

© 2007

Anne Lijing Xu

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE SUBLIME WRITER AND THE LURE OF ACTION:
MALRAUX, BRECHT, AND LU XUN ON CHINA AND BEYOND

by

ANNE LIJING XU

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Program in Comparative Literature

written under the direction of

Stephen Eric Bronner

and approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May, 2007

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Sublime Writer and the Lure of Action:

Malraux, Brecht, and Lu Xun on China and Beyond

by ANNE LIJING XU

Dissertation Director:
Stephen Eric Bronner

In this project I analyze the life and works of three writers, André Malraux, Bertolt Brecht, and Lu Xun. These writers lived and wrote during the period of the two World Wars, when their personal and national identities were in crisis. Their search for new identities brought them to the realm of the other: while the two Western writers used China in their writing, the Chinese writer Lu Xun advocated that his nation learn from the West. However, for all three writers, the divide between the self and the other had to be and was overcome. What distinguished them from a long list of writers, who dealt with the China/West encounter in their writing, is the fact that they sought, instead of pitting China against the West, to combine the two creatively and look for redemptive values beyond the binary-driven world. The conclusions in the works analyzed here suggest to us that, to varying degrees, they succeed in their transcendence. However, their choice to move away from this transcendental world (all of them stopped creative writing and devoted their energy to political work later in their lives) leads us to suspect that one must return to the world of binaries in order to live. My conclusion is that it is the combination

of metaphysical detachment (contemplation) and physical attachment (action) that makes life worth living.

Acknowledgement

I am deeply indebted to my dissertation advisors, Professor Stephen Bronner, Professor Janet Walker, and Professor Ban Wang, for their kindness and help throughout the preparation and writing process. Steve's insights and suggestions have guided my writing process; Janet's questions and corrections have helped shape and refine my presentation; and Ban's comments and encouragements have eased many doubts and given me new hope. I am sincerely grateful for their faith in me and their continuous support in all the years I have studied with them.

I am also thankful that Professor Sandy Petrey, from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, accepted the large responsibility of reading the drafts of my dissertation.

In the long years of graduate study and especially in the last three years of my dissertation writing and research period, I have come to enjoy the friendship of many good men and women, who have become an inseparable part of my life. It is in their company that I have come to appreciate the worth of my own being, so thank you, Amelie, Carsten, Heidi, Jing, Jiwei, Pavel, Qin-Hong, Roy, Shaminder, Sonia, and Sowmya.

Finally, to Pavan, who has seen the daily struggles and the occasional triumphs of my humble work, I dedicate this first fruit of my academic harvest.

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	<i>iv</i>
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Between Dreams and Action: Malraux's Rediscovery of the West in China	
Malraux and His China	10
Malraux before the China Trilogy	14
The Failure of the Other in <i>The Temptation of the West</i>	16
Death and Disease in <i>The Conquerors</i>	25
Approaching Metamorphosis: <i>Man's Fate</i>	38
Conclusion	64
Chapter Two: The Conundrum of Either/Or: Brecht's "Chinese Commitment"	
From China to the World	66
Individual or Comradeship? Some Considerations on <i>In the Swamp</i>	69
Ends and Means: The Grey Area in <i>The Measures Taken</i>	77
On Morality: The "Good" Person of Setzuan?	86
The Difficult Change and the Doctrine of the Mean:	
<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i>	97
Conclusion	112
Chapter Three: The Choice of One: Lu Xun and the Chinese Reality	
Forsaking the Immortal: Lu Xun's Choice of the In-between	114

Form Matters: Revolution contra Literature	117
Forward-looking Memory: <i>Dawn Flowers Picked at Dusk</i> (<i>Zhaohua xishi</i>)	123
Incriminating China: Women, the Crowd, and Intellectuals	
1. Women as China	137
2. The Gawking Crowd	147
3. The Compromised Intellectual	152
The Shadow's Farewell: the Either/Or of <i>Wild Grass</i>	161
Satirical Realism	167
Conclusion	170
Conclusion	172
Appendix: The Chinese Revolution and the World Wars: 1911-1949	179
Bibliography	186
Curriculum Vita	195

Introduction

To praise the true greatness of your native land takes introspection and knowing others—awareness comes from careful comparison. ... So I say that taking a nation's spirit forward depends on how much one knows of the world.

--Lu Xun, "On the Power of Mara Poetry"

Surveying the long history of the encounter between the West and China, one is overwhelmed by images of exoticism, stereotypes, and ethnocentric biases, perpetuated by both Western and Chinese writers.¹ Even today, this practice of misreading and misrepresenting the other is still consciously exploited or unconsciously carried out in an age when the means of obtaining knowledge has become too readily available for us to blame our ignorance on its lack. The search for identities (personal, racial, cultural, national, etc.) has been and is still poisoned by binaries, and dictated by the paradigm of either/or.² However, the voices of a few original writers do burst forth in this otherwise vapid cacophony, and take us on paths forged by their own destinies. The French adventurer and statesman André Malraux (1901-1976), the German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), and the Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936), all living and writing their best works in the interim of the two World Wars, obliterate the despotic rule of binaries in their thinking, and declare their alliance with the in-between: the subliminal

¹ For comprehensive overview and detailed analysis of the West-China encounter, particularly in the areas of philosophy and culture, see, among others, Jerome Ch'en, *China and the West: Society and Culture 1815-1937*; chapters on China in J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounters between Asian and Western Thought*; Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China*; and Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent*.

² It is interesting that almost all studies of East/West literature adopt a one-way gaze: either East looking at the West (few), or vice versa (majority). See, for example, Yvonne Hsieh, *From Occupation to Revolution: China through the Eyes of Loti, Claudel, Segalen, and Malraux (1895-1933)*; Colin Mackerras, *Sinophiles and Sinophobes: Western Views of China*; and Eric Hayot, *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel quel*. To my knowledge, no one has written a comparative study on the works of both Western and Chinese writers writing in the period of the two World Wars.

tension between the self and the other, the space between the extreme pulls of either and or.

In the works analyzed in the following chapters, these writers are seen as engaged in a West-China dialogue, although in the novels, short stories, plays, and essays selected here, the relationship itself is never the focus, but rather serves as a context within which the writers explore more cogent issues, both existential and political, in their search for identities. Permeated through and unifying their writing is the *tension* that results from an intense engagement with different and often opposite worlds: the reality and the ideal, the nation and the world, the individual and the collective. In the worldwide clamor for revolution and liberation, these writers are committed to the elimination of misery and oppression in their own societies and elsewhere (all of them, at different stages of their lives and to different degrees, worked for the Communist cause); but the same ideal—the preservation or restoration of human dignity—that drives them to action also compels them to question the means by which this ideal is to be achieved, so that the urge to act or refrain from action simultaneously abets and constrains one another. The love for their respective nation and the hope for its revivification ultimately incites their pen, but they consider their nation's fate, as shown through their writing, as inextricably intertwined with those of the others and consequently that of the world, so that in the end, their allegiance resides both/neither with their country and/nor with the world, but in the tension that at once binds and separates the two. Faced with such conundrums of commitment/non-commitment, these writers find it impossible to speak either as an individual, or as an anonymous member of the collective: one must speak with the voices of both, and simultaneously invalidating the credibility of both voices.

This tension's ultimate expression is the struggle between the artist and the revolutionary as these writers create works under the double pressure of both roles. While the revolutionary desires to embrace action unconditionally, the artist contemplates the implications of absolutism. Thus, these writers can neither work under the umbrella of "art for art's sake," nor seek abode in the house of "all art is propaganda." On the contrary, their power to move as artist *and* revolutionary derives from the symbiotic relationship of the two: the consciousness of the writer is complicated and concretized by the social and political engagements of the revolutionary, while the revolutionary's perspective is broadened and enriched by the artist's moral and philosophical concerns. Thus, for these writers, the divisive and sterile practice of *choosing between* the two roles becomes a dogged attempt at *combining* the two creatively while protecting the integrity of both. Such determination to preserve both identities in order to be both (more than one!) necessarily leads to the *conviction* that pervades their works: while their actions (and their heroes' actions) succeed each other with the irrevocability of time, their thoughts linger and ponder over the vestiges of the past, because that is the only way to move forward.

The indomitable feeling conveyed by the works analyzed here is the tension between conflicting identities, and the conviction that all of these identities have a right to survive and thrive. In the three chapters that follow, I will attempt to re-create this feeling by examining a selection of particularly pertinent texts. To facilitate a more cohesive discussion, in the chapters on Malraux and Brecht I have limited my choice to their works that are in one way or another connected to China, although references to their other works are made when necessitated by the analysis. All three chapters begin

with a discussion on how the particular writer engages with the China-West topic and why knowing the other becomes essential in his search for self-identity. Biographical details and historical events are given only when pertinent to the discussion (a brief, comparative history of China, Germany, and France in the years between 1911-1949 can be found in the appendix for reference). All works by or on Malraux and Brecht cited are either written in English originally, or published English translations. All translations of or on Lu Xun are done by myself, unless otherwise specified.

In the first chapter I argue that the failure of Malraux to achieve a synthesis between the self and the other through his early Euro-centric and individualistic approach to China leads him to renounce the West-China binary. In his first China book, *The Temptation of the West*, although the young Malraux was already eager to look in China for “a way out” for the West, which he considered as in decline, his efforts were marred by his relentless pursuit of the China as an exotic other, unsubstantiated by real knowledge and experience. Despite the urgency of his mission to redeem Europe, Malraux hardly knew what he was looking for in China, and as a result he only succeeded in digging a grave for China alongside the tomb where he buried the West. In *The Conquerors*, published two years later, Malraux was still deeply entangled within the battle of the individual hero (which he considers a characteristic trait of the West) against the indifference and absurdity of the universe (to which the Chinese seem to be strangely reconciled). He kills off the Chinese protagonists, and threatens the lives of the Western heroes with tropical diseases: utterly alienated from each other despite a seemingly concerted effort for revolution, neither China nor the West can survive. This conclusion leads Malraux to question the West-China binary that he has thus far unsuspectingly

employed, so that in *Man's Fate*, he was able to forego the West-China divide (although for Malraux, this relationship was to remain indubitably tilted towards his West), and see a glimpse of salvation in universal notions such as love, friendship, and solidarity. Also, Malraux's commitment to both art and revolution is revealed through his choice of subject matter and his treatment of it. It is neither possible to read his work purely as that of an artist, nor feasible to treat his thoughts singularly as that of a revolutionary. Our reading of him must be a creative combination of both, as he himself had done in his attempt to achieve a synthesis of history and his imagination.

In the second chapter on Brecht I analyze four of his plays that use "Chinese" elements to different degrees, and contend that, consistent with his theory of the "alienation effect," Brecht uses China not as an exotic other in order to contrast it with the West, but as a carrier of strangeness that is otherwise disguised as normality in Western society. In all these plays (*In the Swamp*, *The Measures Taken*, *The Good Person of Setzuan*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*), the absence of a real China is conspicuous, but Brecht is by no means apologetic about it. In *In the Swamp*, the allegedly Chinese character Shlink starts an inexplicable metaphysical struggle with the Caucasian Garga, but in their fantastic battle infused with a strange combination of attraction and repulsion, love and hate, we realize that Brecht's purpose is to explore the possibility of camaraderie between people, divided by appearances but similar on so many levels. In *The Measures Taken*, a play situated in China and telling the story of Western Communists' efforts to introduce the teachings of Communism to China with the hope of inciting revolution, Brecht presents the "strange" phenomenon of the perversely hostile response of the Chinese to a young comrade whose sympathy for their

suffering leads him to impulsively exhort the mass to rebel against their exploiters. However, in the Party's final affirmation of the killing of the young comrade, whose fault is no more than that he showed his humanity, we learn that the strange hostility is not peculiar to China, but is indeed true of the whole world: it is because of a universal apathy that the practice of withholding human emotions is sanctioned. In the latter two plays, Brecht exposes the exploitative nature of bourgeois morality, and replaces it with that of the proletariat. He employs the philosophers of China (Laozi in *The Good Person of Setzuan* and Confucius in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*) to disabuse his Western audience from the arbitrariness of a black-and-white ethics, asserting that soft water will, with time, wear down hardness (Laozi), and that the middle way is the virtue of the survivor (Confucius). In all these plays one is impressed by the tremendous tension between the writer's urge to act and also to refrain from action, by his drive to identify himself with the working class, while praising the capitalist shrewdness and wiliness of some of his favored characters. At the same time, one recognizes the conviction that enables Brecht to move forward despite these opposite pulls, as the final message of his last great play teaches: life, indeed, is the ultimate virtue that transcends all cultures, politics, and ideologies. Therefore, for Brecht, as for Malraux, restricting binaries such as the West versus China, good versus evil, even Capitalism versus Communism, become irrelevant in the interests of survival, both mentally and physically, which was an excruciatingly persistent and real concern, for the Brecht who lived sixteen years of life—the majority of his productive years—in exile, without a real home or a responsive audience,.

In the third chapter we turn our attention to the Chinese writer Lu Xun. While Malraux and Brecht, to different degrees, consciously sought out China and chose to use Chinese materials in their writing, for Lu Xun, who lived in a China semi-colonized by the West and Japan, whose literary life took off after reading voraciously the writers and thinkers of the West and Japan, the confrontation with the West was not a choice, but a daily necessity. Consciously regarding himself as the “in-between thing of history,” Lu Xun exemplifies the tension that, as we have seen with Malraux and Brecht, electrifies his writing. In my analysis of his fictional works (*Call to Arms*, *Wandering*, *Wild Grass*) as well as his reminiscences (*Dawn Flowers Picked at Dusk*), I argue that Lu Xun’s identity lies precisely in the realm of non-identity, and it is at the place of his self-exile that he is most at home. However, the asceticism of such a subliminal life is not fit for the sane, and Lu Xun moves away from this realm after writing his reminiscences (chronologically the last among the four collections), a literary farewell to his fiction-writing period, after which he wrote political essays (zawen) for the last ten years of his life. In *Dawn Flowers* he recollects the many ills of Chinese society and the many farewells he had bid to that society, and concludes, with the last piece of the collection as with his subsequent action, that he could not live in that place of exile any longer. In this context, I bring the discussion back to his first short story collections, *Call to Arms* and *Wandering*, and use the three most poignant images (women, the crowd, the intellectual) to illustrate the anguish of the writer torn between his fanatical love for the nation (even if it is only the shadow of an idea) and his inveterate hatred for all that is but should not be his nation. Finally, I turn to the lyrical essays in *Wild Grass*, and argue that, in the dreamlike settings, incomprehensible language, and grotesque images of these short but

particularly abstruse pieces, Lu Xun had indeed let his in-betweenness soar to a dangerous height, where he brutally anticipates and welcomes his own destruction as an in-between thing when the age of commitment—after the choice has been made between either/or—takes over. In contrast to Malraux’s hopefulness (redemption through love, friendship, and solidarity), and Brecht’s conclusion that Life is the ultimate good, Lu Xun had come to equate his own existence with all that is sick and must be destroyed. Although Lu Xun was able to avert this crisis in the cathartic writing of his biographical stories, *Wild Grass* nevertheless remains his own cherished philosophy.

Malraux, Brecht, and Lu Xun were caught between two identities: the sublime writer and the realist thirsting for action. While the sublime writer seeks to eliminate binaries, the realist knows that the world cannot function without binaries. When terms are pitted against each other, as in “either China or the West,” “either Capitalism or Communism,” “either art or politics”—either *us* or *them*—one is faced with an ultimatum, and the decision to choose is made out of a fear that not choosing would mean the loss of alternatives. In fact, none of the three writers can claim exemption from this real pressure: while Malraux devoted more than ten years serving in de Gaulle’s conservative government, forsaking his radical politics of the pre-Second World War period, Brecht was never at home in his world exile and opted to live under Communist rule in East Berlin after the Second World War, and Lu Xun chose to end his career as a literary writer in order to better serve the Communist cause in the last ten years of his life. In other words, a choice is made, for better or worse. However, unlike those choices that are made unthinkingly, unfeelingly, or as a result of coercion and ignorance, this choice is made with the full awareness of its implications, and is a conscious surrender to the

dictates of binaries without ceasing to work against the paradigm of either/or. Emerging from the in-between (and therefore unreal and unlivable) world of the artist-revolutionary, these writers, just as they are convinced of the superiority of the binary-free world of the sublime, step into the concrete world of politics with conviction in order to, instead of torturing themselves with “useless” dreams and subliminal theories, do things and change people in the real world. The real irony, however, is that once they have chosen the real world, they can no longer go back to the imaginary world where theories are played out against each other, where one might indulge in the nostalgia for the past and dreams for the future.

Chapter One

Between Dreams and Action:

Malraux's Rediscovery of the West in China

Malraux and His China

The French historian Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's *The General History of China*, lauded as "the most important of works on China in the seventeen and eighteenth centuries,"¹ officially inaugurated China study in France, which swiftly attracted such prominent practitioners as Montesquieu and Voltaire, and quickly resulted in the "expansion of the craze for Chinoiserie" that swept the country in the eighteenth century.² After the French victory in the Sino-French War of 1884-5, which led to the transfer of suzerainty over Annam to France and formally secured France a "sphere of influence"³ in southern China, this sinomania was refashioned into what Jonathan D. Spence calls the "new exotic," culminating in the writings of Pierre Loti, Paul Claudel, and Victor Segalen, who succeeded one another in their somewhat patronizing lamentation of the faded splendor and mystery of the country that called itself the Middle Kingdom. Emerging from this generally Euro-centric tradition of representing and interpreting China was the French adventurer, writer, and later statesman André Malraux (1901-1976). Published between the years of 1926 and 1932, Malraux's China trilogy (*The Temptation of the*

¹ Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, 30-1.

² Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent*, 146.

³ At the end of the nineteenth century, China was, although not formally colonized, divided into "spheres of influence," with Russia dominating the Liaodong Peninsula and Manchuria, Germany in Jiaozhou Bay, Shandong, and the Yellow River valley, the Great Britain in Weihaiwei and the Yangtze valley, and France in Guangzhou Bay and nearby southern provinces.

West, 1926; *The Conquerors*, 1928; *Man's Fate*, 1932) delineates the writer's progression from an initially rather typical Orientalist (in Edward Said's definition⁴), to one who not only gave up polarizing China and the West, but recognized that the identity crisis faced by both could not be resolved without transcending this very binary. After Malraux, France could no longer deny the possibility of China *and* the West (heretofore China *versus* the West): China has been irrevocably humanized by the pen of Malraux.

Although the works in Malraux's China trilogy have been discussed, most often separately, at length by many of his critics, very little has been said about the seemingly obvious subject in all three works: Malraux and China. Such a conspicuous lack of attention begs the question of why there has been such a universal neglect or silence on the topic. One might be tempted to explain this away by quoting Malraux authorities such as W. M. Frohock, Jean Lacouture, and Geoffrey Harris, and declaring that the significance of these early works lies in their metaphysical exploration of the human condition, rather than in any deep insight into (Chinese) politics.⁵ After all, in comments on both *The Conquerors* and *Man's Fate*, Malraux himself had denied the significance of his China setting.⁶ Also, in the context of The Cold War and immersed in the discourse of democracy, fascism, and Communism, many otherwise insightful Malraux interpreters almost naturally followed Malraux's own guidance and approached these works either in a broader East/West context, or dined on the entrée of Capitalist West versus Soviet Russia, with China as a small appetizer. Moreover, Malraux's own rather irksome Euro-

⁴ Edward Said maintains that the discourse of Orientalism is strangely devoid of its supposed subject: the Oriental; the Oriental is stripped of its essential difference and transformed into something exotic yet familiar; the Orientalist discourse is a representation, rather than a presentation, of the Orient. See Said's *Orientalism*, 5, 12, 21.

⁵ For detailed discussions on Malraux's works, see Frohock's *Malraux and the Tragic Imagination*, Lacouture's *Malraux*, and Harris' *André Malraux: A Reassessment*. See also Denis Boak, Cecil Jenkins.

⁶ See the Afterword to *The Conquerors*, 179, and Geoffrey Harris, *André Malraux: A Reassessment*, 87.

centric condescension towards the rest of the world⁷ does not encourage a China-centered discussion of his works. Many who are willing to decode Malraux's China find the Chinese either curiously silent or simply lacking. Finally, Malraux's descriptions of the physical China are not only scarce, but offer little other than stereotypical images of the Orient.⁸ Indeed, although Malraux had falsely advertised his own importance in China and encouraged the mistaken view that he had been leader and participant in the revolutionary episode which he describes in *The Conquerors*,⁹ he was never in China until his brief visit in 1931, shortly before he wrote *Man's Fate*. For some or all of these reasons, critics have been more than willing to steer clear of Malraux's more or less concocted China. Although my subject entails the tackling of precisely this topic, I am far from proclaiming Malraux as an authentic China expert or observer; rather, I situate his work first in the context of Orientalist discourse, then move on to the political and philosophical issues in his writing that remain valid despite his misreading of China.

⁷ In the 1949 Afterword to *The Conquerors*, Malraux talks about the power balance of the two camps of the Cold War by analyzing their cultural roots, and asserts that the United States "has never seen herself...as a discrete part of the world; *she has always seen herself as part of our world*," whereas the Soviet Union's innate "Oriental dogmatism," in contrast to the Russian desire to be considered European, prohibits the identification of Russia with either Europe or Asia. Given the "non-identity" of either of these so-called superpowers in the cultural sphere, it is in fact Europe, and more specifically France, that must assert herself and pull the rest of the world out of the mire. In his few vague references to the other "center" of civilization in the East, Malraux does not inspire confidence in the redemptive potential of the Oriental culture. 182-6.

⁸ In a recent biography of Malraux, Olivier Todd rightly points out that "Malraux's China is neither true in its detail nor false overall, but it is nonetheless imaginary. Malraux cannot quite break clear of a conventional idea of China with coolies, bamboo shoots, opium smokers, destitutes, and prostitutes....his Chinese brothel seems rather Parisian. There are not many truly Chinese characters in *Les Conquérants* or *La condition humaine* either; they are often westernized or mixed race, like the Indochinese Malraux met in Saigon. Malraux sometimes characterizes his Chinese by dressing them up in traditional descriptions: he gives Hong 'little Asian eyes,' and Ch'en 'features that are more Mongol than Chinese.' In *Les Conquérants*, his Chinese are often fat, as in many movies. Throughout *La Condition humaine*, they frequently rub their hands in unction. These clichéd views of Asians are rife in France at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth."

⁹ Before the publication of his first China work *The Temptation of the West*, he announced to his editor that "half of it has already been translated into Chinese and published in various periodicals and papers in Shanghai and Peking," which could have been his wish but was never reality. After the publication and success of his second China novel, *The Conquerors*, "he allows it to be said, he encourages it to be said, that he was a revolutionary leader back in Canton." See Olivier Todd, *Malraux*, 60-1, 83.

However, Malraux's obsession with China¹⁰ remains an intriguing phenomenon. If before the publication of *Temptation* Malraux was but a fledgling writer dabbling his hands in avant-garde writing, publishing, and adventuring, without a clear goal and with little success, after *Man's Fate*, regarded by many as his masterpiece, he had certainly passed the test of a time marked by political upheavals and social unrest with honors, having forged for himself a path of political and intellectual engagement that would see him through to the end of his life. In the following pages I will examine Malraux's China in the three works of the trilogy and argue that inasmuch as the West is indebted to him for introducing the Chinese Revolution, Malraux owes much to China for hastening the maturation of his world view as well as solidifying his political commitment. In his China books one witnesses the lessening of his Euro-centric and Orientalist views on China, as well as a genuine sympathy for the suffering and injustice inflicted upon the Chinese mass by Western imperialists. Despite the predominance of Western heroes in his China works, the persistence of China as a subject reflects Malraux's recognition of the significance of China and her Revolution. If his Western characters come to know themselves in the course of the book, it is only through observing the differences in China that they gain self-knowledge. Unfortunately, as Marie-Paule Ha rightly points out, Malraux was able to hold onto some positive Western values only by chastising the weaknesses of a semi-colonized China.¹¹ However, at the publication of *Man's Fate*,

¹⁰ During the seventeen years of his fiction writing period (1925-1942), Malraux brought out altogether seven works, three of which, as noted above, are about China.

¹¹ In a chapter on Malraux entitled "The Other in Malraux's Humanism" in her book *Figuring the East*, Ha discusses Malraux's colonialist attitude towards China by analyzing his pejorative descriptions of his Chinese characters and his condescending attitude towards the Chinese race as a whole, which was, for him, synonymous with apathy, passivity, and detachment. Although her criticism is original and to the point, Ha does not acknowledge the change of Malraux's attitude, particularly visible in *Man's Fate*, and therefore leaves the reader with the wrong impression that Malraux held the same—condescending and Euro-centric—view of China in all three of his China works.

Malraux's prejudice against the East is checked by a thorough disillusionment with his Western heroes. To redeem mankind from its absurd fate, it is neither the East nor the West that shall play the savior; rather it will be through values that transcend such binaries.

Malraux before the China Trilogy

Born in Paris in 1901, Malraux spent the majority of his childhood and adolescence with his mother (separated from André's father Fernand) in Bondy, a small town outside of Paris, pensive, serious, and unhappy. When the First World War broke out he was too young to enlist in the army, but old enough to register the trauma of a defeated and depleted nation.¹² After peace was restored, the ambitious young man left for Paris, made his presence felt in chic Modernist circles, and prowled the streets of Paris for second-hand book vendors in search of rare books and publishing opportunities. At nineteen, the pioneering spirit and talent to champion the unusual was already unmistakable in the precocious young man. At twenty, he fell in love and married his first wife, Clara Goldschmidt, whose large dowry afforded him the first opportunity to test out his enterprising financial schemes. After losing all of his wife's ready money, Malraux moved on to his next adventure. At the end of 1923, he set off for his first Indochina trip with his wife and childhood friend Louis Chevasson.

¹² In his biography of Malraux, Axel Madsen points out that after the War, Malraux, like most young men of his generation, suffered "acute guilt feelings for having been spared," and later on sought out "dangerous action to test their own mettle." 33.

Naively stepping into a colonial world where politics was an indispensable part of everyday calculation, the aesthete Malraux was naturally under-prepared. The original plan of the family team was to venture into the Cambodian jungle as archeologists, locate a few abandoned temples and “remove” some stone heads or bas-reliefs, smuggle them out of the colony and sell them to interested buyers in Europe or America. If all went according to plan, the whole thing would hardly last for more than a month. Indeed, the group came titillatingly close to completing their “rescue” mission, before they were nabbed at the border by the suspicious colonial government. The two men were thrown into jail and remained there for the next ten months.

Hardly comprehending his crime, Malraux blamed his misfortune on the hypocrisy of the colonial authority, and in his enforced stay “soak[ed] up the social reality of colonialism” with a disenchanted eye.¹³ Barely escaping the claws of colonial in/justice,¹⁴ Malraux was to return to Indochina at the beginning of 1925 to co-edit a revolutionary paper called *La Indochine*, with a militant lawyer named Paul Monin. Despite the hostility from and obstacles posed by the French colonial government, Monin and Malraux succeeded in publishing the pro-Annam newspaper until the end of the year. When the newspaper was finally shut down by the aggravated colonial authority, Malraux, fully initiated into a new phase of his life, left Indochina for good after almost two years of apprenticeship in this political fermenting pot. By that time, the twenty-four-year-old young man had grown so used to hearing, learning, and talking about China in

¹³ Todd, 36.

¹⁴ Malraux’s case was suspended upon the intervention of the French literary circle, when a significant portion of it signed a petition drafted by Clara Malraux that pledged the young man’s promise as a literary star. Malraux had only published a few imitative reviews and some stories written in the surrealist fashion by then.

his editorials¹⁵ that he felt, on the ship back to his own country, compelled to write about this still distant and mystified country.

The Failure of the Other in *The Temptation of the West*

The Temptation of the West, whose outline Malraux sketched on the ship back to France, is more a philosophical essay than a novel. It is a collection of eighteen letters exchanged between two young men, A.D., a twenty-five-year-old Frenchman traveling in China, and Ling-W.-Y, a twenty-three-year-old Chinese touring Europe. The exchange of letters do not form a plot, nor do the characters correspond to each other. In fact, A.D. writes only a third of the letters, with Ling supplying the rest. In this first China work, the ambitious Malraux undertakes the formidable task of exploring the relationship between the East and the West. However, this audacious effort is marred by a cryptic language, a confusion of sensibilities, and an unabashedly Euro-centric attitude in spite of Malraux's rather pessimistic outlook for the European future. The exchange of letters lists, ostensibly, a series of cultural and philosophical differences between China and the West, but culminates in the end by the agreement between the two interlocutors on the essential message Malraux wants disseminated: that the world is in decline, and that man

¹⁵ In the 1920's half-colonized China was the revolutionary example for a completely colonized Indochina. Many Chinese revolutionaries found refuge in the Chinese quarters of Indochina and plotted their future activities. The Malraux made friends with many of them and shared "more meals with their Chinese friends than with Europeans or even Annamese." Todd, 60.

everywhere is confronted with the absurd. This view, however, had nothing to do with Chinese reality.¹⁶

Before delving into the philosophical content of the book, one is struck by three seemingly odd choices that the author made. First of all, the exchange of letters is not distributed equally between the two men. After A.D.'s opening letter, Malraux strings together six letters from Ling before he lets A.D.'s voice be heard again. Second, neither man answers all the questions proposed to them, but both answer unasked questions, which are just as abruptly dropped by the other. Third, while they seem to move from place to place in their new continents, only Ling records quick impressions of these places, while A.D. hardly ever mentions the towns he stays in. These curious editorial choices reveal the young Malraux's inadequacies in this vast and intricate territory that he had courageously but prematurely launched into. To keep to a minimum remarks that might betray his half-baked knowledge of the country he had not yet visited, he made A.D. keep his opinions to himself as much as possible. When A.D. does speak, he refrains from commenting on the physical China that he is supposed to be in. Ling, stationed in Paris and making trips to Rome and Athens, speaks more credibly about a Europe that Malraux himself knew well. Anticipating an accusation of disjointedness in this first work, Malraux the editor states in the Foreword that "These letters have been *selected* and edited. By publishing them, we propose to delineate the developments of two sensibilities, and to suggest to those who read them *some arresting thoughts* on the seemingly unusual sensuous and *spiritual* lives of these two men" (italics added). Since

¹⁶ This view comes from the Western avant-garde during the early decades of the twentieth century, represented by Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, and is far from Chinese reality. The May Fourth writers, for example, by no means regarded the West as in decline, and fervently advocated China's emulation of the West.

the letters are “selected,” a sense of disconnectedness is inevitable here and there.¹⁷ Also, Malraux is shrewd in suggesting to his readers the examination of “some arresting thoughts” in the “spiritual” lives of his two protagonists. Pressed for a deadline and hard up for money, Malraux churns out this book in less time than he would have liked,¹⁸ talking about his “arresting thoughts,” but he does not have either the time or experience to develop his arguments logically and systematically. As a result, this first China book did not receive a warm welcome among an expectant Parisian literary circle. Later, when deciding which of his works to include in his collected works, Malraux prudently left out this somewhat amorphous book.

Despite these rather obvious and awkward defects, the existence of this work and Malraux’s subsequent persistence on the same theme indicate that the subject was of vital importance to him. In this China that he heard and read about, and in his conversations with refugee Chinese revolutionaries, Malraux realized that he had unknowingly stumbled upon the door that could lead to self-discovery. “How can I find myself,” Ling exclaims, “except in an examination of your race” (39-40)? Moreover, the “arresting thoughts” that he shares with his readers, albeit somewhat disjointed, already contain all the essential paradoxes that interested and stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Temptation documents, through a series of monologues and semi-dialogues, the process of disillusionment that both protagonists undergo. The first letter, written by A.D. on board a ship to China, records the Frenchman’s state of mind as the ship moves closer to the mysterious country. “Man, capturing living forms one by one and locking them up

¹⁷ In fact, Malraux might have adopted this editorial device to cover up the true nature of the book as hurried and unpolished. Todd sees the evidence of this in “the surviving feverish fragments of manuscript: a patchwork of alterations, bits pasted onto writing pads, sheets of squared paper from an exercise book, and a cut-up accounts ledger.” *Malraux*, 68.

¹⁸ See Curtis Cate’s *André Malraux*, 107-9.

in books, has prepared the present condition of my mind” (3). After describing a flood of exotic images he had retained from *reading* about China, A.D., half expectantly and half quizzically, concludes his letter with the question: “what can I recover from your hollow surge of victories, O vestiges?” (6 italics added). Similarly, Ling’s first letter states the purpose of his European visit right away: “Europe calls forth few beautiful ghosts, and I have come to her with hostile curiosity....[The] influence of *books* and our own anguish has made us investigate the thought of Europe...[to seek] the source of her strength” (9 italics added). Both are keenly aware of the bookish nature of their knowledge of the other’s culture, and both are intent upon learning from the other culture what is lacking in their own. However, in this first work, Malraux’s analysis of the differences between the two cultures does not lead to fruitful conclusions for either China or Europe, but mainly serves to deepen and complicate the existential (for A.D.) and social (for Ling) angst for the protagonists.

Europe seems to sustain and justify Ling’s initial “hostility,” as he discovers more and more the cultural traits that differentiate Europe from his China. Consistently upholding a Daoist view of the world, Ling avers that the Chinese civilization is based on emotion and emphasizes being. The Chinese does not wish to separate himself from the universe, but willingly delivers himself to the world. In contrast, European civilization is driven by the intellect and promotes action. The European stands apart from the universe as an individual, and seeks to bring the universe to man. Condescending and disparaging, Ling does not stand much of a chance to discover anything positive in Europe. On the contrary, by measuring European culture against the yardstick of China, he augments his sense of superiority by castigating the European way, forgetting that it is from the same

source that Europe derives strength. However, this excessively deprecating view of the West contrasts sharply with Malraux's own experience with Chinese, as well as the attitude of Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth generation.¹⁹ In the beginning of 1925, when Malraux and Monin struggled to raise funds in order to launch their paper in Saigon, they found most of their backers in the local Chinese community, who did not discriminate against the Western liberator.²⁰ Moreover, witness to the revolutionary zeal of Chinese youths in Cholon²¹ who, following the New Culture Movement in China, publicly denounced the teachings of Confucius and Laozi,²² Malraux could not have mistaken the Chinese urge to sever her ties to the old (Confucianism in particular) and welcome the new (Western learning). After Chen Duxiu (educated in France) started the famous journal *New Youth* in 1915 and used "science" and "democracy" as its motto for social reformation, many western-educated intellectuals (Hu Shi, Li Dazhao, et al.) joined Chen in the New Culture Movement, advocating the practice of "western learning, Chinese application." In the context of such a general surge to *emulate* the West, it is puzzling why Ling, a young Chinese intellectual traveling in Europe, would insist on such hostility towards Western civilization.

¹⁹ In *The Lure of the Modern*, Shu-mei Shih notes that, in contrast to the late-Qing scholars' more conservative "Chinese learning as essence, Western learning as method," the May Fourth generation embraced Western learning whole-heartedly: for the May Fourth thinkers, "the locus of cultural power was...an alien Other that was to be welcomed with open arms to replace the old self and usher in its rebirth. 'Western learning' was no longer an external category, but was incorporated for the 'enlightenment' of the self, becoming an internal category. As an internal category, 'the West' enjoyed much greater prestige, not only in cognitive but also in emotive universes. Therefore, proximity to 'the West' and its honorary intermediary 'Japan' became the measure of desirability, and that which did not belong to this particular logic of desire was virulently denounced." 129-30.

²⁰ Jean Lacouture records in his biography of Malraux that this Chinese community "generally supported the Kuomintang....[and believed that] any progress in the emancipation of a neighbouring people was a promise of future support for the cause of Chinese liberation." *André Malraux*, 88.

²¹ The Chinese quarter of Saigon.

²² In Curtis Cate's biography of Malraux there is a good description of such a revolutionary scene: "In the pulsing streets of Cholon Chinese youths could often be seen brandishing posters bearing inflammatory inscriptions: 'Confucius said...Lao-Tse said...Our ancestors said...So it must be false.'" *André Malraux*, 84.

Unlike Ling, none of Malraux's Chinese friends from Cholon knew the West personally. In fact, Malraux's long talks with these people are exclusively about the Oriental man's view on the colonial situation, as well as "possible European attitudes towards Asia."²³ It is clear, then, that Malraux created the character of Ling not as a mouthpiece of "authentic" Chinese views of China and the West, but as a convenient medium through which he expressed his own understanding of the crisis faced by both the East and the West. By using a Chinese voice to criticize the decline of the West, Malraux preempts the accusation that he might be venting his anger for the injustice he suffered at the hands of the French colonial government. In addition, even though the nature of his second Indochina venture was largely political, in this first work he manages to keep politics entirely out of the focus, but talks instead of a universal notion of the absurd.

In this light, we can then proceed to examine Ling's/Malraux's approach to the problem at hand, and what role, if any, China plays in shaping his understanding. "At the core of European man," Ling observes, "ruling the important movements of his life, is a basic absurdity" (40). This basic absurdity manifests itself in the fact that the European holds himself as an individual against the world, perceives the world through his intellect, and endeavors to change it through his action. In this man-made world where the acknowledgment of Nietzsche's pronouncement that God is dead is loud and clear, the Europeans have neglected to notice Man's own death. Man is not and cannot be a satisfactory substitute for God; to search for the meaning of life in the image of Man after the death of God is therefore bound to only deepen the sense of alienation and despair. But the European is not yet above this self-deluding process. "The image of all these men

²³ See Axel Madsen's Malraux biography, 96-7.

dedicated to maintaining an idea of Man which allows them to overcome their thoughts and live, while the world over which this Man reigns becomes each day more foreign to them, is doubtless the final vision which I shall take away from the West” (98). This statement from Ling seems to put the finishing touch on Malraux’s denunciation of all those characteristically Western traits: individualism, intellectualism, and action; but Ling’s final vision, despite his loquacity, comprises at best half of the final vision the book intends to convey.

Ling’s counterpart, A.D., refrains from proposing general observations about the two peoples, and as far as he can keeps his comments restricted to his own race. Although only six of his letters are “selected,” not only does he open the exchange, but he concludes it as well, acquiring thus a much more authoritative status than Ling. As many critics have pointed out, A.D. is an even more unmistakable voice of Malraux’s, as not only his name (“A” could be an abbreviation for André) suggests, but also his age (twenty-five, the same age as Malraux). Two years older than Ling, the Frenchman also seems to be much more mature and conciliatory than the Chinese. With heavy-hearted sincerity, he acknowledges that “Europeans are weary of ... their crumbling individualism,” and that “the European malaise is caused...by the discoveries of our most sophisticated minds” (76-7). Coupled with intellectualism, A.D. confirms, individualism has led Europe into an existential quagmire, and this is why the Chinese civilization, characterized by the absence of the individual and the exaltation of emotion, becomes “one of the temptations of the West” (78). After two years of immersion in the Chinese

culture,²⁴ A.D. realizes that it has irrevocably changed his conception of Man. “I can no longer conceive of Man apart from his intensity” (92).

However, despite such overt disgust with one culture and high expectations for the other culture, A.D.’s attitude towards both Europe and China is by no means uncomplicated. Towards the end of the letter exchange A.D. reports that he has met Wang Loh, a classic mandarin, apparently a household name, who is now out of power. Through the words of Wang Loh, Malraux points out that the Chinese civilization “wavers like an edifice on the point of collapse,” with Confucianism in ruins and Taoism ironically fueling the furious urge for destruction. In her forced contact with the West, not only is China automatically the vanquished because of her culturally inherent disdain for power, but more dangerously, she is being depleted in spirit. These enigmatic words are, in the next letter (Ling’s last), further explicated by Ling who, for the first time in the exchange, reflects substantially on the imminent demise of Chinese culture. Wang Loh believes that China is going to die, and Ling believes it too (109). Learning only from the products of Europe (a mechanized fairyland) without understanding the spirit that drives her, the Chinese is undergoing a metamorphosis whose outcome will be the complete destruction of the Chinese tradition. The respect customarily accorded the old, a symbol of China’s past, is rapidly being replaced by a veneration for the young, whose understanding of both China and the West remains on the surface. The individual is being born in China, and because of his disconnect with either culture, yet witness to and victim of so much misery and suffering, he exemplifies the will to destroy (109-113). Just as Europe, whose values are challenged and questioned when measured against the Chinese

²⁴ This is another telling overlay with Malraux’s own contact with the East, which occurred over almost two years, from the end of 1923 to the end of 1925.

world view, China likewise experiences a humbling and sobering shock in its clash with the West. Both, however, could not have been presented in such clear relief without being juxtaposed to each other. Malraux's analysis of the European condition, undoubtedly his primary concern in this and later works, is carried out, from the very beginning, *in relation to the Chinese condition*.

