

## THE COMMON MAN AS A DOMINANT THEME IN YÜAN DRAMA

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A large part of the Chinese drama of the Yüan period was written for the common man and about the common man. This cannot be said of any other drama that appeared before the 13th and 14th centuries, in which the Yüan drama flourished. At that time, European writers produced only some crude religious plays of the mystery and morality type. Although drama appeared much earlier in Greece and Rome than in China, the classical drama of the West is essentially aristocratic and heroic in nature. Menander's new comedy might have portrayed the social life of ancient Attica, but only fragments survive, while the plays of Plautus and Terence are mainly adaptations. The earliest type of European drama that is comparable to the Yüan is the *commedia dell'arte* of the 16th century, which lacks, however, the sparkling songs of the Chinese theater. The Yüan drama combines a popular plot with splendid poetry, and appeals to both the men in the street and the scholar in his study.

It may be stated in the very beginning that there is little ground for the belief that the patronage of Mongol emperors contributed much to the rise of the Yüan drama. While court patronage did encourage dramatic performance as a whole,<sup>1</sup> the Yüan drama that we have today was to a large extent a product of the popular theater intended for the entertainment of an urban citizenry. A reputed founder of the Yüan drama, Kuan Han-ch'ing 關漢卿 was also one of its most important writers, but the story of his presenting one of his plays before Kublai Khan is, to say the least, highly dubious. So far as we know, Kuan Han-ch'ing was a professional dramatist, who spent much of his time with actors and sing-song girls and who wrote for a much larger audience than the court circle. So did the other Yüan playwrights after Kuan Han-ch'ing. Like him, they belonged to the intellectual middle class; with a few exceptions, they were obscure and unknown. Some of them chose to lead a life of retirement rather than to serve in an alien government; and of those who held offices most had minor positions, the highest being district magistracy and educational superintendency. Moreover, the predominance of anonymous plays in the Yüan repertoire shows that the Yüan drama was indeed the work of the common people, whose names were not even recorded in contemporary writings.

Equally unfounded is another assertion that in the Yüan period official examinations were held for scholars in the writing of the *tz'u* 詞 and *ch'ü* 曲, of which it was said there were twelve categories. This statement has been refuted by Wang

Kuo-wei 王國維 in his *History of Sung-Yüan Drama*,<sup>2</sup> although as recent as 1955 a mainland scholar still asserts in his short biography of Ma Chih-yüan 馬致遠, a famous Yüan dramatist, that Ma passed the *ch'ü* examination as the highest graduate (*chuang-yüan* 狀元).<sup>3</sup> The evidences for this story, however, are too meager to deserve serious consideration. On the other hand, there is more reason to believe with Wang Kuo-wei that the abolishment of the state examinations in the early years of the Yüan dynasty was one of the factors in the development of the Yüan drama.<sup>4</sup> With the road to officialdom closed and the Mongol rulers having little use for Confucian scholars, the literary talents of the time were diverted from classical compositions to the writing of vernacular plays. It is quite conceivable that some Yüan playwrights wrote for a living as professional members of the *shu-hui* 書會, or Writers' Guild. One of them was no other than Ma Chih-yüan himself.

Early records show that the drama was already well established as a form of folk entertainment during the Sung period and that theaters, which were numerous in the "tile districts" (amusement centers) in the Sung capitals at Kaifeng 開封 and Hangchow 杭州, were frequented by an audience comparable to the groundlings in a Shakespearean playhouse. It was there that uncouth rustics from the country<sup>5</sup> rubbed shoulders with city wits and merchants and apprentices from the town. One difference, however, is that among the audience in the Sung-Yüan theater, with the exception of young profligates and gallants from rich families, there were probably very few officials and nobles, who for the most part would attend exclusive command performances in the yamen or court. The Sung emperors as well as some of the great officials had their own dramatic troupes, who performed on festival occasions and banquets. But the court plays, elaborate and spectacular as they were, failed to pass the criterion of time because of their apparent lack of literary excellence, and none of them has survived.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the majority of the extant Yüan plays were written for the citizenry rather than for the nobility. In them, particularly in the social and domestic plays, there are perceptibly a folk background, a vulgar tone, and a bourgeois mentality and morality.

