Title
The Poverty of Fiction: Russia in the Making of a Modern Chinese Realism

Author
Cai, Keru

Publication Date
2020

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

The Poverty of Fiction: Russia in the Making of a Modern Chinese Realism

By

Keru Cai

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Andrew F. Jones, Chair
Professor Sophie Volpp
Professor Harsha Ram
Professor Edward Tyerman

Summer 2020

The Poverty of Fiction: Russia in the Making of a Modern Chinese Realism

By Keru Cai

Abstract

The Poverty of Fiction: Russia in the Making of a Modern Chinese Realism

by

Keru Cai

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Andrew F. Jones, Chair

This dissertation asks how a long-established literary culture exposed to the depredations of modernity reinvents itself. In the early twentieth century, Chinese activists and intellectuals, reeling from decades of political setbacks since the Opium Wars, sought to drag Chinese society out of an allegedly benighted backwardness into a westernized modernity. I show that modern Chinese realist writers frequently turned to the topic of *material* poverty—peasants suffering from famine, exploited urban laborers, homeless orphans—to convey their sense of *textual* poverty and national backwardness. Writers wished to break with a literary and linguistic tradition that for thousands of years had largely been the purview of the ruling scholar-official class. This tradition was, according to modern reformers, woefully impoverished in comparison to Western models, and writing about poverty was a strategy to ameliorate this cultural deficiency. The combination of a radically new subject matter and experimentation with diverse literary resources (indigenous and foreign) generated major innovations in narrative technique and form. Depicting poverty allowed writers to revolutionize the nascent forms of modern Chinese narrative, innovating strategies of representing the nation, the social other, time, and space, while problematizing their deployment of this weighty topic for aesthetic purposes. Though it was contact with Western cultures that produced their sense of backwardness, Chinese intellectuals appropriated from those foreign literary traditions narrative tools to remedy China's purported textual deficiency by writing about poverty. I examine why Russian literature, itself long preoccupied with a problem of belatedness vis-à-vis Western Europe, occupied a privileged place for Chinese intellectuals of this era. Comparing Chinese fiction about poverty to Russian intertexts by Gogol, Andreev, Chekhov, Turgenev, and others, I show how Chinese writers drew and innovated upon themes (such as madness or human animality) and formal elements (such as metonymy) to invent a new, syncretic realism. In contrast to criticism about the limits of realist writing in China, I argue that it is a *heteromodal* form, capable of encompassing many modes of narration or literary genres. Here I draw upon on Mikhail Bakhtin's principle of the omnivorously *heteroglossic* nature of language and the novel. Chinese writers were so omnivorously intertextual, absorbing different Western genres and *-isms* simultaneously while continuing to make use of traditional Chinese literary resources, that modern Chinese realism is necessarily informed by a broad spectrum of narrative modes and styles. My dissertation thus contributes to recent critical discussions about peripheral realisms and the transformation of discursive modes or generic conventions when they cross borders.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

My greatest thanks go to my committee members, for their generosity in encouraging my ideas and reading many drafts over the course of many years. I am grateful to Andrew F. Jones, my dissertation chair and eminent mentor, for his unstinting support in talking through the big picture goals of the project as well as the minutiae of close-readings; to Sophie Volpp, for providing invaluable advice on approaching the premodern Chinese tradition in my discussions of modern fiction; to Harsha Ram, for helping me to widen the scope of inquiry to comparative literature and world literature; and to Edward Tyerman, for offering his pioneering expertise in the field of Sino-Russian literary exchange.

I was fortunate to benefit from the guidance of many faculty members at Berkeley and beyond who took a sustained interest in my project. Irina Paperno first nurtured my conceptualization of squalor, and enthusiastically encouraged the study of poverty in the Russian realist tradition. Judith Butler and the members of her dissertation workshop gave me important formative feedback about my ideas. Theodore Huters read several chapters and provided insights on Lu Xun and Xiao Hong. Roy B. Chan was wonderfully generous in offering advice on navigating the academic and emotional tribulations of graduate school. William Schaefer offered a gem of an idea for synthesizing my readings of modern Chinese fiction and my theoretical work on realism. Conversations with Ling Hon Lam, Weihong Bao, Paula Varsano, Michael Lucey, and Tom McEnaney shaped my thinking as this dissertation came to fruition. And my undergraduate mentor, Helen Vendler, has talked me through the major turning points of my career to date, modeling for me the selflessness of lifelong devotion to literature and to teaching. I have been most extraordinarily fortunate because it is difficult to imagine better, wiser, and kinder mentors than Helen, Andrew, and Wai-yee Li, who gave me a solid foundation for doctoral studies.

Fellow graduate students at Berkeley were gracious sounding boards for ideas throughout my years here: Julia Keblinska and the other members of our dissertation group, Jeehyun Choi, KC Forcier, and Hannah Airriess, who painstakingly read my work; Caitlin Scholl, a stoically patient interlocuter and listener; Taylor Johnston, with her expertise in Western realism; other colleagues across many departments including Xiaoyu Xia, Zijing Fan, Jianqing Chen, Xiangjun Feng, Yvonne Lin, Jiaqian Zhu, Wendy Wang, Chris Elford, Paulina Hartono, Matthew Mewhinney, Peiting Li, Matteo Cavelier Riccardi, Brian Egdorf, Maria Whittle, and Semyon Leonenko; and farther afield, Heather Brink-Roby, Elise Huerta, Sarah Zhang, Elizabeth Guo, and Xiaoxuan Li.

Finally, I thank my family for inspiring the topic of this project, and Ian for sustaining the execution of it. I dedicate the dissertation to my mother and father, master storytellers both.

Chapter 1
Introduction: Poverty and Squalor in Modern Chinese Realism

"They bear the presence of the Europeans in their country with humility, just as they bear poverty (*bednost'*), dirt (*griaz'*), and calamity."
—Sergei Tretiakov, *Roar, China!*[1]

"One warm day, when a balmy breeze seemed to give some foretaste of summer, Ah Q actually felt cold; but he could put up with this—his greatest worry was an empty stomach. His cotton quilt, felt hat and shirt had long since disappeared, and after that he had sold his padded jacket. Now nothing was left but his trousers, and these of course he could not take off. He had a ragged linen jacket, it is true; but this was certainly worthless, unless he gave it away to be made into shoe soles. He had long hoped to pick up a sum of money on the road, but hitherto he had not been successful….Thereupon he made up his mind to go out in search of food."
—Lu Xun, *The True Story of Ah Q*[2]

The eponymous protagonist of Lu Xun's (born Zhou Shuren, 1881-1936) novella *Ah Q zhengzhuan* (*The True Story of Ah Q* 1921-2) is known as an everyman figure:[3] Lu Xun's brother Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967) famously indicated that the "Q" represents pictorially a head with the queue of hair that was required of all male subjects of the Qing empire.[4] In writing a passage like this, Lu Xun was doing something groundbreaking, aligned with the ideals of the New Culture Movement (mid-1910s-20s). As Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), founder of the movement's flagship journal, *Xin qingnian* (*New Youth*), enjoined in his 1917 call to arms, "(1) Down with the ornate, sycophantic literature of the aristocracy; up with the plain, expressive literature of the people! (2) Down with the stale, pompous classical literature; up with fresh, sincere realist literature! (3) Down with obscure, abstruse eremitic literature; up with comprehensible, popularized social literature (*tongsu de shehui wenxue*)!"[5] In this democratizing spirit, modern writers made it their business to represent wide swathes of society, including the destitute Ah Q, dignifying these plebeian subjects as well as the spoken vernacular as the rightful purview of serious literary production.[6] Literature was thus to become an appropriately wide-reaching didactic vehicle.[7]

Creators of this incipient literature had a problem to solve: out with the old, and in with the new—such an exhortation was all very well, but how were they to actually go about writing something new? When traditional Chinese models were so aesthetically impoverished, as these reformers decried, then by what means could they improve modern Chinese literature? This

---

[1] Trans. Barbara M. Nixon and F. Polianovskaia (New York: International Publishers, 1932), 9-10.
[2] In *Lu Hsun: Selected Stories*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (New York: Norton, 2003), 87.
[3] See Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House: a Study of Lu Xun* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 76.
[4] Zhou Zuoren, *Lu Xun xiaoshuo li de renwu* (Beijing: Beijing Shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2013), 87-8.
[5] Chen Duxiu, "On Literary Revolution," trans. Timothy Wong, in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 144.
[6] See also Hu Shi, "Wenxue gailiang chuyi" ("A preliminary discussion of literary reform"), *Xin qingnian* vol. 2, no. 5 (January 1917): 26-36. How a story like *Ah Q*—shot through as it is with irony and allegory— answers Chen Duxiu's call for "sincere realist literature" is something I will investigate in following chapters.
[7] Andrew F. Jones has examined the pedagogical role of fiction in modern Chinese developmental thinking. See *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 5.

dissertation posits that modern Chinese realist writers frequently turned to the topic of *material* poverty to convey and remedy their sense of China's alleged *textual* poverty, cultural backwardness, and national weakness. Because our culture is inadequate, therefore China is weak, and therefore our people are poor—so the reasoning went. Intellectuals and activists were reeling from decades of political setbacks since the Opium Wars. Due to perceived humiliations at the hands of Western imperialist powers, reformers sought to drag Chinese society out of its purported backwardness into a Westernized modernity. Hence this period saw a flurry of translation and study of Western literary, philosophical, and scientific writing. Though it was violent confrontation with Western nations that instilled in Chinese intellectuals this conviction of their nation's weakness, Chinese writers appropriated narrative strategies from those foreign literary traditions to enrich their alleged cultural poverty. Russian literature in particular provided models for writing about poverty upon which Chinese writers could innovate; and poverty became a crucial new topic that thematically and formally gave writers generative material to work with: the building blocks of a new literature.

The engagement of early twentieth-century Chinese literature with foreign literatures is well known;[8] so too is its obsession with depicting social ills.[9] My account adds to this picture, first, an account of Russian realism's role in this process, which remains understudied; and second, finer-grained close textual analyses of how modern Chinese realist depictions of the bodily experiences of poverty gave rise to innovations in narrative form, and to a synthetic new mode of literary realism. My readings remain attuned throughout to writers' awareness of the problematic ethical implications of deploying this weighty topic for aesthetic purposes. The writers I discuss were not necessarily poor themselves,[10] though some, such as Xiao Hong (1911-42) or Lao She (1899-1966), had experienced material deprivation in some form at some point in their lives. Modern Chinese writers deplored the purported textual, linguistic, and moral poverty of their culture in comparison to the West, and their answer was to write, with seriousness and concern, about the bodily suffering of the poor, of people not like them—homeless vagrants, servants and bondmaids, prostitutes, rickshaw pullers, street food hawkers, silkworm farmers, and so on. The writers' anxiety about their potential impotence in salvaging China was transposed, in their fiction, into a sense of inability to succor the poor. What's more, the writers' sense of China's cultural lack and national backwardness was transposed into and metonymically conveyed by realist portrayals of material lack, and this was their means of amending China's literary paucity. The 1910s, 20s, and 30s saw an astonishing proliferation of fiction about peasants suffering from famine, exploited urban laborers, orphans, and vagrants.