Having used two Chinese voices to accentuate the decline of the East, Malraux wishes to bring our attention back to the problem of the West, and concludes in A.D.'s last letter that "at the core of the Western civilization there is a hopeless contradiction, in whatever shape we discover it: that between man and what he has created" (118). The Western sensibility suffers in its continuous effort to find affirmation of the self in the outside world; in the ceaseless striving of the Western man to build an image of himself there lies a desperation that grows in proportion to Western productivity. A.D./Malraux is tired of living such a double life. "Unstable image of myself, I love you not at all. Like a deep wound, badly healed, you are my dead glory and my living pain. I have given you everything, and still I know that I shall never love you" (121-2). In renouncing man's creation, Malraux renounces the Western way of life, but at this point he knows that he does not have a better alternative. "Without bowing down, each day I shall bring you peace as an offering" (122). In this ritualistic image Malraux is offering obedience to a god against whom he must rebel when the time is ripe. The foundation of his religion is in totters. This first encounter with China has not only confirmed his suspicion that there are other ways of living one's life, but, more importantly, has provided him with a cogent language to narrate his frustration.

Malraux ends *Temptation* with an ellipsis, suggesting that although he has nothing further to add at the moment, he will pick up these threads in the future. In fact, in both Ling's and A.D.'s last letters, crucial themes in Malraux's subsequent China works are anticipated. As Ling contemplates the birth of the destructive will in Chinese youths, he observes, much like Garine in *The Conquerors* and Kyo in *Man's Fate*, that millions of these minds are

conscious of injustice, not of justice; of suffering, not of happiness. Their disgust with their leaders only helps them understand what they have in common. I await with some curiosity the one who will come and cry to them that he demands vengeance, not justice....What then will be the acts of those who will accept the risk of death in the name of hate alone? (112-3)

The man of vengeance and hate later became Hong in *The Conquerors*, and retains part of his origin in Ch'en of *Man's Fate*. In these figures the fate of a China convulsed by the clash of the old and the new is fleshed out and, significantly, both suffer a bloody and ignominious death. On the other hand, after criticizing the Western practice of bringing the world down to Man as well as the Chinese way of offering Man up to the world, A.D. exclaims that the only veritable truth is that man is firmly bound to himself (121). Both Garine and the heroes of *Man's Fate* will discover themselves on the bumpy road to this at once disconcerting and comforting truth.

Death and Disease in *The Conquerors*

Shortly before *La Indochine's* first issue on June 17th, 1925, a series of demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts broke out in Shanghai as a response to the May

Thirtieth Massacre. In this event thirteen Chinese workers and students were killed by the international police as they demonstrated against the brutality to which Chinese workers were daily subjected as laborers in their foreign bosses' factories. The movement quickly spread all over the country, and on June 19, under the leadership of the first coalition of the Nationalist and Communist Parties, workers in Canton and Hong Kong started their marathon strike against their British employers, which would officially last until October of the next year. Following the strike closely and reporting it in his own newspaper from Saigon, Malraux was able to get a good grasp of the situation in Canton. When he started writing *Temptation* at the end of the year, the basic conflict underlying the strike (China against the imperialist West) provided him with a philosophical framework wherein he explored the differences between the East and the West. However, the more political, ideological, and social reality of the strike stayed with him, and resurfaced two years later in a more appropriate garb in *The Conquerors*.

Fraught with deaths and diseases, this novel summarizes the fruit of Malraux's continued reflection on the monumental encounter between China and the rest of the world. The first significant death is that of Ch'eng-tai, "the spiritual head of the [Nationalist] party's right wing," "the Chinese Gandhi," the biggest "enemy" among the friends of the Chinese revolutionary forces (15, 98). A symbol of moral force, Ch'eng-tai does not hold any office, but waves a formidable spiritual baton over the orchestra composed of those who still adhered to the traditions of China. Much in the spirit of a Confucian philosopher-king, Ch'eng-tai strives to cultivate his moral perfection, hoping that through his good example the rest of China will follow suit and help him build and maintain a "China of Justice." Since China and Britain are not officially at war, he

therefore rejects any proposal of governmental action against the latter. The decree that Garine asks of the Canton government—to close the port of Canton to any ship stopping at Hong Kong, thus inflicting economic sanctions against the British-controlled island—is out of the question. Further, to Ch’eng-tai, whose faith in Chinese superiority over the British is unshakable, this conquest by means of morality is bound to succeed in the end. “China has always conquered her conquerors. Slowly, it is true. But always...” (82).²⁵ Although embroiled in conflicts with not only foreign thoughts and ideas, but a foreign presence and foreign oppression, Ch’eng-tai is strangely unmoved and unperturbed. He believes in the self-sufficiency of the old teachings of China, and is prepared to defend these values not only with his life, but also with his death.

To Garine, the half-Swiss, half-Russian volunteer in charge of propaganda in the Canton strike, Ch’eng-tai is the veritable enemy of the revolutionary spirit. Described by Garine as having a “death’s head,” for Garine, Ch’eng-tai is a magnet for men “who hate or fear action, men who live by yearnings and regrets” (61, 98). Luckily for the revolutionaries, they are not powerless against Ch’eng-tai anymore, for the young and the suffering are acquiring a new set of eyes:

All modern Asia is learning about individual life and discovering death. The masses are understanding that their poverty is hopeless and they can’t expect anything from an afterlife....Simultaneously with the fear of a meaningless death, a death that redeems nothing and avenges nothing, another idea is born: the possibility that any man can beat the life of mass misery and struggle through to a particular, individual life... (84)

²⁵ Malraux might have modeled this statement on a similar one by Montesquieu, who had observed that “As either the vanquisher or the vanquished must change, in China it has always had to be the vanquisher; for, as the mores of the vanquishers are not their manners, nor their manners, their laws, nor their laws, their religion, it has been easier for the vanquishers to bend slowly to the vanquished people than for the vanquished people to bend to the vanquishers.” Quoted by Spence in *The Chan’s Great Continent*, 94-5.

In conflicts with other nations, China is humiliated and defeated, but at the same time also distinctly identified. A death at the hands of the Japanese or the British distinguishes itself from other deaths by its shock value. Through the discomfort and humiliation one feels while under the oppression of another race, a sharpened sense of self-identity, human rights, and the meaning of life and death, otherwise easily buried underneath the heavy blanket of “traditional practice,” begins to occupy the center stage of a new national consciousness. However, lost in the worship of the “usual way,” Ch’eng-tai is not only outside of this new development, but through his sheer stubbornness in thwarting the historically inevitable and necessary self-examination, also becomes an inconvenient obstacle to the raging appetite of those hungry for change. After the failure of several attempts to convince Ch’eng-tai to pass the decree Garine asked for, the young Chinese terrorist Hong kills Ch’eng-tai so as to level the ground for a more even march and takeover by the new, revolutionary generation. With the death of Ch’eng-tai, the traditionalist world view suffers the last stroke: those who insist, as Ch’eng-tai did, that “China is China, and the rest of the world is the rest of the world” (82), must be swept aside by the tides of modernization that no longer tolerate such a divide. Through the death of Ch’eng-tai Malraux illustrates the impossibility of the isolationist approach in the modern, colonial context.

It is not surprising, however, that the next symbolical death is that of Hong, who is executed by his international allies on the orders of his Comintern boss Mikhail Borodin. While Ch’eng-tai’s death warns against an exclusively traditionalist stance, Hong’s cautions against blind indulgence in the newfound sense of self: neither total rejection, nor total embrace, of the West is a viable option for the revitalization of China.

Having grown up in utter destitution and the most abject misery, Hong has come to see the world as divided between the poor and the others. The most peculiar thing about this angry young Chinese is that, although he can read French and English books,²⁶ he is illiterate in his native language. However, his education in the two foreign languages is rather limited in scope, since he does not find many books to read in his mentor Rebecchi's house. The only author whose influence on him is known is the French anarchist Jean Grave who, along with Rebecchi, plants the idea in the young man's mind that "when you only have one life to live, you don't try to change the world. What's hardest is to know what *you* want" (21). Having recognized the uniqueness of human life, Hong lives in fear of spoiling "this one life." But this young man, courageous and thirsting for action, is oblivious of the gap between his French theory and the Chinese reality. Impatient with anything other than action and its immediate result, Hong no longer obeys orders from the International for whom he works, because the latter "acts too slowly, and is home to too many kinds of men" (110). On his own initiative, he starts to assassinate men who are under the Comintern's protection, simply because they are rich and therefore must be eliminated according to his own theory.

In the end, he kills Ch'eng-tai, whose talk of justice disgusts him because, like all those who are born into wealth, the old man is incapable of understanding the meaning of true poverty. What's more, he hates idealists like Ch'eng-tai who strive to bring order to this world, when the notion of order directly contradicts Hong's own world view: that life is misery, and misery has no order. Ruined by poverty and the humiliation resulting from it, Hong lives to destroy the very concept of respectability and to drag the rest of mankind down to his own level. Thus, the restless mind of Hong yearns for change, but knows

²⁶ He learns French from the Italian Rebecchi, and teaches himself English.

only how to smash and destroy, not how to build, create, and give order. Such incidental “revolutionaries” cannot be the instrument to bring about real social change; chaos is not an answer for chaos. When the arrested Hong is brought in to see Garine, he mistakes Garine’s friendly shrug for a contemptuous insult: he is so thoroughly poisoned by hatred that he can no longer distinguish friend from foe. In order to negotiate a fruitful encounter between China and the West, Hong must die, for he has already been destroyed by the worst of the two cultures: the misery and poverty of China, and the dogmatic excesses of French anarchism.

But the deaths of Ch’eng-tai and Hong represent only one side of the failure in this clash of civilizations. The other side that has ultimately caused their death—the Western imperialists—remains as a vague backdrop. As Gaétan Picon perceptively points out, Malraux has a tendency to refrain from depicting what he is not in his novels, and as a result, in his fictional universe “that is not only one of interior conflict, but also one of combat, the absence of the enemy is striking. Capitalists, oppressors, Nazis, Falangists—all of them, the human adversaries of the novels’ heroes—are absent.”²⁷ Claude-Edmonde Magny takes this observation one step further and declares that this is because Malraux is “incapable of observing anything but light.”²⁸ Supported by the evidence of Malraux’s own novels, Picon’s remark is irrefutable. On the other hand, Magny’s statement only leads one to question—not Malraux’s capability to portray the dark side, but why he refrains from doing so. For the existence of and the urgency to fight against the enemy is unquestionable even in his first work, *The Temptation of the West*. By virtue of its absence within the novels, Malraux’s enemy becomes synonymous with the pure

²⁷ “Malraux on Malraux” in *Malraux* edited by R.W.B. Lewis, 170.

²⁸ “Malraux the Fascinator”, *ibid*, 123.

evil against which all his heroes fight. The ultimate death of the enemy, if not taken for granted, is desired; what is still uncertain is only the when and the how. However, in *The Conquerors*, as in *Temptation* or the other novels written before Malraux became the Minister of Culture in De Gaulle's government, the enemy must remain in the background for the politically ambitious writer. The enemy in *The Conquerors*—the British colonial government in Hong Kong—is dangerously reminiscent of the French government in Indochina. Even in his days as a pro-Annam newspaper editor, Malraux was always cautious when speaking out against colonial rules, confining his remarks largely to advocating reformation *within* the colonial system. His attitude towards power and action—symbols of vitality and life for him—is at once admiring and despising, with many layers of ambivalence in between. Realistically, an in-depth examination of the enemy would have meant either taking sides against his own colonialist French government, or revealing his own incriminating taste for sheer power and action. Malraux was not willing to do either.

Instead, when describing “the rest of the world,” Malraux chooses to focus on the Russian Comintern agent Mikhail Borodin, as well as the international volunteer in the Canton government, Pierre Garine. Once again, he is skeptical about the attitudes these men represent, but instead of killing them off, as he had dealt with Ch'eng-tai and Hong, he inflicts them with tropical diseases that cripple their action and undermine their decision-making process. Borodin, sent by Stalin to Sun Yat-sen's nationalist government already in 1923 as a Communist advisor, remains for the most part of the novel in the background because “the fever the doctors worried about has hit him, and the International's representative, confined to his bed, can neither read nor discuss anything

whatever” (85). When he does appear, he is “yellowed, wasted, [and] seems Chinese” (110). Such unfavorable impressions foreshadow his words and action. On the only occasion where Borodin is heard in his own voice, he angrily instructs the rabble-rousing Hong that one must have discipline because the revolution is “paying the army” (111). This phrase is later regarded by Trotsky as containing

all the elements of the noose that strangled the Chinese revolution [because] Borodine safeguarded the bourgeoisie who, in recompense, financed the ‘revolution.’ The money went to Chiang Kai-shek’s army. Chiang Kai-shek’s army exterminated the proletariat and liquidated the revolution....The bourgeoisie willingly pays only that army that protects it from the people.²⁹

Instead of working for the interests of the people, as he claims he is, Borodin really defends the interests of the rich, against whom the poor seek to rebel. Dismissing Hong’s anarchist terrorism as contrary to the aims of the revolution, he sides with Ch’eng-tai on anti-terrorist decrees (136), and does not flinch from producing “a right-wing Kuomintang opposition much stronger than Ch’eng-tai’s that will crush the workers’ militia” (160). After Hong’s unauthorized assassination of Ch’eng-tai, it is indeed Borodin who orders Hong’s execution, effectively avenging Ch’eng’s death and justifying his cause. Worse still, as Garine points out, in Borodin’s narrow-minded communism there is no place for the individual. “[In] the name of discipline Borodin wouldn’t hesitate to replace Garine as soon as they could do without him; replace him by a man less expert, perhaps, but more obedient” (160). Writing in 1928, after the failure of the Comintern in the Chinese revolution and its subsequent exodus from China, Malraux was already well-informed about the erroneous methods that Communist Russia adopted in China. The diseased Borodin, therefore, signifies a dogmatic form of Communism, of which one must beware. Indeed, Malraux’s critique of the Comintern coincides with the

²⁹ “The Strangled Revolution,” *Malraux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 18.

development of the Chinese communist movement in relation to Moscow after 1928: Maoism arose as a negation of policies implemented by the Comintern.³⁰

Malraux's repudiation of the black/white approaches (Ch'eng-tai, Hong, Borodin) to the clashing and meshing of civilizations continues in his depiction of the central character, Garine who, like Borodin, suffers from tropical diseases, and "will be forced to leave the tropics before long" (53). Before devoting his life to revolutionary activities, Garine was implicated in several alleged abortions, and was indicted as an accessory for paying for the cost of these abortions. Dumbfounded and infuriated, Garine nevertheless experienced impotence at defending his own case in front of a group of indifferent and incompetent people, whose arbitrariness will now determine his fate. Barely escaping jail time on a suspended sentence of six months' imprisonment, Garine enlisted in the French Foreign Legion when the Great War broke out, only to desert the next year after witnessing another humiliating scene that confirmed his suspicion that life was absurd. A newly enlisted soldier had threatened to kill anyone who dared to touch him; on the same night he was beaten almost unconscious, dressed up as a bride, and raped by many soldiers. In these experiences Garine was confronted with the powerlessness of man in absurd situations; despite his intention and volition, a man does not have control over his own life. This realization, disheartening as it was, was strangely liberating for Garine. Henceforth the goal of his life would be a relentless fixation with and pursuit of power, to exert the utmost amount of control over situations that *he* would create for himself.³¹

³⁰ For an excellent analysis of the idiosyncratic form of communism known as Maoism, see Maurice Meisner's book, *Mao's China and After*.

³¹ This side of Garine, the action hero, fascinates Malraux so much that he re-creates it in another figure whose sole preoccupation is action, and the power derived therefrom: Ferral in *Man's Fate*. See my analysis of this character below.

Convinced of life's absurdity, Garine releases himself from the bonds of morals (which makes the moralist Ch'eng-tai a symbol of hypocrisy for him), and states repeatedly that he craves power for its own sake. For him, it is impossible to pledge his allegiance to any social order (44); his revolutionary fervor is "born only of revolution itself..., for [him] revolution is primarily action" (46). He does not love mankind, not even the poor, for whom he fights in the revolution (48-9). He defines his life as action, and is "indifferent to everything that isn't action, including the results of action." He could tie himself "to the revolution so easily because its outcome is remote and always shifting" (154). As a last testimony to his dedication to power and action, he tells the narrator before he leaves Canton that his next destination is England, the enemy against whom he has been fighting, because it is the very symbol of "stubborn, unrelenting force. Running things. Making decisions. Controlling men. That's where life is" (173). But as death perches on the gaunt features of his ghostly face, these last words can no longer cover up the falsity of his contrived "truth." After hearing this last confession, the narrator realizes why he is upset by Garine's words: "it isn't me he's trying to persuade. He doesn't believe in what he's saying and he's trying hard, with every raw nerve, to persuade himself" (173). At the threshold of death, the intoxication with power and control can no longer prevent Garine from recognizing the ultimate failure of his life.

Indeed, the demon of unbelief in his personal religion of power has been on the loose for some time. In a letter to the narrator whom he has invited to join him in the Canton revolution, Garine cautions against unwarranted hope:

You know how much I hope you'll come. But don't come if you expect to find that life here fulfills the hopes I had when I left you. The power I dreamed of, and command today, can only be won by a dogged *peasant* persistence, by unflagging energy, by the constant desire to add to what *we* already have here just that man, or

that element, *we* need. You may be surprised to read that. Here among my comrades I found the doggedness I lacked, and I believe I've made it mine. *I've become strong by putting total absence of scruples at the service of something other than my own interest.* (52, italics added)

The pursuit of power is not a romantic, idealistic process. On the contrary, it demands a dogged persistence that is peasant-like. Nor does it concern only the individual, but always the collective “we.” Instead of achieving, as he dreamed, the power that would enable him to control his life, Garine finds himself constantly having to sacrifice his own interests in order to become stronger and stay in command. Under the direction of Communist Russia, Garine discovers that to stay in his position of power means to learn and teach obedience, to “mass-produce revolutionaries the way Ford turns out cars” (159). This total disregard for the individual will disgusts and appalls him. The wish to be true to his original aim binds him to the anarchist Hong, who refuses to be dictated to by the party. “There are few of my enemies I understand better” (110), Garine says with regard to Hong, and tries to keep Borodin from killing him. However, reluctant to give up his claim to power, and recognizing that the kind of power he is after is inherently institutional, Garine subjugates his personal will to the party, and does not give in until death forces him to step down.

Despite his ultimate failure as an individual seeking control over himself, Garine does not leave the Chinese Revolution empty-handed. Ravaged by disease, memories of his humiliating trial and the raped soldier flood his thoughts; as if to counter these venomous darts that hasten the arrival of death, Garine also starts to talk about the positive aspects of his involvement in China:

Funny. After my trial I really felt—strongly—that all life was useless, that humanity was a slave to absurd impulses. Now I feel it again. Damn foolishness, being sick. Still, I get the feeling that I'm fighting human absurdity, doing what I do here.... Ah,

that indescribable wholeness that lets us feel our lives are good for something.... After the trial my feeling that any social order was absurd expanded slowly until it included everything human.... And yet, and yet...Right now, at this very moment, how many men are dreaming of victories that two years ago they could never even have imagined! I created their hope. Their hope. I'm not much for fancy talk, but what the hell, man's hope is his reason to live and die. (119-20)

Involuntarily, Garine lets go of his obsession with power, thinks about the real effects of his action in China, and is consoled by this happy thought. It is true that there are absurdities in the world. But the fight against absurdity is by no means a wasted gesture, since the act of exerting oneself necessarily leads to a changed state of affairs, if not for oneself, then for others in the same situation. To change a situation—to build or create another situation—is to take control, and regardless of who benefits from the situation, the outcome is gratifying to the one who initiates the change. Inadvertently, Garine had stumbled upon the answer to his existential question: “The only way to fight back is to create something. ...ah, would I like to see this China five years from now! What lasts, that's what matters!” (165). The Western hero Garine, persecuted by a characteristically Western disease (absurdity) which he contracted in the West, is able to find a cure in China. Although hardly elaborated upon, this suggestion already contains the essence of Malraux's philosophy, which will occupy center stage in his third China work, *Man's Fate*.

The symbolic deaths and diseases in this novel indicate that the twenty-seven-year-old Malraux mistrusts representatives from both China and the West and their ability to deal with cultural and political clashes. However, while both Ch'eng-tai and Hong die (at the hands of their own supposed allies), Borodin (a Russian agent of Marxism, a Western concept) and Garine are afflicted with diseases that can be cured. While Ch'eng-tai and Hong are one-dimensional characters who live for one idea and die because of

their blindness to others, Garine is, when he chooses to be, aware of the deadliness of his obsessions and even knows how to save his own life. “To get well [from the tropical diseases] I’ll have to go back to Europe. I know that,” Garine says to the narrator (78). But doing that will only provide him with a superficial cure, because he knows that the most fatal disease is not something that comes from the outside, but from within: “Disease is *yourself*” (113). He postpones his departure for Europe time and again not only because of an unquenchable thirst for power and the thrill of being in control of a large enterprise, but, more importantly, because of the (albeit unconscious) creative urge to shape the minds of the Chinese people. It is to maintain this renewed spiritual life that he is unwilling to leave China, even though staying means physical death brought on by the tropical disease. However, like Malraux himself, Garine is not yet ready to admit to himself that he has found meaning in China: the meaning that he thought irrevocably lost in the West. Nearing the end of his life, he is still trying to delude himself about the glories of power and action, and, climbing into the throne of a “China-savior,” he entertains the thought that, if China were left on her own or to the care of her Russian advisors, she would certainly perish. However, the activities of certain reflective Westerners have resuscitated her hope for survival. In this sense, Malraux’s China is no longer a China that, in Ch’eng-tai’s words, always “conquers her conquerors,” but must be conquered in order to start a new life; China is not much more than a playground for the writer’s fantasy of control and power. It is not until *Man’s Fate* that Malraux is able to let go of this illusion.

Approaching Metamorphosis: *Man's Fate*

With the success of *The Conquerors*, Malraux's financial situation improved, and soon he started to tour the world with his wife Clara. From 1929 to 1931 he took three long trips to Persia and central Asia, and finally went on a world tour that included countries such as India, China, Japan, and the US. Each trip broadened his horizons substantially and afforded him fresh perspectives from which to view the political and social situations in Europe and the rest of the world (particularly Russia and China). As Olivier Todd points out, "Every time he returns to France, Malraux notices that Europe is no longer the center of the world."³² Since the end of World War I, the strong appeal and swift spread of Fascism over all of Europe, including France, had been the major concern for European intellectuals on the left and center. The Great Depression in 1929 drove many more economically desperate people to embrace the Fascist cause, especially in Germany, where Hitler had been doggedly and systematically building his Nazi party since 1919. In the Reichstag election of 1930, the Nazis gained such popularity among the German populace that the party won 107 seats in the Reichstag and became the second largest party after the Social Democrats, leading the Communist Party by 30 seats. By 1932, the Nazis' gain escalated to 230 seats, and the threat of a Nazi takeover to annihilate all individuality and differences so as to start the mechanical governance of "all movements of individuals" became unstoppable.³³ On the other hand, the other mass

³² *Malraux*, 102.

³³ The 25th point in Hitler's first party program, written for the first mass meeting of the German Workers' Party held in Munich on February 24, 1920, reads as follows: "For modern society, a colossus with feet of clay, we shall create an unprecedented centralization which will unite all powers in the hands of the government. We shall create a hierarchical constitution, which will mechanically govern all movements of individuals."

movement—the Communist Revolution—that swept through Europe after the Russian Revolution of 1917 espoused a long-term goal of a classless and stateless society where the individual would have the freedom to do what he desired. In the midst of such violent and apocalyptic clashes of ideologies, socially responsible intellectuals regarded it as their paramount duty to take sides, and the author of *The Conquerors* was unequivocal in his choice: “If there is to be a war, our place is in the ranks of the Red Army;” “it’s either the Nazis—the ‘Fascists’—or us.”³⁴

In his 1931 trip to China, Malraux visited Canton, Shanghai, and Beijing. China at the time was engaged in a civil war between Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party and the Communist Party headed by Mao Zedong and Zhu De. The first alliance between the two parties, suggested by Soviet Russia and accepted by the Nationalist Party leader Sun Yat-sen in 1923, was broken off by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927, when he unleashed a massacre upon his communist allies and the workers militia organized by the communists. The Communist Party was then driven underground; at the beginning of 1928 at Jinggangshan, the remote mountain areas on the border of Hunan and Jiangxi provinces, there gathered about 10,000 men in rags, remnants of troops led by Zhu De and Peng Dehuai, as well as Mao’s small army. In 1930 Chiang launched the first of the five “Extermination Campaigns” to root out the communist base, but only the last one succeeded, in 1934, resulting in the legendary Long March.³⁵ However, in September of 1931, the time of Malraux’s China visit, the Communists had successfully defended their base through two Extermination Campaigns and were closing in on their third victory.

³⁴ Malraux, quoted by Olivier Todd, 105.

³⁵ For a quick but insightful analysis of the development of the Communist Party in China, see Lucien Bianco’s *Origins of the Chinese Revolution 1915-1949*, 53-82.

The success of the persecuted Communist Party in China certainly boosted the morale of the members and supporters of the Party, but did not provide an ideal subject for Malraux's next China book. Not only was the remote base of the Chinese Communists inaccessible to Malraux, but Chinese shift of revolutionary agent from the proletariat to the peasant, and of locale from the city to the countryside, would hardly have interested Malraux whose base of operation had always been the metropolis. Moreover, unlike the pre-1927 years, the international involvement in the development of the Chinese Communist Party was practically non-existent. In his anti-fascist work, however, Malraux wanted to give his definition of what true international comradeship means to a world convulsed by warring ideologies as well as individual obsessions, and to caution his readers on the possible ramifications of the defeat of international Communism. Appropriately, therefore, he reached back in history for the setting of his final China book. The events of *Man's Fate*, based on the crucial months of March and April in 1927 when Chiang maneuvered to break his alliance with the Communists, accommodated both of his desires.

Compared to *Temptation* and *The Conquerors*, the characters in *Man's Fate* come from more diversified origins and backgrounds. In addition to China, France, and Russia, some main characters are from Japan and Germany; besides the usual revolutionaries and intellectuals, there are now also a capitalist, a mythomaniac, and an artist. This expansion in scope marked Malraux's waning interest in the individual hero; from now on he would no longer focus on his Julien Sorels, but would model his works after *The Brothers Karamazov*.³⁶ In *Man's Fate*, Malraux also bids farewell to a provincial view of world

³⁶ In a review of *The Conquerors*, Malraux's friend Drieu la Rochelle praised Malraux's depiction of the new man, but also criticizes the solitariness inherent in such a hero. He concluded that "if Malraux was to

politics, and proffers a more “worldly” outlook. This proves to be attractive to his Parisian audience and especially the judges of his new book, for, he is awarded the long coveted Goncourt Prize.

However, despite Malraux’s cosmopolitan intentions, the lack of Chinese characters in his novel and therefore the lack of Chinese involvement in the decision-making process in such a crucial episode of the *Chinese* Revolution leaves much to be desired and questioned. The only significant Chinese presence, among the six main characters, is the terrorist Ch’en, whose murder of another Chinese man opens the story. In Malraux’s brief sketch of Ch’en, we learn that this more reflective version of Hong had been brought up (having been orphaned early in his life) and educated by an American pastor, who taught him the idea of love as well as the existence of hell. However, this education was later to be denounced and eradicated by his formal education in the University of Peking under the tutelage of old Gisors, who introduced him to Marxism. Having been initiated into adulthood essentially the Western way, Ch’en is never really Chinese; “the only thing which China had deeply instilled in him” is “the respect of the schoolboy for his master” (63, 68). As a result Ch’en “fastened” himself to Gisors, who was “without doubt the only man Ch’en needed” (62). However, even though there is a deep attachment between Gisors and Ch’en, the former cannot feel for the latter “that deep affection which needs no explanation” that he feels for his own son Kyo (62). In fact, during his conversation with Ch’en (who is experiencing an existential crisis after murdering a man and discovering death in its physical form for the first time), Gisors’ thoughts are constantly interrupted by his preoccupations with Kyo. Later, he

make real progress as a novelist, he would have to choose between Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black* and Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*.” In Cate’s *Malraux*, 159-60.

admits that with Ch'en, as well as with his other students who have devoted their young lives to the Revolution, he is interested in them only because he recognizes Kyo in all of them (71). The description of Ch'en, consistent with his depiction of Ling and Hong, betrays Malraux's ignorance of real Chinese revolutionaries, as well as condescending attitude that underlies all his China works: not only is China unable to produce revolutionaries on her own, but her young minds are invariably unfit for revolution. Unwittingly, in depicting the relationship between Ch'en and Gisors, Malraux also reveals his tendency to assign to the "Chinese problems" secondary importance. Having dressed Ch'en in a Western garb (Ch'en himself, as we are told later, preferred to walk in the company of a white man³⁷), Malraux invites his Western readers to regard Ch'en as an inferior imitation of their own culture. Prioritizing Kyo over Ch'en in Gisors' mind, the writer prepares his readers to attach to the former a significance that naturally eludes the latter. In contrast to Kyo's heroic and meaningful death in the end, Ch'en cannot even kill himself properly. When he decides to throw himself underneath Chiang Kai-shek's car with a bomb in order to kill both Chiang and himself, not only does he fling himself on the wrong car, he does not even succeed in killing himself. "A furious kick from another officer caused all his muscles to contract: he fired without being aware of it" (249). With this grotesque depiction of Ch'en's death, Malraux quite maliciously ridicules the Chinaman's death vow that he will, through the act of killing himself, take "complete possession" of himself (196). The fate of China, represented by Ch'en, is in the hands of others; her death will be delivered onto her.

On the contrary, this self-possession is granted to the half-Asian character Kyo Gisors. Arguably the most important character in the novel, Kyo is the leader of the

³⁷ *Man's Fate*, 176.

Shanghai uprising whose status as a half-breed (French father and Japanese mother) reveals Malraux's evolved attitude towards the East-West encounter. East and West are, literally, combined in Kyo, a lovable, believable, and therefore compelling character. However, Malraux's choice of Japan over China in the creation of this half-breed merits attention. Although the creation of Kyo signals Malraux's abandonment of the East-West binary, he is still unconvinced that backward China could shoulder the vast responsibility he is about to place upon the shoulders of Kyo. Naturally, Japan, economically and militarily powerful and rich in history and culture, becomes an obvious China-alternative. Further, Malraux had already justified his reluctance to yield leadership to the Chinese in *The Conquerors*, where the Chinese characters exhibited an unredeemable conservatism and anarchism, which only harmed the revolution. It is also interesting to note that Chinese women are married to minor characters in both *The Conquerors* and *Man's Fate*.

In the former work the Italian Rebecchi is married to a Chinese woman who does not give him any children but watches over him like a hawk; in the latter the German Hemmelrich is trapped in a marriage with a Chinese woman who, along with their sick and dying son, holds him back from participating in a revolution that might endanger their lives. It is the deaths of his wife and son that finally liberate Hemmelrich and enable him to engage himself entirely in the revolution. Significantly, neither woman speaks in the novel; Hemmelrich's wife came to him after being abandoned by her former buyer, and "clung to him with the love of a blind and persecuted dog" (191). Such a depiction of Chinese women is consistent with Malraux's understanding of the Chinese attitude towards woman, who is "subject to man as man is subject to state" (60). The subjugation of China and Chinese women by others disqualifies a Chinese woman from becoming the

companion of a Western intellectual; if Kyo is to be the product of East and West, the mother would have to come from the only conquering country in Asia: Japan. The writer was unaware of the fact that the signal feature of the early revolutionary fervor from the late Qing to the time of his writing was women's liberation. That is what Chinese revolutionaries tried to promote (more than western feminists) as part of national liberation. Unwittingly perhaps, Malraux injects his stereotypes into a nation that was trying to demolish the stereotypes.³⁸

Believing that revolution is a man's game, Malraux kills Kyo's Japanese mother before the novel starts, and, unlike his lavish treatment of Clappique's colorful grandfather, does not give her any attention anywhere in the novel. The only legacy she seems to have left to Kyo is the stigma that comes with being Asian: Kyo is an outcast "despised by the white men and even more by the white women" (70). This half-breed, Malraux explains to us, has lived his formative years (from the eighth to the seventeenth) in Japan and received a Japanese education that had *also* [translation: like the West] "imposed the conviction that ideas were not to be thought, but lived" (69). This essentially Western mind then left his father and lived a nomadic life as a day-laborer and coolie in China, carrying out the simple yet noble mission of restoring dignity to the insulted and the injured. If Kyo's Westernness is still in doubt, one might refer to Malraux's presentation of Kyo for the first time in the company of other revolutionaries

³⁸ As Jerome Ch'en records, women were brought on "to the agenda of social and political reform" as early as 1895. Issues such as foot-binding and female infanticide were heatedly debated in the Women's Conference held in Shanghai in 1900, which resulted in the 1902 edict prohibiting foot-binding. When the first alliance between the Nationalists and the Communists was established in 1923, there was a department created for women. In 1925-6, the Women's Normal College in Beijing actively fought for their rights as women and participated in demonstrations and strikes against foreign and domestic oppression (this issue is discussed at length in the chapter on Lu Xun). Many May Fourth thinkers such as Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, and Lu Xun espoused women's liberation. And in the 1928 penal code and 1931 civil code, equality between the sexes was promulgated. For more details, see the section on women's emancipation in Ch'en's *China and the West*.

under a swinging lamp: “in passing over his head the lamp accentuated the drooping corners of his mouth; as it swung away it displaced the shadows and his half-breed face appeared *almost European*. The oscillations of the lamp became shorter and shorter: Kyo’s two faces reappeared by turns, *less and less different from each other*” (17, italics added). From one angle one sees “the drooping corners” of Kyo’s mouth (does Malraux mean this to be an Asian trait? Such an intention is ambiguous, at best); from another one sees an “almost European” face (all the features that characterize a European face are assumed here). When these two faces become one, what is less categorical (the drooping corners) is naturally supplanted by the more emphatic (the European face). Despite his nominal gesture of making Kyo half-Asian, Malraux’s desire to retain the quintessential Europeanness of his hero is clear from the very beginning.

In *Man’s Fate*, therefore, the success *and* failure of the events depicted are the work of the internationals—Kyo and Ch’en alike. More specifically, the success of the Shanghai uprising is attributed to the European leaders (Kyo and Katov), while the Russian Communist advisors are deemed responsible for the massacre of the Communists by Chiang Kai-shek. Contrary to the historical Shanghai uprising, which was in fact led by a team of Chinese military experts, notably Zhou Enlai, who would later become the PRC’s first premier, Malraux makes up an international team that completely hijacks the revolution, and makes no mention of any effective Chinese participation in organizing the uprising. However, despite Malraux’s intentional misrepresentation of the leadership structure within the Chinese Revolution, it is, as Jean Lacouture points out in his biography on Malraux, largely thanks to his novels that many non-Chinese came to know and even respect China. In an interview with a Chinese diplomat Lacouture was told that

the Chinese regard Malraux as “a friend of China. He was on our side in the most difficult times....”³⁹ To call Malraux “a friend of China” despite all his apparent condescension towards her is to recognize Malraux’s correct but self-referential understanding of the Chinese situation as a whole: China in the mid-1920’s was one of the few places “where one can find all the conditions which make some form of heroism possible.”⁴⁰ Without China as a setting, Malraux’s heroes, individual or otherwise, lose their coherence and significance. It is only within China, in the midst of all the uncertainties, possibilities, violence, and deaths, that their characters are distinctly shaped and formed. Thus Garine must come to and stay in Canton’s revolutionary milieu in order to combat his individual demons; and Kyo and Katov must continue to stay with their comrades in Shanghai even after being warned about the danger which threatens their lives. Despite his misgivings, Malraux has come to appreciate the value of China in Western man’s search for identity and renewal.

Malraux’s choice of a major historical event in Chinese history, as well as his re-staffing the Chinese circle of leaders with Western heroes, also means that not only must he confront the eventual failure of the revolutionary episode (as happened in history), but also that the failure of the uprising must be attributed to the West alone. If Malraux is dismissive of Chinese inefficacy in a revolutionary situation in *The Conquerors*, he is, in *Man’s Fate*, equally suspicious of the revolutionary potential of his countrymen. Three of the six main characters are Frenchmen, and, remarkably, not only do they not represent the virtues that the novel extols, but they either dissociate themselves from the revolution, remain indifferent to it, or even actively contribute to its downfall. However, in contrast

³⁹ Lacouture’s *Malraux*, 438.

⁴⁰ Geoffrey Harris’ *Malraux*, 87.

to the one-dimensionality of the Chinese, whose absence is hardly justified, these French characters are explored in depth and brought to life, just as Pygmalion chiseled out his Galatea. In this last China work, even though Malraux no longer pitted China against the West, but sought to transcend this binary, he is still only too willing to indulge in exploring certain philosophical and existential issues in characters that are closest to his heart: the Frenchmen.

The first of these is Baron de Clappique, who is described as “a dealer in antiques, opium and smuggled wares” (5). By virtue of his resourcefulness, he is approached by Kyo at the beginning to deliver a note to the captain (an acquaintance of his) of a ship containing arms intended for the local warlord government and arrange a different transaction place, so that the insurrectionists can raid the ship for the arms that are sorely needed for the planned uprising. This first appearance occupies a generous space of ten pages in this fast-moving narrative; before Kyo’s brief negotiation with Clappique, the latter is allowed seven pages where he tells a fantastic story about his grandfather, and flirts with and showers his generosity on two prostitutes. Despite the urgency of his mission and his mounting impatience at the loquaciousness of Clappique, Kyo does not interrupt him, but observes him with a great amount of curiosity (31, 34). By the end of Clappique’s dramatic monologue, the reader is presented with a vivid picture of a mythomaniac who does not seem to care about anything but his own flights of imagination. The reader is struck, as well, by the incongruity of this phantom-like figure in the midst of a revolution that demands resolute commitment.

Malraux’s fascination with Clappique continues in the latter’s second prolonged appearance (twelve pages this time). Arriving early at the meeting with Kyo at which he

will receive the money he needs to flee the country (his involvement in the arms robbery is discovered), as well as inform Kyo of Chiang's planned massacre of his communist allies, he tries his hand at the roulette table, only to be riveted by the spinning of the mischievous and unpredictable ball, the spirit of gambling, and fails to meet Kyo at the agreed time.

Winning hardly mattered....He knew he was sacrificing Kyo; it was Kyo who was chained to that ball, to that table, and it was he, Clappique, who was that ball, which was master of everyone and of himself—of himself who was nevertheless looking at it, living as he had never lived, outside of himself, held spellbound and breathless by an overpowering shame. (259)

For Clappique, the reality of the revolution does not even touch the surface of his consciousness. He thinks of Kyo as an individual rather than a revolutionary leader, and he comprehends his surroundings in terms of a nonchalant "they've begun firing again" (260). In order to forget about Kyo he visits one brothel, then another, and talks about a death devoid of all physical reality. To him, the burden of a revolutionary leader's death is easily and ingeniously dissolved in his self-authored fictional world where nothing exists.

Indeed, Clappique is the only main character who does not have a significant role to play in the development of the plot; his tangential involvement in the revolution seems to be merely an excuse for Malraux to examine this character who is dear to his heart. The eloquent Clappique who enjoys a good lie resembles the writer himself, who was famous for his mesmerizing speeches and who fostered his own legend of being a leader in the Chinese Revolution; the mythomaniac's fascination with gambling is reminiscent of Malraux's own life and his adventurous spirit. However, this novel, which took Malraux an entire year to write and revise, is no longer from the same pen that composed

the amorphous *Temptation* and the rushed *The Conquerors*. Malraux's indulgence in this favored character is curbed, as attested by the fact that he had actually written another story about Clappique in an early draft, but decided to leave it out in the final version because Clappique "threatened to run away with the story."⁴¹ Also, Clappique's last appearance in the novel is rather ignominious: penniless and in a hurry to flee Shanghai, he has to disguise himself as a sailor to board the ship that will transport him to France and safety. Once aboard the ship, ignored by everyone, who identify him with his sailor's uniform, he realizes that he had found, "by accident, the most dazzling success of his life. No, men do not exist, since a costume is enough to enable one to escape from oneself, to find another life in the eyes of the others" (313).

However, this moment of brilliance is soon overshadowed and overwhelmed by the thought of going back to Europe, the idea of which constricts him as a prison. "The feast is over," he says to himself, and knows that "but for the menace of death he would have gone back on land" (314). At this point, Malraux has made it clear to himself and his readers that Clappique, whose entire existence is to prove the non-existence of everything including men, must disappear from the revolution that strives to achieve the exact opposite. Ironically, even though Clappique denies the existence of man, he still prefers "life" in Europe over death in Shanghai; however, since he defines Europe as a prison where no real life can be expected, his existence in Europe will only serve as proof of his coward's lie. Real life is in China and the revolution, despite and because of death, which constitutes the most important stage of metamorphosis. Dodging this necessary death, Clappique denies himself the possibility of the life that must follow. Although Malraux had not been able to resist adding this character to the story, he is clear that the

⁴¹ See Frohock, 74-5.

mythomaniac does not have a place in the grand finale. Thus, Clappique's ending contrasts sharply with those of the revolutionaries: while he finds death in life, the others discover life in death.

