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Close Reading, Stage Analysis, and Reinterpretation of Classics: A Review of *From Script to Stage: A Study of the Dramatic Art of Cao Yu's Thunderstorm*

Peng Biwei

Abstract: *From Script to Stage: A Study of the Dramatic Art of Cao Yu's Thunderstorm* by Xian Liqiang is a comprehensive monograph on Cao Yu's classic play *Thunderstorm*. Based on the author's reflections on classroom teaching, this book explores the literary connotations and dramatic expression of *Thunderstorm* by combining close reading with stage analysis. The study focuses on the existential predicaments and complexity of human nature, offering innovative interpretations of the four core characters: Zhou Puyuan, Fanyi, Lu Shiping, and Lu Gui. Furthermore, the book analyzes the charm of *Thunderstorm's* stage art from multiple perspectives, including dramatic rhythm, forms of address, stage design, lighting, and sound effects, revealing the cross-media transformation mechanism from text to performance. This work not only continues the diverse tradition of Cao Yu studies but also reinterprets the universal human issues and contemporary significance of *Thunderstorm* from a modern perspective, highlighting the enduring vitality of classic works in the dialogue between history and reality.

Keywords: Cao Yu; *Thunderstorm*; dramatic art; stage research

Author Biography: Peng Biwei, Master's student at the School of Chinese Language and Literature, South China Normal University. Research direction: Chinese Language Teaching in Secondary Schools. E-mail: 1521305148@qq.com.

题目：文本细读、舞台解码与经典重释——评《从剧本到舞台：曹禺〈雷雨〉戏剧艺术研究》

摘要：咸立强著《从剧本到舞台：曹禺〈雷雨〉戏剧艺术研究》是一部对曹禺经典话剧《雷雨》的综合性研究专著。本书以作者在课堂讲授中的思考为基础，通过文本细读与舞台艺术分析相结合的方法，探讨《雷雨》的文学内涵与戏剧表现。研究关注人物的生存困境与人性复杂性，对周朴园、蘩漪、鲁侍萍、鲁贵四位核心角色进行了创新性解读。同时，著作从戏剧节奏、称呼语使用、舞美、灯光、音效等多角度剖析《雷雨》的舞台艺术魅力，揭示其从文本到演出的跨媒介转换机制。本书不仅延续了曹禺研究的多元化传统，也通过当代视角重新诠释了《雷雨》所蕴含的普遍人性问题与时代意义，彰显经典作品在历史与现实对话中的持久生命力。

关键词：曹禺；《雷雨》；戏剧艺术；舞台研究

作者简介：彭碧薇，华南师范大学文学院硕士研究生，研究方向：中学语文教学，电子邮箱：1521305148@qq.com。

Thunderstorm had a profound impact, leading to 1935 being dubbed the ‘Year of *Thunderstorm*’. Since its publication, *Thunderstorm* has swiftly become an epoch-making classic in the history of modern Chinese theatre, and a work that cannot be overlooked in any account of modern literary history. Over the past 30 years of reform and opening up, the movement to emancipate the mind and the strengthened cultural exchanges between China and the world have broadened scholars’ aesthetic horizons in their study of Cao Yu. Research into his work has expanded beyond a sociological perspective. Researchers now use methodologies such as aesthetics, psychology, and comparative literature to examine his plays from different angles and levels. This research has entered new realms. *From Script to Stage: A Study of the Dramatic Art of Cao Yu’s Thunderstorm* (published by Guangdong People’s Publishing House in 2024; hereinafter referred to as ‘this book’) is a monograph on Cao Yu’s play *Thunderstorm*. The book primarily comprises the fruits of Professor Xian Liqiang’s teaching and reflection on *Thunderstorm* in university and secondary school classrooms. Drawing on a vast collection of published works, stage productions, and literary-historical critiques of *Thunderstorm*, Professor Xian Liqiang employs close textual analysis to explore the possibilities of reading and interpreting the play. He offers an in-depth analysis of the four older characters in *Thunderstorm*: Zhou Puyuan, Zhou Fanyi, Lu Shiping and Lu Gui. Centering on the play’s script and drawing upon stage productions, he dissects the artistic appeal of *Thunderstorm* from multiple perspectives, including language, set design, sound effects and lighting.