---

[8] See, for instance, Theodore Huters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); and Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[9] See, for instance, Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); and C. T. Hsia's famous diagnosis of Chinese writers' "obsession with China" in the appendix to *A History Modern Chinese Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). The preoccupation "with human suffering and degradation" was a central component of Chinese writers' so-called obsession with China (Ibid., 354).

[10] A writer's wages would have been significantly higher than a factory worker's in the Republican period; see Zhiguang Yin, *Politics of Art: The Creation Society and the Practice of Theoretical Struggle in Revolutionary China* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 82-6. I will investigate in later chapters the textual awareness of this discrepancy.

This was part of a larger cultural preoccupation with poverty, in other media such as film, drama, print culture, woodcut art.[11] The obsession with poverty makes sense given the historical context of man-made and natural disasters: war, invasions, drought. In fact, China became known as the land of famine at home and abroad.[12] Journalistic accounts of these calamities circulated widely in the print media of the period, and the writers I examine would have been exposed constantly to accounts of these real-life horrors. Reproduced below are two spreads from the popular *Liangyou* (*The Young Companion Pictorial*) about the victims of extreme deprivation during famine and drought in 1928 and 1937, respectively. I have not included here the left side of the second spread, which shows the unburied corpses of two emaciated children, collapsed from starvation upon the ground. "These two children are dead," the caption reads, "But there are thousands more that can be saved from death by starvation. Wouldn't you help them to live?"[13] No doubt such unflinching portrayals of the terrible bodily ramifications of material privation contributed to the ethos in which writers took up the pen to describe poverty in their fiction. And the kind of appeal that the *Liangyou* photograph makes to the reader (presumably a denizen of one of the major coastal cities not directly affected by this natural disaster) makes its way into realist fiction, with its implied injunction to its often economically privileged readers not to look away from the atrocities described therein, nor the real social problems that they reflect.

[11] See Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 5; Xiaomei Chen, "Introduction," *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama*, ed. Xiaomei Chen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 6, and "Reflections on the Legacy of Tian Han: 'Proletarian Modernism' and its Traditional Roots, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 18, no. 1 (Spring, 2006): 175-7; Xiaorong Han, *Chinese Discourses on the Peasant* (Albany: State University of New York, 2005), 32, 50; Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, 126-7; Paul Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany: Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei's Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen, 1926-1938* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 148; Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 179-80, 192, 213.

[12] See Lillian Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s*, 1.

[13] "Zai li bianye" ("The Suffering Multitudes All Over the Land") in *Liangyou* 129 (1937): 3-4. The first spread is "Shandong jihuang canzhuang" ("The Devastation of the Shandong Famine"), in *Liangyou* 26 (1928): 14.

民有饑色野有饑殍——山東饑荒中之一家人

TRAGIC SCENES IN SHANTUNG

Frequent warfare and years of slack in crop resulted in one of the ever-confronting problems of China—famine. Here are shown the homeless, shelterless, hungry. They were taken before the fall of Tsinan (Shantung's Capital) to the Nationalist. Some 20,000 people were shipped to Manchuria as part of the relief work *(see below)*

(Photo by Newsreel Wang)

難民住於橋底

山東饑荒慘狀

（萬國新聞社王小亭攝）

近年山東處於軍閥管治之下，民窮財盡，加五穀失收，致釀成大饑荒，情形甚爲慘目。本頁各圖係北伐軍未抵濟南前所攝，當時有二萬饑民由青島載往滿洲，以免困死境內。

濟南城外饑民居住之蓆蓬

濟南城外饑民每列隊候十日聽紅字施食會

難民由青島乘船往滿州

二萬難民上船離山東

災黎遍野

曹巴攝

各地災荒的慘狀

民國二十年的大荒災，又重見於今日。只要我們掀開報紙，觸目的就全是各地報災的消息。惟其中以川甘陝豫數省的災情最爲慘重，災民嗷嗷待哺，何止千千萬萬。茲將各地若干災的慘狀，刊載本頁，讀者閱後，當不無感想也。

FAMINE IN CENTRAL CHINA

Hitting Szechuan, Honan, Kansu and Shensi with the worst scorch in years, this year's drought has claimed thousands of victims and put many thousands more to starvation. Immediate relief is imperative if these people are to live. These pictures of the horrible sights will speak louder than words.

川豫災情慘重，災民衆多。目前固然米粟進沒入口；就是樹皮樹葉也差不多給剝光了。

What wouldn't a man do when he is starved. This picture, which shows two men picking leaves from a tree to satisfy their hunger, is typical of the condition now existing in Central China.

1

災民吃的除樹皮樹葉之外，還有雁糞，觀音土，上圖是一羣無家可歸的災童，狂嚼觀音土。觀音土的滋味怎樣，我們雖未嘗過，但總不會比牛油麵包更好吧？

You wouldn't know that some sort of soil can be eaten and you wouldn't care. But these children find it better then nothing. Can they live long with this?

連樹皮觀音土都吃光了時，災民還演出「人吃人」的慘劇了。圖中的貧婦餓得跑不動了，她沒有吃人肉的勇氣，只好嚼着破的棉絮。

A woman and her child, too weak and hungry to move, sit on the way side hoping to have some thing, anything to eat.

In an impassioned 1919 essay entitled "Pinmin de kusheng" ("The cries of the poor"), Chen Duxiu deplores that the problem of poverty in China is different from and worse than in Western nations, for he claims that in China the suffering of the poor is being ignored. In Beijing alone, he estimates, there are over a hundred thousand such unfortunates: "I think that these piteous laments will sooner or later make themselves heard [by the elites], will make them take notice, will give them a headache, and ultimately will make them cry out the same lament!"[14] Chen Duxiu's prediction for social revolution was still far from reality in 1919,[15] but it was the new literature that took up this cry well before political trends turned decisively to the left.

In a period when intellectuals felt troubled by the poverty of Chinese people and Chinese culture in comparison to the West, they in fact faced an embarrassment of riches when it came to potential models and intertexts for their project of developing a new literature. Western realism, a literary movement beginning in the early nineteenth century that critics have found notoriously slippery to define,[16] held pride of place in this endeavor because of its groundbreaking willingness to depict "the ugly, the revolting, the low," as René Wellek once put it.[17] Chinese writers embraced realism for its purported ability to represent vividly and objectively the elements of Chinese society that they wanted to reform, and the immiserated subjects they wished to succor, at this moment of national crisis.[18] Western realism had according to Jacques Rancière led the way in breaking down a system of representation in which "the dignity of the subject matter dictated the dignity of genres of representation."[19] This redistribution of the sensible in Western realism became a model for Chinese thinkers who saw in literary aesthetics an opportunity to influence the political designation of what could be written about and made visible.[20]

---

[14] In *Meizhou pinglun*, 19: 2. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[15] Janet Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 46.

[16] See, for instance, Roman Jakobson, "On Realism in Art," in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 19-27; Ginzburg, *Literatura v poiskakh real'nosti: stat'i, esse, zametki* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), 7-8; Molly Brunson, *Russian Realisms: Literature and Painting, 1840-1890* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), 13; and George Levine, "Literary Realism Reconsidered: The world in its length and breadth," in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 13-32. Raymond Williams limns the Western history of the concept of "realism" in *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University, 2015), 198-202.

[17] "The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship," in *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 241. Erich Auerbach traces the roots of mimetic democratization in the Western tradition as far back as antiquity, but marks the creation of modern realism in the early 1800s, with the work of writers such as Balzac and Stendhal; see *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 468.

[18] See Marston Anderson, *Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 27-37; Roy B. Chan, *The Edge of Knowing: Dreams, History, and the Realism in Modern Chinese Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 25-31; Huters, "Mirages of Representation: May Fourth and Anxiety of the Real," in *Chinese Literature and the West: the Trauma of Realism, the Challenge of the (Post) Modern*, ed. Theodore Huters and Tang Xiaobing (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 13. Rey Chow has noted that "when May Fourth writers needed to rejuvenate literature, they turned to the miseries and frustrations of the lower classes for their inspiration"; see *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University, 1995), 21.

[19] See *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 34. Auerbach too finds in French realism the beginnings of "an entirely new kind of serious or, if one prefers, elevated style" in the treatment of "new type of subjects" (*Mimesis*, 481).

[20] See Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible*, 13.

This dissertation focuses on Chinese interest in Russian realism, in its evolving manifestations from its foundations in Vissarion Belinsky's (1811-48) *Natural'naia shkola* (Natural School) of the 1840s to its early twentieth-century permutations.[21] Belinsky's Natural School counted Nikolai Gogol (1809-52) among its associates; traces of the former's ethnographic gestures and the latter's depictions of squalor would find their way into the work of writers such as Dostoevsky, whose "insulted and injured" characters were taken by Chinese thinkers to represent the downtrodden of Chinese society.[22] In the latter nineteenth century would arise Russian realism of an explicitly politically radical bent, with work by Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-89) inspiring activists whose exploits enthralled Chinese readers eager for upheaval in their own imperial system at the turn of the century. Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), the literary descendant of Chernyshevsky most revered in modern China, would in turn give rise to the manifestations of socialist realism that would dominate literatures of the USSR and communist China alike. The lineage of realism in Russia thus sheds light on the manifold forms of realism active in modern Chinese fiction. And though Chinese writers may have prized Russian literature above all else for its realist proclivities, the "realism" of many of these writers—like Gogol, Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), or Leonid Andreev (1871-1919)—is not to be taken for granted, and this very slipperiness has energizing and enabling implications for the inventiveness of modern Chinese realism, as I explore.

Russia was arguably the single foreign culture with the profoundest impact in China throughout the twentieth century, not least in terms of literary production. Scholars have broken important ground in studying the early twentieth-century cultural relations between these two largest nations in Eurasia. Writing about the complex processes of translation, mediation, and reception in Republican China, Mark Gamsa has analyzed the intercultural exchange by means of which modernist Russian writers Boris Savinkov (1879-1925), Mikhail Artsybashev (1878-1927), and Leonid Andreev reached Chinese audiences and left a mark on intellectuals such as Lu Xun.[23] Roy B. Chan has pointed out the parallels between "Chinese realism's commitment to rejuvenating sociality" and Russian predecessors in the nineteenth century.[24] Xiaolu Ma has interrogated the layers of translation and transculturation by which Japan mediated the reception of Russian literature in China.[25] Building upon the findings of these critics, I turn my attention to literary form, with close-reading as my primary methodology. I maintain that Russian realism was central to the formation of modern Chinese literature because it provided the means by which Chinese writers could learn to narrate poverty and thereby make major innovations in literary form: how to represent the nation in narrative, how to represent the social other, how to represent time, and how to represent space. Comparing fiction about poverty by Lu Xun, Xiao

---

[21] For an overview of Chinese interest in Russian and Soviet literature prior to 1949, see Mark Gamsa, *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature: Three Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 16-24, and *The Reading of Russian Literature in China: A Moral Example and Manual of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5-8, 13-8. Elizabeth McGuire's *Red at Heart: How Chinese Communists Fell in Love with the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) offers an account of Chinese fascination for the Soviet Union starting in the 1920s. See also Chen Jianhua, "Lun Zhongguo E-Su wenxue yanjiu de xueshu licheng," *Waiguo wenxue yanjiu* 4: 108-18.
[22] See Mau-sang Ng, *The Russian Hero in Modern Chinese Fiction* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1988), 55.
[23] See *Chinese Translation*.
[24] See *The Edge of Knowing*, 31.
[25] See, for instance, "An Interstitial Space: Cross-Cultural Negotiation and Concession in Early Fiction Translations in *New Youth*," *Twentieth-Century China* 44, no. 2 (May, 2019): 223-36, and "Transculturation of Madness: The Double Origin of Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman,'" *Literature and Medicine* 33, no. 2 (Fall, 2015): 348-67.