The pages on Ferral, president of the French Chamber of Commerce and head of the Franco-Asiatic Consortium in China, continue Malraux's exploration of the man of action in search of power (like Garine in *The Conquerors*). Professing the same kind of indifference to the success of capitalism in China as Garine had to the revolution, Ferral seeks, in his capacity as head of "the only French enterprise of its kind in the Far East" (339), a position that is powerful enough to sway the fate of China. On the eve of the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek's army in Shanghai, Ferral negotiates with the head of the Banker's Association of Shanghai in order to secure the necessary financial backing for Chiang's break with the Communists. As he persuades the banker with arguments known to and understood by both of them (that the Communists' promise to seize the land and abolish the credit system is an imminent threat to the creditors' very survival; that Chiang opposes these methods and is determined to destroy the Communists as soon as he can), he is secretly elated by another thought that extricates his action from the mudaneness of lucre. "Today he was among those through whom the fate of Shanghai was being decided....Yes, for the first time, there was an organization on the other side. He would like to know the men who were directing it. To have them shot, too" (121). For him, the revolution means the threat of toppling the foundation of his very own dynasty, which he had built almost single-handedly.⁴² For the first time he is confronted with an enemy

⁴² Malraux tells us that Ferral "had the backing neither of the 'families' of the great credit establishments, nor of the Ministry of Finance", 237.

whose annihilation or capitulation will significantly augment his sense of power, because in conquering them, he will be defending his own idea of who he is.

Ferral's ultimate failure is foreshadowed by his troubled relationship to women—first his mistress Valerie, a Frenchwoman, then a Chinese courtesan. Described as a wealthy woman who exercises her intellect as much as her sexual appeal, Valerie does not entertain any illusion of love from Ferral, nor does she reveal herself to him. In the game of eroticism, she is an equal partner to Ferral, and when the latter tries to disfigure the relationship with male dominance, she resolves to avenge herself. Having arranged to meet with Ferral in her room one night, Valerie absents herself while leaving another gentleman caller at her door. Both men carry a birdcage in their hand as a requested present for Valerie, and see their humiliation confirmed in the other's embarrassment. In a note to Ferral, she defends her cause as well as that of Woman: "I am not a woman to be *had*, a stupid body in which you may find your pleasure by telling lies as to children and invalids. You know a good many things, dear, but you will probably die without its ever having occurred to you that a woman is *also* a human being" (229). These words do not enlighten Ferral, whose individualism blinds him to the humanity of others; on the contrary, such words from a woman whose only business is to be possessed⁴³ testifies to the absurdity of the world. "Ferral's energy, his lucidity, the audacity which had transformed Indo-China...led to nothing but this ridiculous bird—ridiculous as the universe—which was undeniably making fun of him" (230). All his achievements, obtained without much assistance from others, especially women, remind him of his superiority over others, who therefore do not have the right to expect and demand

⁴³ In a conversation with Valerie, Ferral avers, "To give herself, for a woman, to possess, for a man, are the only two means that human beings have of understanding anything whatsoever...", 125.

equality from him. Unable to reconcile his present humiliation with his long cherished self-image, Ferral resorts to vengeance on another woman—although, unlike Valerie, this second woman is neither European, nor independent (a courtesan from China—China herself!).

After unleashing a petting zoo in Valerie's room and satisfying part of his design, Ferral picks up a Chinese courtesan and brings her to his room. Deliberately skipping all the ceremonious rituals associated with a courtesan—singing, chatting, serving food, and preparing pipes—he treats her as a common prostitute and orders her to undress before she has a chance to demonstrate her art. This idea of humiliation, hastily composed on Ferral's part, is by no means an incidental choice for Malraux. In one of his letters in *Temptation*, Ling contrasts the attitude towards women in China and Europe, and concludes that “to be interested in women and desire them only for their beauty [as Europeans do] is a sign of grossness! In China there is no courtesan of any status who is uncultured, unable to embellish the physical pleasures she bestows upon a man with those of the mind” (42). By depriving the courtesan the opportunity to display her culture, Ferral rejects outright the Chinese aesthetic taste in women, and affirms that the European way is the right way (although, ironically, the European woman does not agree with him at all!). This urgent need to assert his European superiority over the Chinese ostensibly results from his sexual frustration with Valerie, whose intellectual license irritates him, but is fundamentally due to the difficulties that beset him in China, which drove him to eroticism in the first place (122).

After Chiang's successful purge of the communists from his own party (and hence Ferral's success in aiding Chiang), Ferral goes back to France on the same boat as the

disguised Clappique, not as a victor who has shown the Chinese what's what, but to plead with representatives of French banks and credit establishments to grant aid to the Consortium, which stands on the verge of bankruptcy right after Chiang's takeover. However, just as Clappique is shipped back to Europe, a loser living in dreams and nihilism, Ferral is delivered back to his own country with the full realization that he had achieved nothing in China besides losing the Consortium's money (which is all that matters to his business associates). Chiang's success meant nothing to him, because he is not capable of becoming interested in anything but himself (245) and what he stands for: action, power, domination. His task of asking for aid from others is doomed from the start because Ferral, who consciously behaves as an outsider and a lone hero, cannot bring himself to curry favor from those he despises.

He arrives last at the meeting, wearing a "wrinkled tweed suit and the gray silk shirt with a soft collar from Shanghai" (337), which sets him apart from his countrymen, just as he had always held himself distinct from the Chinese. He speaks "nonchalantly," following his own logic of power and dominance rather than what the representatives want to hear: financial gain. And all the time he speaks from the assumption that his plea will not be heard, because he "was not one of them. Not married: stories about women that had become known. Suspected of smoking opium. He had turned down the Legion of Honor. Too much pride to be either a conformist or a hypocrite" (343). Despite Ferral's personal integrity, Malraux makes clear that Ferral's type of individualism, which functions only around a personal ideal and disregards the interests of any collective, cannot but suffer an inevitable defeat. His casual remark that "the Chinese Revolution will not be eternal" (339), is made not out of a realistic assessment of China's political

and social situation, but simply because he himself had helped Chiang Kai-shek in suppressing the rise of the Communists and considers the power struggle settled once and for all. Like Clappique, Ferral does not belong to the revolutionary collective, nor can he share in the life and meaning being created in the revolution. His only “business” in the East comes to a bitter end when, after failing to convince the representatives, he mockingly invites them to “examine together...the manner in which the Consortium will cease to exist” (351). While for Clappique, nothing matters because nothing exists (including man), for Ferral, nothing matters outside the expansion of the ego. Neither of them functions according to the East/West binary, let alone the transcendence of it.

The last Frenchman who seems oddly out of place in the revolutionary surge is old Gisors, one-time professor of sociology at the University of Peking. Unlike Clappique and Ferral, however, Gisors is by no means outside of the East-West dialogue. After all, he is the first significant character in Malraux’s novels to marry into the East, and through his teaching of Marxism he had “formed the best revolutionary cadres in Northern China” (45). However, when the novel opens, Gisors has already passed on the baton to Kyo to change the world, while he listens and offers council to others besides seeking, in opium, the only escape he has from his own problems. Malraux never explains what these problems are; the only reason Gisors does anything at all seems to be an urge to justify and defend the actions of his only beloved son, Kyo. To him, while the world is a mere illusion that easily dissolves itself in the ascending smoke of the burning opium, Kyo’s conviction, consolidated by his action, offers him assurance. It is only through Kyo and his activities that Gisors lives at all, because for the rest of the world, “there is always a need for intoxication: this country [China] has opium, Islam has

hashish, the West has woman...”; more specifically, everyone around him has found an intoxication, “Ch’en and murder, Clappique and his madness, Katov and the Revolution, May and love, himself and opium.... Kyo alone, in his eyes, resisted these categories” (241). This statement touches the heart of the novel’s concern, which Malraux summarized shortly after its publication in 1933:

No man can endure his own solitude. Whether by means of love, fantasy, gambling, power, revolt, heroism, comradeship, opium, contemplation or eroticism, it is against this fundamental *angst*, consciously or not, that the characters of this novel—Communists, Fascists, terrorists, financiers, adventurers, police chiefs, opium addicts, artists, and the women with whom they are involved—are defending themselves, engaged as they are to the points of torture and suicide in the Chinese Revolution, upon which for some years depended the destiny of the Asiatic world and perhaps that of the West.⁴⁴

However, unlike Malraux, who is keenly aware of the significance of the Chinese Revolution, whose outcome would determine “the destiny of the Asiatic world and perhaps that of the West,” for Gisors the talk of revolution and Marxism is only relevant through Kyo. Without Kyo, he is a man who lives solely to escape his consciousness of the real world. After Kyo’s death, Gisors leaves Shanghai for Japan, and declines all offers to re-affiliate himself with the Revolution, now carried on by exiled Communists in Russia.

Gisors’ fixation with the idea of escape results from his fear of death, a characteristically Western attitude, according to Malraux. For the Chinese, as Ling claims in *Temptation*, the contemplation of death only awakens two emotions: sadness and awe, whereas in the West, death is synonymous with terror (21). This fear of death ties Gisors to the fate of the revolutionaries (i.e., Kyo) whose mission is to restore dignity to a life that is otherwise made absurd by an inevitable death. However, when death finally gains

⁴⁴ Quoted in Cecil Jenkins, *André Malraux*, 63.

the upper hand and takes his only son from his life, Gisors finds himself completely crushed by the finality of death. Nothing really matters in the end. As if completely detached, he tells May that “men should be able to learn that there is no reality, that there are worlds of contemplation—with or without opium—where all is vain...” (365). In order to continue living after such a traumatic loss, Gisors tries to convince himself that the success and failure of an individual’s life does not matter once one realizes that the world is unreal and all human activities are vain. But these words of disillusionment can hardly conceal the bitterness and resentment he harbors against life’s injustice. As a last justification for his inactivity, he says to May:

You know the phrase: “It takes nine months to make a man, and a single day to kill him.” We both know this as well as one can know it.... May, listen: it does not take nine months, it takes fifty years to make a man, fifty years of sacrifice, of will, of...of so many things! And when this man is complete, when there is nothing left in him of childhood, nor of adolescence, when he is really a man—he is good for nothing but to die. (359-60)

The emotional tone of this speech betrays the fact that Gisors has not transcended the world of things and people at all. Before parting with May he not only encourages her to “love the living and not the dead,” to find life “on the road of vengeance,” but also kisses her “exactly the way” Kyo had kissed her on the last day she saw him (360).⁴⁵

These gestures contradict his words and reflect the torment of his mind. The failure of his Western self (who takes the individual and the potential value of *action* seriously) pushes him to seek solace in the Eastern aesthetics where *contemplation* dominates and the individual is of no consequence in relation to the world, but his

⁴⁵ Kyo’s last “kiss” for May was described thus: “He looked at her, took her head between his two hands, pressed it gently without kissing her, as though he were putting into that caress the mingled tenderness and violence of which *all the virile gestures of love* are capable” (214 italics added). It is as if part of Kyo still lived through Gisors, and hence the fight for human dignity, no matter how consciously suppressed and contradicted, is carried on by Gisors as well.

Western roots do not permit him a complete transformation. Although he is made professor of Occidental art in Kobe, he is indifferent to this profession (354). Even though he discovers in Kama's music a place where one is no longer terrified of death, he confesses that without effort on his part, he still remembers his desires and anguish, the very weight of his destiny and his life (356). Before Kyo's death, Gisors had been able to live vicariously through the actions of Kyo; afterwards, he is left only with the worlds of contemplation, which could no longer be translated into action and have become dead ends in themselves. Through the tragic ending of *Gisors* Malraux teaches that a meaningful life must be a combination of action (West) and reflection (East), like that of Kyo's, but not one of pure action (Ferral), or pure contemplation (Gisors).

Indeed, not only is this Eastern solution inadequate for the Western man, it is not even sufficient for the Oriental himself. In an earlier conversation between Clappique and Kama, a famous Japanese painter who is also Gisors' brother-in-law, the latter is questioned by the former about his art. When asked why he paints, Kama answers that it is first of all for his wife, because he loves her. Clappique immediately objects to the answer, and clarifies that he meant to ask "for what," not "for whom." This brief exchange beautifully highlights the different ways of thinking between the two men: whereas the Japanese thinks in terms of "us," the Frenchman thinks in terms of "me." After hearing Clappique's rephrased question, Kama realizes that it would be difficult to explain to an individually oriented mind an art whose ultimate aim is to dissolve the individual in the world. Nevertheless, his gentleness compels him to indulge Clappique and he explains: "The more your painters paint apples, and even lines which do not represent objects, the more they talk about themselves. For me it is the world that

counts.... With us, painting is what charity would be with you” (200-1). This notion of losing oneself in order to paint irks Clappique, who does not understand how it is possible for one to enjoy anything without placing himself in the center of his activity. Thinking that the knowledge of an impending death might shock Kama into reassessing his priorities, Clappique asks him whether he would still paint if he were to die in three months. Without a moment’s pause, Kama answers that he would not only paint, but paint even better, although not differently, because the “sadness and awe” he would feel about death would enable him to summon sufficient “fervor and melancholy” to transform objects into meaningful and comprehensible symbols.

This explanation not only visibly upsets Clappique, who is described as a “forlorn monkey” suffering atrociously “in the presence of a creature who denie[s] suffering” (202), but also agitates Gisors, who volunteers to rephrase the question for Clappique. Gisors’ question—what Kama would do if his wife were to die—ruffles the painter’s composure immediately. After some consideration he pronounces that he would not believe it. Pushing the issue relentlessly (most likely because Kyo’s possible death is constantly on his mind), Gisors asks Kama the final question: What if his wife were dead? At this point the painter’s sadness becomes apparent, although he leaves the room with this parting wisdom: “One can communicate even with death.... It’s most difficult, but perhaps that is the meaning of life...” (203). In this fascinating moment where the aesthetics of the East and the aesthetics of the West clash, neither emerges unscathed. Although Clappique is shown that the individual does not necessarily constitute the center of everything, Gisors succeeds in unmasking the importance of the individual in Kama after all: although Kama is able to surrender himself willingly to the world, he is

far from willing to surrender his wife. Through his individual relationship with his wife he defines himself apart from the world.

After his departure Kama starts to play the samisen in the next room, with notes that are “ordered into a slow fall that spread outward in its descent, down to the gravest notes, held in suspense and lost at length in a solemn serenity” (203). In the same way that Gisors seeks in music a refuge from the terrors of death, Kama plays the samisen only “when something has upset him,” as a “defense” against the invasion of worldly concerns (e.g., his wife’s possible death). The forlorn notes of the samisen mirror and relieve the player’s sadness until only “a solemn serenity” remains. Even though he has apparently mastered the fear of his own death, Kama is not able to suppress his fear of his wife’s death. The Eastern⁴⁶ way of dealing with death is, then, by no means a fruitful alternative to be accepted by the searching minds of the West. The individual, with all his blunders and follies, must not and cannot be effaced from the center of his activities.

Malraux’s final “escape” from man’s fate is channeled through love and friendship (fraternity), the first in the relationship between Kyo and May, the other in the execution yard scene towards the end of the book. It is essential to recognize right away that these redemptive values—love and friendship—are neither characteristically Western nor Eastern; rather, they transcend the cultural boundaries demarcating different races. This insight is only possible after Malraux’s analysis of the complete debacle of Western individualism and its consequences: Garine and Ferral’s individual heroism, Clappique’s

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that because of their different languages, the conversation between Clappique and Kama is done through translation, at the beginning by one of Kama’s disciples, then by Gisors. When translating Kama’s words, the disciple would begin by saying: “The master says...”. This is an unmistakable imitation of the style of *The Analects*, a collection of Confucius’ sayings by his followers, in which all the sayings by Confucius are preceded by the words, “The master said...”. Malraux’s intention of making Kama into another wise man of the East, to be venerated just like Confucius, is clear here.

mythomania, and Old Gisors' non-engaged escapism. However, these values, freshly liberated from all ideological prisons, are obtained not without some quite troubling anxieties on the part of the author. To begin with, both values are challenged by their opposites: love by jealousy and infidelity, friendship by loneliness. Moreover, it is only through death that they are completely validated. It is evident that Malraux is uneasy about parting with the notion of Western superiority, with which he has grown comfortable in writing these China novels. However, time and exigency demand the birth of his new hero; his anti-Fascist and pro-Communism stance, coupled with his reservations about the homogenizing tendency of the latter ideology's present phase, compels him to dissociate from and denounce the notion of the superior race, but also prevents him from fully identifying with "the other"—Russia and China—and their struggle.

The purity of the love between Kyo and May is assaulted as soon as it enters the plot. On the eve of the planned workers' insurrection led by Kyo and Katov, May confesses to Kyo that she had finally yielded to a persistent pursuer and slept with him in the afternoon. Although neither of them wishes to bind the other through sexual exclusivity, this unexpected affair reveals the difference between their understanding of love. In the shadow of death May's love seems to expand and transform to an all-encompassing sympathy for her fellow creatures who might not live to see the next day, so she yields, but without surrendering herself. On the other hand, Kyo reserves his love for an exclusive club (membership: one), and expects his beloved to return this favor. "Men are not my kind," he reflects after May's confession, trying to justify his love for her; "they are those who look at me and judge me; my kind are those who love me and do

not look at me, who love me in spite of everything, degradation, baseness, treason—*me* and not what I have done or shall do—who would love me as long as I would love myself—even to suicide.... With her alone I have this love in common” (59). Defined by his actions as a revolutionary leader, Kyo nevertheless cherishes most the love that allows him to shed all identities associated with his action. In front of May, he can afford to reveal all that he must hide from his public activities, and he regards this freedom as such a privilege that the loss of it would equal death: “if she were to die he would no longer serve his cause with hope, but with despair, as though he himself were dead” (52). Indeed, one might say that the existence of their love—the fact that one *can* be entirely oneself in front of another person without feeling ashamed, that the loss of one’s dignity is never a concern⁴⁷—inspires and motivates Kyo in his fight for human dignity. In the end, when Kyo departs from home to join the Central Committee—going to a certain death—he is able to overcome his jealousy and the dictates of his public persona (that the man must protect the woman, even if the woman, like May, does not need protection), and allows himself to be accompanied by May. “He understood now that the willingness to lead the being one loves to death itself is perhaps the complete expression of love, that which cannot be surpassed” (216). Seeing the death-like expression on May’s face when he refuses to take her along, Kyo realizes that this gesture of protecting her from a death that would consummate their love and confirm the meaning of their lives means abandoning her to a life worse than death, because it would be a life devoid of her most treasured possession. Love equals the courage to identify oneself completely with another being—to at once lose and gain oneself in the union—regardless of race, gender, belief. The love

⁴⁷ In Malraux’s last novel *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*, he is still fascinated by the same topic of whether a man is defined by what he does or what he hides. This split in one’s personality constitutes the main source of one’s solitude and alienation from others. 67.

between Kyo and May derives its redemptive value from the erasure of constricting binaries.

The other instance of redemption is created by Katov, a Russian Communist and Kyo's co-leader in the insurrection, who is known for his courage and his several close encounters with death. After he is captured and awaits his death with hundreds of his comrades in a dark courtyard, this fearless hero is confronted with "the most terrible temptation in his life" (326). To one side of him, Kyo lies dead, having swallowed his cyanide and avoided a violent end. To his other side, however, two young men are terrified by the prospect of being burned alive in the boiler of a locomotive. Katov has one cyanide pill, and he can choose to use it himself, or give it up to the two frenzied men. At this moment he realizes at once his ultimate solitude, as well as a chance to defy such an arbitrary fate:

In spite of the hum, in spite of all these men who had fought as he had, Katov was alone, alone between the body of his dead friend and his two terror-stricken companions, alone between this wall and that whistle far off in the night. But a man could be stronger than this solitude and even, perhaps, than that atrocious whistle: fear struggled in him against the most terrible temptation in his life. (325-6)

To defeat his solitude he must give the gift of death—a death that is infused with meaning and fraternity, a death that defends humanity and dignity. As one of the horrified young men pathetically imagines his body parts being burned in the fire of the boiler, Katov realizes that it is precisely such basic human dignity that the executioners aim to deprive them of. It is after this recognition that Katov gives up his cyanide to his young comrades, and it is in consistence with this recognition that he gives up the halved pill to them again after he finds the halved pill, dropped by one of the young men in the darkness. In the deep joy that envelops everyone after the pill is found, the meaning of

this gift becomes unmistakable. In Violet Horvath's words, Katov presents the gift "of more than...life," and in this poignant scene "the concepts of life and death are totally fused, and even reversed, in Katov's poetic apostrophe when the 'gift' of death is found and he exclaims: 'Oh resurrection!'"⁴⁸ With his own cruel death he buys dignity for two other human beings: even in death one can do something for mankind; death is not the end-all anymore, but merely a stage in the birth of a new life.

Such purposeful deaths reappear in Malraux's later writing as metamorphosis, which is "not a matter of chance," but

a law governing the life of every work of art. ...If death cannot still the voice of genius, the reason is that genius triumphs over death not by reiterating its original languages, but by constraining us to listen to a language constantly modified, ...and what the masterpiece keeps up is not a monologue, however authoritative, but a *dialogue* indefeasible by Time.⁴⁹

The language of the genius is the language of change, of constant deaths and rebirths, of the fearless offer to die so as to be reborn. The life of every work of art derives not from a relentless insistence on meaningless life (meaningless precisely because of the fear of death)—a "monologue" in Malraux's term—but from the belief that all voices must be heard (dialogue), including the voice of silence, the voice of death. Death cannot erase the memory of Kyo and Katov, because their deaths have been transformed into new life in the forms of love and fraternity. The discovery and embrace of these transcendental notions mark Malraux's reconfirmation of his belief that in the confrontation between China and the West, neither nihilistic Orientalism (*Temptation*), nor individualistic heroism (*The Conquerors*), offers a viable option in the search for self-identity. Rather,

⁴⁸ André Malraux: *The Human Adventure*, 213.

⁴⁹ *Voices of Silence*, 68.

to truly know oneself, one must also know the other: “China versus the West” leads to the entombing of both; “China and the West” is the key to a universal resurrection.

Conclusion

In the evolution of Malraux’s attitude towards the relationship between the West and China, we see Malraux gradually relinquishing his Euro-centric and individualistic stance, until he can no longer perceive his Europe apart from, or in opposition to, an albeit weak and backward China. Although Malraux’s China is far from authentic, and the dearth of Chinese characters in these China novels could easily be interpreted as Malraux’s ignorance of the Chinese people, the artist in Malraux had persisted in involving his Western heroes with China, situating them in episodes of the Chinese Revolution where “heroism was still possible.” However, if the creation of meaning in writing novels was exhilarating and potentially redemptive, such theoretical victories were not enough for the realist in Malraux. Although, like Clappique, he indulged in fantasies and the creation of stories with his own life, like *Garine* and *Ferral*, Malraux could never refuse the call of action. His deepest fear was perhaps to sink to the one-dimensionality of an escapist like *Gisors*, writing and talking eloquently without any real achievements to back up his words. This is why he was at pains to disguise his true feelings against the French colonial government in *Temptation* and *The Conquerors*, so that when the opportunity presented itself, he could, without much embarrassment, work for the government he would like to denounce, because that was the only way to effect real changes and get things done. This is also why the “talkers” (A.D., Clappique, *Gisors*)

in his novels always receive the most insufferable fate Malraux designs for his Western protagonists: they are doomed to live a changeless, meaningless life with the full consciousness of its absurdity.

Therefore, Malraux's acceptance of the appointment as Minister of Culture in de Gaulle's conservative government should not surprise those who have read his Chinese novels. His absolute devotion to and admiration for de Gaulle should give us a clear enough clue as to where Malraux's true allegiance lay.⁵⁰ Even though he had learned through writing his China series that there is no answer for the human condition if he persisted in using the East/West binary, he did not hesitate to draw on it when time demanded it.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it is difficult to doubt Malraux's sincerity when he, as a writer, immortalized fraternity in Shanghai's execution yard, or when he, as a former politician who was biding his time to reenter the political stage,⁵² sided with his Europe against the Communists of Russia and China. The tension between a writer's contemplation and a politician's action is real and ineffable, and it is through this tension that Malraux allowed his true identity to be revealed to his discerning readers.

⁵⁰ For a first-hand account of Malraux, de Gaulle, and their relationship, see "A Surprising Friendship: Malraux and de Gaulle," by Gaston Palewski, who worked with both in de Gaulle's cabinet. Palewski describes Malraux's entrance into de Gaulle's government as "a man entering a religious order," and judges his contribution to the work of de Gaulle as going "beyond ardent loyalty or intellectual cooperation." He was "an excellent minister," "exceptionally precise in what he planned and in what he carried out... he had devoted too much of his life to working for the people, he was too preoccupied with social justice and brotherly equality not to radiate these concerns around him. For de Gaulle he acted as a kind of living reminder, not of a necessity of which de Gaulle was already convinced, but of the urgency to give this necessity the force of law." In *Malraux: Life & Work*, 68-78.

⁵¹ See note 7.

⁵² The speech referred to here is the same as in the above note. It was written in 1949 during the Cold War, three years after Malraux's first term in de Gaulle's post-war government, and nine years before he served under de Gaulle again.

Chapter Two

The Conundrum of Either/Or:

Brecht's "Chinese" Commitment

He shies away neither from crudity nor from extreme realism. He is an odd mixture of tenderness and ruthlessness; of clumsiness and elegance; of crankiness and logic; of wild cries and sensitive musicality. He repels many people, but anyone who has once understood his tones finds it hard to drop him.

--Lion Feuchtwanger on Brecht

[Do] argued that one has to doubt anything one hasn't seen with one's own eyes. Rebuked for this negative attitude, he was not pleased and left the house. After a short while he came back, stopped on the threshold and said: I must amend that. One has to doubt what one has seen with one's eyes, too.

Asked what could set a limit to doubt in that case, Do said: The wish to act.

--Brecht, *Me-ti*

From China to the World

If in serving de Gaulle (an individual hero *and* the leader of a nation) Malraux, torn between artist and revolutionary, contemplation and action, had found an easy way out of his in-betweenness, a state both subliminal and unlivable, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) had no such luck. His support for Stalin and his policies was never without reservations, which intensified after the events of the first few months of the Second World War.¹ He admired Mao Zedong and was enthusiastic about the Communist victory

¹ The signing of the German-Soviet Pact, followed by the Soviet invasion of Eastern Poland, meant for Brecht "the stripping of ideological pretences...the adoption of all that fascist bullshit about 'blood brotherhood', liberation of the 'brothers' (of slav descent): the entire nationalist terminology. this is being spouted to the german fascists, but at the same time to the soviet troops." Quote in Brecht's original, without capitalization. Quoted by John Willett in *Brecht in Context*, 193.

in China, but could never bring himself to emigrate to China.² In his own East German Communist Party, there was no strongman that could even remotely compare to the two dictators. Thus it was that Brecht lived his life in transit, literally (from 1933 to 1949 he lived in exile) and metaphorically. His skepticism forbade him to accept reality as it was presented to him; his belief in change enabled him to defy any authority; and, having learned the dialectical nature of morality, he refused to preach good and bad except in the interests of human survival. In a world dominated by binaries and extremes, he was never simply one or the other, but always “an odd mixture” of both and all, a paradox functioning exclusively to the principle of his own conviction: the concrete truth. Faced with the utter disregard for human life and dignity, taking sides (political commitment) was not an option, but a necessity; and it is within this necessity that Brecht carried on his battle against the black-and-white world.

Thus, when Brecht used China in his works, it was never, like the early Malraux, from an Orientalist stance; nor did he believe in the superiority of the European. If Brecht used China as an “other,” a strange and exotic concept far removed from its own people and culture, it was because he wanted to make everything, and, most importantly, his own country, the “other,” so as to achieve new perspectives and obtain new conclusions. His famous Epic Theater is predicated on the assumption that the only effective way for theater to stimulate reflection is by estranging the phenomenon itself: taking it out of its accepted setting and extricating it from its traditional relationships for fresh investigation. Therefore Brecht never had to overcome the China-West binary, but explicitly used China as a setting, not to belittle or extol China, but to offset the strangeness of the

² Brecht translated poems by Mao, wrote poems on him, praised his writing (*On Contradiction* was named as the best book Brecht read in 1954), and in 1952 considered exile in China.

European situation. For him, the goal was not to look, in China, for answers to European problems (as Malraux did in his first two China works), but to avail himself of the help of China in his search for solutions to universal human problems. Therefore, in Brecht's works, although China is incorporated largely through its strangeness to the Western eye, it is never estranged from the West: China and the West are, distinctly but equally, organic parts of the world.

Although China is employed as an "excuse" for strangeness, Brecht's use of China is by no means superficial. In the first China work analyzed below (*In the Swamp* 1921-4), Brecht already tackled his philosophical concerns with the help of Chinese philosophy. In the two great plays, *The Good Person of Setzuan* (1939-41) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1943-45), the integration of Chinese philosophy (both Confucian and Daoist) with the central inquiries is so critical that Brecht would have been much less convincing and eloquent in his final message without the help of the simple words of the Chinese wise men. It is important to note, however, that the Chinese philosophy that appears in Brecht's works is as much Brechtian as it is Chinese. As early as 1920 Brecht had already recorded in his diary that Laozi agreed with him about many things.³ In fact, as Lane Eaton Jennings points out, as far as Brecht's study of China⁴ is concerned, "It was not the 'Chineseness' of Chinese philosophy, theatre, poetry, or art that interested him, but rather those elements within them which were not limited to a

³ In an entry dated September 16-21, 1920, Brecht relates the experience of being introduced to the thoughts of Laozi by his friend Warschauer, who "keeps on being astounded" because Laozi "agrees with" Brecht on so many things. *Bertolt Brecht Diaries: 1920-1922*, 50.

⁴ Renata Berg-Pan's research tells us that Brecht started studying Chinese philosophy seriously in the late 1920s as "antipodes to Marx, Engels and Hegel." *Bertolt Brecht and China*, 59. Lane Eaton Jennings's study on Brecht and China, *Chinese Literature and Thought in the Poetry and Prose of Bertolt Brecht*, details the trace and impact of Chinese philosophers, most notably Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, and Mo Ti, in Brecht's works. See also Antony Tatlow's *The Mask of Evil: Brecht's Response to the Poetry, Theatre and Thought of China and Japan: A Comparative and Critical Evaluation* for more information.

particular time and culture.”⁵ Indeed, the nature of Brecht’s thinking is transnational. In his theater nobody is made at home: the self is othered, and through this Brecht makes it clear that there is something wrong with the world and everyone living in it. In this sense Brecht’s epic theater plays the same transitional role as Lu Xun’s *Wild Grass*: they are given birth to cure a disease; their existence is symptomatic of a sick age; and their death must accompany the cure.⁶

Individual or Comradeship?

Some Considerations on *In The Swamp*

In 1898, when Brecht was born into the comforts of a middle-class family in Augsburg, Germany acquired the port city of Qingdao in distant China. China, heretofore evoked either as a symbol of political reaction or as the epitome of the strange and the comical, was for the first time made the subject of serious study and scholarship. Universities opened departments of Chinese Studies, and translations of Chinese works quickly became available.⁷ The fruits of such serious academic labors made it possible for Brecht, in his late twenties, to study Chinese philosophy and poetry, so that when he wrote and revised his third play, *In the Swamp* (also translated as *In the Jungle of Cities*), from 1921 to 1924, he was already incorporating some of his findings into this early play. But in this play, as in the plays analyzed in the following sections, Brecht is not interested in presenting China and the Chinese to his Western audience. The “gross” mistakes he makes about the identity of the character Shlink prepare his readers fully on this point.

⁵ *Chinese Literature and Thought in the Poetry and Prose of Bertolt Brecht*, 96.

⁶ For an analysis of *Wild Grass*, see Chapter Three.

⁷ See Berg-Pan, *Bertolt Brecht and China*, 2-7.

One cannot tell, for example, where exactly Shlink comes from: he is described as a “Malay lumber dealer,” but calls himself Wang Yen (a distinctly Chinese name), and claims that he was born in the city of Yokohama, which is clearly Japanese. Although he resides in and operates a Chinese hotel, and recalls in passing that he had worked on the rowboats of the Yangtse-kiang, these comments do not usher in any significant aspects of being Chinese. One of his cronies, Skinny, is identified as Chinese, but his shrewdness is more reminiscent of a stereotyped Jew than anything else. In other words, Shlink and Skinny could have been assigned any other nationality, if not for the fact that Brecht wanted to introduce a saying (which fascinated him so much that he would develop it further in a later work, *The Good Person of Setzuan*) from the Chinese philosopher Laozi, whose work *Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching)* would later become one of Brecht’s favorite books. On the other hand, however, Shlink’s Oriental status, be it Chinese, Japanese, or Malay, is important for Brecht to explore the central issue of his play: whether it is possible for one person, or one people, to understand another despite all the differences in culture, race, and history.

The story of *In the Swamp* takes place in Chicago, and it is about a metaphysical “boxing match” between Shlink and George Garga, a clerk in a lending library. The fight is inexplicably started by Shlink, who wants to buy an opinion from Garga on a book about which he knows nothing and cares even less. Garga refuses to sell, even though with the offer of money Shlink makes him, he could buy many things for his starving family. The persistent merchant then offers Garga his entire business, his house, as well as his own service. Garga accepts this offer, but immediately commits a fraud, for which he surrenders himself to the police and is imprisoned for three years. Right before he is

released, he writes a letter to the police accusing Shlink of seducing his wife and sister. When Shlink is pursued by the lynch gang, however, Garga flees with Shlink, and ends his metaphysical duel with the latter by abandoning him. Shlink dies, while Garga sells the lumber business and goes on a trip to New York.

This bizarre play has solicited little attention from Brecht interpreters, and when it is analyzed, it is usually bundled together with the other early plays, mentioned in passing, or used as a foil for the discussion of another work.⁸ Perhaps enough people still share Alfred Kerr's reaction to the first performance of *In the Swamp* and deem it unworthy of intellectual study.⁹ However, my intention is to prove that, contrary to the assertion that the play is marred by a "sense of lack of direction,"¹⁰ Brecht was already engaged in the philosophical and experiential struggle that unites and distinguishes his whole body of work: the struggle to attain a balance between personal freedom and collective camaraderie.

The fight between Shlink and Garga is doomed to failure because, while Shlink seeks companionship, Garga fights for his freedom. In a much-quoted passage, which is generally considered as the thesis of the play, the Asian man laments that "the endless isolation of man makes even of enmity an unattainable goal" (61). He then continues:

Love—warmth from bodily proximity—is our only grace in all the darkness. But the union of the organs is the only union, and it can never bridge the gap of speech. Still, they come together to beget new beings who can stand at their side in their inconsolable isolation. And the generations look coldly into each other's eyes. If you

⁸ See, for example, Eric Bentley's two-page discussion on the play in his article "On Brecht's *In the Swamp*, *A Man's a Man*, and *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*"; and a brief discussion in Tony Meech's article on "Brecht's Early Plays." Antony Tatlow's "Master or Slavery? (On Brecht's Early Plays)" is a refutation of another critic's view and therefore hardly even mentions the play. Siegfried Mews and Raymond English use the play to illuminate Carl Zuckmayer's *Pankraz Awakens*.

⁹ Kerr's review of the play contains the following lines: "Enough of politeness: this is completely worthless rubbish. Completely worthless rubbish." Quoted by Tony Meech, in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, 53.

¹⁰ Ibid.

stuff a ship with human bodies till it bursts, there will still be such loneliness in it that one and all will freeze. *Are you listening*, Garga? Yes, so terrible is the isolation that there isn't even a fight. (61-2, italics added)

This speech on “inconsolable isolation” reminds us of Malraux’s own commentary on the main issue he wishes to address in *Man’s Fate*,¹¹ and, like the majority of Malraux’s heroes who fail to break out of this lonely prison, the young Brecht seems to be rather pessimistic about the possibility of companionship as well. Not only is Garga not listening carefully to this speech that epitomizes Shlink’s whole being, he tells the older man ruthlessly that “your babbling irritates me and that your voice nauseates me” (62). What is more, when Shlink professes his love for Garga, the younger man returns this declaration with an icy remark: “But how revolting of you! You are horribly unappetizing, an old man like you!” (61). Thus, he denies Shlink not only the possibility for communication, but also the last consolation of “bodily proximity,” the warmth that might alleviate some of his loneliness.

Garga, on the other hand, is a man “from the plains” with a dream to go to Tahiti, an idealist who is willing to sacrifice everything to protect his idea of freedom. He refuses to sell his opinion because, as he explains to his mother, “We are not free.”

It starts with coffee in the mornings, and with whippings if one acts like a fool, and the tears of the mother salt the soup of the children, her sweat washes their shirts, and one is secure until the ice-age sets in, and the root sits in the heart. And when a man is grown, and wants to do something and give it everything, he finds he is already paid for, initiated, certified, sold at a high price. And he is not free to go under. (24)

The senselessness and absurdity of life Garga speaks of here echoes the last words Gisors says to May,¹² but, unlike the old man Gisors, who gives up hope completely after his son’s death, the young man Garga is not yet ready to concede to this fate. To break open

¹¹ See Chapter One, note 45.

¹² See Chapter One, page 47.

this iron chamber of prescribed life, he seizes any opportunity whatsoever to abstain from doing things, or to do things on a mere whim, against reason and common sense, free of responsibilities set by convention, just to show that he is the only dictator of his actions.

Brecht's denunciation of Garga is clear. As Charles R. Lyons points out, "What is vital in *Baal* is debilitating in *In the Jungle*. That which Baal destroys seems sacrificed to super energy," while Garga's passion, if one may borrow Lyons' assessment of Shlink, "enervates and gradually consumes, disintegrating in a pervasive and irreversible decay."¹³ Unlike Malraux, whose admiration for the pure individual led him to create idealistic, somewhat superhuman characters such as Garine and Ferral, Brecht was always critical of his "other-worldly" characters, most notably Baal¹⁴ and Garga, and subjected these fantasy- and self-driven characters to the gaze of his earthy and pragmatic characters for a reality-check. First, Brecht lets Jane, Garga's neglected girlfriend and later wife, remonstrate with him when he, seeing her in the company of disreputable men, looks at her with disapproval:

Don't look at me like that, George! Maybe this is my only chance. Can *you* buy me cocktails? Oh, it's not for the cocktails! It's just this: I look in the mirror in the morning, George. For the last two years. You would go away and work for four weeks. When you got sick of it and needed to drink a while, it was my turn. I can't stand it any longer. The nights, George! This doesn't mean I'm bad. I'm not. It's wrong of you to look at me like that. (10)

Jane's loneliness, suffered in the long, miserable nights over the last two years, is pitted against Garga's empty, other-worldly ideal of freedom, and the reader finds sympathy in the much more human sufferings of the dejected woman, who tries to drown her sorrows

¹³ Brecht: *The Despair and the Polemic*, 37.

¹⁴ Brecht's first play *Baal* (1918) was written as a "counter-play" to Hanns Johnst's Expressionist play *Der Einsame, The Lonely One*, which was, for Brecht, "a ludicrous conception of genius and amorality." Brecht's Baal, with his "healthy materialism and cynicism," completely demystifies the false aura of the idealized individual. See Klaus Volker, *Brecht: A Biography*, 44. Also, the self-centered Baal destroys everyone around him and is unfit to live in society. Brecht kills him off at the end of the play.

in alcohol and never wake up to face reality. Likewise, when Garga finds out that his sister Marie is working for the Chinese hotel as a laundry girl, he casts the same disparaging look on Marie, who matter-of-factly tells him that the family lives on her income (whereas he, in his self-righteous freedom, does not bring bread to the family's table at all), and that he should not look at her like that (13). The same matter-of-factness enables Marie to see through Garga's theatrics and expose his true feelings when he, to teach the world an unforgettable lesson of his freewill, has the audacity to suggest that he give Shlink's house (which was given to Garga by Shlink) to a Salvation Army man in exchange for the right to spit in his face. After the proposal is accepted and enacted, and the humiliated man has left the scene, Marie addresses Garga thus: "You're a coward, George. When the minister just went out, you squinted, I saw you. How desperate you are" (20)! In the end, when Garga dreams of going to New York, his new freedom land, and asserts that he, being the younger one, has naturally defeated the older Shlink and will "choose whatever entertains me," the heretofore love-smitten and docile Shlink is for the first time provoked and declares that Garga is "A hired boxer! A drunken salesman! Whom I bought for ten dollars! An idealist who couldn't tell his legs apart, a nothing," who is unworthy of being his opponent (63). Only a good dose of the mundane things in everyday life can do him good; and when Garga reminds Shlink that he did not pay him, the "hired boxer," the older man angrily points out that Garga had already gotten what he *needs*: Shlink had bought him some furniture. Indeed, a character who is so out of touch with reality cannot survive in Brecht's writing.