The heroes and heroines of this drama are mostly minor officials, intellectuals, tradespeople, and other members of the urban population. As used here, the word "hero" or "heroine" is rather a misnomer, and perhaps a better term would be "protagonist" in the sense that the Yüan drama, like the Greek, stresses the role of the leading actor or actress, who is also the chief singer. But whatever term we use, the fact is that the important characters in the social and domestic plays all belong to the rank and file of the common people. Among the one hundred plays in the *Yüan-ch'ü hsüan* 元曲選, the most important collection of Yüan Drama, forty-two may be classified as social and domestic plays; the rest are twenty-six historical plays with emperors, ministers, generals, and scholars as heroes; seventeen supernatural plays, mostly of a Taoist nature and origin; and fifteen romantic plays of love intrigue, featuring young maidens and talented students.<sup>7</sup> Even in some of

these plays not classified as social and domestic, sing-song girls and other folk characters appear as protagonists.

In this paper, we are concerned chiefly with a discussion of the common man versus the official in the Yüan drama. The over-all impression one gets of the officials is that as a class they are the oppressors of the people: corrupt and greedy, they prey themselves upon the people like vultures. In the anonymous play *Ch'en-chou t'iao-mi* 陳州糶米 (Selling Rice in Ch'en-chou), the two young commissioners in charge of selling rice from the government granary for the relief of the indigent in a drought year connived with local "peck-measurers" (*tou-tzu* 斗子) to fleece the hungry people by raising the price of rice, by using small pecks to hand out rice and over-size scales to take in cash, and by adulterating grain with dirt and husks. A poor old man who came to purchase rice was so outraged by the fraud that he accused the officials of being "granary-gnawing rats and blood-sucking flies."<sup>8</sup> In the conflict that ensued, the old man, stubborn to the last in his denunciation and curses, was beaten to death as one of the officials, who witnessed the scene, remarked cold-bloodedly: "These poor people are like a sore in the eye and thorns in the flesh. Yet, if I want to hurt them, it's as easy as to crush a rotten persimmon."<sup>9</sup>

This kind of official arrogance and callousness also manifests itself in the "lawsuit (*kung-an* 公案) plays", in which the magistrate in charge of the case would torture relentlessly the accused regardless of whether the latter is innocent or guilty. Oftener than not, it is the innocent who suffers whipping and cudgeling in the hands of the presiding judge, who is either muddle-headed or susceptible to bribery. In *Hui-lan chi* 灰闌記 (Story of the Lime Pen),<sup>10</sup> District Prefect Su Shün 蘇順 said of himself: "Though occupying an official seat, I know not the legal code. I only care for the bright white silver, by which a case will be determined."<sup>11</sup> In a trial by this official, Chang Hai-t'ang 張海棠, a concubine falsely accused of poisoning her husband, broke down after suffering severe beatings. Later, she recovered from her swoon and cried out in a song:

I saw only whips lashing like winds soughing;  
 Scalding, scalding, they landed on my back.  
 Fluttering, my spirit is dazed;  
 Far, far away my soul has fled.

Then after having been ordered to sign a false confession and put into a cangue, she again burst out crying:

Oh, you officials are too malicious!  
 You treat us common folks too cruelly!  
 You muddle through the trial to condemn me.  
 Here I cry to Heaven, but Heaven is far and high.  
 When can I expect an upright judge to arrive?<sup>12</sup>

Although officials are nominally the upholders of the law, those in the Yüan drama are themselves unruly and lawless. In the plays minor officials such as district judges and yamen scribes often appear as adulterers and abductors, who entice the wives of honest citizens, while the more powerful officials, also more rapacious, would seize their victims by force. The worst offender is Lu Chai-lang 魯齋郎, who, in a play of the same name (by Kuan Han-ch'ing),<sup>13</sup> defiled a silversmith's wife and then a yamen clerk's wife. In a heartbreaking scene, the helpless clerk was forced to escort his spouse to the house of the villainous official. In both cases families were broken up and the children left orphans, with the mothers gone and the fathers either wandering away from home or leaving it to become a monk. In the anonymous play *Sheng-chin ko* 生金閣 (A Gold-bullion Pavilion), the young libertine P'ang Ya-wei 龐衙內 committed one crime after another as he seized the gold-bullion pavilion, a family heirloom, from a young student, murdered him in cold blood, then took his wife by force.