1. From Class Analysis to Empathy for Human Nature

Since its publication, *Thunderstorm* has undergone three theoretical shifts in its critical approach, offering a microcosm of the development of modern Chinese literary criticism. During its formative years in the 1930s

and 1940s, sociological criticism held sway. Zhou Yang (1984, p. 203) states that *Thunderstorm* “exposes the cruelty and wickedness of the feudal family system”; this method of class analysis continued to be employed after the founding of the People’s Republic. In 1951, Wang Yao’s *Draft History of Modern Chinese Literature* was published, marking the appearance of the first work on the history of modern Chinese literature. This work described *Thunderstorm* as “the evil and tragedy caused by irrational social relations”. Influenced by the prevailing social climate of the time, Wang Yao (1953, p. 272) specifically identified the Zhou family as “bourgeois” and the Lu family as representing the “working people”; the narrative of the relationship between the two families thus revealed the dynamics of class struggle. Wang Yao’s views outlined above exerted a significant influence on Chinese academic circles throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and indeed into the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequent editions of *A History of Modern Chinese Literature* largely adopted this perspective, or developed it further in a more “left-leaning” direction. However, class criticism does not appear to have been Cao Yu’s original intention in writing the play. In the preface to *Thunderstorm*, he states: “I was not explicitly conscious of seeking to rectify, satirize or attack anything” (Cao Yu, 1936, p. 182). On the contrary, what drove him to write was a “complex and primal emotion”—a sense of bewilderment at the “cruelty” and “coldness” of the universe. The literary critic Liu Xiwei wrote in 1935 (p. 116) that “the most powerful yet unseen force running through this long play is a pervasive sense of fate.” The ideological liberation movement of the 1980s gave rise to a shift in the interpretation of human nature. Qian Gurong’s view that “literature is the study of humanity” was creatively applied in the study of *Thunderstorm*. Criticism during this period began to focus on the psychological motivations underlying Zhou Puyuan’s role as an authoritarian patriarch, while discussions of Fan Yi’s “demonic nature” gradually moved beyond moral judgment. Since the beginning of the 21st century, research has exhibited a growing methodological diversity. Recent studies have placed greater emphasis on interdisciplinary perspectives, with new approaches such as psychoanalysis, narratology, and spatial theory continually enriching the interpretive landscape of *Thunderstorm*.

It is within this context that the author of this book reconstructs the interpretive paradigm of this classic tragedy from a sympathetic perspective imbued with humanistic concern. This critical approach embodies the fundamental spirit of philosophical hermeneutics: the critic reflects upon and transcends the presuppositions of traditional class analysis, taking empathy and understanding as the starting point for interpretation. This liberates the characters in *Thunderstorm* from stereotypical and symbolic labels, returning them to their authentic existential predicaments, and thereby establishes a more ontologically meaningful channel of understanding between the interpreter and the text. The book’s character analysis vividly illustrates the practical tension inherent in this perspective. Taking Fan Yi as an example, the study does not stop at the superficial appearance of her “thunderstorm-like” rebellion, but goes further to reveal the internal conflict between the suppressed instincts of life and the inescapable psychological dependence lurking behind her extreme defiance; regarding Shi Ping, the study breaks away from the conventional

portrayal of her as a victim, pointing out that her “suffering” stems largely from her subjective perception. It should be noted that the “empathy” practiced in this book is not mere sentimentality, but rather an empathetic understanding grounded in rigorous close reading of the text. It requires researchers to set aside preconceived moral judgments, delve into the subtle inner worlds of the characters, and discern the dilemmas and struggles they face within specific ethical relationships. In a sense, this approach not only reinterprets the character portraits in *Thunderstorm* but also serves as a proactive response to the current trend in literary studies of returning to the essence of literature. Of course, as the focus of research shifts toward the characters’ inner emotions and existential dilemmas, a key question for further exploration in subsequent studies may be how to return to a humanistic perspective while ensuring that the rich socio-historical dimensions inherent in *Thunderstorm* continue to interact organically with this humanistic interpretation, rather than creating underlying tensions. Guided by the insights of this theoretical perspective, as we proceed to the book’s analysis of specific characters, we can more clearly discern the practical logic and interpretive tension inherent in this research approach.