Ironically, however, the one who dies in the play is not the idealist Garga, but Shlink, who seems to be much more grounded in reality. To understand this seemingly

odd choice, it is now necessary to focus our attention on Shlink, who is, as Lyons asserts, the “central tragic figure” of the play.¹⁵ When Garga decides to go to prison for selling Shlink’s lumber twice, the latter tries to dissuade him from this course of action, which he considers as simply foolish, stating first that he could “explain many things to the Sheriff as niftily as Standard Oil could explain its tax declaration,” then appealing to Garga’s lingering attachment to his family and his new furniture, and finally resorting to describing the poverty and misery to which Garga will be subjecting his family. But nothing can shake the determination of Garga, who observes wryly that he has “read that soft waters are a match for whole mountains. And I’d still like to see your real face, Shlink, your milk-white, damned invisible face” (48). This remark about soft waters and mountains is an ineloquent rendition of a chapter taken from the *Dao De Jing*, where Laozi discusses the paradox of yielding:

Nothing in the world is as soft and yielding as water,
 Yet nothing can better overcome the hard and strong,
 For they can neither control nor do away with it.
 The soft overcomes the hard,
 The yielding overcomes the strong;
 Every person knows this,
 But no one can practice it. (chapter 78)

Garga identifies Shlink’s actions towards him so far with this Daoist teaching: in yielding everything in his position and becoming as soft as Garga desires him to be, Shlink aims to eventually overcome the hardness of Garga. However, in Shlink’s desperate attempts to save Garga from wasting three years of his life in prison, the young man realizes that the old man is but a quack Daoist, who lacks the essential merit that makes the softness of water so formidable: patience. He recognizes that beneath the yellow skin of the Oriental man, there is the fundamental desire to become like himself, the corrodible, but

¹⁵ Ibid, 35.

nevertheless hard and forbidding mountain. Shlink, a man in his fifties, also does not deny that for him, time is swiftly becoming the chief obstacle in his pursuit of companionship, for three years for a young man like Garga is “no more than opening a door,” but for him...he dare not think (48). However, when Garga is released from prison, Shlink cannot resist the temptation to try his water tactic on Garga again: caught thus between two identities, neither of which he can follow through to completion and satisfaction, Shlink must die for his lack of conviction.

Unlike Shlink, Garga, the man with a cynical ideal, is not entirely unredeemable. His mother Mae, a practical and sympathetic woman, inspired by Garga’s albeit ill-conceived notion of freedom, leaves her husband, who does nothing but complain, and sets up her own fruit cellar where one can see her old face “in good shape” (55). At the end of the play, Garga sells the business Shlink leaves him, and with the money he can finally realize his dream of going to New York. Before his departure, he says, money in hand, that “to be alone is a good thing. The chaos is used up now. It was the best time” (68). Although he still insists on pursuing his freedom and tries to convince himself that “to be alone is a good thing,” he has to admit to himself that the chaotic battle between him and Shlink constituted for him “the best time,” because it was during the deliberate battle between these metaphorical wrestlers that the opponents learned the true nature of each other, so that the possibility of *being* with the other became ever greater. Unfortunately, their differences prove to be too strong to overcome: Garga is repulsed both by the physical appearance¹⁶ and inner inconsistency of Shlink, while Shlink, too eager to be accepted and to please, forfeits the chance of being taken seriously as an

¹⁶ By identifying Shlink as an older, unattractive, Asian man, instead of a younger, more handsome, and European man like Garga, Brecht draws our attention to the fact that differences can be both superficial and deep-seated. To ignore the former is to idealize mankind and hide from the unpleasant side of human nature.

individual whose worth lies beneath his looks. The fate of these two protagonists gives us a first taste of what was to become one of Brecht's life-long obsessions: how to strike a balance between personal desire (freedom) and collective will (discipline).

Ends and Means:

The Grey Area in *The Measures Taken*

In preparation for a play called *Joe Meatchopper*, Brecht started to read economics in 1926, and soon found that the work was not as light as he imagined it to be. "Nobody...was able to give an adequate explanation of what goes on in the Corn Exchange.... The projected drama did not get written, instead I started to read Marx, and then, not until then, was reading Marx."¹⁷ Thus started the famous conversion of Brecht to Communism. However, Marx's words alone could not have drawn the skeptical playwright into the Communist camp; rather, as observed by his teacher in Marxist theory, Fritz Sternberg, it was the event of May 1, 1929, which Brecht witnessed in person, that finally "helped to push him towards the Communists."¹⁸ On that day, when German workers proceeded with their annual May Day demonstration despite the SPD government's ban, the police were ordered to fire on the participants, so that by the end of the day, 32 people (including bystanders) were killed, and many more injured. Brecht was invited to watch the banned parade from Sternberg's Berlin apartment. The traumatic event was recorded by Sternberg in his book on Brecht: "As far as we could see these people were unarmed. Several times the police fired. At first we thought they were

¹⁷ Quoted by Klaus Voelker, in *Brecht Chronicle*, 46.

¹⁸ Quoted by John Willett in *Brecht in Context*, 181.

warning shots. Then we saw a number of the demonstrators falling and later being carried away on stretchers...When Brecht heard the shots and saw people being hit he went whiter than I had ever seen him before.”¹⁹ Betrayed by the self-proclaimed pro-workers government and confronted with the bloody reality which no amount of lies could cover up or erase, Brecht made the *necessary* choice by solidifying his alliance with the worker’s party: the Communist Party. From this point on, it was *within* this camp that Brecht carried on the fight against arbitrariness, the fight for life.

Thus, Brecht was an individual Communist (if such a term makes sense), critical of the methods and practices of his own party from the very beginning of his conversion. By the end of the 1920’s, Brecht had started to write the learning plays (*Lehrstuecke*) which, instead of being read and received as sheer Communist propaganda, engendered a still ongoing debate on Brecht’s political convictions. There are those who rejected the learning plays as the rabid ramblings of a Communist fanatic, bitterly accusing Brecht of ignorance of the social and political realities of his time.²⁰ On the other hand, whether in the days of the first performance of *The Measures Taken* (generally regarded as the best learning play) or in East Berlin in the 1970’s, spokesmen of the Communist Party tried to distance the play from the work of the Party.²¹ These divergent views on Brecht, offered

¹⁹ Ibid, 181.

²⁰ Ronald Grey laments that Brecht, desperately trying to alleviate the social evils he saw around him, “fell into the trap that waits for all of us who have a moral conscience: he lost his integrity and became a fanatic [of Communism].” Quoted by Charles Lyons, 78. Similarly, Andrzej Wirth points out that the young complained about lacking political convictions, and avers that Brecht’s overpowering urge to be committed led him to willingly substitute Marxist ideal for Communist reality, overlooking many errors and injustices in the Communist practice. See his article “Brecht: Writer Between Ideology and Politics” in *Essays on Brecht: Theater and Politics*, 199-208.

²¹ When *The Measures Taken* was first staged in Berlin in 1930, Alfred Kurella, speaking on behalf of Moscow, attacked the Communist view espoused in the play as “right-wing opportunism,” although he was kind enough to encourage the “petty-bourgeois writer” to amend his ways and continue his “revolutionary gesture.” See Kurella’s article “What Was He Killed for? Criticism of the Play *Strong Measures* [*The Measures Taken*] by Brecht, Dudov and Eisler,” in *Critical Essays on Bertolt Brecht*, 77-82. In their 1979 biography of Brecht, the East German critics Ernst and Renate Schumacher reiterated the same view.

by those who were themselves ideologically committed, reveal to us that Brecht's true commitment was not to Communism as practiced then,²² but to the spirit of Communism, which, he believes, made Communism the most viable option in rooting out misery and oppression.

It is with this understanding that we now approach *The Measures Taken*. In this play, as in *In the Swamp*, Brecht did not incorporate a Chinese element to contrast it with the West, but simply borrowed the "strangeness" of the situation in order to reveal the universality of such strangeness in a more provocative manner. In fact, the choice of China as the setting of this learning play came almost naturally as a result of two things that happened in Brecht's life. First, in the same year that the play was conceived and written, Brecht saw the performance of Vsevolod Meyerhold's theater troupe, and was particularly excited about Sergei Tretiakov's play *Roar, China*. This play, prophetically warning Western imperialists of Chinese rebellion, deeply impressed Brecht for its "combination of politics and excellent theater."²³ Moreover, the excitement brought on by the political theater was further enhanced by Meyerhold's original use of the Oriental theater (mainly Chinese and Japanese) as a vehicle to convey his Marxist messages,²⁴ which inspired Brecht to study the Oriental theater on his own in order to consolidate his own theory of a revolutionary theater. The second factor, which must have made the choice of China clear to Brecht, was that he was able to get first-hand information from the man who was "serving in China at the highest level as a representative of the

²² One might be amused to learn that in 1947, when Brecht was brought to the House Un-American Activities Committee for questions as a suspected Communist, he unhesitatingly uttered five no's plus a "never" in reply to the question: whether he had ever made an application to join the Communist Party. Of course, we all know that in 1949, the same guy who refused to acknowledge his affiliation with the Communists chose to go back to Communist East Berlin. Nevertheless, the internal logic of Brecht makes him still believable: the members on the HUAC and he speak of very different Communisms.

²³ Berg-Pan, 20.

²⁴ John Fuegi, *The Essential Brecht*, 122.

Moscow-based Executive Committee of the Comintern,”²⁵ Gerhart Eisler, brother of Hanns Eisler, who was one of the collaborators of the play. Thus, China became the setting of the play, but the Chineseness of the play stops here. In the events that transpire between Russian Communist agitators and Chinese workers and peasants, we are soon made aware that the strangeness of the Chinese is but a miniature of that of the world: the “Chinese” condition is indeed universal.

This brief play is a report narrated and acted out by four Russian agitators who have just returned to Moscow after successfully completing their illegal propaganda mission in China. However, instead of detailing any of their own actions, the agitators tell the story of a young comrade who guided them to China and worked there under their tutelage. Taking turns acting the part of the young comrade, who is killed at the end of his revolutionary initiation, by his own consent, the agitators reenact four scenes where the young man’s weaknesses as a revolutionary are fully exposed. In the end, the control chorus, who listen to and comment on each scene, judge that the young comrade’s death was appropriate: they agree with the measures taken.

The young comrade is an existentialist with his eyes on the here and now. Instead of wanting to learn the theories and ideas that aim for “the elimination of the primal causes” of their misery, he asks the four agitators for specific things his community needs—locomotives, tractors, seed-corn, munitions and machine-guns, and a letter of instruction. When he leaves his own post to guide the agitators to China, his provincial idea of revolution and change does not expand; immediately he feels pity towards the suffering people of China, following his instincts and taking action rather than following the Party’s agenda and spreading propaganda. Such an instinct-driven man is asked to

²⁵ John Fuegi, *Brecht and Company*, 246.

join the ranks of the Communists, and is told to efface his personal features by putting on a mask and serving only as an empty page “on which the revolution may write its instructions” (12). The young man consents, without understanding that from then on, he

Must be able to fight and not fight
Must tell the truth and not tell the truth
Render service and not render service
Place himself in danger and avoid danger
Be recognizable and be unrecognizable.

In other words, his only merit would be that he fights for Communism (13). The individual is sacrificed to the Party; he must withhold his own emotions, reasoning, and judgment, and act according to the wishes of the Party; he must be able to forego the concrete and adapt to the abstract. When the mask is on, the individual ceases to exist.

It soon becomes clear, however, that the young comrade cannot help being an individual human being. When instructed to incite coolies to demand better conditions for their work without falling prey to pity, he immediately falls prey to it and fails in his mission. When he is asked to distribute leaflets to workers who have not joined their fellows in a strike, he is so overcome by his anger at the ignorance of these “traitors” that he gets into a fight with them instead. When he is sent to convince a rich merchant to arm the coolies, he cannot hide his contempt for the rich man and refuses to eat his food; the rich man in turn refuses to arm the coolies. Finally, when unemployed Chinese organize an uprising and prepare to fight with “tooth and nail,” he abandons his post, which has not agreed with him, and joins the action as “no one but [him]self” (29). When he tears off his mask and reveals his true identity, however, he is immediately chased away as a foreign agitator. None of his immediate human responses is repaid by a similarly human reaction.

Indeed, the Chinese seem to be possessed by an inhuman apathy. When the young man, seeing that the coolies cannot pull the heavy barge upriver in slippery mud, helps them by laying stones under their feet, the coolies, instead of showing gratitude, call him a fool and laugh at him (17). When the workers are asked to join the strike, they see no reason to do so when they have a family to raise and are being paid twice as much since the others went on strike (21). When the young comrade reveals his Russian origins and cries out his passionate devotion to the suffering mass of China, the latter are displeased to be awakened by the piercing cry, and immediately identify the young foreigner as an enemy. Like the young comrade, the oppressed Chinese function on instinct. We see that humanity alone (the young comrade's righteous humanity and the Chinese warped humanity) cannot change the fate of the exploited at all, but needs reason, guidance, and perspective: humanity needs to be estranged before it can reclaim its true name again.

In contrast to the young comrade, the four agitators, true representatives of Communism, know all along that immediate human responses such as pity, anger, contempt, and reckless courage cannot uproot misery and oppression at all. In their instructions to the young comrade, we learn that they also anticipate the ignorance and apathy of the Chinese. As their report on the young comrade's behavior and death progresses, their assessment of each incident is deemed right and in accordance with the teachings of Communism by the control chorus. They *are* the Party, which is far superior to the individual, because

The individual has only two eyes
 The Party has a thousand eyes.
 The Party can see seven lands
 The individual a single city.
 The individual has only his hour
 The Party has many hours.

The individual can be annihilated
 But the Party cannot be annihilated
 For it is the vanguard of the masses
 And it lays out its battles
 According to the methods of our classics, which are derived from
 The recognition of reality. (29)

Through its “thousand eyes,” the Party sees that in China, as everywhere else, ignorance and apathy plague the oppressed masses. Through its “many hours,” the Party knows that the fight is a long and arduous process, not “an impetuous revolution that will last a day / And be throttled tomorrow” (28). This geographical and historical perspective enables the Party to devise its tactics based on reality and according to its ultimate goal. In other words, the Party, which is “you and I and he—all of us” (28), is everybody and nobody at the same time: its involvedness with everyone guarantees its loyalty to the revolutionary goal, while its disinterestedness in any particular individual prevents it from being distracted from the long-term goal. Sufficiently distanced and implicated at the same time, the Party stands for the only way that will eventually lead to the emancipation of mankind.

It is with this recognition that Brecht prepares us for the necessary death of the young comrade. Significantly, it is also in this last scene of killing that the humanity of the Party is most clearly revealed. “At one with the inflexible will to change the world” (33), the agitators know that they must kill the young comrade, whose continued existence will only compromise the revolutionary work they had carried out in China. Nevertheless, it is with a heavy heart that they kill (“It is a terrible thing to kill”), knowing that “violence is the only means whereby this deadly / World may be changed” (32). As the control chorus points out, “It was not easy to do what was right. / It was not you who sentenced him, but / Reality” (33). Instead of imposing the death sentence on

the young comrade, they ask him whether he sees another way out. The young comrade, now a different man after the series of disillusioning experiences in China,²⁶ agrees that he must be killed, and asks for help from his comrades. His final words reveal that he has finally understood what it means to be a member of the Party: he dies “In the interests of Communism / In agreement with the progress of the proletarian masses / Of all lands / Consenting to the revolutionizing of the world” (34).

The young comrade’s consent to his own death also effaces the traditional notion of morality he stands for. The revolutionary’s ultimate allegiance is to change, which, for Brecht, is the spirit of Communism. In a crucial passage entitled “Change the World: It Needs It,” Brecht declares:

With whom would the just man not sit
To help justice?
What medicine is too bitter
For the man who’s dying?
What vileness should you not suffer to
Annihilate vileness?
If at last you could change the world, what
Could make you too good to do so?
Who are you?
Sink in filth
Embrace the butcher, but
Change the world: It needs it! (25)

Having defected from the enemy camp of his own bourgeois class, Brecht knows that bourgeois morality is a system designed by the oppressor to bind the hands and feet of the oppressed.²⁷ He appreciates the effectiveness of Capitalist unscrupulousness too much to not employ the same tactic in the battle against its perpetrators (an eye for an eye). In the interests of survival for all, instead of the thriving of a few, no man is to deem himself too

²⁶ After the young comrade tears off his mask and is driven away by the Chinese, his face is described as “not the same face which he had once hidden with the mask” (33).

²⁷ Brecht records his own “betrayal” of his own class and its secrets to the enemy, the working people, whose rank he joins, in the famous poem “Driven out with Good Reason,” 1938.

“good” to fight with whatever means available, for otherwise the world will forever be sunken in the filth generated by ruthless butchers.

But the death of the young comrade, although agreed on by all as an absolute necessity, means more than just the individual surrendering to the Party. Brecht, who was as individualistic in his thinking as he was committed to the elimination of oppression for all, could not help but adding a paragraph at the end of the play (through the authoritative voice of the control chorus, no less), where he reinstalls a place for the individual within the Party. Having concluded that the agitators have completely succeeded in their mission in China (although none of the successes was mentioned in the play itself), the chorus finishes the play by saying, rather abruptly and incongruously, considering the tone of their previous comments:

And yet your report shows us what is
 Needed to change the world:
 Anger and tenacity, knowledge and indignation
 Swift action, utmost deliberation
 Cold endurance, unending perseverance
 Comprehension of the individual and compression of the whole:
 Taught only by reality can
 Reality be changed. (34, italics added)

With this “yet” Brecht voices his reservations about the need to eliminate the individual within the Party, and proposes that it is not the Party alone, but a combination of the Party *and* the individual, that will eventually change the world. The individual, however, must acquire the perspective of the Party, just as the Party must also comprehend the individual in order to remain grounded in reality.

On Morality:
The “Good” Person of Setzuan?

The issue of morality raised in *The Measures Taken*, as well as the Daoist teaching that soft water will eventually overcome the hardness of rock, which was mentioned in *In the Swamp* but undeveloped there, are explored in detail in Brecht’s next “China” play, *The Good Person of Setzuan* (1939-41). Written during the most excruciating period of Brecht’s eventful life, this play is the work of a writer who, disillusioned with ideological camps, refocused his attention on the survival of the individual. The non-aggression pact that Stalin had signed with Hitler right before the war shocked Brecht; when, simultaneously with the German invasion of Poland, the Soviet Union sent troops to the same country for territorial gains, Brecht was moved to “regret that Stalin does not open the war in a revolutionary fashion, as a war of the people, a proletarian action...”²⁸. In a little more than two months, the international reputation of the Soviet Union was further damaged by her illegal attack on Finland, resulting in her immediate expulsion from the League of Nations. While the Nazis conquered swiftly in Europe so that by June, 1940, Britain became the sole European country that had not yet fallen prey to Hitler’s ambition, the Communist saviors of the Soviet Union were busy making their own conquests. Brecht knew that he could no longer agree with the measures taken.

In contrast to the other plays written in this period, *The Good Person of Setzuan* was a challenge to Brecht, who struggled with the play²⁹ and could not bring himself to

²⁸ Klaus Voelker, 92.

²⁹ Brecht admits that *Setzuan* cost him “more effort than any other.” Voelker, 97.

end it. Meanwhile, he wrote three other major plays, all with great ease. *Galileo* was finished “in three weeks,” *Mother Courage and Her Children* in little more than a month, and *Herr Puntila and His Man Matti* in less than three weeks.³⁰ Compared to *Setzuan*, the topics of the three plays are relatively simple, and Brecht’s “message,” insofar as he himself is concerned, is quite settled.³¹ However, this is not the case with *Setzuan*. The necessary birth and split of the “evil” Shui Ta from the “good” Shen Te completely invalidates Capitalist morality: since “goodness” must resort to and rely on “evil” in order to continue its existence, binary terms such as good and bad cease to have any meaning. What, then, can one teach by telling this story? The Communist ideal, which Brecht had found appealing in *The Measures Taken*, no longer held the same allure to him after the Russians’ betrayal. A new ethics had to be found and embraced.

It is indeed no surprise that Brecht ended up making this work into a China play again. Originally conceived in the late 1920s, this play was to be situated in Germany, about a prostitute who disguises herself as a man in order to circumvent the double exploitations of her pimp and the capitalist system in general.³² After the Second World War broke out, writing about a German prostitute’s fight against Capitalism no longer made any sense to Brecht. A new home had to be found for this woman, and given Brecht’s deep interest in not only the Chinese theater,³³ but also the development of the

³⁰ Ibid, 87, 92, 99.

³¹ Through *Galileo*, Brecht wants to expose and condemn “intellectual prostitutes”; through *Mother Courage* Brecht hopes to castigate war profiteers; and through *Puntila* (a comic character), he attacks Capitalism for dehumanizing otherwise good-hearted people.

³² John Fuegi, “The Alienated Woman: Brecht’s *The Good Person of Setzuan*,” in *Essays on Brecht: Theater and Politics*, 191.

³³ In 1935, Brecht met the famous Chinese opera singer Mei Lanfang in Moscow, and was deeply impressed with the techniques and skills of the Chinese actor. Shortly afterwards he published his famous essay, “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting.”

Chinese Revolution,³⁴ he naturally settled upon China yet again. The name of Setzuan (Sichuan, a Chinese province) was probably mistaken for the city of Chongqing, the wartime capital³⁵ of China that was located in Sichuan Province from 1937 onward. From 1939 to 1941 alone, the city of Chongqing suffered 268 air raids by the Japanese. Following the development of the World War closely in his exile, Brecht must have known about the Chinese situation and learned about the “city” of Setzuan then. In fact, in Brecht’s Setzuan there are also planes in the sky, but instead of dropping bombs, they bring people “friendly mail.”

More importantly, Brecht wanted to return to the idea he touched on in *In the Swamp*, and revisited in his 1938 poem on the origin of the *Dao De Jing*. This poem encompasses three philosophical inquiries that are dramatized in the text of *Setzuan*. At the beginning of the poem we learn that the aging sage is leaving his country, where “goodness had been weakening a little / And the wickedness was gaining ground anew”; in the middle we are introduced to the gist (as Brecht understood it) of the sage’s teaching: “He learnt how quiet soft water, by attrition / Over the years will grind strong rocks away. / In other words, that hardness must lose the day;” and at the end of the poem, we are invited to thank both Laozi and the customs man for their “politeness,” one for obliging a request and the other for asking for it.³⁶ In this frame and in Chinese costumes, the

³⁴ Renata Berg-Pan points out that “Brecht had always been an admirer of Mao, and from the very beginning sympathized with the revolutionary movements in China which he followed with great interest throughout his entire life.” In *Bertolt Brecht and China*, 213.

³⁵ In 1937 in China, the second united front between the Nationalists and the Communists was formed in a concerted effort to combat the Japanese. The initial stages of the Sino-Japanese Conflict (1937-1945) saw the advance of the Japanese and the retreat of the Chinese, so that by the end of 1938, Japan had taken full control of Manchuria, and encroached upon Inner Mongolia, most of northern and east-central China, as well as key ports in south-east China. After the Rape of Nanjing at the end of 1937, Chiang Kai-shek was not able to run his government from Nanjing anymore, and was forced to move his capital to Chongqing.

³⁶ “Legend of the Origin of the Book Tao-Te-Ching on Lao-tsu’s Road into Exile”, in *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956*, 314-6.

bizarre nature of the characters (all of them persecuted by the evils of Capitalism) is fully exposed and accentuated.

The story of *Setzuan* is simple: three gods are searching for good human beings in this increasingly irreligious world, and when they come to the town of Setzuan, they finally find Shen Te, a prostitute who is the only one willing to accommodate the gods for the night. In the morning, the gods leave, but reward Shen Te's kindness with some money so that she can do more good. Shen Te starts a tobacco shop with the money, but soon finds herself surrounded by parasites who would soon suck her dry. Mysteriously, her shrewd and ruthless cousin Shui Ta appears when she needs to drive off spongers and take care of her business. Shen Te then saves a desperate pilot, Yang Sun, from committing suicide, and falls in love with him. In order to help him realize his dream of flying, she sells her shop and faces imminent financial bankruptcy when her cousin appears again, this time to take advantage of all the resources available to him to start a tobacco factory, making all the spongers and Yang Sun work for him. However, when he stays too long while Shen Te is missing, he is accused of murdering Shen Te for her property. A trial is held, during which the three gods return and sit as judges. In the end, Shui Ta reveals to the gods that he is really Shen Te herself: in order to survive and do good she has had to rely on her evil cousin. Not knowing what to do, she pleads with the gods for instructions, but is abandoned by the somewhat embarrassed gods with the command to stay good. The epilogue is an invitation from Brecht for us to supply our own endings as we see fit.

Shen Te's goodness is not contested by the other characters in the play, but Brecht's descriptions of her actions constantly put her "goodness" into question. The

water seller Wang introduces her as someone who can't say no, but when he calls up to ask Shen Te whether she can take in the gods for the night, the first word she utters is a "no," because she is expecting a gentleman and the rent has to be paid (8). Right away, Brecht wants us to question the general opinion of the "good" woman, and he further illustrates to us that to qualify for such "goodness," Shen Te must put up a family of eight, that of her former landlord who had kicked her out once she ran out of money; give rice and cigarettes to everyone who is "in need" even though her shop hardly brings in any money; pay the full price the carpenter quotes her for the shelves in her shop even though the latter tries to cheat her; commit perjury for Wang, who wants to sue the barber Shu Fu for breaking his hand; and give her last penny to the man she loves, even though she knows that he does not intend to stay with her. In fact, Shen Te's goodness is so boundless that it alarms her spongers, one of whom says to her: "You are too good, Shen Te, dear. If you're going to keep this shop, you'll have to learn to say no" (15). They then continue to prompt and guide Shen Te until finally, pressured by her impetuous creditor, she blurts out the name of her evil male cousin Shui Ta, to whom all business matters must be referred (16). When viewed such "strange" perspectives, Shen Te's goodness can at best be understood as an impossible ideal; the good woman Shen Te, as one of her destroyers tells us, cannot survive in reality.

On the other hand, the "bad" cousin is able to get things done and alleviate some of the injustices continuously showered upon the good Shen Te. The mere idea of a "male" relative is a reassurance for Shen Te's creditors and landlord. In his three appearances, Shui Ta chases off Shen Te's parasite boarders; reduces the price of the shelves to a fifth of the original; refuses, on behalf of Shen Te, to testify falsely for Wang;

and saves Shen Te from complete financial ruin. These actions, although necessary to the very survival of the good woman, are considered as bad by those who suffer from them. In this way, Brecht exposes the hypocrisy of what is conventionally understood as good—selflessness, and bad—self-interest. In a society that functions on the basis of various interests—economic, political, ideological—it is pretentious and debilitating to insist on this utterly unrealistic and unexamined dogma.

Besides estranging the “goodness” of Shen Te and the “evil” of Shui Ta, the *Verfremdungseffekt*³⁷ is also distinct in Brecht’s description of the three gods who come to Setzuan to search for goodness. Although they are three of the “highest gods,” they are rejected everywhere by the people, and are now facing the potential failure of their mission. While everyone in the world is, willingly or not, preoccupied with money in order to survive in the capitalist system, these gods “never meddle with economics” and expect to find goodness untainted by the stink of money (11). However, when the hope of finding a single good person diminishes in the course of their long and fruitless search, they begin to waver in their belief and, violating their own principles, give Shen Te money so that she can use it to spread her goodness. This gesture, performed with much sheepishness, is a timid admission of the correctness of Brecht’s thesis that goodness is not an empty concept drawn out of thin air, but is situated, like everything else, in the reality of this world—and that reality is often suffused with the stink of money. The naiveté and ineffectuality of the gods are consistently ridiculed through the contrast of

³⁷ *Verfremdungseffekt* is usually translated as “alienation effect,” and is a method devised by Brecht to be used in his Epic Theater to shock his audience out of their comfort zone and confront them with the strangeness of what is usually taken for granted. It is “a process which leads real conduct to acquire an element of ‘unnaturalness’, thus allowing the real motive forces to be shorn of their naturalness and become capable of manipulation.” “A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar.” See Brecht’s articles on this topic collected in *Brecht on Theatre*, especially “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting,” 91-99; “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” 179-208.

their unrealistic expectations with what actually happens, but it is the naïve *and* unprincipled gods (first and third) that Brecht criticizes most harshly. Towards the end of the play, while all three suffer from extreme fatigue from their wanderings, the first god loses his hat and ear trumpet, and the third god gets a black eye and loses a leg, while the second god (the only one who is skeptical and cynical about their mission throughout the play) suffers no visible damage. By the end of the play, it is clear that not only is it impossible to maintain the kind of goodness the gods search for in this world, but that it is also useless to ask the gods for any help—after all, they are not of this world and can ride off on their pink cloud to get away from the most desperate call for help, “smiling and waving” (112).

However, even though Brecht has proved to us most convincingly that Shui Ta’s “evil” is well suited to this world and to a large extent necessary in order to sustain any hope of doing good, it is with a crying and desperate Shen Te, shorn of the masculine mask and clothes, that Brecht leaves us and concludes the play. Her question of how to survive in the world as a good woman is unanswered by the gods, but her mere presence underscores Brecht’s belief that, harking back to the poem on the origin of the *Dao De Jing*, “quiet soft water, by attrition / Over the years will grind strong rocks away. / In other words, that hardness must lose the day.” Shen Te’s “goodness”—her love for her neighbors, her lover, and her unborn child—is the soft water that will endure and eventually overcome the hardness of the world. Even though in emergencies, she has to resort to Shui Ta’s tough methods, it is she who dominates the pages and continues to give rice and shelter to her spongers when the crisis is over. Her love for Yang Sun overpowers even the resolute Shui Ta, who, although he succeeds in resolving all other

crises, fails to negotiate effectively in Yang Sun's presence. It is also her decision to forbid Yang Sun to stroke Mrs. Mi Tzu's (who is infatuated with Yang Sun) knees in exchange for cheap rentals of the latter's property that prevents Shen Te's/Shui Ta's thriving business from expanding. And it is the maternal love for her unborn child that makes Shen Te, after being abandoned by Yang Sun, want to go on living and secure a better life for her child. Shen Te's love, therefore, is amoral, just like the soft water in the poem, and the potential to either destroy or build with it is left entirely to her, the exploited individual who has now been initiated into the dark secrets of her exploiters.

While Shen Te is left in the lurch at the end of the play, she is no longer the lone "Chinese" woman she is dressed up as, but has become one of us who have learned the injustice of her fate. For Brecht turns to address the audience while Shen Te's desperate calls to the departing gods are still ringing in the ears:

You're thinking, aren't you, that this is no right
 Conclusion to the play you've seen tonight?
 After a tale, exotic, fabulous,
 A nasty ending was slipped up on us.
 We feel deflated too. We too are nettled
 To see the curtain down and nothing settled.
 How could a better ending be arranged?
 Could one change people? Can the world be changed?
 ...
 It is for you to find a way, my friends,
 To help good men arrive at happy ends.
 You write the happy ending to the play!
 There must, there must, there's got to be a way! (113, italics added)

The audience's identification with Shen Te ("We feel deflated too. We too are nettled") is expected by Brecht because Shen Te's fate is a universal fate. If Shen Te does not have a solution yet, that is because there is no solution yet: the writer, as well as the audience, must search for a balance between Shui Ta's shrewdness and capability to look after his

own interests, which is the precondition for anyone who wants to do any good at all, and Shen Te's kindness and love, which, as shown below, make life worth living in a dark time.

Indeed, Shen Te's existence, as the fruitless search of the three gods for goodness testifies, is a miracle whose power to move and inspire awakens the otherwise dormant kindness in other people. In a society driven by self-interest and an insatiable appetite for money, Shen Te does not turn down those who come to her for help; moreover, she falls in love with a penniless man with a lofty dream—literally for Yang Sun, who simply wants to be a pilot, but metaphorically for Shen Te who thinks of the profession in terms of flying and bringing people friendly mail. Her kindness and love give her an aura that distinguishes her from the rest of the crowd so that one morning, when she is distributing rice to her spongers, the barber Shu Fu, a fat old man who is rich and otherwise unscrupulous (he has just broken the water seller Wang's hand with a hot curling iron), marvels at Shen Te's beauty, which he had never given “a passing thought before,” and wonders if he is “in love with her” (47). Later on, when Shen Te is on the brink of losing her shop, Shu Fu writes her a blank check; when Shen Te is about to lose the ability to provide for her parasites, he gives her free access to his own cabins so that she can continue to be the “angel of slums.” His love, albeit not without selfish intentions, furthers Shen Te's capability to do good at critical junctures and must not be dismissed simply as a lewd old man's lasciviousness; it gives birth to a kindness that is otherwise unknown to Shu Fu. Likewise, when Shen Te is in love but must marry a man she does not love in order to pay her rent, an old couple, owners of a neighboring shop, offer to lend her money on a verbal pledge. When the incredulous Shen Te, amazed by such rare

kindness, asks if they are indeed willing to lend money to a person like her, the old woman replies: “It’s folks like you that need it. We’d think twice about lending anything to your cousin” (48). Having learned the nature of both Shen Te and Shui Ta, the old couple know that they can only trust and help the former.

Unlike those around her, who practice “each one for him/herself,” the kind Shen Te makes friends. This concept of friendliness was crucial for Brecht at a time when the world was embroiled in a war among enemies again and when he, exiled from his own country from 1933 onward and now on the verge of fleeing his own continent, was losing his stage and audience at a devastatingly fast pace. His wish for friendliness led him to replace the bombers above the city of Chongqing with planes in Setzuan that carry “friendly mail” to “friends in faraway lands” (41, 51). The would-be pilot Yang Sun is bound, in Shen Te’s imagination, to fulfill this function, and it is with this imaginary but friendly messenger that Shen Te falls in love. In the 1938 poem on the origin of the *Dao De Jing*, Brecht had already observed the friendliness of both the customs man and Laozi. While Laozi, exiling himself from his corrupt land, was polite enough to oblige the request of the customs man and wrote down his life wisdom in eighty-one sayings, credit must also be given to the friendly customs man who had asked to learn. Laozi’s teaching (that hardness must lose the day), which had piqued the customs man’s curiosity in the first place, has now found an echo in Brecht, but could he still count on the same kind of friendliness to demand and spread his own reflection to the world? The exiled playwright could only hope that there still existed those who are unafraid of asking questions, even if their sole interest is to learn who will win.³⁸

³⁸ In Brecht’s poem, the customs man asks Laozi to write down his teaching because although he is an unimportant man, “Who wins or loses” interests him. When Laozi hears this, he looks at the man in sorrow.

Although in *Setzuan*, Brecht gives no definite answer to the question on morality, one can be sure that Brecht had spent his whole life redefining this age-old concept. In John Fuegi's 1994 biography of Brecht, the indignant literature professor indicted Brecht on many accounts, notably his horrific treatment of the women in his life, his lies and plagiarizing of other writers' works, and his cowardliness as a committed writer who, especially during the years of his exile and before his settling in the US, was, besides being subservient like a dog to Moscow in exchange for financial favors, frantic and concerned only about his own safety.³⁹ As ideologically motivated as it is historically inaccurate,⁴⁰ Fuegi's book, in short, manages to carve out a Brecht without scruples and morals. Going back to the first epigram at the beginning of this chapter, one must agree with Brecht's friend Leon Feuchtwanger that the crudity and ruthlessness of Brecht had made him an enemy out of Fuegi, who, despite the volumes of work he had produced on Brecht, never understood "his tones," his ethics, that went far beyond the rigid binary of good and evil. In a style modeled on the teaching of the Chinese sage Confucius,⁴¹ Mr. Keuner (generally regarded as Brecht's alter ego) teaches us, on one occasion: "I don't have a backbone to be broken. I'm the one who has to live longer than Power."⁴² On another: "He who bears knowledge must not fight, nor tell the truth, nor do a service, nor not eat, nor refuse honors, nor be conspicuous. He who bears knowledge has only one

"Worn tunic. Got no shoes. /And his forehead just a single furrow. /Ah, no winner this he's talking to. / And he softly says: 'You too?'" *Bertolt Brecht Poems*, 315.

³⁹ *Brecht and Company*, 289-386.

⁴⁰ Dave Riley has written an effective response against the scathing views proposed by Fuegi. His article can be found in *Green Left Weekly*, 20 March, 1995, entitled "Review of John Fuegi: *The Life and Lies of Bertolt Brecht*." The contrast between these two men of opposite ideological camps reveals, if nothing else, the complexities and unconventionality of Brecht's thoughts and works, which render his works "vulnerable" to misinterpretations.

⁴¹ The concise stories and sayings of Mr. Keuner are reminiscent of those collected in *The Analects*. Instead of "Master [Confucius] says," we hear "Mr. Keuner says".

⁴² *Stories of Mr. Keuner*, 3.

virtue: that he bears knowledge.”⁴³ The interest in survival and the propagation of knowledge alone determine Brecht’s sense of right and wrong.

If at the beginning of the war, the questioning of morality became an essential task for the committed writer, as reflected in the *Setzuan* play, towards the end of the war Brecht had already realigned his moral gears and, with the completion of his greatest play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, was able to envision and describe a much more coherent and reasonable world. He had searched for and found a “happy ending” for the good people of the world.

The Difficult Change and the Doctrine of the Mean:

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

Towards the end of the Second World War, in anticipation of the Allies’ victory, Brecht wrote his last great play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, whose plot is loosely based on an ancient Chinese play by Li Xingdao called *Huilan ji* (*The Tale of the Chalk Circle*), which was known to Brecht since 1925.⁴⁴ This play provided Brecht with the perfect frame for his own story, but Brecht’s message, as we shall see later, was by no means the same as that of the Chinese original, as indicated by the conspicuous addition of the word Caucasian to the title. Meanwhile, Brecht continued his conversation with Chinese sages. The importance of the Daoist saying that had already appeared in *In the Swamp* and

⁴³ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁴ The original tale by Li Xingdao was translated into French by Stanislas Julien. This version was then translated into German in 1876 by Wollheim da Fonseca. Klabund (Alfred Henschke) based his translation on this version and published his adaptation in 1925. It was a popular success and was later staged in London, also a success. In 1940-1 Erwin Piscator put it on stage again in New York. Although we do not know whether Brecht read the original tale, he was quite familiar with Klabund’s version and knew Piscator’s production.

Setzuan grew in proportion to the paradoxical development of his own beliefs: on the one hand, he had become increasingly disillusioned with a “mass movement” to overthrow their enemy, the bourgeoisie, while on the other hand, he had become ever more convinced of the inevitability of such a change. Like a reformed Shlink, Brecht had come to appreciate the virtue of patience, and therefore the true spirit of the Daoist teaching: with time, even if it is not in his lifetime, the soft and persistent virtues of the oppressed people will erode the hardness of the exploiters. In addition, he had consolidated his own moral system, which he started to build in *Setzuan*, with the help of the Confucian Doctrine of the Mean. At the end of the play, Brecht had enshrined survival in his own moral temple.

As Klaus Voelker points out, Brecht did not leave Europe for America until it was absolutely necessary to do so.⁴⁵ After he settled down in Santa Barbara and became familiar with the lifestyle of Los Angeles in 1941, the living situation was such that he compared life in “the city of angels” to hell. In the poems he wrote during the six years of his American exile, he records his daily observations and thoughts of this new country where he finds himself almost anonymous.⁴⁶ The loss of fame resulted in his multiple but futile attempts to establish himself as a script writer in Hollywood, but, although he worked on more than fifty film projects while in America, only one was sold.⁴⁷ Moreover, separated by an ocean on either side of the country from the war that was raging over the rest of the world, the country and her people seemed to be oblivious of the sufferings of

⁴⁵ *Brecht: A Biography*, 282.

⁴⁶ In “Sonnet in Emigration,” Brecht relates that “Wherever i go they ask me: ‘spell your name!’ / And oh, that name was once accounted great.” In *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956*, 366.

⁴⁷ This movie is called *Hangmen Also Die*. The whole process of delivering and revising the script, casting the roles, deciding the title, and a final lawsuit on the proprietary rights to the script, disgusted Brecht and revealed to him the secret (which he would never use) to success in Hollywood: conformity. See Voelker, *Brecht: A Biography*, 290-4.

war and content in their seclusion, in which Brecht had become a knowing and therefore guilty participant.⁴⁸ In the apparent luxury and abundance of the California lifestyle, Brecht discerned an emptiness indicative of a subconscious unhappiness.⁴⁹ Here, as in Europe, the divide between the rich and poor was conspicuous and refused to be camouflaged by the works of the dream factories of Hollywood.⁵⁰ Compared to Europe, however, the hell of America was rendered even more insufferable by the indifferent responses to his works: Brecht had gathered for himself a large following of devout admirers in his country, yet in America he was but one of the many nameless European refugees. His voice was no longer heard.