There are, however, also good magistrates and judges, who right the wrongs committed by the wicked. Thus, although the official world as presented by the Yüan dramatists is grim, it must not be supposed that all this villainy goes rampant without being curbed. There is clearly in the Yüan drama a sense of poetic justice which demands that even if virtue is not necessarily rewarded, wickedness at least should be punished. Especially in these murder and lawsuit plays, the audience gains some satisfaction when in the end the wrongs are redressed by some honest and upright judge such as the one for whose arrival Chang Hai-t'ang had prayed. He was Pao Cheng 包拯, an iron-faced judge—he smiled only when the Yellow River became clear—who wielded great authority in punishing the wicked and unruly. Both Lu Chai-lang and P'ang Ya-wei met their deserved end in the hands of Judge Pao while in *Hui-lan chi* he succeeded in settling the case justly by acquitting the innocent woman and bringing the culprits to justice. In another play, *Tou-o yüan* 饒娥冤 (The Wrongs of Maid Tou),<sup>14</sup> the wrongs of an unjustly condemned woman were finally redressed by her father, a high court official. Though he appeared too late to save her life, she was cleared posthumously of the blot on her name. In all these stories, the Chinese dramatists, instead of evolving a *deus ex machina*, took the logical step of providing an "*officio ex machina*" to solve the seemingly insolvable law cases.

But the most unusual thing about the Yüan drama is that besides relying on the good officials for the dispensation of justice, the playwrights, it seems, went out of their way to seek the aid of the bandit chieftains for the redress of wrongs. Not only judges but bandits too became heroes of the drama. In the play *Chao Li jang-fei* 趙禮讓肥 (Chao Li Offers his Fat), the brigand Ma Wu 馬武 spared Chao Li's life because of the family affection shown by Chao Li, his brother, and their mother. Even in the iron heart of a brigand, there was a soft spot for such family love. Later Ma Wu joined the government and after a series of successful cam-

paigns became a Grand Marshal of the Army. He then recommended the virtuous Chao brothers to high official positions. In *K'u-han ting* 酷寒亭 (Bitter-cold Pavilion), the yamen clerk Cheng Sung 鄭嵩 was tattooed and banished for having killed his unfaithful wife, but was rescued on his way to exile by a bandit friend, who invited him to his mountain lair for a feast of welcome. This reminds us of the *Shui-hu* 水滸 (Tale of the Marshes) plays of the Yüan and early Ming period, of which thirty-one titles are known and ten have survived.<sup>15</sup> This large body of *Shui-hu* drama, rather out of proportion to the total number of plays in the known Yüan repertoire, testifies to the popularity of the bandit-hero story.

As a whole, the *Shui-hu* legend in the Yüan drama agrees with that in the later novel. Its main outline was already well defined as a result of a long oral tradition initiated by the folk storytellers of the Sung period. More than one third of the 108 bandit leaders appear in the ten extant Yüan plays. Sung Chiang 宋江 is mentioned in all of them, Wu Yung 吳用 comes next in importance in the bandit hierarchy, but it is Li K'uei 李逵, the Black Whirlwind, who is the most popular hero of the Yüan theater-goers. This contrasts sharply with his role as a petty highwayman in two later plays<sup>16</sup> written by a prince of Ming royal house,<sup>17</sup> who naturally would have looked askance at such bandit-heroes.

In the *Shui-hu* plays, the people who committed some of the heinous crimes were the officials and their subordinates—not the bandit chieftains. To the theater audience of that time, Sung Chiang, Wu Yung, Li K'uei, and others were all good fellows who “practised virtue in the name of Heaven.” It is true that they indulged in fighting and killing as shown in the following popular slogan of theirs:

In high winds we dare set the heavens afire;  
On dark moonless nights we lift the sword to kill.<sup>18</sup>

But the people they killed were all those who deserved death in the eyes of the law. The times were so bad that the bandit-heroes had to take upon themselves the task of administering justice, which should have been the duty of the officials.

