becomes monstrous, and thus, to use Cohen's words, 'an unstable category.' The human body turned monstrous can also be called a liminal body. Deriving from the Latin for threshold – *limen* – liminal refers to a transitory, in-between space or situation. Its technical meaning derives from anthropological studies of ritual passages in small-scale societies, which are made up of three steps; separation, liminality, and re-integration. During the middle, 'liminal' stage, those going through the ritual enter a zone of exclusion from the rest of society. They are brought to question their self and the existing social order, and come to feel, 'nameless, spatio-temporally dislocated and socially unstructured'.[27] But this dissolving sense of reality also brings the possibility of new perspectives. By passing through this threshold stage, they can then be re-incorporated into society with a new identity.

The concept of liminality can be extended from these anthropological roots to refer to any state of being on the border, or 'betwixt and between'. This liminal state is characterised by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, and the potential for subversion and change; it disrupts and subverts established entities. Liminal spaces are both destructive *and* constructive.[28] The grotesque body in Bakhtin's framework, degraded and brought down to earth, but filled too with the potential for new life in its breaking of bodily thresholds, can be seen to embody this state; 'It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body.'[29] It is always, to put it another way, 'becoming'.

The idea of liminality – of a space or a body that is 'in-between' and capable of both destruction and creation – brings into focus the subversive potential of the *Liaozhai* tales. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Historian of the Strange himself is a monstrous construct, a playful but ambiguous hybrid, and in the monstrous bodies which he creates can be seen this same tension. The Historian's comment to 'Painted Skin' warns against being taken in by beauty, giving the tale a didactic reading which focuses on moral containment. But the tale itself is more complex. By breaking moral boundaries, Wang loses his life. And yet by the breaking of physical boundaries, he regains it. The moral message is subtly undermined.

Below, I will discuss other tales in which the human body in *Liaozhai* becomes monstrous – through fragmentation, through becoming multiple, through the failure of

27 Bjorn Thomassen, in the *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, eds. Harrington, Marshall and Muller, London: Routledge, 2006, p322.
28 Ibid.
29 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p317.

containment. Some of these changes are horrific and terrifying, others are humorous. Some seem to contain moral judgements, but others undermine them, whilst still others do not allow for them at all, producing a body turned monstrous but giving no reason. In the end, these monstrous bodies, grotesque, liminal, deny any attempt to impose a framework of order. It is this which gives them their subversive power; they suggest that social order cannot hold; that the self is uncertain. They provide no answers but instead ask only questions. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Liaozhai* is an exploration, and these liminal bodies provide the means to explore issues of otherness, and of the self and its position in society.

The Body Fragmented

In certain stories throughout the collection can be found scattered limbs, suggesting a particular type of monstrosity – that of lack. Severed heads fall out of the sky or terrorize travellers in inns; flying hands are seen in a town; men hack parts off their own bodies.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes, 'Decapitation is surely a kind of monstrosity, the becoming-monstrous of the human through fragmentation, through the reduction of embodied identity from five limbs and torso to a liminal object, an uncanny thing.' [30] He highlights the fact that conceptions of identity are closely entwined with questions of wholeness – one of the reasons perhaps why lack has been seen in various contexts as one type of monstrosity.[31] He goes on to write that, 'beheading nullifies personal identity, (the acephalic body is a corpse without history, personhood, individuality)'. [32] Conceptions of the self are founded upon notions of wholeness or completeness. The fragmented body threatens the sense of personal stability – of an enduring body and individuality. It suggests that what was thought of as stable and whole is in fact capable of dissolution and breakdown. This supports Chiang's argument, that the grotesque figures in *Liaozhai* point to a male self alienated from their own unstable identity.[33] However, in the context of late imperial China, the head without a body is disturbing not only to personal subjectivity but also to the larger social order.

The protagonist in 'Carrying a Corpse' (負尸) first finds a headless corpse hanging from his shoulder pole, then later discovers that a severed head has fallen from the sky.[34] The

30 Cohen, 'Preface: Losing Your Head', in Larissa Tracey, and Jeff Massey, eds. *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination,* Leiden: Brill, 2012, pix.

31 See Isidore of Seville's categories of monstrosity in Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, p107 – both 'superfluity of bodily parts' and 'deprivation of parts' are mentioned.

32 Cohen, 'Losing Your Head', pviii.

33 Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, p125.

34 'Fu shi' (312) 負尸, 'Carrying a Corpse', p1065.

head disappears, only to appear later in another man's basket. In another tale, 'The Rolling Head' (頭滾), a man is taking an afternoon nap when he sees a head appear out of the earth and spin around and around.[35] He is so shocked that he falls ill, ending up confined to bed. Later, his second son is killed, whilst spending the night with a prostitute. The tale ends by questioning whether perhaps the head was an omen; one traditional understanding of monstrosity.

In 'The Beauty's Head', (美人首) traders staying at an inn in the capital see a beautiful girl's head appear through an opening in the adjoining wall, followed by an arm, as white as jade.[36]

> 'Suddenly, a girl's head appeared through the opening, with very pretty features and nicely dressed hair; and the next moment an arm, as white as polished jade. The traders were very much alarmed, and, thinking it was the work of devils, tried to seize the head, which, however, was quickly drawn in again out of their reach. This happened a second time, and then, as they could see nobody belonging to the head, one of them took a knife in his hand and crept up against the partition underneath the hole. In a little while the head reappeared, when he made a chop at it and cut it off, the blood spurting out all over the floor and wall.'[37]

When the matter is reported to the authorities, the traders are arrested, but as the magistrate cannot find anyone to appear for the prosecution, they are released, and orders given for the girl's head to be buried.

These three tales all deal with the unexplained appearance of a severed head which, by its continued movement, still retains aspects of its previous life. Fascination with the head and the skull can be found world-wide, as it is not only the main means by which we recognize one another but also generally regarded as the seat of life and of power.[38] As a monstrous aspect, disembodied heads have been seen, as Cohen points out, within various contexts as sacred objects, trophies, apotropaic devices, admonitions.[39]

Whilst 'Carrying a Corpse' offers no explanation at all for the appearance of the head, 'The Rolling Head' suggests that it was perhaps an omen of the ill fortune to come. This has been a typical use of the severed head, a *memento mori* seen in contexts from Chinese *zhiguai*

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35 'Tou gun' (158) 頭滾, 'The Rolling Head', p556.
36 'Meiren shou' (231) 美人首, 'The Beauty's Head', p797.
37 Trans. Giles, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p312.
38 Tracey and Massey, *Heads Will Roll*, p5.
39 Cohen, 'Losing Your Head', pviii.

tales and Buddhist art to the sixteenth and seventeenth European still-life paintings which depict a skull alongside the objects of everyday life. As Tracey and Massey point out, 'The spectacle of the severed head... is a monstrous encounter with our own mortality.'[40] Though in this tale it is not the protagonist himself who dies, the death of a son nonetheless presents a threat to the lineage itself, an important aspect of Confucian society which will be examined more closely in Chapter Five.

Luo Hui points out that, although the head is beautiful, without a torso it is considered a manifestation of evil, so chopped off by the traders. Real blood spurts out when the head is chopped off, suggesting that this is not merely an apparition – a ghost's body can be a physical, corporeal thing, made of flesh and blood, whilst still not being entirely human. He states that, 'There is no identity attached to the head. It is not yet claimed by human society, and part of its danger lies in its unattached, free-floating status outside the kinship system.'[41] In this way, the severed head (and particularly as it is a female head) resembles the position of young unmarried women after they die. Not having married, they are without ancestors to perform rites for them, and outside of any kinship system.

Luo goes on to remark that treating the severed head as a murder case demonstrates the human effort to contain the unidentified, ghostly head within a social and moral structure. And when this attempt at social containment fails, the burial of the girl's head is another attempt to deal with the ghostly being, this time by putting it to rest.[42] So the fear with which the severed head is met suggests a threat to the individual, and the attempts to bring the head back into the social system, either through legal methods or through proper burial, also illustrate the extent to which the fragmented body poses a threat to social order.

In his work Bakhtin notes the frequent linking of the grotesque dismemberment of the body with that of society.[43] This recalls, as discussed above, the body's representation as a microcosm of society, and below I will discuss other ways in which bodily monstrosity is linked with social disorder The fact that there are a number of severed limbs within the collection suggests a world which is unstable. The 'rolling head' is interpreted as an omen of individual ill fortune, but when read alongside heads falling out of the sky or peering through walls, it perhaps suggests a broader unease. As Philip Thomson writes, 'It is no accident that the grotesque mode in art and literature tends to be prevalent in societies and eras marked by

40 Tracey and Massey, *Heads Will Roll,* p5.
41 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai,* p85.
42 Ibid., p85.
43 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p351.

strife, radical change or disorientation.'[44] As already described, by the late Ming the traditional assumption of an ordered universe had begun to be challenged.[45] In addition to this, the Ming-Qing transition had been a difficult time, of uprisings and violent deaths, meaning that the monstrous transformations of *Liaozhai* bring to mind what Chris Baldick calls 'the monsters of political organisation', or the ways in which monstrosity can be seen to reflect political discord and rebellion.[46]

Horror and Humour

Personal and social breakdown is one way of reading these dismembered bodies. However, as discussed above, key to the grotesque is its mixed nature – both horror and humour can be found in the grotesque body.

Larissa Tracey and Jeff Massey note that, 'disembodied heads are at times sinister yet at other times jovial and wise in their animation.'[47] 'The Beauty's Head' hints at a past tragedy, and its detail of 'spurting blood' brings unexpected horror, as though the severed head has suffered a second act of violence. 'The Sharp Sword' (快刀), however, sees the severed head motif at its most comic. In this tale, one of the government soldiers in a township garrison is known to possess an especially sharp sword:

> 'One day, a group of a dozen bandits were caught and brought to the execution ground. One of them recognized the soldier with the sharp sword. "Everyone says you've got the sharpest sword,' he mumbled. "They say it can cut a head off in a single blow. I beg you, be the one to kill me!"… The soldier drew his sword and swung it once. The man's head tumbled to the ground and rolled a few feet. And as it rolled, it gasped, "That *is* a sharp sword!"'[48]

The disembodied talking head should be horrific, yet here it provides what is in effect a

44 Thomson, *The Grotesque*, p11.

45 See Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology.*

46 Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, p14. Lydia Chiang discusses Dan Minglun's 但明伦 (1782-1853) commentary on 'Squirting' (1842) – an imperial minister sitting alone in a supposedly haunted house in the imperial capital. One night, a severed head appears on the table. As he's about to strike it with a sword, another head appears on top, and in the blink of an eye numerous heads had formed a chain that reached the beam. The next day, he moved out of the house. She argues that his comments echo the thematic import of the tale – that the haunted capital of a regime built on intimidation and decapitation is uninhabitable even to the boldest of individuals. The infinitely reproducing heads may stand for those that the Qing imperial minister himself had ordered severed. Chiang writes that, 'It seems that in *Liaozhai*, the Qing empire is littered with rolling human heads in search of their bodies.' Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, p103-104. See Chang and Chang, *Redefining History*, for an examination of the historical background to the transition and its aftermath.

47 Tracey and Massey, *Heads Will Roll* p2.

48 'Kuai dao' (66) 快刀, 'The Sharp Sword', p209. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p209.

punchline.[49]

This is what Thomson calls the 'impossible mixture of horror and comedy', or the confusion between a sense of the comic and something – revulsion, horror, fear – which is incompatible with the comic.[50] Several *Liaozhai* stories tread this fine line between horror and humour, with the human body subjected to changes which can be seen as both disturbing and comedic; a severed head, or, as discussed in the following section, creatures sneezed out of a man's nose, one of which devours the others, then attaches itself to his side. These tales, and the broader framework of grotesque realism, reflect Hélène Cixous' statement that, 'All laughter is allied with the monstrous... Laughter breaks up, breaks out, splashes over.'[51] Here again is the idea of excess, of things breaking out of their boundaries.

In his monster theses Cohen points out that one way of neutralising potentially threatening aspects of the monster is with a liberal dose of comedy; the thundering giant, for example, represented instead as the 'bumbling giant.'[52] 'Laughter degrades and materialises,' writes Bakhtin; 'materialising' meaning 'turning to flesh' any idealised subject, or bringing down something that is fearful. Here is a way of defeating fear, because what is fearful is powerful, but laughter acts against that power. This is why satire has often used the comedic monstrous as a tool, undermining the powers at the centre.

And certainly, critics have often pointed to the satirical impulse in *Liaozhai*, especially in regards to its portrayals of corrupt bureaucracy and the examination system. As remarked in the preface to this thesis, the author of the tales, like so many other scholars, found himself trapped in what Ichisada Miyazaki calls 'China's Examination Hell', unable to progress through the system. Several tales are overtly mocking of the examinations which took up so much of the lives and energies of scholars. In 'The Bureau of Examination Frauds', (考弊司）all degree holders must cut a piece of flesh from their thighs as tribute to the inspector of examination frauds in the underworld.[53] The word for fraud, *bi*, 弊, puns with the

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49 Zuo Jieyi 左介贻 remarks that this scene brings to mind the Ah Q's death scene in Lu Xun's famous tale 'The True Story of Ah Q' ('阿Q正传'). Lun *Liaozhai zhiyi* de youmo fengci yishu' 論聊齋志異的幽默諷刺藝術, *Pu Songling yanjiu jikan* 蒲松齡研究集刊 4, 1984, p3.

50 Thomson, *The Grotesque*, p7-8.

51 Hélène Cixous, in Marina Warner, *No Go The Bogeyman*, p327. I will return to the idea of laughter 'splashing over' in Chapter 5, when discussing the representation of the monstrous shrew in *Liaozhai* – the *pofu* (泼妇) or 'scattering woman'.

52 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p18.

53 'Kao bi si' (241) 考弊司, 'The Bureau of Examination Frauds', p822-825. Lei Qunming remarks on other tales which involve worthy scholars struggling to progress through the examination system, such as 'Ye sheng', (31) 叶生, 'Scholar Ye', p81-85; and 'Su qiu', (399) 素秋, 'Suqiu', p1349-1358. See Lei Qunming , *Liaozhai xiezuo yishu jianshang*, p175.

word that is used in the story for thigh, *bi*, 髀. Keith McMahon remarks that it is as if success in the exams, which entails getting the inspector's approval, involves the fraud of submitting one's pound of flesh in order to join the order of men who govern the bureaucracy.[54] And this linguistic merging of one thing into another mirrors the physical hybridities that the tales present. Official corruption is written onto the human body.

Laughter in the grotesque is therefore ambiguous laughter; the power at the centre is brought down to earth, but so too are the scholars who passively uphold the system, who continue to feed the monstrous mouth of official bureaucracy. Lei Qunming remarks that the laughter in *Liaozhai* 'contains tears'.[55] It continues the monstrous work of revelation, refusing any simple answers, but bringing to light the dark and hidden aspects of the human world.

Breaking Boundaries

In the stories discussed above, the body is fragmented and, to use Cohen's words, its embodied identity reduced. Other tales depict various ways in which the body becomes multiple, through the monstrous and sometimes humorous crossing of bodily boundaries.

Bakhtin's work is particularly useful here because of his focus on the thresholds between the inner and outer body. He considers how the boundaries of the body are threatened and broken, an aspect of the grotesque that is key to the depiction of the monstrous human body in *Liaozhai*, which plays off the tension inherent in 'containment' and its failure. Keith McMahon, examining the ways in which the body was controlled in late imperial China, writes that, 'All boundaries can be reduced to the surface of the body itself, with its several 'apertures', *qiao*, above and below. The rule for all such openings is that as long as they are properly contained, the family and the body will maintain a state of moral well-being.[56]

Typical of grotesque realism, however, is the *failure* to control these bodily boundaries, and the fascination with what happens at the threshold of the body and the outside world. The mouth in particular plays a key role, Bakhtin calling it one of the most important human features for the grotesque.[57] David Williams points out that the mouth; 'constitutes one of the principal thresholds of the body and thus of the self, a border between

54 Keith McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*', p225.
55 Lei Qunming, *Liaozhai yu xiezuo yishu jianshang*, p193.
56 McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, p35.
57 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p317.

the inside and the outside, a portal.'[58] He also remarks that, 'strict regulation of what is taken in through the mouth and what is expelled from the mouth contributes to the construction of the concept of the normal, not only in the restricted areas of eating and of speaking but in all forms of behaviour and in the world as a whole.'[59] And Emily Ahern, in her study of women and ritual in China, writes that substances that escape across body boundaries were (and are) considered unclean, a taboo common to many cultures.[60]

Such taboos and behavioural norms are partly due to what these substances are and where they come from. As Mary Douglas remarks, in her famous study *Purity and Danger*, most of the substances abhorred as 'impure' - spittle, blood, tears, sweat, vomit – figure ambiguously in terms of categorical oppositions such as me/not me, inside/outside, and living/dead.[61] They are neither one nor the other, defying categorisation, a tension integral to the grotesque, and to an understanding of monstrosity in a broader sense. So both the boundaries or thresholds themselves, and the things that cross them, are fraught with tension, something which writers and artists of the grotesque have exploited.

Another *Liaozhai* tale, 'Liang Yan', (梁颜) uses this tension between the inside and the outside, between 'me' and 'not me', to startling effect. In this tale, a scholar has for some time been suffering from a chronic sneezing condition:

> 'One day, he was lying down when he felt a strange itching in his nose. He jumped up and gave a large sneeze. A creature jumped out and landed on the ground, no bigger than the tip of a finger, in appearance somewhat like a tiny clay figurine of a dog. He sneezed again, and another creature fell to the ground. Four times this happened, by which stage there were four little creatures wriggling around on the floor, sniffing at each other.'[62]

The strongest of them begins to devour the others, and has soon grown much larger than all the rest. It climbs up the horrified scholar's leg and attaches itself to his side like an enormous wart, licking its lips then closing its eyes as if asleep. When the scholar pinches it, it hurts him as if it has become part of his own body. Here, there is a monstrous breaking and remaking of boundaries.

Though this tale is very brief, it is vivid in its physical and sensory details, adding to

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58 Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, p141.
59 Ibid.
60 Emily Ahern, 'The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women' in Arthur Wolf, ed., *Studies in Chinese Society*, Stanford, Ca.; Stanford University Press, 1978, p208.
61 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Routledge, 1966, p10.
62 'Liang yan' (209), 梁颜, 'Liang Yan', p716. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p362.

what Prúsek calls the 'stern realism' of the collection.[63] This can be seen elsewhere in tales such as 'The Beauty's Head', which, though it seems to be an almost dream-like apparition, is brought down to earth by the red blood that spurts from it. This emphasis on details – on the physicality of the monstrous body – anchors the tales in the realism of the everyday world. It also emphasises the corporeality of the monstrous body. As Philip Thomson points out, key to the grotesque is the conviction that, however strange it is, it 'is yet our world, real and immediate.'[64] It is this apparent reality which makes the physical strangeness of the body all the more unsettling.

The strange creatures are alien to Liang Yan, yet they come from inside him, finally returning to him, in the one that attaches itself to his side. The story deals with the ambiguity of what is 'inside' and 'outside', with what is 'the self' and what is 'the other', recalling Douglas' comment on impurity and defiance of categories.

This tension is given extra impetus in the tale because no reason is given for the strange phenomenon and no detail about what happens to the scholar or whether or not he is cured. As discussed in the previous chapter, the apparently random nature of monstrosity is one of the ways in which the collection unsettles and scares. Bodies can become monstrous, it seems to be saying, and there is not always a reason or a resolution. Boundaries can be broken, containment can fail; categories such as self and other can become blurred.

Another tale of inexplicable multeity contained within the body is the story 'Gongshi Zhang' (張貢士), in which a little man leaps out of the protagonist's heart and performs an opera depicting his own life.[65] Afterwards, the man, who has been lying ill in bed, only vaguely remembers what has passed. As in 'Liang Yan', there is no authorial comment to guide the reader (or to lead him or her astray). The fact that Zhang is ill and in bed, and his dim remembrance, suggests the events may have been a dream. But the tale can also be seen as playing upon the idea of self and other; Zhang is being shown himself as 'other', as an actor on the stage of his own life. Here is a monstrous splitting of the self, a representation of the 'otherness' contained within the body.

In other tales, there is a moral aspect to the monstrous multiplicity of the body. Two such tales are 'The Man in the Ear' (耳中人), and 'The People in the Pupils Communicate' (瞳人語). In 'The Man in the Ear' the protagonist, Tan Jinxuan, finds that a tiny man has taken up

63 Jaroslav Prúsek, *Chinese History and Literature, Collection of Studies*. Dordrecht, Holland: D.Reidel Publishing Company, 1970, p115.
64 Thomson, *The Grotesque*, p23.
65 'Zhang gongshi' (345) 張貢士, 'Gongshi Zhang', p1189-1190.

residence in his ear.[66] Tan is a Daoist adept who practises a type of self-cultivation called *daoyin* (導引). One day, as he is sitting in meditation he hears a voice in his ear, saying, 'I think I'm taking shape'. He's delighted, telling himself that this must be the 'Inner Elixir', which Daoists cultivate to achieve immortality. Continuing to practise his meditation, he finally feels a strange sensation in his ear, and a tiny figure comes out, its appearance as fierce as a *yecha* (夜叉).[67] Before Tan can do anything however, someone knocks on the door, and the little figure runs around frantically, before finally disappearing.

It was thought that if a Daoist practitioner thinks consciously of the achievement of immortality, then demons can seize the opportunity to enter his heart.[68] This story can be seen as a sly embodiment of this, supporting other *Liaozhai* tales in which those who seek Daoist learning without sufficient work or sacrifice are mocked.[69]

'The People in the Pupils Communicate' has a similar mocking tone. The tale tells of an 'unprincipled libertine' who is fond of trying to seduce any pretty woman he sees on the street.[70] One day his eye happens to be caught by a young woman, who is angry at him for staring at her so rudely. She throws a pinch of dust from the ground in his face. When he manages to open his eyes again the lady and her maid have vanished. Returning home, his eyes are painful and there is a film over each of his eyeballs, which thickens and grows. Having become completely blind, he manages to find peace in reciting Buddhist scripture. He then begins to hear voices from his eyes, and two tiny men emerge from his nose. The little men eventually crack through the thick film over one of his eyes. And in that eye two pupils appear, though the other is still covered by a growth. The protagonist of the story is changed by his experiences, and forgoes his previous licentious ways.

In these two tales, the body becoming multiple serves as a lesson or warning for the human protagonist. 'The People in the Pupils Communicate' in particular exhibits a clear link between the man's behaviour and the monstrosity with which he is afflicted. The function of the monster as revealing or showing is demonstrated here on the men's own bodies; their own moral mutations are revealed, a theme I will return to when discussing tales of metamorphosis in Chapter Four.

A different tale provides an interesting parallel to this story. In 'The Eighth Great

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66 'Er zhongren' (2) 耳中人, 'The Man in the Ear', p4.
67 A kind of demon which appears in Buddhist texts, from the Sanskrit *Yaksha*.
68 See Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* note to translation, p500.
69 'Laoshan daoshi' (15) 劳山道士, 'The Daoist Monk of Laoshan', p38-41, is possibly the most famous of these tales.
70 'The People in the Pupils Communicate', p10-13.

King' (八大王), the protagonist, Feng, is repaid for his good deed towards a turtle spirit.[71] The turtle, in human form, spits out a tiny man and inserts it underneath Feng's skin. Feng develops supernaturally keen sight, and is able to see pearls beneath the water. Whilst in one story the protagonist is punished with monstrous multiplicity, here he is rewarded for his kindness.

These stories illustrate the various ways in which the human body becomes multiple, and the subsequent effects of this multiplicity. Monstrosity can be a punishment for moral failings but a reward for goodness. So the breaking of boundaries which are meant to be controlled can be both fearful and wondrous – the typical framework, as the previous chapter discussed, of the collection overall. This ambiguity can be seen again and again, from story to story.

To return to 'Painted Skin', the beggar's phlegm is swallowed first by Wang's wife, then expelled again and transformed into part of his body. Bodily boundaries are repeatedly crossed here, and the transference of the beggar's phlegm plays vividly on the tensions of inside/outside, human/not-human, me/not-me. But the result of this boundary-crossing is Wang's return to life. So through the crossing of boundaries, and from something impure and unclean, comes something life-giving. Here can be seen one important understanding of Bakhtin's conception of grotesque realism. By the 'bringing down to earth' of all that is high, new life and regeneration become possible. Wang is transformed at the site which can be seen as making him most human – the heart. But he is no longer pure, contained, or controlled. Both he and his wife have been made hybrid by the crossing of boundaries, by their taking in of part of the beggar's monstrosity.

The attitude displayed in the collection towards the thresholds of the body, and the substances that pass through them, can therefore be seen as highly ambiguous. Whilst the tales emphasise the repulsive aspects of these actions (the scene in which Wang's wife is forced to eat the beggar's phlegm is arguably more horrifying than the scene in which the demon tears out Wang's heart), they also depict their positive aspects. 'Becoming monstrous' leads to new life; the human body has been degraded, but is made new again.

Finally, in this section, another story which reflects the collection's ambiguous portrayals of boundary-crossing and the grotesque is 'The Wine Worm' (酒虫), which tells of a man who *loses* his monstrosity.[72] In this tale, a man named Liu is addicted to wine. One day

71 'Ba da wang' (254) 八大王, 'The Eighth Great King', p868-875.
72 'Jiuchong' (175) 酒虫, 'The Wine Worm, p607-608.

a Daoist monk discovers that a wine insect is hiding inside him, and offers to rid him of it. To do this, he makes Liu lie down, binds him so that he can't move, then places a jug of wine next to him. Liu smells the wine and finds his throat becomes itchy, then finally the insect appears and crawls into the jug. Liu agrees to give the insect to the Daoist, who uses it to make wine from water. Subsequently, Liu no longer desires alcohol, yet he finds that he has not only lost his addiction, but also his health, and his wealth. He becomes thinner and thinner, and poorer and poorer.

In this story, the protagonist *begins* as doubled, or hybrid, and at this point in the tale he is a landowner, and able to live well. It is when he is 'cured' of his monstrosity – when he is no longer hybrid – that his fortunes change. This tale is another example of the collection's subversion of norms, including the idea of the containment of bodily boundaries, and of the control of what crosses those boundaries. Excessive drinking goes against the idea of containment, and is one of the 'Five Prohibitions' (五戒) of Buddhist thought.[73] Its dangers are made clear elsewhere in the collection, in the tale 'The Alcoholic' (酒狂), which tells of the effects of excessive alcohol, in its description of an incurable drunk, who is rude and violent when he has been drinking, and who fails to learn his lesson even after he dies and is then given a second chance at life.[74] And yet in this tale it is only when he stops drinking that the protagonist's fortunes start to change for the worse.

Dangerous Liaisons

In the stories just discussed, the body's boundaries are broken through a failure of containment. In this section, I will look at another way in which containment fails in the collection, leading to the body becoming monstrous – through human relationships with the monster.

In 'Painted Skin', a Daoist priest immediately sees the influence of the demon written on Wang's body. Although Wang brushes off his warning, he begins to be suspicious, and spies the demon through the window, painting the human skin. Here, the protagonist's relationship with the monster affects his body, giving it what the Daoist calls an 'evil aura'. Other tales also portray the dangers of a physical relationship with the monster to the man's

73 Huang Qia黄洽, *Liaozhai zhiyi yu zongjiao wenhua* 聊齋志異與宗教文化, Jinan: Qilu shushe chubanshe, 2005, p86. See also Wang Li 王立, *Liaozhai zhiyi; Jiu chong* 聊齋志異；酒虫', *Pu Songling yanjiu*, 蒲松齡研究, 1, 2002, for an examination of this tale.

74 'Jiukuang' (167), 酒狂, 'The Drunkard', p582.

health, even when the monster herself does not wish to do harm.

One such story is 'Scholar Dong', (董生). In this tale, a scholar finds a beautiful woman in his bed. At first he is alarmed, but soon they begin a relationship. The young scholar finds his health failing; he is weak and tired, and a doctor tells him he is under the influence of a fox, and must at all costs keep her away from his bed. Dong finds this impossible, however, and eventually dies.[75] The same situation occurs in 'Lianxiang', '蓮香', although this time it is the relationship with a ghost which causes the man's health to fail.[76]

Tales of dangerous fox relationships were not unique to *Liaozhai*, however. In her work on foxes in literature, Rania Huntington discusses fox tales after the Tang dynasty, in which; 'the fox's role as a sexual vampire became increasingly clear and codified.' [77] The fox in 'Dong Sheng' has been cultivating her *jindan* 金丹 or 'Golden Elixir', over many years. This was a type of inner alchemy, which foxes were said to achieve through a process of *caibu* 採補 or nourishment, in which they drained humans of sexual energy in order to achieve immortality. So the figure of the fox, as well as embodying the male fantasy of a relationship with a beautiful woman, can also be seen as embodying some of the fears of the male – the loss of control, their energy being stolen from them, and the power that women could gain.

However, in other tales of romantic relationships between human and monster, the human carries no ill effects on his body. Could it be argued, therefore, that in these tales, it is not the monster which is making the protagonist ill, but their own failure to sufficiently control their desires? The stories support what Charlotte Furth calls 'the powerful identification of sexuality with danger' in Ming-Qing China and the medical thought of the time (which I return to in Chapter Five).[78] Lianxiang the fox spirit rebukes Sang for his constant indulgence with the ghost Li. Sang becomes weak and tired, and Lianxiang realises what the problem is. It is not the fact that Li is a ghost which is making him ill, she states; any such failure of control, whether with a ghost or a human, would have equally damaging effects on the health. This recalls the discussion on good health earlier in this chapter – a healthy body was carefully controlled, both as to what entered the body, and what came out, and both in sustenance, emotions and behaviour. As Francesca Bray writes in reference to

75 'Dong sheng' (44) 董生, 'Scholar Dong', p133-136.
76 'Lianxiang', p220-232.
77 Rania Huntington, 'Foxes and Sex in Late Imperial Chinese Narrative.' *Nan nü* 2, 1 (2000), p86.
78 Furth, 'Concepts of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Infancy in Ch'ing Dynasty China,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46, 1, (1987), p14.

keeping a healthy body in order to assist fertility; 'Moderation was the key to fertility: moderation in consumption, in emotional behaviour, and in frequency of sexual congress.'[79] The protagonists of 'Scholar Dong' and 'Lianxiang' don't abide by this advice. They fail to moderate their behaviour, indulging instead in excess and all its dangers. In these tales, this is what makes the human monstrous – their own excess.

In tales of male monsters harassing human women, however, the virtue of the human woman is emphasised, and they are shown to be innocent of any transgression.[80] On the contrary, the wife of the coarse and ugly Chen Dai is both a faithful wife and a good daughter-in-law. Instead, these stories suggest a different representation and use of monstrosity. 'The Merchant's Son' (賈兒) involves possession by a male fox, leading to the serious illness of the merchant's wife.[81] The family are powerless to stop the harassment until the clever son finally defeats the fox. In the tales 'The Earthen Scholar' (泥書生) and 'Wutong' (五通), the aggressors are types of demon[82]. The story of the clay scholar tells of a woman who is married to a ill-mannered and ugly man. She begins to be harassed by a young scholar, but is powerless to do anything about it, and soon becomes haggard and worn. Her mother-in-law fears that it must be a ghost. Eventually, her husband hides in the room and lies in wait. When the scholar arrives, he jumps out and batters him around his midriff. The scholar disappears, leaving behind nothing but a fragment of gown made out of clay, and a clay hat.

'Wutong' is narratively very similar, but in this tale it is a Wutong spirit who enters the chamber of the woman. This creature, according to the tale, is somewhat similar to a fox spirit, but whereas the fox spirit's evil force may be exorcised in many different ways, the Wutong is much more vicious and difficult to deal with. The spirit molests Zhao Hong's wife, Yan, whilst Zhao is away on business. The following nights, the maids and servants are too afraid to sleep in her apartments, but move to another part of the house, leaving Yan alone.

John Minford remarks that recent scholars have suggested a psychological connection between spirit-possession and prenuptial anxiety.[83] As discussed in the previous chapter, women in traditional Chinese society were vulnerable during the period shortly before and

79 Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p319.

80 Such tales account for a significantly smaller number of the *Liaozhai* stories than tales of female monsters harassing men. Rania Huntington points out that stories of male foxes possessing or molesting women seem to be more common in the Tang than later. See Huntington, 'Foxes and Sex', p109.

81 'Gu'er' (41) '賈兒, 'The Merchant's Son, p125-129.

82 'Ni shusheng' (164) 泥書生, 'The Earthen Scholar, p577; 'Wutong' (408) 五通, 'The Wutong Spirits', p1417-120.

83 Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p557.

after their marriage, as they were leaving their own home, but their position in their new home was not assured until they had proved themselves capable of providing heirs. Often, their husbands were men they had never seen before. Richard von Glahn writes that, 'Feigning union with *Wutong* was a culturally accepted strategy employed by women to avoid sleeping with their betrothed husbands or to escape conjugal obligations altogether.'[84] Huang Qia also points out, however, that during the Ming and Qing the Confucian school of idealist philosophy, *lixue* (理學), which advocated reason, not desire, was especially strict in its attempts to control female sexual desire.[85] She argues that tales such as 'The Earthen Scholar' and the 'The Clay Statue' (土偶), in which a woman makes a clay statue of her dead husband, and later gives birth to a son, depict ways in which women created outlets for their desires.[86]

These *Liaozhai* stories can be seen to reflect one of the ways in which monstrosity was put to use in society. Becoming monstrous gave women a chance to escape an unhappy marriage.

Huang also points out the tales' similarities to stories of the succubus and incubus in Europe, which were female and male demons thought to appear in dreams to seduce human men and women. Similar to the way the *Liaozhai* creatures above were portrayed, it was thought that continued harassment by these demons could lead to illness and death. But they were, remarks Huang, a reflection of the repression of sexual desire and a means of freeing desire from social repression.[87]

This again recalls Cohen's formulation of the monster – that it embodies human fears, anxieties, but also desires.

Mutated Morals

If sometimes the cause of monstrosity in *Liaozhai* is the human protagonist's own excess of feeling, or his inability to control his sexual desire, other times it is his inability to control other types of desire or behaviour that leads to grotesque bodily changes.

In the very short tale 'The Cursed Duck', (罵鴨), the protagonist is a greedy man who cannot resist stealing one of his neighbour's ducks to kill and eat. The next day, however, he finds that his skin is covered in eiderdown. In a dream, a spirit arrives and tells him that the

84 Richard von Glahn, 'The Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 51 (1991), p699-701.
85 Huang Qia, *Liaozhai zhiyi yu zongjiao wenhua*, p183.
86 'Tu ou' (190) 土偶, 'The Clay Statue', p661-662. Huang Qia, *Liaozhai zhiyi yu zongjiao wenhua*, p184.
87 Ibid., p209-210.

only cure is for him to submit to the angry words of the duck's owner. The man has no choice but to admit to his crime; the owner duly berates him angrily, and finally he is cured of his affliction.[88] In another story, a man who spreads rumours about his neighbour's wife, causing her death, is afflicted with warts on his mouth that mean he can no longer speak without pain.[89]

In these tales, monstrosity is caused by the protagonist's own behaviour. Here again is the question of balance and containment. Both protagonists fail to be contained, Confucian men – this time, through their own moral behaviour – and their failure is written on their bodies. The tales recall the linking of morality to good health; if the boundaries of the body are well-regulated, the body will function correctly. As already described, the traditional conception of health and the medical body was one of dynamic balance between the various forces of *yin-yang* and *qi*. The healthy body was a balanced body, one in which these forces could flow unimpeded; one whose boundaries were controlled and regulated. Charlotte Furth describes how the Chinese term for illness, *bing* 病, denotes a condition of imbalance, and is in fact better translated as 'disorder' than as 'disease'. 'Disorder', then, results from excess or deficiency – categorised as 'heat' or 'cold', repletion or depletion and 'inner' (weakness) or 'outer' (invasion).[90] In other words, it results from the failure of the good regulation of boundaries.

This recalls Cohen's thesis that 'the monster polices the borders of the possible'. This aspect of the monster stands as a warning. Cohen writes that the monster delimits 'the social spaces through which private bodies may move. To step outside this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself.'[91] Chapter Six will discuss the monsters that lie outside 'official geography'. Here, however, the focus is on *becoming* monstrous as a punishment for transgressing. Here, the official geography can be seen as 'moral geography'. The duck thief and Huo Sheng are punished for breaking moral rules.

Monstrous Illness/ Monstrous Cures

The stories described above could be seen as representations of illness; bodies turning strange, and uncontrolled. Daria Berg, in her study of carnival in the seventeenth-century

88 'Ma ya' (199) 罵鴨, 'The Cursed Duck', p687.
89 'Huo sheng' (105) 霍生, 'Scholar Huo' p368-369.
90 Furth, 'Concepts of Pregnancy', p13.
91 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p12.

Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World, looks at the way in which sickness and healing are portrayed in the novel and argues that it portrays a link between human illness and social disorder. As mentioned above, and as Berg also points out, 'the image of the body politic as a physical organism and the equation of illness with moral decline reflect traditional concepts in Chinese thought.' [92]

Descriptions of illness frequently appear not only in writings of the time of the Ming-Qing transition but also in art.[93] Qianshen Bai considers the trend amongst certain Chinese artists of the time who claimed they were ill or crippled. Artists, he argues, presented themselves as ill, thus producing, 'a self-proposed and self-defined otherness.'[94] Richard Vinograd, in his work on late imperial self portraits suggests that this internal otherness reflected their alienation from the new political and economic realities of Manchu power, describing 'an aesthetic of illness and infirmity,' within the art of this period and calling it evidence of, 'a profound sense of dislocation and loss of identity.'[95]

Whilst the difficulties surrounding the Ming-Qing transition should not be overemphasised in relation to *Liaozhai*, as Chun-shu and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang point out, the period was nonetheless one of both social and political change, as discussed throughout this thesis, and this is reflected in the art and literature of the time. The boom in commerce during the late Ming had led to new social and cultural trends, including the creation of what Daria Berg calls, 'the new urban society... which appears as a topsy-turvy moral universe, a world torn between the traditional ideals and the new challenges of city life, commerce and a money economy.' [96]

Yet whilst the monster can cause illness, it can also cure it. In several stories the protagonist is saved through the healing skills of a fox spirit or other supernatural creature. Earlier in the chapter I discussed how the fox in 'Dong Sheng' was cultivating her *jindan* 金丹, or 'Golden Elixir' – a kind of inner alchemy. In this story, she used the human for his essence, or *jing* 精, and this had dangerous effects on his health. In other stories, however, a similar kind of inner alchemy is used to more positive effect.

In 'Jiaona', (嬌娜), the protagonist almost dies from a tumour.[97] The fox spirit Jiaona,

92 Berg, *Carnival in China*, p357.
93 Introduction, in Wu and Tsiang, *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture*, I, p6.
94 Qianshen Bai, 'Illness, Disability and Deformity', in Hung and Tsiang, p170.
95 Vinograd, Richard Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p147.
96 Berg, *Carnival in China*, p22.
97 'Jiaonuo' (22) 嬌娜, 'Jiaona', p57-66.

however, cuts out the tumour from his side with a gold bracelet, then presses a bolus which she has cultivated inside her onto the wound, curing him completely. A similar pattern occurs in 'Lianxiang'. In this tale, Sang, the protagonist, is having relationships with Lianxiang – a fox spirit – and Li Shi – a ghost. As already mentioned above, he becomes afflicted with a wasting disease, and Lianxiang realises that it is because he has been overindulging with Li. There is a cure, however; Lianxiang has collected the necessary herbs, but the final ingredient is Li's own saliva. Lianxiang makes the herbs into a pill, then asks Li to press it to Sang's mouth. In no time at all, Sang recovers.

So although in some stories ghosts and foxes are harmful to human health, in these tales they also have the power to cure disorder. In 'Lianxiang', in fact, the danger *and* the cure come from within the monster's body. These tales recall the way in which boundaries in 'Painted Skin' were broken both to harm and to restore the human body. The grotesque aspect of bodily fluids (and their ambiguous relation to inside/outside, self/other) becomes positive, life-renewing.

In all these tales, there is what could be called a chain of monstrosity. Something from inside the monster is transferred into the human. Sometimes this has dangerous or deadly effects, but sometimes it is life-saving. In both cases, however, the human becomes monstrous. This chain of monstrosity again recalls Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism, in which bodies are debased and brought down to earth in order to be remade anew. In this framework, the grotesqueness of bodily functions – spitting, consuming – results in regeneration and new life.

The Corpse

In one story, however, the pattern of monstrous cure has been turned around. In 'Liansuo', (連瑣), it is the human protagonist who cures the monster, when he is able to make the ghost Liansuo human again, with his breath, blood and semen.[98] Liansuo is an example of what Judith Zeitlin calls 'hyper-femininity' in the phantom heroine.[99] She is fragile and insubstantial, her body portrayed as absolutely feminine and absolutely ghostly. Through her relationship with the Yang, however, she is able to become human again. After they have slept together, and after she has consumed some of his blood and saliva, he becomes very ill. He recovers, however, and goes to her tomb, where he finds her body is warm, although she

98 'Liansuo' (97) 連瑣, 'Liansuo', p331-337.
99 Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p17.

has been dead for twenty years. Here, it is humanity which is transferred into the ghost's body. Becoming-human, she can live again.

So I end this chapter's discussion of the monstrous human body with a consideration of the body's final dissolution, and how this last monstrous change is depicted in the collection. I have argued that the *Liaozhai* tales, and their representation of monstrosity, are an exploration of what it means to be human or 'other'. In their tales of walking corpses can be seen an exploration of the human body after death, and the boundary between the dead and the living, which has endured as one of the most fearful and fascinating of boundaries both in the Chinese anomaly tale tradition and across different cultures and contexts.

A great uneasiness regarding the corpse can be seen in fiction and film from Europe and America. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which the monster is created out of pieces of dismembered corpses, one of the most horrific scenes comes from when Victor is plundering the charnel houses for pieces of the dead; 'I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life.' [100] Edgar Allen Poe then pushed the horror of the corpse into other strange places, in stories such as 'The Facts of the Case of M. Valdemar', and the horrific corruption of his body, after he is put into a mesmeric trance at the moment of death. [101] And the popularity of the zombie, flourishing at present both on film and television, tells of their continued power to fascinate and horrify, a reminder that death and the end of self awaits. [102]

Theories of fear and horror tend to be, in the words of Clive Bloom, 'essentially narcissistic', revolving around threats to the self, and no threat is greater than that of the ending of life, no boundary more threatening nor more inevitable than that between life and death. [103] However, within different contexts there are different understandings of this boundary, which is tied to ways of conceptualising the self, the body, and its changes and transformation. As Cohen writes, the monster's body is a cultural body, and through its portrayal, different ways of understanding life and death can be seen.

In the context in which *Liaozhai* was written, the boundaries between the worlds, and between bodies, are less fixed than in a monotheistic context in which it is the living body that is the signifier of selfhood. In an illuminating article looking at the use of horrifying

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100 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, London; Penguin, 2003, Chapter 4.

101 Edgar Allen Poe, 'The Facts of the Case of M. Valdemar', *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, London: Wordsworth, 1993, p21-38.

102 See the television series *The Walking Dead* (AMC, dir. Frank Darabont, 2010-), and recent films such as *World War Z* (dir. Marc Forster, 2013).

103 Clive Bloom, *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p5.

images in East Asia and Europe, Rajyashree Pandey quotes the theorist Julia Kristeva's vivid description of the corpse, or 'the ultimate horror'; 'The corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.' [104] If the body is indeed the signifier of selfhood, then the corpse is what destroys the sense of self. Images of the ghost – or the body after death, including representations of ghosts and zombies or other figures of the 'undead' – are therefore threatening to the sense of selfhood, and cause the horror Carroll discusses by being both physically and cognitively threatening.

But the corpse in early and medieval Chinese cosmography is associated with cosmic regeneration rather than death and destruction. Influenced by Buddhist tenet, everything is impermanent and forever changing.[105] In this conception, argues Pandey, 'there is no self or ego that can claim for itself a lasting identity.' 'The body itself,' she writes; 'comes to serve as a pedagogical truth of the doctrine of impermanence.' And so, in this scheme, the dissolution of the body is not a source of anxiety about the dissolution of the self.' [106] This framework can help to illuminate the ways in which the body turning monstrous is portrayed in *Liaozhai* – the fact that it can be both horrific and humorous, destructive and life-giving.

However, just as life and death cannot be placed in absolute opposition, neither can East and West in ways of thinking about bodily dissolution. Bakhtin's discussion of death within the system of grotesque imagery used by writers such as Rabelais illustrates its renewing aspect – an aspect that recalls Chinese thinking about death and the corpse. Writing of the opposition of life to death, he states that; 'Such an opposition is completely contrary to the system of grotesque imagery, in which death is not a negation of life seen as the great body of all the people but part of life as a whole – its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation. Death is here always related to birth; the grave is related to the earth's life-giving womb.' [107]

Several corpses appear in *Liaozhai*. Some, like Liansuo, are uncorrupted even after many years:

> 'They hacked away the undergrowth and opened up the grave. The coffin boards had already rotted away, but the lady's body within the coffin was uncorrupted and still slightly warm to the touch. He wrapped her in a shroud and carried her home, laying her in a warm place. Her breathing was faint, tenuous like fine

104 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, in Pandey, 'The Medieval in Manga', *Postcolonial Studies*, .3, 1 (April 2000), p28 .
105 See Pandey, 'The Medieval in Manga', p28, Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, p99.
106 Pandey, 'The Medieval in Manga', p28-30.
107 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p50.

> threads of silk. He fed her small portions of nourishing broth, and by midnight she was fully revived.'[108]

In this and other tales in which the ghost is reborn as human, it is possible to see the corpse very much as a liminal state – one which the body must go through in order to be born again. 'These twenty years seem just like a dream,' says Liansuo, when she wakes. And although *Liaozhai* and other collections and stories fictionalise the process, it is nonetheless a reflection of real beliefs. In the figures of *Liaozhai's* monstrous corpses can be found both death and life. Barend J. ter Haar writes, in relation to stories of walking corpses such as this, that; 'When someone died, this was not believed to be a final moment, but the beginning of a long process in which the life force left the physical corpse... It was always a few days before the corpse's remaining 'breath' (*qi*), disappeared. And indeed, at any later stage, if a corpse was able to collect sufficient breath, it might actually come alive again. Hence, stories about corpses rising up, and walking around like a zombie, are rife.'[109]

There are two *Liaozhai* stories in particular in which a corpse is used to specifically horrific effect. In 'Squirting', (噴水), a woman and her maid are killed when they spy an old lady in the courtyard, 'prancing around like a crane... an endless stream of water spurting from her mouth.'[110] The crone spits at them, and they fall down dead. Later, the husband digs up the ground where the crone was seen, and finds the remains of an entire corpse, its face still covered in flesh. When the corpse is struck, the flesh and bones fall away – beneath the skin the corpse is all rotten, consisting of nothing but water.[111]

In another tale, 'The Restless Corpse, (尸變), a man and his companions stop for the night at an inn. The innkeeper tells them that his daughter-in-law has recently died, and her body remains in the inn. The men agree to stay anyway. During the night, however, the protagonist wakes up, and sees the corpse rise. Walking over to each of his companions, she breathes on them, killing them in their beds. The protagonist flees, but he is chased by the corpse, who is only finally halted when she tries to clutch him around a tree, and remains fixed in place there, her nails buried deep into the wood.[112]

Here can be seen the working out of what happens after death, with the tales providing different outcomes – the hideous, dangerous corpse; the beautiful, uncorrupted

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108 Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* p289.
109 Ter Haar, *Telling Stories,* p286.
110 Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* p15-17.
111 'Squirting', p9.
112 'The Restless Corpse', p7.

corpse. In the stories above, the living body fails to be 'contained' – boundaries are crossed, the body turns monstrous. In these tales, it is the body after death whose containment has failed. Tales such as 'Squirting' and 'The Restless Corpse' reflect the necessity of the correct rites to deal with the dead, similar to the tale discussed earlier, 'The Beauty's Head'. Tales such as 'Liansuo', however, show a different side bodily dissolution, suggesting that death itself can be turned around.

In 'Painted Skin', Wang and his wife become monstrous – they take in the beggar's phlegm, and Wang is brought back to life. In 'Liansuo' can be seen a parallel to this tale, but here it is the monster who takes in human essence. Grotesque these scenes may be, but they lead to new life. The failure to contain bodily boundaries leads to what Bakhtin calls the 'unfinished body', always in the process of becoming.

Conclusion: The Body Degraded, the Body Remade

The *Liaozhai* tales of bodies turning grotesquely monstrous tell of the failure of containment – the subverting of the ideal, Confucian body whose boundaries are strictly controlled. Bodies are fragmented or made multiple; they are degraded through illness or through death. Whilst the failure of containment and its resulting effect on the body was frequently used in fiction for moral and didactic purposes, its use in *Liaozhai* is more ambiguous, and can be seen, in the spirit of grotesque realism, as a celebration of the monstrous and perverse. The *Liaozhai* stories delight in their monstrosity, the Historian of the Strange refusing to grant any unified vision to his tales. They subvert expectations; whilst sometimes the human body turning monstrous can be traced back to monstrous human behaviour, other times there is no reason behind the change. The tales can be seen as explorations of otherness. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Liaozhai*, like previous collections of anomaly tales, has curiosity at its heart; the desire to cross boundaries, as well as the fear of this crossing.

The human body in *Liaozhai* thus becomes a liminal space; changed, invaded or fragmented. It becomes monstrous, 'an unstable category.' This monstrous change can be horrifying or it can be humorous. It can embody moral judgements but it can also undermine them. It can mock wider social norms but it can also highlight individual failings. And it can also be, as the next chapter will discuss, wondrous and liberating, a means for the achievement of impossible goals.

Chapter Four: Monstrous Metamorphoses

Introduction

In the popular imagination, the most representative *Liaozhai* figure is the fox spirit who can metamorphose into a beautiful woman. Yet fox stories count for less than a quarter of the overall *Liaozhai* tales, and alongside them can be found metamorphosing deer, fish, frogs, wolves, snakes, and other creatures, as well as flowers, and tales of human beings transformed into animals.[1] This chapter looks at the theme of metamorphosis in the collection and links it into the larger framework of the monstrous in the collection as a whole.

The previous chapter looked at how the human body turns grotesquely monstrous in the tales, and how this monstrosity is explored and celebrated. This chapter examines another type of 'becoming' – the animal becoming human and the human becoming animal. Metamorphosis is itself a much-studied aspect of monstrosity; from early myths of animal-human transformations to contemporary urban tales of the werewolf, these bodily changes have haunted and fascinated. The transformed body provokes different responses; fear, wonder, humour; and is used in different ways and for different means; as warning, exploration, allegorisation.

One of the main ways in which the metamorphosing animals of *Liaozhai* have been studied is through what has been called their 'humanisation'. Traces of their original animal bodies have, in the main, been ignored or played down, and it has been argued that *Liaozhai* 'tames' or 'domesticates' the monstrous and strange.[2] There has also been less critical attention paid to human-animal metamorphoses in the collection, as they make up a much smaller part of the collection overall. By looking at both of these types of metamorphosis together, through the lens of monster theory, I hope to bring out other aspects of the collection's

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1 Gu Meigao identifies eighty-six tales in *Liaozhai* which involve a fox. 'Tan hu: *Liaozhai zhiyi* zhaji' 談狐:聊齋志異札記, in Gu Meigao, ed., *Guoji Liaozhai lunwen ji* 國際聊齋論文集, p251-264. This number is in fact relatively small, considering the fame of the *Liaozhai* fox figure, a point which will be taken up in the concluding chapter of this thesis, which looks at the ways in which the text itself has become monstrous, or hybrid. Liu Yanqing 劉衍青 records more than fifty tales which involve a different type of animal. *Ming Qing Xiaoshuo de shengming lichang* 明清小說的生命立場, Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2010, p89-90.

2 See Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p94. Zhou Jianming, in his study of animals in the work of Kafka and Pu Songling goes as far as to say that, 'Animals serve as representatives of certain human features; their animal nature is either seldom mentioned or not at all; as far as an animal/human character is concerned, there is no causal relation between the animal and the human.' Zhou, 'Literary Rendition of Animal Figures: A Comparison Between Kafka's Tales and Pu Songling's *Strange Stories*', in Adrian Hsia, ed. *Kafka and China*, Bern; London: Peter Lang, 1996, p122.

portrayal of these transformations. I argue that, rather than the 'humanisation' of the non-human, the collection instead works towards 'hybridisation', the combination of the human and the animal in one. This hybridisation allows for the achievement of otherwise impossible goals.

In order to better understand this theme, in the first sections of the chapter I look at some of the ways in which the relationship between the human and animal worlds was understood in China and how this understanding has influenced its portrayal in *Liaozhai*. I then approach metamorphosis through the way it has been understood in different contexts, as both a fearful anomaly and an accepted part of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, in order to highlight the collection's own representation of changing bodies.

Due to the sheer number of stories, the consideration of *Liaozhai*'s tales of metamorphosis in this chapter cannot give adequate attention to the collection's many portrayals of this theme, but I hope that it can highlight its complexities, and the way in which it functions within the collection overall.

The Human and the Animal Worlds

Two opposing doctrines run through much of traditional Chinese thinking on the relationship between the human and the animal world[3]: the unitary view (*Tianren heyi* 天人合一) or (*Tianren ganying* 天人感應), which envisages continuous interaction and reciprocity between Heaven and humanity; and the opposite view (*Tianren zhi fen* 天人之分) which sees a clear division between nature and humanity, between destiny and human behaviour.[4] The former view – that of cosmic unity – was the most influential, and an understanding of this is important for my arguments in this chapter, in which metamorphosis will be seen as a merging of the human and the animal, leading to the fulfilment of characters' desires. Roel Sterckx, in his examination of animals in early China, discusses this doctrine of cosmic unity,

3 Due to the constraints of the thesis, in this chapter I concentrate on animals as representative of the natural world more broadly. A broader examination of the theme of the natural world in *Liaozhai* might also look at depictions of the link between Heaven and the weather ('Bao shen' (20) 雹神', 'The Hail God', p51), anomalous weather ('Xia xue' (307) 夏雪', 'Summer Snow', p1058), unexplained phenomena such as in the mirage in the tale 'The City on the Mountain' ('Shan shi' (251) 山市, p852), natural disasters, ('Dizhen' (51) 地震, 'An Earthquake', p170), and even monstrous fruit ('Gua yi' (130) 瓜異, 'A Strange Melon' p443). See Chapter Six for a consideration of certain of these tales in relation to the representation of the wilderness in the collection.

4 These doctrines can be found in the *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* (黃帝內經), which was discussed in the previous chapter. See Liu Yanqing, *Mingqing xiaoshuo de shengming lichang*, p82, for a further discussion of this doctrine in *Liaozhai*.

explaining that the early understanding and classification of animals was part of a larger scheme attempting to explain the structures of the cosmos as a whole; 'Rather than perceiving the world as a purely physical reality that could be analysed as a biological system, the ancient Chinese classified the living species as part of a textual and ritual order based on correlation rather than differentiation.'[5]

Sterckx looks at some of the earliest evidence of human-animal interaction, finding that records of animals and descriptions of their use in socio-economic, religious, and ritual practice have been preserved in some of China's oldest written records, including oracle bone inscriptions dating from the late Shang period (c. 1200-1045 BCE).[6] From some of the earliest philosophical records, animals were used for the purpose of analogy, or to illustrate particular moral arguments. Confucius is quoted arguing that 'a swift horse is not praised for its physical strength (*li* 力) but for its virtue/excellence (*de* 德).'[7] And for the poets of the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*, 詩經) their species and behaviour provided images and analogies to evoke emotions, impressions of the natural world, and moral messages.[8] This early linking of animals and morals continued to be influential. Later, Buddhist ideas about the equality of animals and humans found support in this early Chinese thinking about the correlation between the human and natural world.[9]

One aspect which may account for the interest in the representation of animals in fiction worldwide is what Sterckx calls animals' 'double role'. Animals, he points out, are, 'both habitual and ordinary companions to humans in daily life as well as objects instilling fear and awe in the minds of commoners and elites alike, animals in early China, as in other ancient societies, were creatures laden with both biological veracity and symbolic significance.'[10] They could be both ordinary *and* extraordinary. Early *zhiguai* tales reflected this interest in animals and the natural world, depicting creatures both monstrous and ordinary.[11] And later, as Zhao Xiaohuan points out, Tang writers of fiction also showed an

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5 Roel Sterkcx, 'Animal Classification in Ancient China', *East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine*, 23, (2005), p29.

6 Ibid., p26.

7 See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed. *Lunyu* 論語, Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1993.

8 Sterckx, 'Animal Classification in Ancient China', p27-28. Sterckx also points out the absence of a volume on zoology in Joseph Needham's monumental *Science and Civilization in China* project.

9 Ji Yunlu 冀運魯, *Liaozhai zhiyi xushi yishu yuanyuan yanjiu* 聊齋志異敘事藝術淵源研究, Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2011, p32-33.

10 Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002, p69.

11 Relatively little research has been undertaken in relation to the representation of animals in these early tales. (With the exception of the fox, which has been the focus of considerable scholarly attention. In her 2010 thesis, *Animal Symbolism in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fantastic Literature: Yuan Mei and the Writing of*

exceptional interest in animals, with many Tang tales dealing with the transformation of men into animals or animals into men, and exploring the relationship between men and animals.[12] But *Liaozhai* takes this unpredictability, this combining of the fearful and the wondrous, the everyday and the monstrous, further than previous collections, through its sheer number of tales, and through the myriad different ways in which the human and the non-human are explored.

Animals in *Liaozhai*

Certainly, the collection presents a wide variety of animals, both the 'habitual companions' of everyday life, but also animals fearful and monstrous, giant or possessed of strange powers, in addition to its various metamorphosing creatures. When an animal is depicted in a tale, there is almost inevitably something unusual about it, but the range of different attributes is very wide. Many *Liaozhai* creatures are ordinary in appearance. It is their behaviour which marks them out. Looking briefly at these types of creatures can add to an understanding of the collection's treatment of animal and human metamorphosis.

Stories such as 'The Faithful Dog' (義犬) depict animals whose loyalty to their human masters causes them to act in extraordinary ways.[13] In this tale, a dog saves its master from attack by bandits, losing its own life in the process. Other tales are based around moral reciprocity and the repayment of debts of gratitude. 'The Elephant' (象), for example, tells of a hunter saving a herd of elephants from a lion.[14] The elephants pick him up and put him in a tree; it is only when he sees the lion approach that he understands what they want him to do, and he shoots it with his bow and arrow. Here, the human uses his special skills to save the animals. In other tales, it is the animals who trade off their particular skills to help the human. In 'The Myna Bird', (鴝鵒) the bird helps the protagonist when he runs out of money, first by arranging to be sold to a wealthy man, who is impressed by the bird's ability to speak, then by returning to his owner.[15]

Zi Bu Yu, (University of Gent), Evelien Vanderhaute refers to a series of articles written in German in *T'oung Pao* in the 1940s by Eduard Erkes, but points out that they are studies of one particular animal, and are not necessarily dealing with them in the literary context. See Erkes, 'Das Pferd im Alten China', *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 36, 1 (1940): 26-63; 'Vogelzucht im Alten China', *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 37, 1 (1942): 15-34; 'Der Hund im Alten China', *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 37, 5 (1944), 186-225.

12 Zhao Xiaohuan, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural*, p76.

13 'Yi quan' (375) 義犬, 'The Faithful Dog', p1255.

14 'Xiang' (311) 象, 'The Elephant', p1064.

15 'Juyu' (112) 鴝鵒, 'The Myna Bird', p397. These types of stories are found both in Chinese anomaly tales and in folk and fairytales from around the world. DeWoskin and Crump, discussing the *Soushen ji*, (搜神記)

The animals in these stories are not physically extraordinary, but behave in extraordinary ways. These ways can be seen as influenced both by Buddhist understandings of moral reciprocity and by Confucian ethics (*li* 禮). The moral aspects of the tales highlight the way in which the human and natural world were understood as connected, with both animals and humans seen as being in a relationship of mutual responsibility.

Other tales in the collection depict animals monstrous in size; a giant scorpion, centipede, fish, or alligator, are all fearful and dangerous to the tales' human protagonists. Excessive size has been a typical marker of monstrosity, not only in Chinese anomaly tales but within the broader horror genre as a whole, within different contexts, again recalling Sterckx's formulation of animals as both ordinary and extraordinary. As Noel Carroll writes of giant creatures in contemporary horror fiction and film, 'though nominally the antagonists belong to our everyday world, their presentation in the fictions they inhabit turn them effectively into fantastical beings.'[16]

As I have argued in previous chapters, this tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary is at the heart of *Liaozhai*'s representation of the monstrous, as well as its creation of narrative tension from tale to tale. The same animal's behaviour may vary from one story to another, just as ghosts may be either deadly or benign, just as the relationship with the monster may lead to wondrous or fatal consequences. The collection's depiction of snakes and wolves plays upon this in particular. Both are animals that are typically feared, which is reflected in a number of *Liaozhai* tales. There is a giant python that swallows a man

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point out that several versions of what has been labelled 'the grateful animal' folktale type (Aarne-Thompson Folktale Type 554) can be found in this early collection. (Kenneth DeWoskin and J.I. Crump, Jr, *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record, by Gan Bao*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, pxxxi). Another influential theory of folklore, Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Trans. Lawrence Scott, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968, shows that in Russian folktales animals are often 'magical helpers' or agents. (See Zhao Xiaohuan, for an analysis of Chinese *zhiguai* tales using Propp's framework.)

16 Noel Carroll, *Paradoxes of the Heart*, p37. *Liaozhai* stories deal with giant animals of various types. The tales in which they appear are generally brief accounts, sometimes only a few lines long, and mostly dealing with a short introduction to the creature, then a description of how it is dealt with by those humans who cross its path. In one tale a giant turtle kills a man's whole family. He takes revenge by pouring molten metal into the water for the turtle to swallow ('Zhang lao xianggong' (55) 张老相公, 'Old Master Zhang', p178-179). In 'The Giant Scorpion' ('Da xie' (426) 大蠍, p1495), we hear of a temple which is said to contain a monster who kills anyone who enters. It turns out to be a scorpion 'as big as a *pipa*', and the soldiers are so scared they burn the temple down. In 'Chopping the Python' ('Zhe mang' (18) 斫蟒, p48) a man's brother is swallowed whole by the huge snake, and although he eventually survives, he has already lost his nose and ears before he is pulled out. The python retreats, wounded. Not all of the giant creatures in the tales are dangerous or terrifying, however. In 'The Whales Surface' ('Hai dayu' (54) 海大鱼, p177), a range of mountains seem to suddenly appear along the sea, to general astonishment. The mountains disappear just as suddenly, and we are told that, 'Legend had it that it was a huge sea-fish, which came every Qing Ming Festival, along with all its family, to worship at their ancestral tomb.' The monstrous animal here in fact behaves in a human – even filial – way, worshipping its ancestors.

whole, and a terrifying snake demon on a deserted island.[17] There is a murderous wolf demon, and corrupt clerks represented as wolves in a dream.[18] However, there is also a tale of a man's friendship with snakes, and a tale of wolves who repay a man for his kindness.[19]

The collection's portrayal of dragons mirrors this framework of unpredictability. One of China's four sacred animals, the dragon is, 'the champion of metamorphosis among early China's sacred animals' and 'the embodiment of change', to use Roel Sterkx's words.[20] Their changeability is reflected in their varying representations in the collection. They can be small enough to hibernate in a human eye, yet big enough to threaten to sink a boat.[21]

So the representation of animals in *Liaozhai* feeds into the collection's complexity, its combining of the wondrous and the fearful, the ordinary and the extraordinary. The collection emphasises changeability and unpredictability, reflecting the traditional perception of the animal world, and in some cases, of specific beliefs about certain creatures, such as the dragon.[22] Yet the collection also takes this changeability further, in the ways in which it plays with ideas of other creatures, making the small become giant ('The Giant Scorpion' (大蠍); 'The Centipede' (蚰蜒), the fearsome benign or comical (as in the tale of 'The Lion' (獅子) whose fearsomeness is somewhat compromised when instead of eating its prey, it blows on the bird and makes all its feathers fall off.)[23]

This fascination with change and unpredictability is typical of the representation of monstrosity in *Liaozhai*, and the way the collection takes existing beliefs, stories and perceptions, changing them or taking them further. It is brought even more strongly to the

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17 'Chopping the Python', p48, portrays a giant python. 'Hai gongzi' (52) 海公子, 'The Lord of the Sea', p174-176, tells of a traveller to an uninhabited island. He is seduced by a beautiful sing-song girl, who is then frightened off by the appearance of 'the Prince'. The Prince turns out to be a huge snake, which almost bites the traveller to death. He only escapes by using fox poison on the monster

18 'Li shi' (197) 黎氏, 'The Li Clan', p680-681, tells of a man who tried to rape a wolf spirit. She marries him, and eventually kills his children. The revenge of the wronged animal in this tale is particularly violent, targeting as it does the man's family, and thus his own lineage. (This issue will be discussed further in the following chapter.) 'Meng lang' (305) 夢狼, 'Dreaming of Wolves', p1052-1056, describes corrupt clerks as wolves.

19 In 'Sheren' (17) 蛇人, 'The Snake Man', p45-47, a man raises snakes as pets. In 'Mao Dafu' (459) 毛大福, 'Mao Dafu', p1604-1605, a wolf repays a man's kindness after he helps to cure its companion.

20 Sterkx, *The Animal and the Demon in Early China*, p179-180. China's Four Sacred Animals, 四大门 also included the unicorn, the phoenix, and the turtle.

21 'Long' (81) 龍, 'Dragons', p284; 'Pi long' (388) 疲龍, 'The Exhausted Dragons', p1300.

22 Campany, in *Strange Writing*, p249, remarks that they are taxonomically related to snakes, yet also associated with water, bringing them closer to fish. Some are described as winged, and they are often depicted as legged, 'which sets them apart from both snakes and fish and juxtaposes them to lizards and crocodiles, and as horned, which sets them apart from all these classes.' Dragons were understood in several ways; as portents, as protectors, as metaphors for sage-hood and royalty, and in various other roles.

23 'The Giant Scorpion', p1495, 'Youting' (429) 蚰蜒, 'The Centipede', p1507; 'Shizi' (188) 獅子, 'The Lion,' p657.

fore in tales of transformation between animal and human forms, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Understandings of Metamorphosis

Tales of animals changed into human form and humans transformed into animals can be found throughout world literature. From early myths, to anomaly tales, to fairy stories and contemporary fantasy and horror fiction, these metamorphoses have provoked both fascination and anxiety. In such tales the human and animal worlds contain a sometimes uncomfortable closeness, causing understandings of both the animal and the human to be questioned.

Marina Warner writes that metamorphosis, 'expresses eternal flux, a prevailing law of mutability and change.'[24] Bodies are presented not as fixed in one form but able to change from one into another. Yet change is understood in very different ways in different contexts, and to understand the different representations of metamorphosis it is important to recall Cohen's argument in his 'Monster Theses' – that the monstrous body is a *cultural* body, and must be approached from within its own context.

In the Chinese context, within the thinking of a world constantly in flux, change is deeply ingrained into the understanding of the natural world and of all living things within it. As discussed in Chapter One, the belief in the constant transformations of the natural world, and of the human within that world, has wide-reaching effects on how the monstrous has been represented and understood in Chinese culture. Monstrosity is both accepted *and* anomalous. Demons, animal spirits, and ghosts were thought to exist and yet still provoked fear and wonder.

As already discussed in earlier chapters, in Chinese thought the body was believed to be a complex and dynamic network of *qi* or 'energised matter'. *Qi* was not only thought to be at work in the human body, however, but functioned as part of all material things (as well as less corporeal things such as ghosts). Perpetually changing, it meant that a process of change and transformation was also constantly at work, between humans and other living things, between animate and inanimate objects, between ghosts and spirits, between genders.

And whereas, as Rania Huntington writes, 'There is an absolute division in the West between the possession and the lack of a soul,' early thinking in China maintained that *all*

24 Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p4.

living things had a soul, and that the soul did not die (万物有灵，灵魂不死), but continued even as the body changed.[25] Change was an expected and accepted part of the natural world, in which the human played an equal part to the animal, each existing along a continuum along which bodies could move. Buddhist thinking also influenced this understanding of human bodily change, and of those changes seen within the natural world. In a Buddhist framework, everything is impermanent and ever-changing, with every creature part of a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth into one of the six realms of gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings. A person is reborn depending on one's actions. Within the changes of the body, therefore, the soul was thought to continue.[26]

Understandings of metamorphosis in the West, however, have been influenced strongly by the Judeo-Christian tradition which posits a soul within an unchanging body. Bodily change has often been seen in Western depictions of metamorphosis as fearful and anxiety-ridden. Within this context, the loss of the body brings fear of the loss of the self. Soul migration, or metempsychosis, which is such a part of traditional Chinese understanding of the changing body, challenges the ideas of individual uniqueness held in this tradition. Furthermore, because the human is directly under God in the ranking of worth of all creations, followed by other aspects of the natural world, the transformation of a human into something else means, accordingly, alienation from God and loss of worth.[27]

Folklore, fairy tales and other types of fiction in Europe and in America have therefore emphasised the fearful aspects of bodily change. In medieval literature metamorphosis was a warning, a sign of the moral degeneration of the human. Later, representations of metamorphosis focused more on issues of identity and self, the horror of bodily changes beyond one's control. Perhaps the most famous work of fearful bodily transformation of the twentieth century in Europe is Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis,* in which a young salesman, Gregor Samsa, wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a giant insect.[28] Gregor's transformation has been read as a terrifying loss of identity, a questioning of

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25 Huntington, *Alien Kind,* p326. Huang Qia, *Liaozhai yu zongjiao wenhua,* p212.

26 Scientific understanding of physical change in China was also influenced by this way of thinking. Joseph Needham discusses the efforts, beginning in the twelfth century, to observe and understand the nature of biological transformations, which was, he argues, 'obviously connected with Buddhist ideas concerning metempsychosis.' (Needham, *A Shorter Science and Civilisation in China*: *An Abridgement of Joseph Needham's Original Text,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978-86, p422). He points out that the doctrine of reincarnation 'naturally aroused interest in those remarkable animal transformations which the Chinese had long studied; if, for instance, birds could turn into mussels, as it was generally supposed they could, it seemed less surprising if men could do this, if their load of karma was sufficiently heavy. Needham, *A Shorter Science and Civilisation in China*, p268.

27 See Zhou Jianming, 'Literary Rendition of Animal Figures', p159.

28 See *Kafka and China*, ed. Adrian Hsia, for a longer discussion of Kafka's work and their relationship to

his own self which leads him to his inevitable end.

However, one of the most influential treatments of this theme in Western literature is in fact a much earlier work, portraying a pre-Christian vision of metamorphosis which more closely resembles the understanding of change in China. The Roman poet Ovid's long poem *Metamorphoses*, for all its 'freight of anti-Christian significance', to use Marina Warner's words, enjoyed great popularity in the medieval European world, as well as during the Renaissance, when ideas of physical transformation and monstrosity were being debated and argued over, and was seen as posing a challenge to Judeo-Christian tenets of the 'unique individual integrity of identity.'[29]

The poem, telling and elaborating on earlier Greek and Roman myths, includes depictions of gods disguising themselves in order to appear in the human world, as well as transformations of humans. Despite its very different context, it is a useful work to consider alongside *Liaozhai* because of some of the similarities in the way in which both works treat their many different tales of transformation. Both lack a systematic classification for such transformations, but involve various different ways in which bodies can change.[30] Some of their metamorphoses are helpful and benign – in Ovid, gods save mortals by changing them into other forms; in *Liaozhai*, transformation into an animal helps the human achieve their goals, as will be seen later in this chapter. Other metamorphoses are more malign – for evil purposes or punishment. Still others are the result of an ability to shape-shift, as in Ovid's immortals and *Liaozhai*'s animal and flower spirits.

Perhaps the most important point at which the works intersect, however, is given voice by Ovid's most recent translator into English, the poet Ted Hughes. He comments, in the introduction to his retelling, that Ovid was interested in *passion*; 'Not just ordinary passion either, but human passion *in extremis* – passion where it combusts, or levitates, or mutates into an experience of the supernatural.'[31] This intense passion causes bodies to be changed – in Ovid, for women to turn into swallows or nightingales to escape their tormentors; for a jealous goddess to turn a rival into a spider; for a man's love for a statue to bring it to life.[32] And in *Liaozhai*, written at a time when the cult of *qing* (情) – desire,

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Chinese fiction. The *ungeheures Ungeziefer* is literally 'monstrous vermin', and has been translated as beetle, bug, or insect.

29 Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p2.

30 See Marina Warner, *Signs and Wonders – Essays on Literature and Culture*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2003, p441, for a discussion of Ovid's different means of transformation.

31 Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid*, London: Faber and Faber, 1997, Introduction, pix. Hughes' translation is a variation on, or interpretation of, Ovid's original stories.

32 See the tales of Tereus, Arachne, and Pygmalion.

emotions – was influencing literature and art, these extremes of feeling are also at work, as the agency behind metamorphosis. The sections below will look at how *qing* was thought to function within both the human *and* the animal worlds, and how this is reflected in the tales, which show *qing* to be an active force, driving bodily transformation.

The collection presents metamorphosis as part of the same framework in which, as Sterckx remarks, animals are both 'ordinary and extraordinary'. The transformation of one form into another is, from tale to tale, both accepted and anomalous, reflecting the perception of a world in constant flux and following the tradition of anomaly tales in which various metamorphoses occurred. Upon seeing an exceptionally beautiful woman, the male protagonist of a tale often expects her to be a fox spirit. When a woman is transformed into a pig, a magistrate treats it as a perfectly reasonable consequence of her disloyal behaviour to her mother-in-law.[33]

The collection also follows the tradition of describing anomalies found on the outer edges of the empire, and situates certain changes in marginal places, remote from the centre of power. One short tale, for example, concerns the strange things that happen in a certain town in Yunnan province. The people of Chengjiang, (澂江), we are told, can turn into animals to get food.[34] When a guest in an inn sees mice climb into a container of rice he drowns them. Subsequently, all the innkeeper's family except one son are found to have died. The man is reported to the local officials, but the magistrate pardons him, for not understanding the local customs.

Yet it is not only in remote, marginal places that these transformations occur. They may also happen in one's own home province, and even one's own home. This reflects the way in which the collection plays with ideas of centrality and marginality, situating the monstrous not only on the margins, where earlier anomaly tales found it, but also much closer to the 'centre'; to 'human', domestic space.

In the following section, I look at how certain tales of metamorphosis in *Liaozhai* reflect the relationship between the animal and human worlds discussed above. I then move on to a consideration of the most famous of the collection's metamorphosing creatures – the fox.