Out of this helplessness, more than ever, grew the conviction that reality must be changed, and that as an artist he could play a conscientious, if not decisive, role in that change. He reminded himself that “a new age does not begin all of a sudden” and therefore one must exercise patience and forbearance.⁵¹ He remained firm in his belief that everything changes and that you can “make a fresh start with your final breath.”⁵² It is with such convictions in mind that Brecht continued to write plays even though only a

⁴⁸ In a poem titled “Summer 1942”, Brecht describes the utter disconnect between his daily life and the war in Europe: “Day after day / I see the fig trees in the garden / The rosy faces of the dealers who buy lies / The chessmen on the corner table / And the newspapers with their reports / Of bloodbaths in the Soviet Union.” In another poem entitled “Hollywood,” he denounces himself as a conspirator in the trade of selling lies to the public: “Every day, to earn my daily bread / I go to the market where lies are bought / Hopefully / I take up my place among the sellers.” In *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956*, 379, 382.

⁴⁹ In “On Thinking about Hell,” Brecht likens Los Angeles to Hell because “In Hell too, / There are, I’ve no doubt, these luxuriant gardens / With flowers as big as trees, which of course wither / Unhesitatingly if not nourished with very expensive water. And fruit markets / With great heaps of fruit, albeit having / Neither smell nor taste. And endless processions of cars / Lighter than their own shadows, faster than / Mad thoughts, gleaming vehicles in which / Jolly-looking people come from nowhere and are nowhere bound. / And houses, built for happy people, therefore standing empty / Even when lived in.” *ibid*, 367.

⁵⁰ In “Hollywood Elegies,” Brecht writes that although the village of Hollywood had planned itself to be a heaven, it “serves the unprosperous, unsuccessful as hell.” The works of great artists are distorted by Hollywood writers to suit their aims, and while the poor suffer, the dream factories are armed to the teeth so that “the stink of greed and poverty shall not reach them.” *Ibid*, 380-1.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, “New Ages,” 386.

⁵² *Ibid*, “Everything Changes,” 400.

handful of friends read them, and it is with the hope of eventually staging these plays written in exile that he kept working on his dramatic theory. In this light, it becomes easy to understand Brecht's decision to return to East Berlin after the War was over; there he was made the master of his own theater and could do what he wanted with the financial and staff support afforded him. On the other hand, much as he was estranged from Hollywood, the experience of the film industry taught him something that changed his Epic Theater into a Dialectical Theater. In "A Short Organum for the Theatre" written in 1948, Brecht no longer embraced the stringently didactic aspect of his Epic theory; instead, he called for a "theater of pleasure and fun."⁵³ He now realized that to change the mass it is necessary to first reach them, and the easiest way to do that was through providing them with fun and pleasure. Art, for the Brecht who had finally regained access to the stage, his own revolutionary realm, was no longer employed solely for the purpose of educating the mass, but to "make men's lives easier" by entertaining them.⁵⁴ However, this conciliatory and humanizing change in no way prescribed the end of Brecht's effort to enlighten the oppressed mass, for he spent the majority of his ink reiterating the principles of the *Verfremdungseffekt* and its potential impact on the audience. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* we see that this bourgeois spokesman of the poor and the oppressed finally crafted the ultimate rebellion through the joint story of Grusha and Azdak.

Grusha's story constitutes the first part of the Grusinia chalk circle tale. A maid in the service of the wife of the governor in Grusinia, Grusha is a simple and good girl like Shen Te, but unlike the good person of Setzuan, who metamorphoses into her evil cousin

⁵³ *Brecht on Theatre*, 180

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 185.

when times are difficult, she relies entirely on her own initiatives throughout the story. She is not too bright, but makes up for the lack of intelligence through her physical strength. Abused by her mistress, she nevertheless saves the latter's child when the latter flees from insurgents. Realizing that an innocent child's life is in danger, she has the courage to strike down the lecherous corporal who pursues the child for monetary gain. Chased by the wounded and bloodthirsty corporal, she is brave enough to cross a rickety bridge that collapses into the yawning abyss after her passage. When her brother refuses shelter to her and her illegitimate child, she consents to marriage to a dying peasant so that the child can grow up respected. When the dying peasant turns out to be a coward faking illness to avoid being conscripted, she has the forbearance to accept her fate so that the child can remain in safety. In other words, Grusha is, as Brecht admits, "too pure, too good and too chaste."⁵⁵ However, it is precisely through this particular combination of virtues—humaneness, simplicity, courage, loyalty, and forbearance—that we learn Brecht's reason for defecting from his own bourgeois class to the working class. In stark contrast to Grusha, the bourgeois mistress possesses none of these endearing qualities.

However, Grusha was not born with all these virtues. Like her fellow servants, she considers leaving the child behind in the chaos of the insurgency; fearful that her fiancé Simon might return and find her missing, she decides to give the child to a peasant family and rid herself of all responsibilities. She is unable to do so because, as she later confesses to Simon, she is in love, which makes her incapable of denying any claims made in the name of love. As she is about to leave the child, she imagines that the child is calling to her:

Not whining, but calling quite sensibly,

⁵⁵ *Brecht: A Biography*, 303.

Or so it seemed to her.
 “Woman,” it said, “help me.”
 And it went on, not whining, but saying quite sensibly:
 “Know, woman, he who hears not a cry for help
 But passes by with troubled ears will never hear
 The gentle call of a lover nor the blackbird at dawn
 Nor the happy sigh of the tired grape-picker as the Angelus rings.” (146)

The imagined words of the child make it clear that the ability to love does not restrict itself to a particular person, but extends to all that is worth loving. Having just accepted a marriage proposal from Simon, Grusha has proved herself worth loving and capable of romantic love; now the “sensible” voice of the child reminds her that romantic love is encompassed by a greater love: love for humanity. When admonished by the other servants to leave the child because “if he had the plague he couldn’t be more dangerous,” she simply answers: “He hasn’t got the plague. He looks at me! He’s human!” (145). The Brecht who puts these words into the mouth of the good Grusha has moved far away from the author of the didactic plays. Instead of remonstrating with the exploited servant, who does not treat Michael as her potential exploiter, Brecht praises Grusha for her love of life, regardless of its class origin. Her lack of class consciousness is no longer the subject of Brecht’s teaching; on the contrary, her disregard of the child’s class status for the sake of life is praised by the playwright. Furthermore, Grusha’s virtues, which are revealed only after she passes the initial trial, are *contingent* upon the fact that she is able to overlook the child’s class difference. If in the previous plays Brecht’s characters moved in an amoral world, in this play morality is defined against life and vitality: what is good for the growth of life is quite unequivocally praised as good by Brecht.

Brecht also leaves no room for doubt that the love of life he praises can only come from the working class. The bourgeois class, represented by the governor and his wife, is

in no way suited to the prospering of life. The city under Abashwili's governance is called "City of the Damned," and while the governor piles up riches and servants in his household, he has more beggars, more soldiers in war, and more petitioners on his doorsteps than any other governor in Grusinia (127). As the play opens the governor, followed by a retinue which includes his beautiful wife and newborn baby, is surrounded by a crowd of petitioners. Ignoring all the cries for help, the governor proceeds to the church for the Easter service. It is said that he is planning on tearing down the slums to build an east wing for his palace. He dismisses a messenger with urgent military updates in order to eat a hearty meal, and he shows more interest in finding out if it rained the night before than in the fate of his country. This governor who denies assistance to the growth of life is next seen with his head on a stick brandished by insurgents. The wife, Natella Abashwili, acts abusively towards her servants and, while the troops of the insurgents move closer to her palace, fusses over her dresses instead of taking care of her baby, and never once inquires as to the whereabouts of her husband. In the persons of this loveless couple we see no hope of nurturing life at all: their son Michael, attended to zealously by two doctors while the governor is still in power, is left behind to perish on his own as soon as the insurgency breaks out.

The dissociation from the didactic aspect of his theater also signals Brecht's re-adoption of natural imagery, whose conspicuous dearth from the learning play period onward has been observed by many critics. Esslin believes that Brecht abstained from using natural phenomena in his plays and poetry (although his early poems and his first play *Baal* was "full of ecstatic praise of the beauties of nature"), because he had "come to

fear them as a temptation, which might lure him away from his duties as a social critic.”⁵⁶ Nature stands for “the forces of instinct and uncontrolled emotion which threaten his self-control,”⁵⁷ whereas Brecht sought for self-discipline and rationality in Marxism. Esslin concludes his book on Brecht with these words:

Behind the loud, frenzied demand for violent change, dictated by the ruthless, cold process of scientific reasoning, therefore, there always lay a yearning for the quiet, passive acceptance of the world as it is, with all its harshness and absurdity. The more he forced himself into the strait-jacket of discipline and purposeful activity, the more deeply he longed for the warmth of self-oblivion and self-abandon.⁵⁸

Commenting on the outcome of the test of the chalk circle, Esslin views Grusha’s winning of the child as the triumph of emotion over reason.⁵⁹ For Esslin, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* marked Brecht’s return to his true nature, a tired social critic who really just wants to enjoy his cup of tea in the morning and abandon himself to self-oblivion through the rest of the day. But how removed this picture of the “real” Brecht is from what we have seen him to be so far! As analyzed above, Brecht’s embrace of humanity is still inextricably embedded within his belief that the emancipation of mankind can only be achieved by the working class; the bourgeois class has, in order to exploit and dehumanize the working class, killed off its own humanity in the process. Understood thus, nature is really the nature of the poor, and the natural images are no longer symbols of “the violent irrational force...in Baal” or the chaotic universe spinning out of its orbit.⁶⁰ Instead, nature is humanized through the eyes of the good Grusha. In their flight into the northern mountains, amidst wind and snow, Grusha teaches little Michael to be unafraid of these formidable natural forces, for the wind is “a poor thing too. He has to

⁵⁶ *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 221.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 243.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 232.

⁶⁰ Lyons, 139.

push the clouds along and he gets quite cold doing it.... And the snow isn't so bad, either.... It covers the little fir trees so they won't die in winter" (163). Simply but effectively, Grusha has demystified nature; in other words, she has rationalized these mysterious forces in her own terms: the "harshness and absurdity" of the world have melted away.

Contrary to Esslin's assessment, Brecht's desire for social change figures prominently not only in his characterization of the different classes in this play, but also in the structure of the play itself. Speaking about the revolutionary potentials of his dialectical theater, Brecht maintained that the events portrayed must be historically specific so as to "keep their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen to be impermanent too."⁶¹ Employing this strategy in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Brecht tells two stories at once: in the Prologue and Epilogue of the play, a meeting between two Collective Farms of a war-ravaged Caucasian village, debating the rightful ownership of a valley; and in the center, the story of the chalk circle test in Grusinia, performed by the singer of the commune to illustrate the lesson of the meeting. As mentioned above, the central story is based on a Chinese play, which was adapted by Klabund in 1925 and had been known to Brecht since then. However, Brecht's singer starts his narration by informing his audience that he will tell the story, "*of course*, in a changed version. Comrades, we hope you'll find that old poetry can sound well in the shadow of new tractors. It may be a mistake to mix different wines but old and new wisdom mix admirably" (126, italics added). Although old wisdom is inherited by new people, the olden time of China and Grusinia is, *of course*, gone, changed and replaced by new generations. Given a new set of circumstances, Brecht would be happy to tell the old

⁶¹ "A Short Organum for the Theatre," 190.

tale in yet another version. In other words, the impermanence of a specific historical time is marked from the very beginning, and in Brecht's revolutionary mind, everything still changes and must change.

Therefore, although Brecht's story still culminates in the determination of motherhood through the test of the chalk circle, he replaces the mother figure and refashions the story leading up to the test, so that the final judgment gains a new meaning and significance appropriate for a time and a place vastly different from Li Xingdao's China. In the original story, the heroine Haitang is a weak and obedient girl who becomes the second wife of a rich old man, gives her husband a boy, and lives on quite happily until the first wife, who is without a child (the key to inheritance in the old Chinese system), murders her husband and accuses Haitang of the crime. In the court of a bribed judge Haitang is beaten into giving a confession, and it is only when, by chance, a higher court judge decides to reopen her case that her innocence is finally restored and her child returned to her. In Brecht's version, however, the passive and weak Haitang is replaced by the working girl, Grusha, who, unlike Haitang, who does nothing to qualify for the name of mother except give birth to her child, becomes Michael's mother by *choice*. The more she suffers from the consequences of her choices (saving the child's life from the Ironshirts, hitting the corporal, marrying the peasant, etc.), the better qualified she becomes as a mother in the true sense of the word. Therefore, when she is chosen as the real mother of Michael over his birth mother, it is not through luck, as is the case with Haitang, but because of her actions. Likewise, the Prologue introduces the dispute over the rights to a valley between two farms. When the original residents of the valley claim ownership because "the valley has belonged to us from all eternity," this statement is

immediately turned into a question and discredited at once: “What does that mean—from all eternity? Nothing belongs to anyone from all eternity” (122). The dispute is then resolved in a rational manner. After the new residents of the valley (the adopted mother) prove to the old inhabitants (the birth mother) that they can make better use of the valley, they are proclaimed as the rightful owner of it.

Such enlightened administration of justice is, of course, not the rule but the exception. The Brecht who insists on the “pleasure” principle in his theater no longer holds the same idealist vision of the future as when he wrote the learning plays. To compensate for the unrealistic goodness of Grusha,⁶² Brecht creates Azdak, who is “corrupt, unheroic and pleasure-loving,” possessed of a superabundance of “gumption and cunning”, and therefore much more to the taste of the playwright himself.⁶³ Azdak is the village scrivener of Grusinia, and when the insurgency breaks out, he unwittingly shelters and saves the life of the ousted Grand Duke. When he discovers the identity of the latter, he immediately has himself arrested, denouncing his crime against humanity, for which he is ready to be punished. In front of the Ironshirts he condemns himself, and announces that the poor people have risen up and a new age is coming. Mistaking him for a mad rambler who has come to “fish in troubled waters,” the Ironshirts tell him that they still work for the princes who have overthrown the Grand Duke: they get paid to beat up the poor rebels who have just hanged the village judge. Immediately Azdak cowers and obfuscates his previous statements. However, his eccentricity amuses the Ironshirts who, as a joke, install him in the seat of the judge. In his new capacity Azdak tries to play the

⁶² Written for the actress Luise Rainer, wife of the famous playwright Clifford Odets, this role is restricted by the vision of the actress herself and could not be molded to Brecht’s satisfaction. Voelker, *Brecht: A Biography*, 303.

⁶³ Ibid.

rascal, but underlying all the mad ruling theatricalities (he judges two cases at once, accepts bribes, sleeps with a rich and voluptuous plaintiff, etc.) there is one principle that remains constant: he always rules in favor of the poor. “And he broke the rules to save them. / Broken law like bread he gave them, / Brought them to shore upon his crooked back. / At long last the poor and lowly / Had someone who was not too holy / To be bribed by empty hands: Azdak” (211-2).

However, Azdak can only rule in the era of disorder. Once “order” is restored and the Grand Duke returns to Grusinia, fear seizes him so that, without even knowing what disputes there are between the governor’s wife and Grusha, he promises to behead the latter and return the child to the former. He tries to run away, but is captured and tortured by the Ironshirts until a decree from the Grand Duke arrives, appointing him to be judge of Grusinia. Understanding perfectly the new meaning of this judgeship, Azdak tries the case of Grusha vs. Natella Abashwili, and after he rules in favor of the poor yet again, he vanishes and is “never seen again” (233). Although in a time of disorder Azdak was able to help the poor for two years, in peaceful, “normal” times he is only able to do this once: in this contrast Brecht makes it clear to his audience that true justice is the aberration rather than the norm. When the city of Grusinia lacked a clear governing body, Azdak’s preference for the poor could be masked by his apparent muddle-headedness—some of the poor are real criminals—and regarded by the bored Ironshirts as the price to pay for a good laugh, but as soon as the rich are restored to power, such protection for the poor is no longer tolerated by the ruler.

The final scene of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is therefore at once full of hope and despair for the future of the poor. On the one hand, the poor, loving, and deserving

Grusha is, with the help of a discerning judge, awarded the child. In the name of justice, the rich are denied access to their exploited property—Natella’s claim to the governor’s estates is voided without the child, heir to the estate, which is converted to a playground for poor people’s children. In other words, the rich are deprived of their property because they did not earn it, and such property is returned to the poor who have produced it in the first place and must reap the benefits thereof. On the other hand, however, this “brief golden age, / Almost an age of justice” vanishes with the disappearance of Azdak, who must hide from certain retaliation and persecution from the rulers. Although the call for justice is urgent and persistent, the age of justice is indefinitely postponed to the future. The singer concludes his story with these words:

“[What] there is shall go to those who are good for it,
 Children to the motherly, that they prosper,
 Carts to good drivers, that they be driven well,
 The valley to the waterers, that it yield fruit. (233 italics added)

Justice remains a hope (shall), not a reality. Contrasting the justice of Azdak’s final rule with the fact that he must disappear in order to preserve his own life, Brecht brings to the audience’s attention the strange yet normal phenomenon that in a society ruled by the rich, justice cannot exist for the poor. Although Azdak must vanish in such a society, he has shown us right from wrong before his departure: what there is *should* go to those who have earned it and will continue to work in order to keep it. The real injustice is that it *does not*. The Chinese wisdom that the child shall be awarded to the real mother is given a new, modern twist: we keep what we work for, not what we inherit, because the child does not grow on itself, but is the fruit of labor.

Read from a Confucian perspective, Azdak’s disappearance can be understood not as an admission of defeat, but merely as an act in accordance with the Doctrine of the

Mean. For a Confucian superior man “does what is proper to the station in which he is; he does not desire to go beyond this.” The Chinese philosopher elaborates on this statement:

In a position of wealth and honor, he does what is proper to a position of wealth and honor. In a poor and low position, he does what is proper to a poor and low position. Situated among barbarous tribes, he does what is proper to a situation among barbarous tribes. In a position of sorrow and difficulty, he does what is proper to a position of sorrow and difficulty. *The superior man can find himself in no situation in which he is not himself.*⁶⁴

Like Azdak, who calls himself a “superior person” (190), the Confucian superior man is not a rigidly moral person, but rather a practical one who knows the virtue of caution.⁶⁵ However, this superior way is rare among the people, and the path of the Doctrine of the Mean is untrodden, because “The knowing go beyond it, and the stupid do not come up to it,” and “The men of talents and virtue go beyond it, and the worthless do not come up to it.”⁶⁶ Echoing this excellent philosophy of life, which he himself had followed throughout his life, Brecht composes “The Song of the Center,” sung by Grusha when she is recovering from her illness in her brother’s house:

And the lover started to leave
And his betrothed ran pleading after him
Pleading and weeping, weeping and teaching:
“Dearest mine, dearest mine
When you go to war as now you do
When you fight the foe as soon you will
Don’t lead with the front line
And don’t push with the rear line
At the front is red fire
In the rear is red smoke
Stay in the war’s center
Stay near the standard bearer
The first always die
The last are also hit

⁶⁴ Zhongyong (*The Doctrine of the Mean*), in *Four Books and Five Classics (sishu wujing)*, 23. My translation and italics.

⁶⁵ “The superior man does not wait till he sees things, to be cautious, nor till he hears things, to be apprehensive.” Ibid, 19.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 19-20.

Those in the center come home.” (168)

Survival, which is the foundation of any useful activities at all, is best insured by following the doctrine of the Mean/Center. When Grusha finishes the song, she tells Michael and herself to make themselves as small as cockroaches so that the sister-in-law, who does not welcome their stay at all, will forget that they are in the house, so that they can stay until spring comes. Her readiness to adjust to any situation in which she finds herself is further attested to by her acquiescence to the marriage to the peasant despite her betrothal to Simon. When Simon comes back from the bloody war, the singer tells us that his survival is also a result of abiding by the same doctrine. While the men around him fall to their deaths, Simon, standing in the middle, is able to outlive the battle and return home, feeding on aspen buds, drinking maple juice, and sleeping on stone, in water (185). The fact that all these lovable characters, despite all the evil forces operating against them, *live*, and in the case of Grusha and Simon, live happily with each other, is, for Brecht, where hope lies. The tenacity of the Doctrine of the Mean will see to it that these superior beings do not perish in any kind of adversity.

Yet Confucius' superior beings are Brecht's ordinary people. Grusha is not too bright but works for her bread; Azdak does not have a superhero's courage and integrity, and helps the poor only when he can. The combined story of these two people, however, presents an extraordinary picture of what is otherwise deemed trivial and insignificant. The dehumanized Grusha (a servant to the Abashwili family and no more) is humanized when released from her bond of servitude, and we see her love for the human child, her courage in the face of relentless persecution, and her will to survive through all adversities. However, all these seemingly extraordinary virtues are not new to Grusha; in

her flight to the mountains we do not see a different person from the servant Grusha, but the same person—only human. Similarly, when, as a joke, Azdak (to the Ironshirts no more than a shameless rogue) is wrapped in the judge's gown and made to mete out "justice," he remains the same person he was, and exposes the fact that, through accepting bribes from the rich, who give knowingly and expect to be exonerated accordingly, justice for the rich equals money and nothing else. He rules in favor of the poor because he is from the poor, whose justice must identify with the poor. Morality is that of the rulers, and only the poor can and will help each other.

Conclusion

The China plays of Brecht show that, unlike Malraux, Brecht never held an Orientalist attitude towards China. His real interest was never to divide further an already fragmented world, but to bring our attention to issues that concern all of us as human beings. In the plays analyzed above, China is used to estrange a "normal" situation and give the audience a new perspective, from which they learn the strangeness of normality. From the very beginning, Brecht's aim was to find out if the individual could be meaningfully integrated into the collective, so that the survival of one does not mean the elimination of the other. In the end, with the help of the Chinese sages, Brecht was able to set up his own moral system where binaries crumble under dialectical scrutiny; where the ostensibly weak is prophesized to triumph over the strong, given time; and where survival is made both the precondition and the ultimate goal of virtue. Compared to Malraux, who was never able to *completely* descend to the earth from the heights of idealism and

heroism, Brecht's philosophy was, from the very beginning, an earthy one that sought to embrace the universe through the smallest details of the mundane.

However, no matter how great the theory is, writing remains largely in the realm of contemplation and cannot assuage the thirst for real action. Therefore, like Malraux, who chose sides in order to change his country according to his artistic vision, Brecht chose to side with his Communist government so that he could translate his thoughts into action.⁶⁷ It is, after all, impossible to *live* in the realm of the in-between.

⁶⁷ As Voelker observes in his Brecht biography, after he settled down in East Berlin, Brecht "not only behaved very loyally towards the East German government, he also tried, by means of constant discussions with politicians, to maintain contact with it in a way conducive to his own work and to be effective on its behalf in promoting socialist awareness." However, his initial efforts to show his loyalty to the Communist regime did not result in much official favor, so that by early 1953, he "was forced to realize that the Ensemble's performances aroused almost no interest any more" in East Germany: there were more people in the audience from the West than from the East that attend the Ensemble's performances. Therefore, on June 17, 1953, right after the bloody suppression of the mass uprising in Berlin protesting intolerable living conditions and the unfulfilled promises of the leaders, Brecht quickly sent a letter to Walter Ulbricht, First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, in which he declared his "loyal allegiance" to the Party. John Willett points out that Brecht's public stance on this matter "altered the official attitude to him almost overnight, even though he thereafter insisted on publicizing his reservations about the party's mistakes, which the initial reports of his letter to Ulbricht had not mentioned." Brecht was, continues Willett, "so much quicker to react than many other intellectuals," and his astuteness was rewarded when the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, shortly before that vacated by the Volksbuehne, was handed over to his authority in July as proof of his "association with our Republic." From then on "Brecht began exploiting his changed status both privately and publicly by campaigning for the abolition of the troublesome Art and Literature Commissions, with their rigid control by mediocre party officials, in favour of a new Ministry of Culture." See *Brecht: A Biography* by Klaus Voelker, 336, 343, 354-8; and *Brecht in Context* by John Willett, 203.

Chapter Three

The Choice of One:

Lu Xun and Chinese Reality

Forsaking the Immortal:

Lu Xun's Choice of the In-between

In the last two chapters, through reading the China works of Malraux and Brecht, we have come to the conclusion that these two writers are defined by “in-betweenness”: they do not belong entirely to the sublime realm of the artist, nor do they fit completely in the world of realpolitik, but rather somewhere in between, and it is from out of this continuous tension that their greatness emanates. Maturing and writing in the 1920s through the end of the Second World War, they struggled, when their personal and national identities were in crisis, to find meaning and restore hope to humankind in their China works. But for them, the solutions they found in their writing remained dreams and theories until they were tested by reality, and so when the crisis passed with the end of the war, they did not hesitate to shelve their identities as writers whose immortality lies in their words, and took up the role of actor on the political stage where they sought to change the world through their actions. For them, the world of the in-between had to be and was a transition period. For Lu Xun (1881-1936), who fought for the independence of China and died thirteen years before that dream became a reality, the in-between world was all he had.

If one wonders what Lu Xun would have done had he lived to see the day of liberation, one needs only to go back to Lu Xun's life to find that unequivocal answer. The choice was already made in 1927, when Lu Xun returned from his one-year self-exile in Southern China and settled down in Shanghai, where he lived until his death in 1936. At the end of 1926 he was torn between writing and teaching as a career, and between living for himself and living for others in the future.¹ The next ten years of his life in Shanghai tell us that he had decided on using his pen to fight for a better future for the younger generations. Although he had become famous for his short stories, written between 1918 and 1925, some of which are still unparalleled in language and craft even today, he did not pursue his tremendous talent and achievement in writing fiction. Although he knew that a writer "lives" on as long as his writing endures the test of time, he did not hesitate to trade immortality for a moment in real life. Instead of short stories (a form in which he was already a master) and novels (which he always wanted to write), Lu Xun wrote volume after volume of in the last ten years of his life and spoke, through these short pieces of observations and thoughts on current events and life, to the living instead of to the unborn: his choice was to live and die with his time.

However, since Lu Xun did leave us certain fruits of his imagination (he was reluctant to call them "art" but was nevertheless delighted to have an audience for them²), we are not only drawn to speculate, rather uselessly, as many who adore Lu Xun do, on what might have been had Lu Xun chosen the road not taken; but also, and more importantly, what it *was* that caused him to make up his mind to stop writing fiction after 1927. An examination of his writings before then, as well as some articles in which he

¹ Lu Xun, *Collected Works (Lu Xun quanji)* (henceforth CW), Volume 11, 184, 200, 221.

² See Lu Xun's foreword to *Call to Arms* in CW1, 420.

explains the origin of his fiction,³ reveal to us that Lu Xun would never have written stories, had he not believed that his stories could help awaken his fellow countrymen to the gloomy reality of China, and that it was for the same reason that he stopped writing fiction in order to serve his country in a more effective and timely manner. Through writing the twenty-three stories collected in *Call to Arms* (1923) and *Wandering* (1926), and exploring the depth of his own psyche in the prose essays collected in *Wild Grass* (1927), Lu Xun had come to identify his writing, as well as his own existence as a writer of these dark times, with the sick age. Lu Xun was not interested in making a name for himself as such.⁴ After writing the reminiscences later collected in *Dawn Flowers Picked at Dusk* (1928), Lu Xun had said his goodbyes to the past and was ready to move on.

In the following pages we will retrace Lu Xun's footsteps as a creative writer, a role he took on incidentally, as a matter of convenience,⁵ and shed resolutely, as a matter of exigency. We will see that, whereas for Malraux and Brecht, in-betweenness was a phase where the writers engaged in a reflexive dialogue with the immortal issues of

³ "Preface to *Call to Arms*" in CW1, 415-20, and "How Did I Begin to Write Short Stories?" in CW4, 511-14.

⁴ In an article entitled "On Dostoevsky," Lu Xun admits that in his youth, he admired great writers whose works inspired him, but that among those writers, there were two whom he could not bring himself to love. One was Dante, the other was Dostoevsky. Lu Xun then elaborates his thoughts on the latter: "In his novels, he places the men and women in intolerable situations to try them. Not only does he rip through the surface purity to get to the crimes underneath, but he reaches for the real purity that is hidden behind the crimes. He does not let his characters die a swift death, but tries his best to keep them living. It is as if Dostoevsky shared his criminals' pain, and his inquisitor's glee. This is by no means a trivial feat, but simply a matter of greatness. But I myself wanted to close the book so as not to look. ...As a Chinese reader, I cannot get used to Dostoevskyan submission—real submission to the absurdity and injustice of fate. In China, there is no Christ as in Russia. ...It is perhaps hypocritical to dig [through the layers of purity and sin], because...[to justify sin with underlying purity] is an evil act for the exploited, but a moral gesture for the exploiter." Lu Xun ends his essay by clarifying that he does not simply regard Dostoevsky as a preacher: the greatness of Dostoevskyan submission is undeniable, although out of this world. However, this kind of greatness does not inspire Lu Xun to write; for him, much like Malraux's Hong, there is only this life, and one must do what one can to change reality.

⁵ In "How Did I Begin to Write Short Stories," Lu Xun states that "I started writing short stories not because I thought of myself as possessing the talent for fiction writing, but because I was living in a Beijing hostel at the time, and did not have reference books for writing essays, or master copies to do translation. That is why I started dabbling in short stories.... There was no preparation for it except the one hundred or so foreign works I had read before, and some medical knowledge." CW 4, 512.

humankind, for Lu Xun, the in-between was a state of being against which—against his own existence as a writer of these dark times—he fought. The presence of the West in Lu Xun’s writing is never conspicuous, because it is ubiquitous. Much like Brecht’s Epic Theater, Lu Xun’s makes his writing such⁶ so as to expose evils that are otherwise disguised as normality, and much like Brecht, Lu Xun used *human* wisdom, whether it is distilled from Chinese antiquity or Western civilizations, to guide his battle for the oppressed. If binaries exist in his writing, they are only in the forms of old versus new, death versus life: Lu Xun grew up too quickly to ever buy into the morality of the rulers.

Form Matters: Revolution contra Literature

Born into an affluent middle-class family in Shaoxing in 1881, Lu Xun had a comfortable childhood. At six he started his education in classical Chinese literature, but regarded it as a burden since he did not understand the antiquated language. Instead, he preferred to read illustrated books and unofficial histories on his own, and formed his skepticism towards authority from a young age. At twelve his carefree days were over. His grandfather, an official in the imperial court and the main breadwinner of the family clan, was imprisoned for bribery, and the majority of the family’s property was sold to save the old man’s life. The next year, Lu Xun’s father fell seriously ill, and his treatment

⁶ The Chinese stage artist Xue Dianjie, who designed the stage for the performance of Brecht’s play *Galileo* in 1979, points out the similarity of the writing techniques of Brecht and Lu Xun by quoting from the latter: “Besides arousing public indignation, we should use methods to implant real courage. While working up their emotion, we should also attempt to arouse their clear reasoning: giving special stress to courage and reasoning.” And “What he wrote about is openly acknowledged and also often seen, but being nothing strange, it is naturally unnoticed by anyone. Although what happened is already considered at the time as irrational, funny, base, and even hateful, yet because it had always been like that, so customary, no one considers it strange any more even if it takes place openly in public. To give it a special emphasis now will move people.” In *Brecht in Asia and Africa*, 54.

over the next two years exhausted the remainder of the family savings. By the time of his father's death in 1896, Lu Xun, the eldest son, had not only been shouldering familial responsibilities too heavy for a fifteen-year-old boy, but had come face to face with the indifference, hypocrisy, and ignorance of his townspeople, who had treated him with reverence before, but now did not even bother to hide their contempt for the declining family. At seventeen Lu Xun decided to abandon the traditional route of success through the Civil Service Examination system,⁷ and left home to study in a school where foreign subjects, such as physics, chemistry, and foreign languages, were taught. Although the exposure to these new subjects opened Lu Xun's eyes to new possibilities, he was not satisfied with the little he could learn in such new schools, and after graduation, he applied for a scholarship to study in Japan and was accepted. From 1902 to 1909, Lu Xun stayed in Japan, first studying science and medicine, then engaging in his first literary efforts, all the while reading voraciously the new ideas and works from the West, meeting with fellow Chinese to discuss these new ideas, and translating scientific and revolutionary works into Chinese with the hope of changing the Chinese consciousness. By 1909, however, Lu Xun had grown rather disillusioned with the hope that literature could change China: his first effort at organizing a literary magazine with his "kindred" spirits had failed, with the latter withdrawing, with no apparent reason at all, at the last minute.

⁷ First established in the Sui Dynasty and abolished in 1905 after more than 1300 years of practice, the Civil Service Examination was a system through which civil servants were selected. Those who were deemed qualified were awarded different privileges and offices according to the levels of exams they passed. This was the official, accepted way to fame and fortune. Lu Xun's deviance from this path was a great blow to his mother, and attracted even more contemptuous looks from his townspeople. See "Preface to *Call to Arms*," in CW 1, 415.

When the Qing Dynasty was overthrown in 1911, Lu Xun was back in his hometown heading a high school, and witnessed the nominal change of hands in the local government that left the bases of oppression untouched. In 1912 he left his hometown and became an official in the newly established Education Bureau of the Republic of China in Beijing, but under the rule of Yuan Shikai⁸ and, after his death, the dissenting warlords, Lu Xun confined his intellectual pursuits to the most innocuous: he formed the habit of copying from tombstones so as to avoid the government's persecution of intellectuals in potentially dissident activities. It was not until 1918, upon the persistent urging of his friend Qian Xuantong, who had been an editor for the revolutionary magazine *New Youth* since its launching by Chen Duxiu⁹ in 1915, that Lu Xun finally started writing short stories. He became the most powerful voice in the May Fourth Movement, which denounced a weak, ignorant, and backward China. In March, 1926 (much as May Day of 1929 was to Brecht), Lu Xun saw the government massacre unarmed demonstrators, and realized that a literary battle was not possible in the face of such brutality; the real fight was an ideological and political one. In 1927 Lu Xun settled down in Shanghai and started studying Marxism. For the last ten years of his life, as we have mentioned, he wrote political essays in support of the Communist movement in China.

In his collected works published by People's Literature Publishing House (Renmin wenxu chubanshe) in 1981, Lu Xun's creative works (short stories, prose essays, reminiscences, and poems) fill fewer than two volumes, whereas his *zawen* (essays)

⁸ Yuan Shikai was a general in charge of the Manchu armies, who became the President of the Republic of China shortly after its establishment, replacing Sun Yat-sen. He restored the monarchy and proclaimed himself emperor briefly in 1916, shortly before his death. See the appendix for more on Yuan Shikai and the history of the Republic.

⁹ Chen Duxiu (with Li Dazhao) co-founded the Chinese Communist Party in 1921.

occupy more than six volumes. As the Chinese term *zawen* (literally, “miscellaneous writing”) indicates, Lu Xun’s *zawen* include many forms of writing (essays, comments, letters, prefaces, reminiscences, etc.), and address a wide variety of issues (social, political, literary, and ideological). Collectively, they serve as a journal of Lu Xun’s life: his thoughts on what he saw, heard, did, or read. However, because of the *zawen*’s immediate dependence on current affairs, some of these writings no longer hold the same kind of relevance for our time as they did when he wrote them; as Leo Ou-fan Lee points out, it is to the more metaphorical passages and the symbolic layers that modern readers are still irresistibly drawn.¹⁰ Lu Xun certainly knew that. What he knew better and cared more about, however, was the fact that in the chaotic and senseless time in which he lived, beautiful words amounted to nothing next to the deafening sounds of guns and cannons. In a speech delivered at the Whampoa Military Academy just four days before the fateful events of April 12, 1927, when Chiang Kai-shek broke the Nationalist-Communist alliance and massacred his Communist allies in Shanghai, Lu Xun first broached the subject of the relationship between literature and politics.

Entitled “Literature in the Revolutionary Era”, this speech begins with an emphatic denial of literature’s effectiveness in great revolutions. “I think,” Lu Xun says,

Literature, literature—this is chanted by the most useless, the least powerful people. Those with real power do not open their mouths, but kill. The oppressed speak a few sentences, write a few words, and risk being killed; even if they are lucky enough to not get killed, and can continue shouting and complaining about their misery and injustice, they are nevertheless practically impotent, while those in power continue their oppression, abuse, and killing: what good does such literature do for people?¹¹

Not only is literature useless in a revolutionary setting, but writing for the sake of revolution is against its nature, since “good literary and artistic works have always been

¹⁰ *Voices from the Iron House*, 119.

¹¹ CW 3, 417.

composed without being ordered to, without concern for practical interests; it is a natural flow from the heart. If you hand out a topic so as to have an article, then such practice is no different from the eight-legged essays¹²: worthless as literature and without the possibility of moving people.”¹³ Having pointed out the innate incompatibility between literature and great revolution, Lu Xun goes on to specify three phases of literature in a revolutionary era: “roaring literature” before the revolution, to express the pent-up anger and foreshadow storms; no literature during the revolution (no time for literature); and either eulogic (for the victors) or mourning (for the defeated) literature afterwards. However, not only does China not have any of the specified literatures, it also does not “not” have literature: the only prevalent literature is still “old literature,” which neither praises the new nor mourns the old, neither complains about bitterness nor cries over injustice. Such a lethargic condition prompts Lu Xun to conclude his speech to the military cadres by urging them to stop dreaming about literature and start appreciating the cannons: the sound of cannons is much more beautiful than the sound of literature.¹⁴ One can have literature, or revolution, but not at the same time.

In an essay published on October 21, 1927, called “Revolutionary Literature,” Lu Xun re-accommodated literature within revolution, but emphasized that the writer must first be a true revolutionary, and called the works of such a writer “revolutionary literature.”¹⁵ By December of the same year, in a speech to university students in Shanghai entitled “The Wrong Path of Literature, Arts, and Politics,” Lu Xun started to

¹² An eight-legged essay was a formulaic essay style used in the Civil Service Examination in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The finished essay had to consist of eight parts, and develop itself around a given topic chosen from the Four Books and Five Classics.

¹³ CW 3, 418.

¹⁴ Ibid, 419-23.

¹⁵ Ibid, 544.

talk about the effect of literature on dissent: literature, in contrast to politics, which aims to maintain the stability of an existing system, “propels social progress by splitting society apart—for it is thus that society progresses.”¹⁶ In early 1928, in yet another article entitled “Literature, Arts, and Revolution,” Lu Xun formally conceded to the slogan that “all literature is propaganda,” although adding a footnote that not all propaganda is literature.¹⁷ By the spring of 1930, according to Lu Xun’s famous disciple Feng Xuefeng¹⁸ (who exerted such a powerful influence on Lu Xun in the last seven years of his life that the writer even allowed Feng to write in his stead a long essay proposing an anti-Japanese united front¹⁹), Lu Xun had completed his transformation from a “left-wing petty bourgeois” to a “true Communist.”²⁰ At that time, he published the famous essay called “‘Hard Translation’ and ‘the Class Nature of Literature.’” In this essay, Lu Xun avers for the first time that in a class society, all writers and literature acquire a class nature, and the dearth of true “revolutionary literature” in China results not from “using literature and art as weapons for class struggle,” but from “using class struggle as weapons for literature and art.”²¹ In later essays he further denounced the “third category writers” who placed themselves beyond politics.²² Thus, Lu Xun completed his evolution

¹⁶ CW 7, 114.

¹⁷ CW 4, 84.

¹⁸ Feng Xuefeng was a Communist who became Lu Xun’s devoted friend at the end of 1928. Stubborn in his Marxist views but full of vigor and energy for concrete action, Feng played a major role in transforming Lu Xun into a virtual Communist. Starting from 1929, Lu Xun’s essays acquired a decidedly Communist vocabulary.

¹⁹ The essay is entitled “An Answer to Xu Maoyong and on the Question of An Anti-Japanese United Front.” It was written in August, 1936, when Lu Xun had been suffering from acute attacks of tuberculosis for over three months and almost died from it. He reportedly told Feng his opinions on the matter, Feng wrote the essay, and Lu Xun revised it.

²⁰ Feng Xuefeng, *Remembering Lu Xun* (*Feng Xuefeng yi Lu Xun*), 17, 21.

²¹ CW 4, 204, 207.

²² “On the ‘Third Category Writers’” (“Lun ‘disanzhong ren’”), and “On the ‘Third Category Writers,’ Again” (“Youlun ‘disanzhong’ ren”), in CW 4, 438-42, 531-5. The term “third category” writers refer to those who consider themselves neither right-wing or left-wing, but declare that they write simply for the sake of art.

from a literature-outside-of-revolutionist to a literature-must-be-for-revolutionist. What one writes must have an impact on reality, right away; moreover, writing is to serve revolutionary purposes and therefore must be guided by the needs of the revolution. Lu Xun's "revolutionary literature" has moved far away from "good literary and artistic works[, which] have always been composed without being ordered to, without concern for practical interests;" it has ceased to be "a natural flow from the heart." Hence, short stories, novels, and prose poems were no longer possible for the revolutionary Lu Xun: only *zawen* remained.

