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Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature. By LI Wai-yee. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014. Pp. xii + 638.

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This major study brings to life the fall of the Ming and its afterlife in China's historical memory with almost visceral intensity. Li Wai-yee explores nearly all the literary genres of the seventeenth century, from classical poetry to novels, stories, and plays, with special attention to the fate of women, both as represented by male authors and writing in their own voices. The author exploits an incomparable breadth of reading and admirable sensitivity for narrative technique to weave together a compelling portrait of the mentality of the age; but it is her mastery of dialectic, long familiar to readers of her first book, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, that truly raises the work to a higher plane and achieves an undeniably moral import. In this searching study of the ironies of historical judgment, we come to perceive the identities of both men and women after the fall of the Ming as the cumulative result of imaginative sympathy, redemptive suffering, and the aporias of self-perception.

Women and National Trauma consists of six chapters, each roughly one hundred pages in length; this is a work of great scope and ambition, presented with fine scholarship. Li excels at explaining the literary-historical context of the pieces under study, with targeted digressions on the poetry of Du Fu or the *Chuci* that present the relevant background as needed.[1] This whole study is richly ornamented with new translations of hundreds of key texts, including poems in their entirety and selections from drama and fiction. Adapting these texts into English is itself a serious challenge, to be sure, and though Li knows these texts too well to make any mistakes, here and there she glosses over a significant detail.

1 Occasionally the scholarship is dated. The myth that Bao Zhao 鮑照 (421–465) wrote the "Wucheng fu" 蕪城賦 after a rebellion (p. 121) was disproved decades ago and is perpetuated solely in Cambridge, Mass.

The analytical method of the book is illustrated best by the first two, complementary, chapters: "Male Voices Appropriating Feminine Diction" and "Female Voices Appropriating Masculine Diction." Though these 200 pages would appear to have a very simple thesis, namely the parallel ways that male writers continued to employ femininity as a political trope and that female writers adopted masculine voices as claims to newly martial aspirations, the weight of the material both substantiates and alters this thesis in an original way. Above all, the counterpoint of the two chapters forces the reader to reflect again on the constraints of the imaginative spaces in which we dwell. The ambiguity of Wang Shizhen's 王士禎 (1634–1711) "Breaking Willows" poems is familiar to students of Chinese poetry, but it prepares us to read fresh ambiguities into contemporary *ci* lyrics by women, writing of their frustrated ambitions for "heroic strivings" (p. 185).

Similarly the third chapter analyzes heroic female figures, not so much with regard to their representation of femininity as for their political significance: "Critique and defense of the late Ming, alienation from and reconciliation with Qing rule, as well as attitudes toward what the Ming-Qing transition symbolizes in later periods, are filtered through heroic transformations of women into assassins, avengers, warriors, statesmen, and knights-errant" (p. 203). This is a superb example of Li's thoughtful readings of literary works, identifying particular political stances and their opposites, reframing female characters as figural "transformations." This chapter climaxes with an analysis of the Lin Siniang 林四娘 episode in *Story of a Stone*, revolving around romantic irony as so often with Li: "Ultimately the contexts of performance render both of these responses to the collapse of the garden world ironic and ambiguous, perhaps a token of the unresolved contradictions in Cao Xueqin's attitude toward the tension between imagination and reality, between love and its transcendence through ethical-political ideals" (pp. 290–91). Overall this may be the finest chapter in the book because of the way it surveys a wide variety of texts, including drama and *tanci*, but also manages to sum up the incarnations of this theme in the transcendent masterpiece of the age. Li goes even further to conclude the chapter with intimations of the 20th century, successfully tracing the formation of a theme central to both premodern and modern literature.

Consistent with her penchant for irony, Li follows the study of heroic women with a chapter on poets and courtesans. As throughout the work, she includes numerous writings by men in her purview, and one of the highlights