In this glorification of banditry we obtain a clue to the social significance of the Yüan drama. A Venetian adventurer might have painted in his travelogue a glowing picture of medieval China during the reign of Kublai Khan, but to the Chinese people, the Yüan was by no means a splendid dynasty. If official oppression in the Sung period had forced good citizens to go up Mount Liang (梁山) to become bandits, it was official oppression plus alien misrule in the Mongol period that threw the common folks into the lap of the bandit leaders, who posed as champions of the weak and innocent. It was to them that the poor little fellows, who had fallen victims in the web of misapplied law, looked for justice—to be sure, a rather crude form of folk justice, but nonetheless a makeshift justice that satisfies. It is interesting to observe here that none of the officials condemned in the *Shui-hu* and other social plays of the Yüan dynasty are court ministers, great governors, and others

high in the official hierarchy. In this instance, the drama differs from the novel, in which appear such powerful ministers as Ts'ai Ching 蔡京, T'ung Kuan 童貫, and Kao Chiu 高俅. Instead, the villains in the plays are mostly subordinate officers, who have direct dealings with the people. Their abuse of power leaves deep wounds in the people's life and consequently their deeds are bitterly resented. It is also worth noticing that whereas Judge Pao, who seldom assumes a leading role in the plays, is as a whole a stock character without much individuality, Li K'uei, the bandit-hero in a number of Yüan plays, is vividly portrayed.<sup>19</sup>

Thus a study of the social and domestic plays, especially the *Shui-hu* plays, dispels completely the notion that the flourishing of the Yüan drama was due to the patronage of the Mongol emperors and that the *ch'ü* was a subject in the traditional literary examination. It is hardly conceivable that murders, lawsuits, and brigandage should be the themes set by imperial examiners; nor would the monarchs and court ministers relish the denunciation of officialdom, so unequivocally voiced in these plays. As their titles indicate, the earlier Sung plays have little in them that is objectionable to their pleasure-seeking patrons in the court or yamen. But the Yüan plays are different. They no longer catered to the noble and the wealthy. In language, style, and content, they reflect the trends toward a greater popularization of the theater among the people. The Yüan drama as we know it today was not meant for the entertainment of the ruling class. It was written undoubtedly for an urban middle class audience whose manners and life, whose daily pursuits and behaviors, were all clearly presented on the stage. And who else could have created these dramatic stories of the little fellows but the professional artists of the theater, who belonged to the people, shared their sympathies, and talked their language?

In a bibliography of extant Yüan and Yüan-Ming plays,<sup>20</sup> as many as 156 plays out of a total of 266 are attributed to anonymous writers. It is reasonable to assume that if the known dramatists were all humble and obscure, even much more so would be the unknown authors. Some writers, like Ma Chih-yüan, mentioned above, were members of the Writers' Guilds<sup>21</sup>, which thrived in the Sung-Yüan period. By supplying plays, stories, songs, riddles, *etc.* to the public—no doubt for a fee—these guilds were instrumental in the development of the Yüan drama.<sup>22</sup> Among their known members, two were minor officials (Ma Chih-yüan and Li Shih-chung 李時中); two actors (Hua Li-lang 花李郎 and Hung-tzu Li Erh 紅字李二—they were not courtesans as erroneously stated by Bazin);<sup>23</sup> and one was a physician (Hsiao Tè-hsiang 蕭德祥). It is quite possible that other writers like Kuan Han-ch'ing might have also been connected with the guilds. Thus, on the one hand, they were in close contact with the acting profession, to which they supplied the plays; on the other, they knew well the taste and sentiments, the likings and dislikes of the audience for whom they wrote. Little wonder that the Yüan plays are good stage versions and not just literary plays, to which the drama degenerated in the Ming

and Ch'ing periods. The conclusion, then, is that the Yüan drama, which drew its sustenance and inspiration from the people, is a great literary undertaking that presents for the first time the common man as a main theme in world literature.