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33 'Du Xiaolei' (458) 杜小雷, 'Dung Beetle Dumplings', p1603. This tale will be discussed below.

34 'Cheng su' (341) 澂俗, 'The Cheng People's Ability', p1176. A similar tale is 'Yuan su' (379) 沅俗, 'Some Customs in Yuanjiang', p1263, which also tells of a certain town in which strange things occur. Disembodied flying hands can be seen, and the inhabitants can turn into animals.

Animals and Metamorphosis in *Liaozhai*

A number of tales depict animal-human metamorphosis as occurring in order for animals to seek help from the human world. These tales take the theme of animal-human reciprocity a step further than those stories discussed above, which portray the animal and human world as connected and mutually responsible. In 'The Girl in Green' (綠衣女) for example, the beautiful young woman who approaches the protagonist in his home turns out to be a hornet which has been caught by a huge spider. After the protagonist saves her, the little hornet crawls into some ink and traces the words 'Thank you' onto the table.[35] In another story, in which the metamorphosis takes place within a dream, a man named Dou falls asleep and finds himself in a beautiful palace, where he meets the King and his daughter, 'Princess Lotus' (蓮花公主). They are threatened by the arrival of a terrible monster which has broken into the palace, and she begs him to take her away with him, and to find a new home for her family. Although he is poor, he agrees. On waking, he finds bees around his pillow, and he makes them a hive, which is instantly filled with a huge number of the insects. A neighbour, an elderly bee-keeper, hears this story, and goes to check on his own hive:

> '[He] discovered that there was not a single bee left inside it. He opened it up and found a large snake, ten feet long, which he caught and killed. So this was the huge python-like monster that had swallowed whole halls and pavilions… As for the bees, they remained with Dou and thrived.'[36]

These two tales involve two types of monstrosity – the shape-shifting bee and hornet, and the huge, threatening snake and spider. In order to save themselves from the monster that threatens them, the small creatures themselves become monstrous, metamorphosing into human form. Through this transformation, they are able to gain the power they need – the ability to communicate with the human world, and find a rescuer.

These tales illustrate how small and apparently insignificant creatures can still feel the emotions of fear and gratitude. There are echoes here of the practice of 'liberating animals', (*fangsheng* 放生). Literally meaning 'releasing lives', it denotes the practice of releasing or rescuing animals from confinement or death, and it took hold amongst the literati in the late

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35 'Lüyi nü' (196) 綠衣女, 'The Girl in Green', p678-679.

36 'Lianhua gongzhu' (195) 蓮花公主, 'Princess Lotus', p673-677. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p355. Several stories feature metamorphoses that occur in dream. Rather than treating these tales as a separate section I consider them alongside transformations in the waking world, because of the frequent blurring of boundaries between dream and reality that are found in the collection, with the same impulses found in both realms. 'Metamorphoses of the soul', in which the human soul metamorphoses into an animal whilst the human body remains unchanged, will be dealt with below. For an in-depth examination of the dream in Ming-Qing fiction see Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, Chapter 5, p132-182.

Ming and early Qing.[37] Joanna Handlin Smith examines this changing sensibility, highlighting contemporary trends such as this celebration of feeling, but also the ways in which traditional Buddhist accounts were used to legitimise these new understandings. She discusses the popularity of tales in this period which were based on history and hearsay to show that those who had been kind to animals lived long, prosperous lives. These tales, she writes, 'shaped how Ming literati understood and wrote about their experiences.'[38] They emphasised that all creatures have feelings, or emotions, (*qing*).[39] Tang Xianzu (湯顯祖) himself, the writer of the play *The Peony Pavilion*, (牡丹亭) around which the late imperial cult of *qing* centred, recognised these feelings in animals, describing the distress of a sacrificial animal which understood its fate days before the event.[40]

As discussed already, the cult of *qing* influenced late imperial fiction such as *Liaozhai*, and tales such as 'The Girl in Green' and 'Princess Lotus' reflect the perception of *qing* being also at work in the animal world. In these tales, the gap between the animal and human worlds becomes smaller. The animals' (or here, insects') human-like feelings are highlighted, another reason why the tales have often be said to humanise the non-human. Yet the stories also pick out their non-human features – the thin, wasp-like waist of the girl in green, and her light voice, for example. (This aspect of metamorphosis will be discussed further below.) So the animal remains imperceptibly between the lines of the narratives, creating what Zhou Jianming calls ' curious, 'mixed' animal-human figures'.[41] I argue that the *hybrid* nature of the metamorphosing monsters is depicted in the tales. This hybridity features not only in the physical forms taken, but also, as will be seen below in the tales of human-animal metamorphoses, in the abilities which these forms provide, and the goals which they allow the protagonist to achieve.

Such hybridity can also be seen in the collection's tales of foxes. Rania Huntington labels shape-changing foxes in Chinese fiction 'alien kind'; a special species of creature, both alien but also 'in-between', able to move between the human and demonic world, and between human and animal forms.[42] It is perhaps this simultaneous closeness to and distance from the human that has made them so fascinating to both writers and readers. The fox is, as Fu Yanzhi

37 Joanna F. Handlin Smith, 'Liberating Animals in Ming-Qing China: Buddhist Inspiration and Elite Imagination', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58, 1 (Feb 1999), p51-84.
38 Ibid., p56.
39 Ibid., p70.
40 Tang Xianzu, *Tang Xianzu ji* 湯顯祖集, 1973, Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, p30. Handlin Smith, p71.
41 Zhou Jianming, 'Literary Renditions of Animal Figures', p143.
42 Huntington's book *Alien Kind*, is one of the most comprehensive recent studies on the fox in late imperial Chinese fiction.

(付岩志) points out in an article on fox haunting, an 'Other' with which humans can communicate and understand.[43]

Foxes and Metamorphosis in Liaozhai

The collection's tales of metamorphosing animals are often unconcerned with the *means* of metamorphosis. The ways in which animals (or flowers) appear in human form is not explained in detail, nor is it given any systematic framework. Whilst some creatures are able to appear in corporeal, human form, others appear only in a dream, such as Princess Lotus. In a number of tales, the fact that they are 'spirits' is the only explanation given. In 'The Flower Nymphs', (香玉), for example, Xiangyu explains to Huang, the human protagonist, that when she was a flower spirit (*hua jing*, 花精) she was able to appear in human form, but when she reappears after the death of her camellia flower she is less corporeal.[44]

By looking at the fox, however, the collection's approach to metamorphosis can be better understood, because of all the tales of transformation in Chinese fiction, it is fox tales which deal most explicitly with the mechanics of metamorphosis – the reasons behind it and the means through which it is enacted. And it is the fox which has been seen as the creature closest to the human, occupying an ambiguous, 'in-between' position.

The fox spirit goes through many changes throughout Chinese history. In the Han and Pre-Han, it was a magical and ominous animal, a divine messenger of the Queen Mother of the West, (*Xi Wangmu* 西王母), capable of negotiating the boundary between the dead and the living. By the Six Dynasties it had emerged as the beast most gifted at transformation and trickery. And in the Tang its abilities to both seduce and bewitch were brought out in narratives, with the fox linked more to humanity than to its original, wild nature.[45] Different aspects of the fox are brought out in *Liaozhai*, and will be discussed below. First, however, it is useful to look at the question of *how* the fox effects its transformations.

The Taiwanese critic Wang Yijia (王溢嘉) argues that a Western person seeing traces of the wild on a person's body would always assume it was a man becoming a wolf, not a wolf becoming a man.[46] In the Chinese context, however, the framework is reversed, and

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43 Fu Yanzhi, 'Lun *Liaozhai zhiyi* zhong hu zuo sui xianxiang de xingshi tezheng ji wenhua neihan' 論聊齋志異中狐作祟现象的形式特征及文化内涵, *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 1, 99 (2011), p156.

44 'Xiang yu' (443) 香玉, 'The Flower Nymphs, p1548-1555.

45 Huntington, *Alien Kind,* p91. This book provides one of the most comprehensive analyses of the fox in Chinese literature and culture.

46 Wang Yijia, 王溢嘉, 'Yuwang jiaoxiangqu: *Liaozhai* huyao gushi de xinlixue tansuo' 欲望交響曲: 聊齋狐妖

instead of the human body 'descending' into that of an animal, tales tell of the animal raising itself up to human form through 'self-cultivation', *xiu shen* 修身. Self-cultivation was a Daoist idea in which a person, through meditation and moral work, could 'cultivate' their 'inner alchemy', *nei dan* 内丹, thus allowing them to achieve certain powers, and eventually, immortality.[47]

Zhiguai tales from the Six Dynasties onwards told of foxes whose cultivation enacted actual physical change on their bodies, allowing them to take human form. Self-cultivation was a process which took many years, leading to the linking of metamorphosis with age. A celebrated quotation concerning the metamorphosis of foxes is found in the Song dynasty collection, the *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* (*Taiping Guangji*, 太平廣記); 'The fox at fifty *sui* can transform into a woman, at one hundred can become a beauty, or a sorceress... At one thousand *sui* they can communicate with heaven, and are known as heavenly foxes.'[48]

Apart from age, however, there are various ways in which the fox can cultivate this inner alchemy and achieve immortality.[49] It is possible through a kind of parasitism, in which the fox feeds off human essence. These practices are called *caibu* 採補 or *caiyang buyin* 採陽補陰, meaning to harvest *yang* in order to replenish *yin*. Huntington points out that it was after the Tang that the fox's role as a sexual vampire became increasingly clear; 'Parasitism became a rational, if immoral, path of advancement.'[50] Here can be seen the connection with the succubus in European tradition, discussed in the previous chapter. Alternatively, the inner alchemy may be cultivated through learning and moral goodness. This type of fox is the student, ever eager to learn, and its self-advancement is not at the cost of human life. Huntington remarks that the centrality of self advancement is one of the unique traits of China's imaginary cosmos; the fox may share roles as trickster, femme fatale, or petty deity with supernatural creatures in other cultures, but the role of earnest student seems unique to the Chinese tradition.[51]

Both methods of self-cultivation can be seen in *Liaozhai*, which fully exploits the

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故事的心理學探索, in Gu Meigao, ed, *Guoji Liaozhai Lunwenji*, p219.

47 The tale 'The Person in the Ear' (耳中人) discussed in the previous chapter mocked those who sought to achieve this state without the necessary work.

48 Li Fang 李昉 et al., comp. *Taiping guangji* 太平广記 p3652 under the title '說狐', with *Xuanzhong ji* (玄中記) listed as the source.

49 See Gu Meigao, 'Tan hu', for the four categories of fox found in the collection; the parasitical fox (*caibu hu* 採補狐), the non-parasitical fox (*fei caibu hu* 非採補狐), the wise fox (*zhihui hu* 智慧狐), and the haunting fox (*sui hu* 祟狐).

50 Huntington, *Alien Kind*, p86.

51 Ibid., p307.

fox's ambiguous nature, portraying both wicked and benevolent foxes. As discussed in previous chapters, its portrayals in the collection differ from tale to tale, with both its enchanting and fearful aspects appearing in different stories. Victoria Cass calls the *Liaozhai* foxes moral, as well as physical, shape-shifters, and the tales illustrate the sometimes conflicting values they contain, providing help to the human for both selfish and selfless reasons, and harm both deliberately and accidentally.[52]

The previous chapter examined tales in which the relationship with the fox is harmful to the human. 'Scholar Dong' (董生) and 'Third Lady Lotus' (荷花三娘子) both feature foxes who feed on men's essence.[53] The fox spirit in the latter realises she is harming the human man, and eventually repents. In 'Scholar Dong', however, the relationship leads to his death, and the fox's punishment in the underworld is for her years of self-cultivation to be taken away.

In other tales, however, a relationship with a fox leads to no ill effects upon the human protagonist. A fox can appear because they are said to have a 'predestined affinity' with the human.[54] Still other stories portray mischievous foxes, causing chaos in the human home, or grateful foxes, appearing in order to repay a debt. These types of tale tend not to touch upon the idea of self-cultivation or the means of metamorphosis.[55]

In comparison with the other stories of shape-shifting animals in the collection, the fox tales engage to a greater extent with the mechanics of metamorphosis, providing a spectrum of reasons for, and consequences of, the transformation into human form. This is helpful for understanding the theme in the collection overall. The tales of foxes cultivating their inner alchemy illustrate the desire on the part of the animal to not only take on human form, but to become more than human, and achieve immortality. Before this ultimate goal is achieved, the fox must become hybrid – it must contain both the animal *and* the human. This need for hybridity, or in-betweenness, is vital to many tales of metamorphosis in the collection, in which characters' goals can be achieved only through the transformation of their

52 Victoria Cass, 'Introduction'. in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, trans. Herbert Giles, Tokyo; Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2010, p10.

53 Scholar Dong, p133-136; 'He hua sanniang zi' (198) 荷花三娘子, 'Third Lady Lotus', p682-686.

54 In 'Shuang deng' (155) 雙燈, 'A Pair of Lanterns', p550-551, a beautiful young woman is brought to the protagonist by her brother, who says that their destiny is entangled. They enjoy a relationship for half a year, until she bids him farewell. When he asks her the reason for her departure, she tells him that, 'In love, everything is predestined. What more is there to say?'

55 See 'Jiaoming' (30) 焦螟, 'Jiao Ming', p79-80 and 'Hu Dagu' (228) 胡大姑, 'Elder Sister Hu, p788-790, for two tales of foxes causing trouble in a home, throwing tiles, etc. In 'Wang Zi'an' (369) 王子安, 'Wang Zi'an', p1238-1240, the mischief foxes cause is particularly cruel, tricking the protagonist into thinking he has succeeded in the examinations. Tales such as 'Xiaocui' (288) 小翠, 'Xiaocui', p1000-1008, (dealt with further in the next chapter) portray a fox repaying a human for their kindness.

original, physical form. Metamorphosis brings opportunity, freedom, and strength. Its frequent recurrence in the collection perhaps reflects the very real, human desires to go beyond the bounds of one's own abilities.

So the fox, the 'in-between', can be an outsider to the human home, causing mischief or harm, but also a more benign visitor. Yet it can also be a mirror of the human world itself, reflecting back human desires – both positive and negative.

Huntington highlights this aspect of metamorphosis when she writes that foxes may act as a 'funhouse mirror that distorts and enlarges human flaws by making them monstrous or a magic mirror that reveals the monstrosity hidden under the surface.'[56] Excessive desire, lustfulness, greed, malice – all this can be seen in the tales of harmful or troublesome foxes. But Huntington also links the tales of foxes cultivating themselves into human form to the scholars in imperial China working their way through the examination system, arguing that this type of fox, 'provides a mirror for a human literatus.'[57] Here is the hopeful metamorphosis of upward social mobility. Yet although the exam system offered a tantalising promise of this transformation, it was a hard struggle and one not always successfully completed, as many of the collection's tales show. It was also a corrupt system, a bureaucracy in which those with most merit could not be guaranteed success. This metamorphosis, much longed for, remained out of reach for many.

So fox tales illustrate different types of desire; not only sexual desire, the dangers and pleasures of which they amply illustrate, but also the desire for wealth and success. As Ma Ruifang underlines, many *Liaozhai* tales are about a *pursuit* – of love, beauty, money; of different ideals.[58] The tales of harmful foxes illustrate the negative aspect of the pursuit of desires; the fact that it can cause harm to others, as well as to oneself (as both the fox and the human protagonist in 'Scholar Dong' discover). Here is the darker side of the cult of *qing*, reflective of *Liaozhai*'s refusal of simple, one-sided portrayals.

But the positive aspects are also illustrated, the ability to achieve goals and ideals, to go beyond the boundaries of what is allowed or possible, as the next section examines.

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56 Huntington, *Alien Kind,* p314.

57 Ibid.

58 Ma Ruifang, *Jiang Liaozhai*, p40. It is also interesting to point out that, in a recent film adaptation of 'Painted Skin', (畫皮), the demon of the original tale is depicted, at the film's end, as a fox who has been cultivating her immortality. She gives up her inner alchemy, and years of cultivation, in order to undo the wrong she's done, and save the protagonist and his wife.

Metamorphosis as 'Passing'

The idea of metamorphosis as the pursuit of certain goals or ideals brings to mind the sociological term 'passing', used to denote the ability to 'pass' unnoticed and become accepted as part of a social group to which one does not originally belong. Often referred to in relation to race, ethnicity, gender, and class, the term has been in use since the 1920s. As an alternative way of approaching the theme of metamorphosis in *Liaozhai*, it draws attention to the shape-shifting monsters as active, as possessing their own agency, emphasising the pursuit of ideals, of self-improvement or self-perfection.

Linda Schlossberg calls passing, 'the creation and establishment of an alternative set of narratives,' remarking that the act of passing draws attention to the subject as 'a work in progress'.[59] Looking at metamorphosis from this angle highlights the ways in which the *Liaozhai* monsters are more than just ways of presenting the human. They are subjects in their own rights.

In some tales, the metamorphosing monsters make up their own stories, deliberately hiding their real forms. In 'Scholar Dong', the fox spirit tells the scholar that she was his neighbour, when she was a girl. In 'Lianxiang', the eponymous heroine, a fox spirit, tells the protagonist she is a courtesan from the Western District.[60] Some stories follow a trope found in fairytales around the world – the disappearance of the non-human creature when their true identity is discovered. In the *Liaozhai* tale 'Gejin' (葛巾), the human protagonist and peony spirit Gejin live together happily, until he tries to discover more about her origins.[61] When he finds out her true nature, she insists on leaving. In other tales, despite the recognition of their non-human nature, they will not reveal what they really are. In 'The Girl in Green' (綠衣女) a hornet appears in human form as, 'a lady of the most incomparable delicacy and the most exquisite beauty... He knew at once that this was no ordinary mortal.'[62] When the protagonist, Yu Jing, asks her where she is from, however, she will not tell him.

These monsters exhibit a determination to keep control of their own identities, and how they are seen. Keith McMahon, discussing the 'remarkable woman' in *Liaozhai* (the immortal, the fox spirit, the knight-errant, the shrew, among others), examines those who

59 Schlossberg, *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race and Religion*, New York: New York University Press, 2001, p4.
60 'Lianxiang' p220.
61 'Ge jin' (412) 葛巾, 'Gejin', p1436.
62 '綠衣女', p678. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p356.

leave upon the discovery of their identity, or when they are revealed to other eyes;[63] 'When the man wants to know too much about the woman and when he wants to spread this knowledge to others, the woman is then in danger of being placed among the infinity of other women with whom she will be compared and then potentially added or subtracted.'[64] 'In other words,' writes McMahon, being displayed to others marks a critical transition between the realm of the woman's control and that of the man's.'[65] So by 'passing', the monster controls their own identity and subjectivity. In this way metamorphosis provides enormous power. And in certain tales, when this passing is threatened, the monster takes the other option which is open to them, and leaves the human world.[66]

So it is noteworthy that the female monster in *Liaozhai*, passing under human skin, is often a strong character, a 'remarkable woman.' This strength is on show in many of the tales of metamorphosed foxes or other creatures, who are quick-witted and strong-willed.[67] But even the metamorphosed hornet in 'The Girl in Green', who is delicate and frightened, retains her own agency, refusing to reveal herself until the moment when the protagonist can save her from the spider.

The story 'Axiu' (阿繡) provides a particularly interesting portrayal of passing, as it calls attention to the monster's pursuit of her goals, and creation of her own narrative.[68] In this tale, after the human lovers, Liu Zigu and Axiu, are separated, a fox spirit metamorphoses into human form in the image of Axiu. Her real identity only becomes known when Liu's servant becomes suspicious. When her true identity is discovered, however, it becomes clear that the 'fake' Axiu, rather than seeking to usurp the 'real' Axiu, is trying to find whether she can cultivate (*xiulian* 修煉) herself to be as beautiful as the human woman. And in the end she helps the lovers reunite.

Huntington calls this tale, 'a playful exploration of the nature of illusion and identity.'[69] It calls attention to metamorphosis as disguise, with the tension in the story created by the question of whether or not fox-Axiu will be revealed as a fake. But in the end the fox's

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63 In 'The Fox Concubine' ('Hu qie' (119) 狐妾, p409-413), for example, the fox will only reveal herself to the protagonist, not his friends, however much they ask. Although they can hear her, she remains invisible.

64 McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*', p217

65 Ibid. The representation of the female monster in *Liaozhai* will be dealt with further in the next chapter.

66 Here, the male gaze, problematised in tales such as 'The People in the Pupils Communicate' (瞳人语), discussed in Chapter Two, is refused once and for all.

67 As in the case of 'The Fox Concubine', who easily outwits the protagonist's human friends in the stories and jokes she spins, as well as other monsters who use their abilities (whether for harm or for good). p409-413

68 'Axiu' (286) 阿繡, 'Axiu', p991-998.

69 Huntington, *Alien Kind*, p261. She goes on to say that the uncertainty about identity found in the tale has none of the horror of European doppelganger tales, in which monsters replaced relatives, but is more like a game played by the women within the house.

pretence is less important than her aiding of the human protagonists. And Ma Ruifang emphasises instead the fox's pursuit of the real Axiu's beauty, arguing that it is in this ceaseless pursuit that true beauty lies.[70] Both of these readings call attention to the way in which the tale explores illusion, beauty, identity. The fox spirit, or 'fake Axiu', is using illusion and disguise in order to create her own identity, cultivating herself to become as beautiful as the 'real Axiu'.

So the *Liaozhai* monsters, far from being of interest simply for the strangeness of their transformatory powers, have their own complex desires and lives. They are first and foremost *characters*, with emotions, motivations, and needs. This is, as critics have pointed out, one of the things that sets *Liaozhai* apart from other collections of strange tales.[71] Characters such as those discussed above appear in human guise for a reason, whether it is as a means of repayment, of seeking help, or as searching for love or friendship. In the majority of these stories, they build their own identities around their human form, echoing what Schlossberg calls, in the act of passing, 'the creation and establishment of an alternative set of narratives.'[72] To return to Cohen's 'Monster Theses', they are 'Becoming...', always in the process of change.[73]

But these acts of metamorphosis, and the subsequent passing of foxes, or other creatures (or flowers) in human form, threaten accepted systems of social recognition and cultural intelligibility. They blur the lines between species, gender, class. Traditionally, the monster has been linked with 'seeing'. *Monstrare*, to show, is the etymological root of the word, and the monster is often known by its anomalous body. The shape-shifting monster, however, unsettles this link with visibility. It disallows the monster's role of showing, and threatens the epistemological certainties that are based around seeing. Whereas other monsters (such as the monstrous human body discussed in the previous chapter) draw attention to the monstrosity visible on their body, the shape-shifting monster unsettles the boundaries more subtly. It asks the question, as David Williams puts it, 'How do we know what we know?[74] In a system in which everything has its place, and there is little space to move within the hierarchy, metamorphosing monsters enjoy freedoms denied to those whose

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70 Ma Ruifang, *Shengui huyao de shijie* 神鬼狐妖的世界, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002, p19.

71 See Y.W. Ma, in *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, vol.1, ed W.H. Nienhauser (Jnr), p39; Sabina Knight, *A Short Introduction to Chinese Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p71. The tales have also been praised for their nuanced depictions of female characters, both human and non-human. Chang and Chang remark upon the positive portrayal of women in *Liaozhai*, and the range of roles they are given, p185.

72 Schlossberg, *Passing*, p4.

73 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p20.

74 Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, p124.

skin cannot change. So metamorphosis is inherently subversive, unsettling the rules and boundaries of society by undermining its readability but also by providing dangerous and appealing freedom.

Changing Skin

The shape-shifting monster, passing under human skin, becomes a hybrid, able to move between the animal and human worlds in order to achieve its aims. This hybridity, allowing for otherwise impossible goals to be reached, is highlighted in other tales which allow the human to borrow aspects of the animal. These tales provide another means of metamorphosis – the putting on of animal skin, allowing for the transformation of the human into the animal.

Shamans, in Chinese culture as elsewhere, would put on animal skins in order to make a connection with the animal and spirit world. Roel Sterckx writes, in relation to shamanistic practices in early China, that 'evidence suggests that animal skin was thought to be endowed with metamorphosing powers and that the enactment of a metamorphosis into animal form required wearing animal skin and mimicking animal sounds.'[75] The skin in this conception is a type of entrance-way, the threshold or point of contact between worlds. By wearing the skin, the shaman can cross over the threshold, using it as a medium to become the animal. This symbolical transformation, writes Sterckx, bridges the categories of the human, the supernatural, and the divine.'[76]

This bridging of categories can be seen in the *Liaozhai* tales of metamorphosis. Within the tales, human skin, animal skin, and bird feathers are all used as means of transformation. In 'Xiang Gao' (向杲), a tiger skin allows a man to transform into a tiger.[77] In this tale Xiang Gao's brother is beaten to death by a wealthy man who is in love with the same courtesan. Xiang is powerless to exact revenge, with the wealthy man bribing the magistrate to throw out the lawsuit, then hiring a bodyguard to protect himself. One day, during a storm, Xiang takes shelter in a temple, and a monk offers him a tiger-skin cloak to change into. As soon as he puts it on, he grows fur and transforms into a tiger. In this guise, he waits for the wealthy man to pass, then pounces on him and eats him up. Although the

75 Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China,* p188. Charles E. Hammond looks closely at the character for tiger, 虎. He writes that the two bottom strokes are the tiger's feet, while the balance of the character – the tiger radical in Chinese dictionaries – represents the tiger skin; 'This suggests that the Chinese conceive of the skin as a separate entity, holding the essence of the beast.' Hammond, 'Sacred Metamorphosis; The Weretiger and the Shaman', *Acta Orientalia*, XLVI, 2-3, (1992), p239.

76 Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China,* p191.

77 'Xiang Gao' (244), 向杲, 'Xiang Gao', p831-833.

tiger is killed by the bodyguard's arrow, Xiang wakes in his own human skin, remembering his strange experience and how he has finally avenged his brother's death.[78]

Through his metamorphosis, Xiang Gao gains the freedom and power he lacked as a human. As Tie Xiaona (鐵曉娜) writes, putting on the tiger skin and becoming a tiger allows him to break free of the unfairness of the world and achieve justice and revenge.[79] Those things he cannot resolve in human skin, he can resolve once he takes up the skin – and therefore the power – of an animal. Within the boundaries of the corrupt, human world, crime goes unpunished and the rich can bribe their way to power. But through metamorphosis – becoming a monster – he is able to achieve justice for his brother.

In 'The Man Who Was Changed Into a Crow' (竹青), the protagonist, Yu Rong, is transformed into a crow by a coat of crow's feathers.[80] Whereas Xiang Gao's transformation gives him strength, this tale allows its protagonist freedom – the ability to move between worlds. Falling in love with the crow spirit Zhuqing, Yu is able to pass back and forth between the human and animal worlds by means of the feathers, maintaining both his human life and his life with Zhuqing. The two worlds cross when Zhuqing gives birth to a son, who is then raised as human.

These tales portray the powers of an animal – the tiger's strength, the bird's ability to fly – being granted to the human through his metamorphosis. But neither wholly loses their human aspect when they are in animal form. Xiang Gao survives, even when the tiger is killed. And Yu can move from one form to another whenever he puts on the feathers. So rather than completely becoming the animal, they become a hybrid, creating an ideal situation.[81]

When this type of metamorphosis is attempted for immoral ends, however, it is less successful. 'Yi From Jinling' (金陵已) is another tale which uses skin as a medium for

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78 Ma Ruifang points out that this story has its basis in Six Dynasty tales of men transforming into tigers. She also examines its difference from a tale found in the Tang dynasty '续玄怪录' in which a man is turned into a tiger by simply walking on a particular patch of grass, rather than by the specific means related in 'Xiang Gao'. Ma Ruifang, *Shengui huqo de shijie*, p153. For a discussion of the links between 'Xiang Gao' and tales of human-tiger transformations in the Song *Taiping Guangji*, see Wang Li 王立 and Liu Weiying 劉衛英, '*Liaozhai zhiyi*' *zhongyin wenxue suyuan yanjiu* 聊齋志異中印文學溯源研究, Beijing: Kunlun chubanshe, 2011, p354-359.

79 Tie Xiaona 鐵曉娜, 'Pizhe hupi huahu fuchou' 披著虎皮化虎復仇, *Pu Songling yanjiu* 蒲松齡研究, 3, 3 (2004), p37-38.

80 'Zhuqing' (433) 竹青, 'The Man Who Was Changed Into a Crow', p1516-1520.

81 This is very different to European tales of the werewolf, for example, as well as this monster's contemporary depiction in fiction and film. In their transformation into a wolf, the human loses the ability for rational, human thought, becoming the animal in mind as well as body.

metamorphosis, but the consequences of this transformation are very different.[82] The human protagonist of the tale – an unscrupulous wine-seller – spares a male fox demon's life in return for helping him seduce a neighbour's wife. The fox gives him a set of clothes which he says belonged to his dead brother. When he wears the clothes, much to his delight the wine-seller becomes invisible. However, on approaching his neighbour's home he finds that they have engaged a priest, in order to drive away fox influence. When the exorcism takes place, the wine-seller is transformed into a fox, his clothes still hanging around him. Though his life is spared, a few days later he dies, still in his fox form. In this tale, the wine-seller's goal is morally dubious, and the act of transformation turns against him. This suggests that metamorphosis, at least that which is enacted through shamanic means, is linked in the collection to morals. The wine-seller is motivated by greed and lust (the tale describes how he waters down his wine, labelling him as morally suspect even before he is revealed as wanting to seduce his neighbour's wife.) Xiang Gao and Yu Rong, however, are motivated by love – whether for a brother and the desire to avenge him, or for an animal spirit.

So the metamorphoses in these tales reflect the way that desire in *Liaozhai* is *active*. Judith Zeitlin, examining the importance of *qing* to the collection, discusses 'the broader implications of qing during this period as a universal force and even as life itself', highlighting a seventeenth century compendium of fact and fiction called *A Classified History of Love*, (*Qingshi leilüe* 情史類略）which documents the power of *qing* over every part of the universe, including animals.[83] Yet, as discussed in Chapter Two, the collection also portrays the darker side of *qing*. The wine-seller's transformation echoes some of the fears about lascivious foxes (both male and female) who prey on humans, consuming their essence.

Metamorphoses of the Soul

The force of desire is shown in tales depicting another type of human-animal transformation – that of the soul. In these tales, no external object is needed to cause the metamorphosis –

82 'Jinling yi' (372) 金陵已, 'Yi From Jinling', p1245-1246.

83 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p70-71. The assumed author of this compendium , the Historian of Love, comments that all things are born and die of *qing*. Zeitlin writes that Feng Menglong (冯夢龙, 1575-1645) is thought to have published the compendium under the pseudonym Zhanzhan waishi. She also points out that Allan Barr, in his PhD thesis 'Pu Songling and *Liaozhai*: A Study of Textual Transmission, Biographical background, and Literary Antecedents', Oxford University, 1983, p216-217, remarks that the parallel between the pseudonym the Historian of Love and *Liaozhai*'s Historian of the Strange and demonstrates that Pu Songling was familiar with *Qingshi*. (Zeitlin, p242-243, n.29). See Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p95-97 for a discussion of the book's authorship and contents.

desire itself is the agent of change. But here the transformation is not of the body itself, which remains in human form, but of the soul, which leaves the body to metamorphose into animal form.

The protagonist of 'Abao' (阿寶), Sun Zichu, is lovesick for his rich and beautiful neighbour.[84] Poor, simple and shy, his nickname is 'Foolish Sun' (孫痴). Abao's family will not consider his proposal of marriage because of his lack of wealth. He tries to prove his love to Abao by cutting off his extra finger on his hand, but he is rebuffed until finally he falls unconscious:

> 'Just at this juncture a parrot that had been long with the family died; and a child, playing with the body, laid it upon the bed. Sun then reflected that if he was only a parrot one flap of his wings would bring him into the presence of Abao; and while occupied with these thoughts, lo! the dead body moved and the parrot flew away.'[85]

The parrot flies off to his beloved Abao, who gradually learns of his love, and his soul returns to his body.

Sun is one of *Liaozhai*'s several 'foolish' protagonists. Frances Weightman, writing about the portrayal of folly in the collection, considers the different usages of the term *chi* (痴), or 'foolishness', all of which mean a kind of extreme idealism, dysfunction, or inability to relate to society.[86] In tales such as 'Abao', the 'absolute refusal to compromise with reality' finds form in a kind of stupor, or physical paralysis.[87] Yet the paralysis of the body, caused by such extreme desire, frees the soul to find its own metamorphosis.

Another story in which the human soul transforms into an animal (or in this case, an insect), is 'The Cricket' (促織).[88] This tale describes how the poor are able to earn money by supplying crickets to the imperial court, where cricket fighting is popular. Cheng Ming, a failed scholar, is ordered to collect some of the insects, but without success. At his wits' end, he enlists the help of a fortune-teller, and is able to find a fine specimen. However, that night his nine-year-old son allows the cricket to escape, and crushes it in his attempts to catch it. After being scolded by his mother, the son runs off and falls down a well. When he is found,

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84 'Abao' (70) 阿寶, 'Abao', p233-239.

85 Trans. Giles, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p123.

86 Frances Weightman, 'Folly (*Chi* 痴) in the *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異', in Santangelo, and Guida, p200. She numbers the instances of the term *chi* in *Liaozhai* as being used ninety three times in the tales themselves. In the vast majority of instances, it is used in a positive light.

87 ibid, p201.

88 'Cuzhi' (137) 促織, 'The Cricket', p484-490.

he appears to his family to be close to death. However, a little cricket later hops on to Cheng's arm, and proves to be a champion fighter, leading to rewards of wealth and status for Cheng. A year later, his son recovers, and tells his family that he himself had been the cricket that saved the family.

The themes in this tale – a critique of official corruption, the triumph of the small and powerless over the strong – are illustrative of *Liaozhai*'s powerful siding with the 'common people'. Abao's family do not agree to the match because of Sun's poverty. Yet through his metamorphosis he reaches Abao herself, circumventing the usual social obstacles to such a marriage. And in 'Crickets' the metamorphosis of the son saves the family from financial ruin. Again, in these tales the human aspects of the protagonists are not lost – Sun has greater agency in his form as a parrot than he did as a human. He also loses his shyness and awkwardness around Abao. And although 'Crickets' is not told from the perspective of the son, we learn when he wakes that he remembers his life as a cricket.

In these tales, desire causes the metamorphosis of the human soul. In other tales, it is the catalyst for the metamorphosis of the object of desire itself. And here, *qing* reaches beyond even the animal world. 'Ge Jin' (葛巾) tells of Chang Da's obsessive love of peonies. Here too is the idea of *chi* (痴) or foolishness, but given form through an obsession, or infatuation with an object, rather than a person. Chang paces up and down in front of his peonies, waiting for them to bloom. When a beautiful young woman appears, it transpires that she is in fact a peony spirit. Although the tale ends tragically – when he insists on investigating her origins, she breaks off their relationship – it nonetheless illustrates how strength of desire can become the catalyst for metamorphosis. Obsession, glorified from the late Ming into the Qing, was linked to the cult of *qing*.[89] Zeitlin discusses how the fanatical attachment of a person to a particular object was seen as a manifestation of love, or passion, with this love moving not only the person but also the object of their desire. She remarks; 'Once the relationship between someone and the object of his obsession was conceptualized as qing, it was not a difficult leap to declare that the object itself could be moved by its lover's devotion and reciprocate his feelings.'[90]

In another *Liaozhai* tale of a man's love for a flower, when the protagonist dies, he becomes a flower himself so that he can be beside his beloved camellia, Xiang Yu, who

89 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p69-71. Zeitlin discusses the various objects of obsession, such as rocks, flowers, books and calligraphy, seen almost as a badge of honour for a literatus in the late Ming and early Qing.

90 Ibid., p70.

appeared to him in human form.[91] Here again can be seen metamorphosis driven by desire, with the protagonist, after his death, providing a mirror image of his loved one's metamorphosis from flower into human form.

Metamorphosis and Essence

Ge Jin and Xiang Yu, even in their human form, both perfume the air around them, hinting at their origins. If the *Liaozhai* tales of metamorphosis can provide the collection's protagonists with what they desire, they also hint, in different ways, at what they *are*. Transformation into another form can leave traces of the original form, and it can also reveal those things that were previously hidden.

Marina Warner remarks that in many tales, in different contexts, recognition is arrived at through a series of concealments, or even disfigurements, 'revealing true, inner character through a series of outer changes of shape.'[92] This is part of the narrative pattern of anagnorisis, or recognition, the literary device in which 'the beggar maid turns out to be the foundling princess,' or the lowly animal the handsome prince.[93] Often found in fairy tales, this type of narrative tension hangs on the recognition of true shape (and true worth), even when it is hidden under another form.[94]

Certain *Liaozhai* tales work in a similar way, with the non-human behind the human figure coming through. In 'The Girl in Green', the protagonist notices in particular her tiny waist, and her fine voice:

> '"I love the sound of your voice," he said. "It is so fine and soft. Sing me a song. I am sure it will quite carry my sould away."… Her voice was light as silk, and barefly audible. Yu Jing listened intently, and his whole being vibrated to the haunting, lilting melody.'[95]

Both her tiny waist and her unusual voice suggest her true form as a hornet. In another tale, the protagonist comes across a family in the woods. The girl's scent is that of a musk deer, hinting at her non-human origins.[96] In the tale 'Ge Jin', the scent of flowers can be smelled on

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91 'The Flower Nymphs', p1548-1555.
92 Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses,* p85.
93 Ibid., p19.
94 For a comparison of Grimm's fairytale, 'The Frog Prince', and the *Liaozhai* tale 'The Frog God' ('Qingwa shen' (417) 青蛙神, p1464-1468) see Liu Huihui 刘慧慧, '*Liaozhai zhiyi* 'Qingwa shen' yu Gelin tonghua 'Qingwa wangzi' bijiao tan 聊齋志異青蛙神與格林童話青蛙王子比較談, in *Pu Songling yanjiu* 蒲松齡研究 4 (2011), p82-89.
95 'The Girl in Green', p678. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* p356-357.
96 'Hua guzi' (184) 花姑子', p624-641. Though Ma Ruifang points out that it is in fact the male deer which

the flower-spirit's breath.[97] Other tales, such as that of the mouse spirit Axian, (阿纖) emphasise the continuum of behaviour between the animal and human forms – Axian's diligence in storing grain is emphasised, saving her family during a time of famine.[98]

What is interesting to note is that, when it comes to tales of foxes, in general it is only in cases of mischievous or harmful foxes that the fox's animal body is hinted at. In 'Scholar Dong', the first time the young scholar discovers a young woman asleep in his bed he is delighted, only to encounter, to his great alarm, a long bushy tail, although this soon disappears.[99] In no other *Liaozhai* tale of a relationship between a fox and a man is so clear a sign given of the fox's body.