By examining the characters’ personalities and the historical context, the author demonstrates that the tragedy depicted in the play is neither a simple product of social criticism nor an inevitable consequence of individual moral failings, but rather a complex outcome of the interplay between the limitations of human nature and the irresistible forces of fate under specific historical conditions. Each character is both a victim of the tragedy and an accomplice to it; in their quest to find meaning in life, they unwittingly become entangled in the absurd cycle predetermined by fate. This sympathetic perspective is deeply aligned with the philosophy that guided Cao Yu in writing *Thunderstorm*. Cao Yu once remarked: “I reflect on how pitiable human beings are—full of ambition and confidence, as if they were the masters of their own destiny, yet often unable to control their own fate.” (Cao Yu, 1936, p. 182) Within the dramatic universe of *Thunderstorm*, he constructs a tragic cycle from which no one can escape. Si Feng is electrocuted to death, Zhou Ping shoots himself, Fan Yi descends into madness, and Shi Ping breaks down. Even Zhou Puyuan—whom many view as the perpetrator—plunges into the abyss, ultimately facing a desolate fate marked by his wife’s madness and his own death in old age. This design of a tragedy involving all characters serves as an inquiry into the predicament of human existence: when individuals cannot break free from the shackles of their era, and when free will is in eternal conflict with the inevitability of fate, how should we view the weaknesses and struggles of human nature? In discussing O’Neill’s influence on Cao Yu, Long Zhaoxiu (1997, p. 57) points out that both Cao Yu and O’Neill were committed to creating characters with “split personalities characterized by multiple facets”—that is, characters embodying “multiple aesthetic forms of beauty and ugliness, good and evil, sorrow and joy.” Such characterization clearly transcends simple judgments of good and evil. This is precisely where Cao Yu surpasses many of his contemporaries: he is not writing a moral play about the consequences of good and evil, but rather portraying a structural predicament from which no one can escape. It is on this point that the book’s empathetic perspective resonates with Cao Yu’s creative spirit.

2. The Characters of *Thunderstorm* in the Dilemmas of Human Nature

In 1962, Mr. Qian Gurong published a lengthy essay titled “A Discussion of the Characters in *Thunderstorm*” in the first issue of *Literary Criticism*. Drawing on his theoretical perspective that “literature is the study of humanity,” he returned to the fundamental stance of literature as the study of humanity to analyze characters such as Zhou Puyuan and Fan Yi. Mr. Qian Guorong’s research transcended the socio-historical critical paradigm prevalent at the time, refocusing attention on the characters’ inner worlds and the essence of human nature, thereby opening a new avenue for the study of the characters in *Thunderstorm* following the founding of the People’s Republic of China. In the character analysis of *Thunderstorm* in Chapter 2 of this book, the author fully incorporates Mr. Qian Gurong’s research methodology on “character studies,” while integrating the wisdom of academic predecessors with his own unique insights to analyze the four core characters of the older generation in the play: Zhou Fanyi, Lu Shiping, Zhou Puyuan, and Lu Gui.

2.1 The Demon of Despair: Fan Yi

In the pantheon of characters in modern Chinese drama, few evoke such a complex mix of love and fear, pity and sorrow as Fan Yi from *Thunderstorm*; even Cao Yu himself remarked, “I love watching women like Fan Yi.” Chapter 2 of this book, titled “The Forging of Demons and Ghosts,” examines Fan Yi, focusing its analysis on her strikingly “demonic” traits. Interpreting Fan Yi from this perspective highlights her unique rebellious nature and the abnormal characteristics inherent in that rebellion. The author places Fan Yi within Cao Yu’s lineage of female characters, noting that she, along with Chen Bailu from *Sunrise* and Hua Jinzhi from *The Wilderness*, forms a series of characters imbued with a “demonic” quality, reflecting the author’s consistent aesthetic pursuit. This wild quality, marked by primal impulses and the vitality of life, also allows Fan Yi’s “Thunderstorm-like personality” to resonate with Western dramatic culture. The intense, even twisted emotional bond between her and Zhou Ping is a manifestation of this primal desire; its obsession and madness led Zhou Ping to call her a “ghost.” Yet Fan Yi’s allure lies not in her “wickedness,” but in the vitality of her humanity, which erupts in extreme ways, and in the destructive, unbridled force of life that breaks all conventions.