#### NOTES

1. For a detailed account of the patronage of the drama by Mongol emperors, see Yoshikawa, Kōjirō, *Gen Zatsugeki Kenkyū* (Studies of Yüan Drama), (Tokyo, 1948) pp. 84-102; also Chinese translation by Cheng Ch'ing-mao (Taipei, 1960), pp. 51-62.
2. Wang Kuo-wei, *Sung-Yüan hsi-ch'ü shih*, (History of Sung-Yüan Drama), (Chung-king) 1943, p. 78.
3. T'an Cheng-pi, *Yüan-ch'ü lu ta-chia lüeh-ch'uan* (Short Biographies of Six Great Yüan Dramatists), Shanghai, 1955, pp. 222-4.
4. Wang Kuo-wei, pp. 78-9
5. See the song sequence *Chuang-chia pu shih k'ou-lan* (The Country Fellow Knows not the Theater) by Tu Shan-fu, a 13th century poet.
6. We still have 280 titles of *Sung kuan-pen tsa chü* (Official Scripts of Sung Drama), but none of these has been preserved. It is possible that the Yüan court plays suffered from the same fate. On the other hand, many court plays of the Ming-Ch'ing periods have survived and some have been collected and reprinted in recent years.
7. There is no standard classification of the 100 Yüan plays. The one given here is merely a result of my own study and may not accord with other classifications.
8. *Yüan-ch'ü hsüan* (Peking, 1955), I, 36.
9. *Ibid*, I, 38.
10. It is translated into French under the title *Hoei Lan Ki, ou l'histoire du cercle de craie* by S. Julien in 1832; rendered into English (*The Story of the Circle of Chalk*, London) by Frances Hume in 1954. There is also a German adaptation by Klabund, translated into English by James Laver (*The Circle of Chalk*, London, 1929).
11. *Yüan-ch'ü hsüan*, III, 1116.
12. *Ibid*, III, 1120.
13. The play is translated as "The Wife-Snatcher" in *Selected Plays of Kuan Han-ch'ing*, by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, (Shanghai, 1958) pp. 48-78. Recently, however, some Chinese scholars have doubted Kuan's authorship of the play and attribute it to some anonymous writer. See Yen Tun-i, *Yüan-chü chen-i* (Queries and Discussions of the Yüan Drama), (Peking, 1960) I, 202-210.
14. "*Teou-Ngo Youen, ou le ressentiment de Teou-Ngo*" is the French title of the play translated by Bazin Ainé in *Théâtre Chinois*, (Paris, 1838) pp. 321-409; English translation, retitled "*Snow in Midsummer*" in *Selected Plays of Kuan Han-ch'ing*, pp. 21-47.
15. Ho Hsin, *Shui-hu yen-chiu* (Studies of *Shui-hu*), (Shanghai, 1954) p. 9. In his article "Shui-hu hsi" (*Shui-hu* Drama) in *Wen-hsueh nien-pao*, V, 195-200, Lin P'ei-chih lists thirty titles; Richard G. Irwin also has a list of the *Shui-hu* plays in *The Evolution of a Chinese Novel*, Cambridge, (Mass., 1953) pp. 34-6.
16. Lin P'ei-chih, pp. 195-200.

17. Chu Yu-t'un. His plays have been reprinted in *Shui-hu hsi-ch'ü chi* (Collection of *Shui-hu* Drama, 2 vols.), ed. by Fu Hsi-hua, etc., (Shanghai, 1957-58) I, 59-126. The other extant Yüan and early-Ming plays can also be found in the first volume of this collection.
18. There are some variations to this couplet. In one of these, the first line reads: "In high winds I dare leap over a high wall," in an anonymous play, *Tung-p'ing fu* (Tung-p'ing Prefect), *Ku-pen Yüan-Ming tsa-chü* (Unique Texts of Yuan-Ming Drama), (Changsha, 1941) Vol. 24, p. 1.
19. For a summary of one of these plays, *Li K'uei fu-ching* 李達負荊 (Li K'uei Carries Thorns), see Irwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-38; the play is also translated by J. I. Crump, *Occasional Papers*, Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, No. I, pp. 38-61.
20. Hsü Tiao-fu, *Hsien-ts'un Yüan-jen tsa-chü shu-lu* (A Bibliography on Extant Yüan Plays), (Shanghai, 1955). Most of the anonymous plays in this bibliography, however, are historical in nature, and quite a few of them, court plays of the early Ming period written probably by the playwrights of the *chiao-fang*, or Imperial Training Center for musicians, dancers, and actors. In his *Yüan-tai tsa-chü ch'üan-mu* (A Complete List of the Dramatic Works of the Yüan Period) (Peking, 1957), Fu Hsi-hua lists altogether 737 known titles of Yüan and Yüan-Ming drama, of which 187 are by anonymous writers of the Yüan-Ming period.
21. No study of the *shu-hui* has been made. For general information, see Feng Yüan-chün, *Ku-chü shuo-hui* (A Collection of Essays on Ancient Drama), (Shanghai, 1947) pp. 51-2; 89-91; Sun K'ai-ti, *Yeh-shih-yüan ku-chin tsa-chü k'ao* (A Research on the Old and New Drama in the Yeh-shih-yüan Collection), (Shanghai, 1953) "Appendix," pp. 388-395.
22. Sun K'ai-ti, *op. cit.*, p. 393.
23. Bazin, *Théâtre Chinois*, p. lxiii. Following Bazin, Giles also erroneously called Chang Kuo-pin, author of *Ho han-shan* (tr. as "Joining the Shirt"), "the educated courtesan of the day," *History of Chinese Literature*, (London, 1901) p. 274. See Liu Wu-chi, "Notes on the Sex of a Yüan Dramatist," *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, New Series I, No. 2, (April 1957), pp. 246-252.