As I have argued, a key aspect of *Liaozhai* as a whole is the unpredictability and ever-changing nature of the monsters within its pages, and their behaviour. These tales illustrate how the stories play upon this tension, using small clues to hint at the character's true nature. The sheer number of tales of metamorphosed creatures in the collection means that the entrance of the monster is expected. In their small, telling, details, however, the tales retain the narrative tension, playing on the revelation of what it is that lies behind the human exterior. They play upon, 'the erotics of secrecy and revelation'.[100] In 'Scholar Dong', the fox's tail is soon found to have disappeared, and Dong thinks he must have been mistaken. But that telling detail has already hinted that the fox may be potentially harmful. This tension is only increased through those stories that offer no clue at all as to a character's original form. In 'Li Shi', (黎氏), for example, there is no hint of the true form of the woman who Xie Zhongtiao met in the mountains, attempted to rape, then brought home to be his wife.[101] The revelation of her true, wolf form comes only at the end, after she has taken her terrible revenge, killing Xie's children.

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produces the musk, so these natural details are manipulated in *Liaozhai* to suit the story. (*Ma Ruifang shuo Liaozhai* 马瑞芳说聊斋, CCTV DVD, Beijing, China International TV Corp., 2006, disc 7).

97 'Gejin', p1436.

98 'Axian' (402) 阿纖, 'Axian', p1380-1386. This tale also, however, goes against typical human attitudes to mice, often seen as vermin who steal from humans. Tang Fuling compares the portrayal of Axian to the Tang poet Bai Juyi's (白居易, 772-846) poem depicting a crow, both being representations which emphasise the positive aspects of a typically unpopular creature. Tang Fuling, 唐富齡, *Wenyan xiaoshuo gaofeng de huigui: Liaozhai zhiyi zongheng yanjiu* 文言小說高峰的回歸: 聊齋志異縱橫研究, Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1990, p193.

99 'Scholar Dong', p133. When the scholar recoils, and the young woman asks him what the trouble is, he replies, 'It wasn't your face... It was your tail.' Minford points out that this is an expression which occurs in the *Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*, one of countless throwaway allusions in *Liaozhai* (whose force and humour are lost in translation), Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* pxvii. The use of language in the collection will be discussed further in the conclusion to this thesis.

100 Schlossberg, *Passing*, p11.

101 'The Li Clan', p680-681.

Li's true, dangerous form remains hidden. But revelation through metamorphosis also plays its part in tales of the monstrous punishment of human protagonists, where the metamorphosed form reflects the evils that were hidden in human form.

One of the most famous stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is that of Lycaon, which tells of the creation of the first werewolf in Western literature. In the narrative, Jupiter, the ruler of the gods, stays in the house of Lycaon, the king of Arcadia. In the night, Lycaon attempts to kill Jupiter as he sleeps, and the next day serves him pieces of a servant's body as a meal. As punishment for this gruesome violation of the host-guest relationship, Jupiter transforms Lycaon into a wolf; what Cohen calls, 'a monstrous semblance of that lawless, godless state to which his actions would drag humanity back.'[102] This transformation has banished Lycaon from the human world, trapped him in a shape that it is not his own. It is monstrous transformation as punishment; the degrading of the human body. Yet it is also a transformation in which he keeps certain traces of his former shape. To use Ted Hughes' translation; 'But still his humanity clings to him.../ The same grizzly mane/ The same black-ringed, yellow/ Pinpoint-pupilled eyes, the same/ Demented grimace.[103]

In the Chinese context, this same type of change can be seen as filtered through Buddhist thinking about reincarnation. Whilst Lycaon's transformation was at the hands of a god, transformation as punishment in *Liaozhai,* as in Chinese fiction as a whole, tends to be seen as a more integral and inevitable part of the universe.

In Buddhist thought, there are different realms of rebirth; the six realms are those of gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings.[104] A person's actions decide which realm they are to be reborn into. Reincarnation into different animals is also predicated upon different actions. Excessive conceit leads to rebirth 'in the wombs or donkeys and dogs'; those who are angry and avaricious, 'are reborn after death as tigers, cats, jackals, bears, vultures, wolves and so on.'[105]

Certain *Liaozhai* tales depict these types of metamorphosis, enacted by reincarnation. In 'Zhen Hou' (甄后) for example, the warlord Cao Cao (曹操, 155-220 CE) famous for his arrogance and ruthlessness, as well as for his military skill, is depicted as having been reborn

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102 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p13.

103 Hughes, *Tales From Ovid*, p18.

104 See Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. *Buddhist Scriptures*, London: Penguin Books, 2004, p3. The six realms are sometimes condensed into five, with demigods included in the realm of ghosts. The ultimate goal in Buddhist practice is to be freed from the bonds of karma, and the cycle of rebirth into the different realms.

105 Lopez, *Buddhist Scriptures*, p10. Translated by Ann Appleby Hazlewood. See 'A Translation of the Pancagatidipani,' *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 11 (1987), p133-59.

as a dog.[106] Another tale featuring a historical figure is 'Qin Hui', (秦檜).[107] In this tale, the traitorous Qin Hui (1090-1155 CE), infamous for his part in the execution of the national hero, General Yue Fei (岳飛, 1103-1142 CE) is reborn as a pig. The pig's flesh is so foul, however, that even the dogs will not eat it. These tales play upon the idea of metamorphosis as revelation – the real, hidden self is brought to light.

Other tales can be seen to be influenced by the idea of reincarnation as reflecting morality, even though the metamorphosis is enacted in life, rather than after death. In 'Dung Beetle Dumplings', (杜小雷) an undutiful daughter-in-law chops up dung-beetles and serves them in dumplings to her mother-in-law.[108] Later that night, she is transformed into a pig with human feet. The magistrate orders the pig to be paraded through the street, as a lesson to all. Though transformation into an animal occurs in life, not after death, the moral aspect of metamorphosis remains.

In other tales, the transformation occurs in a dream. In 'A Man From My Hometown', (邑人) a man dreams that he is pushed into the carcass of a pig, hanging in a butcher's shop.[109] Throughout the day customers come to buy parts of the pig, and when the man wakes, he remembers every cut.

A particularly interesting instance of dream metamorphosis revealing inner essence is in the tale 'Dreaming of Wolves' (夢狼). In this story, a man named Bai dreams he sees his son – a magistrate – in the underworld. He is horrified to see that he is in a courtyard piled with bones, the building swarming with wolves. In the dream two underworld knights arrive to arrest his son, who falls to the ground and becomes a tiger. Rather than cutting of his head, however, the knights knock out the tiger's fangs as a warning. Bai, when he wakes, sends a letter to his son to urge him to change his ways before it is too late. It turns out that the son's front teeth had indeed been knocked out by a horse that very night. However, he ignores his father's warnings, and continues his corrupt ways. Subsequently, the remainder of the dream comes true; the son's head is cut off by bandits. Eventually, divinities order his head to be reattached, in order not to cause sorrow to his father. But they reattach the head backwards, saying, 'A crooked-minded man should not have a straight body'. The son thus comes back to life, but he is able to see down his own back, and is regarded as a monstrosity.[110] Although

106 'Zhen hou' (284) 甄后, 'Empress Zhen', p54.
107 'Qin hui' (489) 秦桧, 'Qin Hui', p1699.
108 'Dung Beetle Dumplings', p1603.
109 'Yi ren' (349) 邑人, 'A Man From My Hometown', p1199.
110 'Dreaming of Wolves', p1052, translation, Giles, p285. From their earliest appearances, strange tale

the metamorphosis in this tale has taken place in a dream, it finds its realisation in the waking world; the allegorical expression of 'tiger officials and wolf clerks' (*hulang lizhi* 虎狼吏治) becomes real, and the truth of the son's corruption revealed.[111]

So metamorphosis can also be used as a way of exploring identity, and of the ways in which true essence is continued, despite bodily transformation, or revealed, because of it. Caroline Walker Bynum argues that Ovid uses the theme of metamorphosis in a similar way, as a metaphor to explore identity: 'throughout the change of man to wolf, woman to tree, youth to nightingale, something perdures, carried by the changing shape that never completely loses physical or behavioural traces of what it was. Daphne becomes a laurel whose leaves flutter in eternal escape; Ovid's werewolf Lycaon and Bisclavret [in a twelfth century tale by Marie de France about a man trapped in wolf form] retain in (or under) wolfishness the rapaciousness or courtesy of human selves.'[112]

Conclusion

Warner calls the processes involved in metamorphosis 'ways of telling the self', and remarks that they are, at the same time, ways of story-making. Stories, she argues, are inherently fluid and provocative; they are shape-shifting acts that pursue and prompt metamorphosis at the same time as they describe it.[113] This seems especially apt in a large collection such as *Liaozhai*, containing a whole spectrum of different stories of bodily transformations. The portrayal of metamorphosis in *Liaozhai* follows the framework of the collection overall, which is to deny any systematic representation or explanation of the monstrous. Whilst the reasons behind metamorphosis sometimes play their part in the tales, other stories provide no explanation for the existence of the metamorphosing animal. In Chapter Two I argued that

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collections included stories about dreams and their interpretation. A surge of interest in dreams among the literati during the late Ming and early Qing also led to the flourishing of fiction and scholarly work on this theme. (See Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange,* Chapter 5, p132-182, for an in-depth examination of the dream in Ming-Qing fiction and thought.) Karl Kao points out that dreams in Chinese narrative traditionally perform two functions: either they are allegorical, as in the case of Tang tale 'The World inside the pillow', or they form a 'twilight zone' where the living and the dead or other beings may communicate with each other (as often seen in Six Dynasties *zhiguai* and early historiographies) (Karl S.Y. Kao, 'Projection, Displacement, Introjection: The Strangeness of *Liaozhai zhiyi*', (p199-229) in Hung, *Paradoxes of Chinese Literature*, p209). 'Dreaming of Wolves' can be seen as fitting into the allegorical tradition. In other *Liaozhai* tales, however, dream does not only allow for communication between the living and the dead, but also between different species.

111 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange,* p145. Zeitlin points out that the tale brings out the most monstrous implications of an expression dulled by habit and familiarity. The 'making monstrous' of language in *Liaozhai* will be discussed further in my concluding chapter.

112 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity,* New York: Zone Books, 2001, p32.

113 Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses,* p211.

one of the primary means by which *Liaozhai* produces both fear and wonder is in its unpredictability; the fact that it isn't possible to know, from tale to tale, whether *this* fox, *this* demon will be benign or harmful. The metamorphosing monsters play upon this uncertainty.

This unpredictability, however, is one of the most powerful aspects of metamorphosis; its many different variations. As Andrew Feldherr writes in his essay on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 'the changing implications of metamorphosis among the many kinds of literary discourse in which it occurs make it a narrative element that invites contrasting readings and opens out interpretive possibilities.'[114] The representation of metamorphosis in *Liaozhai* shows that there can be changing implications and readings even within a single collection. It can be both fearful and wondrous. It can be inspired by previous portrayals, as well as forging its own paths.

The tales of transformation – both animal-human and human-animal – reflect traditional Chinese thinking about change. The acceptance of these transformations reflects the understanding of a universe which is in constant flux, and in which animals and humans are closely connected. But the collection also takes this further, with *desire* driving change, providing a catalyst for metamorphosis and for the joining of human and animal in a monstrous hybrid.

'We envy the monster its freedom', writes Cohen.[115] Outside of society's structures and nature's laws, the monster has the freedom and power to speak freely, reflecting anger and frustration at the evils of society that might otherwise remain unspoken or unseen. It is through the monster that desires can be fulfilled, an aspect of the collection which will be examined more closely in the following chapter, which links these metamorphosing figures can be linked to idealisation and wish-fulfilment.

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114 Andrew Feldherr, 'Metamorphosis in the Metamorphoses', Hardie, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p165.

115 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p8.

Chapter Five: The Monstrous Family

Introduction

The previous chapter examined how metamorphosis in *Liaozhai* can allow for the achievement of goals and desires. Many tales can therefore be seen as depictions of a kind of wish-fulfilment; a movement towards an ideal. This chapter looks at wish-fulfilment, or idealisation, in relation to one particular aspect of the world depicted in the collection – the family – arguing that monstrosity in *Liaozhai* allows for the 'impossible' combination of desire and duty, thus paradoxically both subverting *and* supporting social norms and expectations.

The importance of the family structure and the continuation of the lineage to Chinese society are amply illustrated in the many tales in the collection which turn on issues of marriage, wealth, and heirs. There are protagonists who are too poor to make a good match, and others who are too lazy or foolish. There are shrewish wives and lascivious husbands and cruel mothers-in-law, as well as sympathetic mothers, loyal wives, faithful husbands and filial children. In short, from tale to tale, the collection presents a complex spectrum of family life and relationships, building up a picture both of the family's place in the Confucian system and of the family as mirroring the social system in microcosm. This chapter will deal in particular with those families which are changed by the entrance of the monstrous. It will argue that, in a number of tales, monstrosity allows for the creation of the idealised, Confucian family, whether this is through providing material wealth, or through marriage, or childbirth.

At the heart of this discussion, however, is a paradox – the monster's simultaneous subversion and support of social norms. Because it is outside of categories and boundaries, monstrosity is inherently subversive; threatening to the status quo. Yet monstrosity works, time and again in the collection, to *support* social structures and norms, through helping to create the idealised family, ensure the lineage, or allow for success in the examinations. The present chapter will look more closely at this paradox, and how it relates to the collection as a whole.

The chapter is split into two parts. Part I looks at the family itself in late imperial China, and how it is affected by the entry of the monster. It looks in particular at the tensions in society

between desire and duty, and how the beautiful, enchanting monster allows the human protagonist to resolve these tensions. Part II examines the theme of monstrous birth in the collection. Looking at the different types of monstrous conceptions, births, and children in *Liaozhai*, it examines how this representation of monstrous birth also shows the movement toward an ideal, upholding social norms whilst breaking physical and social boundaries.

Part I: The Monstrous Family

Before turning to the *Liaozhai* tales in which the family is changed by the entrance of the monster, it is useful to consider the structure of the family in late imperial China, its own idealised position in the larger social framework, and the way its patriarchal structure is reflected in the tales. Highlighting the family's social idealisation and the inherent tensions this caused can illuminate some of the impulses behind the collection's own portrayals of the monstrous family, and in particular the way that the tales can be seen as providing a male fantasy of wish-fulfilment.

The ideal family in imperial China encompassed 'five generations under one roof'. This was seldom achieved, even though young people often married in their teens, but even amongst poor families it wasn't uncommon for three generations to live together at different stages of the domestic cycle.[1] The head of the family, the patriarch, had authority over all household members and property, and the moral principles that organised family behaviour were those of 'communality and of reciprocal respect between ranks of the hierarchy.'[2] Chinese philosophers considered the family as part of a political continuum, the social order in microcosm. The foundation of Confucian social order was the Five Relationships (*wu lun* 五倫); ruler-minister, father-son, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, and friend-friend. All except the last (between friends) were unequal relationships in which the senior or superior had authority, but also a responsibility to treat the other partner with kindness, consideration and understanding. These relationships show, as Ann Waltner points out, the centrality of the kinship tie, with three out of the five intimately connected to kinship and family, and other relationships analogised to the family, such as the minister's duty to his ruler being compared to a son's duty to his father.[3]

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1 Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p93-94. See Bray for a more in-depth discussion of the family in late imperial China.

2 Ibid., p94-95.

3 Ann Waltner, *Getting an Heir: Adoption and the Construction of Kinship in Late Imperial China*, Honolulu:

Legally, late imperial China was a monogamous society; whatever his rank, a man was entitled to only one official wife. Legal marriages usually took place between families of similar social status, and once married, a woman was legally incorporated into her husband's lineage: 'She acted as her husband's partner in all the rituals of ancestral worship and was in charge of running his household. [4] Women were often very young when they married, and the entrance into her husband's family was fraught with difficulties, as will be seen below. Other tensions also existed within this ordered scheme. Strictly speaking it was illegal to take a concubine unless one had no heir, and then only one was permitted (as will be discussed below). But in practice, a wealthy man might take several concubines over the course of his life.[5]

Keith McMahon's work on 'containment' in seventeenth century Chinese fiction focuses on the necessity of the control of desires and behaviour demanded by Confucian norms (as discussed in Chapter Three). Yet alongside the ideal of the contained Confucian man, the ideal of polygamy also existed, an ideal only possible for the very wealthy.[6] Furthermore, the late imperial cult of *qing*, discussed throughout this thesis, idealised love and sentiment, meaning, as Daniel Hsieh remarks, that an educated upper class man was expected to rein in his desires and emotions at the same time as being surrounded by the sight of and opportunities for indulgence in the vast realm of courtesanship. The less wealthy, on the other hand, were excluded from this pursuit of desire, and often unable to marry at all.[7]

So behind the ordered façade of the ideal family lay competing tensions; between wealth and lack of wealth, between the containment and indulgence of desires, between Confucian duty and individual happiness. Behind it also lay a deeply ingrained patriarchal framework, one of the reasons why many Chinese critics have taken issue with the 'feudal'

University of Hawaii Press, 1990, p27. The five relationships are detailed in Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 2, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960, p251-252.

4 Bray, *Technology and Gender,* p351.

5 Ibid., p353. 'The concubine entered her master's house without ceremony; she was not presented to his ancestors, not did she participate in the ancestral rituals. She was accommodated in separate quarters at the side or to the rear of the compound, and she was expected to obey the legal wife in all matters. Once the initial transaction of exchange had been concluded, the concubine's family no longer existed as far as her master was concerned, and he had the right to rename her as he wished.... Her master and mistress did not mourn her even if she had given birth to sons.'

6 Keith McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion; Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009, p2. McMahon points out that despite the legal framework of monogamy, polygamy was considered the ideal towards which successful men aspired. Relatively few men ever had concubines (probably never more than about ten percent of men could afford to do so) or patronized high class prostitutes, yet polygamy was nevertheless, 'the superior goal toward which the successful man tended, while monogamy was for the rest – except the large numbers of poor men whose prospect was no marriage at all. What the privileged few desired constituted the supreme model by virtue of its prominence through millennia of history and by virtue of the socially productive effects of that prominence.

7 Hsieh, *Women and Love in Chinese Fiction*, p60.

thinking evident in the *Liaozhai* tales.[8] The following sections will look at the ways in which these tensions are represented – and often resolved – through the monstrous in *Liaozhai.*

The Idealisation of the Feminine

In Chapter Two I discussed the male-centred nature of the tales; though many carry the name of the female protagonist in their title, they are nonetheless told very much from the male point of view, reflecting the society of their time. The portrayal of the monstrous family in the tales serves to highlight this, presenting idealised pictures of the enchanting monstrous woman entering and helping the human family, allowing, as the following sections will discuss, for the fulfilment both of desire but also of duty; the Confucian obligation towards the continuation of the family and the family line.

In the story 'Hengniang', (恆娘) a fox spirit teaches a wife how to dress and act in more concubine-like ways, in order to attract her husband's attention and affection.[9] Although the wife is beautiful (*mei* 美), she needs to understand seductiveness (*mei* 媚). This story touches upon the tension between love and marriage in late imperial China. As already discussed elsewhere, the cult of *qing* had led to the idealisation of love and emotion, yet this was not easy to reconcile with the demands of the social and moral framework of the time. Many of the human protagonists of the tales are young men trying to fulfil their Confucian duties – to pass the civil service examinations, to gain an official post, and marry a woman who will bear sons and heirs. They are trying, in other words, to fulfil society's expectations. Yet they also have their own desires, as can be seen in many of the tales of love at first sight, or those in which the protagonist falls ill from desiring an unattainable woman.[10]

As discussed throughout this thesis, social and cultural norms in seventeenth century China were aimed at the control and containment of bodies, their behaviours, and desires. Love (libidinal desire) was separated from marriage, which was oriented towards the continuation of the family line. However, the monstrous in *Liaozhai* can provide for the freedom of desires – as discussed in Chapter Four, in which monstrous metamorphoses

8 See Tang Fuling, *Wenyan xiaoshuo gaofeng de huigui: Liaozhai zhiyi zongheng yanjiu,* p70-82 for an examination of the representation of women within the 'feudal' tradition in *Liaozhai*.

9 'Hengniang' (411) 恆娘, 'Hengniang', p1431-4135. Another tale in which a fox spirit encourages a human to dress-up and pretend is 'Xiaocui' (小翠), p1000, in which she plays 'dressing-up games' with her child-like husband, before curing him of his foolishness for good.

10 In 'Yingning', p147-159, which will be discussed at more length below, the protagonist falls ill from desiring the beautiful young girl he has glimpsed. And in tales such as 'Abao', p233-239, discussed in the previous chapter, excessive desire can cause a stupor-like state, leading, in tales such as this, to the metamorphosis of the human soul.

allowed for the achievement of otherwise impossible goals – providing a means for this reconciliation between individual desires and the demands of society. As Karl Kao writes, 'The appealing portrayals of foxes and ghosts…are the transference of what men want from their wives to the creatures of another world.'[11] In the figures of the enchanting monsters are both the idealised image of the beautiful woman with the seductive qualities of the concubine or courtesan (and the lack of responsibility in this relationship) and the idealised image of the loyal (and, importantly, fertile) wife, a combination which is 'as impossible as it is impermissible.'[12] As in the tales of metamorphoses, where animal-human hybridity leads to success, so too does this hybrid image lead to the achievement of these competing desires.

The tale 'Jiaona' (嬌娜) provides a representation of something perhaps just as 'impossible' as this combination: the true, platonic friendship between a woman and a man. In the authorial comment to this tale, which tells of a man's relationships within a family of foxes, the Historian of the Strange admires the protagonist, Kong Xueli, more for his friendship with Jiaona than for his relationship with his beautiful wife. Here can perhaps be seen another side of *qing*. Xie Qian argues that it is not only *qing* as 'romantic sentiments' that can be found in *Liaozhai*, but that friendship, *you qing* 友情 and gratitude, *en qing* 恩情 are also part of the same impulse, and that often within the same story several forms of *qing* can be found.[13]

This idealisation of the feminine, and of different female roles, reflects broader literary trends. Keith McMahon, studying Ming-Qing 'scholar-beauty' (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) romances, discusses the 'remolding among high-literate circles of prescribed male and female roles.'[14] These trends were reflective of changing social conditions such as the flourishing of commerce in the late Ming, the booming printing industry, more widespread education, and the rising individualism that influenced the cult of *qing*, which came to be seen as embodied by the feminine.[15] In Chapter Two I argued that the female figures in *Liaozhai* needed to be

11 Kao, 'Projection, Displacement, Introjection', p210.
12 Ibid., p212.
13 Xie Qian 謝倩, '*Liaozhai* qing zi erti' 聊齋'情'字二題, *Pu Songling yanjiu* 蒲松齡研究 1 (1998), p33.
14 McMahon, *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists*', p100. He goes on to write that, 'Going beyond the image of woman as passive sufferer, the beauty-scholar romance provides the chaste female with powers of self-determination and self-invention that exceed not only normal female roles but male ones as well.' p101. This can be reflected in the tales of 'passing' monsters, discussed in the previous chapter.
15 For a study of the effects of these social changes on women in late imperial China, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994. Roland Altenburger remarks in his study of the female knight errant in Chinese fiction that works such as Ko's, 'have helped qualify the myth of permanent and universal female oppression, and to increase the awareness of social differentiation and historical change'. However, he also notes that there is a tendency, in some recent works, such as Victoria Cass's *Dangerous Women*, towards replacing the older myth of women's powerlessness with, 'a new myth of

approached through the lens of *qing*, due to its influence on images of the feminine. Maram Epstein argues that, from the late Ming the feminine began 'to be idealised as an authentic subject position untainted by the frustrations, sacrifices and moral compromises demanded by participating in the bureaucratic system.'[16] She discusses 'the development of an iconography of *qing*, a system of *yin*-associated values that promoted the feminine and the natural as markers of moral and spiritual authenticity (*zhen* 真) in contrast to a mechanical, even false (*jia* 假), ritualism.'[17] The feminine was set up as a contrast to the patriarchal, Confucian world dominated by the examination system and the rigid demands of society, or what Epstein calls the 'perceived excesses of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy'.[18] McMahon echoes this when he discusses the 'remarkable woman' in *Liaozhai*, and hypothesises a divide in the stories, 'between female figures like the swordswoman or Chang E and the masculine sphere in which men compete among themselves for positions of power via the exam system.'[19]

So the female monster in *Liaozhai* can perhaps be seen not only as providing an idealised figure containing both beauty and wifely virtues, but also in fact representing a broader, idealised world, both fairer and more authentic.

Yet alongside this idealisation of the feminine, the collection also displays a fear of the feminine, as discussed in Chapter Two, which argued that the collection's depiction of monstrosity hinges upon the juxtaposition of the fearful and the wondrous, the ordinary and the extraordinary. The tales of the 'impossible combination' of loyal wife and lovely concubine are juxtaposed with stories of horrific monsters who attack men in their own bedrooms. In these figures too can be seen a hybrid – a combination of femininity and horror, equally impossible, in terms of social acceptability – as the courtesan/wife.

So any fixed ideal is unsettled by a consideration of the monstrous in the collection overall, which resists any systematic reading, and undermines not only social ideals, but also fictional ones, subverting typical representations of the different figures in the tales through its many different explorations.

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female power and self-determination, and thus perhaps of exchanging one distortion of gender history for another.' Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle: The Female Knight-Errant (xia) in Traditional Chinese Narrative*, Bern; New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009, p135.

16 Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p88.

17 Ibid., p7.

18 Ibid., p88.

19 McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in *Liaozhai zhiyi*', p224. The female swordswoman in 'The Swordswoman (俠女), p210, will be discussed below. 'Chang E' (嫦娥), p1069, is a *Liaozhai* story which features the character of the goddess of the moon, come down to Earth.

Duty and Desire

In 'Nie Xiaoqian' (聶小倩), the protagonist Ning Caichen is studying for the civil service examinations, staying at a lonely temple because accommodation is so expensive. At home, his wife has been ill for some time, and his mother must bear the burden of managing the household. In the temple at night he meets the beautiful Nie Xiaoqian, who releates to him her sad story:

> '"I died when I was eighteen years old, and they buried my body outside this temple. Then an evil spirit took control of me, and ever since he has been forcing me against my will to cast spells on men, to seduce them and do all sorts of shameful things with them. Now there is no one left in the temple to kill apart from you, and I am afraid that the spirit will come looking for you. He will take the form of a yaksha-demon."'[20]

By the end of the story, however, the evil spirit is defeated, and Nie Xiaoqian's bones reburied. To repay her debt of gratitude, she begs to be allowed to serve his mother. She becomes part of the household, taking the load off Ning's mother, and when Ning's wife dies, they finally marry.

The story ends with all problems solved and the ideal domestic situation achieved. Ning finds both a beautiful, courtesan-like figure, as well as a loyal wife. He succeeds in his examinations, and Nie Xiaoqian provides him with a son. He later takes a concubine, and she and Nie Xiaoqian each provide another heir. The family is therefore clearly both financially wealthy and also assured of the continuation of the lineage. So the entry of the monster into the family has allowed Ning to fulfil all his obligations. Yet it is not only Ning who is able to achieve the goals which society has set for him. Nie Xiaoqian herself needs the help of the human in order to be saved from the demon possessing her, and then, as there has been a failure of rites upon her death, she needs Ning to rebury her remains. By entering the family to show her gratitude to Ning, she is accepted back into the human world. She gradually begins to eat a little, and visitors to the house do not notice anything ghostly about her:

> 'At first Little Beauty ate and drank nothing, but after six months had passed, she gradually began to take a little thin congee. Little by little, mother and son became extremely attached to her, and they would never have mentioned it in the house that she was a ghost. Indeed, strangers were unable to distinguish anything

20 'Nie Xiaoqian', p160-168. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p172.

ghostly about her.'[21]

This move towards the ideal can be seen in another of the most famous of the *Liaozhai* tales, 'Yingning'.[22] In this story, the eponymous heroine is the daughter of a fox. When she first comes to Wang's home she is giddy and always laughing, seeming not to understand how to behave. But in the end, she settles down as part of the family, and she too provides an heir.

Yingning's monstrosity is suggested in several ways at the tale's beginning. First of all, she is extraordinarily beautiful, so much so that Wang falls ill pining for her, after seeing her only once. Subsequently, she is found as the result of a lie – Wang's cousin, fearing for his health, invents a story, telling him that the girl is in fact his cousin and that she lives in the hills nearly. The story, however, turns out to be true, and Wang is able to find the young woman again. It is then her behaviour that marks her as different – she is always laughing, and seemingly blissfully naïve. Another side to her behaviour is seen, however, towards the end of the story. After they are married, Yingning is collecting flowers from up on the trellis which separates her husband's garden from their neighbours' when she is seen by the neighbours' son, who instantly falls in love, and accepts what he thinks is an assignation from her that evening. He comes to an unfortunate end, however, when she tricks him into being stung by a scorpion whilst he believes he is making love to her, and he dies. The case is taken to the magistrate, but is thrown out. Wang's mother, however, tells Yingning that her silliness has gone too far, and that she could have damaged the family's reputation. Following this, she changes her giddy demeanour for a more serious appearance.

In this story, it is only at the very end that Yingning reveals her monstrous origins:

> '"There's something I have never told you," she sobbed. "I haven't told you about it before, because we hadn't known each other very long and I didn't want to frighten you. But now that I know you better, and I know how much you and your mother love me, I must tell you the truth.
>
> "I am the daughter of a fox. When my fox-mother went away, she entrusted me to a ghost-mother, who looked after me for ten years. I have no brothers. You are all I have in the world."'[23]

The fact that she is not only the daughter of a fox, but has also been raised by a ghost foster-mother, makes her origins even more dubious. Yet by the time this is revealed, Yingning is a solemn and loving wife and Wang is unconcerned by her revelations.

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21 Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p177.
22 'Yingning', p147-159.
23 Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p166.

So in order for these ideal conclusions to be brought about, the monster is needed, but then her monstrosity seems to be 'tamed' or neutralised. Becoming a loyal wife and mother, she becomes, to all intents and purposes, human. The tales could therefore be seen as profoundly conservative, portraying the reassertion of 'the need for human order according to conventional rules.'[24] Certainly, it is striking that by the conclusion of many of the tales, their happy ending consists of the bringing back of the social order demanded by society. The ideal Confucian family has been created; the lineage has been assured. And the monster, in all its uncontained and dangerously boundary-crossing potential (which both Nie Xiaoqian and Yingning exhibit in their tales) has been normalised and made safe by being assimilated into this order.

Yet the apparent conservatism in these tales is more complex than it may at first seem. It is useful to look further into this 'assimilation', in order to better understand the portrayals of characters such as Yingning, and how they can in fact both support *and* subvert the status quo. For Allan Barr, the drama that 'Yingning' enacts 'is that of a woman's efforts to resolve the tensions generated when she seeks to shed her deviant status and establish for herself a conventional place in society.'[25] Yingning's origins, he points out, are highly irregular, as she is not only the daughter of a fox, but has been raised since she was a child by a ghost. It is clear, he goes on to say, that her two primary goals are to arrange a proper burial for her foster mother, and to be assimilated into human society.[26] Despite her 'irregular origins', therefore, her goals are very conventional, and she is, Barr points out, fundamentally committed to traditional values. But in order to achieve her goals and be true to her values, she puts on the 'mask' of lightheartedness. It is only after these goals have been achieved that she is able to strip off the mask, and let her outward manner accurately reflect her inner seriousness.[27] So for Barr, Yingning's behaviour is all aiming towards her acceptance into the human world, reflecting some of the very real issues a young woman had to go through to gain acceptance into a new family.

The monster could therefore be seen as a tool to bring about these ideal situations, supporting the frequent argument, discussed in Chapter One, that the *Liaozhai* foxes, ghosts and animal demons are not monsters but 'people.' The human protagonist is able to fulfil both society's demands and his own desires, and the monstrous woman achieves her goal of

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24 Waltner, *Getting an Heir*, p24.
25 Barr, 'Disarming Intruders: Alien Women in *Liaozhai zhiyi*.' *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, 49 (1989), p504.
26 Ibid., p504.
27 Ibid., p505.

acceptance into the human world, reflecting at the same time the real difficulties faced by women in a patriarchal society.

Yet by focusing only on the 'humanisation' of the monster and the upholding of social norms, the monster's subversive potential is ignored. Whilst taking Yingning as a portrayal of a young woman trying to find her way within a new family can illuminate aspects of the social difficulties faced by young women, and the need for respectability within a family, it ignores other aspects of her non-human nature, and of her character. And whilst the entry of the monster into the family does indeed allow for the achievement of both duty and desire, it raises other questions.

Throughout this thesis I argue that the monster, in its function of showing, or revealing, contains complex and sometimes contradictory discourses. The key here, I argue, is in Kao's description of the 'impossible combination' found in figures such as Nie Xiaoqian and Yingning. They are both loyal wife and seductive concubine in one. Despite their apparent humanisation they are a hybrid, 'impossibly' combining these two aspects and mirroring the tales, discussed in the previous chapter, of metamorphosing animals who contain both the animal and the human in one. So the acceptance of the monster into the human family can be seen as a confirmation of their hybridity, rather than a taming of their monstrosity. And just as they are hybrid – both monstrous and human-like, both 'wifely' and courtesan-like – so too do they make the family monstrous. With the entrance of the monster, the human family is no longer simply human – it is itself a hybrid, holding both the human and the monstrous, and thus subverting the Confucian framework of control and containment even as it upholds the Confucian ideal.

'Prosperity Ever After'

The tales go further in their idealisation – it is not only 'happily ever after' that the monster facilitates, but also, to use Wai-yee Li's words, 'prosperity ever after'.[28] A pressing issue at the time was that social and professional advancement was limited by strict hierarchies and by the bureaucratic machinations of the exam system. A number of the tales, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, deal with the portrayal of the exam system and its failings.[29] Others deal with the pressing need to earn a living, and the dire consequences of poverty and the loss

28 Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p99.

29 For a study of the examination system in relation to Pu Songling himself, see Allan Barr, 'Pu Songling and the Qing Examination System', *Late Imperial China*, vol.7. no.1, (June 1986), p87-111.

of livelihood.[30] The lack, loss and gain of wealth can therefore be seen as a major impetus to many of the *Liaozhai* tales.[31] Wealth is a major influence on the success of the family, a social issue reflected clearly in the stories. Tales such as 'Abao', discussed in the previous chapter, highlight how a family's financial standing could influence a person's chances of marriage.[32] Abao's family refuse Sun's proposal because of his poverty, and even after he has proved his love for her, and she has pledged her love to him, her family fear that they will be mocked because he is so poor. Abao, however, proving that it is not just the monster in *Liaozhai* who possesses determination and strength of will, refuses to marry anyone else but Sun.

In this tale, it is through becoming monstrous himself – through the metamorphosis of his soul into a parrot – that Sun is able to marry Abao. He then works to pass his exams, helped by Abao, who is able to manage their household affairs. And in 'The Cricket', another tale of the metamorphosis of the soul, the son becoming monstrous provides the family with a way of earning money.[33]

A more common trope in the collection, however, is the monster who aids the human to greater wealth.[34] Sometimes, this is because of their particular nature; Axian, the mouse spirit, is diligent at storing grain for times of need.[35] She thus fulfils yet another ideal criteron – that of the wife skilled in household management. In other tales, the monster appears in order to repay a debt, often bringing wealth with her. In 'A Supernatural Wife', a spirit repays a man for his kindness in a former life.[36] Embarrassed by his poor living quarters and lack of food, he soon finds that they are transformed into finery and his larder well stocked.

The collection also reflects the traditional ability of fox spirits to provide wealth or other help to the human. In tales such as 'Wang Cheng' (王成), a fox provides the human with the means to earn his fortune.[37] And the ways in which the *Liaozhai* foxes help poor scholars

30 'The Cricket', p484-490, discussed in the previous chapter illustrates clearly the difficulties of poverty.

31 'Chu suiliang' (472) 褚遂良, 'A Supernatural Wife', p1647-1649. These tales of monsters bringing wealth to human protagonists are joined by the many other tales which pivot around wealth – its lack, its loss, its gain. Throughout the thesis, wealth is ambiguous. Its gain can cause as much suffering as its lack. Money itself can be monstrous. In 'The Flow of Money' ('Qian liu' (203) 钱流, p695), it is shown as possessed of its own, monstrous life. And tales such as 'The Gambling Charm' ('Du fu' (121) 赌符, p419), show its power over human lives. Excessive desire for wealth – excessive greed – the stories seem to say, can lead to monstrosity or monstrous punishment. Those monsters who enter the human family and bring good fortune are shown to be more than willing to take this fortune away, should the human man be proved undeserving.