Previous studies have often viewed Fan Yi as a microcosm of the May Fourth women’s awakening, arguing that she embodies a powerful voice for individual liberation. This book challenges that interpretation. The author acknowledges Fan Yi’s spirit of resistance; within the suffocating confines of the Zhou Mansion, she was indeed the only one who dared to challenge Zhou Puyuan’s authority. But the question remains: what is the root of this rebellion? Why didn’t Fan Yi simply leave the Zhou Mansion? This book’s answer is that Fan Yi’s rebellion was not based on the awakening of modern female consciousness, but rather stemmed from repressed instinctual desires. She yearned to break free from her cage, yet never imagined the world beyond it. This contradiction made her rebellion both intense and blind, exhibiting distinct irrational characteristics, and ultimately leading to destruction rather than liberation. This assessment hits the nail on the head. As the book states, “her greatest demand of Zhou Ping was the

exclusive possession of his love, and her minimum demand was that he take her with him; the only thing she did not demand was female independence” (Xian Liqiang, 2024, p. 71).

In summary, this book’s interpretation of Fan Yi neither glosses over her destructive tendencies nor exaggerates her awakening; it enriches the depth of her character while further highlighting the realistic weight and intellectual depth of the female narrative in *Thunderstorm*.

2.2 The Bound “Mei”: Shi Ping

Amid the tragic turmoil of *Thunderstorm*, the character of Shi Ping is often reduced to that of a pure victim, an unfortunate woman abandoned by Zhou Puyuan, bearing the merciless blows of fate. For a long time, the relationship between her and Zhou Puyuan has also been interpreted as one between oppressor and oppressed. While this past interpretation aligns with the work’s social critique, it has diminished the psychological complexity of Shi Ping as an independent individual to some extent. The chapter “Everything Is Fate: A Study of Shi Ping” in this book offers a new perspective on Shi Ping: no one can deny that she had a tragic background and led a life of suffering. However, through an in-depth analysis of her “suffering,” we discover that this pain stems largely from her subjective perceptions.

The book argues that the detailed descriptions in *Thunderstorm* actually support this conclusion. The Shi Ping portrayed by Cao Yu is “fair-skinned and looks to be only thirty-eight or thirty-nine years old,” which stands in stark contrast to the weathered image we might imagine. Cao Yu clearly had no intention of using this to emphasize Shi Ping’s destitute condition, if that were the case, she would have appeared even older than her actual age. The author thus raises the following question: The academic consensus regarding Shi Ping’s “tragic fate” largely stems from her own account during her reunion with Zhou Puyuan; however, these lamentations themselves reflect Shi Ping’s subjective feelings rather than her purely objective circumstances. An even more telling detail is that when Shi Ping unexpectedly encounters Zhou Puyuan at the Zhou Mansion, she repeatedly refers to her expulsion from the Zhou family as having occurred “thirty years ago.” Yet she left with the newborn Lu Dahai twenty-seven years ago; “thirty years ago” was precisely the period when she and Zhou Puyuan were in love. This temporal discrepancy reveals Shi Ping’s deep-seated longing for the good old days—she unconsciously uses happy memories to overshadow her painful experiences. (Chen Sihe, 2003) In my view, when reading *Thunderstorm* in the past, we often focused solely on the nostalgia embodied by Zhou Puyuan’s thirty-year-long preservation of old furniture and maintenance of old habits, yet few paid attention to the equally deep attachment to the past that existed within Shi Ping’s heart. Zhou Puyuan’s nostalgia is overt and materialistic, whereas Shi Ping’s fixation is latent, deeply buried in her subconscious, and only emerges through such detailed analysis. This analysis in the book offers a meaningful shift in perspective.