Hong, Lao She, Mao Dun (1896-1981), and others, to the Russian texts they read and admired for their (purported) realism, I show how Chinese writers drew and innovated upon thematic and formal elements to invent a new, capacious realism. Poverty as a theme is virtually ubiquitous in early twentieth-century Chinese fiction, in the oeuvre of famous and little-known writers alike. This dissertation examines both well-known and lesser-known instantiations from this body of work, in order to demonstrate that with this approach we can understand these texts in new ways, particularly when we take into account how Russian realism mediated writers' expositions of poverty.

Thus I maintain that focusing upon the theme of poverty sheds light on the development of modern Chinese fiction, as well as upon the nature of Chinese interest in Russian literature. And conversely, investigating the Chinese appropriation of Russian realist techniques sheds light on the innovations in modern Chinese fiction, particularly in the writing of poverty. Poverty certainly appears in premodern Chinese literature—we might think of the poetry of Du Fu, or the lower-class characters populating late-Ming *huaben* tales, or described in late-imperial *zhanghui* (linked chapter) novels such as *Shuihu zhuan* (*The Water Margin*), *Jin ping mei* (*Plum in the Golden Vase*), *Rulin waishi* (*Unofficial History of the Scholars*) and *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*). But what was new in modern Chinese realism was the sustained, detailed, fascinated depiction of poverty as political critique, the nature of which would evolve during the early decades of the twentieth century. Ah Q is poor and degraded because, Lu Xun implies, all of Chinese society was morally, culturally, and materially impoverished and debased. In this sense, writers conceived of poverty as a powerfully radical topic for modern Chinese fiction. And while they were enthralled with newly translated foreign models, modern Chinese writers continued to draw upon premodern vernacular literary resources.

Ba Jin's (1904-2005) bestselling 1931-2 novel *Jia* (*Family*) presents a revealing case of what could emerge from the smashing together of traditional Chinese and imported foreign literary elements. In his prefaces to the novel Ba Jin makes reference to Western texts as diverse as Lev Tolstoy's (1828-1910) 1899 *Voskresenie* (*Resurrection*), Charles Dickens's (1812-70) 1849-50 *David Copperfield*, and even Gracie Fields's (1898-1979) popular 1929 song "Sonny Boy." Ba Jin also quotes French dramatist Romain Rolland (1866-1944) and, in the opening chapter of the novel, describes his main protagonists, the three brothers of the Gao family in Chengdu, returning from a school rehearsal of Robert Louis Stevenson's (1850-94) 1883 *Treasure Island*. The roster of Western literary names expands in subsequent conversations between the young scions of the crumbling feudal family, who are electrified to be reading progressive periodicals such as *New Youth* from faraway Shanghai.

Yet even while the novel aggressively foregrounds its medley of foreign intertexts, and in particular redeploys plot elements from Tolstoy's *Resurrection,* it is self-consciously based upon the declining aristocratic family from the renowned Qing dynasty novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin (1715-63). The central love triangle in *Family* (the eldest Gao brother is torn between two women, one of whom is his cousin) is modeled on Jia Baoyu's inability to choose between his cousins Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai. Ba Jin's portrayal of the old family's genteelly corrupt practices rotting it away from the inside out echoes Cao's account of the Jia family's slow decline; so too does Ba Jin emulate Cao's meticulous spatial logic in his descriptions of the layout of the Gao family compound, with its gardens (the innermost haven) and its walls and windows (symbols of entrapment or emotional separation, yet sometimes permeable as liminal spaces of possible escape or communication). And the leisurely scenes of feasting and holiday merrymaking, with multiple generations gathered to listen to traditional

music by the lake in the garden, are as elegiacally expressive of nostalgia for the disappearing traditions that the Gao family symbolizes as for the very content and form of Cao's traditional novel itself. Even Ba Jin's interest in the Gao family's servants, particularly the bondmaid Mingfeng for whom the semi-autobiographical youngest brother Gao Juehui has a *tendre*, draws upon the complex relationships between Jia Baoyu and his many maids. Mingfeng takes her own life out of hopeless love for her young master, just as Baoyu's maid Qingwen sacrifices her health and ultimately her life on Baoyu's behalf. The relationship between Gao Juehui and Mingfeng is thus as much an appropriation from *Dream of the Red Chamber* as it is a reenactment of the central relationship between Nekhliudov and the maid he seduces and ruins in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*.[26]

The narrative attention to the socially downtrodden and the poor in Ba Jin's *Family* thus has its roots not only in Western intertexts but also in traditional Chinese models. To ring in the new year, the Gao family watches a dragon dance, during which firecracker sparks are sprayed over the dancers' bodies. The searing flesh of the lower classes elicits merriment among the spectators in much the same way that Grannie Liu's crude bodily antics entertain the Jia family when the impoverished village woman comes to visit. The crucial difference here is that Ba Jin's description of the rich taking advantage of the poor is framed explicitly as ideological commentary.

The fascinatingly multifarious confluence of precedents that gave rise to modern Chinese realism complicates the controversial yet seminal models of world literature propounded by Western theorists such as Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova. Drawing upon Immanuel Wallerstein's worlds-systems theory, Moretti has illustrated the flow of literary forms from core to periphery[27]; Casanova articulates a Paris-centered "Greenwich Meridian of Literature" from which other literatures seek approval in order to join literary modernity.[28] One recent intervention, pushing back against these diffusion models, has zeroed in on the semi-peripheral case of East Asia in the early twentieth century, namely the layers of mediation and translation in the Japanese, Korean, and Chinese reception of Russian literature. Heekyoung Cho proposes a model of world literature predicated not upon hierarchy and competition or inclusion/exclusion, but rather upon processes of literary relations, highlighting the East Asian case in which literary practitioners cooperated in a common goal to "critique antihumanist oppression" and "create a better society."[29] According to Cho, East Asian writers were not necessarily seeking international recognition or Paris's approval, for "the Russian and East Asian literary relationship exemplifies a process of world literature that is not generated by a constant rivalry among national literatures. This relationship, as imagined and practiced in East Asian cultures, was collaborative and sympathetic, rather than competitive."[30] The attitude of Chinese intellectuals toward the Russian writers they drew upon, often through the mediation of Japanese, English, or German translations, was certainly animated by a spirit of commiseration, and a shared ethical imperative

---

[26] Ba Jin, *Jia*, in *Ba Jin quanji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2000).
[27] See Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54-68, and "More Conjectures," *New Left Review* 20 (2003): 73-81.
[28] See Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).
[29] Cho, "Rethinking World Literature through the Relations between Russian and East Asian Literature," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 28: 18. Cho also differentiates her claim from those of other world literature theorists including Pheng Cheah and David Damrosch (Ibid., 20-3).
[30] Ibid., 19.

to improve social conditions; and as Cho asserts, this multivalent network of literary relations is not captured in all its nuance by diffusion models of world literature.

Of course, the impetus of international rivalry remained salient in the Chinese case, because the initial impetus for cultural reforms was China's perceived humiliation at the hands of imperialist powers, and the end goal of all this literary ferment was the elevation of Chinese standing, culturally and politically, on the world stage.[31] But indeed, the primary goal of literary revolution in this period was not really to compete with other cultures, but rather to help build a new culture and thereby a new nation. The exploration of other literatures, especially that of Russia, was an ongoing quest to understand what it means to be a national literature, in a period when the entity of China as a nation was still in question.

Historian Rebecca Karl has drawn attention to the role that China's perception of the non-Euro-American world played in the formation of its nationalist discourses in the late Qing dynasty, for Chinese intellectuals did not perceive of the world as "neatly bifurcated into a "West/Japan" and "China."[32] The modern world was, for these intellectuals, "an ongoing historical process" made visible in colonized places including the Philippines, Cuba, Poland, Egypt, Vietnam, and so on.[33] Looking to these imperialized peoples as confrères, Chinese intellectuals tried to restage or understand the world, and China's place in it. The establishment of a national literature in the period I examine similarly involves a sense of solidarity with places like Russia and Eastern Europe.[34] In 1909, Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren published a compilation of translations entitled *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* (*A Collection of Short Stories from Abroad*), three-quarters of which consisted of works by Eastern European and Russian writers. The brothers professed that they deliberately countered contemporary translation trends by emphasizing "literature of the oppressed."[35] In a 1933 essay "Wo zenme zuoqi xiaoshuo laide" ("How I Came to Write Fiction"), Lu Xun explains, "Because anti-Manchu views were prevalent at that time, young people quoted those authors who cried out against and resisted oppression in order to give voice to their own positions….Because the works I sought out were outcries and resistance, my inclinations turned toward Eastern Europe."[36] He frames his early project of translation and composition as a subaltern one, focusing on marginalized literatures as models. In the multifaceted Chinese attitude toward Russian culture during the early twentieth century, the latter—acknowledged as marginalized yet rapidly gaining prestige in the West—became a source of inspiration for writing about the marginalized and the impoverished. That Russia was itself an imperialist agent on Chinese soil further complicated this sense of commiseration, as we shall see: when we zoom in on the semi-peripheral case of literary "diffusion" from Russia to China, then, the picture becomes more nuanced than center-periphery theories of world literature have delineated.

---

[31] See, for instance, Gamsa, *Reading*, 28.
[32] *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 11
[33] Ibid., 16
[34] See Irene Eber, "Images of Oppressed Peoples," in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 127-41.
[35] See Eileen J. Cheng, "In Search of New Voices," 592.
[36] Translated by Jon Eugene von Kowallis, in *Jottings Under Lamplight* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 54.