Forward-looking Memory:

Dawn Flowers Picked at Dusk (Zhaohua xishi)

Written entirely in the course of 1926, *Dawn Flowers Picked at Dusk* includes ten short reminiscences of Lu Xun's childhood, youth, and young adulthood, before he stepped into the literary circle in Beijing in 1912. Since the publication of his first story "Diary of a Madman" (*Kuangren riji*) in 1918, Lu Xun had been steadily building up a solid name for himself as a member of the vanguard of the New Culture Movement,²³ and by the time he published his second collection of short stories, *Wandering (Panghuang)*, 1926), he had already gathered a wide following among young literary aspirants, as well as a formidable reputation among his peers. In August, 1926, however, Lu Xun accepted a teaching post in the newly established Xiamen University in southern China, and

²³ Chen Duxiu's magazine *New Youth* signaled the start of the New Culture Movement in 1915. Its motto was "science and democracy;" it advocated new literature (literature written in the vernacular) and protested against the outdatedness of old literature (literature written in classical Chinese). The magazine also introduced socialism and Marxism, and attacked feudalism.

quietly left the country's cultural center, Beijing. This departure was the culmination of the crises within which Lu Xun had been embroiled since the beginning of the year, which would remain unresolved until the end of the year.

In the fall of 1924, the students at Beijing Women's Normal University petitioned to have their corrupt headmaster Yang Yinyu removed, only to suffer at the hands of Yang, who was well-connected within the power circle. As a lecturer at the university who sympathized with the students' protest, Lu Xun became the target of numerous attacks on the part of Yang's supporters, and in August, 1925, he was fired from his official post in the Education Bureau. Although Lu Xun, having filed a complaint against the bureau chief, won his case and was restored to his post, he continued to suffer verbal abuse from his literary enemies who, in Lu Xun's own metaphor, kept a distance amongst themselves like porcupines, but crowded into those without needles just to hurt them.²⁴ The more steeped Lu Xun was in the literary circle, the more clearly he saw the abuse of righteousness and justice, the rampage of rumors and "public opinions," the insidiousness of words, and the hypocrisy of the so-called "gentleman" (shenshi), so that "those weaklings who are without a knife or a pen cannot even breathe."²⁵ Moreover, his hard work and self-sacrifice was not only unappreciated, but sometimes even taken advantage of.²⁶

An even more direct cause of Lu Xun's departure was the March Eighteenth Massacre in 1926. March eighteenth was inscribed as "the darkest day since the founding

²⁴ "One Analogy" (Yidian biyu), CW 3, 218-9.

²⁵ "I still cannot Stop" (Wo hai buneng daizhu), CW 3, 244.

²⁶ In a letter to Xu Guangping (later his common-law wife), Lu Xun complained bitterly: "These years I often wanted to do something for others, so when I was in Beijing I worked without consideration for my life: I forgot to eat, slept less, took medicines so I could edit, proofread, write. Who knew that all those efforts yielded bitter fruits! Some used me as an advertisement to promote themselves, that is clear; but even *Mangyuan* started a fight from within when I left." (*Mangyuan* was a periodical that Lu Xun helped to launch.) CW 11, 176. See also another letter in CW 11, 195.

of the Republic of China” by Lu Xun.²⁷ On that day, 47 people were killed, and more than 150 people were wounded, in a peaceful demonstration protesting against Japan’s infringement on Chinese sovereignty.²⁸ As the monstrosity of the atrocity sank in, Lu Xun’s reaction to this massacre went from belligerent declaration of war, to impetuous denunciation, to speechless mourning and pregnant silence. “The real bullets spilt the blood of youth. Blood cannot be masked by lies written in ink, nor can it be appeased by elegies written in ink; it will not be subjugated by tyranny, because it can no longer be lied to, or killed again,” Lu Xun wrote on the day of the massacre.²⁹ A week later he was outraged by government apologists who called the demonstrators a “conspiring rabble” aiming to overthrow the government by the force of “one wooden stick, two handguns, and three bottles of kerosene,” who therefore “voluntarily went to their execution yard.”³⁰ Two weeks later, in the famous essay “In Memory of Liu Hezhen” (Jinian Liu Hezhen jun), Lu Xun had sunk into a state “beyond indignation.” “I shall savor the dark desolation of this inhuman world, to which I present my uttermost grief, so that they might relish my agony: this shall be the poor offering for the shrine of the dead, from one who will die later.” “Silence, silence! Either burst out of it, or perish with it.”³¹ Two month later, when the appointment letter came from Xiamen University, Lu Xun signed it

²⁷ “Flowerless Rose 2” (Wuhua de qiangwei zhier), CW 3, 264.

²⁸ In March, 1926, the northern warlords and the Nationalist army fought against each other. When the warlords’ army, backed by Japan, showed signs that they would be defeated, Japan dispatched two warships in assistance of their protégé, and fired upon the Nationalist army. Japan further demanded that the Nationalist government stop all military action and remove national defense; otherwise there would be war. On March 18, the people of Beijing organized a demonstration to urge the Nationalist government to denounce Japan’s infringement on Chinese sovereignty; the head of the government Duan Qirui ordered his troops to fire on the demonstrating people.

²⁹ CW 3, 264.

³⁰ “Execution Yard” (sidi), and “The Pitiably and the Pitiful” (Kecan yu kexiao), in CW 3, 267, 270.

³¹ CW 3, 273, 275.

without hesitation. He could no longer live in the “execution yard,” but had to break out to seek a new life.

It was in such a bleak atmosphere of persecution, when words were used to divide and injure, instead of unite and inspire, and when righteous protests were ruthlessly silenced by the “reason” of bullets, that Lu Xun started to reconsider his career as a fiction writer. When it seemed impossible to make sense of the present situation without, Lu Xun turned within, to his own past, and wrote the reminiscences later collected in *Dawn*. To make sense of his own past was a way to take back control, which had been lost in the outside world; and to make peace with his past was to regain hope for the future, since the past, once as hopeless as the present now seemed, could already be reconciled in the present. According to Ban Wang’s analysis of the dialectical relationship between history and memory, while “modern history starts as a critique of tradition and memory,” memory functions as “the critique of critique, as when nostalgia expresses not the love of the past, but a vital vision against a reigning historical narrative in the present. It is not a matter of choosing one over the other. Rather, the point is to put the two components of temporality together and set them in dynamic motion.”³² In Lu Xun’s case, against all the traumatic experiences of his present life, his resorting to the past can be viewed as a much needed historical exile, where old events were re-experienced, put into perspective, and offered closure. It was certainly not out of love for the past (although it was not devoid of it either) that Lu Xun turned to his childhood; in fact, most of the reminiscences record unpleasant or even painful memories. But as Wang suggests in his analysis, this “backward-looking” process enabled the writer to distance himself from the “reigning historical narrative in the present,” the traumatic experiences

³² *Illuminations from the Past*, 5.

with which he could not yet negotiate peace. By re-examining past, but likewise traumatic, experiences, he was then able to forgive and forget (in addition to criticizing and denouncing); by recollecting good memories, he replenished his courage and faith, and relit his hope for the future. In this sense, the “vital vision” is that the present, despite its grueling and visceral immediacy, is already subject to historical reassessment: despair is for the short-sighted.

The stories in *Dawn* follow a roughly chronological order, tracing Lu Xun’s childhood at home, his school days, the decline of his family, his study away from home (in Nanjing and then Japan), ending in 1911 when he was back at home from Japan again. It is a chronicle of how Lu Xun developed into the man he was, while searching for the man he wanted to be. At 45, in 1926, Lu Xun looks back at the first thirty years of his life, and describes to us a society that is plagued and disfigured by feudal beliefs and practices, superstition, and hypocrisy. Remembering the first picture book “24 Illustrations of Filial Piety”(Ershisi xiao tu) he ever owned, Lu Xun tells a few stories from the book that scared and worried him as a child. One story describes a grown man who, in order to satisfy his step-mother’s wish to have fish in the thick of winter, strips himself naked so as to throw himself into the ice-covered lake to catch fish, when two fish jump out of the water and land on his lap. The young Lu Xun immediately imagines himself in the role of the filial son, but he is convinced that in his hometown, where winter is rather warm, the ice would be too thin to hold his weight long enough for fish to swim over and jump into his lap—and then he would indeed fall into the water and perhaps lose his life! In another story a destitute man plans to bury his young son alive in order to continue feeding his mother, only to be rewarded with a box of gold when he is digging the grave for his son.

Since Lu Xun's own family was declining swiftly into poverty, he started to fear hearing discussions of their financial straits, and even avoided seeing his grandmother, whom Lu Xun thenceforth regarded surreptitiously as his potential murderer. However, the true insidiousness of such stories does not stop at constituting imaginary harm to Lu Xun's young mind; more alarmingly, as the adult Lu Xun recollects, these bizarre notions of filial piety were spread and acknowledged as universal truth, since "it seemed that everyone knew [them]; even an illiterate person like A Chang, after a glance at the pictures, could tell a long story about them."³³

While the young must unconditionally surrender to the authority of the old, the old can do what they wish with the young. In this feudal practice, even Lu Xun's otherwise moderate father was no exception. In a story called "The Fair of the Five Fierce Gods" (Wuchang hui), Lu Xun relates that, just when his family was excitedly preparing to go to a fair early in the morning, his father, in a whimsical mood, asked him to recite a long passage from a history book, of which the young boy understood "not even a word." In a hypnotic trance he finally finished reciting, but this process also sucked all the fun out of the event. "Even now when I think of it, I'm still stupefied as to why my father wanted me to recite the book just then," Lu Xun concludes.³⁴ The complete lack of reason in these feudal practices scarred the young mind and made it question the validity of all accepted conventions later on.

There are two other weapons that contributed to the murder of young Lu Xun's innocence: superstition (which actually killed his father) and hypocrisy. In "Father's Illness" (Fuqin de bing), Lu Xun recollects the bizarre diagnoses and prescriptions of two

³³ CW 2, 253-6.

³⁴ Ibid, 261-5.

“traditional medicine” doctors who, charging exorbitant fees, saw his father to the grave without relieving the sick man of any pain. To cure edema the doctor uses a pill made from the skin of a broken drum, so that when swallowed, the pill can, by its own example, persuade the swollen skin to break as well. When running out of fresh ideas to “cure by example,” the doctors either disappear or suggest that the disease might in fact be the manifestation of an old debt from a previous life.³⁵ In “Miscellaneous Recollections” (Suoji), Lu Xun presents us with the character of Mrs. Yan (Yan taitai), whose double-dealings reveal to him yet another grotesque aspect of his hometown. Famed for her “tolerance” of childish behavior (although she is very strict with her own children), Mrs. Yan attracted many children to her place, where she encouraged and applauded the children’s many reckless games, but pretended to scold them when another adult appeared on the scene. When Lu Xun complained to her about not having money to buy what he wanted, she answered that since his mother’s money was his anyway, he should just take what he wanted from her. Later, however, Lu Xun discovered that Yan had spread the rumor that he stole from his mother.

Although the whole body of Lu Xun’s writing exposes and criticizes the sickness of a dying Chinese society, it is not the main purpose of these reminiscences. In 1926, Lu Xun had reached the main crossroad of his life, and had to decide which way he wanted to take in the future. During the self-imposed exile in Xiamen, he outlined his options to Xu Guangping in a letter:

[I] often hesitate about which road I must take from now on: 1. Give up hope, save some money, do nothing in the future, and live a bitter life on my own; 2. Do some good for people without any consideration for myself, even if it means hunger and abuse; 3. Do some more good, but if even my “comrades” should turn to attack me

³⁵ Ibid, 284-7.

from the back, I will then dare do anything to survive and avenge myself—but I don't want to lose my friends.³⁶

The second road, taken in the few years before he left Beijing, proved to be too much for Lu Xun, who was a human being after all. The first road was in direct contradiction to Lu Xun's nature. In a letter written two weeks later, Lu Xun expressed his determination to try the third road, to "do some more good" again. This letter was written in late November, just after Lu Xun finished writing the last reminiscence in his collection. The experience of writing the history of his own life had made him realize that through all the vicissitudes of his life, his choice had always been one of survival and hope, and he was now ready to fight for the same for all.

The first two stories in *Dawn* were written in February and March of 1926, when Lu Xun was still living in his Beijing apartment and had been thus far engaged in a bitter verbal war against his literary enemies, headed by Chen Yuan.³⁷ These two stories, entitled "Dog, Cat, and Mouse" (Gou, mao, shu) and "A Chang and the 'Classic of Mountains and Seas'" (A Chang he shanhaijing), address the idea of revenge that must have been on his mind constantly at the time. After the publication of "Rabbits and Cats" (Tu he mao) in 1922, Lu Xun had gained notoriety as a cat-hater, for in that story the narrator (undifferentiated from the author) planned to poison the black cat who had murdered some baby rabbits.³⁸ In "Dog, Cat, and Mouse," Lu Xun admits his hatred of cats, and reveals that this deep resentment is embedded in a childhood memory: when he was told by his nanny A Chang, that his beloved mole had been eaten by a cat, "When I

³⁶ CW 11, 200.

³⁷ This verbal war broke out between the supporters and denouncers of the student movement (mentioned above) of the Women's Normal University. Chen Yuan attacked Lu Xun for inciting the student "rebellion" against the authorities and started a long, bitter exchange that lasted for over a year.

³⁸ CW 1, 553.

lost what I loved, and felt the emptiness thereof, I wanted to fill the void with the evil intention of revenge!”³⁹ He then systematically carries out his plans and strategies of exterminating all cats, until one day he finds out that the mole did not die because of a cat, but was trampled by A Chang when it tried to crawl up her leg. Although otherwise tolerant of her gossiping and complying with her petty rituals, the young Lu Xun scolds her severely, and crowns his revenge on her by calling her by her servant name “A Chang,” instead of the respectful “Chang mama” (Mother Chang). However, it is the same A Chang who, returning home from her vacation, brings back *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the book which becomes Lu Xun’s “first and most precious book.” “From then on, the hatred of A Chang for murdering the mole disappeared completely.”⁴⁰ For Lu Xun in 1926, the significance of these two incidents of mis-directed hatred and revenge was to teach him the virtue of forbearance. Lu Xun notes that he has now become quite tolerant of cats, and wishes that the soul of A Chang will be sheltered in the bosom of mother earth for eternity. It was only after looking at his present situation from a historical perspective (what if he has been too vindictive again in his literary strife? He was too hasty in his judgment of cats and A Chang before!) that Lu Xun was able to forego the idea of personal vengeance, but instead have faith in the innocence and kindness in people.

After the March Eighteenth Massacre, however, Lu Xun was once again embroiled in a verbal battle with those who defended the government and denigrated the murdered demonstrators as rabble who had asked for their own death. As mentioned above, Lu Xun described himself as already “beyond indignation.” Horror-stricken by the

³⁹ CW 2, 238.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 248.

fact that the blood of nearly fifty young demonstrators had been spilt, by their own government, when they were engaged in the act of defending the honor of their country, Lu Xun felt powerless against an inhuman society that bred only senseless brutality and violence towards the weak and the defenseless. If justice is not to be enjoyed by all in life, then perhaps death would amend this injustice? In “24 Illustrations of Filial Piety,” Lu Xun had already expressed his preference for the nether world (yinjian);⁴¹ in June, 1926, he wrote another reminiscence, “Wuchang” (Messenger of Death), in praise of the title character. In Lu Xun’s hometown, during the annual festival to welcome the gods, Wuchang is one of the characters presented on stage, and although he is a messenger of death, Wuchang is the “most loved” by many who attend the performances. “Not only is he lively and humorous, but he is dressed all in white, and stands out from the rest, wearing red and green like a crane among a crowd of chickens. As soon as we see the high hat made from white paper and have a glimpse of the wretched plantain-leaf fan in his hand, everybody becomes at once a little tense and happy.”⁴² Lu Xun then explains why Wuchang is not at all feared by the people:

When you think of the pleasures of life, you become reluctant to leave it; but when you think of its miseries, then Wuchang is not necessarily an evil guest. Whether you are of high or low class, rich or poor, when the time comes we all “go to Yama empty-handed.” There injustices are redressed, and crimes are punished.... Wuchang holds a great abacus in his hand, and will not give it to you easily because of your pompous airs.⁴³

⁴¹ In this piece, Lu Xun writes: the nether world is “ruled by ghosts, and abides by truth. It is useless to offer banquets or beg on your knees; [the rich] have no more way out. In between heaven and earth in China, it is extremely hard to be, whether alive or dead. But there is after all a better place than this world: where there are no “gentlemen,” nor “gossips.” CW 2, 252-3.

⁴² CW 2, 270.

⁴³ Ibid, 270. In Chinese, the abacus equals the scale; to have an abacus means to know exactly what is going on.

For the majority of people, whose lives are synonymous with misery and injustice, death is nothing to be afraid of. On the contrary, it is in death that one can hope to finally hear the voice of justice, which is heralded by the appearance of Wuchang.

Lu Xun dwells, for a moment, on the prospect of equality for all in death. Wuchang's resolution is to "let no one slip, even if you hide behind a bronze wall or a steel wall, even if you are the blood relative of the emperor!"⁴⁴ Power, money, lies, deception—all are useless when one is in the clutches of death. But this is not all, and Lu Xun swiftly retreats from this somewhat macabre idea, and bring us back to seek justice in life. He proceeds to differentiate the white-robed Wuchang, who appears on stage and should be properly addressed as "huo Wuchang" (living Wuchang), from the black-clothed "si Wuchang" (dead Wuchang), who is "loved by no one."⁴⁵ Whereas stories and legends about huo Wuchang are told and performed in the festivities to welcome the gods, si Wuchang is merely a wooden statue to people. Huo Wuchang is said to have a wife and a child; all three of them appear in the festival as comical characters who are teased affectionately by people. Huo Wuchang is popular among the villagers because he is "straightforward, loves to talk, and has human emotions." Some even go so far as to say that huo Wuchang is really a human being, and only officiates for death in dream.⁴⁶ In this way Lu Xun reminds us that justice is possible in life after all: the love of huo Wuchang is already in the hearts of poor people; it only needs to be given its proper name and translated into action.

In a series of stories about Lu Xun's various departures (from Shaoxing to Nanjing, from Nanjing to Japan, from Japan to Shaoxing, and from Shaoxing to Beijing),

⁴⁴ Ibid, 272.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 268.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 273.

the writer depicts a China that has become an unlivable place, and comes to the conclusion that only the removal of unlivable conditions from China can put an end to these endless departures. In “Miscellaneous Recollection” (Suoji), Lu Xun tells of his departure from his hometown Shaoxing to attend a western-style school in Nanjing, where he is first introduced to Western academic subjects; when he transfers to another school, he is further exposed to modern Western thoughts and ideas; when that learning period comes to an end, he applies for and wins for himself a chance to study in Japan. In all these places Lu Xun leaves behind, the society is afflicted with an incurable disease, be it hypocrisy, feudalism, or superstition; Lu Xun moves from one place to the next unhesitatingly, in search of health and fresh air. However, even when he is in Japan, he is somehow still surrounded by shameful reminders of his backward country. In “Professor Fujino” (Tengye xiansheng), Lu Xun decides to leave Tokyo for Sendai, because he is disgusted by the hypocrisy and superficiality of his compatriots, who hide their queues⁴⁷ under their hats and occupy themselves by learning modern dance. In Sendai, despite the kindness of some of his classmates and professor Fujino,⁴⁸ Lu Xun is nevertheless subjected to racial discrimination⁴⁹ and, after the humiliating episode of the war slides,⁵⁰ makes up his mind to leave yet again.

⁴⁷ The queue—a Manchu practice forced upon the Chinese when the Manchu Qing dynasty was established—was regarded as a symbol of shame for the Chinese under Manchu rule. In the beginning of the twentieth century many intellectuals, especially those who studied abroad, cut off their queues and became involved in activities that aimed to overthrow the corrupt Qing government. Lu Xun cut off his queue shortly after he arrived in Tokyo (in 1902). Here Lu Xun parodies those students who wish to look and act modern, but in fact still remain slaves who hold onto their queues so that they may show them as a symbol of their loyalty to their alien masters when they return to China.

⁴⁸ As the only Chinese student in the medical school, Lu Xun was exempted from paying tuition; some solicitous staff members took care of his room and board; when he was accused of cheating in an exam, some of his Japanese classmates vouched for his integrity and helped settle the rumors. More importantly, his professor Fujino was so kind as to correct his lecture notes every week, for fear that the foreign student could not understand Japanese well enough to take proper notes.

⁴⁹ When he passed a difficult exam, which many of his Japanese classmates failed, Lu Xun was immediately accused of cheating simply on the grounds that he was Chinese.

In the last story in the collection, “Fan Ainong,” the deadliness of Chinese society is brought out in an extreme way through the tragic story of Fan Ainong. Originally Lu Xun’s fellow student in Japan, Fan Ainong made an impression on Lu Xun through his fiery temper and strange bellicosity towards Lu Xun.⁵¹ However, when they meet again in their hometown, Shaoxing, Lu Xun notices that China had already eroded the fighting spirit of this young man. Not yet thirty years old, Ainong already has a head of graying hair. Suffering from endless contempt and persecution from his townspeople, who look upon his “new learning” as heresy, he is driven to work at a petty post in the country and only comes into town to temporarily get away from the stuffiness of the countryside. After the liberation of Shaoxing,⁵² Lu Xun is able to get Fan Ainong a job in the city, where they work in the same school. In this brief respite Lu Xun notices that although Ainong was still wearing the same shabby robe, he “did not drink much anymore, and had very little time to chit-chat. He worked for the school, taught classes, and was really very diligent.”⁵³

Soon, however, the school is forced to close, and as Lu Xun gets ready to leave for a teaching post in Nanjing, Ainong again becomes what he was before the revolution. “The situation here is...unlivable. Go...”, are his last words to Lu Xun. In the ellipsis Lu Xun acknowledges the tacit agreement that when he is settled in his new environment, he

⁵⁰ In “Preface to *Call to Arms*,” Lu Xun records the famous account that determined his future career as a writer: in a slide that showed Japanese soldiers executing a Chinese spy (for the Russians during the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War), the execution yard was filled by Chinese spectators who, just as the Japanese students shouted their approval at their country’s victory, shouted their appreciation of the bloody scene as if inebriated. Lu Xun was struck by such numbness of the living dead, and made up his mind to “change minds rather than cure bodies.”

⁵¹ Later, Lu Xun found out in a conversation that he had left the impression that he disapproved of Fan Ainong without knowing anything about him; this misunderstanding was then cleared up. CW 2, 312-3.

⁵² Shortly after the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, Shaoxing was liberated as well, although no substantial changes occurred.

⁵³ Ibid, 314.

will send for Ainong so that they can explore a new life together. Meanwhile, Ainong “could not find anything to do, because everybody despised him. He was destitute, but still drank when friends treated him. He seldom interacted with people, and saw only a few relatively young people that he came to know later, but even they were reluctant to hear his complaints, and thought that it was more fun to tell jokes.” Ainong was often heard saying, to reassure himself: “Perhaps tomorrow a telegram will come, and when I open it, it will be an invitation from Lu Xun.”⁵⁴ Sadly, Lu Xun never sent such a telegram, and not long afterwards, Ainong drowned during a boat outing. In the nagging suspicion that Ainong had taken his own life,⁵⁵ Lu Xun realizes that the relentless persecution of Chinese society had finally sent Ainong to his death. In so many ways similar to Ainong,⁵⁶ Lu Xun knew that he would have suffered a similar ending, had he stayed or capitulated to the senseless injustice of the old society.

In the crisis-ridden year of 1926, Lu Xun turned to his memory in order to see the present more clearly, using the historical distance to gain perspective. The reminiscences in *Dawn* were a sanctuary where he turned the psychoanalytical lens on himself, rationalized his departures as a way of surviving and keeping hope alive, and came to the decision that he could no longer escape the horror that surrounded him everywhere, but must plunge into a real—political—fight to change the dehumanizing reality in China. During his sojourn in Xiamen, Lu Xun followed the progress of the Northern

⁵⁴ Ibid, 315-7.

⁵⁵ Lu Xun points out the fact that Ainong was a very good swimmer and refuses to believe that he could have drowned. Ibid, 316.

⁵⁶ They are from the same hometown; they both studied in Japan; they both detested the old society, and believed in the revolution and education's role in it, etc. In a poem written in memory of Ainong, Lu Xun exclaims, “when my old friend dissipates like a cloud, I myself am no better than light dust.” Ibid, 316.

Expedition⁵⁷ closely, and reported the successes of the alliance troops enthusiastically in his letters to Xu Guangping.⁵⁸ When he emerged from southern China in 1927, Lu Xun became a political fighter in support of the Communist Party. He settled down in Shanghai, wrote about the political and social strife of a China caught in a bitter civil war, and never left again.⁵⁹

Incriminating China:

Women, The Crowd, and Intellectuals

1. Women as China

After the first burst of creative energy (1907-8) in Japan, where Lu Xun wrote five essays dealing with subjects such as his belief in evolution, science, individualism and idealism,⁶⁰ he did not pick up his pen to “meddle” with social and political changes again until the publication of his first short story written in the vernacular, “Diary of a

⁵⁷ In July, 1926, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, the Northern Expedition began. The alliance troops (Nationalist and Communist) aimed to destroy the rampaging warlords (backed by various imperialist countries) on their campaign from the south (starting in Guangzhou) to the north.

⁵⁸ See his letters to Xu on September 14, October 15, and November 25, 1926. CW 11, 117, 152, 216.

⁵⁹ Despite political dangers and deteriorating health, Lu Xun refused to leave Shanghai. According to Feng Xuefeng, who was with Lu Xun in the last few months of his life, Lu Xun rejected the idea of leaving his “fighting post” in Shanghai after much deliberation, saying: “to live on the sickbed is to be bored to death. ...It’s better to work and live a few less years, than to not work and live a few more years. Because the result is the same, a few years will be wasted.” See *Remembering Lu Xun*, 93. See also Agnes Smedley’s account in *Reverberation from Overseas: International Friends Remember Lu Xun* (Hawaii huixiang: guoji youren yi Lu Xun), 17.

⁶⁰ A brief glance at the titles of these essays gives us a good idea of Lu Xun’s interests at the time: “A History of Man” (ren zhi lishi 1907), “The Lessons of the History of Science” (kexue shi jiao pian 1907), “On the Aberrant Development of Culture” (wenhua pianzhi lun 1907), “On the Power of Mara Poetry” (moluo shili shuo 1907), and “On Destroying the Voices of Evil” (po esheng lun 1908). For more detailed discussions of these essays, see an excellent lecture by Qian Liqun in *Encountering Lu Xun* (yu Lu Xun xiangyu), 60-93. Ban Wang incorporates an analysis of “On the Power of Mara Poetry” into his discussion of the sublime and the demonic in *The Sublime Figure of History*, 61-70. In *Close-reading Lu Xun* (Lu Xun jingdu), Hao Yuanbao offers an interpretation of “The Lessons of the History of Science” and “On Destroying the Voices of Evil”, 5-25.

Madman,” in 1918.⁶¹ Although not much historical material is available for us to study this period of silence in Lu Xun’s life, the renowned Lu Xun scholar Qian Liqun believes that the “real” Lu Xun was born from this period. “When I am silent, I feel complete; when I am about to speak, I feel empty at once,” Lu Xun prefaces his philosophical essay collection *Wild Grass* with these words.⁶² Qian points out that it was during these ten years that Lu Xun completed his transition from “uni-directionally criticizing the outside world as the other, to a double, multiple criticism of the self and the other, within and without.” After debunking the myth of culture in his Japan years, he continued to demystify the individual, which he had worshipped earlier, and when he emerged from his long quiescence, “he really returned from an illusive heavenly kingdom to reality, to everyday life, and became an ordinary member of a real land that is China.”⁶³

In this context, it is particularly interesting to look at the subjects of his writing when he found his voice again in 1918. In “Diary of a Madman,” Lu Xun cries out against the “man-eating” tradition of Chinese culture, and pleads to the willing listeners, “Save our children!” Three months after that, Lu Xun publishes an essay titled “My View on Constancy” (Wozhi jielie guan), in which he vehemently condemns the bizarre proposition that national dignity can be maintained as long as women practice constancy. Together, these two pieces of writing inaugurate Lu Xun’s lifelong championship of children and women. Since for Lu Xun, children are hope and therefore belong to the realm of a future which does not concern him much,⁶⁴ I will concentrate on Lu Xun’s

⁶¹ Lu Xun’s only literary creation during these ten years was a short story written in classical Chinese called “Remembering the Past” (huaijiu 1912), which he carelessly tossed away after completion. It was his younger brother Zhou Zuoren who saved this story and published it later.

⁶² *Encountering Lu Xun*, 94.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 98, 99.

⁶⁴ In the preface to *Call to Arms*, Lu Xun says, “as for hope, that is not something I can negate, because it is for the future, and I cannot persuade others of its nonexistence with the proof of my own conviction.” In

concern for the liberation of women, and argue that in Lu Xun's terminology, the oppressed woman is synonymous with a sick China, whose rejuvenation depends on and results from the liberation of the former.

Women, the most downtrodden and helpless class in Chinese society, are the last thing China would have wanted to identify herself with. However, in "My View on Constancy," Lu Xun reveals to us that it is precisely in such an equivalence that some of the absurd phenomena in China can be understood. At a time when China suffered a double oppression from imperialist countries and from her own warring and pillaging warlords, a slogan emerged, advocating a peculiar way to salvage the nation: "commending the constant" (biaozhang jielie). Lu Xun explains what is meant by the word "constancy": "When a woman loses her husband to death, she should continue to live by herself, or die as well; if she is raped, then she should kill herself; when all these women are commended for their constancy, then morals are upheld and the public appeased, and China is consequently saved."⁶⁵ In other words, the "logic" behind the slogan is predicated on equating women with China, which, of course, was not intended by the slogan-makers. After raising and answering a series of questions⁶⁶ that completely

"What Happens after Nora left," Lu Xun emphasizes that even if one has to fall back on dreams to escape the cruelty of the present, one must dream "present dreams." CW1, 419, 160. Elsewhere Lu Xun exclaims: "Those who adore the past, go back to the past! Those who want to renounce the world, get out of this world! Those who want to go to heaven, hurry up and leave! The souls that yearn to depart the body, depart now! Our present earth should be the dwelling of those who are obsessed with the present, with this earth." CW 3, 49.

⁶⁵ CW 1, 117.

⁶⁶ "How does inconstancy harm our country?" Lu Xun starts out, "Why must women shoulder the entire responsibility of saving our country?" "Is constancy a moral issue?" "Do polygamists have the right to commend constancy?" Lu Xun's analyses make it plain that not only is it ridiculous to attribute social and natural problems (warlords, thieves, floods, droughts, famines) to inconstancy, but also it is time for men, who occupy all the positions of power in Chinese society, to stop scapegoating women for their own incompetence. Constancy is by no means a moral issue, since it is only applied to women; in the case of rape, the idea of constancy is predicated on the evil intentions of a man. Indeed, the preaching of constancy is in direct proportion to the decline of the country: "Since a woman is a possession of a man, she must not then remarry after her husband's death, or be taken away by force while the husband still lives. However,

dissociate China's problems from women's constancy, however, Lu Xun suggests in the subsequent text that, just as women are forced by men to be "constant," China is forced by her conquerors to be subservient; and the degree to which men wallow in the helplessness of women is the degree to which China is enchained and enslaved by her domestic and foreign masters. To liberate China, therefore, we must first liberate her women: only when equality between men and women is achieved, can we hope to liberate ourselves as a nation. Therefore, for Lu Xun, to liberate women is to "discard hypocritical masks...; to eliminate fatuity and brutality, which are harmful to all...; to eradicate the meaningless sufferings of life," so that "all of humanity enjoys a happiness it deserves."⁶⁷

In a speech where Lu Xun talks about more concrete steps towards the liberation of women, he starts by discussing the issue of economic independence, which seems to apply only to women, but concludes by addressing the whole of society again.⁶⁸ In order to become their own masters, women must have money, and money can be obtained as long as the parents have a long memory and the children have a "rogue spirit."⁶⁹ However, women do not automatically stop being men's puppets once their economic independence is assured, because in Lu Xun's society, "not only do women often become men's puppets, but even between man and man, woman and woman, such relationships often form; men also often become women's puppets."⁷⁰ Once again, the boundary between women and the rest of society is intentionally blurred, and the initial discussion of

when the husband is a citizen of a conquered nation, he no longer has the strength to protect, nor the courage to protest; so ingeniously, he starts to commend his woman's suicide." CW 1, 117-24.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 125.

⁶⁸ "What Happens After Nora Left?" (Nuola zouhou zenyang), *ibid*, 158-64.

⁶⁹ As Lu Xun explains, if everyone remembers the miseries of his/her youth, s/he would not want to subject the young to the same experience; if, like a rogue, we petition for economic equality shamelessly and persistently, not taking no for an answer, then eventually we would be greeted with a "yes." *Ibid*, 162.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 163.

women's economic status evolves into an examination of the whole society. Indeed, throughout the rest of the essay (and, one might add, in the most important and most frequently quoted part) Lu Xun does not mention the word "women" again, but addresses now the "mass." Lamenting that the sacrifices of those who are eager for social transformation in China are invariably wasted on an apathetic crowd, Lu Xun makes the famous statement that "the mass—especially in China—are forever the audience of a theater," instead of the actors who put on the show. The only possible cure for such apathy is to not put on a show for the mass.

Pity, it is so hard to change China. Blood is shed even in moving a table, or refitting a stove; and even blood cannot guarantee the success of moving or refitting. If not for the flogging on the back by a gigantic whip, China would not move herself forward. I believe that this whip is coming sooner or later—whether this is a good or a bad thing is another matter. But from where this whip will issue, or how it will come forth, I cannot know the precise details.⁷¹

With this Lu Xun concludes his speech. Those who stand by idly while women like Nora struggle to gain their independence are no longer watching the successes or failures of women, but of an ailing China in desperate need of change.

This idea of "oppressed women as China" is carried out in many women characters in Lu Xun's fiction. In "Medicine" (Yao, 1919) for example, two old women meet on the Festival of the Dead at the graves of their respective sons, one dead from tuberculosis (an incurable disease then), the other from his revolutionary activities. Significantly, the two women's surnames are "Hua" and "Xia" which, when read together, mean literally "China."⁷² Both having suffered a long, miserable life only to lose their sons to senseless deaths, these women can only burn some paper money for their sons and cry a few bitter tears. After these brief rituals, Mother Hua "sat on the ground in

⁷¹ Ibid, 163-4.

⁷² Leo Lee makes this observation in *Voices from the Iron House*, 66.

oblivion, as if waiting for something, but couldn't say what she was waiting for," while Mother Xia "loitered around for a bit...sighed...hesitated a while longer, but finally shuffled away."⁷³ Neither of these women, old and feeble, ignorant of the world and the meaning of their sons' deaths, could or would do anything to change their lives. When Mother Xia sees the wreath of red and white flowers on her son's tomb, she immediately takes it as a manifestation of her son's soul which, having endured injustice in life, now returns to make it known to the world. The superstitious mother then appoints a crow (the only living thing within her sight, but unfortunately also the harbinger of ominous tidings) as her son's messenger: to prove to her that her guess is accurate, the son must direct the crow to fly to the crown of the tomb.⁷⁴ The crow, of course, does not budge. As the two old women move away from their sons' graves, not even able to retain an illusion of hope through the employment of superstition, the future of China, as the future of these two women symbolizes, does indeed look gloomy. The burden of powerlessness, ignorance, and superstition has proved to be so crushing that they even become resistant to any form of hope (even if engendered by superstition): when the crow, unaware of the sacred mandate it has been issued, stays as if glued to the bare branch on which it perches, Mother Hua feels relieved, as if a heavy load has been lifted from her shoulders.⁷⁵ However, before they could walk thirty paces away, the crow gave a piercing cry, "opened its wings, braced itself, and shot away like an arrow into the distant sky."⁷⁶ Having denied Mother China the last trace of illusory hope, the harbinger of ominous tidings departs, leaving "huaxia" startled, but perhaps not without food for thought.

⁷³ CW 1, 447-8.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 448.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 449.

The tragic and thought-provoking stories of two other female characters, Shansi Sao in “Tomorrow” (Mingtian) and Xianglin Sao in “Benediction” (Zhufu), highlight once again Lu Xun’s intent to portray these women characters as a caricature of old China. In his insightful analysis of these two characters, William Lyell observes that both women reveal “more about the society around [them] than about [themselves].”⁷⁷ In other words, Shansi Sao and Xianglin Sao serve merely as a mirror of society; their utter passivity not only renders them useless for social change because of their complete lack of self-agency, but also makes them into an ideal canvas upon which all the evils of society can be painted. Wang Xiaoming is correct in remarking that in “Benediction,” although Xianglin Sao is the ostensible “heroine” of the story, it is obvious to the attentive reader that Lu Xun is concerned much more with the thoughts of the narrator than with the poor woman.⁷⁸ In fact, even if one wanted to make a case for Lu Xun’s female characters as specifically “female,” one would necessarily be hampered by the paucity of evidence to support such a claim.

To start with, even though most of them are nameless and are referred to only by the names of their husbands (dead or alive),⁷⁹ this nameless state is not characteristic of women only; Lu Xun’s most famous characters, Ah Q and Kong Yiji, do not have real names either.⁸⁰ Moreover, even when women are referred to by name, their fate is not

⁷⁷ *Lu Hsün’s Vision of Reality*, 220, 222.

⁷⁸ *Life in the Inferno*, 101.

⁷⁹ Shansi Sao literally means “the wife of Shansi”. Xianglin Sao is “the wife of Xianglin”.

⁸⁰ In the prologue of “The True Story of Ah Q,” Lu Xun tells us that not only is Ah Q’s surname unknown to anyone, but it is also impossible to determine which character corresponds to the first name. The final rendition, “Q,” a letter from the English alphabet, at once alienates and accentuates Ah Q’s Chineseness: he is nobody and everybody. Lu Xun’s brother Zhou Zuoren also thinks that Q was used because it resembles a man’s head with a pigtail, a symbol of shame for Han Chinese who were ruled by the Manchu Qing court, who imposed their own hairstyle on the Han people. Kong Yiji’s last name, Kong, is known, but nobody bothered to find out his first name, and called him by two random characters found in a children’s calligraphy book.

only just as miserable as that of their nameless sisters, but also, and more importantly, it is as wretched as that of their male counterparts.⁸¹ Also, as the most downtrodden people in their society, Shansi Sao and Xianglin Sao are not only oppressed and abused by men, but are just as often and as cruelly abused by women, so that in the end, their suffering is no longer unique to them *as women*,⁸² as Lu Xun makes clear in his essay on Nora. Even their status as widows does not make them overly “womanly,” since their widowhood is conveniently overlooked and even erased whenever it stands in the way of meeting mundane yet real necessities.⁸³ Describing them as utterly ignorant (cuben), helpless, and passive, a blank piece of paper submerged in the dye jar of society, Lu Xun did not *present* these women as “women,” but created them to *represent* all the ills of Chinese society.

Perhaps, as Qian Liqun states, it is out of perversity that Lu Xun always insists on “marginality, rebelliousness, and heterogeneity.”⁸⁴ Precisely because women suffered the most and were the group upon which society heaped scorn and contempt in old China, he thought of and employed women as the most appropriate symbol for China. In this way, then, the reader is charged with the task of reading these women as China: their

⁸¹ See, for example, the story of Zijun and Juansheng in “Regret for the Past,” or Aigu and her “little beast” husband in “Divorce.”

⁸² Shansi Sao is cheated and manipulated by Wangjiu Ma (Mother Wangjiu), her older neighbor, and Xianglin Sao is used and teased by, among others, Si Shen (Aunt Lusi), Wei laopozi (Old Woman Wei), and Liu Ma (Mother Liu).

⁸³ Shansi Sao is coveted by Red Nose Gong, who thinks of her lewdly whenever he is drunk; Red Nose Gong’s drinking buddy Blue Skin Five takes advantage of her when he offers to hold her sick child for her: “he then reached out his arm, glided it between Shansi Sao’s breasts and the kid, and took the kid away.” CW 1, 452. Xianglin Sao is forced to remarry after her first husband’s death so that her in-laws can get money from the second husband. Her violent action protesting her second wedding is circulated among gossipers not as a proof of her constancy, but as an inroad for the more insidious question: Why did she obey in the end? It is also important to note that while Xianglin Sao died eventually of society’s rejection of her as a widow (she is prohibited from handling sacrificial items for fear that she will bring ill-luck and offend the ancestors), she was not subject to the same treatment when she “worked more diligently than a diligent man.” It is clear that in Lu Xun’s mind, widowhood is just another name for the weak, men and women alike.