The author of this book argues that what is often termed a tragedy of fate can also be seen as a tragedy of character in Shi Ping’s case; her suffering stems from an inescapable tendency to compare her circumstances. She unconsciously uses Zhou Puyuan and life at the Zhou Mansion as a benchmark against

which to measure her subsequent marriage and her years of wandering. Precisely for this reason, the failure of her two subsequent marriages was not merely due to the hardships of life, but rather because she had lost the ability to invest in new relationships. While I largely agree with this interpretation, I do have some reservations. Although there are certainly psychological reasons why Shi Ping was unable to invest in new relationships, might the character of her two husbands themselves have been a significant factor? In particular, given Lu Gui's crassness and selfishness, it would likely be difficult for anyone to form a genuine emotional bond with him. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that this perspective breaks through the flat, stereotypical perception of Shi Ping, liberating her from the rigid image of a pure victim and allowing us to see a more multidimensional and modern tragic female figure.

2.3 The Model Prisoner: Zhou Puyuan

In previous studies of *Thunderstorm*, the character of Zhou Puyuan has often been reduced to a stereotypical representation of a ruthless capitalist and feudal patriarch. Going beyond moral criticism, the book offers a more explanatory perspective: Zhou Puyuan is essentially a "model seeker" who internalizes social norms into obsessive self-standards, only to become the antithesis of his own pursuit. This interpretation reveals that Zhou Puyuan's tragedy does not stem from a lack of morality, but rather from an excessive fixation on it.

The author outlines Zhou Puyuan's efforts to cultivate a model image from multiple perspectives. In his professional life, he transformed from a feudal landlord into an industrialist, using the knowledge gained while studying in Germany to develop mines, build bridges, and run businesses; within his family, he maintained order as the patriarch, striving to create "the most harmonious and orderly" household. Even his retention of Shi Ping's old belongings and his contradictory attitude, as shown in the line "There's no need to bring up the past," are, in the author's view, not just a hypocritical performance. Instead, they reflect a subconscious attempt at self-glorification. By recalling the past, he tries to present himself as a man of deep loyalty and integrity. However, this self-image is full of self-deception. Paradoxically, it was precisely this moral self-discipline that led to an even greater family tragedy. He treated family order as unquestionable authority while ignoring his family members' emotional needs, causing Fan Yi to become so repressed that she fell ill and Zhou Ping to sink into a state of mental distress. This inevitably brings to mind the classic tragic irony found in ancient Greek tragedy: just as Oedipus, the more he strove to evade the oracle's prophecy, the more precisely he walked into the trap of fate; so too did Zhou Puyuan, the more he was obsessed with becoming a moral exemplar, the more he went against his own nature by stifling genuine human needs, thereby transforming moral norms into instruments of oppression.

The author's analysis of Zhou Puyuan's concept of time is equally intriguing. As an early national capitalist, Zhou Puyuan brought the factory's efficiency-driven logic of time into his family life. The author observes that Zhou Puyuan measured time in minutes inside the Zhou Mansion; he even managed to force Fan Yi to take her medicine in just seven minutes. This detail exposes the absurdity and cruelty of running a

household as if it were a factory. The family is supposed to be a flexible emotional space, but Zhou Puyuan imposed the industrial society's concept of time upon it, turning every family member into a to-do item on his schedule. The author particularly agrees with the author's further observation that this pattern of alienation has, in fact, been passed down from one generation to the next. Zhou Ping, having gone from initial rebellion to eventual submission, chose to follow in her father's footsteps. This not only signifies the successful replication of Zhou Puyuan's pattern of alienation, but also reveals the psychological predicament of the entire feudal bourgeois family: under the dual oppression of efficiency-at-all-costs and authoritarian rule, human nature is distorted and emotions are suppressed, free will is gradually eroded, and the family ultimately falls into a tragic cycle. In this sense, Zhou Puyuan is not only the oppressor of his family but also the first prisoner of this logic of alienation.