Russian Literature in China

The mentality toward Russian politics and culture was never static in China. In the late Qing, luminaries such as Yan Fu (1854-1921) and Kang Youwei (1858-1927) had considered the early eighteenth-century reforms of Peter the Great worthy of emulation for a backwards nation.[37] But this view of the Petrine model declined with increasing Russian expansionism in the final years of the nineteenth century,[38] and instead Chinese intellectuals and political radicals began to view contemporary (rather than historical) Russian politics as a parallel to their own.[39] Chinese revolutionaries admired and emulated Russian revolutionaries such as Sofia Perovskaia (1853-81), whose role in the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II made her something of a romantic heroine for Chinese audiences.[40] In the first decade of the twentieth century, Chinese stories about Russian revolutionaries proliferated in print.[41] At this time, interest in translated Russian literature was still limited.[42] Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren's 1909 anthology, which features more Russian literature than any other kind, failed ignominiously, selling only 21 copies of its first volume and 20 of its second.[43] But by the time the brothers prepared the work for its second edition publishing in 1920 intellectual tides had changed: the May Fourth Movement—which had begun as student protests in 1919 against the unequal terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and continued as a sustained effort to reform Chinese culture and society—aimed to overhaul literary production according to foreign models.[44] The work of writers such as Ivan Turgenev (1818-83), Tolstoy, and Chekhov, extolled for evincing a keen moral conscience and penchant for social engagement, became particularly favored for translation and dissemination, since what Chinese readers perceived in these Russian texts resonated with their ideals for social and cultural reform.[45]

In the thirty-year period between 1919 and 1949, there were more books translated into Chinese from Russia than from any other country.[46] So lively was Chinese interest in Russia that many of these translations happened by means of a mediating language, since most early

---

[37] See Don C. Price, *Russia and the Roots of the Chinese Revolution, 1896-1911* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1974), 29-62.

[38] Ibid., 86.

[39] Ibid., 88-117. Chinese students and activists learned about Russian political movements such as nihilism, populism, and anarchism, largely by means of Japanese translations; see James D. White, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1921: A Short History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 133. See also Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[40] See Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 106-52, for an account of Sofia's afterlives in China.

[41] Price, *Russia and the Roots*, 195.

[42] See Gamsa, *The Chinese Translation*, 20. According to Chen Jianhua, in this period Chinese readers were focused upon the philosophies embedded in Russian texts, rather than on their literary qualities ("Lun Zhongguo E-Su wenxue," 109).

[43] See Zhou Zuoren, "Xu," *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* (Shanghai: Qunyi shushe, 1929), 2.

[44] See Chen Jianhua, "Lun Zhongguo E-Su wenxue," 109-10.

[45] In 1920, the year he took the helm of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (*Short Story Monthly*), and indeed in the first two issues that year, Shen Yanbing (who would later adopt the nom de plume Mao Dun) discusses a number of these writers in "Eluosi jindai wenxue zatan shang," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 11, no. 1 (1920): 1-3, and "Eluosi jindai wenxue zatan xia," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 11, no. 2 (1920): 1-6, especially highlighting Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky, and Andreev. See also Ng, *The Russian Hero*, 5-6.

[46] Li Ding, "Eguo wenxue fanyi zai Zhongguo," in *Eguo wenxue yu Zhongguo* (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan daxue chubanshe, 1991), 364. See also Lin Jinghua, "Jiashe yihuo zhenshi," *Eluosi wenyi* 3 (2005): 49. Prior to this period, Russian translations trailed far behind those from English and French (Gamsa, *Reading*, 4).

translators did not know Russian, a linguistic poverty that did not dampen their enthusiasm.[47] Lu Xun is a case in point: a prolific translator, he favored Russian texts above all, usually working with Japanese and German translations. Few translators at the time knew Russian. Among them was Geng Jizhi (1899-1947), the most prominent translator from Russian in the Republican period,[48] and Zheng Zhenduo's close friend and associate. Along with the later communist leader Qu Qiubai (1899-1935), Geng had studied at the *Guoli Ewen zhuanxiu guan* (National Institute of Russian Language) in Beijing, one of the most important schools of its type.[49] Geng translated prolifically, but some notable Russian sinologists (including teachers at the National Institute V. M. Alekseev and S. A. Polevoi) criticized his and other Chinese translators' work as profoundly inadequate and amateurish.[50] Nevertheless, the translations of graduates from this institute were seminal. In 1920, students including Qu and Geng published *Eluosi mingjia xiaoshuo ji* (*Anthology of Russian Short Stories*), a watershed moment for the direct translation of Russian literature into Chinese.

Qu's preface to the volume asserted that it was Russia's political trends that made Russian literature the focus of Chinese intellectuals.[51] Russia held a privileged and complex place in the Chinese political and cultural imagination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: seen as part of the Western world, an imperialist aggressor on Chinese territory,[52] Russia was simultaneously a kind of intermediary (geographically and otherwise) between China and the West.[53] Whereas Western Europe was regarded as the other, Chinese intellectuals felt that China and Russia shared a number of similarities in their national circumstances.[54] Russia was an object of emulation, not just for what Chinese culture could become, but also for the steps that China could to take to get there. Consequently, Russian literature could serve as a template for how to catch up to the West, a feat which Russia itself was perceived to have performed quite recently in terms of literary production. For example, Geng Jizhi commented in 1924 that having undergone the "baptism" (*xili*) of the West in the early nineteenth century, Russian literature began to flourish, and though at first it naturally still engaged in the business of "copying"

---

[47] See Gamsa, *Reading,* 4, 77-8.

[48] See Ge Baoquan, "Geng Jizhi xiansheng yu Eguo wenxue," *Wenyi fuxing* 13, no. 3 (1947): 269-73.

[49] Gamsa, *Chinese Translation*, 308. Established in 1899 by the Qing government to remedy the shortage of translators between Chinese and Russian and to facilitate the negotiations of diplomats and politicians, the National Institute outlived several other similar language institutions, lasting till the 1930s; see Kateryna Bugarevska, "The Beijing Institute of Russian Language and Translation of Russian Literature in 20th Century China," *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* 6, no. 1: 46.

[50] Ibid., 55-6.

[51] "Xu yi" ("Foreword 1"), in *Eluosi mingjia xiaoshuoji*, and quoted in Bugarevska, "The Beijing institute," 53.

[52] Russia is, for instance, included in histories of Western or European literature, such as *The Eastern Miscellany*'s (*Dongfang zazhi*) 1920 "Recent Trends in European New Literature" (Ouzhou xin wenxue zuijin zhi qushi), or *Short Story Monthly*'s 1922 series on "The History of the Development of Western Fiction" ("Xiyang xiaoshuo fada shi"). See, for instance, the latter's segment on romanticism, which acknowledges that Russian literature has only recently arrived on the European literary scene, since before the nineteenth century it was absorbed in the process of copying (*mofang*) (*Xiaoshuo yuebao* 13, no. 3: 10).

[53] See Gamsa, *Reading*, 7, and Wang Jiezhi, *Xuanze yu shiluo: Zhong-E wenxue guanxi de wenhua guanzhao* (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1995), 16.

[54] See Qu Qiubai, "*Eluosi mingjia duanpian xiaoshuo ji* xu 1," in *Eluosi mingjia duanpian xiaoshuo ji* (Beijing: Xin Zhongguo zazhi she), 2; Zhou Zuoren, "Wenxue shang de Eguo yu Zhongguo," *Xin qingnian* 8, no. 5: 1; and Robert Merrill Bartlett quoting Lu Xun in a 1926 interview, "Intellectual Leaders of the Chinese Revolution, *Current History* 271, no. 1 (1927), 295. Wang Shengqun discusses the rhetorical positioning of Russia as a "mirror" for China in the May Fourth period; see "'Eguo xiangxiang' yu jindai Zhong Ri dui Eluosi wenxue de yinjie," *Eluosi wenxue* 6 (2017): 66-8. See also Lin Jinghua, "Jiashe yihuo zhenshi."

(*mofang*), thereafter it became "independent" (*duli*).[55] The early nineteenth century in Russia had indeed seen the rapid absorption and amalgamation of a wide array of international styles:

> Classicism, the Enlightenment, Sentimentalism, Romanticism, and Realism….The variety of institutional forms and literary styles, not to mention the wealth of genres associated with these styles, points in turn to a more fundamental aspect of early nineteenth-century Russian culture: its attempt to confront in mere decades and almost simultaneously an interrelated *complex* of problems that Western cultures had been addressing more sequentially over the course of several centuries….But Russian writers of the early nineteenth century, unlike their French or English confrères, worked with a literary language that had but recently coalesced, a relatively minuscule reading public, and native literary tradition scarcely a century old.[56]

Aside from this last characteristic, China would a century later experience these very conditions of rapid literary assimilation and development, in a language—the modern vernacular—that was just taking shape. These frenetic primordial circumstances, in Russia and in China, would have implications for a constantly shape-shifting landscape of literary realism.

Lu Xun himself designated Russian literature as "our guide and friend": Russian texts taught Chinese readers "the important lesson that there are two sorts of men in the world: the oppressors and the oppressed!"[57] Yet Lu Xun in the same breath also acknowledges Russia's invasions into Chinese soil. This Janus-faced role is implicit in the background of Lu Xun's own trajectory as a budding writer: his famous explanation for why he gave up the study of medicine hinges upon yet obfuscates the role of Russia as an imperialist aggressor. In the 1922 preface to his first story collection *A Call to Arms* (*Nahan*), Lu Xun recounts the memory of viewing in a Japanese classroom a lantern slide featuring the execution of an alleged Chinese spy (working for the Russians) by Japanese soldiers in Manchuria, historically Chinese territory that was fought over in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5). In the image, the kneeling execution victim is surrounded by a crowd of Chinese spectators, who all seem perfectly sound of body, yet can only look on with deadened facial expressions. According to Lu Xun's account, it was after this moment, humiliated and rendered complicit as the only Chinese student among a class of cheering Japanese peers, that he formed the determination to write literature rather than continue studying medicine: for to cure the flesh of a nation of people sick in spirit, he opined, would be worse than futile. Interestingly, the anecdote forcefully foregrounds Japanese territorial expansionism while barely mentioning the role of Russian military encroachment upon Chinese territory at the same time. Russia's imperialist ambitions were one unspoken cause for the alleged sickness of Chinese spirit, and writers like Lu Xun appropriated Russian literary elements as a remedy: an encapsulation of the multivalent nature of China's attitude toward its northern neighbor at this fraught historical moment.

Since it was Russian politics that first put Russian culture on the map for Chinese intellectuals, it is no coincidence that Russian literature—especially Russian realism—became favored in China for its ethical engagement in the plight of the Russian people and for its

---

[55] See "Bailun duiyu Eguo wenxue de yingxiang," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 15, no. 4 (1924): 1-6.
[56] William Mills Todd III, *Culture and Society in the Age of Pushkin: Ideology, Institutions, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 2.
[57] See "Zhu Zhong E wenyi zhi jiao," in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 473.