32 'Abao', p233-239.

33 'The Cricket', p484-490.

34 Or, as mentioned in a previous note, to the taking away of wealth, should the human prove unworthy.

35 'Axian', p1380-1386.

36 'A Supernatural Wife', p1647-1649.

37 'Wang cheng' (38) 王成, 'Wang Cheng', p104-111. The fox in this tale turns out to be the wife of the protagonist's grandfather, still aiding the family.

to success in the exams are particularly distinctive. In 'Feng Xian', (鳳仙), for example, the fox spirit, during her absence from home, will appear in a mirror if the protagonist has been studying. When he does not work, she won't appear.[38]

By the end of the seventeenth century the merchant class in China was growing, but the Confucian suspicion and disdain for merchants still existed. In *Liaozhai*, acquiring wealth through the help of a benign and beautiful monster can perhaps be seen as neutralising this potentially problematic depiction. 'The Furry Fox' (毛狐), however, illustrates the danger of taking this aspect of the fox for granted.[39] In this story a labourer named Ma meets a fox spirit and, knowing of their reputation for helping humans, asks that she provides him with money. Although she accedes to his demand, he keeps wanting more. When he asks her why she is not as beautiful as fox spirits are said to be, she replies slyly that foxes adapt themselves to their company. And when she helps him arrange a marriage, although he hopes for a beautiful bride, his wife is astonishingly ugly. Again, the clever fox has adapted herself to her company, finding him the wife he deserves.

This tale highlights key aspects of the collection's use of monstrosity in relation to the family. Firstly, it shows that the monster has the power to help create a family, which is itself one of the most important duties of a Confucian man. Yet it also illustrates the fact that the monster in *Liaozhai,* as in Cohen's theses, is ambiguous. It can be helpful or dangerous, and it may act in unpredictable ways. The protagonist of 'The Hairy Fox' believes that he knows how fox spirits behave, and he hopes to exploit this to his own ends. But it is typical of *Liaozhai* that whilst those who are worthy may be aided by the monster, those who are not may be harmed or mocked. As discussed in the previous chapter, the monster is in control of its own agency and identity, something which the following section examines more closely.

The Transient Monster

In a number of the tales in which the monster provides material wealth or success in the examinations, its time in the human world is limited. Allan Barr calls these kind of monsters 'Transient Aliens'. They are monsters whose 'passing' is for a limited period (and they tend to be female). In Barr's words, they 'appear quite content with their anomalous position... Showing little interest in becoming integrated into the human community, the Transients tend to regard their association with a mortal man as only a short-term affair, which they are

38 'Feng xian' (342) 鳳仙, 'Feng Xian', p1177-1184.
39 'Mao hu' (125) 毛狐, 'The Furry Fox', p429-432.

bound sooner or later to terminate. In many cases, Transient Aliens attribute their liaison with the hero to predestination and not to any deliberate design on their part.'[40] They recall earlier *zhiguai* plots, in which the relationship between the human and the supernatural being was likely to end in one of two ways; either in the lovers' separation, as they each return to their own, separate realms; or in the death of the female 'interloper' (whether she is a benign figure or a dangerous demon).[41]

Some become weary of human society, as in the tale of 'Xin shisiniang' (辛十四娘), or Wenji, the ghost in 'A Gentleman of Jiaping' (嘉平公子), who becomes disillusioned with the human protagonist's lack of learning.[42] (This suggests that it is only those humans considered worthy who are able to achieve their ideal ends with the help of the monster.) Others leave when their predestined time has finished. As the fox spirit in 'Third Lady Lotus' tells her husband, life has meetings and partings, and it is the quality of life which is important, not the length of time together.'[43] Others, as discussed in the previous chapter, leave when their true identity is discovered, or revealed to others.

It is often due to the repayment of a debt that a monstrous woman will enter the human world, and she will leave when the debt is paid or their pre-destined time at an end. In 'Xiaocui', a human family once saved a fox spirit from the thunder god.[44] The debt is repaid when a young woman named Xiaocui arrives to marry their only son – Wang Yuanfeng – who is foolish and child-like. The couple scandalise the family by playing at dressing up like children. Xiaocui eventually drowns Yuanfeng in the bath, much to the family's horror. However, he wakes up cured of his foolishness.

Xiaocui's playfulness in some ways recalls Yingning, and Xiaocui too is hiding more serious intentions underneath her sunny exterior. She wishes to repay a debt to the Wang family. Unable to bear children herself, she tells Yuanfeng that he should find himself a concubine in order to provide him with an heir. Initially unwilling, he eventually agrees. Xiaocui, meanwhile, has been gradually changing her appearance in order to exactly resemble the concubine that he will choose. She then disappears, having made her loss easier for him to bear. Here, the fox's goal is never to assimilate into the human world. Instead, she wishes to repay her debt, something she does through her monstrosity, which makes her able

40 Barr, 'Disarming Intruders', p510.
41 Ibid., p507.
42 'Xin shisiniang' (153) 辛十四娘, 'Fourteenth Daughter Xin', p535-547; Jiaping gongzi' (452) 嘉平公子, 'The Young Gentleman Who Couldn't Spell, p1588.
43 'Third Lady Lotus', 686.
44 'Xiaocui', p1000

to transform Yuanfeng. In this tale, the family becomes monstrous, and thus more successful – prior to Xiaocui's appearance, Yuanfeng does not understand relationships between men and women; it is only after he is cured of his foolishness that he becomes a 'real' man, and is able to carry on the family line. When she has achieved this goal, she leaves.

Rania Huntington points out that one role a fox can play that a human woman never can is that of 'the perfect wife, departing.'[45] 'Vixens' passion is of a kind not possible for human women: a human woman of childbearing age has no blameless exits from domesticity, save death.'[46] Above, I discussed the 'impossible combination' of loyal wife and beautiful concubine found together in the monster. Huntington highlights another kind of ideal that the fox can embody – not simply a fantasy of 'availability and fulfilment' but also a 'fantasy of a particular kind of loss.'[47] This ideal provides a relationship without responsibilities, another beguiling fantasy, possible only within the realm of courtesan-ship but again, given form in *Liaozhai* through the portrayal of the monstrous woman.

This aspect of the monster in the collection provides another example of how *Liaozhai* continually problematises the figure of the loving wife and mother. It is interesting to look at another depiction of a transient female figure in the collection, who, though human, is nonetheless aligned with the monstrous. 'The Swordswoman' (俠女) is a reworking of an older story, found in several versions elsewhere, and revolves around a mysterious woman who moves next door to the protagonist, Gu.[48] Though refusing the marriage that Gu's mother hopes they will make, she unexpectedly appears to him on two occasions in the night; the second time, she says that she has returned because she failed to conceive a child the previous time. A further unusual event is her killing of the pleasure boy with whom Gu associates, revealing him to be a fox spirit who is attempting to prey on Gu.

At the end of the tale, it is revealed that she has taken revenge on the man who killed her father. She leaves her child with Gu, and takes away with her the head of her enemy. As Roland Altenburger writes in his study of the female knight-errant in Chinese narrative, 'Her domestic role of life-giving mother and caring housewife is now reversed and substituted by

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45 Huntington, *Alien Kind*, p288

46 Ibid., p268. This issue can be seen in other contexts. European fairy tales in which the non-human wife and mother leaves her husband and children without a backwards glance (in stories such as 'The Swan Maiden') received considerable renewed attention in Europe in the late nineteenth century, where the roles of a wife were being re-examined and questioned. The folklorist Midori Snyder writes that 'The swan maiden, with her ability to effectively fly away from her marriage and her children, became a fascinating study for Victorian folklorists, who saw in the narrative the evolution of the institution of marriage.' www.midorisnyder.com/essays/the-swan-maidens-feathered-robe.html. Retrieved 25/06/2013.

47 Huntington, *Alien Kind*, p247.

48 'The Swordswoman', p210-216.

the counter image of the swordswoman. The child that symbolises life she leaves with Gu, instead carrying with her the cut-off head of her enemy, signifying death.'[49]

The swordswoman is thus aligned with the monstrous in several ways. Firstly, she recalls the 'passing' of the metamorphosing monsters discussed in the previous chapter. Although she does not disguise her physical form, she hides her true aims and identity beneath a quiet, conservative exterior. Gu sees that there is something unusual about her, however, calling her an 'extraordinary person' (*qiren* 奇人). Her murderous intentions and actions, so at odds with traditional female ideals, also bring her closer to the monstrous. This is underlined by her leaving of the child, taking with her only the head of her enemy. A further detail – the killing of the fox boy – relates her to the monstrous 'by negative implication', to use Altenburger's words; 'The rationale of her behaviour might be characterised as a reversed fox logic: by rejecting any sexual relation with Gu, she acts contrary to the common logic of foxes, as represented by the pleasure boy, who seeks to suck the man's vital essence.'[50] Finally, her exit from the tale suggests that she not only leaves the protagonist, but the human world itself. Altenburger, looking at previous versions of this tale, remarks that all suggest that the woman flies away, rather than simply walking out of the door; that she disappears 'into another sphere beyond the human world.'[51]

Leaving the child with Gu, the swordswoman ensures the continuation of his lineage, thus repaying his family for their kindness. Yet she takes herself away from the society that would have her act the role of loyal wife and mother. She refuses to be an 'ideal' of any kind. Like the passing monsters who leave when their true form has been revealed, she too vanishes when her true self – in her role as knight-errant – is made clear. She 'unplugs herself' from the social logic, to use McMahon's words, of defined roles and of social ideals.[52]

Dislocations in Gender

The swordswoman in this tale crosses gender boundaries, a theme which recurs in several *Liaozhai* tales. In this section I will look at other ways in which gender boundaries are crossed in the collection, and the ways in which this changes the family. I refer here back to Chapter Three and the discussion of the monstrous body in *Liaozhai*. In that chapter I argued that the body, in its monstrous changes, becomes liminal, a site of both destruction and

49 Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle,* p168.
50 Altenburger, p170.
51 Altenburger, p174.
52 McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in *Liaozhai zhiyi*', p225.

construction. By looking here at how monstrous bodily change affects the family, the social aspect of this monstrous bodily change can be seen.

In Judith Zeitlin's influential study of *Liaozhai*, one of her three main themes is 'dislocations in gender'. A major focus of this section of her work is the seldom-discussed story 'The Human Prodigy' (人妖).[53] The tale tells of a devoted couple – Ma and his wife – who are both wild and uninhibited. When a young woman arrives at the home of their neighbour, seeking shelter, the neighbour boasts that the girl is skilled in massages that can cure feminine ailments. Spying the girl through a chink in the wall, Ma takes a liking to her and plots with his wife to feign illness and summon the girl to administer a massage. They trick her by switching places in bed, so that she thinks it is the wife who she is massaging, when in fact it is Ma himself. But a surprise is in store for both of them – she discovers Ma has tricked her, but he discovers that 'she' is in fact a boy, named Wang Erxi (王二喜or 'Double Joy', to use Zeitlin's translation), skilled in the art of female impersonation.[54]

This offence is a crime punishable by death, but rather than handing the boy over to the authorities, Ma castrates him, promising to heal him on the condition that he serves him for the rest of his life. Soon, having become the girl he was pretending to be, the impersonator serves the couple like a maidservant, her name changed to Wang Erjie (王二姐or 'Double Lass'). The rest of the gang of female impersonators are arrested and put to death, only the girl/boy escapes, able to prove to suspicious villagers that she is indeed female, and remains grateful to Ma until death.

The violence in this tale makes it unusual, and also, as Zeitlin points out, disturbing and problematic.[55] It is also unusual in the direction of its change of gender. Generally, in Ming-Qing tales of 'dislocations in gender' it is a change from female to male that occurs.[56] In the one *Liaozhai* tale which deals with this issue, 'Becoming a Boy' (化男) a young woman is struck on the forehead by a meteor.[57] When she wakes up she has been transformed into a boy. The family, who have no sons, are delighted by the transformation of their daughter into a son.

Charlotte Furth notes that there are various accounts, during the Ming and Qing, of

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53 'Renyao' (494) 人妖, 'The Human Prodigy', p1711-1714.
54 See Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange* p98-106.
55 Ibid.,p98. She remarks that it is perhaps the most disturbing tale to a modern reader, and therefore never anthologised and rarely discussed.
56 See Charlotte Furth, 'Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century China', *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 9 No. 2, 1988, p8.
57 'Hua nan' (308) 化男, 'Becoming a Boy', p1060.

women turning into men, and several appear in notation books of the time. She discusses the natural philosopher Li Shizhen and his influential *Materia Medica*, in which he concludes that changes of sex were among the 'possible transformations of *yin* and *yang*.'[58] She remarks that these changes were presented as 'psychologically unproblematic' shifts of role.[59] Sons were more desired than daughters, because they would carry on the lineage. Daughters, on the other hand, would leave the family upon their marriage. So the change from female to male is seen as a filial act, doing what is best for the family.

'The Human Prodigy' is therefore unusual in its transformation of gender. But like the tales discussed above, it can be seen to create a more ideal situation – the couple gain a loyal concubine and maidservant (services they may not otherwise have been able to afford), and Wang is saved from disgrace and execution. Through his castration, Wang really does become the girl he was pretending to be, and social order is brought about. The story takes the 'passing' discussed in the previous chapter and makes the deception real.[60] In these tales, monstrosity has entered the family through the human body itself turned monstrous, or liminal. In 'The Human Prodigy' the castration is present, in Judith Zeitlin's words, as a 'symbolic death and rebirth'. The boy's blood is shed, and he faints. When he wakes, he has a new identity and name. 'Like an initiation rite, the castration allows Double Joy to pass from his old state of outlaw to a new state of acceptance into the community.'[61] In 'Becoming a Man', the symbolic death occurs when the meteor strikes and the young girl falls down unconscious. She is reborn as a man.

Zeitlin points out that the subject of this tale, slyly referred to by the Historian the Strange in his authorial comment, 'is not so much the transgression of boundaries as the ingenious and productive reinstatement of them.'[62] By the end of the story, social order has been re-established and the family normalised. Ma has told the neighbours that the girl is the

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58 Furth, 'Androgynous Males and Deficient Females', p8. Li Shizhen, cf Chapter Three, note 17.

59 Furth, 'Androynous Males and Deficient Females', p489. On this point, Judith Zeitlin considers the French physician Ambrose Pare (1510-1590) who in *Des monstres et prodiges*, first published in 1573, contends that shifts in gender are exclusively one way; 'We therefore never find in any true story that any man ever became a woman, because Nature tends always toward that which is most perfect, and not, on the contrary, to perform in such a way that what is perfect should become imperfect.' （Zeitlin, p108）

60 This 'making real' of deceptions, desires, and even figurative language is one of *Liaozhai*'s major means of creating monstrosity, as will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

61 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p102.

62 Ibid., p114. The Historian assigns a political meaning to the castration in this tale; 'It can be said that Ma Wanbao was good at making use of people. Children like to play with crabs as pets, but they fear the claws, so they break them off and keep the crabs as pets. Alas! If one has grasped this meaning, one can rule the world!' (Translation Zeitlin, p104). Zeitlin remarks that this comment illustrates that the Historian's commentary can be as twisted and disorienting as the story it purports to interpret, turning it into 'an ironic parable of how to wield political and military power', p105.

daughter of a distant cousin. The 'girl' then serves the family loyally. Zeitlin sees this tale as a search for rehabilitation and order, yet paradoxically, she points out, 'this reordering is accomplished only through the most extreme and inexorable crossing of gender boundaries.'[63] In other words, again, the story subverts social norms, yet paradoxically reaffirms them. As discussed in the previous chapter, metamorphosis of the human body occurs when the human needs the power of an animal in order to achieve their aims. Here, monstrous change provides the family with the means to meet social expectations and needs.

Threats to the Family

So far, this chapter has discussed the ways in which monstrosity in the collection supports the family structure through subverting social norms and crossing boundaries. Yet the collection also presents ways in which the family is threatened. The horror tales discussed in Chapter Two provide images of the monster who poses a danger not only to the protagonist but to the family itself. Here, the ideals which other tales affirm are threatened and unsettled.

'The Ghost Wife' (鬼妻) is a tale of a ghost's revenge for her husband's continuation of the family.[64] After her death her husband mourns for her so much that she comes back from the underworld as a ghost, and they continue their relationship as normal. After a while, however, the man is encouraged to remarry, much to the fury of the ghost wife, who fights with the new wife and then visits the couple for many nights, simply standing and staring, saying nothing. Eventually, the husband hires a magician to get rid of her.

This vengeful wife, and her threatening behaviour, recalls a typical figure in Qing fiction – the shrew. The 'shrew' (*pofu* 潑婦 or literally, 'scattering woman') is a caricature who metaphorically 'scatters' her polluting fluids on the man. Yenna Wu has written in depth on the theme of the shrew: 'Its prominence in literature reflects a deep anxiety about the threat the shrewish wife poses to a patriarchal society: the theme reveals a male fear of women's competition for supremacy, anxiety that she might subvert the patriarchal order, and a certain amount of hostility toward her. Men needed women for procreation, support, and comfort, and yet dreaded their potential power to dominate.'[65] So whilst the Confucian ideal described

63 Ibid.
64 'The Ghost Wife', p1044.
65 Yenna Wu, 'The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth Century Chinese Literature', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol.48, no.2, December 1988, p368. Although I deal in this thesis with the assumed persona of the author – the Historian of the Strange – rather than speculate on Pu Songling himself, it is interesting to point out that he did have personal experience of the harm shrewish wives can do to the family. Squabbling by the wives of his three brothers forced the

a wife who was submissive to her husband, her parents and her son, and women were undoubtedly under pressure to conform, wives in real life, as Yenna Wu points out, were nonetheless sometimes sovereigns at home, and posed a serious threat to the family and to concepts of order if they were tyrannical.[66] Women were seen as having the potential to destroy the home from within.

In *Liaozhai* tales such as 'Jiangcheng' (江城), a husband has to suffer verbal and physical abuse from his wife. She even spies on him when he goes to a brothel to seek some solace.[67] And yet even when he sends her back to her family, he finds that he misses her, and goes to visit her. The shrew embodies excess, and is used, both in *Liaozhai* and elsewhere, both in comic and horrific roles. She is allied with laughter, which is itself, as discussed in Chapter Three, allied with the monstrous. 'Laughter breaks up, breaks out, splashes over'.[68] And so too does the shrew, who 'spills and splashes either literal or figurative fluids' - blood, saliva, jealousy, rage.[69] She embodies the failure of containment. Yet whilst she may play a comedic part, she is also, as McMahon points out, 'a symbol of pollution, volatility, transgression, uncontained sexual desire, and castration.'[70]

Whilst shrew stories can censure rebellious wives, they can also, points out Yenna Wu, deprecate spineless husbands.[71] In the previous chapter I discussed some of the moral aspects of *Liaozhai*, displayed in stories where the good are rewarded and the bad punished. The stories of monstrous families are another way of considering the collection's acute moral gauge. Jiang Cheng was a rat in a previous life, and she repays the man who killed her by becoming his shrewish wife. Only those considered worthy may benefit from the monster.

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extended family to move apart.

66 Ibid., p369.

67 'Jiang cheng' (252) 江城', 'Jiangcheng' p854.

68 Cixous, in Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman*, p327.

69 Chiang, p89.

70 Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists*, p55. Paolo Santangelo also remarks that the presence of elements such as the demon-woman or shrew threatening the man in *Liaozhai*, as well as in works by Feng Menglong, both of which tend to, for the most part, extol female intelligence and feelings, 'confirms the existence of a conservative school of thought during the period between the Song dynasty and the Qing dynasty.' He picks out in particular a 'violently misogynistic scene against adultery' in the *Liaozhai* story 'Chengxian' ('Becoming an Immortal'), 'which is reminiscent of one of several episodes in the *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳.' (Santangelo, *Sentimental Education in Chinese History: An Interdisciplinary Textual Research on Ming and Qing Sources*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p129). This trope, he goes on to say, demonstrates a fear of female beauty and amorous passion as threats to family and social order, and is mirrored by the representation of women as strange beings, famished vampires and ghosts. Another tale of a shrewish wife in *Liaozhai*, 'Ma Jiefu' ('Ma Jiefu' (212) 马介甫, p721-736), can be seen as equally misogynistic, in the punishment the immortal Ma inflicts as punishment upon her. Judith Zeitlin also argues that the shrew, 'is a justification for and a vindication of the most misogynistic view of women', arguing that she exaggerates and intensifies the worst feminine traits in Chinese thinking; 'She is not so much *un*feminine as *hyper*feminine.' Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p130

71 Wu, 'The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy', p381.

These tales of shrewish wives find terrifying embodiment in figures such as the crone in 'Squirting'.[72] Here is, quite literally, a 'scattering woman', splashing her deadly water onto the innocent bystanders, killing the wife and maids. And her corpse, when it is found and destroyed, is foul and rotten, consisting of nothing but water. Here, it is an outsider damaging the family, just as a shrew can be seen as coming from outside to wreak havoc within.

So through its monsters – both benign and fearful – the collection presents a complex, and often ambiguous, picture of the family and its idealisation. Not only do tales such as 'Nie Xiaoqian' and 'Yingning' both support *and* subvert social norms, the representations of the fearful female monster unsettle any unified reading of the feminine ideal. The following sections will look at a different aspect of the family in *Liaozhai* – childbirth and children – examining further the collection's complex portrayal of this social ideal, and its reflection in the monstrous.

Part II: Monstrous Birth

The second part of this chapter will examine the theme of monstrous birth in the collection. It will argue that in *Liaozhai*, this breaking of boundaries and the monstrous births that ensue portray new life triumphing against the odds, and the upholding of the social order through its monstrous subversion.

There are a number of very different portrayals of childbirth within the collection, with key themes that overlap. Some seem to mirror the idea of childbearing as a reward, granted by the will of heaven; in these stories children are granted to those who most desire (and deserve) them. Several stories portray the monster giving birth to a child who is then accepted as human. Several also represent pregnancies which break the boundaries of species, and of life and death. Before looking at these tales in the collection, I first briefly consider the ways in which pregnancy and childbirth were thought of in Qing China.

Pregnancy and Childbirth in Qing China

Ming-Qing China was a profoundly pro-natalist culture. Producing heirs was one of the most important tasks of the good Confucian man. Sons were necessary in order to carry on the family lineage, and so a failure to produce sons was seen as both a private and a public

72 'Squirting', p8-9.

problem. A new wife's incorporation into her husband's lineage depended on her becoming mother to a son.[73] If a wife was unable to bear children, this was grounds for divorce, in which case most men would hope to take a second wife.[74] Rather than divorcing his wife, a man who still had no heirs at the age of forty was encouraged to take a concubine in order to provide the family with heirs.

In this context, the role of mother was seen as vital, and honoured. However, it was not unambiguous. Charlotte Furth has examined Ming-Qing medical thinking about pregnancy and childbirth. She describes how medicine labelled women as the 'sickly sex', and bound them to their children as both nurturing creators *and* a toxic source of childhood disease and death: it was thought that emotions such as lust and anger could 'heat the womb' and cause the baby to die. So the thinking about the childbearing female body was two-sided; it could provide heirs, but it was also the sources of the dangerous emotions and pollution that could kill these heirs.[75] Furth also points out that there was high infant mortality in this period, as well as serious risks to the mother herself.[76]

Reproduction, however, was not only seen as a matter of biology. It was also a moral issue. There was a widespread belief that children were granted by the will of heaven. Offspring could be granted as a reward but also withheld as punishment. The transgressions of both the present generation – whether men or women – and of their ancestors, could block the line of descent.[77]

So both the female and the male body could be implicated in the success or failure to produce an heir. It was a question not only of the regulation of the body, but also of moral containment. As discussed in Chapter Three, the boundaries of the body were regulated in terms of both sustenance and waste, and also behaviour and emotion. There was a linking of the well-ordered body to a well-ordered family and society – new life and the continuation of the lineage was, as already mentioned, both a private and a public, social issue. Yet childbirth was dangerously uncontained, posing risks not only to the mother and child but also to male authority. The birth itself was an area from which the male was excluded, giving power instead to boundary-crossing women such as midwives (who will be discussed in the

73 Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p283, p339

74 Ibid., p352. She points out, however, that this need not always be the case. And in some cases, such as where a wife had nursed her husband's parents through sickness, or gone through mourning for them, or if she had no home to return to, she could not be legally divorced.

75 Charlotte Furth, 'Concepts of Pregnancy and Childbirth in Ch'ing Dynasty China', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46, 1 (Feb. 1987), p7-35.

76 Ibid, p28.

77 Waltner, *Getting an Heir,* p14.

following chapter), and to the mother.

The many different representations of childbearing in *Liaozhai* reflect this pro-natalist culture. They also reflect the argument discussed above – that monstrosity allows for the upholding of social ideals. Time and again in the collection, the tales provide their protagonists with heirs through monstrous means – children are born to ghosts and to fox spirits, to a woman in her eighties, and even to a man. However, by portraying not natural birth, but monstrous birth as what allows new life to succeed against the odds, the tales also subvert the pro-natalist, Confucian culture. Order is created through disorder, as the following sections will discuss.

The Ghostly Body and Birth

The female ghost was the locus of several different discourses. When a young, unmarried woman died, she disrupted the Chinese kinship system; not truly belonging to her natal family, she had no proper burial place, and without a husband or children, she had no one obligated to look after her posthumous worship.[78] Discussing the tale 'The Beauty's Head', in Chapter Three, I examined how the protagonists of this story attempted to bring the unknown girl back into the social system to contain the disorder she brings, first through legal means, then through a proper burial. The female ghost's body, therefore, is problematic within the social and familiar system.

However, she was also a major manifestation of the cult of *qing*, transforming, throughout Chinese literary tradition, from the frightening to the fragile.[79] The Ming and Qing saw the epitome of this representation, in what Zeitlin calls the 'hyperfeminine' ghostly body. Marked by her beauty and fragility, she was not only an object of desire but also a way of projecting fear back onto the supernatural itself.[80] As Charlotte Furth points out, 'Threatening symbols of female power were replaced by benign symbols of female generativity and weakness that moderated pollution taboos and permitted an interpretation of gender based on paternalism, pity and protection.'[81] As discussed in Chapter Two – both fear and desire are combined in *Liaozhai*, often within one body.

The emphasis on the fragile body of the ghost ties it to several issues. It recalls the ambiguity surrounding the female, child-bearing body, which was seen as both life-giving

78 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai*, p11.
79 See Chapter Two of this thesis. And Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p24.
80 Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p17.
81 Charlotte Furth, 'Blood, Body and Gender: Medical Images of the Female Condition in China.' *Chinese Science*, 7 (1986), p64.

and as threatening to life. It also suggests the idealisation of a certain figure of femininity, adding an extra dimension to the portrayal discussed above of the 'ideal' combination of wife and courtesan. In her fragility, the ghost is not only beautiful and loyal, but she is also in need of protection. This could be a manifestation of what, as discussed in Chapter Two, Luo Hui calls the 'subconscious male desire to subjugate the female body with patriarchal power, and thereby symbolically place the wild and the dangerous under human control.'[82]

However, I argue that those stories in which the ghostly body becomes a *child-bearing* body problematises this viewpoint. In order to consider this point further, I will look at two stories of ghostly families. In the story 'Qiaoniang', (巧娘), a love triangle develops between a human man, a fox, and a ghost.[83] This is a tale that appears from the very beginning to be very much concerned with fertility and the need for heirs:

> 'Fu, a Cantonese gentleman in his sixties, had an only son named Lian, an extremely intelligent young man who had the misfortune to have been 'born a eunuch'. When our story commences he was seventeen years old, but his member was still tiny and shrivelled, no larger than a silkworm. This defect of his was common knowledge, and his marriage prospects were worse than poor.
>
> The thought of the imminent extinction of his family caused his father unremitting anguish. This, he would reflect wretchedly to himself, was his bitter but ineluctable fate.'[84]

However, a lucky set of coincidences send Lian to the home of Qiaoniang, a ghost who shares her tomb with a pair of foxes. The fox mother cures Lian, and eventually he makes a home with both the fox daughter, and the ghost Qiaoniang. Qiaoniang provides him with a son, who is handsome, sturdy and human-looking, 'not at all the half-ghost' that Lian's worried mother had been expecting. He is therefore able to fulfil his filial obligations.

And the ghost mothers themselves become more human through childbirth. They are accepted into the human family, so they are marked as *socially* human. But in the case of Nie Xiaoqian, they also become *physically* human. Nie Xiaoqian starts the process of becoming human by eating food, and she finishes the process by providing her husband with sons. In what could be seen as a warped reflection of Qing society, a ghost is accepted into the lineage when she provides an heir, just as a human woman is only truly incorporated into a lineage when she becomes mother to a son.

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82 Luo Hui, *The Ghost of Liaozhai*, p110.
83 'Qiao niang' (75) 巧娘, 'Qiaoniang', p256-264.
84 Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p238.

In 'Wanxia', (晚霞) both parents are ghosts, but by the end of the tale, the only way in which this is shown is that they have no shadow; their son is completely human.[85] So they are the ideal Confucian family – filial children who have ensured the survival of the lineage. And they have done this by breaking the boundaries of life and death; not only by returning to the world of the living, but by Wanxia's body containing both death and new life.

To return to 'Qiaoniang', by the end of the story there has been a complete turnaround in the fortunes of both Lian and Qiaoniang herself. Lian has been cured of his disability. And Qiaoniang, who before she died was married to another 'natural eunuch', has finally found a 'real man' who can give her a son. Zeitlin argues that 'Qiaoniang' replaces male deficiency with male super-potency, 'whose sign is the impregnated ghost.' Lian has overcome his deficiency to the extent of reversing death's course, engendering new life. It is a sign, Zeitlin goes on to say, of *yang*'s victory over *yin*.[86] Here, the power or authority lost by the man in the process of childbirth can be seen as regained, his position reasserted. The monstrous body of the ghost is sidelined, pushed into a subservient position which exists only to provide proof of male 'potency'.

But another reading of these stories is that pregnancy allows the monster its own 'becoming' – that by challenging both the physical boundaries of the body, and the boundaries of life and death, both humanity and monstrosity are problematised. Both Lian and Qiaoniang move between humanity and monstrosity, and both become hybrid. The ghost's body bearing a human child shows the boundaries of human/ monster, self/other to be unclear. It holds both death and life, both monster and human. And Lian shows the human body can move between monstrosity and humanity.

Birth and death combined in the body of the pregnant ghost recalls the discussion of grotesque realism, in Chapter Three, which argued that the monstrous body in *Liaozhai* can be positive and life-renewing, as well as fearful. Bakhtin himself discusses the image of the senile pregnant hags in the Kerch terracotta collection, who are laughing. 'It is a pregnant death,' he writes, 'a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. And as such it is precisely the

85 'Wanxia' (420) 晚霞, 'Wanxia', p1476-1481.

86 Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p32. She also argues that this portrayal lends support to the thesis that in late imperial China, the erotic (as opposed to the pornographic) was strongly linked to reproduction, unlike modern constructions of the erotic as an entirely separate realm of pleasure. (p33).

grotesque concept of the body.[87]

The *Liaozhai* pregnant ghosts are neither decaying nor deformed, and yet the principles they embody can be said to be the same. They contain both death and life in one body, and thus the incompleteness and renewal that the grotesque encapsulates. The difference, however, is that in *Liaozhai* death and life are represented in the beautiful, female ghostly body. This reflects the overall depiction of monstrous childbirth in *Liaozhai*, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Monstrous Births

Despite the real dangers involved in childbirth, in its portrayal in *Liaozhai* it loses its associations with pollution and danger. Instead, certain of the dangerous, 'uncontained' aspects of birth are contained and made safe.

Princess Yunluo (雲羅公主), a fox spirit, becomes pregnant with the child of her human lover. When the time comes to give birth, however, she states that she cannot put her body through such stress, and transfers the child into the stomach of her maid, who then gives birth.[88] Another fox cuts her child out of her own stomach.[89] And in the tale 'Chang'e', (嫦娥), the eponymous, immortal heroine simply pulls a baby boy and girl from her right and left sides, presenting them to the male protagonist as offspring.[90]

These characters are often those who are 'transient' - who stay for a limited time and then leave. They are examples of the figure which Keith McMahon calls 'the remarkable woman', as discussed in Chapter Two. He writes that, 'She is brazen and cool at will; she comes and goes without the man's control; she educates and helps him in times of crisis.'[91] And she is able to manage the home and see to the reproduction of children without involving herself in normal child birth or child rearing.'[92] These fox spirits and other supernatural creatures are able to change their bodies in ways impossible for human women. Whilst child-bearing posed serious threats to the physical health of human women, and also dictated, in many ways, their social position, the monster is free from these effects. As discussed throughout the thesis, the monstrous body, in its many possibilities, is allowed a

87 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p25-26.
88 'Yunluo gongzhu' (380) 雲羅公主, 'Princess Yunluo', p1264-1275.
89 'Third Lady Lotus', p686.
90 'Chang'e', p1069-1079.
91 McMahon, 'The Remarkable Woman in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*', p214.
92 Ibid., p220.

freedom unavailable to the human body in its 'pure' and singular form.

Therefore, very often in *Liaozhai*, in order to bring about more perfect conclusions, the human body itself needs to become monstrous. Becoming monstrous allows the human body to achieve extraordinary things, as discussed in the previous chapter in relation to characters such as Xiang Gao. In this way, several instances of what could be seen as wish-fulfilment relating to childbirth occur in the tales. In 'Jin Yongnian' (金永年), an old couple have given up hope of producing an heir. The husband has a dream, however, in which an immortal appears and tells him that he will have a son. The next day, to his disbelief, he finds his seventy-eight year old wife is pregnant, and she gives birth to a healthy son.[93] In another story, 'A Boy Gives Birth to Sons' (男生子) an officer's male lover becomes pregnant. He dreams that children are cut out of his side by a god. The next day he finds a scar on his side, and twin boys beside him.[94] Here again the family is strengthened through monstrosity – boundaries have been crossed and norms subverted, but through this subversion the ideal has been reached.

In some *Liaozhai* tales, a man is not needed at all in the process of childbirth. In 'Su Xian', (蘇仙) a woman is crouching on a rock at the side of a river, washing clothes, when some grass in the water wraps itself around the rock.[95] Later, she discovers she is pregnant, and gives birth to a son who grows up to possess strange powers.[96] In another story, 'The Clay Statue', (土偶) a woman's husband dies, leaving her childless. She has a clay statue made in his likeness, and later bears a son. The boy is proved to be the son of the clay statue by the fact that he only possesses a pale and insubstantial shadow, proving that he is not wholly human.[97] In this story, the boundaries of life and death have again been crossed.

Stories such as these, in which men play no part in the creation of new life, can be seen to balance the argument which stems from stories such as 'Qiaoniang', that it is male 'super-potency' that can break the boundaries of life and death. Instead, throughout the

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93 'Jin yongnian' (183) 金永年, 'Jin Yongnian', p633.

94 'Nan sheng zi' (298) 男生子, 'A Boy Gives Birth to Sons', p1037. In her investigation of gender identity and anomalies in late imperial China, Charlotte Furth found three late Ming accounts of men who were said to have given birth, 'in contexts which suggest that many associated this phenomenon with current fashions in sodomy.' Furth, 'Blood, Body and Gender', p486. This supports the way that childbirth is framed in this story.

95 'Su xian' (91) 蘇仙, 'Su the Immortal', p311-312.

96 It is worth noting that the idea of 'the maternal imagination' – which in Europe greatly influenced ideas of monstrous birth - does not seem to have taken hold in China, although certain stories do recall it in some ways in the idea that desires can affect the body and its processes. This idea stemmed from the belief that the paintings and statues a woman looked at whilst pregnant could lead to 'false resemblance' – the offspring 'products of art rather than nature, as it were.' See Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993, p7.

97 'The Clay Statue', p661.

collection, there seems to be an impulse towards fertility and new life, the representation of monstrosity perhaps reflecting traditional thinking about the body and cosmos, their links and their dynamic relationship.

Monstrous Children

One of the rare tales in which monstrosity is clearly seen on the child's body is 'Giving Birth to a Dragon' (產龍). In this tale, as a woman is giving birth, a dragon's head is seen. When the baby is eventually born, although there is no dragon's head, it has translucent skin, through which all its organs can be seen.[98] In most tales of monstrous children in *Liaozhai*, however, monstrosity is not exhibited so openly on the child's body.

In 'Nie xiaoqian', and 'Wanxia', the children born to ghosts are clearly marked as human.[99] The stories emphasise that the children are strong and healthy, not at all 'ghostly'. In 'Su Xian' and 'The Clay Statue' the protagonists are human women, but give birth to children which are marked in different ways as 'strange'; the child in 'The Clay Statue' possesses a pale shadow, and Su Xian's son possesses strange powers. In 'Yingning', right at the end of the story, it is remarked that her son, even when he was very young, was never afraid of strangers, but always laughed in their presence, just like his mother.

Another story which deals overtly with a monstrous family and its children is 'The Yaksha Kingdom' (夜叉國).[100] In this tale, a man named Xu is shipwrecked on an island which he finds to be inhabited by fearsome *yechas* – hideous beings with sharp fangs and glaring eyes, who eat raw animal flesh. When he is seen by the *yechas*, it seems that they want to eat him too, but he saves himself by offering them the food he is carrying. Eventually, by cooking for them, he is accepted by them and even given a wife. He is afraid of her at first, but soon live happily together. After some years, his wife gives birth to triplets – two boys and one girl, 'all of whom were ordinary human beings and not at all like the mother'.[101] By the end of the story, the whole family – after being split up when Xu left, with just one of the sons – is reunited and sails to China, where they become assimilated into the country, wearing Chinese clothes and learning the language.