2.4 The Misunderstood Clown: Lu Gui

In studies of *Thunderstorm*, Lu Gui is perhaps the least controversial character. Slippery, opportunistic, and manipulative—even going so far as to scheme against his own daughter—he has long been viewed as a pure villain or a comic figure. This book reinterprets the character of Lu Gui within the context of the logic of the underclass, offering a new perspective on him. The author argues that Lu Gui's scheming and sycophancy are essentially a distorted survival instinct. For a lowly servant of old China with neither status nor security, such petty cleverness was just a way to survive. This shift in perspective does not whitewash his despicable actions. Instead, it compassionately views the distortion of human nature under survival pressure, reflecting a realistic concern for the fate of ordinary people.

The author's discussion of Lu Gui's situation within his family is also striking. The book points out that Lu Gui boasts, "Who doesn't say I, Lu Gui, am the best?" Yet in the eyes of his wife, son, and daughter, he is a complete failure. Shi Ping looks down on him, Lu Dahai despises him, and Si Feng merely obeys him superficially. His so-called status as the head of the household was nothing more than a hollow title; within the family, he was unable to prevent Shi Ping from leaving home years ago to work as a domestic servant, nor did he have any say in Sifeng's romantic choices. The book also contrasts the parental figures of Lu Gui and Zhou Puyuan: Zhou Puyuan's authoritarianism is rooted in economic and social power, whereas Lu Gui's "dream of being a patriarch" lacks any basis in reality. This comparison spot-on reveals that in *Thunderstorm*, even becoming a despicable patriarch requires qualifications that Lu Gui lacks. So his ridiculousness takes on a tragic undertone.

This book's interpretation of Lu Gui reminds us that, before rushing to label a character as a "villain," we might first ask: Where does his "evil" come from? What role does the social structure play in this? However, we must be mindful that acknowledging the social roots of "evil" does not automatically absolve individuals of moral responsibility. The complexity of Lu Gui's character lies precisely in the fact that he is both a victim of social oppression and an agent who actively chooses to commit evil deeds. The tension between these two aspects leaves ample room for further exploration of this character.

3. The Multifaceted Stage Art of *Thunderstorm*

In Chapter 3 of this book, titled “An Aesthetic Analysis of *Thunderstorm*,” the author examines the play’s dramatic rhythm, stage vocal delivery, color, and lighting. Regarding the dramatic rhythm in *Thunderstorm*, he pointed out that rhythm refers to regular variation, a regularity built upon the repeated appearance of similar elements. Whether it be the variations in pitch, volume, duration, and intensity at the phonetic level, or the modes of expression and scene reenactment at the narrative level, all contribute to a unique dramatic rhythm. The rhythm of a play is multi-layered. At the micro level, every word and syllable of an actor’s lines contains rhythmic variations; from a macro perspective, the repeated use of similar expressions can also create rhythm. For instance, similar phrases such as Zhou Puyuan’s remark to Zhou Chong, “Neither you nor your mother knows what ails you,” and Lu Gui’s remark to Si Feng, “Neither you nor your mother knows the value of money,” create a rhythmic echo within the narrative. The way the two men speak to their families also creates a sense of repetition, giving the plot’s development a certain rhythm or a regular pattern. It is worth noting that rhythm can be expressed in a wide variety of ways: the pace of characters’ movements, the intensity of sound effects, the contrast between character traits, and even stage direction, lighting changes, and scene transitions can all create variations in rhythm. It is precisely these changes that breathe life into a play, “without variation, there is no rhythm; without rhythm, there is no drama.” The author also points out that we must distinguish between two dimensions: the internal rhythm of the script and the rhythm of the stage performance. The former is conveyed through the text, while the latter is the artistic effect ultimately experienced by the audience. For the general reader, the process of understanding the rhythm of a play offers an open space for interpretation. For actors and directors, however, this must be transformed into a visual performance rhythm through a series of artistic re-creation processes, including professional interpretation and stage design. The author also uses the first act of *Thunderstorm* as an example to analyze the play’s fast and slow pacing. Although the opening dialogue between Lu Gui and Si Feng harbors underlying tension, Lu Gui’s patient guidance lends it a gentle, unhurried rhythm; the mother-son exchange between Fan Yi and Zhou Chong is similarly warm and unhurried. This slow pace shifts after Zhou Puyuan enters the scene; his habit of frequently interrupting others and abruptly changing the subject accelerates the play’s rhythm. This fast-paced dialogue stems not only from Zhou Puyuan’s time constraints but also from his domineering and autocratic personality. This contrast in pacing not only shapes the character but also creates a dynamic tension in the dramatic conflict, showcasing Cao Yu’s masterful control of the play’s rhythm.