⁸⁴ *Encountering Lu Xun*, 111.

oppression, suffering, namelessness, ignorance, passivity, helplessness, superstition...all these traits are reflected on the “audience” that gather around these women, hoping for a good show. Since, as mentioned above, the only cure is “to not give them a show,” Lu Xun offers them a mirror in which the audience sees only itself. Of course, this way of reading Lu Xun’s women characters would seem to corroborate the thesis that this great champion of women’s issue in fact deprives women of their own voices through his “over-protection.” In “Gendered Spectacles: Lu Xun on Gazing at Women and Other Pleasures,”⁸⁵ Eileen Cheng argues that although Lu Xun “scrupulously refused to participate in the circulation of disingenuous and exploitative images of women,”

yet in his adamant refusal to participate in this scopic economy, as well as his distrust of gender-crossing gestures and behaviors, Lu Xun himself was ironically to replicate the patriarchal discourse he so sternly criticized. His inscription of a categorical victimhood on women’s bodies and narrative erasure of women precludes the possibility of women’s agency and performative politics, reinscribing the public as a distinctly male terrain.⁸⁶

It must be pointed out, first of all, that Lu Xun did not “inscribe” a “categorical victimhood” on women, but observed it; nor did he associate this victimhood exclusively with women—one might list Kong Yiji as a most suitable alternative. Furthermore, the “possibility of women’s agency and performative politics” is not precluded by Lu Xun’s “inscription,” but by social reality.

Cheng postulates on Lu Xun’s possible aversion to the flamboyant public display of the female revolutionary Qiu Jin and, citing the evidence that he had discouraged his common-law wife Xu Guangping from working publicly, concludes that Lu Xun had been against “public femininity,” that is, women—in a manlike manner—interfering with

⁸⁵ *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Volume 16, Number 1, 1-36.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

public affairs.⁸⁷ It is, indeed, well-known that Lu Xun was never enthralled by the spectacle of Qiu Jin, and did in fact prefer to have Xu Guangping at home to her working publicly. However, Lu Xun's public stance against senseless sacrifice—for any public activity that aims to change society entails sacrifice—is not a warning for women only, but for men as well.⁸⁸ Lu Xun was certainly not eager to encourage women warriors like Qiu Jin to sacrifice themselves, as Cheng correctly points out. What is more important, however, is that Lu Xun, much like Brecht, was not eager to encourage any type of unnecessary sacrifice at all: anything other than “trench warfare” would be considered as foolishness or even stupidity by him.⁸⁹ What is essential to Lu Xun is certainly not women's agency, but *human* agency.

However, when out of a fatal necessity, such sacrifices are made, then Lu Xun spares no words in his sincere admiration for such actions. In his elegy of his student Liu Hezhen who, along with two of her classmates, became three of the forty-seven victims in the March Eighteenth Massacre, Lu Xun offers his mourning and respect. Instead of thinking of Liu as a student whose teacher “dragged out an ignoble existence until now,” he prefers to think of her as a “young Chinese person who sacrificed herself for China.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid, 23, 26, 30.

⁸⁸ Take, for example, the issue of cutting hair. In the 1920s in Beijing, many women students rebelled against the school admission rule that forbade them to cut off their long hair. Lu Xun lamented the action of those who cut off their hair in defiance but could not get into any school as “senseless sacrifice.” However, in 1912, when he was a teacher in Shaoxing and was approached by male students who wanted his opinion on cutting off their queues as a protest against the Qing Dynasty, Lu Xun tried to dissuade them from such actions as well. This episode is fictionalized in “The Story of Hair” (Toufa de gushi) in CW 1, 464. See also Zhou Zuoren's account in *Life within Books* (*Shuli rensheng*), 17-8.

⁸⁹ In a letter to Xu Guangping, Lu Xun confesses, “As for social struggles, I do not encourage others to sacrifice themselves, because I don't do this myself. During the European War, most often there was ‘trench warfare,’ when soldiers hid in the trenches, sometimes smoked, or sang, played cards, drank, or even put on an art exhibition. But sometimes they also fired a few shots at the enemies. There are too many invisible arrows in China, so that those who show themselves are easily killed. This ‘trench warfare’ is thus necessary here. However, there will be occasions when one is forced to fight hand-to-hand, and then, because there's no other way out, one must fight hand-to-hand. CW 11, 16.

⁹⁰ CW 3, 274.

He marvels at the composure with which the three women “navigated through the hail of bullets invented by civilized people,” trying to help each other at the threshold of death. “The great feat of Chinese soldiers slaughtering women and babies, the exploit of the Eight-Nations’ united soldiery in butchering students, were unfortunately annihilated by these few trails of blood [of the dead women].”⁹¹ Instead of precluding “the possibility of women’s agency and performative politics” as Cheng asserts, Lu Xun sees and unreservedly praises the greatness of women, whose integrity and bravery contrast sharply with the hypocrisy and vileness of those men who ordered their slaughter.

2. The Gawking Crowd

As mentioned above, Lu Xun’s hatred for the gawking crowd (*kanke*), or the audience, is inveterate. Originally a medical student whose ambition was to practice western medicine in order to cure people’s bodies, Lu Xun changed his career to writing because of the shock he suffered at seeing the mindless apathy of such a crowd.⁹² Always amorphous, zombie-like, yet thirsting for blood, the gawking crowd frequents Lu Xun’s fiction and exemplifies “all that is wrong with Chinese society.”⁹³ The worst thing about the gawking crowd is, however, its ubiquity and ordinariness.⁹⁴ In the following section, I argue that in Lu Xun’s fiction, the presence of the gawking crowd indicates the complete absence of the self. The crowd without the self is not only incapable of directing its gaze

⁹¹ Ibid, 276.

⁹² See note 50.

⁹³ Lyell, 255.

⁹⁴ In V.I. Semanov’s words, the “sensation of inconsolability in Lu Hsun’s work is...intensified by the fact that the hero is surrounded neither by sadists nor scoundrels, but by ordinary people.” Quoted by Lyell, *ibid*.

inward, but also unable to comprehend the object of its gaze. The arrival of the gawking crowd terminates any possibility of communication.

When the gawking crowd arrives, the atmosphere is immediately slashed into two spheres, with the crowd on one side, and the observed object on the other. The crowd is curious about the object, but is never serious about their curiosity. In “Kong Yiji,” for example, the crowd of wine customers at Prosperous Tavern unfailingly tease the would-be scholar Kong Yiji every time he comes in for a drink, but they do not even bother to find out his real name.⁹⁵ The jeers thrown at Kong Yiji are always based on what the crowd has heard about him, and no one ever takes the trouble to speak to Kong except to make fun of him. During Kong Yiji’s sustained absence from the tavern, no one inquires about him; only the tavern owner mentions him when he is reminded of Kong’s existence by the sight of his name on the debt board. Likewise, in “Public Display” (Shizhong), when one member of the crowd rashly asks to find out what the publicly displayed man is displayed for, he is immediately chastized by blank stares from the rest of the group, until he becomes extremely uneasy, “as if he had committed a crime.... Finally [he] slowly backed out, and quietly slipped away.”⁹⁶ And before the crowd could find out what the first spectacle is about, they are already distracted by a second so that “all the heads turned back” in the direction of the second spectacle, and the circle around the first “immediately dispersed” and reassembled itself at its next station. In “The True Story of Ah Q,” when Ah Q is being paraded through the streets before his execution, he notices that among the crowd surrounding him, his one-time love interest Wu Ma is not even looking at him, but is “staring at the foreign rifles on the backs of the soldiers, as if

⁹⁵ See note 80.

⁹⁶ CW 2, 70.

entranced.”⁹⁷ In all these stories, the gawking crowd’s interest in the observed object is transient and shallow. They cannot see, nor do they allow, a deeper meaning in the spectacle. They watch for the sake of watching.

Indeed, the gawking crowd seeks only sensation. The crowd that witnesses Ah Q’s execution is dissatisfied with the experience because the execution, done by a firing squad, is “not as spectacular as decapitation.” What’s more, Ah Q is lackluster and disappointing during the long parade, for he “did not even sing one line out of an opera: they had followed him in vain.”⁹⁸ Ironically, before his own execution, Ah Q had seen an execution by decapitation, and had bragged to his townsfolk with much swagger and spit that it was “spectacular. Killing a revolutionary. Ai, really spectacular...”.⁹⁹ In the rather eventless episode in “Public Display,” the crowd tries to catch the spectacle simply to reassure themselves that they are in fact watching *something*. When they cannot detect anything unusual in the displayed man any more, they become fidgety and start to find new targets for their sensory organs. One maid tries to coerce a bored girl in her custody: “Ah, ah, look! What a spectacle!,” without specifying what there is to look at. Another suddenly becomes aware of the hot breath on his neck, freely and urgently bestowed upon him by a man behind him. One bald man diverts his attention by staring at four white characters on a red board. And two other men fix their eyes on an old woman’s shoe tip, which is shaped like a hook. When all these sensations are exhausted, they are only too happy to abandon the displayed man and go on to the next spectacle, where a rickshaw puller is just getting up from his fall and “rubbing his knee.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ CW 1, 526.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 527.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 509.

¹⁰⁰ CW 2, 72.

Another characteristic of the gawking crowd is that they have no sense of morality except that of the authorities. The crowd in “Kong Yiji” looks down on Kong because of the simple fact that he has failed to pass the first round of the Civil Service Examination. Since Kong’s learning is not recognized by the authorities, the crowd deems his knowledge, along with Kong himself, as worthless and laughable. On the other hand, when they hear that Kong Yiji tried to steal from Ding Juren’s¹⁰¹ house, they become incensed at Kong’s audacity: “he lost his head and tried to steal at Ding Juren’s house. Mr. Ding’s things, how could he!”¹⁰² For the crowd, the official title “Juren” equals right, and thus even the spectacle of Kong’s punishment fails to arouse the gawking crowd’s interest. Kong Yiji was made to first write a confession, and then was beaten savagely for most of the night, until they broke his legs: but no fuss is raised over these details at all by the crowd. In “Medicine,” we learn that the revolutionary Xia Yu has been betrayed to the authorities by his own uncle, who is viewed by a commentator as “clever.” Upon hearing that while imprisoned, Xia Yu tries to persuade the guards to rebel, a young man from the crowd exclaims angrily, “Aiya, what’s the world come to!” And when they hear that Xia Yu dared to prophesy the end of the Qing Dynasty’s rule, they denounce this statement as “inhuman babble,” and Xia Yu is slapped across the face twice.¹⁰³ In the unthinking mind of the crowd, might is right, and those who are against the authorities are automatically in the wrong. After Ah Q’s execution, his townsfolk “naturally all said that Ah Q was wicked, and his execution was the proof of his wickedness; how could he have been executed if he were not wicked after all?”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ “Juren” is a title granted to those who pass the second round of exams held at the provincial capital.

¹⁰² CW 1, 437.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 445-6.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 527.

This is not to say that Lu Xun is against “watching” completely, or against “spectacles” per se. What he is against is the unreflective attitude of the gawking crowd, whose gaze is forever directed outward, never upon itself. In an article written about a month before his death, Lu Xun recalls the night a few days after his recovery from near death, when he awakened and woke up Xu Guangping as well:

“Give me a drink of water. And go turn on the light, so I can take a look around.”
 “Why?...” Her voice sounded a bit alarmed. Perhaps she thought I was delirious.
 “Because I want to live. Do you understand? This is also life. I want to take a look around.”¹⁰⁵

What he wants to see is not a spectacle, but the things that accompany him in his everyday life, to which he had never paid close attention because of their plainness. Because of the strangeness of such a request (there seems to be nothing to see in the simply furnished room), Xu Guangping does not turn on the light: she does not understand the meaning behind such a request. However, with the help of a streetlight, Lu Xun sees “the familiar walls, the ridge of the wall corner, the familiar pile of books, the unbound picture collection beside the pile,” which, because of their solid and steady existence, assure him of his own existence, and connect him to “the night outside, infinite, faraway places, and numerous people.”¹⁰⁶ In this moment of looking at the ordinary and examining his own existence, Lu Xun was able to feel more alive than ever, and even, despite his weakness, “had the urge to act.”

However, without stimulating spectacles, it is extremely hard to stay awake and alert to the mundane: Lu Xun falls back to sleep shortly after. It is tempting and easy to fall prey to the endless parade of spectacles in life, so that one does not have to look at oneself and confront the unspectacular. “Spectacle” is a drug that stupefies the pain of

¹⁰⁵ “This is Also Life” (zhe yeshi shenghuo), CW 6, 600.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 601.

life and renders sufferings tolerable. This is why, Lu Xun continues, the biographers of famous people exaggerate the idiosyncrasies of their subjects: “how Li Bai composed poems, how he feigned insanity, or how Napoleon battled, how he never slept;” but nothing is said about how they didn’t feign insanity, or slept. “In fact,” Lu Xun concludes, “one cannot live by feigning insanity or not sleeping. Sometimes people can feign insanity and forego sleep precisely because at other times they do not feign insanity and also sleep. But people think of these ordinary things as the garbage of life, and do not even give them one brief look.”¹⁰⁷ The ability to understand the meaning of the spectacular rests precisely on the ability to appreciate the value of the ordinary, but the gawking crowd is driven only by the sensation-arousing aspect of the spectacle.

3. The Compromised Intellectual

Lastly, we turn to the haunting image of the compromised intellectual in Lu Xun’s fiction. I have chosen the term “compromised” to distinguish its meaning from Wang Hui’s term, the “in-between thing” (zhongjian wu). In *Revolt against Despair*, Wang defines “in-between” as a state in which one “exists in” but “does not belong to” two societies; an “in-between thing” does not characterize itself by “reconciliation and compromise, but [by] the co-existence and struggle of tradition and modernism, East and West, history and value, experience and judgment, enlightenment and the transcendence of enlightenment....”¹⁰⁸ The recognition of his own “in-betweenness” marks Lu Xun’s return to historical reality. However, the compromised intellectuals in Lu Xun’s fiction

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Wang Hui, 17.

are far from reaching Lu Xun's level of social and historical consciousness. In fact, as Wang Furen frankly acknowledges, even today's intellectuals lag far behind Lu Xun's sense of historical and social responsibility. It is not that contemporary intellectuals "do not have their own social demands, or realistic social concerns, but that they feel powerless to realize these concerns." Subconsciously but deeply under the influence of the Daoist principle of "inaction" (wuwei), they feel distanced from social problems that do not directly impact their own lives, and instead try to maintain the peace of their personal lives. "In our cultural environment, it is better to ignore than to pay attention to social problems, and as long as one has a steady position to make a tolerable living, it is best to mind one's own business."¹⁰⁹ Such a cultural environment, indeed, urgently calls for a revisit to Lu Xun's legacy. Like their contemporary counterparts, Lu Xun's compromised intellectuals, whether consciously or subconsciously, resort or retreat to the "middle-of-the-road" position whenever they are confronted with a choice. However, unlike Brecht's understanding of the Doctrine of the Mean (that one must do what one can to preserve Life),¹¹⁰ the compromises of these intellectuals are made solely to prolong their existence, without any consideration for the meaning of such an existence. Therefore the compromised intellectuals are defeated and forever dejected, but take no action to alter their fate.

The earliest such character in Lu Xun's fiction is Kong Yiji,¹¹¹ whose compromised state is marked by the fact that he is "the only long-robed person who

¹⁰⁹ "Lu Xun Study and I" (Wo he Lu Xun yanjiu) in *Twenty-first Century: Lu Xun and Us* (*Ershiyi shiji: Lu Xun he women*), 54-5.

¹¹⁰ See Chapter Two, note 62, and the discussion thereafter.

¹¹¹ One might argue that the madman in "Madman's Diary" is an even earlier creation of this kind; I am bypassing him because of his "mental illness," which cannot be convincingly explained as completely a fictional device employed by Lu Xun, who feared that the madman's fierce attack on Chinese tradition, if uttered by a sane character, would prevent the story from passing the censors.

drinks standing up.”¹¹² The difference between him and later intellectuals is that Kong, belonging to the old generation of scholars whose only aim in life is fame and fortune through success in the Civil Service Examination, does not oppose or even question tradition. Still, the pain and guilt that result from his failure in both societies (metonymically distinguished by the long robes and short jackets) are clearly visible. His face is pale, and often bedecked by new scars. His long robe is dirty and shabby, “as if it has not been washed or mended for over ten years.” His speech is full of literary jargon so that no one can ever fully understand him. Initially, when teased about his scars and wounds, he would blush and argue “with the veins standing out prominently on his forehead;” when teased about his failure as a scholar, he would “immediately appear dejected and uneasy, his face covered in a layer of grey.” However, as time goes by, he is reduced to “begging” that none of his shameful acts are mentioned in public again. His tall stature is also literally reduced to half of its size when his legs are broken.¹¹³ It is evident that Lu Xun does not intend Kong Yiji to be a wholly sympathetic figure. Through the evolution of Kong Yiji’s reaction to the other customers’ ridicule, we understand that Kong Yiji’s final resignation to his ignominious fate is due to his own guilt over his failure both as a human being and as a scholar.

After Kong Yiji, Lu Xun creates an eccentric character called Mr. N (N xiansheng) who often “becomes angry over nothing, and speaks without any tact.” On the day of the Double Tenth Festival,¹¹⁴ he comes to the home of the narrator and delivers another

¹¹² CW 1, 435. Long robes are a sign of status and education. The long-robed customers are the richer ones who go into the tavern and eat while seated. Those who have only enough money to have a drink (but no dishes) wear short jackets. They remain outside of the tavern, drinking while standing.

¹¹³ Ibid, 435-8.

¹¹⁴ On October 10, 1911, the Wuchang Uprising broke out, and the Qing dynasty was overthrown. Later October 10th, known as the Double Tenth Festival, was commemorated as a national holiday of the Republic of China.

cynical lecture, to which, as usual, the narrator lends only half an ear, and does not comment on at all. Mr. N starts by expressing his extreme dissatisfaction with the lackluster celebration of this holiday symbolizing the transition from the old to the new, from oppression to liberation, citing as evidence the story of his hair—having cut off his queue before the end of the Qing Dynasty, he had suffered numerous insults because of his pig-tailless state; it was not until after Double Tenth that he was able to walk around proudly with his head held high. However, his own sufferings for something as seemingly innocuous as hair (he had cut off his queue for no other reason than convenience while studying in Japan) had completely disillusioned him about making any changes at all in China, so that now he advocates forgetting all talk of equality and liberty to avoid a life of pain. “You promise the appearance of the Gold Age to the sons and grandsons of these people, but what do you have to offer these people themselves?” he asks. “When the creation whip has not reached the spine of China, China will forever remain the self-same China, and will never change herself the slightest bit,” he continues. “Since there are indeed no poisonous fangs in your mouths, why do you put up the sign ‘viper’ on your forehead to attract the beggars’ rods?” he concludes. However, just as he was not accepted by the old society, who despised him for having no queue, he is ostracized by the “new society” for capitulating to the old. Sensing that the narrator is only tolerating his presence out of politeness, Mr. N terminates his visit and apologizes for his intrusion. “It is just as well that it will no longer be the Double Tenth Festival tomorrow, so that we can forget about it all.”¹¹⁵ His real tragedy is to have compromised his beliefs so that now he can neither join the young to fight the old, nor sincerely side with the old against the young.

¹¹⁵ CW 1, 461-5.

In “Double Fifth Festival” (Duanwu jie), a milder version of Mr. N is reincarnated in Fang Xuanchuo. Originally a righteous man who was angered by social injustices, Fang has lately discovered the common wisdom of “almost-the-same-ism.” Oppression, he tells himself, is inevitable, and since the oppressed would behave in just as beastly a manner as the oppressor, should they find themselves in the position of power, it is just as well that things are the way they are. Although sometimes his conscience still makes him wonder if this new ism has been created by himself as a result of his cowardliness in fighting social evils, this opinion, despite his qualms, has taken root and grown in his mind. Crippled by this passive philosophy, he starts to suffer for his inaction. The government has been postponing his wages so that the household bills pile up; his otherwise meek wife becomes quite disrespectful towards him; and by the time of the Double Fifth Festival, he is forced to buy on credit (a common practice for poor people). Still, this compromised intellectual does not do anything to alleviate the situation. “What else can I do?” he asks his exasperated wife, and refuses to budge after downing a bottle of wine bought on credit, preparing to read a poetry collection.¹¹⁶ Indeed, he can only numb himself with alcohol, and live vicariously through others: the poetry collection, *Experiments (Changshi ji)* by Hu Shi, contains both old style poetry and new poetry by the same writer, who has successfully completed his transition from the old to the new. The image of the compromised intellectual becomes even more pathetic through the ironic twist that the failures and inaction of Fang Xuanchuo culminate on the Double

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 533-41.

Fifth Festival, the day on which the commitment and integrity of the patriotic poet Qu Yuan is commemorated.¹¹⁷

In “In the Tavern” (*Zai jiulou shang*), this compromised state permeates the thoughts and action of the two protagonists, Lü Weifu and the narrator. Out of sheer boredom the narrator goes to a tavern he used to frequent. From his window seat he is surprised to see, out in the deserted yard, that “despite the snow, numerous flowers have blossomed on a few old plum trees, as if oblivious of the deep winter; there is also a camellia tree next to the toppled pavilion, thrusting a dozen of red flowers from among the dark green leaves, bright like fire in the snow, angry and proud, as if contemptuous towards the wandering traveler.”¹¹⁸ Although the narrator had seen this deserted yard “many times, sometimes in winter too,” he was never surprised to see the same scenery before. However, now that the compromising mentality has enveloped him body and soul, he marvels at the “old” plum trees’ defiance of the cruel winter and the heavy snow, and to the vibrancy and vitality of the flowers, rooted in the same spot every year, he contrasts the paleness and inefficacy of his wandering career. Because of this rude reminder of his failure, he finds himself feeling more and more lonely in the empty tavern, but still “reluctant to have other guests coming upstairs.”¹¹⁹

When his solitude is finally broken by the arrival of his old acquaintance Lü Weifu, who is in an even more pitiful state than he, the narrator happily directs our attention to the new arrival. Lü’s eyes have lost their luster, but when they catch sight of

¹¹⁷ During the Warring States period, two states, Chu and Qin, fought each other. Qu Yuan served as an advisor to the king of Chu, but was later dismissed from his service because of slanders on his character. His good advice was further rejected by the king when he tried to prevent him from falling into Qin’s trap. When all hopes of saving Chu were dashed, Qu drowned himself on May Fifth.

¹¹⁸ CW 2, 25.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

the deserted yard, “suddenly there flashed the piercing light that I used to see at school.”¹²⁰ Like the narrator, he is no longer the person who “went to the temple of the town god to pull off the idol’s beard, or argued about ways to reform China for days on end until [they] almost came to blows.”¹²¹ He has become perfunctory in his ways and ambivalent in his attitudes. One of the duties he is charged with on this trip back home is to move his little brother’s grave to another place. Since he could not find a trace of his brother’s body, he gathered a handful of dirt and buried it in a new coffin just so that he could go back and lie to his mother. He fails the other task—delivering two velvet flowers to a girl who had died before his arrival—miserably, but consoles himself by telling the story of his previous encounter with the girl, a good memory. He had been given a bowl of buckwheat mush (a treat for the country folk but disagreeable to his palate) mixed by the girl Ah Shun, who shyly observed him from afar. To please her Lü decided to finish it, and although he suffered from a stomach ache and nightmares the whole night, he felt happy because of her happiness. However, in reality, this great “sacrifice” does not change her life at all: she had died from disease and shame before he could offer her the two velvet flowers that would not have saved her life either. But neither Lü nor the narrator is willing to confront the truth and challenge reality anymore. Just as Lü is able to soothe his conscience enough with his buckwheat feat and the velvet flowers, the narrator feels much better about himself after realizing that Lü is much worse off than he. He pays for their food at the end of their conversation, and asks, almost patronizingly, “What are you going to do in the future?” When they separate, he

¹²⁰ Ibid, 26.

¹²¹ Ibid, 29.

emphasizes that they leave in “opposite directions,” and despite the cold wind and snow, he feels “refreshed.”¹²²

Aside from Kong Yiji,¹²³ Lu Xun’s intellectuals all come to their compromised state after some kind of initial iconoclasm. However, Lu Xun never dwells on his protagonists’ rebellious past: suffice it to know that they had one. In “The Happy Family” (Xingfu de jiating), we learn that the writer once had the courage to declare that he would sacrifice anything for his wife;¹²⁴ in “The Misanthrope” (Gudu zhe), Wei Lianshu advocated the destruction of the family system;¹²⁵ and Shi Juansheng in “Regret for the Past” (Shangshi) talked about breaking old habits and establishing equality between the sexes.¹²⁶ Sadly, these ideas are rarely substantiated by action, and the stories all follow a palpable thread to certain doom for the iconoclasts. In this light it is particularly interesting to take a look again at the last ten years of Lu Xun’s own life. As mentioned above, after the publication of his reminiscences in 1927, Lu Xun almost completely ceased writing creative fiction.¹²⁷ Instead, he used his pen to engage in dynamic discussions and debates with his contemporaries on current issues; he continued to encourage and engage in translations of foreign literatures to serve as nourishment for a fledgling Chinese literature;¹²⁸ he tirelessly read, corrected, and advised massive amounts

¹²² Ibid, 34.

¹²³ I do not consider Chen Shicheng in “White Light” (Baiguang), Siming in “Soap” (Feizao), or Gao Ganting in “Master Gao” (Gao laofuzi) as compromised intellectuals. They are products and defenders of the old educational system.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 41.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 86.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 111.

¹²⁷ Except for a few stories written in 1934 and 1935, collected in *Old Stories Retold* (Gushi xinbian).

¹²⁸ From 1930 on, Lu Xun wrote a number of essays on the subject of translation, exploring many aspects of the subject including technique, contents, criticism of translation, indirect translation, and re-translation. See among others “Hard Translation and the Class Nature of Literature” (yingyi yu wenxue de jiejixing) in CW 4, 195-222, “Letters on Translation” (guanyu fanyi de tongxin) in CW 4, 370-88, “Defending Translation” (wei fanyi bianhu) in CW 5, 259-60, “About Translation” (guanyu fanyi shang/xia) in CW 5, 295-300, and “On Indirect Translation” and “On Indirect Translation again” (lun chongyi, zailun chongyi)

of writing by aspiring writers;¹²⁹ he advocated the modernization of the Chinese language so that knowledge would be more easily accessible and disseminated to everybody;¹³⁰ and towards the end of his life, he devoted a great deal of energy to promoting the woodcut as a cheap and effective way to educate the largely illiterate masses.¹³¹ In other words, he *did* things, perhaps as a way of making up for the inaction of his fictional heroes whose failures seemed preordained and irrevocable. In many ways the compromised intellectuals that he wrote about serve as warnings to himself, and although his intellectuals, like their contemporary counterparts, are either fundamentally drawn or pressured by reality to conform to a Daoist philosophy of “inaction,” Lu Xun personally preferred to follow the other strand of ancient philosophy, Confucius’ famous edict: do it, knowing that it cannot be done (zhi qi buke wei er wei zhi).¹³²

in CW 5, 504-9. For a list of and introduction to all the translations Lu Xun personally made from 1903 to 1936, see Lennart Lundberg’s study *Lu Xun as a Translator*. He translated as much as he wrote. The number of his various translations (from poetry, short stories, essays, to novels and biographies) totaled 208.

¹²⁹ For a good recollection of Lu Xun’s work in this area, see Xu Guangping’s essay “Lu Xun and the Youth” (Lu Xun he qingnianmen), in *Ten Years of Vicissitudes Together* (shinian xieshou gong jianwei), 27-51.

¹³⁰ From 1934 on Lu Xun wrote a series of essays on the issue of modernizing the Chinese language. Starting with “Chinese Characters and Latinization” (hanzi he ladinghua), CW 5, 555-8, he proposed concrete steps to popularize the language in articles such as “Letter in Answer to Mr. Cao Juren” (da Cao Juren xiansheng de xin), CW 6, 76-9, “The New Life of Chinese” (zhongguo yuwen de xinsheng), CW 6, 114-6, and he wrote a long history of the evolution of the Chinese language to prove the outdatedness of it in “Literary Discussions outside the Door” (menwai wentan), CW 6, 84-110.

¹³¹ See, for example, “Preface to the National Woodcut Exhibition Album” (quanguo muke lianhe zhanlanhu zhuanji xu), CW 6, 338-9; “Notes on the Soviet Union’s Woodcut Exhibition” (ji sulian banhua zhanlanhui), CW 6, 481-4; and “Preface to the Collection of Soviet Union Woodcuts” (sulian banhua ji), CW 6, 593-4. Lu Xun’s enthusiasm for this art and his efforts to help and advise young people to learn and promote woodcut are well appreciated and remembered by many of his students. See, for example, Bai Wei’s “Remembering Lu Xun (Yi Lu Xun), Cao Bai’s “Written in Eternal Remembrance” (Xiezai yonghen de jinian zhong), and Sha Fei’s “The Last Day I saw Mr. Lu Xun” (Wo zuihou jiandao lu xun xiansheng de yitian), in *Eternal Warmth* (*Yongzai de wenqing*), 67-71, 76-87, 130-1.

¹³² In an essay on a story he wrote about Confucius and Laozi, Lu Xun comments, “as for the competition between Confucius and Laozi, it is my opinion that Confucius won over Laozi: Laozi promoted yielding; ... Confucius also promoted yielding, but he also used yielding to go forward, whereas Laozi used it to retreat. The key lies in the fact that Confucius was a pragmatist who “did it, knowing that it could not be done,” he did not slack off regardless of the size of the matter; but Laozi was simply an empty talker who, following his principle of ‘in order to do everything, do nothing,’ did nothing.” CW 6, 520-1. For a good discussion on this topic, see Qian Liqun’s *Searching for the Soul* (*xinling de tanxun*), 206-9.

The Shadow's Farewell:

The Either/Or of *Wild Grass*

Leo Lee calls *Wild Grass* “an elitist text” both because of its reconditeness and the originality of its form. The reading process of this text is “an almost unending quest for meaning.”¹³³ Lu Xun certainly would have agreed with this assessment, since he referred those interested in his philosophy to the reading of this prose poetry collection. The twenty-four short prose poems (including the much celebrated dedication), indeed, at once repel us with their seemingly nonsensical language, grotesque images, and illogical stories, and allure us with their strange beauty, otherworldly power, and ineffable poignancy. Once we are drawn in, however, the initial confusion dissipates; in its place we see two clear threads that hold all these pieces together. First, a choice must be made: Lu Xun gives us either/or, whether it is heaven or hell, fire or ice, light or darkness, life or death—there is nothing in between. Second, the carriers of these choices, the prose poems, must necessarily be amoral and transient; their death is anticipated and celebrated once the choice is made. This is the ultimate expression of Lu Xun’s belief in “literature for life”: once life is obtained, literature ceases to be useful and therefore dies. Having come to identify his fiction and his own existence as a fiction writer with a sick and backward China, Lu Xun welcomes the death of all his works.

In “Shadow’s Farewell” (Ying de gaobie), Lu Xun writes,

I am only a shadow, and will bid you farewell and drown in darkness. Yet darkness will swallow me, yet light will erase me.

¹³³ *Voices from the Iron House*, 106-7.

Yet I do not want to waver between light and darkness, I'd rather drown in darkness.¹³⁴

The shadow's choice is to drown either in light or darkness, and the choice for the latter is justified thus: "I'd rather that it be darkness, so that it might disappear from your bright days; I'd rather that it be emptiness, so that it does not encroach upon your heart."¹³⁵ The in-between thing is determined to annihilate itself, and is prepared to take with it the totality of darkness:

I'm willing to do this, my friend—

I'll go far by myself; not only without you, but without any other shadows in the darkness. Only I will be drowned in the darkness, and that world will belong entirely to myself.¹³⁶

What is striking about this ending is the fact that nothing is said about the "other" world. The shadow embraces the world of darkness wholeheartedly, and even seems to rejoice in the thought that it would take sole possession of darkness. What is so "good" about light? Lu Xun's deliberate silence on this subject makes one doubt that it is his intention to praise light over darkness. Rather, it is the *choice* that is put into focus. A choice has been made, whether it is light or darkness, and something has been done: Lu Xun's concern is exigency, not morality. Similarly, the pensive hero in "The Passerby" (Guoke) has the choice to either turn back or go forward on his journey, but never to rest ("I want to rest...but I cannot"¹³⁷). He does not go back because he hates his past, and he goes forward because he is being called by a voice. However, nothing further is said about the "voice;" what's more, the passerby knows very well that there are only graves waiting for him ahead. Still, propelled by the need for action, he "has to go. It is best that [he]

¹³⁴ CW 2, 165.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 166.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 193.

goes.”¹³⁸ Likewise, the dead fire in “Dead Fire” (Sihuo) has a choice to either remain frozen and thus become completely extinguished, or be warmed up again and burn out. Either choice leads to the death of the in-between thing, but the dead fire resolutely chooses to be burned out. Once again, Lu Xun refuses to comment on the reason for the dead fire’s decision; compared with the immobility of the frozen death, it prefers the “active death” of burning out.

This severe attack on the inaction of the in-between thing is further carried out in two other pieces, “The Argument” (Lilun) and “The Wise Man and the Fool and the Lackey” (Congming ren he shazi he nucai). In the first piece, a student asks a teacher how to set forth an argument. The teacher presents the difficulty by giving the following example:

A family has a newborn boy, and everyone is very happy. When the boy becomes a month old, he is shown to the guests, --naturally, perhaps in hope of getting a few lucky signs.

One says, “this child will get rich in the future.” Consequently he is thanked profusely. One says, “this child will hold office in the future.” In return he is complimented as well.

One says, “this child will die in the future.” As a result he is beaten savagely by everybody.

To say that the child will die is only to tell the inevitable, to predict rich and power is to lie. But lies are rewarded, whereas telling the inevitable leads to a beating. You...¹³⁹

In reply to the unfinished question, the student admits that he neither wants to lie, nor get a beating. The teacher then instructs him: “Then, you must say, ‘Aiya! This child! Look! How.... Aiyo! Haha! Hehe! he, hehehehe!’”¹⁴⁰ Regardless of the truth or falsehood of the previous statements, *something* is said about the child. In contrast, the guest who neither wants to please, nor offend, says *nothing* in spite of all his exclamations. Lu Xun’s

¹³⁸ Ibid, 194.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 207.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 207.

abhorrence for this kind of non-response reminds one of his comments in the famous preface to *Call to Arms*, where he attributes his loneliness to the apathetic non-response of the crowd.¹⁴¹ In the second story, the lackey complains to the wise man and the fool, respectively, about his miserable condition in his master's house. He is happy that the wise man shows sympathy for him but does nothing, but he is alarmed and calls for help to chase out the fool when the latter tries to change his living situation. It is clear that the bulk of Lu Xun's criticism is directed, not against either the wise man and the fool, who have both made a choice, but against the lackey, whose complaint never leads to anything. Precisely because the lackey is noncommittal about either course of action—to suffer misery quietly or do something to change his fate—his complaints sound all the more exasperating and superfluous.

Indeed, it is with this mission to act¹⁴² in mind that Lu Xun writes the dedication. His prose poems are compared to wild grass that does not have deep roots or beautiful leaves and flowers. But, in order for its own survival, it sucks not only dew and water, but also the flesh and blood of long dead people: in order to live, it does not discriminate between good and evil—in a way that is strikingly similar to Brecht in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Lu Xun declares here that to live and to act is the ultimate good. Wild grass yearns for the eruption of the underground lava to burn it to ashes and death, so that by virtue of the ashes and death, the existence of life can be finally ascertained, and that is

¹⁴¹ There he says, “when one proposes an idea: if it gets affirmation, the affirmation encourages one to go forward; if it attracts opposition, the opposition compels one to struggle; only when one shouts amidst strangers who do not respond—neither affirmation nor opposition—then one would be like in an infinite and deserted plain, and would not know what to do. How pathetic this is! I then knew that I was experiencing loneliness.” CW 1, 417.

¹⁴² One might object to this thesis with the story “Revenge” (Fuchou), in which a couple are frozen in space, as if they are about to either embrace, or kill each other. However, they do nothing. This is their revenge on the gawking crowd: they do not give the crowd a show. In a letter to a friend in which this story is recalled, Lu Xun says, “it was written that way out of extreme anger. The right thing to do would be to either let them love each other, or kill each other; they should do what they want to do.” See CW 2, 173, note 1.

the writer's ultimate desire. *Wild Grass* is therefore deliberately populated with provocative images that are far from a conventional understanding of morality and beauty. The "heroes" in these stories are, literally, mostly ghosts, and they are unfriendly, unfathomable, ugly, and ghastly. Like wild grass, they are transient figures who must die in order for real life to be born. Their "otherworldliness" is designed to shock us out of our complacency in regard to the present world. Unlike the lackey, who complains only for complaining's sake, these strangely determined "madmen" will persist in their quest while being trod on and cut down, "until they die and decay."¹⁴³

In the dead of night, the narrator of "Autumn Night" (Qiuye) observes the ominous thrust of a long, bald, and steel-like branch of a date tree against the quaint and high sky, as if intent upon the death of the sky, and along with it the death of the many bewitching eyes decorating the night sky. Suddenly, the silence is broken by a cry of "an evil bird traveling at night," followed by a muffled, sinister laugh that jolts the narrator out of his reverie. He then realizes that the laughter is his own. When he goes into the house he sees that in order to get warmth, many flying insects knock themselves against the lamp shade; some even fly directly into the fire. The painted gardenia on his lamp shade makes him think of spring, when the date tree will once again become lush and bear heavy fruit. Suddenly he hears his own laughter again. The jarring effect of the laughter is such that the reader is at once startled by it, and compelled to look for the reason behind it. While nature (the date tree, the flying insects, etc.) battles for its own survival unreservedly and without disguise, human nature seems to be alienated from such bold undertakings. The bizarre laughter of the narrator is both an elegy for unadulterated nature and a dirge for the waywardness of human nature.

¹⁴³ CW 2, 159.

This macabre quality of the narrator is magnified to its ultimate intensity in “Epitaph” (Mujie wen). Dreaming that he is in the midst of a dilapidated tomb site, the narrator reads from the epitaph: “feeling chilled in the feverish heat of a great song; seeing the abyss in the sky. Perceiving nothing in the eyes of everything; receiving redemption in the absence of hope....”¹⁴⁴ Behind the tombstone he sees the body that, according to the rest of the epitaph, has eaten its own heart in order to taste the true flavor of the self, but has failed to capture the true flavor. Expressionless and without moving its lips, the body sits up from the grave and tells the narrator, “when I become dust, you will see my smile!”¹⁴⁵ The body’s wish to disintegrate into dust indicates its transient nature, but before it does so, we, like the narrator, fidget to get away from it, “not daring to look back, afraid to see that he is following.”¹⁴⁶ However, this image of the heartless body does follow us, and not “looking back” does not negate its existence. The only way to exorcise it is for us to find out the true flavor of our own heart, to “receive redemption in the absence of hope.” Thus, Lu Xun engraves in our mind the dire need to hasten the decaying process of the already dead, so that it might be returned to the beginning of life and “smile” again.

This strange, inhuman power of the macabre is invoked again in the old woman in “The Trembling of the Decadent Line” (Tuibai xian de chandong). The old woman is described as resembling a stone statue. Her naked body, exhausted and decaying, is exposed in the darkness of the night. Instead of giving us a nude, vibrant, beautiful body of a young girl to elicit our natural attention and sympathy, Lu Xun presents us with the disturbing image of the nude old woman, as if taunting us to show disgust and repulsion.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 202.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 203.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 203.

But the old woman has sacrificed her youth and beauty in order to nourish the young, and is discarded by the young when they inherit her youth and beauty. The ugly heap of the leftover body is the soil from which youth and beauty had sprouted and on which they had fed; this ugliness insists on its right to reveal itself as true beauty and greatness. Thus Lu Xun subverts the conventional notion of beauty, morality, and truth. As the old woman stands in the dark night, trembling at the heartlessness of those who have discarded her as a heap of useless garbage, we realize that she has become a symbol of all that must be changed.

Satirical Realism

In *The Limits of Realism*, Marsten Anderson argues that Lu Xun is extremely wary of employing the realist method in his fiction, because “representational art risks making the victim into a mere object of the reader’s curiosity or pity; in the process of reading, these emotions, which significantly are those of the observer, are satisfied, thereby camouflaging the true nature of the reader’s involvement with the victim.”¹⁴⁷ According to Anderson, although Lu Xun does use the realist approach in his stories, he makes sure to critique his own method, as well as the realist project in general, by means of what Anderson terms “ironical epiphanies,” because the realist narrative imitates the relation of oppressor to oppressed at a formal level, and is therefore bound to the logic of that oppression and ends by reproducing it.¹⁴⁸ Hence, for Anderson, Lu Xun’s fiction is

¹⁴⁷ Marsten Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 86.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

ultimately anti-realistic, written so as to prevent the reader from full identification with the characters, which would necessarily lead to full catharsis. It is, however, extremely difficult to read Lu Xun's writing as anti-realistic. In a famous essay called "On Watching with Eyes Wide Open" (Lun zhengle yan kan), Lu Xun condemns China's long history of "deception literature," and concludes with the following:

Literature is the spark of national spirit, as well as the guiding light of its future.... Chinese people have never dared to confront life, so that they must hide and lie, and from this practice a literature of lies and deception was born. This literature led the Chinese people to sink further into the quagmire of lies and deception, until they could no longer tell lies from truth. The world is changing daily, and the time has long arrived for our writers to take off their masks, sincerely, penetratingly, and daringly observe life, and write out its flesh and blood. It is high time that there be a brand new literary field; it is high time that there be a few fierce pathfinders!"¹⁴⁹

What Lu Xun wants to point out is the fact that realist writing had scarcely existed in Chinese literature before.¹⁵⁰ When lies and deception have become the norm of society, realist writing cannot then be regarded as a mere imitation "at a formal level [of] the relation of oppressor to oppressed." On the contrary, the sheer incongruity between the literary form (traditionally—in China—a carrier of pretty people and harmonious events) and reality (suffering people and absurd events) must in itself deliver a shocking revelation to the unprepared reader. Lu Xun was never shy about making public his hatred for classical Chinese literature, because when he read those books, he always felt a serenity that was detached from real life, whereas when he read foreign books, he then

¹⁴⁹ CW 1, 240-1.