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98 'Chan long' (134) 產龍, 'Giving Birth to a Dragon', p474.

99 'Nie Xiaoqian', p160-168; 'Wanxia', p1476-1481.

100 'Yecha guo' (100) 夜叉國, 'The Yaksha Kingdom', p348-354. Both *yecha* in this tale and *luosha* in 'The Rakshas' Sea Market' ('Luosha haishi' (132) 羅殺海市, p454-465) are Chinese renderings of the sanskrit Yaksha, a kind of nature spirit or demon, often found in Buddhist writings.

101 Translation Giles, p230.

There are several interesting aspects to this story which revolve around the family, the importance of which is emphasised when Xu's *yecha* wife berates him for running off without her, and Xu acknowledges his own error.

The human appearance of the children in the tale is underlined, and yet their monstrosity is still visible in different ways. Because of her origins as the daughter of a *yecha* mother, the young girl in the story has some difficulty finding a husband. Her brother, though, is successful in the army, and a sergeant under his command – a widower named Yuan – consents to marry her. She has skills which are unusual for a girl – she can shoot birds at one hundred paces, never missing. Furthermore, she accompanies her husband on his military campaigns, and his rise in rank is due to her. This military prowess is shown to be inherited from her mother, who rides into battle with her son, fighting side by side with him and terrorising their adversaries. The two sons are also portrayed as possessing military skills.

So although by the end of the story the family are happily ensconced in the human world, and although the children are said to be 'human', the women in the family have not taken on traditionally female roles. Because of their monstrosity they are portrayed as taking on the male roles of fighting and military skill.

Other stories also take on this theme of a family split between two worlds. In 'The Man Who Was Turned Into a Crow', Yu puts on his coat of feathers in order to be able to fly between his human family and his beloved Zhuqing, who was once a crow but is now a spirit of the Han river.[102] Zhuqing gives birth to a boy, Hanchan (漢產, meaning 'born of the Han river'). Yu's human wife has no children, and she becomes so fond of Hanchan when he comes to visit that she doesn't wish to give him up. However, after months pass he is taken ill and dies. Yu then finds that Hanchan has been called home by Zhuqing, who says that Yu's human wife must wait until there is another child. She later gives birth to another boy and a girl, and Hanchan returns to the human world. He is called home again, however, when his mother does not believe there is a mortal woman good enough for him to marry; she instead arranges a marriage to the daughter of a spirit like herself.

The tension in this tale between the two worlds of the human and the non-human is played out within the family, with a child at its centre. This mirrors the tensions in the human family in which the husband in a childless couple may have turned to a concubine or taken another wife in order to provide an heir. Again, it is ultimately monstrosity which leads to the successful forming of the family. However, the story also makes it clear that this is not simple

102 'The Man Who Was Turned Into a Crow', p1516-1520.

wish-fulfilment. Zhuqing does not allow her son to stay for too long in the human world whilst he is still young, and Yu's human wife must bear the tragedy of his apparent death in repayment for her desire to keep him with her.

Many of the tales concerning the family in *Liaozhai* depict positive outcomes to the entrance of the monster or the becoming monstrous of the human. But, as already discussed, key to *Liaozhai* is its exploration of different possibilities and outcomes. One of the collection's darkest tales of revenge and murder, 'Li Shi', (黎氏) tells of the destruction of the family by the monster .[103] In this story, a man rapes a wolf in the mountains. She later appears in human form, seeking her revenge. She gains his trust, and when he leaves his children with her, murders them. As pointed out in the previous chapter, wolves are one of the few animals in *Liaozhai* who are, on the whole, portrayed in a negative way. The revenge in this story, however, is particularly horrific, aimed as it is at the man's children. Again, there are certain things that can be read into this tale. Firstly, it could be seen that Li Shi is acting in the realm in which a woman held a certain amount of power: as already discussed, child-bearing both empowered women, though it also put them in physical and social danger. Yet this power was also feared, posing a challenge to male authority.

This is not limited to imperial China, however. As Marina Warner writes of the Greek tragedy of *Medea*, which tells of a woman who murders her own children in order to seek revenge on her husband; 'Her maternity is the terrain of her authority... and so she strikes at Jason where he is most vulnerable, and where his reach – and all men's – is weakest.'[104]

Grotesque Inversions of Childbearing

Other tales in the collection also puncture any simplistic reading of childbirth as unambiguously positive. Lydia Chiang examines two stories which she calls 'horrific inversions of pregnancy' – 'The Ghost's Saliva', '鬼津' and 'Drawing Out the Intestines', '抽腸'. In the first, a hideous female ghost attacks a man on his bed, forcing her saliva into his mouth. Later, his belly swells up as if he were pregnant, and he almost dies.[105] In the second,

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103 'The Li Clan', p680-681.

104 Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time*, London: Vintage, 1994, p7. Another *Liaozhai* tale, 'Xi hou' (229) 细候, 'Xi Hou', p791-74, seems to mirror this. In this tale, a mother kills her child in order to punish her husband, who had her lover imprisoned. At the end of the tale, after killing the child, she leaves her husband in order to rejoin the man she loves. Ma Ruifang draws the comparison between Xi Hou and Medea (*Jiang Liaozhai*, p47), and echoing the Historian's own comment, writes admiringly of the young woman's strength of character. (*Shengui huyao de shijie*, p55).

105 'The Ghost's Saliva', p945.

the protagonist is alone in his room when two figures enter – a man, and a woman with an enormous, swollen stomach. Realising that they are ghosts, the protagonist stays silent, and watches in horror as the man cuts open the woman's belly, to pull out her entrails and drape them around the room. They are also thrown over the protagonist himself, who begins to scream. When his family enter, there is no trace of the figures, nor of the entrails he swears he saw.[106]

Whilst neither of these stories portray actual pregnancy or birth, they can be seen as their grotesque inversion. Chiang, who reads the *Liaozhai* horror tales as portrayals of male anxiety, argues that, 'Like the opened female body in 'The Disembowelment', the swollen male abdomen in 'Demonic Saliva' implies a displaced grotesque womb that is beyond male comprehension and control.'[107] Whether or not this kind of psychoanalytical reading is given to the stories, it can still be argued that in their grotesque mirrorings of pregnancy they nonetheless hint at the fearful and anxiety-provoking side of childbirth; a representation of a male-centred anxiety stemming from a process from which they will always, to some extent, be excluded.

The childbearing body could be said to be a liminal body – a transitional state, in which change takes place, and something new is created. As discussed in Chapter Three, liminal states are themselves said to be capable both of destruction and of creation. The childbearing body becomes new, doubled, strange, beyond control. It becomes, in other words, uncanny – the familiar body turns into something strange and unfamiliar. Ming-Qing medical thinking made clear the genuine anxieties about pregnancy and childbirth – the pollution of the mother which was dangerous to the child, and the physical danger to the mother herself. The mixture of medical and religious and cosmological beliefs surrounding childbirth point to the complex methods which went in to attempting to understand this vital aspect of society. The birth itself was also something from which men were normally excluded. In a society in which male and female roles were often very segregated, men had little to do with the task of childbirth. So this most vital aspect of life was one over which they had very little control. In this context, the stories of grotesque inversions of childbirth could be seen as portraying the very real anxieties which birth provoked. The two stories above also portray an inversion of power relations. In both, it is women who threaten the helpless male. Lydia Chiang goes as far as to argue that 'The Ghost's Saliva' portrays; 'a metaphorical enactment of 'rape' – a grotesque female who forces her bodily fluids on an

106 'Drawing Out the Intestines', p1226.
107 Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, p91.

unwilling partner.'[108] This inversion of power relations could be seen as stemming from the fear of loss of control for the male which childbirth represents; fear of the liminal state of pregnancy, in which the female body becomes different, and doubled; fear of the birth itself, for being unable to control it and all the dangers associated with it (both physical, for mother and child). And also fear of what may come afterwards – the potential disruption that new life can bring to the family. As Marina Warner writes, discussing monsters and mothers from myth to modern times, 'Ungoverned energy in the female always raises the issue of motherhood and the extent of maternal authority; fear that the natural bond excludes men and eludes their control courses through ancient myth.'[109] The mother's body has a power which is lacking in the male. And mothers and children share a bond that the male cannot replicate, posing a challenge to male authority.

So these grotesque stories perhaps reflect the monstrosity seen as inherent within childbearing and the family. Children are longed for, yet they pose a threat to the physical body and to the body of the family. Mixed with the wonder and delight of childbirth is anxiety; *Liaozhai* punctures any simplistic view of the world, arguing that nothing is as simple as it seems.

Conclusion

Time and again in *Liaozhai*, ideal situations are reached through monstrous means. This chapter has shown how the family – at the heart of Confucian society – is created or strengthened, in many tales, through the entry of the monster or of monstrosity. The previous chapter argued that desires and goals can be achieved in *Liaozhai* through the hybridity of the human and animal world; the monster as neither wholly human nor wholly animal but a mixture of both, enabling a greater freedom and self-determination. A similar framework can be seen in this chapter – becoming monstrous, the human family is strengthened and lineages continued. The monster, concurrently, is granted their desire of being accepted into the human world, one of the ultimate goals of certain of the monsters who pass as human.

By creating this ideal family, 'becoming monstrous' could be said to be highly conservative, upholding Confucian norms and morals. As Schlossberg points out, 'passing' can hold existing structures in place, despite its apparent subversiveness.[110] The monstrous

108 Ibid.
109 Warner, *Managing Monsters,* p4.
110 Schlossberg, *Passing,* p11

women become model Confucian women, serving their husbands and mothers-in-law and providing heirs for the continuation of the lineage. And the men are able to achieve both their own desires and their duties as filial sons and contained, Confucian men.

However, I argue that, despite the ideal Confucian outcomes that monstrosity creates in certain tales, there is nonetheless a subversive element to the collection as a whole, unsettling any simple representation of the monstrous as a function of conservative ideals. In tales of the idealised family created by the entrance of the monster or by monstrous birth, the monstrosity – the making hybrid of the human family – that allows for this ideal is inherently subversive, a crossing of boundaries that unsettles the hierarchical, ordered social structure. Furthermore, as so often in *Liaozhai*, the darker side of desire, of idealisation, can also be seen, and the stories warn of the dangers inherent in the family and in childbirth, illustrating again that monstrosity in the collection is complex and ambiguous, reflecting the very real ambiguities that existed in society, and suggesting the precariousness of human life.

Chapter Six: Monstrous Margins

Introduction

The monster is a boundary creature: guarding boundaries, unsettling them, existing on their other side but threatening always to escape them. 'The monster stands at the threshold', writes Cohen; 'They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world... but they always return.'[1]

Throughout this thesis I have discussed the theme of boundaries and boundary-crossing in relation to *Liaozhai* and the monstrous. I have looked at how monstrosity threatens bodily boundaries, social boundaries, as well as those between species and even between life and death. The previous chapter examined the paradoxical nature of boundary-crossing in the collection, in the way in which boundaries and the social norms they protect are both supported and subverted when the monster enters the centre of the human social structure, the family. In this chapter I return to one of Asa Mittman's criteria of the monster; always escaping from categories, the monster has nevertheless been known in different ways: through its body, its behaviour, and its impact, all of which have been discussed throughout this thesis. But Mittman also points out that in many contexts the monster has also been known by its geography; that monsters were thought to exist on far continents, or beyond the known spaces on maps, far away from the familiar, 'civilised', centre. The chapter will take the discussion of boundaries and boundary-crossing in *Liaozhai* further by looking more closely at the idea of centre and margins, considering some of the complex ways in which the consequences of geographical boundary-crossing are portrayed. It will look at how the home is constructed as the centre of human space, and how, through the entrance of the monster, it becomes marginal; how the homely and unhomely merge into one. It will also look at the wider spaces of *Liaozhai*; how they are represented as marginal, and what happens when a human stumbles upon them.

Boundaries, Walls, Thresholds

Of all human spaces, the home is the most private and most protected, around which humans

[1] Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p20.

raise the strongest of boundaries. If the family in imperial China was a microcosm of society, the home itself was 'an embodiment of neo-Confucian values... [it] sheltered a family line, the dead as well as the living, and tied it into a historical and geographic network of patrilineal kinship.'[2] And like the larger Confucian world, the home was a place, to use Keith McMahon's words, of control and containment. Things had their place in the home, and people their roles. The women's chambers, the man's study, the garden, were all separate and controlled by the walls which divided them and the social norms which ruled them.[3] In his study of Chinese vernacular fiction in the seventeenth century, McMahon's main thesis is the idea of 'containment'; the control of the self and of desires demanded by the strict norms of Confucian society, and how it is challenged in fiction. He writes that; 'containment and its opposites, for example, abandon, change, interaction, are central ideas for observing how fiction handles problems of conformity and transgression.'[4] The contained self achieves equilibrium by prescribing boundaries for itself between, for instance, proper and improper, enough and too much, or self and other.'[5] The home was constructed as a way of keeping those boundaries. Yet time and again in *Liaozhai*, as in the fiction which McMahon examines, boundaries are breached, containment fails; eyes are put to chinks in the wall, beautiful women are spied upon, space is invaded by outsiders both dangerous and benign. For all its framework of control and containment, the space of the home is vulnerable.

McMahon points out that walls, doors, windows and their various openings are 'omnipresent props in both real and fictional Chinese landscapes', highlighting the fact that they are both barriers and openings; they can be thresholds, the point at which boundaries are crossed or where the two spaces meet. These thresholds or 'interstices' can provide the story with narrative openings; the 'crack in the wall' setting up a typical seduction scenario in vernacular fiction for example.[6]

Such thresholds can be dangerous; in 'Painted Skin', it is when Wang spies on the beautiful young woman in his home that he realises she is really a demon. In 'Yingning' it is

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2 Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p59.

3 Traditional domestic worship emphasized the idea of control and hierarchy with its categories of spiritual beings in and around the home, each with a designated area in the domestic arena; the Stove God above the stove, the ancestors in the family altar inside the house, and the wandering ghosts outside the back door. See Kang Xiaofei, *Power on the Margins: The Cult of the Fox in Late Imperial and Modern North China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p72. See Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p60, for a discussion of the home as a 'cosmic, energetic space', designed as a magical shelter from wind or evil influences; 'a site that would channel cosmic energies (*qi*) for the benefit of its occupants.'

4 Bray, *Technology and Gender*, pix.

5 Ibid., p10, p9.

6 McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth Century Chinese Fiction*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988, p2, p26.

at the wall which divides her new home from her neighbour's that she reveals her dangerous, monstrous power. And in tales of men lost in the wilderness, as will be discussed below, stepping beyond the bounds of familiar human space and into the forests or mountains brings encounters with dangerous and fearful creatures.

Yet thresholds are also desired. From the very beginning of the collection the Historian of the Strange longs for boundary-crossing 'across the dark frontier.' Human protagonists long to find a way out of their narrow, restricted lives. Ghosts long to cross back to the world of the living. The monster who crosses into the human world can bring the fulfilment of desires, and the human who enters the wilderness may find enchanted realms. In a number of tales, the desire for boundary-crossing is granted, another reflection of the wish-fulfilment discussed in the previous chapter, as well as the portrayal of desire as active. Judith Zeitlin points out that whilst boundaries and openings in the kinds of vernacular fiction that McMahon deals with tend to be concrete, in *Liaozhai* they 'can simply materialize in response to the hero's desire and imagination.'[7] In the story 'Jinse' (錦瑟), for example, a door opens in a cliff, allowing the hero to follow the beautiful ghost he has spied; in 'The Frescoed Wall' (畫壁), the protagonist enters the wall painting and meets the lovely girl whose image he has been admiring; and for those lost in the wilderness, shelter or refuge may suddenly appear, as will be discussed further below.[8]

For McMahon, walls are boundaries 'across which the 'truth' must pass'. Privileged domains will always be threatened. This, he writes, is the 'law of walls'.[9] Throughout this chapter I will examine *Liaozhai*'s own 'law of walls'; how order is unsettled by boundary-crossing, and how truths are revealed.

The Unhomely Home

In previous chapters I have argued that the fox is the eternal 'in-between', an 'other' both close to and distant from the human, and thus a perfect means of embodying the monster's function of 'revealing'. Rania Huntington discusses how the fox 'throws human space into disorder and renders it strange, reveals concepts of order... a geography of human space, with the most sensitive centre the home itself.' In discussing the ways in which the fox enters the home, Huntington argues that fox tales 'test of how a household can not only become *unheimlich*...

7 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p194.
8 'Jinse' (484) '錦瑟', 'Jinse', p1682-1689; 'The Frescoed Wall', p14-17.
9 McMahon, *Causality and Containment*, p27.

but how the *unheimlich* can become *heimlich* again.'[10]

In his famous essay, 'The Uncanny', written in 1919, Freud examines the German word *unheimlich*, which literally translates as 'unhomely', and its opposite, *heimlich*, meaning 'familiar', or 'belonging to the home.'[11] Whilst there may seem to be clear distinctions between the two words, *heimlich* is in fact highly ambiguous, 'belonging to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight.' The two sets of ideas blur into each other, as something that is *heimlich* - which belongs to the house and home, with its associated feelings of security - gradually takes on the dimensions of its opposite; the unhomely, something secret and concealed. Thus, the notion of something hidden and dangerous is developed further, so that *heimlich* 'develops in the direction of ambivalence', coming to have the meaning usually ascribed to '*unheimlich*'.[12]

One of the clearest illustrations of the ambivalent meanings of *heimlich* is the 'haunted house', in which the space of the home invaded by the monstrous. It first contains the meaning of *heimlich* as, 'belonging to the house or family'; intimate, homelike, at ease, free from fear. But when the boundaries of the home are crossed – when the walls are breached – the space changes, moving towards the more negative meaning of the term. The monster, as a marginal creature, makes the home itself marginal; *heimlich* in the sense of something 'unhomely', 'something withdrawn from the eyes of others, something concealed, secret...'. What is in the home should be familiar and safe, but the entrance of the monster turns the familiar into the unfamiliar, *heimlich* into its opposite.

The tales discussed in the previous chapter can be seen as embodying this movement between *heimlich*/ *unheimlich*. In stories such 'Nie Xiaoqian' and 'Yingning', the monster crosses boundaries into the human home, unsettling social order and norms. Yet this boundary-crossing creates ideal domestic situations. The home thus comes to contain a meeting of *heimlich*'s two meanings – both that which is concealed and secret, even fearful, in the marginal figure of the monster and that which is familiar, safe, homely, as the monster

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10 Huntington, *Alien Kind,* p89, p126.

11 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, ed. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p154.

12 Ibid, p156-157. This brief discussion cannot do justice to the complexities of Freud's essay or its themes. Anthony Vidler, discussing 'uncanny architecture', remarks on the difficulty of defining the 'uncanny' – something which Freud himself illustrates in his essay. Sharing qualities with the 'allied genres of fear' – terror, horror, anxiety – 'the uncanny revelled in its non-specificity, one reinforced by the multiplicity of untranslatable words that served to indicate its presence in different languages.' Vidler, Anthony. *The Architectural Uncanny*: *Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1996, p22. For an in-depth examination of the uncanny and its various meanings and representations, see Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction,* New York: Routledge, 2003.

strengthens the family. Rather than Huntington's formulation of the home moving from *heimlich* to *unheimlich* and then back again through the entry of the fox, the home here comes to contain both meanings – like the term *heimlich* itself.

This reflects the working of the monstrous throughout *Liaozhai*; the way in which the human and the monstrous, the ordinary and the extraordinary, the fearful and the wondrous blur into each other, combined within different tales, the same tale, or even the same body.

And it is through this blurring of boundaries, this becoming hybrid, or becoming uncanny, that the monster 'brings to light', to use Freud's words, what is secret and hidden. 'Nie Xiaoqian' and 'Yingning', through crossing social boundaries, reveal patterns of social and familial order. The metamorphosing monsters may reveal their true essence through their monstrous transformation, and truth may be written grotesquely onto the human body in tales such as 'Huo Sheng' or 'The Duck Thief', discussed in Chapter Three. In order to understand the workings of the uncanny and of marginal space in *Liaozhai*, I look in the following sections at some of the ways in which space is portrayed in the collection; at how *Liaozhai*'s own 'law of walls' functions.

Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio

Through the collection's title, the telling of the *Liaozhai* tales is situated in a very specific place before the stories have even begun – in the studio (*zhai*, 齋) of the writer. A studio was usually seen as a retreat from the noise and commitments of everyday life, a place not just for working but for relaxing. It was often set apart from the house itself; a pavilion in the garden, maybe containing a bed or couch. It was in the words of Charlotte Furth, a private, masculine space, that should 'exude the air of a refined recluse'.[13] The scholar could surround himself with his obsessions here; his collection of rocks, or other artefacts, and all the trappings of a scholarly and refined life. John Minford links the 'studio world' to *Liaozhai*'s particular 'flavour' or *quwei* (趣味); the classical language of the tales evoking 'the ambience of the scholar-gentleman's world'.[14] It was more than just a physical space, he argues, it was also a symbolic space, 'a gestalt', denoting a whole cultural, spiritual, aesthetic and sensual world.[15] And it was also in some aspects a marginal space, set apart from the centre of the home; a space in which the boundary-crossing desires of the writer could be indulged.

13 Charlotte Furth, 'Solitude, Silence, and Concealment: Boundaries of the Social Body in Ming Dynasty China', in McDougall and Hansson, *Chinese Concepts of Privacy,* Leiden: Brill, 2002, p40.
14 Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* pxix.
15 Ibid.

This foregrounding of the writing studio is not unique to *Liaozhai* – writers often named their studios and alluded to them in their work, encoding their own personal sense of identity into the name. In the case of *Liaozhai*, the difficulty in the translation of *liao* 聊 is perhaps itself a clue to thr complex collection of tales to follow. John Minford remarks that *liao* is virtually untranslatable, containing several differing yet interconnected senses; besides being an ancient name for a place in Shandong, it also has the meaning of: leisure, time on one's hands, a passing enthusiasm or whim, something ephemeral, chit-chat, a desolate feeling of helplessness or inadequacy.[16] It is, he writes, a little word which is both nothing and everything, 'a mere trifle, a passing whim, but a trifle and a whim charged with poignant meaning.'[17] Like the blurred meanings of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, the meanings contained within liao, and by extension the space of the writer's studio, seem to collapse into each other, so that something which means leisure and pleasant conversation can also mean helplessness and inadequacy; a space of refinement but also a space of 'lonely anguish' (*gufen* 孤憤).

So at the centre of the collection is the private, male space of the writer's studio. Yet the preface, and even the name of the studio itself, make clear that this space is not the idealised, refined retreat from the worries of family and public life. Instead, there is a sense of entrapment and claustrophobia, of fear and anxiety. The Historian is alone and working late at night; the chilling imagery suggests unhappiness and a lack of material wealth. His studio is the first of the collection's *unheimlich* spaces. He evokes the fearful things that seem to surround him, yet he also longs for boundary-crossing, as a way of finding someone who understands him – a means of escape from the confines of his own life. This paradoxical positioning is complicated further by the fact that the Historian, despite seeming to emphasise his own marginality (mocked by goblins and ogres, writing in a cold studio, poor and alone) in fact positions himself at the centre: rather than travelling to the periphery to collect anomalies, he writes down stories sent to him from 'the four corners'. The margins come to him – a movement which is continued in the many tales of monsters crossing boundaries into the human home.

16 Ibid., pxx. Minford's own translation (Penguin Classics) is titled *Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio*, also used by Herbert Giles in his translation. *Tales From Make-Do Studio*, translated by Denis. C. and Victor H. Mair (edition by the University Press of the Pacific, 2005) attempts to retain some of *liao*'s original meaning, as 'leisure' or 'make-do'. Judith Zeitlin translates it as 'Studio of Leisure' or 'Studio of Conversation'.

17 Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, pxx.

The Closed Space – *Liaozhai* and the Gothic

In the preface the writer's studio is portrayed as a bleak and claustrophobic place, entrapping the writer within it. As I discussed in Chapter Two, it sets the scene for the unsettling tales to come. The present chapter returns to this earlier discussion of horror, looking at one specific mode of writing in the horror genre – the Gothic – with which to approach the ways in which physical space is depicted in the collection. Manuel Aguirre calls Gothic fiction the literature of 'the closed space.'[18] Some of the most famous 'haunted houses' in European fiction can be found in these works, a mode of writing whose focus on walls, locked doors, transgression, and the unhomely home makes it a useful lens through which to consider the *Liaozhai* tales and their boundary-crossing monsters. It is also a mode in which the intersections between fear, wonder and desire are explored.

Li Weifang (李偉昉) has made a comparative study of Chinese Six Dynasties *zhiguai* and English Gothic fiction, arguing that there are several reasons why it is useful to make this comparison: both mix fantasy and realism alongside an atmosphere of darkness and settings such as tombs and caves, and both both share certain character types (such as the monster) and narrative similarities. Furthermore, in their effects, both leave the impression of fear and the grotesque.[19] *Liaozhai* continues many of the narrative *zhiguai* traditions that Li highlights in his work, and, as this chapter will discuss, takes even further than earlier *zhiguai* the preoccupation with boundaries and closed spaces. Whilst not making a direct comparison between the two, looking at one through the lens of the other can nonetheless lead to useful insights.

Emerging in eighteenth-century Europe, the Gothic has various different definitions, and there is much critical disagreement surrounding it, leading to its label being given to almost any work which involves the themes of haunting and the supernatural, or of gloomy castles and ruins. It took its name from the medieval German, or 'Gothic' setting of early works such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, written in 1764, and was practised by

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18 See Manuel Aguirre, *The Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Symbolism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990. The terms Gothic and Horror are often conflated. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Noel Carroll calls the Gothic the mode from which the modern horror genre has expanded. Horror has sometimes been called a more violent version of the Gothic (Gina Wisker, *Horror Fiction: An Introduction*, New York; London: Continuum, 2005, p26). However, much of the Gothic mode of writing focuses on romance. It explores both the enchanting and the horrifying. As Clive Bloom states, the Gothic is more closely concerned with the manipulation and exploration of feeling and human nature than Horror, which is concerned with the manipulation of effect. (Clive Bloom, *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p12). It is the effect of the closed space and of the past returning upon the protagonists that the Gothic seeks to explore – the exploration of extremes of feeling.

19 Li Weifang 李偉昉，*Yingguo gete xiaoshuo yu Zhongguo liuchao xiaoshuo bijiao yanjiu* 英國哥特小說與中國六朝志怪小說比較研究, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004, p67.

writers such as Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve and Matthew Lewis, with stories set in crumbling castles and old houses, featuring trapped heroines and villainous anti-heroes. It was in these settings that the monstrous and excessive, were found, and in these spaces that the past was buried, ready always to return, a theme which I will examine more closely below. Nineteenth century works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), continued the Gothic trend, providing at the same time some of English literature's most memorable monsters.[20] Aguirre, one of the foremost critics on the Gothic, discusses its 'closed spaces', meaning not only the spaces of the castle or house, but also the way in which apparently open, natural spaces can be fearful and entrapping. Typical of this type of literature, and a key reason why it is a useful lens through which to examine *Liaozhai* is what Aguirre calls an obsession with crossing a physical or moral boundary; 'the determination (and dread) to lift the veil, cross the threshold…overstep some limit or restriction.' [21] Connecting this way of looking at transgression and *unheimlich* spaces with Keith McMahon's work on walls and thresholds in Chinese fiction can bring to light some interesting aspects of *Liaozhai*'s portrayal of the monstrous and marginal.

The atmosphere of foreboding and sense of entrapment found in the Gothic and in *Liaozhai* can be seen to have roots in the social and economic background of their times. In both seventeenth century China at the time in which *Liaozhai* was written, and the eighteenth century Europe from which the Gothic emerged, economic and social changes were influencing the fiction that was being written. Both were worlds of growing commerce and cities. Both were worlds in which social hierarchies were changing – in Europe, with the rise of industry, and in China, with the rise of the merchant class. Epistemological thinking was also undergoing changes. In Europe the Enlightenment was ushering in new ways of thinking about science and superstitions. In China, as discussed in Chapter Two, traditional correlative thought was being questioned, and the plurality and diversity of the cosmos acknowledged. And alongside these social and cosmological changes had come the upheaval of the Ming-Qing transition and the sense of loss that dynastic transition caused.

This upheaval can be found reflected in certain of the *Liaozhai* tales, which deal

20 The popularity of the Gothic continues today, and its influence can be seen not only on ghost stories and horror fiction but also on works by contemporary authors such as Joyce Carol Oates, who makes use of its claustrophobia and tropes of haunted houses and hidden secrets.

21 Manuel Aguirre, 'Narrative Structure, Liminality, Self-Similarity: The Case of Gothic Fiction', in Bloom, p234.

overtly with the transition and its aftermath.[22] Certainly, the writing of *Liaozhai* at this time can be seen to reflect Feng Menglong's remark that, 'In the times of peace, men and ghosts are kept apart./ In a world like ours, men and ghosts mingle freely.'[23] As David Der-wei Wang points out, these words touch on an important motif in the classical Chinese ghost tale, whether in the vernacular or in literary tradition: at times of chaos (*luanshi* 亂世) the world is so disturbed as to unleash the forces of both social and cosmological transgression.[24] And David Punter highlights the importance of the social changes in Europe to the rise of the Gothic, in words that seem to echo the sentiments of Feng Menglong. At this point in Europe, he writes, 'The individual comes to see him or herself at the mercy of forces which in fundamental ways elude understanding. Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find the emergence of a literature whose key motifs are paranoia, manipulation and injustice, and whose central project is understanding the inexplicable, the taboo, the irrational.'[25]

The Past Returning

The beginnings of the Gothic were prefigured by the 'graveyard poetry' of a number of eighteenth century English poets, who wrote meditations on mortality and suffering, often upon visiting graves or tombs. A similar kind of writing in China is the *huaigu* (怀古); poetic reflections written on visits to historic sites.[26] *Huaigu* are poems of nostalgia and loss, but their composition was inspired not necessarily by proximity to humans' last resting place, but to ancient sites. Judith Zeitlin draws a comparison between Chinese ghost stories and *huaigu*. Whilst she restricts her arguments to stories which feature actual historical events or people, this comparison in fact stands for any tale in which the past returns, in the shape of a ghostly figure. These tales, to use Zeitlin's words, owe to huaigu not merely their setting; '(an abandoned, often ruined site), orientation (contemplation of the past), and mood (melancholy, sensuality, nostalgia), but something even more fundamental: the impulse to recall what has vanished from a place, to fill in what is missing or concealed from view at a spot.[27]

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22 See tales such as 'Gongsun jiuniang' (136) 公孫九娘, 'Gongsun Jiuniang', p477-483, which tells of a young woman who died in the rebellion which followed the transition. Other stories will be discussed in the following section.

23 Feng Menglong, 冯夢龙 in David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That is History,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p262 .

24 Ibid.

25 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions From 1765 to the Present Day,* London: Longman, 1996 vol.1, p112.

26 Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p89.

27 Ibid.

This recalling of the past, linked to a specific place – the 'spatialisation' of time – is key also to the Gothic mode. Whilst *huaigu* relate encounters with the past, lamenting what is lost, the Gothic, and Chinese anomaly tales, emphasise the fearful and fascinating aspects of what happens when past and present meet. And this fearful meeting of past and present is often embodied in the setting of the tales. Whether it is the castles and secret passages of the English Gothic or the tombs, caves and wilderness of *zhiguai*, both involve an atmosphere of mystery and fear. All of these spaces conjure images associated with some of the most primal fears – of isolation, of the dark, of death. The Historian of the Strange's studio, in his preface, evokes this same effect, using the same techniques. Within the stories can be found the closing in of boundaries, the emphasis on locked and secret natures, often entrapping the protagonist within. In fact, I argue that it is more apt to make the comparison between *Liaozhai* and the Gothic than between Six Dynasties *zhiguai* and the Gothic, because of the more intricate plotting involved in the later tales, which mirrors the Gothic's own labyrinthine narratives. So the focus on the past, in both Gothic fiction and Chinese anomaly tales, can be seen as a kind of nostalgic impulse, driven by social upheaval and contemporary uncertainties.[28]

One such way in which the past is perceived and represented is through the physical, enclosed space of buildings; haunted houses, tombs, castles harbouring secrets. In Gothic fiction from *The Castle of Otranto* to *Dracula* and beyond, terrible things wait behind walls to be discovered by the protagonist. Monstrosity is suggested by the architecture within the tales – the grand, gloomy houses and castles whose walls hide secrets. In *Liaozhai* too the past can be seen coming to monstrous life within buildings themselves, as if monstrosity has become embodied not in a person, as in those tales discussed in Chapter Three, but in a place.

The story 'The Weeping Ghosts' (鬼哭), for example, is set in the house of Commissioner Wang, which had been commandeered by rebels during the Xie Qian troubles:

'When the government troops eventually retook the town and massacred the

28 Both types of writing have been connected with historical writing; Robert Campany sees *zhiguai* as being a part of the cosmographic project, the writing down of the cosmos, connected with the writing of history (arguing against those scholars who see *zhiguai* as 'the birth of fiction' in China. See Campany, *Strange Writing*, and Kenneth DeWoskin, 'Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai* and the Birth of Fiction').This connection is highlighted in *Liaozhai* by the way the Historian of the Strange's name links himself with the Grand Historian and the writing of the Shiji (記史). And the Gothic too has often been conflated with historical fiction, because of the way it has blended the historical with the fictional. (Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, (1764), usually labeled as the first Gothic novel, was published as a medieval Italian romance, discovered and translated by a fictional editor. It was only upon its second edition that Walpole claimed authorship.) David Punter points out, though, that one reason why it is so difficult to draw a line between Gothic fiction and historical fiction is that Gothic itself seems to have been a mode of history, a way of perceiving an obscure past and interpreting it.(Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, p52).

rebels, every porch was strewn with corpses. Blood flowed from every doorway.

When Commissioner Wang returned, he gave orders that all the corpses were to be removed from his home and the blood washed away, so that he could once more take up residence. In the days that followed, he frequently saw ghosts in broad daylight, and during the night ghostly will-o'-the wisp flickerings of light beneath his bed. He heard the voices of ghosts wailing in various corners of the house.'[29]

So although the blood is washed away, and the house inhabited again, the past will not be silent. The ghosts, it seems, are haunting him in the most private sphere of his home. Eventually, Wang gives orders for a lengthy ritual to be performed – using both Buddhist and Daoist priests, who pray for the release of the souls of the dead, and put out food in the courtyard. A servant who had been lying ill meets the ghosts as they feast. After that, the haunting ceases.

Chun-shu and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang stress the political message of this story. The owner of the house, Wang Changyin 王昌蔭 (1620-1654 CE), entered the civil service system under the Ming, but subsequently went over to the new Qing government. In the story, when he tells the ghosts his new title under the Qing – Education Commissioner – they sneer and laugh at him.[30]

In stories such as this, the home becomes the contested site between past and present. The monster crosses both physical and temporal boundaries, causing a kind of collapse of time and space, as what is long vanished returns. As discussed earlier, the home connected a family to its past through the family shrine and ancestral tablets. It sheltered the dead as well as the living. Of all buildings, the home is, as the philosopher Gaston Bachelard puts it, in his *Poetics of Space*, a 'psychologically complex space'.[31] It is not simply the building (or the 'geometrical space'), but everything contained within it – the space, the family, the possessions, as well as more abstract concepts such as the family history and memories. This sense of the building itself being connected to the past can be seen in tales such as 'Wailing Ghosts'. The new dynasty has attempted to hide the bloodshed in its past, and though the blood has been washed away, the space of the house has been changed by the events which it

29 'Gui ku' (28) 鬼哭, 'The Weeping Ghosts', p76-77. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p104.

30 Chang and Chang, *Redefining History*, p139. See also Pu Ze 蒲泽, '*Liaozhai zhiyi:* 'Gui ku' benshi kao' 聊齋志異；鬼哭本事考, in *Pu Songling yanjiu*, 蒲松齡研究1 (2013), p56-66, for a discussion of the violent uprising which provides the historical basis to this story.

31 Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1969, p14.

has been witness to. The haunting only ceases when prayers and rituals are performed – when those in the present acknowledge and appease the past.

In another *Liaozhai* tale – 'Goblins in the House' (宅妖) – a house quite literally embodies the monstrosity of the past. The owner, Mr Li, begins to notice something unusual about the house:

> 'One day, he saw a long bench on his veranda, flesh-pink in colour, very smooth-looking and well-finished. He did not recall possessing such a bench and went up to it and touched it, letting his hand run along its curves. The thing actually felt soft, like flesh, and he walked away from it in shock and revulsion. He had walked a few steps when he looked back and saw the bench vanish as it merged with the wall.'[32]

Next he sees a wooden staff wriggling away like a snake before it too vanishes into the wall. On another occasion, the family tutor sees a crowd of tiny figures conducting a funeral ceremony. The house belongs to a Mr Li, the nephew of an official who rose to high rank under the Ming, then became President of the Board of Justice under the Qing.[33] Lydia Chiang suggests that the monstrous house could be read as an emblem of the patriarchal body of the (real) lineage with which the story deals. The corruption and decay of the patriarchal body can in this way be seen to be reflected in the house itself.[34] The house has itself become a monstrous body, revealing the decay into which the lineage has fallen.