Regarding the use of honorifics in *Thunderstorm*, the author believes the play exhibits the following characteristics: First, the higher a person’s social status, the fewer types of honorifics they use when addressing the same individual; conversely, those of lower social status tend to use a greater variety of honorifics when addressing the same person, and there are differences in their usage between public and private settings. Second, within the Zhou residence, spouses address each other by their first names; for

example, Zhou Puyuan occasionally calls Fan Yi by her first name, and both Lu Shiping and Zhou Fan Yi have addressed Zhou Puyuan by his first name. This practice does not exist in the Lu household, yet addressing each other by first name is a hallmark of a civilized family. Specifically, in the scene where Zhou Puyuan and Lu Shiping meet, Lu Shiping initially addresses Zhou Puyuan with honorifics such as “Sir,” which not only conforms to the hierarchical order of the Zhou Mansion but also hints at the dynamic of their relationship during her time there. It is only after Zhou Puyuan recognizes her as Shiping that she switches to addressing him as “you” and “Puyuan.” This shift in address not only reveals Lu Shiping’s complex inner emotions but also highlights her steady and composed nature, standing in stark contrast to Lu Dahai’s rashness and Lu Gui’s tendency to be petty and complain. Third, when the same term of address is used by different characters, it can reveal distinct personalities. The same phrase, when spoken by different people, conveys vastly different emotional tones and attitudes. For example, both Lu Gui and Lu Shiping referred to Si Feng as “my daughter”; while Shiping’s use of the term conveyed trust and pride, Lu Gui’s tone was tinged with flattery and an air of authority. Fourth, the use of similar terms of address can imply character relationships and enhance the drama through intertextuality. Lu Gui repeatedly calls Lu Dahai “you little bastard,” and when speaking to Si Feng about Lu Dahai, he says, “Who knows what kind of son that bastard has raised?” In Act III, he curses Zhou Puyuan as “old man, you old bastard.” The terms “little” and “old” refer to age. Although Lu Gui does not know that Zhou Puyuan and Lu Dahai are father and son, he inadvertently labels them as “old” and “young.” Readers and audiences, aware of their true relationship, cannot help but smile knowingly when they see or read this.

4. Conclusion

From Script to Stage: A Study of the Dramatic Art of Cao Yu's Thunderstorm offers a unique academic perspective and provides an in-depth interpretation of this classic of modern Chinese theater. Professor Xian Liqiang has distilled his years of teaching experience into a systematic academic study that not only continues the three-decade-long tradition of diverse scholarship on Cao Yu but also charts a new path for interpreting *Thunderstorm* from the perspective of stage arts. Through a nuanced analysis of the four central characters, a keen grasp of the play’s language, and a unique interpretation of stage elements such as set design, sound effects, and lighting, this book not only reveals the enduring artistic appeal of *Thunderstorm* but also demonstrates the vitality of a literary classic that continues to be reinterpreted across different eras. At the same time, This book offers valuable insights into the contemporary relevance of classic texts. Through modern interpretations of the characters, it reveals that the issues reflected in *Thunderstorm*, such as the estrangement between parents and children and the solidification of class divisions, still resonate with contemporary society. This dialogue across time and space highlights the vital role of literary criticism in bridging history and reality, as well as theory and practice.

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ORCID

Peng Biwei ^{ID} <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6571-4585>

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