"humanism" (*rendao zhuyi*).[58] Chinese intellectuals were drawn to Russian realism for its commitment to exposing and proposing solutions for social problems. In Russia, characters from fiction such as Turgenev's 1862 *Otsy i deti* (*Fathers and Children*) and Chernyshevsky's 1863 *Chto delat'?* (*What Is To Be Done?*) had been seen as "worthy of imitation in real life," the latter inspiring a generation of "new men" based upon the program of behavior and radical politics set out in the novel.[59] Indeed, thanks to Chevnyshevsky's novel, young women were inspired to leave their parental homes and their marriages (as Henrik Ibsen's Nora would later inspire Chinese women to do); Vladimir Lenin himself would proclaim that Chernyshevsky's novel influenced him to become a revolutionary.[60] The promise of a realism that then transforms real life captivated May Fourth commentators, who accentuated and applauded the role of Turgenev's 1852 *Zapiski okhotnika* (*A Sportsman's Sketches*) in the movement leading to the 1861 liberation of serfs.[61] Geng Jizhi wrote that Turgenev's 1960 *Nakanune* (*On the Eve*) "was a spur for the struggle of the Russian youth. Everyone who read this book understood that his responsibility lay not in indulging in empty talk, but in really going out to reform society. As soon as this book appeared, many young men and women in Russian were awoken and vied to learn from the example of Insarov and Elena…."[62] The October Revolution of 1917 could only serve as the ultimate proof of the radical efficacy of the realist lineage in Russian literature. A 1922 article "Zhipei shehui de wenxue lun" ("On literature that guides society") proclaimed that in the Russian Revolution, "the power of literature played a huge role; if Russia did not have Gogol, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Sologub, Korolenko, Andreev, Ropshin, Artsybashev, Blok, Gorky, and other literary writers, could the flower of the Russian Revolution have blossomed so soon?"[63]

From the perspective of May Fourth intellectuals, even before the entrenchment of leftist ideology, the alleged transitivity of Russian realism was something that China lacked, and needed. As Zheng Zhenduo deplored in 1920:

> Our Chinese literature is most lacking in the spirit of the "real" (*zhen*); it is constrained by form (*xingshi*), its essence is ornate style (*diaoshi*); it only knows to expend effort on writing style (*wenzi*), and forgets that literature is the expression of thought and emotion (*sixiang, qinggan de biaoxian)*. So it does not

---

[58] See, for instance, the segment on "naturalism" (*ziran pai*) in the *Short Story Monthly's* series on the history of Western fiction, in which writers such as Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Gorky are lauded for pitting their pens against structures of power on behalf of the people: this is literature "for human life" (*wei rensheng*): see "Xiyang xiaoshuo fada shi: si, ziran zhuyi shidai (shang)," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 13, no. 5 (1922): 6. In 1920 Shen Yanbing describes the late Tolstoy's "humanism" as the crystallization (*jiejing*) of his own spirit, as well as the crystallization of the spirit of all Russian literature; see "Tuoersitai de wenxue," *Gaizao* 3, no. 4 (1920): 97. See also Shen Yanbing, "Eguo jindai wenxue zatan shang" and "Eguo jindai wenxue zatan xia;" Geng Jizhi, "Eguo si da wenxue jia he zhuan," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 12, supplement (1921): 1-22); Zheng Zhenduo, "*Eluosi mingjia duanpian xiaoshuo ji* xu 2," in *Eluosi mingjia duanpian xiaoshuo ji* (Beijing: Xin Zhongguo zazhi she, 1920), 4-5; and Lu Xun, "*Shuqin* qianxu," in *Lu Xun yiwen quanji,* vol. 6 (Fujian: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), 5-6. For further critical discussion see Gamsa, *Reading*, 29-34; Wang Jiezhi, *Xuanze*, 28-34; Chen Jianhua, "Lun Zhongguo E-Su wenxue," 109; and Cho, *Translation's Forgotten History: Russian Literature, Japanese Mediation, and the Formation of Modern Korean Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016), 29-30.

[59] See Irina Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 12-36.

[60] Ibid., 30.

[61] See, for instance, Hu Yuzhi's "Dujieniefu," *Dongfang zazhi* 17, no. 4 (1920: 78, as well as Shen Yanbing, "Eguo jindai wenxue zatan xia" 2; and Zheng Zhenduo, "Eguo wenxue shilue 3," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 14, no. 7 (1923): 2.

[62] Translated and quoted in Gamsa, *Reading*, 100.

[63] Zhidang, "Zhipei shehui de wenxue lun," *Wenxue xunkan* 35 (1922): 2.

> have any value. Russian literature is not like this. It particularly takes the word "real" as its backbone (*zhuan yi* zhen *zi wei gu*); it is expression of the consciousness of emotion; it is the character of the people, the real representation of social conditions (*shehui qingkuang de xiezhen*); its essence is unadorned and unornate, expressed in language without formal constraint. So its feeling (*ganjue*) can communicate with the reader's feeling, and can exercise enormous efficacy.[64]

He goes on to laud the democratic nature of Russian literature.[65] According to this assessment, Russian literature's moral engagement and transitive potential are enabled by its grounding in the real, and in a language that the Chinese vernacular should emulate. That Russian literature is for Zheng powerful and meaningful at the level of the idea, and not at the level of the word or stylistic contrivance, is perhaps one reason why Chinese writers deemed it sufficient to translate Russian literature by means of mediating translations, since presumably what was lost in double translation would be not the ideas but only the non-essential elements of individual style.

Nevertheless, as I endeavor to show in the chapters that follow, elements of form and style from Russian texts do emerge, often in a reinterpreted format, in Chinese appropriations. Some formal qualities, such as the powerful implications of metonymy in gesturing at social totality, or the structural affordances of focalized point of view, are perhaps so intrinsic to the makeup of literary realism, as well as to the narration of poverty, that they carry through frictionlessly in translation and double translation. These rhetorical devices inhere not in lexical items which might be lost in making the leap from one linguistic context to another, but rather have meaning on the level of the detail, which would not be as vulnerable to alteration in the process of translation. Other types of form that translated well included certain subgenres like the madman's diary, or indeed epistolary or diary form more generally, which Chinese writers deployed with gusto. And most prominently, of course, the form of the short story or novella translated best of all—more readily than long novels (which, when published in Chinese journals, tended to come out in serialized form and were therefore broken down into smaller chunks). The 1920 preface to the Zhou brothers' *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* reflects that at the time of its initial publication in 1909, "there were still very few short stories; readers were accustomed to the *zhanghui* novel form, with one or two hundred chapters, so the short form was nothing to them (*wuwu*)."[66] It was in short stories (or novellas, often consisting of loosely connected segments) that many of the writers in this study encountered the Russian literary elements they would experiment with. And it was in short fiction that they did much of their aesthetic experimentation—the brevity of form offering, perhaps, the freedom to test out what might have been seen as a crazy idea (literally crazy, in the case of Lu Xun's first vernacular story, as I discuss in the next chapter); or to try out different stylistic or affective effects, without having to manage a thoroughly worked out plot[67]; or to throw together disparate elements from a whole range of Western and Chinese sources and models and literary "isms," to see what amazing or monstrous literary creation might emerge.[68] Almost all of the works I examine are short fiction;

---

[64] Zheng Zhenduo, "*Eluosi mingjia duanpian xiaoshuo ji* xu 2," 4.
[65] Ibid., 5.
[66] Zhou Zuoren, "Xu," 5.
[67] Lawrence Wong-chi Wang has contended that the groundbreaking nature of the brothers' chosen form was not the shortness of length but rather the tendency of the stories to evoke a single mood or effect rather than develop a full plot; see "'The Beginning of the Importation of new literature from exotic countries into China': Zhou Zuoren and Yuwai xiaoshuo ji," *Asia Pacific Translation and Intellectual Studies*1, no. 3 (2014): 177-8.
[68] While it is not the focus of this dissertation, the sophisticated lineage of short fiction in traditional Chinese literature remained a resource for modern Chinese fiction. This was more palpably the case for so-called *yuanhang*

and when I do turn to longer fiction, as in Chapter 4, I investigate the temporal structures that facilitate the continuation of the plot.

The Poverty of Russian Realism

By the 1920s, Chinese enthusiasm for Russian literature, for reasons both political and aesthetic, was well established. In a 1920 speech exhorting young students to strive toward establishing a new Chinese literature, Zhou Zuoren stresses that Russian writers all care for "the insulted and injured" (*bei wuru yu bei sunhai de ren*), alluding to Dostoevsky's eponymous 1861 novel.[69] Russian literature is "for society, for human life" (*shehui de, rensheng de*), Zhou Zuoren declares; "China's particular national situation is somewhat different than Western Europe's, but has many aspects in common with Russia's, so we believe that China's future new literature must naturally also be for society, for human life."[70] Yet in spite of the similarities between the two countries, one main difference is that the Chinese people labor under the burden of an ancient culture, whereas according to Zhou Zuoren, Russia's is young: "Russia is like an impoverished youth, whose many trials and tribulations has cultivated steadfast striving and hope for a bright future. China is an old man in dire straits, who has suffered the hardships of the human world his entire life, and who in the end has no energy remaining in his body to enjoy good fortune, so he no longer believes or prefers that good fortune will come in the future."[71] That the young Russia will serve as a model for the young Chinese students sitting in Zhou's audience—the only hope left for an aging and decrepit Chinese culture—is only natural, according to this reasoning. Moreover, that impoverishment serves as a figure for the difficulties faced by both nations is logical given the socially engaged focus of the Russian literature that Zhou Zuoren endorses as a literary model. Russian literature was seen, by Zhou and other Chinese writers, as the foreign literature most invested in describing the pain and suffering, "crying out in pain on behalf of the whole world."[72]

In the nineteenth century the rise of realism in Russia was in fact tied to the very notion of poverty (*bednost'*). Russian writers had long been preoccupied with the problem of how to define Russian identity vis-à-vis Western Europe. There was a fear that Russian literature and culture were belated and needed to catch up; hence in the early nineteenth century critics such as Belinsky would announce that "we have no literature" (*u nas net literatury*).[73] (Less than a

---

hudie pai ("Mandarin Duck and Butterfly" school) writers; see Perry E. Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). But it was true for May Fourth writers as well. Lu Xun himself was a scholar of traditional Chinese *xiaoshuo*; see Robert E. Hegel, "Traditional Chinese Fiction—the State of the Field," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (1994): 397-8, and Carlos Yu-Kai Lin, "The Rise of *Xiaoshuo as a Literary Concept:* Lu Xun and the Question of 'Fiction' in Chinese Literature," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 8, no. 4 (2014): 631-51. For formal differences and similarities between traditional and modern Chinese short stories, see for instance Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 129, and *The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 96, as well as Cyril Birch, "Change and Continuity in Chinese Fiction," in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era,* 385-405.

[69] "Wenxue shang de Eguo yu Zhongguo," *Xin qingnian* 8, no. 5 (1921): 5. This influential speech was republished by a number of different print media outlets.

[70] Ibid., 4.

[71] Ibid., 6.