In these stories, the boundaries between past and present dissolve. By the monster's crossing of boundaries, the crimes of the past are brought to light, given monstrous body. Even if the past has been buried and covered over, the monster exposes the truth; 'everything that ought to have remained...hidden and secret and has become visible'.[35] This framework of visibility and invisibility has been seen at work in *Liaozhai* throughout this thesis, from the tales problematising the male gaze to the stories of 'passing' monsters. The tales constantly play with the monster as monstrum, both highlighting and subverting its function of revelation.

Manuel Aguirre writes of the Gothic that it reflects the desire to 'lift the veil', to cross the threshold.[36] So too do the *Liaozhai* tales insist on bringing to light what is hidden, what is lost, or what is secretly desired. The past returning, embodied in the space of the home,

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32 'Zhai yao' (77) 宅妖, 'Goblins in the House', p25. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p40.
33 Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p505.
34 Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, p118.
35 Freud is here quoting the German philosopher Schelling's (1775-1854) definition of *unheimlich*, p8.
36 Aguirre, 'Narrative Strucutre, Liminality, Self-Similarity', in Bloom, p234.

reflects another aspect of the collection's exploration of the known and the unknown, of the desire and the dread of boundary-crossing.

Intruders

So the home may become the contested space between the past and the present. But it may also become the site of a clash between the marginal and the central, between 'outside' and 'inside' the different boundaries that society draws around itself.

In Gothic fiction, a typical trope is the protagonist trapped in an unfamiliar and unfriendly space – the forbidding castle of the Count in Bram Stoker's famous novel, for example – and it is there that they discover secrets and truths. In these works, it is the protagonist who enters the marginal, unhomely space. The haunted house is already haunted (or possessed by some other malign influence) and *unheimlich*. Many of the *Liaozhai* tales, however, tell of the home becoming unhomely; the marginal entering the centre.

Foxes, as already discussed, occupy an ambiguous position in relation to the human world. In the Tang, foxes were worshipped in the home with offerings of food. As Kang Xiaofei points out, the fox crossed lines in regular domestic worship, mediating between the living and the dead and crossing gender boundaries.[37] They were thus seen as playing a part within the home, albeit an ambiguous one, and were a perfect medium through which to probe the human space and uncover human fears, anxieties, weaknesses and desires.[38] Foxes in *Liaozhai*, as discussed throughout this thesis, can make the home unhomely in different ways. Whilst their crossing of boundaries can be deadly, as in certain tales of fox possession, in many tales they bring disorder rather than death, sometimes being driven by mischief, and sometimes by love, or by karma. (As in tales in which they enter the human home to repay a debt, usually leaving after their allotted time is up). Several stories tell of the ways in which the protagonists make the foxes leave. Some involve the killing, or attempted killing of the creature (whether it is tricked into a bottle and then burnt, or unsuccessfully caught and tied in a sash.)[39] Others tell of exorcisms performed by Daoist priests. In these tales, the narrative

37 Ibid, p95.

38 Fu Yanzhi picks out four key ways in which fox haunting is depicted in *Liaozhai*, through different types of behaviour. Firstly, fox possession, in which a fox attaches itself to someone, causing illness or even death, as discussed in relation to stories such as 'Scholar Dong' (董生), p133. Secondly, foxes which cause trouble in the home, smashing tiles or doing other damage. Thirdly, foxes which move in and make themselves at home. And finally, mischievous foxes which do not cause physical damage to the home, or harm to the human, but nonetheless play tricks and cause trouble. Fu Yanzhi, 'Lun *Liaozhai zhiyi* zhong hu zuo sui xianxiang de xingshi tezheng ji wenhua neihan', p151.

39 'Hu ru ping' (27) 狐入瓶, 'The Fox Hides in a Jug', p75; 'Zhuo hu' (9) 捉狐, 'Catching a Fox', p22.

is concerned with the domestic space turning monstrous, then becoming human again.

In the story 'Jiao Ming' the house itself appears to be turning against the inhabitants; 'Tiles, pebbles and brick shards were liable to fly around the house like hailstones at any moment,' and the family constantly has to take shelter from the disturbances.[40] But when the protagonist, Dong, moves his household into a different residence, the trouble continues, suggesting that it is a personal, rather than a spatial, issue. However, when Dong seeks help from a Daoist master, who comes to the house to perform an exorcism and uses the body of a maid to question the fox as to where it is from, the fox says; 'We have been in the capital for eighteen generations.' So the tale suggests that for the fox, despite the fact that it has followed Dong from home to home, it is nonetheless a question of disputed space, raising the question of who exactly is the intruder. Whilst the figure of the fox is thought of as marginal, this fox proclaims it belongs in the capital just as much as Dong himself.

What can be said about the intrusion of foxes into human space, however, as opposed to other monsters, is that it is only in rare cases that true damage is done (and this, as discussed in Chapter Three, is often due to the failure of the male protagonist himself to curb his desires). Huntington writes that the fox is, 'a move away from the most deadly confrontation with another world; it offers the possibility that an ordinary man could manage such a confrontation successfully and live to tell the tale.'[41] In tales of mischief-making foxes, the boundaries of the home are crossed, and domestic space threatened, but when the fox is dealt with, order returns. Here can be seen Huntington's movement from *heimlich* to *unheimlich* and back again.[42]

If the fox is a playful and only sometimes dangerous visitor however, there are other intruders in *Liaozhai* who are more fearful. Above, I discussed the figure of the vengeful ghost, and throughout the thesis I have considered the malign, dangerous monster in *Liaozhai*, as well as the better-known, benign figures. Several of these frightening figures attack men in their bedrooms, leading Lydia Chiang to argue for a reading that concentrates on male alienation both from themselves and from 'the female other'. 'Biting the Ghost' and 'The Ghost's Saliva' were both examined in Chapter Two. In both of these tales, a hideous female monster forces herself upon the helpless male protagonist. 'The Earth Woman' (土地夫人) is another tale in which a man is not safe in his own bedroom.[43]

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40 'Jiaoming', p79-80.
41 Huntington, *Alien Kind,* p124.
42 Ibid., p126.
43 'Biting the Ghost', p20-21; 'The Ghost's Saliva', p945; 'Tudi furen' (165) 土地夫人, p578.

Chiang points out that these stories, including others such as 'Squirting' seem to, 'mirror late imperial unease about the class of professional women known as *po* (婆), and who included matchmakers, midwives and shamanesses.'[44] These boundary-crossing women had access to the inner quarters of the homes – from the most ordinary of homes up to the Emperor's palace – and were both needed and feared. Victoria Cass, discussing the *po* and predators of the Ming, describes them as 'dangerous visitors' who caused discord and disaffection; 'Indeed, it was their public status and private intimacy that worried officials, for the wizened old herbalist, the cackling matchmaker, the benign wet-nurse had access to the intimate that gave these women a worrisome authority.'[45] They were able to cross thresholds; walls could not hold them back. And not only could they gain entry to these innermost spaces, they could also leave. This gave them a power and a freedom foreign to men – who could not always access these spaces – and also to women, whose status as a wife or mother did not give her the freedom of leaving, as discussed in the previous chapter. Such free crossing of boundaries was threatening. With their entrance, the home changed – control of the central, domestic space was no longer in the hands of the male head of the family but had become an unfamiliar, marginal space. The suspicion in which these women were held exposes the tensions inherent in what McMahon calls 'privileged domains', and the monstrous crone and her boundary-crossing abilities can be seen as bringing these tensions to light. The home, the most sensitive and most protected of human spaces, is itself exposed as vulnerable.

The Illusory Home

If space can be threatened by the entrance of the monster, so too can its very existence be called into question. A recurring plot in the collection, typical also of earlier *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* tales, is that in which a man meets a beautiful women either by stumbling upon or being invited to her home, which is often an opulent mansion. Typically, a romantic encounter takes place. But when the protagonist leaves or wakes, the luxurious house turns out to be a ruin or tomb.

This can in some ways be seen to echo the way that thresholds in *Liaozhai* can appear in response to a character's desire. The desire for a home – for a family and a rich, comfortable domestic space, is so strong that it can manifest itself. The protagonist is often a

44 'Squirting', p8-9. Chiang, p98. Sometimes rather misleadingly translated as 'grannies', *liu po* 六婆, or the six old women, was a derogatory term for six kinds of women; matchmakers, midwives, shamanesses,

45 Victoria Cass, *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies and Geishas of the Ming*, Lanham, Md.; Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999, p47.

poor scholar. Sometimes he is lost, and the house appears as a welcome refuge. Stepping across the threshold, the protagonist enters an idyllic, enchanted space; a space that seems to answer all his desires. But it is a threshold that leads only to an illusion.

In the tale 'A Brilliant Light (犬燈), for example, the protagonist is led by a fox spirit into a beautiful mansion in a sorghum field, where a feast is spread out and servants are waiting to attend him. As the evening draws on and he takes his leave, however, he looks back to see nothing but the sorghum, and raised walkways running through it.[46] And in 'Qiaoniang', the home of the beautiful ghost (shared with fox spirits) turns out to be a tomb.[47] Though the protagonist of 'Qiaoniang' finds domestic happiness, in the hybrid human-monster family, others are not so lucky. The protagonist of 'Yun Cuixian' (雲翠仙), Liang Youcai, is punished for his unfaithful and cruel behaviour when the house disappears, leaving him staring up at the stars, alone on a hillside.[48]

Here is the idea of an ideal home, and a fantasy of wish-fulfilment – the beautiful woman inviting the young scholar into her luxurious home. But at its heart is absence and loss, the fantasy turning into dust and decay. In 'Yun Cuixian' this happens because of the protagonist's own moral failings. In other tales, however, it can be seen to mark the transience of such boundary-crossing relationships; the boundary between the living and the dead, or between species (most often between human and fox) can be crossed, but often only for a limited period of time. This is perhaps the ultimate 'unhomely' home; a space whose boundaries disappear, leaving nothing but emptiness. It also unsettles the use of desire in the collection as an active and powerful force. In previous chapters I have discussed the ways in which desire itself can effect change – it can lead to the transformation of the human body, it can make one's true love materialise. Yet these tales suggest that desire is empty or illusory. As so often happens, *Liaozhai* undermines its own enchantments, refusing any fixed framework for its monstrous transformations.

Sacred Space?

Moving away from the portrayal of domestic space in the collection, another space which frequently becomes monstrous is the temple or monastery. As already pointed out elsewhere in this thesis, *Liaozhai* uses the trappings of religion in various ways, with Daoist and

46 'Quan deng' (117) 犬燈, 'A Brilliant Light', p406-407.
47 'Qiaoniang', p256-264.
48 'Yun cuixian', (217) 雲翠仙, 'Yun Cuixian', p748-754.

Buddhist thought, priests and temples all playing their part, as well as ideas surrounding ancestor worship and folk religion. The collection's use of what should be the sacred and quiet space of the temple – whichever religion it belongs to – is interesting to consider.

Zhang Guofeng points out that in Ming-Qing fiction, the temple was often a space used to depict romantic meetings. This may have been because, at that time, there were few opportunities for young men and women to meet freely. The fact that romantic encounters in a place supposedly sacred and reverential were more lurid and sensational may also have come into play, however.[49] *Liaozhai* tales such as 'The Frescoed Wall' describe strange, romantic meetings. In this tale, the protagonist, Zhu, actually steps into a painting on the temple wall, where he meets the beautiful woman whose picture he had been admiring.[50]

Other stories tell of monks or scholars stopping in temples whilst travelling or on their way to studying for or sitting the civil service examinations. The temple is not always a space for enchantment or romance, however. 'The Dead Monk' (死僧) tells of a travelling monk who stops at a temple on the outskirts of a town, and his midnight encounter with a monk covered in blood.[51] And 'The Temple Demon' (廟鬼) describes a near-fatal meeting of a man and a vengeful spirit in a temple. Disguised as a beautiful woman, she lures him in and almost kills him. He is only saved when a passer-by sees the woman for the demon she is.[52] In 'The Mountain Spirit' (山魈) a scholar returns to the temple he left just a few days before to find it covered in dust and cobwebs. That night, a terrifying creature appears in his room, and the scholar manages with difficulty to scare it away.[53]

If, as Zhang Guofeng suggests, the popularity of tales of romantic encounters in temples was provoked to some extent by scandalised delight at such sacrilege, then fearful, monstrous encounters may work in the same way. Recalling in some ways the discussion of the grotesque, in Chapter Three, in which everything 'high' or official is brought down to earth, here is is the 'official' space of religion which is subverted. The temple or monastery should be a retreat from society, a place of quiet and contemplation, a refuge from the world. It is an 'in-between', or liminal space, meant to facilitate communication between one world and the other. But the intrusion of the monstrous subverts the function of the temple as a controlled space for such communion, and instead breaks the boundaries of its own accord.

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49 Zhang Guofeng, *Hua shuo Liaozhai*, p13.

50 'The Frescoed Wall', p14-17. Zhang Guofeng highlights the fact that paintings which appear to come to life – usually those that depict beautiful women – is a feature of earlier *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* tales, p16.

51 'Si seng' (264) 死僧, 'The Dead Monk', p916.

52 'Miao gui' (46) 廟鬼, 'The Temple Demon', p138.

53 'The Mountain Spirit', p18-19.

'Nie Xiaoqian', discussed in the previous chapter, combines these two types of encounter, in a story of both horror and enchantment. Ning stays the night at a temple on the outskirts of Jinhua, where he meets the beautiful Nie Xiaoqian, who is possessed by an evil spirit, who forces her to harm the men who seek shelter in the temple.[54] The tale provides a vivid description of the temple; it is a desolate scene, overgrown with weeds and seemingly deserted. Here is one of the spaces of *Liaozhai* which seems most 'Gothic', in its gloominess, its suggestion of fear and isolation, and the terrible secret it hides, in the form of the demon possessing Nie Xiaoqian. Yet Lei Qunming points out that covering the pond is a mass of water-lilies in bloom, suggesting, he argues, Nie Xiaoqian's hope of returning to life.[55] So here, the story's combination of horror and enchantment is reflected in the space of the temple itself.

Key to several of the *Liaozhai* tales of monstrous temples is their remoteness and isolation. Sometimes in ruins, and overgrown with weeds, this setting suggests that the wild is reclaiming its territory. In the next part of this chapter I move away from the man-made, architectural spaces of the tales, whose walls prove to be easily crossable boundaries, and look instead at the wider spaces of the collection; the spaces of the wilderness. These are the marginal spaces, no longer belonging to the human world but to the wild, the unknown and the monstrous. Here, the human protagonist is outside the boundaries of the familiar, human world, in the places in the periphery that contained, according to early *zhiguai* collections, all manner of strange flora and fauna.

On the Margins

The Gothic, for all its focus on the enclosing aspects of walls, also exhibited a fascination with the natural world. Its early works were frequently set in remote regions of Europe, where its tumbledown castles and ruins were found. *Frankenstein* makes use of the awe-inspiring scenery of the Swiss Alps, as well as the desolate icy wastes which book-end the story. Dracula exploits the fear of the wild and unknown for the setting of the Count's castle. In these Gothic tales it is the disappearance of boundaries that is emphasised, and juxtaposed with the human architecture of walls and thresholds. When there are no longer any walls, the remoteness from the familiar world is fearful and dangerous. Here, the Gothic's framework of 'the closed space' is turned around, and the emptiness of the wilderness is what threatens the

54 'Nie Xiaoqian', p160-168.
55 Lei Qunming, *Liaozhai xiezuo yishu jianshang*, p91-92.

protagonist. The broader horror genre, as well as earlier wonder tales within different cultures, also exploit the fear inherent in this journey into the unknown.

Cohen, discussing the different aspects and uses of the monster in relation to boundaries points out that one such use has been to demarcate segments of geographic space; where monsters did or did not exist, where was safe and where was not; what lay beyond the known world.[56] In China, the *Shanhai jing* (山海經) was a compendium of strange flora and fauna that lay outside the bounds of the empire. Medieval European maps delimited whole spaces as monstrous – terra incognita, sketched with dragons and other fearsome creatures. As Cohen writes, 'the monster stands as a warning against exploration of uncertain demesnes', it declares that, 'curiosity is more often punished than rewarded, that one is better off safely contained within one's own domestic sphere than abroad, away from the watchful eyes of the state.'[57]

Marginality and monstrosity have been linked in other ways. In medieval China, the 'barbarians', or those on the edges of the Chinese empire, were symbolically linked to the fox. Xiaofei Kang discusses the intersection of fox *hu* (狐) and barbarian *hu* (胡). The Chinese, he writes, 'categorized China as internal and the 'barbarian' as external, on the edge of bestiality. Animal radicals were frequently attached to the names of some barbarian groups, and animal features were used to describe their physical attributes and cultural customs.'[58] Kang points out that during the Tang, the term *hu* (barbarian) was a term used not only to refer to the Indo-European speaking peoples of Central Asia, but also loosely used to label all non-Chinese people from the north and west.[59] 'Fox' was thus used as a derogatory term, and was a convenient tool for people in the Tang to express their feelings about the foreign elements that were not only beyond the borders, but also increasingly a part of Chinese life.[60]

'Monstrous spaces' can therefore be *made*, highlighting the fact that the monster is

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56 See *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, eds. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003, for more on this topic.

57 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p12. Barend ter Haar, in *Telling Stories; Witchcraft and Scapegoating in Chinese History* discusses the ways in which monstrosity was put to similar use in imperial China, 'making monstrous' those who were already marginal and mistrusted.

58 Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox*, p27.

59 Kang, p27-28.

60 Whilst reflecting contemporary fears of the unknown, the monsters of 'uncharted space' also, however, could be made to deliberately marginalize and distance those thought to be 'different.' John Block Friedman, in his influential work on the monstrous in medieval thought, interprets the 'monstrous races' that were thought to exist on the margins of the known world as a medieval example of Edward Said's Orientalism. Their monstrosity was depicted in various ways, and he argues that these monstrous races were viewed not merely as 'wonders of nature' or as warnings against moral sins, but also as a means of labelling and distancing disparate social groups and non-Christian religious groups. See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p64-95.

often used as a warning and means of control by the centre over the periphery. Internal and external, or the centre and the margins, were powerful categories.

However, as argued throughout this thesis, key to the monstrous is its ever-changing potential, its combination of not only fear but also of wonder and desire. So whilst the monster stands beyond the boundaries of what is known, these 'uncertain demesnes' can provoke fascination, as much as fear. Far away from the protective but entrapping walls of the familiar world, 'The habitations of the monsters... are also realms of happy fantasy, horizons of liberation.'[61] Tales of the strange and horrific, in different times and cultures, have always told of those who have crossed boundaries into monstrous space, pulled by the irresistible attraction of the monstrous. Curiosity, I argued in Chapter Two, drives the horror genre, and can also be seen as playing its part in *Liaozhai*, in the tales' exploration of the known and unknown worlds; the myriad different depictions of the monster.

The Wider Spaces of *Liaozhai*

Whilst there can be found *Liaozhai* tales whose setting is in far corners of the empire and beyond, many are set in the writer's home province of Shandong.[62] Jaroslav Prúsek describes the setting of the Shandong landscape in this way: 'Fantastically wild mountain ranges rise straight from the plain, especially the Taishan massif, the holy mountain of the East, its gulleys thick with age-old cypresses and with coloured monasteries here and there on its sides; the capital of the province, Jinan, is famed for its great springs bursting from the ground like fountains... It could even be said that Shandong is one of the most bizarre parts of China, the wild cliffs of the half-circle of mountains drop sheer to the sea...'[63]

So the landscape itself provided rich inspiration, something which is reflected in the tales. In fact, Lei Qunming argues that the richness of the collection's portrayal of the Chinese landscape and natural world has often been neglected.[64] He examines the ways in which the collection provides information about contemporary places and the natural phenomena found there. Certainly, there are several stories which tell of spaces becoming monstrous, in which the Historian seems to be relating hearsay or recorded experiences. 'Mountain City' (山市), for example, describes 'one of the wonders of my home district', in which a city seems to

61 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p18.
62 See Chang and Chang, who point out that the tales are written 'with a broad and even universal perspective', and not restricted only to those places close to the author's own home. *Refining History*, p167.
63 Jaroslav Prúsek, 'P'u Sung-ling and His Work', p111-112
64 Lei Qunming, *Liaozhai xiezuo yishu jianshang*, p227-229.

appear out of a mountainside. The story tells of friends drinking on a terrace, 'when suddenly they beheld a lone pagoda on the mountainside opposite... Then a host of palaces and halls sprang into view, with roofs and flying eaves of bright green-glazed tiles...'[65] Lei points out that this had been recorded on several occasions, and suggests a natural phenomenon that occurred in the area of Mount Huan, in which, under certain conditions, the shape of a city seems to appear.[66] What many of the *Liaozhai* tales do is make the familiar unfamiliar. Like the home which becomes 'unhomely' with the entry of the monstrous, so the familiar spaces of Shandong (or other well-known places) are also revealed to be changeable and monstrous. What was thought to be at the centre is itself made marginal, something which the Historian in fact refers to in his preface, writing that, 'within the civilized world, things may be more wondrous than in "the country of those who crop their hair"; before our very eyes are things stranger than in "the land of the flying heads."'[67] Here again is the movement or displacement found between centrality and marginality.

But *zhiguai* tales have always concerned themselves with the unfamiliar spaces on the periphery of the empire, and the wilderness would have represented a very real fear as well as a fascination to the writers and readers of strange tales. Bandits, wild animals, an unforgiving landscape – all this would have been found at the limits of civilisation and the imagination. *Liaozhai* makes clear the ways in which scholars had to travel through unfamiliar regions on their way to take examinations or take office. And changing social and economic conditions also meant that, from the late Ming, travelling and tourism became a distinctive feature of life, with guidebooks for travellers emerging as a new genre of writing.[68]

So ideas of the centre and the margins played their part in contemporary life.[69] Scholars travelling to take the examinations or officials taking up posts far from their home

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65 'The City On the Mountain', p852. Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p373.

66 Lei Qunming, *Liaozhai xiezuo yishu jianshang* p228.

67 Translation Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p44.

68 Berg, *Carnival in China*, p22. And see Julian Ward, *Xu Xiake (1587-1641): The Art of Travel Writing*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001, p18-19 on Ming gazetteers and route books, and p21-22 on the growth of tourism. Ward also discusses the fact that travel became one of the 'obsessions' (*pi* 癖) lauded in the Ming as a mark of the civilised man, as discussed earlier thesis. He describes how Xu Xiake (徐霞客) the most celebrated travel writer of the Ming, was happy to declare his own obsession with mountains. Another travel writer, Wang Shixing (王士性, 1547-1598), declared himself obsessed with scenery. Ward, p27.

69 See Julian Ward, *Xu Xiaoke*, Chapter One. He points out that the period of division in China during the Six Dynasties was crucial in the development of the travel diary; 'The lush scenery encountered in southern China, very different from the harsh, dry terrain of the north, sparked off an outpouring of poetry and prose about nature.' So travel writing and *zhiguai* writing were developing during the same period, suggesting that fascination with the periphery unfolded in different ways; *zhiguai* tales exploring the anomalous and fearful aspects of the wilderness, and travel writing exhibiting what Ward calls the change from fear of the perils of the wilderness to love of remote places, p5.

town were forced away from their own 'centre', and into the margins. Travellers sought to explore the unknown and the wild. And Buddhist and Daoist followers both looked for spiritual enlightenment and freedom, away from the demands of the centre – the official, public world.

Several *Liaozhai* tales focus on the human protagonist stumbling into the unfamiliar spaces of the wilderness. The mountains are portrayed as a typical setting for a close encounter with monstrous nature. In 'Chopping the Python', for example, two brothers go into a deep, dark valley in search of firewood, and encounter a huge snake, that swallows one of the brothers whole.[70] Although he eventually survives, he loses his nose and ears before he is pulled out. In 'The Giant Scorpion', an army general is on patrol in a region that is now Sichuan Province.[71] Deep in the mountains, he comes across a temple that is said to have been deserted for more than a hundred years, and the locals tell him it contains a monster who kills anyone who enters. It turns out to be a scorpion 'as big as a *pipa'*, and the general burns the temple down.

The spaces of the wilderness – the deep valleys and dark mountains – are the spaces of the monster, not the human. This depiction of the fearful spaces of the unknown, beyond the boundaries of the human world, is not unique to *Liaozhai*. As Cohen points out, there have always been monsters beyond the geographical boundaries of the known world that have provoked both terror and fascination. It is this combination of fear and fascination which *Liaozhai* plays on in particular. 'The Lord of the Sea' (海公子), is one such story in which the emotions of fear, fascination and desire are combined.[72] In this tale, a traveller, fond of hunting and adventure, travels to a famously beautiful but uninhabited island. He is seduced by a beautiful sing-song girl, who is then frightened off by the appearance of 'the Prince'. The Prince turns out to be a huge snake, which almost bites the traveller to death. He only escapes by using fox poison on the monster.

Here, the beauty and danger of the unknown space – the island – is mirrored in the beautiful woman and the fearsome giant snake. In other tales of distant islands, the protagonist meets the fearsome, cannibalistic *yeshas*, or the country of the hideous *luosha* (or Rakshas, in certain translations).[73]

It is also typical of *Liaozhai* that monstrosity is used in various ways from story to story. It is not only the fearful monstrous that is found in the wilderness, but also the

70 'Chopping the Python', p48.
71 'The Giant Scopion', p1495.
72 'The Lord of the Sea ', p174-176.
73 'The Yaksha Kingdom', p348, 'The Rakshas' Sea Market', p454-465.

wondrous. It is not only the hideous *yeshas* to be found on remote islands but also the poetry-loving immortals of 'The Island of the Immortals'.[74] And another common feature of these tales is that, even deep in the wilderness, when help is needed, it is found. This relates to my earlier discussion of thresholds in the collection, and the fact that in *Liaozhai* a threshold may often appear because of the protagonist's desire or need, whether it is a literal threshold – a door in a wall – or an abstract one, which nonetheless allows a crossing of boundaries, from one space to another, from the human world to the monstrous. In one story, for example, a man named Guo loses his way in the hills and finds himself wandering through thick jungle.[75] He stumbles upon a group of people drinking, and after joining them in their entertainment, they leap up upon each others' shoulders like a human ladder. When they are all up, the ladder gradually bends down to the ground, where it is transformed into a path. Guo sets out along the path, and finds himself at his own home. He returns to the spot a few days later, and though he finds the remains of a feast, there is no path. This could also be seen as the kind of moral reciprocation found, as discussed in Chapter Four, between humans and animals. Far from civilisation, those who are morally worthy (or talented, as is Guo, who demonstrates his marvellous ability to imitate birdsong) will receive help.

So the margins are not necessarily fearful. In fact, Ma Ruifang highlights the creation of enchanted utopias in the collection, arguing that in spaces far from the human world, a more ideal version of that world is created.[76] Here, in these marginal spaces, the protagonist may find the answer to his desires. In 'The Rakshas' Sea Market'(羅殺海市), for example, the protagonist finds his true love in the Dragon Palace under the sea, where there are crystal walls and fish-scale tiles.[77] In this satirical tale the spaces reflect the opportunities and happiness of the protagonist – the black walled city of the hideous *luoshas*, where true beauty and talent isn't recognised, compared to the beautiful palace where his talent is both recognised and rewarded by the King, with the hand of his daughter. The recognition of true worth, so sought-after for those who went through the examination system – is reflected in the landscape, creating a utopia far removed from the 'real' world.

This finding of a utopian space in the wilderness recurs in other tales. In 'Pianpian', for example, the protagonist is the dissolute Luo Zifu, reduced to begging on the streets, and

74 'Xianren dao' (275) 仙人岛, 'The Island of the Immortals,' p946-956.
75 'Guo Xiucai' ,'郭秀才', p914.
76 See Ma Ruifang, *Jiang Liaozhai*, p276 for a discussion of the utopian motif in *Liaozhai* and in *A Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢, and *Shengui huyao de shijie*, p207-212.
77 'The Rakshas' Sea Market', p454-465.

covered in suppurating sores.[78] Ashamed of his state, Luo sets out for a temple outside of the town, and meets a beautiful young woman who leads him to her home, a cave deep in the hills, full of light even though no lamps can be seen. She tells him to bathe in the stream, and gives him clothes made of plantain leaves:

> 'After bathing in the stream, Luo felt all the pain go out of his sores, and when he awoke during the night and touched them, they had already dried and hardened into thick scabs. In the morning he rose, wondering if he would truly be able to wear the plantain-leaf trousers. When he took them in his hands, he found that they were wonderfully smooth, like green satin.'[79]

Jian Jiacai 蹇家才 compares Pianpian's grotto to the mythical 'Peach Blossom Spring' of Tao Yuanming's (365-427) tale – an otherworldly utopia stumbled upon by a fisherman sailing along a river – describing it as, 'a Peach Spring beyond the world', *shiwai taoyuan* 世外桃源.[80] Away from the human world, Luo Zifu is cured of his ills and his dissolute ways. Pianpian tells him that she herself has renounced the world, following a long tradition in China of retreat into the mountains. Julian Ward discusses how, in the Six Dynasties, the increasing popularity of Buddhism led to the growth of retreats, both Buddhist and Daoist, located in mountainous settings, with the act of withdrawing from active participation in life (and especially official life) adding an increased allure.[81]

Another story which reflects a retreat from the world is 'Jia Fengzhi' (賈奉雉).[82] Jia is a scholar disillusioned with the world after he realises that his chances of passing the examinations improves as the quality of his essays fall (a very real issue that confronted scholars, as discussed in Chapter Three). So he goes off into the mountains to devote himself to a study of Daoism. Meeting a Daoist master, he is given a room which is beautifully clean and smells of a delicious perfume; he eats food which tastes wonderfully sweet, and faces a tiger which does not harm him. Ma Ruifang argues that this tale illustrates *Liaozhai*'s rewriting of the human world, using the utopian motifs of the realm of the immortals, *xian*

78 'Pianpian', p432-436.

79 Trans. Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p299.

80 Jian Jiacai, 蹇家才, 'Shi lun *Liaozhai zhiyi* de kongjian xushi' 試論聊齋志異的空間敘事, *Pu Songling yanjiu* 蒲松齡研究, 4, (2012), p62.

81 Julian Ward, *Xu Xiake*, p5. He points out that the art critic and Buddhist layman Zong Bing (宗炳, 375-443) helped to establish the idea of mountains not as fearful zones inhabited by spirits, but as zones of enlightenment; 'Withdrawal into nature became an end in itself, with the goal being to seek a transcendent experience, in order to gain peace and freedom.' (p5) Ward remarks that Tao Yuanming's poem and its prose introduction draw on both Daoist and Buddhist ideas of justified retreat from society, p6.

82 'Jia fengzhi' (400) 賈奉雉, 'Jia Fengzhi', p1359-1366.

jing 仙境.[83] In these utopias, the insoluble problems of the human world can be solved; what is dangerous is no longer harmful; all desires can be fulfilled.

Yet the human protagonist almost always returns home; unlike the human home, made both unhomely and homely by the monster, these wilderness utopias remain marginal, resistant to becoming homely even when they seem to be an ideal vision of the home. Even if the protagonist wishes to return, the way is often blocked; at the end of 'Pianpian' Luo Zifu goes in search of her with his son, but they cannot find the path back to her cave. Like the legendary Peach Blossom Spring, enchanted spaces are not to be revisited.

Into the Underworld

Of all the marginal spaces depicted in *Liaozhai*, the underworld could be seen as the most marginal – and the most unhomely. If the beautiful mansions or enchanted utopias are spaces which the human longs to visit, the underworld is a fearful space, made all the more unsettling for its inevitability. As discussed in Chapter Two, much horror fiction takes the fear of death as central; it is the final and most fearful of boundaries. Stephen Teiser, in his study of medieval Chinese pictorial representations of hell, remarks that the most common terms for the underworld: 'yin-residence' (*yinzhai* 陰宅), 'the dark regions' (*mingjian* 冥間), 'the underground prisons' (*diyu* 地獄), 'left no doubt that hell was part of the mysterious world, the unseen half of experience that so often threatened to disrupt the forces of Yang.'[84] Yet the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead is, in *Liaozhai* as in other *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* tales, eminently crossable, and the representation of the underworld is by no means unambiguously fearful.

In previous chapters I have discussed various depictions of ghosts in the collection – those who cross between the worlds of the living and the dead. In these types of tale, ghosts are *revenants* – they return to the living. David Der-wei Wang discusses the paradox of the ghost, pointing out that, etymologically, the Chinese character for 'ghost' or *gui*, (鬼) partakes of the connotation of 'return', or *gui* (歸); 'Return, in this context indicates 'return home', but contrary to common wisdom, 'home' refers not to an abode in the human world but to the site of eternal rest.' The underworld, writes Wang, is the 'home of all things'. Ghosts, however,

83 Ma Ruifang, *Shengui huyao de shijie*, p211.
84 Stephen F. Teiser, 'Having Once Died and Returned to Life: Representations of Hell in Medieval China', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 48, no.2 (Dec 1988), p460.

retain the human meaning of 'returning', and thus reappear in the world of the living.[85] This return, as discussed in tales of the monster entering the human world, brings the 'unhomely' into the human home; the 'wrong direction' of the return throws order into disorder. In other tales, however, it is the living who enter the realm of the dead; a crossing of boundaries that can be seen as equally 'wrong'. However, just as the ghost's transformation of the home brings with it the ambiguous meanings of *heimlich*, so too is the human entry into the underworld more complex than it seems. In his preface, the Historian calls out to those 'beyond the dark frontier' of death, a first instance of the desire for crossing the boundary of life and death. And in the tales themselves, the threshold to and from the underworld is seen to open, often in response to a character's needs or desires. In 'Xi Fangping' (席方平) the protagonist journeys to the underworld to help his father; in 'Xiangqun' (湘裙) the journey is made due to concern over the family's lineage; and in 'Liancheng', (連城) it is for love.[86]

This entry to the underworld can be seen not only in *Liaozhai* and other Chinese *zhiguai* tales but also in some of the very earliest literature, in Europe and elsewhere, which involves journeys into the underworld in search of knowledge or lost love.[87]These journeys into the underworld allow the hero (or heroine) a means to defeat death, gain knowledge, and often to prove their exceptional status. One of the oldest Chinese myths of a journey to the underworld, coming originally from Indian Buddhist tales, is the tale of Mulian (目蓮).[88] In this story, the filial monk Mulian goes to find his mother in hell and, with the assistance of Buddha, helps her ascend to heaven. To complete his journey he must pass through different realms of hell, including 'the Knife Hill and Sword Forest Hell', and 'the Copper Pillar and Iron Bed Hell'.[89] This type of journey through a hellish geography is mirrored in *Liaozhai*

85 Wang, *The Monster That is History*, p266. Wang goes on to write that, 'If life is seen as a temporary sojourn among the living, death represents a return to the source from which all creatures have come.'

86 'Xi Fangping' (398) 席方平, 'Xi Fangping', p1341-1348; 'Xiangqun' (395) 湘裙, 'Xiangqun', p1322-1329; 'Liancheng' (104) 連城, 'Liancheng', p36-3672. Another means of entry into the underworld in *Liaozhai* is through clerical error. One such unfortunate victim is the eponymous Wang Lan ('Wang Lan' (36) 王蘭, p99-102). In this story, a ghost – one of Yama's servants – has mistakenly brought Wang to the underworld. By seeking to help him and redress the error, the ghost sets off a complex chain of events. Depictions of the underworld in China were often used to this kind of satirical effect, being represented as a mirror of the bureaucracy in the world of the living.

87 Dante's *Inferno* is perhaps one of the best known of western journeys into the underworld, though 'The Epic of Gilgamesh', an epic poem dating from Mesopotamia, is one of the earliest. In the poem the hero Gilgamesh, mourning the death of his friend Enkidu, journeys into the underworld in search of the secret to immortality.

88 The text, dating from the early 9th century, is entitled *The Transformation Text on the Great Maudgalyāyana [Mulian] Saving His Mother From the Dark Regions*. See Teiser, 'Having Once Died', p446.

89 Ibid.

tales such as 'The Buddhist Monk's Sin' (僧孽).[90] In this tale, a man named Zhang dies suddenly, and is brought before Lord Yama (*Yan Wang* 阎 王) who passes judgement on the dead. However, when Lord Yama checks his registers, he tells his demon-servants that they have made a mistake, and orders them to take Zhang back immediately. As they leave, Zhang asks them to allow him to look around the underworld. They lead him through the 'Nine Dark Places', and past the same 'Knife Hill' and 'Sword Forest' seen in the Mulian story, scenery which provides a monstrous embodiment of punishment and suffering.

Eventually, Zhang sees his own brother suffering appalling punishment for his misdeeds. When he returns to the world of the living, fearing his brother must be already dead, he hurries to his home, finding him alive but in awful pain from an abscess on his leg. Zhang recounts to him what he has seen in the underworld, and his brother changes his debauched ways, soon becoming well again. As Teiser remarks, representations of hell served as 'effective devices for educating, exhorting, and giving advantage' to the residents of the world of the living in their encounters with the world of the dead.[91] Here can be seen another kind of 'bringing to light' what is secret and hidden; the unhomely space of the underworld reveals the truth of human wickedness. It can thus be seen as a liminal space – a space which the protagonist enters, and in which he is changed, before returning to his own world with new knowledge.