# 論元人劇本中特出的平民性

柳 無 忌

在元代雜劇的發展過程中，我們可以看到它的一個劃時代的特點，就是，主要的，元劇是一種最早的平民文學。有些外國學者，以為元劇的繁榮是由於蒙古皇帝及貴族的培植扶持，這種說法非但證據不足，且亦悖於事實，正如明人宣傳的元代以曲取士，設有十二科那類封建性的傳說，一樣的不可靠。這類迂腐的看法，在最近大陸上尚有人提到，如譚正璧在“元曲六大家略傳”中，就主張馬致遠曾“中曲科狀元。”為掃清這些對於元曲欣賞的障礙，本文擬從元劇作家及劇本內容方面，列舉事實，以闡明元劇中基本的平民性。

在南宋及元初，頗有一些當代的隨筆雜著，記載宮廷開宴，伶人進劇的盛況；且有宋官本雜劇二百八十種劇目的書錄。不幸，此類宋人劇本，未得傳世。至元朝，如仍有宮廷上演的劇本，亦早已湮沒無聞。其理由為此類作品，並非上乘，缺少平民性及文學價值，因此給時間所淘汰。從現存的明、清內府劇本，就可以證實這種看法。相反的，現存元曲，如在“元曲選”中的百種劇本，則大部分為當時聽眾所喜好的劇作，膾炙人口，故能印行流傳。據作者分析，在元人百種中，有四十二本屬於社會及家庭劇，而這些劇本，均富有都市民眾的意趣，俚俗的口語，和中下產階層的心理與道德觀念。其中主要人物，如獨唱的男女主角，多為小官吏、職業人員、知識分子、商賈，及其他都市平民。

在元劇中，本文特別提出平民與官僚間尖銳的矛盾與衝突，尤其是官吏迫害老百姓的暴行。文中列舉“陳州糶米，”“灰關記，”“魯齋郎，”“生金閣，”“竇娥冤”諸劇，以為引證。可是，元劇中雖有那些糊塗的或殘忍的大小官僚，卻亦不無一些清白正直的朝廷大吏，如包拯一類的人物，來解決疑獄，為民眾洗冤與除害，因此使聽眾感到並獲得“詩的正義觀”的滿足。不僅如是，劇作家並寄同情於江湖豪俠的仗義行為，在劇本中敘述他們如何拯救人民於水火之中。此種劇本最顯著的例子，當推在元代及元明之際盛行的水滸戲曲。即以元代而論，水滸劇的創作甚豐，如

著名的高文秀的幾本以李逵為主角的劇作。這些元曲故事，已具有“水滸傳”的模型，時時提及以宋江、吳用為首的“三十六大夥”，“七十二小夥”的梁山僕儷。他們替天行道，在“聚義堂”上樹起杏黃旗，但同時也“風高敢放連天火，月黑持刀去殺人。”不過他們並不亂殺亂屠，他們所除去的是貪官污吏、奸夫淫婦。因此，綠林英雄，一躍而為正義的主持者，老百姓的維護者。

從這些劇本在當時的大量寫作，及受聽眾歡迎這一點看來，我們可以瞭解在異族暴政支配下的黑暗世界，劇作家及他們的聽眾，如何以反常的心理來擁戴江湖人物為民族英雄。無疑的，這一類劇本——也包括大部分的社會劇、公案劇、家庭劇——都不可能受到帝皇的青睞，在宮廷開演，或在試場上奪魁的。我們的結論是：為都市平民所愛護而獲得滋潤的元曲，在文學領域內，它首先以平民的生活為主題，用力地親切地描繪着城市民眾的形形色色，他們的喜怒哀樂，他們的平常的或不平常的生活經驗，他們中間的一些喜劇或悲劇。在內容的廣泛及題材的充實方面，元曲不僅足與歐西戲劇相媲美；由於其突出的平民性，亦可在世界文學上獨樹一幟。