¹⁵⁰ Surveying the long history of Chinese literature, Lu Xun concludes that Chinese literati had never dared to face reality and employ realist techniques in their writing. For example: although they were unhappy about arranged marriages, they never dared to challenge this practice in their fiction, but simply made their heroes always talented, and the heroines beautiful women who love talent. The romance between such a pair is not condoned by tradition, but since the man always ends up testing first in the Civil Service Examination and is honored by the emperor himself, an exception is made and everyone is happy. Lu Xun gives many more examples of how writers, dissatisfied with the injustice that is presented in a tale, change the story so that justice always prevails in the end, instead of taking any action to change the conditions in real life that cause injustice. Ibid, 237-41.

“came in touch with life, and wanted to do something.”¹⁵¹ It was with this urge to “do something” that Lu Xun adopted the realist form in his writing, and following the tradition of Swift, Gogol, and Shaw, became the first satirical realist in modern Chinese literary history.

In a series of articles on the definition of satire, Lu Xun repeatedly emphasizes the realist foundation for satire. If a piece of writing is not realistic, it “cannot become a so-called ‘satire;’ a non-realistic satire, even if such a thing could exist, is no more than slander and calumny.”¹⁵² Indeed, the life breath of satire is reality,

not necessarily a thing that had happened, but something that must be true.... [Satire] describes a thing that is public and often seen, and usually no one thinks of it as strange, and naturally no one pays attention to it. But this thing is no longer reasonable at the time, and has become laughable, contemptible, even despicable. But since things have always been this way and people have gotten used to them, no one gives it a second thought even when [the despicable thing] is displayed in public; now if it is singled out, then it becomes striking.¹⁵³

Lu Xun and Brecht would have certainly understood each other’s works very well. What others regard as “normal” and unworthy of mention, the satirical realist sees as abnormal and singles out for scrutiny, thereby revealing to all the abnormality of the otherwise accepted phenomenon. Although few had given a thought to the traditional practice of treating women as inferior to men, Lu Xun noted in the imperialists’ power politics towards China the same unjustifiable intention to oppress. Although the gawking crowd had always congregated in the streets and taverns of China, Lu Xun pointed out and criticized its superficiality and insatiable and indiscriminate desire for spectacles, arguing

¹⁵¹ CW 3, 12.

¹⁵² CW 6, 278.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 328.

that its unthinking applause would surely “clap China to death.”¹⁵⁴ Although for the ease and peace of life, it is natural for intellectuals to compromise their own beliefs, this attitude neither cancels out the guilt over giving up, nor alleviates the despair over the present. In other words, the satirical realist simply takes the facts of life, and gives them a closer and purposeful look. He shows no respect for what is *supposed* to be, but examines what *is*, and concerns himself with what *should* be. Like the uncultured rich man who, having purchased a Zhou Dynasty cooking vessel which was covered with patina and mottled, hired a coppersmith to polish the vessel and restore its original appearance,¹⁵⁵ Lu Xun does not hesitate to strip off the normalizing layers of social covering so that reality can appear in its true form. Lu Xun’s satire, therefore, is completely dependent upon the existence of these normalizing layers. As long as truth is still hidden under the covering of lies and deception, Lu Xun’s works will not cease to amaze and shock us with their single-minded concern with truth.

Conclusion

To a certain degree, Malraux and Brecht both found some transcendental values in their writing, and perhaps they were, indeed, inspired by these values and acted so as affirm these values in real life. Lu Xun’s writing offers no such relief. His stories, reminiscences, and prose poems depict a world of unmitigated suffering and ignorance on

¹⁵⁴ Lu Xun uses this expression to describe the death of Qiu Jin, who was “clapped to death” by the crowd who were intent on seeing the novel spectacle of Qiu Jin, a female revolutionary. Although I disagree with Eileen Cheng’s analysis of Lu Xun’s treatment of women in his writing (see above), she has made a good portrait of Qiu Jin, who in fact deliberately made herself into a spectacle to attract the attention of the crowd. My emphasis, of course, is on the insensitivity of the crowd, rather than on the revolutionary intent of Qiu Jin. See “Gendered Spectacle,” 23-8.

¹⁵⁵ See CW 6, 427-8.

the part of dead souls. His characters are intolerable and unredeemable. His situations are relentlessly hopeless. Lu Xun knew that his fiction could only be an honest reflection of the world he saw, and since he invariably felt that only darkness and nothingness were real,¹⁵⁶ he could not help but convey that sense of gloom in his writing. However, although Lu Xun was not willing to sugarcoat the bitter pill of life, he never gave up his fight against despair. On the path of life, Lu Xun tells us, if he encounters a crossroad, then he will “sit down, rest for a while, or take a nap, and then take a road that seems to be passable.”¹⁵⁷ If he runs into a tiger, then he will climb up a tree and wait until the tiger goes away; or he would rather starve on the tree, not even letting the tiger feed on his dead body. If there is no tree, then he will “take a bite of the tiger” before letting himself be eaten. If he reaches the end of the road, he will then “step into the brier, and temporarily walk there.”¹⁵⁸ For Lu Xun, no matter how impossible the situation is, there is always a way to go forward until death stops his march. It is, therefore, this strange combination of despair *and* rebellion against despair that carries Lu Xun’s writing forward. Still, there is no way out in Lu Xun’s fiction. Unlike Malraux and Brecht, Lu Xun turned from art to revolution in order to find his inspiration.

¹⁵⁶ CW 11, 20-1.

¹⁵⁷ CW 11, 15.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 15.

Conclusion

In the works of Malraux, Brecht, and Lu Xun, we have seen that political and revolutionary visions form an inextricable part of their artistic creation. None of these writers fits neatly into the category of either artist or revolutionary; their identities are not complete without us giving consideration to both roles. Therefore we have considered the importance of historical events, which compelled these revolutionaries to make certain choices, both artistically and politically, along with the artists' search for universal truth. However, the desires of the individual artist often came into sharp conflict with those of the revolutionary, so that the writer of the analyzed works struggled with the pull of both identities. But it is precisely through their resistance to being categorized as either artist or revolutionary, and their perseverance in being both, that these writers distinguish themselves from the conforming mass, who live and operate by the rules of the binary-driven world.

In the three works Malraux wrote on China, we witness the continuous battle of a young man whose pen was inspired by a philosopher's mind, and whose mind was persuaded by his political ambitions. Therefore, in *The Temptation of the West*, despite his knowledge that the Chinese youth of the May Fourth generation were in the throes of emulating the West in order to revivify a weak and backward China, Malraux opted to use his "Chinese" character Ling to shower severe criticisms on the West, which, according to the writer himself, was in a state of irrevocable decline and must find its redemption elsewhere. This device of employing a Chinese voice to criticize the West also exonerated Malraux from being identified as anti-West, which could have potentially

thwarted his future political career. However, having denied that either China or the West could save itself, let alone each other, Malraux came to recognize that he had to move away from the rigid opposition in which he had situated China and the West. In his second China novel, *The Conquerors*, although he still denied that China could save itself (both Chinese characters, the terrorist Hong and the nationalist leader Ch'eng-tai, die), he no longer distorted the Chinese view of the West, but conscientiously characterized his West as sick by afflicting his Western heroes with diseases. Significantly, although the novel ends with the failure of Western individualism in China, not only does the Western hero find a trace of hope for himself (he has created hope for the Chinese and thereby rendered his life meaningful), but China is also deemed as salvageable: the Chinese mass, like Hong, has been awakened to the condition of their misery and will not keep silent any more.

In his best China work, *Man's Fate*, Malraux was able to heed the calls of both art and revolution even better. Even though he never found a place for a Chinese revolutionary leader in his novels on the Chinese Revolution, Malraux came to see that the Asians could not be denied a place in the struggle that would determine their own fate. Therefore, the creation of the character Kyo, who is half French and half Japanese, should be regarded as a trope of Malraux's genuine commitment to transcending the West-China binary. It is this character's almost artistic vision of love as a redemptive virtue for mankind, along with the solidarity exemplified by the pure revolutionary Katov, that bring the novel to its moving crescendo, in which death is defeated, and meaning resurrected. In contrast, those characters (Clappique, Ferral, Gisors—all Frenchmen) who deliberately place themselves outside of the revolution are consigned to the oblivion of

history as they sink under the weight of their mythomania, individual heroism, and escapism. In *Man's Fate*, Malraux no longer indulged the rule of pure thoughts or pure actions. Redemption can only come from a combination of both.

Unlike Malraux, Brecht never approached China as an other in opposition to the West. From the very beginning, he consciously borrowed the exoticism associated with China as a setting for his European plays, in order to offset the strangeness of the European “normality.” However, in his China works, Brecht also tackled binaries, and it is through observing his nuanced reaction to the opposing concepts that we appreciate him both as a revolutionary and an artist. In his first China play, *In the Swamp*, as well as the learning play, *The Measures Taken*, Brecht sought to reconcile the claims of personal desire and collective will, instead of privilege one over the other. In the first play, the characters learn that both the desire for individual freedom and the desire for camaraderie are part of human nature, but they are, unfortunately, also in constant and inveterate conflict with each other. In the second play, we see that prioritizing the collective will does not and must not negate the individual’s humanity. While collectively, we might see further and fight better, the goal of collective struggle is precisely to restore individual humanity. Forsaking the individual for the collective merely serves to deprive the latter of its meaningful components.

In *The Good Person of Setzuan*, Brecht grappled with the concepts of good and evil. His identity as a bourgeois conflicted with his identification with the proletariat, so that he could neither denounce bourgeois morality as completely hypocritical and useless, nor wholeheartedly praise the indiscriminating goodness of the exploited. Instead, he remained torn, neither succumbing to the efficacy of capitalist shrewdness and

calculation (Shui Ta is banished in the end), nor falling prey to the all-melting power of love (Shen Te is left helpless by the gods), but pledging his loyalty to the only deity that promises to both liquidate and consolidate all: change. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* this commitment to change is further strengthened by an artistic image Brecht borrowed from the Chinese philosopher Laozi: with time, soft water will erode hard rocks—the seemingly impossible can and will be achieved. Although the artist, trusting immortality, places the hope for justice in eventuality, the revolutionary in Brecht made him score an immediate victory for Grusha, an honest working girl who deserved to be rewarded for her virtues. Although justice for all remains a hope, not a reality, Brecht sketches out a picture of the “good,” who will eventually be the recipient of justice: the good are those who nourish the growth of life. Indeed, life became the ultimate good for Brecht, who could no longer hold onto the Communist promise of liberty for all, nor trust that the capitalists would voluntarily relinquish their privileges, which they regarded as their birthright. In their stead he teaches his readers the wisdom of the middle course, or, in another Chinese philosopher’s term, the Doctrine of the Mean. To stay in the middle is to be neither this or that, but to stay alive so that one can choose to be what one wants to be.

In Lu Xun’s brief period of creative writing (1918-1926), the writer always consciously combined his role as an artist and a revolutionary. Lu Xun admits that he would not have started writing fiction, if not for the persistent urging of his friends, who believed it possible to change the nation’s consciousness through literature. Therefore, although he always tried to let the logic of the events speak for itself, he did not hesitate to place a few “call to arms” in his stories, so that those with hope could hold onto their hope. However, the injustices he suffered in his own life, along with the bloody massacre

of March, 1926, thoroughly disillusioned Lu Xun about the power of literature to change society, although it was only after writing about these cruel experiences that Lu Xun was able to stop recreating them in his fiction. In *Dawn Flowers Picked at Dusk*, Lu Xun reminisced about the painful experiences in his past in order to gain perspective on the present and hope for the future. Not only was he able to convince himself that one could still have faith in the goodness of mankind, but also that justice for the living was an undeniable possibility. However, having confronted his own past as composed of a series of departures from one unlivable place to the next, Lu Xun realized also that the only way to stop fleeing from his own life was to change the condition he was in.

The examination of Lu Xun's short stories led us to believe that Lu Xun could no longer see himself as a fiction writer because he could not, without jeopardizing his integrity as an artist, restore the missing dimension to the heroes populating his stories. We see his women, whom he uses as a symbol for China itself, as a blank canvas upon which the superstition, ignorance, and backwardness of China are written; his gawking crowd is completely devoid of the self, and echoes only the voice of the authorities; and his compromised intellectuals do not reside in between two worlds (the old and the new) because they have chosen to be resistant to both, but because they have been pushed into a no-man's land without putting up a fight. In other words, the characters of his fiction are either without any identity, identify themselves according to the dictates of authority, or are stuck in between two identities, both of which reject them as outcasts. Thoroughly grounded in reality and committed to change, Lu Xun, much like Brecht did with his *Verfremdungseffekt*, used what I call "satirical realism" in his writing to bring out the strangeness of the oppressive reality. By exposing the absence of the self in his characters,

Lu Xun warns that they cannot be relied on as agents of change; on the contrary, their existence is merely a prolonged episode of suffering. Taking the fate of the compromised intellectual as a warning to himself, Lu Xun then advocated, in his prose poem collection *Wild Grass*, making a choice in order to take a stand against inaction. In this last creative work Lu Xun depicted characters who are conscious of their in-betweenness (the ghostly figures that both repel and captivate the readers) and desire a swift demise of their own being, as Lu Xun himself did, so that the age of action and change may take over. In this sense, Lu Xun's despair for the present *and* his rebellion against this despair become a statement for his status as both an artist and a revolutionary: the artist, inspired by the ideal of rebellion, is nevertheless grounded in the revolutionary's sober assessment of reality, while the revolutionary, disheartened by real resistance to change, derives continuous succor from the artistic vision for change. This symbiotic relationship between the artist and the revolutionary attests to Lu Xun's refusal to being confined within either one role.

Thus, our analysis of the three writers brings us to the conclusion that all of them resisted the temptation of looking at the world in binary terms, but instead understood and presented the human condition through a tension-filled but conviction-driven combination of artistic intuition and revolutionary pragmatism. The sublime writer is at once constrained and abetted by the lure of action, and vice versa. However, like any great tragedy, whose power to move and conquer rests in the hero's hopeless defiance against his fate as prescribed by a higher power (one thinks of Oedipus and Albert of Sisyphus¹), our writers' struggle against being defined as either/or in a world that, as Lu

¹ In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus draws our attention to a Sisyphus who, in carrying out the endless punishment of rolling a boulder up a hill, only for it to fall down as soon as it reaches the top, thinks about

Xun points out in *Wild Grass*, called for a choice so as to extricate the world from the morass of inaction, was, in a sense, doomed to fail. After writing the analyzed works, which continue to win over the discerning reader through their poignancy and grandeur, all of them made certain political choices and bade farewell to the realm of the in-between. While Malraux relinquished his pursuit of radical politics and joined de Gaulle's conservative government, Brecht pledged his loyalty to the East Berlin government in his reaction to the May Day Demonstration in 1953, and Lu Xun became the most influential spokesman for Communism in China and endorsed the slogan that all literature is propaganda. However, it is precisely through the juxtaposition of their in-betweenness with this last "betrayal" and "surrender," foreseen by the writers themselves (especially in the cases of Malraux, who always knew his own political ambition, and Lu Xun, who never granted any hope for his literary fight), that one is given a glimpse of the true beauty of the subliminal fight. To fight against the impossible is to be the impossible and to give hope to all possibilities. The sublime writer and the lure of action digress from each other, but it is in the paradoxical convergence of the two that, as Lyotard hoped, the honor of the name is saved.²

his toil at the brief moment of release from his labor and, suffusing his suffering with consciousness, invests his life with meaning.

² *The Postmodern Condition*, 82.

Appendix

The Chinese Revolution and the World Wars: 1911-1949

1. 1911-1921

By 1911, the rule of the Manchu Qing Dynasty had run its course. Since the Opium war against the Great Britain in 1839 and the first unequal treaty in 1842, the corrupt and militarily backward Qing government suffered more humiliating defeats in the Anglo-French Expedition of 1856-60, the Sino-French War of 1884-5, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5, and the Boxer War of 1900, contracted huge war indemnities, ceded valuable trade ports and granted numerous economic privileges to the imperial powers.¹ In November, 1908, the Emperor Guangxu and the Empress Dowager Cixi both died, leaving the throne to a barely three-year-old Puyi. It therefore came as no surprise that in 1911, “the Father of the Chinese Revolution” Sun Yat-sen, with little military power but a grand dream of a strong and democratic future for China, was able to break the last resistance of the Qing Empire. However, the presidency of the Republic of China, established on the first day of 1912, was quickly snatched away by General Yuan Shikai, who reorganized and maintained control over the remaining Manchu armies and could thus easily topple Sun’s army-less Republic. From 1913 until shortly before his death in 1916, Yuan exercised dictatorial control over China and even briefly restored the

¹ The Treaty of Nanjing, signed with the Great Britain on August 29, 1842, delivered Hong Kong to the British Empire. In addition, China was forced to open the ports at Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai. Under the same treaty, the British also received 21 million ounces of silver as reparation, fixed tariffs, extraterritoriality for British citizens on Chinese soil, and the Most Favored Nation status. The later treaties demanded more of the same things.

monarchy in 1916. After his death, however, no strongman was able to step into his shoes and the Republic swiftly disintegrated into warlord politics, which was to remain the pattern of rule until Chiang Kai-shek's reunification of China in 1928.

The most significant event in this period is the May Fourth Movement in 1919, which started as a patriotic and anti-imperialist response to the edicts of the Versailles Treaty. In 1915 Japan presented the notorious Twenty-one Demands to Yuan's government, the acceptance of which would practically render China into a Japanese protectorate.² Powerless to fight Japan's gigantic war machine on her own, China had looked to the West (especially the United States and Great Britain) for support, but although the latter were displeased with Japan's encroachment upon their own interest,³ at the negotiation tables after the Great War, they were nevertheless ready to sponsor Japan's "official" takeover of the rights in Shandong, a former German concession. China's pitiful effort at joining the War in 1917 on the side of the Allied, sending thousands of peasant workers to France in the last stages of the war, and emerging, alongside her archenemy Japan, as one of the victors of the War, failed to put her on a par with Japan in the eyes of the Western powers. Disillusioned and bitter, Chinese revolutionaries turned elsewhere for help, and their attention riveted on the newly established Bolshevik government in Russia. By 1921, the Communist Party of China

² The 21 demands not only asked for special economic and territorial rights of Japan in China, but the seven articles in the fifth group of the demands severely encroached upon Chinese sovereignty by demanding that Japanese officials be appointed in the Chinese government, and Japanese police be consulted in case of Japanese-Chinese conflict on Chinese soil. The first version of the Twenty One Demands were rejected because of these articles. After the deletion of the fifth group, however, the document was signed by Yuan and put into effect.

³ Britain, the biggest concession holder in China, was unhappy enough about Japan's inconsideration that she helped fuel the anti-Japanese sentiment during May Fourth and the subsequent boycott of Japanese goods. The United States was also thoroughly disgusted by Japan's rejection of the Open Door Policy (proposed by Secretary of State John Hay in 1899), which would guarantee all countries an equal opportunity to trade in and benefit from China.

was founded in the first congress attended by 13 members, representing 52 Communists in the whole China.

In Europe at the same time, the clashes of nationalist and imperialist interests resulted in the First World War, whose trauma gave birth to the Lost Generation, inculcated in the survivors a strong sense of disillusionment with the notion of progress, and bred in them a nihilistic outlook. Sustaining the heaviest damage and loss from the winning side was France, with 1.4 million of her male citizens between the age of 18 and 30 killed in the war, a quarter of her able subjects. Fought largely upon French soil on the Western Front, the war also destroyed large parts of the French land and millions of her homes. On the losing side, Germany was not only ordered to disarm, but also made to pay huge sums of reparation set at an unrealistic schedule, which immediately led to the collapse of her currency. Like China after the War, revolutionaries in these two countries found a viable alternative in Communism. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht reorganized the famous Spartacists into the German Communist Party at the beginning of 1919, and by 1920 the left and center portions of the French Socialists split from their party and formed the French Communist Party.

2. 1922-1937

In 1923, although Sun Yat-sen had been able to set up his own Kuomintang government in the southern city of Canton, supported by local military figures, he was still far from realizing his dream of unifying China under his own benevolent rule. It was then that Mikhail Borodin, a Comintern agent working as an adviser for Sun at the time,

succeeded in persuading Sun to welcome the Communists to join the Nationalist Party as individual members, so as to “tap into the enormous latent energies of China's peasants and industrial workers, who were just beginning to emerge on the political landscape.”⁴ As a result of this first alliance between the two parties, the Nationalist government was able to launch the Northern Expedition in 1926 under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek (successor to Sun, who died of cancer in 1925), with the objective of ridding China of the warlords and unifying the country. Although the Expedition proceeded smoothly and the Communist fought bravely alongside the Nationalists, Chiang Kai-shek, in a bid to secure his ultimate leadership within the coalition before the final victory, massacred his Communist allies in April 1927 and severed relation with the Comintern. After the completion of the Northern Expedition, Chiang installed himself as head of the Nationalist government in Nanjing, and continued his relentless extermination campaigns against the Communists, now largely confined to the poor mountainous areas in Jiangxi under the leadership of Mao Zedong. In 1934 Chiang succeeded in dislodging the Communists from their Jiangxi (a province in southeast China) base and chased them through most part of the Long March, which took a year to complete, at the cost of tens of thousands of lives, but transported the Red Army to the remote town of Yan'an in the northwest province of Shaanxi and into much needed seclusion to regroup. On the other hand, Chiang's policy of “first internal pacification, then external resistance”⁵ outraged some of his own generals, two of whom kidnapped him in December 1936, forced him into negotiations with the Communists, until the second alliance between the two parties

⁴ Jonathan D. Spence, “Sun Yat-sen,” *Time Asia*, August 23-30, 1999. Vol. 154, No. 7/8.

⁵ Japan had invaded Manchuria in 1931 and established the puppet state of Manchukuo shortly after. Chiang, busy at quelling internal conflicts against the warlords and the Communists, adopted the policy of nonresistance to Japan. As a result, the general in charge of Manchuria, Zhang Xueliang, was forced to evacuate his army and suffered further humiliation for his shameful role in the Manchuria Incident.

was established, this time with the goal of ousting Japan from Chinese soil.⁶ In this interlude, it is worth noting that the decision of releasing Chiang instead of executing him was not reached until Moscow's intervention.⁷

In Germany and France, most of the 1920s was spent recovering from the damages of the War and rebuilding the nations and their economies. Just when life took on a semblance of normalcy again, however, the Great Depression (1929-1939) swept these countries and plunged them into the depth of massive unemployment and poverty. Riding on the wave of political radicalism in these hard times, Hitler's Nazi party won the Reichstag election in 1933, while in France and elsewhere, Popular Fronts were formed in response to Stalin's call for the leftists and centrists to unite in the combat against fascism. In 1936, Leon Blum's *Front populaire* even won the national election and held office for a year. Thus, in Europe as in China, the Communist movement charted a turbulent course as a counter-movement to oppressive regimes and fascist threats,⁸ and was, despite different interpretations of Marxism⁹ and Stalin's bloody

⁶ One of the generals was in fact the same Zhang Xueliang who had long harbored a deep hatred for the Japanese who drove him out of his own home state, and whose enthusiasm for Communism was no hidden secret.

⁷ Believing that the execution of Chiang will only exacerbate the Japan situation and therefore interfere with Russia's own interest in the Manchuria area, Stalin urged the release of Chiang and the re-alliance of the two parties. In desperate need of Soviet aid, Mao, otherwise adamant on the immediate execution of his archenemy, relented and consented to negotiations.

⁸ Jerome Ch'en has drawn an analogy between Chiang Kai-shek and Hitler, calling the former the Chinese *Führer* who employed the service of the Blue-shirts (Chinese equivalent of the Brown-shirts) and promoted reading on fascism, especially Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. *China and The West*, 86-7.

⁹ Mao's understanding and use of Marxism differs from the Russian model from the very beginning in his heavy reliance on the peasant population. He was to continue calling on the peasant body for peace-time revolutions after the Communist triumph in China, especially in the land reform movement in 1950-1 and the 1955 campaign to collectivize the country. Mao was also, as Maurice Meisner points out, "never an international revolutionary spokesman" like Lenin or Trotsky, but "an eminently national revolutionary leader." Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 64-5.

purges of the “whites,”¹⁰ still influenced by directives from Moscow in making important decisions during this period.

3. 1938-49

This period covered, in China, the anti-Japanese War which ended in 1945, and the ensuing struggle for power between the Nationalists and the Communists until the former's flight to Taiwan and the latter's pronouncement of victory in 1949. For the Europeans and the United States, it meant the Second World War and the Cold War right afterwards. For our purpose here, what is most interesting is the fact that Communism, thus far attracting significant followings in both Western Europe and China, took radically divergent routes in these two parts of the world. While the PRC endeared herself to the “elder brother” Soviet Union who provided crucial aid, both material and personnel, in building a hitherto nonexistent industry in China, Western Europe, as a collective entity known as the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (1948-61), was sheltered under a gigantic financial aid blanket woven by the Marshall Plan (1947-52) of the United States. Although the purpose of the Marshall Plan is, besides the achievement of avowedly humanitarian and expressly economic ends, to stop the potential spread of Communism westward by organizing Western Europe as a bloc to side with the United States in the Cold War,¹¹ there was never the question of rejecting

¹⁰ Soon after Stalin's victory in the battle for leadership against Trotsky after Lenin's death, he started clearing the ranks within the Communist Party to eliminate any potential opposition (whites) to his rule. The Great Purge was touched off by the assassination of a Stalin supporter in late 1934, and continued until 1938.

¹¹ See Secretary of State George Marshall's speech to his Harvard University audience on June 5, 1947. Collected in the Congressional Record, June 30, 1947.

the generous 13-billion-dollar package after the near collapse of European economy in 1946-7. Under the aegis of the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed in 1949 so as to better facilitate “economic and political cooperation,” but more importantly to effect “collective defense” against potential threats (from the Soviet Union bloc).¹² The fate of Communism seemed to have been determined less by fundamental philosophical considerations than geopolitical and economic reasons.

¹² See the North Atlantic Treaty drawn on April 4, 1949.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Marston. The Limits of Realism: Chinese fiction in the Revolutionary Period. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Bartram, Graham and Anthony Waine, ed. Brecht in Perspective. London and New York: Longman, 1982.
- Benjamin, Walter. Understanding Brecht. Trans. Anna Bostock. New York: Verso, 2003.
- Bentley, Eric. Bentley on Brecht. New York: Applause, 1999.
- Berg-Pan, Renata. Bertolt Brecht and China. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1979.
- Berlau, Ruth. Living for Brecht: The Memoirs of Ruth Berlau. Ed. Hans Bunge. Trans. Geoffrey Skelton. New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1987.
- Berman, Marshall. All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Bianco, Lucien. Origins of the Chinese Revolution. Trans. Muriel Bell. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971.
- Blend, Charles. André Malraux: Tragic Humanist. Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1963.
- Bloom, Harold. Ed. André Malraux's *Man's Fate*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988.
- Boak, Dennis. André Malraux. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968.
- Brecht, Bertolt. Two Plays by Bertolt Brecht: The Good Woman of Setzuan, The Caucasian Chalk Circle. Trans. Eric Bentley. New York: Meridian, 1994.
- , Bertolt Brecht Diaries: 1920-1922. Ed. Herta Ramthun. Trans. John Willett. London: Eyre Methuen, 1979.
- , Bertolt Brecht: Journals 1934-1955. Trans. Hugh Rorrison. Ed. John Willett. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- , Bertolt Brecht Poems. Ed. John Willet and Ralph Manheim. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1976.
- , Brecht on Art and Politics. Ed. Thomas Kuhn and Steve Giles. London:

- Methuen, 2003.
- , Brecht on Theatre. Ed. & Trans. John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.
- , Galileo. Trans. Charles Laughton. In Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961. 331-404.
- , In the Swamp: A Boxing Match Between Two Men in the Giant City of Chicago. Trans. Eric Bentley. In Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961. 2-68.
- , The Measures Taken, and Other Lehrstucke. Trans. Carl R. Mueller, et al. London: Eyre Methuen, 1977.
- , Stories of Mr. Keuner. Trans. Martin Chalmers. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001.
- Camus, Albert. The Myth of Sisyphus. Trans. Justin O'Brien. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.
- Cate, Curtis. André Malraux: A Biography. London: Hutchinson, 1995.
- Chan, F. Gilbert, and Thomas H. Etzold, ed. China in the 1920s: Nationalism and Revolution. New York: New Viewpoints, 1976.
- Chapman, H. Owen. The Chinese Revolution, 1926-27. London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1977.
- Ch'en, Jerome. China and the West: society and Culture 1815-1937. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979.
- Cheng, Eileen. "Gendered Spectacles: Lu Xun on Gazing at Women and Other Pleasures" in Modern Chinese Literature and Culture, Volume 16, Number 1, Spring 2004, 1-36.
- Chiang, Kai-shek. Soviet Russia in China. Trans. Madame Chiang Kai-shek. New York: The Noonday Press, 1965.
- Clarke, J. J. Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Gregory, John S. The West and China since 1500. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.
- Clifford, Nicholas. Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s. Hanover and London: Middlebury College Press, 1991.

- Courcel, Martine de. Ed. Malraux: Life and Work. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.
- Demetz, Peter. Ed. Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.
- Denton, Kirk A., ed. Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Esslin, Martin. Brecht: A Choice of Evils—A Critical Study of the Man, His Work and His Opinions. New York: Methuen, 1984.
- Fan Boqun & Huapeng Zeng. New Criticism on Lu Xun's Novels. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1986. (范伯群, 曾华鹏。鲁迅小说新论。北京: 人民文学出版社, 1986)
- Franke, Wolfgang. China and the West. Trans. R. A. Wilson. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1967.
- Frohock, W. M. André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1952.
- Fuegi, John. Brecht and Company : Sex, Politics, and the Making of the Modern Drama. New York: Grove Press, 1994.
- , The Essential Brecht. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1972.
- Fuegi, John, Renate Voris, Carl Weber, and Marc Silberman. Ed. Brecht in Asia and Africa (The Brecht Yearbook, Volume XIV). Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1989.
- Ha, Marie-Paule. Figuring the East: Segalen, Malraux, Duras, and Barthes. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Harris, Geoffrey T. André Malraux: A Reassessment. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. André Malraux. London: Bowes & Bowes, 1960.
- Hayot, Eric. Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, *Tel quel*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004.
- Holcombe, Arthur N. The Chinese Revolution: A Phase in the Regeneration of a World Power. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930.

- Horvath, Violet M. André Malraux: The Human Adventure. New York: New York University Press, 1969.
- Hsia, Hsi-An. The Gate of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968.
- Hsieh, Yvonne Y. From Occupation to Revolution: China through the Eyes of Loti, Claudel, Segalen, and Malraux (1895-1933). Birmingham: Summa Publications, 1996.
- Huters, Theodore. Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.
- Jenkins, Cecil. André Malraux. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972.
- Jennings, Lane. Chinese Literature and Thought in the Poetry and Prose of Bertolt Brecht. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1970.
- Kline, Thomas Jefferson. André Malraux and the Metamorphosis of Death. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1973.
- Kuhn, Tom and Steve Giles. Ed. Brecht on Art and Politics. Trans. Laura Bradley, Steve Giles and Tome Kuhn. London: Methuen, 2003.
- Lacouture, Jean. André Malraux. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.
- Lee, Leo Ou-fan. Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Lewis, R. W. B., ed. Malraux: a Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964.
- Lin, Yu-sheng. The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979.
- Lu Xun. The Collected Works of Lu Xun, Vol. 1-18. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1981. (鲁迅著。鲁迅全集, Vol 1-18。北京: 人民文学出版社, 1981)
- , Lu Hsun: Writing for the Revolution. San Francisco: Red Sun Publishers, 1976.
- , The Complete Stories of Lu Xun. Trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.
- Lukács, György. The Theory of the Novel. Trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge: The M.I.T

Press, 1971.

Lyell, William A. Jr. Lu Hsun's Vision of Reality. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

Lyons, Charles. Bertolt Brecht: The Despair and the Polemic. London and Amsterdam: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

MacKenzie, John M. Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995.

McDougall, Bonnie S. The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919-1925. Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971.

Mackerras, Colin, ed. Sinophiles and Sinophobes: Western Views of China. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Mackerras, Colin. Western Images of China. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Madsen, Axel. Malraux. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1976.

-----, Silk Roads: The Asian Adventures of Clara & Andre Malraux. New York: Pharos Books, 1989.

Malraux, André. Anti-memoirs. Trans. Terence Kilmartin. New York: Holt, Rinehart And Winston, 1968.

-----, The Conquerors. Trans. Stephen Becker. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

-----, Days of Wrath. Trans. Haakon M. Chevalier. New York: Random House, 1936.

-----, Man's Fate. Trans. Haakon M. Chavelier. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

-----, Metamorphosis of the Gods. Trans. Stuart Gilbert. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1960.

-----, The Royal Way. Trans. Stuart Gilbert. New York: Vintage Books, 1935.

-----, The Temptation of the West. Trans. Robert Hollander. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

- , The Voices of Silence. Trans. Stuart Gilbert. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- , The Walnut Trees of Altenburg. Trans. A. W. Fielding. New York: Howard Fertig, 1989.
- Malraux, Clara. Memoirs. Trans. Patrick O'Brian. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967.
- Meisner, Maurice. Mao's China and After. New York: The Free Press, 1986.
- Mews, Siegfried, ed. Critical Essays on Bertolt Brecht. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989.
- Mews, Siegfried and Herbert Knust, ed. Essays on Brecht: Theater and Politics. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1974.
- Morrissey, Will. Reflections on Malraux; Cultural Founding in Modernity. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984.
- Munk, Erika. Ed. Brecht. New York: Bantam Books, 1972.
- Pak, Hyobom. China and the West: Myths and Realities in History. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974.
- Pollard, David. The True Story of Lu Xun. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002.
- Průšek, Jaroslav. The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of Modern Chinese Literature. Ed. Leo Ou-fan Lee. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.
- Qian, Liqun. Encountering Lu Xun: Lectures in Beida, No. 2. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2002. (钱理群著。与鲁迅相遇：北大演讲录之二。北京：三联书店，2002)
- Raymond, Gino. André Malraux: Politics and the Temptation of Myth. Brookfield: Avebury, 1995.
- Ren, Chuanlu. The Reception of Bertolt Brecht in China from 1955-1987. Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University, 1992.
- Rigby, Richard W. The May 30 Movement: Events and Themes. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980.
- Riley, Dave. "Review of John Fuegi: *The Life and Lies of Bertolt Brecht*." In Green Left Weekly, 20 March, 1995.

- Said, Edward. Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. What is Literature? Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1965.
- Savage, Catharine. Malraux, Sartre, and Aragon as Political Novelists. Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1964.
- Schrecker, John E. The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004.
- Shih, Shu-mei. The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Spence, Jonathan D. The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- , The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895-1980. New York: The Viking Press, 1981.
- Sun, Yu & Qiaosheng Huang. Ed. Eternal Warmth—Cultural Stalwarts Remember Lu Xun. Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (孙郁, 黄乔生主编。《回望鲁迅: 永在的温情—文化名人忆鲁迅》。河北: 河北教育出版社, 2000)
- , Vicissitudes of Youth—Brothers Remember Lu Xun (1). Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (《回望鲁迅: 年少沧桑—兄弟忆鲁迅(一)》。河北: 河北教育出版社, 2000)
- , Vicissitudes of Youth—Brothers Remember Lu Xun (2). Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (《回望鲁迅: 书里人生—兄弟忆鲁迅(二)》。河北: 河北教育出版社, 2000)
- , Ten Years of Vicissitudes Together. Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (《回望鲁迅: 十年携手共艰危》。河北: 河北教育出版社, 2000)
- , Searching for the Soul. Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (《回望鲁迅—心灵的探寻》。河北: 河北教育出版社, 2000)
- , Lu Xun under the Red Aura. Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (《红色光环下的鲁迅》。河北: 河北教育出版社, 2000)
- , Feng Xuefeng Remembers Lu Xun. Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (《回望鲁迅: 冯雪峰忆鲁迅》。河北: 河北教育出版社, 2000)
- , If He Were Still Living—Later Students Remember Lu Xun. Hebei: Hebei

- Education Publishing House, 2000. (回望鲁迅：如果现在他还活着——后期弟子忆鲁迅。河北：河北教育出版社，2000)
- . Mr. Lu Xun in My Memory—Lu Xun under the Female Pen. Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (回望鲁迅：我记忆中的鲁迅先生——女性笔下的鲁迅。河北：河北教育出版社，2000)
- . Reverberations from Overseas—International Friends Remember Lu Xun. Hebei: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000. (回望鲁迅：海外回响——国际友人忆鲁迅。河北：河北教育出版社，2000)
- Sun, Yushi. Study on Wild Grass. Beijing: Social Science Publishing House of China, 1982. (孙玉石著。《野草》研究。北京：中国社会科学出版社，1982)
- Tang, Tao. Studies on Lu Xun. Beijing: Arts and Culture Publishing House, 1991. (唐弢著。《鲁迅论集》。北京：文化艺术出版社，1991)
- Tang, Xiaobing. Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Tannery, Claude. Malraux: The Absolute Agnostic, or Metamorphosis as Universal Law. Trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Tatlow, Antony, and Tak-Wai Wong. Ed. Brecht and East Asian Theatre. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1982.
- Tatlow, Antony. The Mask of Evil: Brecht's Response to the Poetry, Theatre and Thought of China and Japan, A Comparative and Critical Evaluation. Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1977.
- Thomson, Peter and Glendyr Sacks, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Brecht. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Thompson, Brian, & Carl A. Viggiani, ed. Witnessing André Malraux: Visions and Re-Visions. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984.
- Todd, Olivier. Malraux: A Life. Trans. Joseph West. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.
- Voelker, Klaus. Brecht: A Biography. Trans. John Nowell. New York: The Seabury Press, 1978.
- . Brecht Chronicle. Trans. Fred Wieck. New York: The Seabury Press, 1975.
- Wang, Ban. History and Memory: Questions on Global Modernism. Hong Kong: Oxford

- University Press, 2004. (王斑著。 历史与记忆：全球现代性的质疑)
- . Illuminations from the Past. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Wang, Furen. The History and Current Situation of Lu Xun Study in China. Zhejiang: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 1999. (王富仁著。 中国鲁迅研究的历史与现状。浙江人民出版社, 1999)
- Wang, Hui. Rebel Against Despair: Study on Lu Xun and *Call to Arms, Wandering*. Taipei: Jiuda Cultural Company, Inc., 1990. (汪晖著。 反抗绝望：鲁迅及其《呐喊》《彷徨》研究。台北：久大文化股份有限公司, 1990)
- Weber, Betty Nance, and Hubert Heinen. Ed. Bertolt Brecht: Political Theory and Literary Practice. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980.
- Weiss, Ruth F. Lu Xun: A Chinese Writer for All Times. Beijing: New World Press, 1985.
- Willett, John. Art and Politics in the Weimar Period. New York: Da Capo Press, 1996.
- . Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches. New York: Methuen, 1984.
- Witt, Mary Ann Frese. Existential Prisons: Captivity in Mid-Twentieth-Century French Literature. Durham: Duke University Press, 1985.
- Witt, Hubert. Ed. Brecht as They Knew Him. Trans. John Peet. New York: International Publishers, 1974.
- Yi, Tu. Ed. The 21st Century: Lu Xun and Us. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2001. (一土编。 21 世纪：鲁迅和我们。北京：人民文学出版社, 2001)

Curriculum Vita

Anne Lijing Xu

Education:

2000-2007	Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, Rutgers University
2000-2004	M.A. in Comparative Literature, Rutgers University
1999-2000	M.A. Program in English, Drew University (transfer to Rutgers)
1995-1999	B.A. in English Language and Literature, Zhejiang University

Occupations:

2006-2007	Lecturer in Chinese, University of California at San Diego
2005-2006	Teaching Assistant in Chinese, Rutgers University
2004-2005	Part-time Lecturer in Chinese, Rutgers University
2001-2006	Part-time Lecturer in Comparative Literature, Rutgers University

Publication:

2004	“A Quarrel between Friends: Towards a Union of Artist and Philosopher” in <i>Stirrings Still: The International Journal of Existential Literature</i> , Vol. 1, No. 1, 2004. 64-73.
------	---