[72] See Wang Tongzhao, "Eluosi wenxue pianmian," in *Wang Tongzhao wenji*, vol. 6 (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1980), 351.

[73] From the 1834 *Literaturnye mechtania*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1953), 23; see also Peter K. Christoff, *K. S. Aksakoff, A Study in Ideas, Vol. III: An Introduction to*

hundred years later, Geng Jizhi would maintain that he made it his business to translate Russian writers like Tolstoy into Chinese because China "still has no art" (*hai meiyou yishu*).[74]) In the introduction to the 1845 collection of the Natural School's physiological sketches, *Fiziologiia Peterburga* (*Physiology of Petersburg*), Belinsky expounds upon the "poverty of our literature" (*o bednosti nashei literatury*), which this volume, with its descriptions of urban poverty, was meant to remedy.[75] Russian realism, arriving belatedly, "was inevitably colored by its historical insecurity and its peripheral status….the mastery of realism represented the key to cultural and professional legitimacy, social and political potency, and national, perhaps even global, rejuvenation."[76] The development of Russian realism was therefore driven by an urgency about catching up with and "overcoming" Western European cultural centers.[77] So there are unmistakable parallels with the Chinese case less than a century later.

The critic Lidiya Ginzburg, designating Belinsky the "founder of Russian realism,"[78] has pointed out the argument over "kopecks" (*grivenniki*) in the letters between Belinsky and political thinker Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76), showing that the former's attentiveness to the mundane monetary concerns of ordinary social life reveals the incipience of a realist vein of thinking: "Poverty, debts, and the impossibility of discharging one's material and moral obligations" determine psychology.[79] So the practical problem of making ends meet influenced the kinds of reality (*deistvitel'nost'*) that would interest Belinsky, a member of the new generation of intelligentsia who were not noblemen but rather *raznochintsy*, hailing from "various ranks" in society, and therefore obliged to make a living (often economically tenuous) with their pen. In more ways than one, then, poverty was pivotal in the development of Russian realism. We shall see that in early twentieth-century China arose, too, a class of litterateurs whose untethering from their traditional role in governance meant that they had perforce to earn their living, an exigency that gave rise to a great deal of writing about the poverty of the writer, and how it compares to the poverty of the urban laborer or the peasant.

The thematic and formal preoccupation of poverty in realist fiction is an indispensable lens through which to understand the early twentieth century Chinese engagement with Russian realism, because both literary cultures' obsession with impoverishment in its many guises (material poverty, textual poverty, cultural poverty) was in fact the reason for Chinese writers' identification with, admiration for, and appropriation of Russian realist literary techniques. Above all other foreign literatures, Chinese intellectuals associated Russian literature with a realist engagement with the plight of the poor. As the writer and editor Shen Yanbing (later Mao Dun) propounds in the first 1920 issue of *Short Story Monthly*, the year he took the helm,

---

Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 25-6. Two years later saw the first publication of Piotr Chaadaev's (1794-1856) provocative *Pervoe filosoficheskoe pis'mo* ("First Philosophical Letter"), which laments, "It is one of the deplorable traits of our peculiar civilization that we are still discovering truths which other peoples, even some much less advanced than we, have taken for granted….we are neither of the West nor of the East, and we have not the traditions of either. Placed, as it were, outside of time, we have not been touched by the universal education of the human race"; see "Letters on the Philosophy of History: First Letter," trans. Nathaniel Knight, in *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1978), 162. Many of these characterizations of Russia were ones that Chinese thinkers nearly a century later would pick up on, and apply to China itself.

[74] "Yizhe xuyan," in *Yishu lun: Tuoersitai zhu* (Shanghai: Gongxue she), 1.

[75] See "Vstuplenie," in *Fiziologiia Peterburga*, ed. Nikolai Nekrasov (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 6.

[76] Brunson, *Russian Realisms*, 17.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Trans. Judson Rosengrant, in *On Psychological Prose* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 58.

[79] Ibid., 63.

> The English writer Charles Dickens does not necessarily refrain from describing the wretched plight of lower social classes, but when we read it, we clearly feel that this is someone from the upper classes writing on behalf of people from the lower classes, because it lacks real, sincere, deep feeling (*zhen zhi nonghou de ganqing*). Russian writers are not like this; when they describe the wretched plight of lower social classes, it makes readers feel solemnly as though we have seen these miserable wretches, heard the sorrowful sound of their oppression in the lower depths penetrating upward; as for those who come from nobility, such as Tolstoy and Turgenev, when we've read their works, it is as though we have heard firsthand what people mired in muck (*wuni li ren*) have said.[80]

The problem of members of a literate class representing or ventriloquizing less privileged social classes is one that Chinese writers of this period thought through at length, often by means of mediating Russian texts, as I explore in Chapter 3. Russian realism is in Shen's estimation sensorily and affectively vivid and precise, and for this reason not only a better generator of sympathy, but also capable of leaping across class boundaries in communicating this sympathy. Shen insists that Russian writers tend to underscore the topic of poverty as pecuniary lack, as in the case of Gogol's *Shinel'* ("Overcoat"), whose plot Shen describes in detail; but equally important is Russian realism's rendering of squalor, the sludge and muck (*wuni*) that according to his account accompanies the experience of poverty.

Poverty and Squalor

Historian Janet Chen has shown that the concept of poverty (*pin*) underwent a major shift during the late Qing. Traditionally poverty had been seen as a temporary condition of hardship rather than the state of a distinct social group.[81] Poverty was a morally neutral concept, and indeed the poverty of scholars (*pinshi*) was associated with moral probity. But Chen points out that during the last years of the Qing dynasty, "'poverty' emerged as the subject of a national discourse about the uncertain future of China"[82]; it was considered one of the nation's crippling problems, contributing to China's national weakness vis-à-vis other nations.[83] A 1904 editorial in one of the first issues of the influential journal *Dongfang zazhi* (*The Eastern Miscellany*) lamented, "In China today there are two great perils. The first is poverty (*pin*), and the second is ignorance (*yu*). One of these alone is enough to destroy the nation and exterminate the race, and yet today we have both….Beyond this point we will no longer be a nation."[84] In the first decade of the twentieth century, it was not disasters such as famine that triggered this shift in discourse, according to Chen: rather, it was caused by "a different consciousness about the fate of the nation and new calibrations of China's weakness. The intrusion of Westerners merged with the rise of Japan as a military and cultural power to underscore China's impotence and the implications of 'poverty' for the nation's uncertain future."[85] With the rise of carceral institutions such as workhouses and poorhouses, poverty became associated with criminality; and with the growth of sociology, eugenics, and evolutionary biology, poverty connoted a parasitism that

---

[80] "Eguo jindai wenxue zatan shang," 3.
[81] *Guilty of Indigence*, 6.
[82] Ibid., 14.
[83] Ibid., 16, 18.
[84] "Lun pin yu yu zhi yinguo" ("On the causes of poverty and ignorance"), *Dongfang zazhi* 1, no. 2 (1904): 40, translated and quoted in Janet Chen, *Guilty*, 14.
[85] Janet Chen, *Guilty*, 44.

became "an expansive metaphor for national weakness."[86] In the Republican period, then, poverty was for the first time considered a specifically social problem, often crystallized in the figures of the beggar or the vagrant, and decisively linked to the state of the nation.[87] In literature these appeared as stock figures (the oppressed factory worker, the careworn peasant), the basis for a new mode of writing about poverty whose realism, trafficking in social types, was fundamentally synecdochal.[88] Chapter 4 explores one of the most commonly depicted oppressed social types—the rickshaw puller—at length.

This dissertation focuses upon the literary portrayal of poverty from 1918, the year that Lu Xun's published "Diary of a Madman" ("Kuangren riji")—often called the first modern Chinese short story[89]—to the late 1930s, when the escalation of warfare with Japan changed the literal and literary landscape of poverty in China.[90] The association between material poverty and national weakness that Chen has noted in intellectual discourse during this period obtains in the fiction I examine, but there is a difference in the structure of feeling evoked by literary representations of poverty.[91] Institutionally, poverty was increasingly criminalized, the poor viewed as social parasites, degrading with their physical and moral degeneracy the state of the nation; but the structure of feeling in the realist texts that I examine seems to locate the moral and social failing not within the poor but rather within those who were unable to understand or lend succor to the poor; moral poverty was depicted not as the cause but rather a likely effect of material poverty; what texts depicted as criminal was not the hopeless state of poverty but rather the social structures that perpetuate it; it was not the parasitic poor that weakened their nation, but rather the weakness of the nation that rendered widespread poverty ineluctable; or, sometimes, these cause and effect factors fed into each other in abject cycles. As I contemplate

---

[86] Ibid., 47. While Janet Chen's study focuses on urban poverty, other scholars have demonstrated that in the first decades of the twentieth-century discourses on the peasant began to stress their poverty as ultimately caused by imperialism; see Xiaorong Han, *Chinese Discourses on the Peasant*, 28-9. See Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant 'Other' in Modern Chinese Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 27-9, for a discussion of intellectuals' obsession with the plight of the peasant during this period. Seung-joon Lee discusses the scientific study of China's "food problem" and the concomitant development of the new concept of national economy; see *Gourmets in the Land of Famine: The Culture and Politics of Rice in Modern Canton* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 114, 116, 127.

[87] Janet Chen, *Guilty*, 60, 66. See also Zwia Lipkin, *Useless to the State: "Social Problems" and Social Engineering in Nationalist Nanjing, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006); and Hanchao Lu, *Street Criers: A Cultural History of Chinese Beggars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 38-9.

[88] This is moreover an adumbration of the eventual embrace of the socialist realist aesthetic. See, for instance, Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000), 66.

[89] The appellation perhaps belongs more accurately to the 1917 story "Yiri" ("One Day"), by woman writer Chen Hengzhe. See Michel Hockx, *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911-1937* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 146-7.

[90] See Janet Chen, *Guilty,* 128-9, for how the conception of poverty modulated as a result of the war.

[91] In Raymond Williams's explanation for the structures of feeling present in art that are irreducible to formalized, institutionalized social experience, he gives the example of poverty in Victorian fiction: "Early Victorian ideology, for example, specified the exposure caused by poverty or by debt or by illegitimacy as social failure or deviation; the contemporary structure of feeling, meanwhile, in the new semantic figures of Dickens, of Emily Brontë, and others, specified exposure and isolation as a general condition, and poverty, debt, or illegitimacy as its connecting instances. An alternative ideology, relating such exposure to the nature of the social order, was only later generally formed: offering explanations but now at a reduced tension: the social explanation fully admitted the intensity of experienced fear and shame now dispersed and generalized"; see *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 134. In the modern Chinese case, there is a roughly analogous distinction between the institutional and sociological approach to poverty, as delineated by Chen, and the ways that fiction portrays the ubiquitous experience of poverty.

below, the structure of feeling in fiction about poverty metamorphosed in the 40s, especially after Mao Zedong's talks at the Yan'an forum on art and literature ("Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotan hui shang de jianghua").