Yet whilst this underworld scenery is fearful and monstrous, as far away from the concept of 'homely' as possible, other kinds of representation of the underworld can also be seen in *Liaozhai*, typical of the collection's overall refusal of any simple framework. As described in Chapter Three, horror and humour can often be found combined in one tale, and stories of clerical underworld errors work to diffuse the fearfulness of death. Beginning in the ninth or tenth centuries in China, the underworld was seen to be governed by an administration whose authority mirrored bureaucracy of the world of the living.[92] This underworld bureaucracy provided ample opportunity for writers to satirise the clumsy and often corrupt bureaucracy which affected their own lives. In one *Liaozhai* tale, a gentleman from Shaanxi Province remembers appearing before Lord Yama and seeing the instruments of

90 'Seng nie' (23) 僧孽, 'The Buddhist Monk's Sin', p66.

91 Teiser, 'Having Once Died', p460. Li Weifang compares the underworld setting of Six Dynasty *zhiguai* tales with the English Gothic. He argues that both include detailed descriptions of the gloomy horror of the hellish world, and that the reasons for their descriptions are the same: to praise good and punish evil (*yangshan cheng'e*, 扬善惩恶), p128; p131.

92 See Teiser, p433.

torture in the underworld – cauldrons filled with boiling oil.[93] He is sentenced to be reborn as a sheep, but whilst the demon servants are putting the sheepskin on him, it is realised that there's been an error – by saving another man's life, he has redeemed himself and is to be spared. Unfortunately, the demons have great difficulty getting the sheepskin off him, and he's reborn with a white furry birthmark, like a sheepskin patch. Yet tales such as this also portray the underworld as a more ideal and fairer version of the human world. If mistakes are made, they are rectified. The innocent are not punished; those who are worthy are rewarded, something which was at issue in particular for those scholars who remained unrewarded for their talents. As Ma Ruifang points out, compared to the human world, the underworld is represented as 'a fair and unselfish place.'[94]

It can also be represented, in tales such as 'Gongsun Jiuniang', as mundane in the extreme, mimicking the world of the living in its layout and towns, as well as in the behaviour of its citizens.[95] The ease of boundary-crossing is depicted here. In 'Xi Fangping', wanting to find his way to his father in the underworld, Xi finds himself outside what appears to be his own home, and simply asks a passer-by the way into the district capital. The concerns of the living are echoed in the world of the dead, as are their structures of order – in *Liaozhai* as in other *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* tales – leading Anthony C. Yu to comment on 'the paradox of difference and congruity of this world and the next.'[96] Lovers marry, children are born; towns and homes exist, just as they do in the world of the living.[97]

Exploring the underworld and its different representations, the collection questions established thinking not only about the afterlife but also about the world of the living. Like the enclosed space and architecture that are seen to be changed and made monstrous by events in the past, so too are the fears and desires of the living reflected in the space and architecture of the underworld. Horrific punishment and suffering can be seen embodied in the infernal landscape. But so too, in other tales, can be seen the desire for the lost daylight world, in the mimicking of its physical and social structures. Here the underworld reflects the ambiguous meanings of *heimlich*; mirroring the human world, but set apart from the human world, it is both homely and unhomely at once. So the representations of the underworld can be seen as another part of the collection's exploration of marginal and monstrous spaces. In

93 'Mou gong' (65) 某公, 'A Certain Gentleman', p208.
94 Ma Ruifang, *Jiang Liaozhai*, p127.
95 '公孫九娘', p477-483.
96 Anthony C. Yu, 'Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit!' p412.
97 See 'The Shuimang Herb' ('Shuimang cao' (56) 水莽草, p180-184), for a tale in which a family is formed in the underworld.

the tales of unhomely homes, the unfamiliar and monstrous is shown not to be 'somewhere else', on the margins, but in the familiar spaces closest to the human. And in the tales of the homely underworld, the familiar can be found even in the most marginal of spaces. Again and again, the *Liaozhai* tales question what is known, making the reader look anew at established structures and ways of thinking.

Conclusion

Both the tales of journeys into the underworld and journeys into the wilderness can be seen as mirroring the changes which human space goes through upon the entry of the monster. The centre and the margins meet; truths and desires are revealed. From its very beginning, in the Historian's own preface, *Liaozhai* is a collection in which physical space – and the boundaries of spaces – play a vital role, and in which ideas of centrality and marginality are explored. The Historian of the Strange places himself in his studio at night, writing down the stories that come to him from 'the four corners', thus positioning himself in the centre, despite his own geographical and social marginality. Calling out to those 'beyond the dark frontier', he exposes his own longing for boundary-crossing, reflected again and again in the stories he tells.

Just as the monster itself can embody both fears and desires, so too do the boundaries it threatens or guards provoke fear and fascination. As in Gothic fiction, emerging at a time of change and uncertainty, the desire to transgress, to cross forbidden thresholds can be seen in *Liaozhai.* Subverting the social expectations of control and containment, the tales explore the consequences of transgression, reflecting the collection's constant questioning of both the known and the unknown. From the most central, 'human' space of the home, to the marginal spaces of the wildnerness and even beyond, to the underworld itself, the tales open up new vistas, bringing to light the unfamiliar in the familiar, the wondrous in the fearful unknown.

On the margins, liminal spaces can be created – spaces of both destruction and construction, embodying the ambiguous meanings of *heimlich*, in which the homely and the unhomely, the open and the hidden, merge into one. Like the hybrid, liminal bodies discussed throughout this thesis, the spaces of *Liaozhai* are spaces of change and possibility, subversive to the status quo, challenging established ways of thinking, demanding new ways of seeing and understanding the world.

Conclusion: A Monstrous Text

> 'A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically “that which reveals”, “that which warns”, a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on a page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which is received, to be born again.'[1]

So writes Jeffrey Jerome Cohen at the beginning of his essay 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', which has been so influential, not only on this thesis but on the growing field of 'Monster Culture'. The monster *reveals*. A 'cultural body', it can reveal fears, desires, prohibitions, prejudices. But reading the monster is, for both the human protagonists of the stories in which they appear and for critics, a task fraught with difficulties. Because for all the readability inscribed upon its body, the monster, as Cohen also points out, 'always escapes', always contains more than it seems, always fails to be contained by categories, boundaries, or 'simple binaries.'[2] Cohen makes this into a key issue in his monster theses, turning the ambiguity of the monster – and the difficulty in even finding a single definition for such a figure – into a central aspect of his work, examining not what the monster is but what it *does*; how it is represented and used; how it reveals.

It is for this reason that I have argued that monster theory is a helpful way of approaching *Liaozhai.* As discussed throughout this thesis, the collection is a hybrid; unwieldy, uncontained, 'gigantic'; a textual mirror of some of the giant and hybrid creatures within its pages. And so, approaching the collection as monstrous itself, a more integrated approach can be made, allowing for an examination of the text as a whole. Whilst the volume of tales within the collection makes a close reading of every tale impossible, the figure of the monster and the theme of monstrosity hold them together, linking the content of the tales with the other aspects of the text; its size, its heterogeneity of form, its assumed author, its complicated afterlife – and its language.

Taking my cue from Cohen's comparison of the monster to 'a letter on a page', always representing something other than itself, I conclude this examination of the monstrous in *Liaozhai zhiyi* by focusing on an aspect of the collection which underlies everything I have discussed – its use of language. The collection has been celebrated, from some of its earliest

1 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p4.
2 Ibid., p8.

critics to scholars in the present day, for its use of the classical Chinese language. Complex, elegant and allusive, the language of *Liaozhai* sets it apart not just from other anomaly tale collections, but also from other literary works. Yet it is not only through the elegance of its turns of phrase that it succeeds, but also in its self-conscious exploitation of the metamorphic potential of language. Like the monsters within its tales, the language of *Liaozhai* holds more than it seems, revealing truths in fictions and throwing new light on the familiar and mundane.

The collection frequently draws attention to the acts of writing and reading, beginning with the Historian of the Strange himself who tells us he is writing out of 'lonely anguish', looking for those readers who understand him, even though they may be beyond the boundary of death. The preface makes clear the serious intent with which the project of writing is undertaken, something which is reflected within the tales, in which literary endeavours are frequently applauded or judged.[3] Yet throughout the tales, reading and writing also lead to unexpected consequences, and the boundaries between reality and fiction, truth and lies, all become blurred. A man buries himself in books but fails to progress either in the examination system or in his own sexual maturity. He is so foolish that he believes that everything he reads is true – that grain and gold can be found in books; that 'jade-like beauties' will be encountered within their pages.[4] Yet this 'book fool' (書痴) finds that his beliefs are vindicated; language becomes metamorphic: not only does a book lead him to stored grain (although it is inedible), and to gold (although it is only gold-plate), a beautiful woman emerges from its pages, her name Yan Ruyu 顏如玉– 'beauty like jade'.

Through a consideration of language and monstrosity in the collection I hope to gather together the different threads of this thesis (or perhaps to put together the different 'patches of fox fur', to borrow a phrase from the Historian), looking briefly back at each chapter and considering how my main arguments concerning the representation of the monstrous in *Liaozhai* are supported by the language and structure of the text itself. In this way I take a last look at the collection as a whole in the light of its paradoxical, monstrous hybridity, and draw together some final conclusions.

In Chapter One, 'Monster Culture', I looked at how the monster has been represented and

3 The poetry-loving immortals in 'The Island of the Immortals' (仙人岛 p946) for example, are quick to mock the protagonist's literary pretensions. And in 'A Gentleman of Jiaping', (嘉平公子, p1588) the ghost Wenji is so disgusted at the protagonist's inability to spell that she leaves the human world for good.The Historian's own writing, however, is admired even within the tales themselves, as will be discussed below.

4 'Shu chi' (415) 書痴, 'The Book Fool', p1453-1458.

used in different contexts – as a warning, as an omen, as an 'invitation to action', as subversion, as a joke. Monsters have exerted a powerful fascination over the human imagination from some of the very earliest pictorial and written representations, and yet it is almost impossible to find a single, comprehensive definition for 'monster'. As Cohen discusses, it escapes from attempts to pin it down, always threatening attempts to control it, always 'rising from the dissecting table', always returning. Refusing simple binaries, the monster 'demands polyphony', writes Cohen.[5] And this demand is met in *Liaozhai* not only through its different styles, genres, emotions, but also through its language.

In its elliptical nature, its lack of inflection, and its rich cultural and literary allusiveness, the classical language used in *Liaozhai* can be said, like the monsters I have discussed in these pages, to contain more than it seems, to 'spill over', breaking its own boundaries. So it is also a perfect medium through which to represent the monstrous. This linguistic monstrosity is exploited throughout the collection.

Most obviously, perhaps, the tales delight in puns and plays on words, something suited to a language in which so many homophones exist. The variations on the surname *Hu*, for example, homophonous with *hu* 狐, fox, suggest the monstrous origins of a character before any other clues are revealed. Tales such as 'Fourth Miss Hu' (胡四娘), 'Mr Hu' (胡氏) 'Zhou the Third' (周三), all feature figures who share this name.[6] It is not only foxes whose names suggest their origins, though; other character's names also reveal more about them, such as Scholar Liu, (柳秀才), who turns out to be the spirit of a willow tree, or the beautiful Xiang Yu, (香玉), whose surname suggests her real nature, as a flower spirit.[7] The nature of the monster is embodied in the language used to describe them.

Moving beyond the playfulness of word games, the allusiveness of the language in the tales provides another level of monstrosity. Sometimes the allusions used are straightforward embellishments, typical of the classical language. Other times, as Minford points out, allusions are stood on their head, and references twisted, 'subversively recycling' the very material scholars are obliged to memorise for the examination system.[8] For example, the tale 'The Adulterous Dog' (犬姦), omitted from early editions of the collection, and some modern

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5 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p12.

6 'Hu sijie' (62) 胡四姐, 'Fourth Sister Hu', p201-204, involves young fox spirits caught by the protagonist. In 'Hu shi' (86) 胡氏, 'The Hu Clan', p302-305, a male fox wants to marry his landlord's daughter, but is refused. In 'Zhou san' (246) 周三, 'Zhou the Third', p837-838, an old fox helps the protagonist with the fox trouble he is having at home.

7 'Liu xiucai' (138) 柳秀才, 'Xiucai Liu', p491; 'The Flower Nymphs', p1548-1555.

8 Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, pxvii.

Chinese editions today, tells of a woman who has sexual relations with a dog; when her husband discovers this, she is taken to the magistrate and punished horribly.[9] The Historian's comment to the tale is a 'judgement', longer than the anecdote itself, and in parallel prose, using a vast number of classical allusions. Whilst providing a virtuoso display of learning, it is also a graphically detailed treatment of bestiality, gleefully subverting the kind of essay demanded by the examination system.[10] This subversive use of language mirrors the subversive potential of the collection overall; even when conservative norms are apparently upheld, the fact that this has often occurred through monstrous means undermines any purely didactic reading. And even when a clear moral message is found in one tale, it might be unsettled in the next, or even in the authorial comment appended to that same tale.

The 'highbrow' and scholarly use of language in the collection is also subverted by the fact that it can be found combined with the vernacular. Whereas the classical tale in Chinese tradition has tended to be concerned with private affairs, the vernacular story is concerned with wider society, and involves much more narrative and descriptive details. Whilst clear distinctions are often drawn between works using these two traditions, recently critics have studied the impact of Ming vernacular fiction on the writing of *Liaozhai,* and found that the tales display the influence of this fiction in their use of colloquial language and narrative technique.[11] Zhang Renrang（張稔穰） highlights the way in which colloquialisms are used in dialogue in the tales, providing the example of a chatty old matchmaker in the tale 'Ninth Sister Shao' (邵九娘).[12] Zhang goes on to write that works in the classical language tend to feel distanced from 'real life', but that *Liaozhai* overcomes this through its use of real, tangible and down-to-earth details; 'Although its form is classical, its substance is of the everyday.'[13]

This parallels my assertion in Chapter Two, 'Monsters and Fear in *Liaozhai*', that the collection can be seen as a *search*; that it is driven by curiosity for both the fearful and wondrous aspects of the world, for both the 'high' and the 'low', the tragic and the romantic,

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9 'Quan jian' (19) 犬姦, 'The Adulterous Dog', p49.

10 Another tale which is given a 'judgement' is 'Huang Jiulang' (黃九郎, p316), which tells of the relationship between a man and a male fox spirit. Judith Zeitlin calls his 'jesting judgement' 'an amazingly arcane and rather hostile parody in parallel prose on homosexual practices.' (*Historian of the Strange*, p91). Minford argues that rather than being deliberately hostile, it is a deliberately exaggerated spoof, poking fun at the anti-homosexual lobby in the early Qing. (Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio,* p538).

11 See in particular Allan Barr, '*Liaozhai zhiyi* and Chinese Vernacular Fiction', in Berg, p3-36. Barr also points out that Pu Songling, besides the writing of *Liaozhai*, was an accomplished author of vernacular plays and ballads (p4).

12 Zhang Renrang, *Liaozhai zhiyi xinshang*, Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1986, p141-142. 'Shao jiuniang' (258) 'Ninth Sister Shao', p883-894.

13 Ibid., p145 '他的語言的根本特點可以說是文言的體式，生活的神髓，或曰口語的神髓'.

the happy and the tragic. Fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy can all be found embodied in the monster, revealing and exploring competing social discourses and tensions as seen through the eyes of the male literatus. This author is himself a complex and hybrid figure. Longing for boundary-crossing, he not only depicts the threatening and crossing of boundaries in his tales, but crosses them himself in his language – from the highbrow to the low, from the serious to the mocking, from the transcendental to the down-to-earth.

In Chapter Three, 'Becoming Monstrous', I discussed the use of grotesque realism in the tales; the portrayal of the changed and degraded human body. Grotesque realism typically has to do with bodily functions, and the stories do not shy away from such detail, despite their linguistic elegance. In fact, as Kenneth DeWoskin points out, the 'chaste, highly restrained diction' of the tales lends itself quite readily to the 'extensive presentation of mimetic, even ribald details.'[14] This can be seen in 'The Fornicating Dog', as well as tales such as 'Qiaoniang', which deals with male impotence, and 'Punishing a Lewd Fox' (狐懲淫), in which mischievous foxes add a man's aphrodisiac to his wife's food whilst he is away, causing her to attempt to seduce her house guest.[15] 'Vanquishing Foxes' (伏狐) is an extremely candid tale, involving two anecdotes in which foxes are killed through intercourse with a man.[16] And 'Scholar Huo', with its narrative of bawdy gossip and graphic retribution, strongly recalls the type of tale discussed by Bakhtin in his work on grotesque realism.[17] This mixture of 'high' and 'low', and the combining of different styles, recalls the aesthetics of the grotesque and its mixture of forms, conflicting feelings and effects.

Word-play continues in a darker vein in other tales. In Chapter Four, 'Monstrous Metamorphoses', I examined human-animal and animal-human transformations within *Liaozhai*, discussing the tale 'Dreaming of Wolves' (夢狼), which reveals through monstrous transformation the corruption of the protagonist's son. This dream metamorphosis is realised in the waking world when the son's body is permanently changed – his teeth knocked out then his head grotesquely twisted.

In this story, the allegorical expression 'tiger officials and wolf clerks' (*hulang lizhi* 虎狼吏治) is given body within the protagonist's dream in the son's metamorphosis into a

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14 Kenneth DeWoskin, 'The Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai* and the Birth of Fiction', in Plaks, ed. *Chinese Narrative; Critical and Theoretical Essays*, p323. What Allan Barr calls *Liaozhai*'s 'relative candour on sexual matters' reflects both the influence of Ming vernacular fiction, some of which is highly explicit, and the chaste, Qing beauty-scholar romances. (See Barr, '*Liaozhai zhiyi* and Chinese Vernacular Fiction', p18).

15 'Hu cheng yin' (250) 狐懲淫, 'Punishing a Lewd Fox', p849-851.

16 'Fu hu' (89) 伏狐, 'Vanquishing Foxes', p309.

17 'Scholar Huo', p368.

tiger and his clerks into wolves. Judith Zeitlin points out that the tale brings out the most monstrous implications of an expression dulled by habit and familiarity.[18] The words come to life, embodied in the protagonist's son and his venal, lupine clerks. In fact, this metamorphosis of language into life occurs twice in the story, as the corrupt – or crooked – man literally becomes crooked when his head is reattached backwards. The tale 'restores the shock of immediacy to a dead metaphor, reinvesting language itself with a new strangeness.[19] Here is the literalisation of figurative language, something Zeitlin calls 'one of the most common ways of generating fantasy in *Liaozhai*'.[20] Monstrosity described in language becomes monstrosity in reality, just as the monstrosity inside the character is reflected on his body. As discussed throughout, the monster *reveals*. The tale provides a 'chain of monstrosity', consisting of the moral mutations, the words or expressions to describe them, the dream metamorphoses, and finally the actual changes that take place on the body. Language itself becomes metamorphic, hybrid.

Like bodily metamorphoses, these puns and plays on words collapse conceptual boundaries, throwing order into disorder, and revealing hidden truths. In Chapter Three, for example, I discussed the tale 'The Bureau of Examination Frauds' (考弊司), a satirical treatment of the examination system, in which all degree holders are forced to cut a piece of flesh from their thighs as tribute to the inspector of examination frauds.[21] The word for fraud, *bi*, 弊, puns with the word that is used in the story for thigh, *bi*, 髀. This linguistic merging of one thing into another mirrors the physical monstrosities that the tales present, which can themselves reflect an internal twisting – such as bureaucratic greed and corruption, in these tales. Here, official corruption is, as in 'Dreaming of Wolves', written onto the human body. This time, however, it is the bodies of the scholars who must suffer; a suggestion, perhaps, that it is the scholars too who play their part in this 'monstrous system'.

Other tales use metamorphic language in other ways. I have discussed throughout the thesis the way in which the tales are centred around male experience, reflective of a patriarchal society and the male author, and in Chapter Two I argued that several tales problematise the act of looking. One such tale is 'The People in the Pupils Communicate' (瞳人語), also discussed in Chapter Three, in which a man is punished for his leering at

18 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange,* p145.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 'The Bureau of Examination Frauds', p822-825.

women.[22] Here, the traditional Chinese expression for pupil, *tongren* 瞳人 or 'man in the pupil' – from the reflection of oneself that one sees in the eye of another – is given literal form. The 'monstrous implications' of a man literally existing within a person's eye are brought to light. But far from being a simple play on words, the tale uses them to comment upon the moral behaviour of the protagonist.[23]

This literalisation of language is taken further through the blurred lines in the tales between lies and the truth, fiction and fact. It is not only verbal expressions or dreams which come true, but also jokes and lies. In 'Pretending to Hang' (戲縊), for example, the protagonist who pretends to hang himself for a joke really does kill himself.[24] And when Wang's cousin in 'Yingning' lies in order to help Wang, who is pining away out of lovesickness, saying that the girl Wang saw is his own cousin, and lives just south-west of here, the invention turns out to be quite true. So from a joke to a tragedy, from a lie to the truth, from a metaphor to reality, language in *Liaozhai* is changeable, escaping from categories, staging its own metamorphoses. Zhang Renrang remarks that the tales show 'truth in illusion'.[25] Like the monster itself, monstrous language 'reveals.'

I argued above that there is a self-conscious aspect to the use of language in the tales. This can be seen in particular in the metafictional impulse to *Liaozhai*, that corresponds to the idea of metamorphic language. In the tale 'A Fox Dream' (狐夢), for example, the author's friend Bi Yi'an (畢怡庵) has read the tale 'Qingfeng' (青鳳), and envies the protagonist his meeting with the beautiful fox spirit. In a dream he too meets a beautiful fox, who then asks to be written in to such a tale as *Liaozhai*'s 'Qingfeng'! Yuan Shishuo uses this tale to illuminate his argument that the collection goes beyond the *zhiguai* tradition in its creativity – the tale draws attention to the act of creating.[26] In another story, the author himself becomes the hero of an adventure. In all other tales, the Historian of the Strange relates or comments on the tale. 'The Crimson Princess', (絳妃) however, tells of the author's own dream.[27] In the dream, he is summoned to the home of the Crimson Princess, who asks him to write a poem

22 'The People in the Pupils Communicate', p10-13. See Minford, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, p503.

23 Another tale in which an expression concerning eyes comes to life is 'Scholar Gu', (顧生, p1154) in which the protagonist, who is suffering from a painful eye inflammation, seems to enter another world when he closes his eyes, and witnesses the staging of an opera. As he opens and closes his eyes the scene seems to jumps forward in time, from showing young babies and a youthful prince watching the performance, to an elderly prince watching a second opera. Seventy years have elapsed between Gu's visits – time has passed 'in the blink of an eye'. See Zeitlin, p171, for a further discussion on this tale.

24 'Xi yi' (255) 戲縊, 'Pretending to Hang', p876.

25 Zhang Renrang, *Liaozhai zhiyi xinshang*, p22.

26 'Hu meng' (178), 狐夢, 'A Fox Dream', p618-622. Yuan Shishuo, *Pu Songling zhi*, p132.

27 'Jiang fei' (215) 絳妃, 'The Crimson Princess, p739-746.

which will incite the flowers to battle against the wind. He drafts it quickly, (noting that usually he writes very slowly, but finds that his thoughts now pour out) whilst surrounded by beautiful spirits, and the Goddess is delighted. When he wakes, though he can only remember half of his words, he completes the poem.

Judith Zeitlin remarks that the act of writing in this tale is 'eroticized'; the court ladies bustle around the writer, wiping the table, grinding the ink and wetting the brush.[28] Writing itself here brings the fulfilment of desire, just as in many of the tales desire is fulfilled through monstrous means. This story in fact seems to provide an idealised counterpoint to the Historian's situation in the preface, writing in his cold studio at night. There, he is alone, longing for the boundary crossing that would allow communication over the frontier of death, with those who understand him. The imagery is cold and dark, the sparrow 'startled by frost', the autumn insect 'mourning the moon.' In 'The Crimson Princess', however, the writer is surrounded by flowers in bloom – first in the garden of his friend, and then transported to the palace of the Goddess of Flowers, full of gold and jade, waited on by her handmaidens. The tale plays out the longing expressed in the preface; he is surrounded by luxury and company, his work is admired, and his writing is quick and smooth. Like so many of his protagonists, he finds fulfilment not in the human world, but in the monstrous and marginal. And even though his visit to the Goddess's realm is only fleeting, it provides him with inspiration for his writing.

Typical of the collection as a whole, however, the tale is by no means unambiguously idealistic. In fact, in his long summons to the flowers, written in ostentatiously high-flown language and gleefully subverting the traditions of parallel prose, he mocks and undermines the act of writing, making the text itself grotesque. In Chapter Five, *The Monstrous Family*, I examined the portrayal of the monster as 'ideal' in the collection, looking at the ways in which the monstrous can lead to the fulfilment of desires, yet also subvert these desires. Beautiful ghosts and fox spirits seem to provide the 'impossible' combination of loyal wife and seductive concubine. (And, in the case of 'The Crimson Princess', the learned and appreciative audience). They provide a means to fulfil both duty and desire. Yet other figures unsettle this ideal, presenting threats to the family or mocking the idea that the beautiful monster will fulfil all desires. And through their puns and plays on language, other tales often mirror this sly subversion or puncturing of ideals. They show that it is wise for the *Liaozhai* protagonists to be careful of taking language – and what it reveals – for granted.

28 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p133.

In 'Grand Master of the Five Sheep Fleeces' (五羖大夫), for example, the protagonist, when he is a student, dreams that a voice speaks to him, addressing him using a name given to a famous statesman in the Spring and Autumn period.[29] He sees thisa good omen. When unrest comes, however, he is stripped of all his clothes and shut up in a cold room. He only survives by wrapping himself in sheep hides. In the morning he sees that there are exactly five hides, and laughs at the joke played on him by the spirit of his dream. In 'The Flying Ox' (牛飛) another dream is read as an omen. In this tale, the protagonist dreams of his ox flying away. Believing this to be a bad omen, he sells the animal, making a loss. On the way home, a falcon swoops down and carries the money away.[30] Both tales warn against the reading of omens in dreams. These stories subvert the idea that there is truth in illusion. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the tales revel in their unpredictability – they subvert and unsettle, always refusing simple ways of reading the world.

Finally, in Chapter Six, *Monstrous Margins*, I examined the theme of boundaries and space in the collection. Boundaries and boundary-crossing have been key to this thesis. The monster threatens or crosses geographical and bodily boundaries, as well as the boundaries between species, and even life and death. In this chapter I discussed the ways in which the monster – a marginal, boundary creature – makes human space marginal; how it makes the *heimlich* become *unheimlich.* It also considered what happens when humans enter the marginal spaces of the monster; the wilderness, or the underworld itself. Here, the monster's function of 'revealing' can be seen in its unsettling of the binary of 'centre' and 'margins'. As discussed in my first chapter, the monster causes 'vertigo'; it unsettles epistemological certainties, providing new ways of looking at and understanding both the familiar and the unfamiliar. And in *Liaozhai*, this vertigo, this constant troubling of boundaries, is supported by the structure and language of the collection itself. The tales draw the eye towards small, apparently insignificant details; an insect creeping across a page, a shadow, the perfume of flowers, a light in the distance. They make the familiar unfamiliar. And this act of representation is supported by the way the tales throw light on the marginal – whether it is these small details, or the 'ordinary' people depicted in the stories. The tales thus ask the reader to look and think again. What seems marginal becomes central, just as what is central

29 'Wugu dafu' (124) 五羖大夫, 'Grand Master of the Five Fleeces', p427-428. The statesman was Baili Xi, (百裡奚, birth and death dates unknown) who served under Duke Mu of Qin (秦穆公, reigned 659 BCE). He was called 'Grand Master of the Five Sheep Fleeces' because he was once ransomed for the price of five ram skins. This story is related in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, Chapter one. See Nienhauser, William H., ed. *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p72-73.

30 'Niu fei' (368) 牛飛, 'The Flying Ox', p1237.

is made marginal through its dealings with monstrosity or through its own monstrous change.

The Historian of the Strange's own ambiguous position also plays into this shifting of boundaries. As Robert Campany argues, the practice of writing and collecting anomalies was itself 'anti-locative', positioned on the margins, a way of challenging the powers at the centre.[31] Yet the elegant, learned use of language in the collection, the comparison to canonical texts as well as to famous writers of anomaly tales, unsettles this position, as does the Historian's statement that men send him stories from the 'four corners', putting himself at the centre of a project of collecting which in fact reverses the normal course, in which the writer travels from the centre to the periphery to find his tales.

So the monster in *Liaozhai zhiyi* can be wondrous or fearful, beautiful or hideous. It can bring the fulfilment of desires, but it can also bring disaster. It can be found in the dangerous wilds, far from human space, yet it also enters the human home, transforming the central into the marginal. Unpredictable, changeable, escaping from any framework that tries to contain it, the *Liaozhai* monster is a perfect vehicle to explore a text that is not only *about* the monstrous, but is monstrous itself. This hybrid text, read, critiqued and adapted by generation after generation, reflects the narrative of many of its tales; that monstrosity brings new possibilities and ways of thinking; that norms can be subverted even as they appear to be upheld, and that the monster issues an invitation 'to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world.'[32]

Warning, revealing, and exploring, the *Liaozhai* tales continue to exert a fascination over successive generations of readers, illustrating that the fears and anxieties, desires and fantasies that the monster embodies are still meaningful to readers today; the contradictions between containment and desire, the anxieties over the self and the other, the tension between the expectations of society and the individual. Although the context may be different, the monster, as Cohen writes, 'always returns', to reveal both old and new truths, crossing the gap between the time of upheaval that created it, and the moment it is received, always being born again.

31 Campany, *Strange Writing*, p13.
32 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p7.

Appendix: The Historian of the Strange's Self-Introduction

聊齋自志

披蘿帶荔，三閭氏感而為騷；牛鬼蛇神，長爪郎吟而成癖。自鳴天籟，不擇好音，有由然矣。松落落秋螢之火，魑魅爭光；逐逐野馬之塵，罔兩見笑。才非干寶，雅愛搜神；情類黃州，喜人談鬼。聞則命筆，遂以成編。久之，四方同人，又以郵筒相寄，因而物以好聚，所積益夥。甚者：人非化外，事或奇於斷髮之鄉；睫在眼前，怪有過於飛頭之國。遄飛逸興，狂固難辭；永托曠懷，痴且不諱。展如之人，得毋向我胡盧耶？然五父衢頭，或涉濫聽；而三生石上，頗悟前因。放縱之言，有未可概以人廢者。

松懸弧時，先大人夢一病瘠瞿曇，偏袒入室，藥膏如錢，圓粘乳際。寤而松生，果符墨志。且也：少羸多病，長命不猶。門庭之淒寂，則冷淡如僧；筆墨之耕耘，則蕭條似鉢。每搔頭自念：勿亦面壁人果是吾前身耶？蓋有漏根因，未結人天之果；而隨風蕩墮，竟成藩溷之花。茫茫六道，何可謂無其理哉！獨是子夜熒熒，燈昏欲蕊；蕭齋瑟瑟，案冷疑冰。集腋為裘，妄續幽冥之錄；浮白載筆，僅成孤憤之書；寄托如此，亦足悲矣！嗟乎！驚霜寒雀，抱樹無溫；吊月秋蟲，偎闌自熱。知我者，其在青林黑塞間乎！

康熙己未春日[1]

Liaozhai's Own Record [2]

'A belt of wood-lotus, a cloak of bryony' – the Lord of Three Wards was stirred and composed 'Encountering Sorrow'; 'Ox-headed demons and serpent gods' – of these the Long-Nailed Youth chanted and became obsessed. The pipes of Heaven sound of their own accord, without selecting fine tones; in this, there is precedence.

1 '*Liaozhai* zizhi' 聊齋自志, Zhang Youhe, p1.
2 Translation by Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*, p43-49. Zeitlin also provides detailed glosses for the many allusions in the preface.

I am but the dim flame of the autumn firefly, with which goblins jockeyed for light; a cloud of swirling dust, jeered at by mountain ogres. Though I lack the talent of Gan Bao, I too am fond of 'seeking the spirits'; in disposition I resemble Su Shi, who enjoyed people telling ghost stories.

What I have heard, I committed to paper, and so this collection came about. After some time, like-minded men from the four directions dispatched stories to me by post, and because 'things accrue to those who love them,' what I had amassed grew even more plentiful.

Indeed, within the civilised world, things may be more wondrous than in 'the country of those who crop their hair'; before our very eyes are things stranger than in 'the land of the flying heads.'

My excitement quickens: this madness is indeed irrepressible, and so I continually give vent to my vast feelings and don't even forbid this folly. Won't I be laughed at by serious men? Though I may have heard wild rumours at 'Five Fathers Crossroads,' I could still have realised some previous causes on the 'Rock of Past Lives.' Unbridled words cannot be rejected entirely because of their speaker!

At the hour of my birth, my late father had a dream: a gaunt, sickly Buddhist monk, whose robe left one shoulder bare, entered the room. A plaster round as a coin was pasted on his chest. When my father awoke, I had been born, with an inky birthmark that corroborated his dream. Moreover, as a child I was frequently ailing, and when I grew up, my fate was wanting. The desolation of my courtyard resembles a monk's quarters and what 'ploughing with brush and ink' brings is as little as a monk's alms bowl. I often scratch my head and muse: "Could 'he who faced the wall' have really been me in a previous existence?" In fact, there must have been a deficiency in my previous karma, and so I did not reach transcendence, but was blown by the wind, becoming in the end a flower fallen in a cesspool. How murky are the 'six paths of existence!' But it cannot be said they lack coherence.

It's just that here it is the glimmering hour of midnight as I am about to trim my failing lamp. Outside my bleak studio the wind is sighing; inside my desk is cold as ice. Piecing together patches of fox fur to make a robe, I vainly fashion a sequel to *Records of the Underworld*. Draining my winecup and grasping my brush, I complete the book of 'lonely anguish.' How sad it is that I must express myself like this!

Alas! A chilled sparrow, startled by frost clings to frigid boughs, and autumn insect mourning the moon hugs the railing for warmth. Are the only ones who know me 'in the green wood and at the dark frontier'?

Spring, the year *jiwei* (1679) during the reign of Kangxi.

An Appendix of the *Liaozhai* Tales Discussed in the Thesis

Chinese titles and division into volumes (卷) according to Zhang Youhe (張友鶴) , *Liaozhai zhiyi: huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 聊齋誌異: 會校會注會評本 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986). Numbering using the sequence proposed by Allan Barr in 'The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*,' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44.2 (1984): 556–562 ('Index to Entries in *Liaozhai zhiyi*'). English titles and page numbers from Sidney L. Sondergard, *Strange Tales from Liaozhai*, 6. Vols., Fremont: Jain Publishing, 2008-2013. (As Volume 5 has not yet been published, for this final volume I have used the translations of titles by Minford or Giles wherever possible.) Additional page references for Pu Songling, *Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio*, translated and edited by John Minford (London: Penguin, 2006), and Pu Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, translated and edited by Herbert Giles (Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont, Singapore: Tuttle, 2010).

S: Sondergard
M: Minford
G: Giles

No.	Chinese Title	漢字	English Title (Sondergard)	Page		
				S.	M.	G.
第一卷						
2	Er zhong ren	耳中人	The Man in the Ear	9	2	
3	Shi bian	尸變	The Restless Corpse	11	10	339
4	Pen shui	噴水	Squirting	16	15	
5	Tongren yu	瞳人語	The People in the Pupils Communicate	18	18	2
6	Huabi	畫壁	The Frescoed Wall	23	23	
7	Shanxiao	山魈	The Mountain Spirit	28	28	
8	Yao gui	咬鬼	Biting the Ghost	32	31	
9	Zhuo hu	捉狐	Catching a Fox	34	34	
10	Qiao zhong guai	荍中怪	Something Strange in the Buckwheat	36	37	
11	Zhai yao	宅妖	Goblins in the House	39	40	
15	Laoshan daoshi	勞山道士	The Daoist of Laoshan	56	50	34
17	Sheren	蛇人	The Snake Man	65	59	
18	Zhe mang	斫蟒	Chopping the Python	70	64	
19	Quan jian	犬姦	The Adulterous Dog	72	66	
20	Bao shen	雹神	The Hail God	75	67	
22	Jiaonuo	嬌娜	Jiaona	84	76	4
23	Seng nie	僧孽	The Buddhist Monk's Sin	96	87	345
25	Ye gou	野狗	The Feral Dog	103	95	
26	San sheng (1)	三生	Three Lives	105		
27	Hu ru ping	狐入瓶	The Fox Hides in a Jug	109	102	
28	Gui ku	鬼哭	The Weeping Ghosts	110	104	
30	Jiao ming	焦螟	Jiaoming	114	109	
31	Ye sheng	葉生	Scholar Ye	117	112	
36	Wang Lan	王蘭	Wang Lan	141		
38	Wang Cheng	王成	Wang Cheng	149		
39	Qingfeng	青鳳	Qingfeng	159		

				S.	M.	G.
40	Hua pi	畫皮	Painted Skin	168	126	6
41	Guer	賈兒	The Merchant's Son	175	133	68
	第二卷					
43	Jin Shicheng	金世成	Jin Shicheng	183	142	
44	Dong sheng	董生	Scholar Dong	185	143	
46	Miao gui	廟鬼	The Temple Demon	192		
48	Yingning	嬰寧	Yingning	206	152	79
49	Nie Xiaoqian	聶小倩	Nie Xiaoqian	223	168	89
51	Dizhen	地震	An Earthquake	236	182	370
52	Hai gongzi	海公子	The Lord of the Sea	238	185	338
54	Hai dayu	海大魚	The Whales Surface	246	193	
55	Zhang lao xianggong	張老相公	Old Master Zhang	247	194	
56	Shuimang cao	水莽草	The Shuimang Herb	249		95
57	Zao zhu	造畜	Creating Livestock	257	197	371
59	Geng Shiba	耿十八	Geng Shiba	264		
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