Janet Chen has noted that poverty remained a poorly defined concept in spite of the furor of institutional and academic debate surrounding it.[92] When I discuss poverty in the fiction of this period, I refer not to a particular social class—this changes depending on the text, which might focus on impoverished writers, or on factory workers, or homeless beggars. Rather, I refer to poverty more generally as a circumstance of material deficiency: the texts I explore are obsessed with the inability to satisfy basic physical necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. And while poverty in this sense of material deficiency was not absent from premodern Chinese literature, as I have mentioned, what gets developed with particular avidity in modern China was squalor, a term that I use to refer to abject, bodily, sensory depictions of physical suffering. As a counterpoint to the squalid descriptions in modern fiction, we might consider the premodern example of Pu Songling's (1640-1715) preface to his Qing dynasty collection *Liaozhai zhiyi* (*Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*). In it, the writer likens himself to a Buddhist monk: "The desolation of my courtyard resembles a monk's quarters and what 'plowing with brush and ink' brings is as little as a monk's alms bowl….Outside my bleak studio the wind is sighing; inside my desk is cold as ice. Piecing together patches of fox fur to make a robe, I vainly fashion a sequel to *Records of the Underworld*."[93] The impoverished scholar waiting to be recognized for his talents is an old topos in traditional Chinese literature, but as Judith Zeitlin points out, here Pu Songling is describing his monkish quarters for the sake of likening himself to a bodhisattva capable of bringing enlightenment to his readers, thereby elevating his own position in the literary pantheon; and the reference to the patchwork garment acts as a symbolic representation of the allusively and formally patched-together nature of this preface and the collection of tales as a whole.[94] Descriptions of poverty, in other words, are present not because of an interest in the literal material circumstances themselves, but because of their figurative usefulness in Pu Songling's project of intellectual self-positioning. The barrenness of his dwelling lends it a sense of spartan tidiness (rather than of physical sordidness) that mirrors his moral and artistic integrity.

If poverty is defined by deficiency, by lack, then squalor is defined by excess in modern Chinese realism's gruesome descriptions. A passage from Xiao Hong's 1935 novella *Shengsi Chang* (*Field of Life and Death*) can illustrate what I mean. Xiao Hong describes a young peasant, Yueying, who was once "the prettiest woman in Fisherman's Village. Her family…was also the poorest (*zui pinqiong*)….she had been born with eyes so expressive that in earlier days anyone who met her gaze felt a pleasure and warmth."[95] Now, however, Yueying has been afflicted by paralysis for several months, and her husband has abandoned her. This is how her neighbors find her:

> The hushed dark room seemed to have become a shrine, and Yueying was the bodhisattva sitting in her place. Surrounded by pillows, she'd spent a year like that….The whites of her eyes had turned green, and so had her straight front teeth. Her hair stuck to her scalp, as if singed. She was like a sick cat, abandoned and

[92] *Guilty*, 19, 47.
[93] Translated in Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 48-9.
[94] Ibid., 49-50.
[95] *The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (Boston: Cheng & Tsui, 2002), 32.

> devoid of hope. Mother Wang placed a comforter around Yueying's waist.…Pulling back the comforter, she saw that the tiny pelvis was coated with excrement. Fifth sister tried to lift her up by the waist, but she shrieked in pain. "Oh Mother! Oh it hurts!" She sat there with her legs straight, like two bamboo poles, a perfect right angle with the *kang*. Her body seemed to be nothing but a gathering of lines supporting a large head that sat on the torso like a lantern on a pole.…While Mother Wang was cleaning her buttocks, little white things landed on her arm and began to crawl around. She held it up close to the fire to see what they were. Maggots. Yueying's buttocks were rotting away, infested with maggots.[96]

Xiao Hong, like Mother Wang, is unflinching—she is not afraid to go there, to paint the most disturbing picture possible: "the ugly, the revolting, the low" indeed, in most agonizing terms. The passage starts out by noting that Yueying's eyes and teeth have turned green, implying that her body is becoming vegetation or mold in its state of decay. Then Xiao Hong escalates the rhetorical dehumanization of Yueying's body by using a simile to liken Yueying to a sick cat, an animal. But as the passage continues, the description becomes increasingly dehumanizing. Her legs are like two bamboo poles (another simile), her body is a lantern pole (a metaphor). Here the passage no longer compares her to an animate creature like the cat, but to inanimate objects. But then the description devolves further. Her body is not just figuratively *like* an animal; it has been literally devoured by animals, the maggots. We have gone from simile and metaphor to metonymy: the maggots contiguous to Yueying metatextually take over the rhetorical description of her, just as they are consuming and replacing her flesh. That the metonymic indicator of squalor is located upon the part of her body that defines her as physiological feminine underscores the intersectionality of gender in class that, as I discuss further in Chapter 3, defines Xiao Hong's writing.

This is not just about Yueying's poverty, her lack of material necessities. This passage is characterized by a tremendous excess in bodily detail about her literally visceral suffering under dehumanizing conditions of poverty. Xiao Hong's emphasis upon gazing into Yueying's eyes invites us to look, and look carefully. Yueying herself enjoins her visitors to observe the excretions from her body: "It's beyond filthy (*zangwu si le*)!" she cries.[97] I want to make the case that in modern Chinese realism there appear forms of squalor with roots in Western realist traditions, but Chinese squalor often surpasses these imported models in their commitment to vividly grotesque, deliberately horrific descriptions of bodily suffering. After all, Xiao Hong and other Chinese intellectuals of her day were reading not only Russian realists like Turgenev, but also later writers like Gorky and Lidiia Seifullina (1889-1954),[98] alongside French naturalists like Émile Zola (1840-1902), with their intensified scrutiny of the miseries of the human body. These would all have been models for the Chinese writing of squalor, which for some writers (such as Wu Zuxiang, an example of whose work I investigate below) turns into a seeming desire to push the envelope, to see just how far the ugliness can be taken—as though only the shock of such harrowing details could sufficiently unsettle Chinese readers and bring home to them the wretchedness of national and social reality.

---

[96] Ibid., 33.

[97] See *Shengsi chang*, in *Xiao Hong quanji*, vol. 1 (Harbin: Heilongjiang daxue chubanshe, 2011), 70.

[98] See Zhang Guozhen, "Xiao Hong xiaoshuo chuangzao yu Zhongwai wenxue chuancheng ji meixue jianshu," *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 1 (2012): 146.

Here it is helpful to compare Xiao Hong's passage to one from Russia that I think inspired Xiao Hong's description of Yueying. Xiao Hong read and admired the work of Ivan Turgenev, and her fiction shows tonal, thematic, and formal resonances with the latter's scrutiny of rural life.[99] Let us consider a passage from Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*, about a young woman named Luker'ia who is similarly afflicted with paralysis. This woman, like Yueying, has been abandoned by her young man, left to waste away alone:

> The head was completely withered, of a uniform shade of bronze, exactly resembling the colour of an ancient icon painting; the nose was thin as a knife-blade; the lips had almost disappeared—only the teeth and eyes gave any gleam of light, and from beneath the kerchief wispy clusters of yellow hair protruded on to the temples. At the chin, where the quilt was folded back, two tiny hands of the same bronze colour slowly moved their fingers up and down like little sticks. I looked more closely and I noticed that not only was the face far from ugly (*bezobraznoe*), it was even endowed with beauty….I had no notion what to say, and in a state of shock I gazed at this dark, still face with its bright, seemingly lifeless eyes fixed upon me. Was it possible? This mummy was Lukeria, the greatest beauty among all the maid servants in our house….[100]

A number of details are the same as in Xiao Hong's passage. Both liken the young woman to a divinity: a bodhisattva in the case of Yueying (note the contrast to Pu Songling's evocation of Buddhist monkhood), an icon painting in the case of Luker'ia. Both describe the young women's head, with hair emerging messily from it; their teeth; their stick-like limbs; and especially their transfixing eyes. These body parts are described one by one, as though anatomizing the body as it decays and turns into inanimate matter. But whereas Turgenev's narrator emphasizes Luker'ia's beauty, which is seemingly intensified by her martyr-like proximity to death (the name of this sketch is "Zhivye moschi," or "Living Relic"), Xiao Hong takes the ugliness, decay, and squalor as far as she can with the disturbing description of maggots. Indeed, Turgenev's passage starts by illustrating Luker'ia's state of decay and culminates by drawing attention back to the ethereal beauty in her face, whereas Xiao Hong flips the order, first mentioning Yueying's beauty and then driving home the degradation of her body. It is as though for Chinese realist writers, there can be no way to sugarcoat the urgent problems facing China: realism in this new cultural context at this fraught historical moment takes on a new exigency. Xiao Hong wrote her novel against the backdrop of the Japanese invasion of China, so not only are the individual lives of these characters hanging in the balance, so too is the very existence of China. She ups the ante, as it were: if Russian realism portrayed squalor to an already frightful degree, then Chinese writers, in the urgency of creating a brand new literature, of needing to shock and outrage readers into acknowledging, deploring, and perhaps doing something about the suffering of their own countrymen and the backwardness of their country, would write squalor of an even more viscerally alarming pitch.

The combination of poverty and squalor was particularly generative for Chinese writers. An aspiring writer in the early twentieth century, repudiating premodern Chinese literary models and testing out new ways to craft narrative, may well have approached poverty and squalor as two axes along which new forms of fiction could proliferate. Poverty is a lack, a deficiency, which means that writing about poverty will always provide forward momentum in the plot; the

---

[99] See, for instance, her essay "Wuti" ("No title"), in *Xiao Hong quanji* 4: 200. I will discuss her affinity for Turgenev further in Chapter 3.

[100] Turgenev, *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, trans. Richard Freeborn (London: Penguin, 1990), 356.

character, like the hapless Ah Q, is always thinking ahead: where is he going to scrounge together the next meal, where is he going to sleep that night? So there is always a forward moving temporality provided by the narrative of poverty, which concatenates metonymically outward, from Ah Q's empty stomach to his threadbare clothing and empty room, and finally to the streets he will stalk as he seeks sustenance. Poverty is "the mother of longing,"[101] and not just in an abstract or metaphysical sense as Georg Lukács implies; but, in modern Chinese realism, longing for the implacably concrete and material necessities for survival. And as for squalor, this excess of bodily details allows the writer to test out powers of description, as in Xiao Hong's passage about Yueying. These descriptions pause the forward momentum of the narrative to dwell upon unbearably vivid illustrations of what this woman's body looks, smells, and feels like. Yueying literally cannot move—she is paralyzed—and the narrative is held in paralysis momentarily as it dwells on this description of her. In this way, I conceptualize poverty and squalor as the two poles or axes of narrative upon which pioneering Chinese writers of realism built their craft.[102]

I propose *squalor* as an alternative to or inverse of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) *carnival*, his term for the occasions of anarchic freedom and disruption of social hierarchies beginning in folkloric practices of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and making themselves felt in certain novelistic traditions (particularly in the work of Rabelais). Carnivalesque laughter is thus "the laughter of all the people,"[103] and the forms of what Bakhtin calls "grotesque realism" arising from these liberating forces celebrate the lower strata of the human body, its "acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth." The grotesque body's apertures are open to the earth, and this process of degradation "digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one."[104]

Squalor, like carnival, brings the bodies of the folk to the fore of literary representation, since as I have mentioned modern realism in the West and in China insisted radically that these hungry masses were now as worthy of representation as the intellectual or ruling elites. So depictions of squalor upset social hierarchies like the carnival, but its governing principle is not a laughter that mocks and profanes the sacred even while it revives: it is not laughter that we find in squalor but rather weeping, lamentation, and misery, an affective state that is debilitating for the poor and embarrassing for the wealthy.[105] And the grotesque body in squalor is similarly crude, earthy, and vulgar but not, as for Bakhtin, in a regenerative, triumphant sense, but in a way that dehumanizes and depletes in its fatal excess of secretions, effluvia, disintegration, and pain. The poverty in modern Chinese realist fiction that I examine is inseparable from squalor. Commenting upon Zheng Zhenduo's 1921 famous call for "a literature of blood and tears," Marston Anderson writes that "the new fiction was to possess the palpable reality of fluids exuded by the body"—not only, I would add, under conditions of revolutionary violence as outlined in Zheng's essay, but also, in the work of many realist writers, under conditions of poverty and squalor.

---

[101] See Georg Lukács, "Longing and Form: Charles-Louis Philippe," in *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 119.

[102] We might think, here, of the two temporal poles of realist narrative that Fredric Jameson has identified in *Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2015): the past-present-future trajectory of the *récit* versus the atemporal pole of affect. I will have more to say about Jameson's articulation of realist temporality in Chapter 4.

[103] See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 11.

[104] Ibid, 21.

[105] In this sense it is an instantiation of the epochal mood of *kumen* (bitterness and suffering) that Jing Tsu has identified in the 1920s and 30s (*Failure, Nationalism, and Literature*, 195-221).

A squalid misery that degrades without, like carnivalesque laughter, opening up a space for regrowth: realism that features such an aesthetics of poverty, that gives no quarter to the represented sufferer, may well open itself to the allegation that writers soon found realism inadequate to their aims of social reform. Hence scholarship on Chinese realism, including Anderson's, has tended to focus on the genre's limitations, its moments of epistemic crisis or formal deformation.[106] I trace instead the transcultural origins of modern Chinese realism to show that it is a supple, versatile, and syncretic new form.[107] In contrast to critics who discuss the limits of realist writing in China, I argue that it is a capaciously and energetically *heteromodal* form, capable of encompassing many modes of narration from a spectrum of "isms" recently translated from the West (romanticism, naturalism, modernism, symbolism, and so on). Here I draw upon Bakhtin's principle of the *heteroglossic* nature of language and of the novel, which omnivorously absorbs a multitude of speech registers and styles.[108] The following chapters tease out the qualities in the fiction of this period that characterize it as realist: serious treatment of the everyday concerns of characters from lowly backgrounds; enmeshing of particular individuals and events within a historical milieu and social totality; attentiveness to detail that may feel superfluous; deployment of metonymy as a primary mode of conveying meaning.[109] As will become clear, many of these realist characteristics are ones that critics such as Wellek, Lukács, Roland Barthes, and Roman Jakobson have identified in Western realisms.[110] But there also emerge from my close-readings qualities particular to modern Chinese realism that exceed or innovate upon those Western precedents. The dissertation builds toward the concluding chapter, which proposes to theorize the suppleness and inventiveness of modern Chinese realism in a historical moment characterized by the simultaneous translation and absorption of a stunning array of foreign and indigenous forms. Chinese writers were so omnivorously absorbing different Western literary movements simultaneously, while continuing to make use of traditional Chinese literary resources, that modern Chinese heteromodal realism is necessarily informed by a broad spectrum of narrative modes and styles.[111]

Of course, the question that Anderson and others have asked still stands: did modern Chinese realism, innovatively heteromodal as it was, ultimately prove inadequate to writers' socially transitive aims? Was it an enclosed system, albeit aesthetically inventive, of portraying,

---

[106] See, for instance, Anderson, *Limits of Realism*; Huters, "Blossoms in the Snow: Lu Xun and the Dilemma of Modern Chinese Literature," *Modern China* 10, no. 1 (1984): 152; and Ann Anagnost, *National Past-times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 26.

[107] I take my cue from Chan, who prefers not to view the realist "text as a finished, completed entity that either succeeds as 'realist' or not," but instead stresses "how such texts in fact involve dynamic, open-ended, and tactical management of competing narrative desires and imperatives" (*The Edge of Knowing,* 32).

[108] See David Roy, "Introduction," in *Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei: Vol. 1, the Gathering* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), xvii-xlviii; and Shang Wei, "'Jin Ping Mei' and Late Ming Print Culture," in *Writing and Materiality in China*, ed. Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), for accounts of the traditional Chinese novel *Jin Ping Mei* as heteroglossic.

[109] Chan offers a helpful breakdown of realism's three main axes (ontological/epistemic, discursive, and pragmatic) and May Fourth realism's engagement with them (*Edge of Knowing,* 25-34).

[110] Among the realist conventions imported from Europe, as Chan notes, are "the narrator-observer, the appeal to empiricism and social science, the exposé of the lower classes, the use of vernacular registers, the analogy between fictional and historiographical modes" (Ibid., 29).

[111] My project thus contributes to recent critical discussions about so-called peripheral realisms and how to read them in relation to better-known canons from the West; I refer to the challenge issued by the September 2012 *MLQ* issue on *Peripheral Realisms*. My concluding chapter will delve further into the stakes of this project, as well as my intervention in it.

exploiting, and spectating the suffering of others, without offering practicable solutions? Lu Xun, as critics have deftly shown, was keenly worried that readers would consume cathartically his fiction about other people's misery; yet some of his protégés and disciples of the next generation, as I discuss further below, did not necessarily reflect metatextually upon these compunctions in the same way. Was the realist writing of squalid poverty, with its affect of desperation and hopelessness, later discarded so that writers could find a way out of the dead end by adopting instead the affectively rousing, hopeful forward-looking master plots of socialist realism? Perhaps instead of postulating the limits or inadequacy of the early twentieth-century ethos of realist fiction, we might conjecture that its body of literature about squalor played a role in changing the structure of feeling towards the socially downtrodden throughout the 1920s and 30s, laying the foundation for the leftist turn and for an ongoing tradition of writing about poverty to the present day.

Poverty and Squalor, Diachronically

This dissertation asks how early twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals sifted through hundreds of years of Western and Chinese literary history and compacted them into new genres during a few decades of heady experimentation. How does a long-established literary culture exposed to the depredations of modernity, reeling from violent encounters with the West, reinvent itself? Depicting poverty allowed writers to develop the nascent forms of modern Chinese narrative, innovating strategies of representing the nation, the social other, and time and space, while problematizing their aesthetic exploitation of this topic. This was a period in which the nationhood of China was still unclear, and as such it is no accident that narratives, in novels, newspapers, print media and its plethora of shorter narratives, became an important way to attempt to articulate the nation.[112] This is discussed in Chapter Two but implicitly frames the other chapters as well. The quandary of the social other is, in both Chinese and Russian realism, a question of how they belong to the same nation, as Chapter Three explores. Chapter Four deals with the shared bondage to modern clock time that underpins processes of capitalist production, and is a key element in Benedict Anderson's argument about the role of the novel in the formation of modern national imaginaries.[113] Finally, Chapter Five demonstrates how a single nation consists of interconnected, disparate spaces that though geographically, socially, and economically heterogeneous, are shown to be equally worthy of narrative attention. So the question of the nation in narrative is in some sense relevant to all of my chapters; poverty in literature, and the poverty of literature, were fundamentally national questions.[114] As will become clear, scrutinizing the depiction of poverty and squalor in these works of fiction often unlocks the interpretation of other interwoven thematic and formal strands: in other words, the chapters take a holistic approach to close-reading works of fiction, to demonstrate the centrality of the topic of poverty and the way it undergirds the architecture of these texts' realism.

Each chapter of the dissertation sketches out a narrative problem that modern Chinese writers faced, and that they solved by means of writing about poverty, often in ways mediated by

---

[112] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

[113] I thank Edward Tyerman for this insight.

[114] Perhaps poverty was conceptualized differently in premodern Chinese culture in part because the modern concept of the nation did not then exist. To Pu Songling, poverty is a matter of the spiritual, of overcoming material attachment. But to modern writers, poverty is a relentlessly material question linked to a modern understanding of the nation as a basic unit of political economy.

Russian intertexts. Writers such as Lu Xun considered it their duty to produce literature in order to awaken the Chinese masses to their national plight. How, then, could they write about the nation in the form of narrative, particularly realist narrative? How were they to describe a problem prevalent on a massive scale, endemic to an entire population or an entire race, in a narrative that follows merely a handful of individual characters? The next chapter explores how the cannibalization of Russian intertexts equipped Lu Xun with strategies to encapsulate the general in the specific, the national in the individual, by depicting bodily suffering under conditions of poverty. Enabling these kinds of narratives were the rhetorical affordances of metonymy and synecdoche. I show how these strategies arose from Lu Xun's study of Gogol, and how intertextual engagements with writers like Chekhov and Andreev brought into focus the theme of poverty in Lu Xun's fiction. It was Lu Xun's sense of the comparative textual poverty in China that led to his cannibalization of literary elements from Russia, elements whose depiction of material poverty were meant to address the problem of the backwardness of Chinese culture.

Depicting the poor and downtrodden gave rise to quandaries about the ethics and feasibility of depicting the social other. Chapter 3 explores this problem, a central one in the debates surrounding modern Chinese literature in the 1920s and 30s, as Anderson has shown: how can a bourgeois intellectual writer represent a proletarian subject? Can literature about poverty allow the subaltern to speak? Or do depictions of oppression within realist fiction simply perpetuate the spectatorship of violence and degradation? I show that the image of the hand was, in fiction of this era, the crystallization of these questions of representation, since the hand serves as a convenient synecdoche for physical and mental labor both, acting as a reminder that the latter is not necessarily able to represent or assist the former.[115] Turgenev's 1878 prose-poem *Chernorabochii i beloruchka* (literally, "The black-worker and the white-hand") is the starting point of my account, followed by a number of Lu Xun's prose poems and Xiao Hong's 1936 short story *Shou* ("Hands") as well as her longer fiction and 1936 memoir *Shang shi jie* (*Market Town*). I show that these texts are metatextually aware that the writer of rich language is not necessarily equipped to overcome mental or moral poverty in herself or others, but contrives to do so nonetheless.

The next chapter addresses the problem of narrating time in Xiao Hong, Mao Dun, and Lao She's fiction. These writers negotiated the dialectic between cyclical and forward-moving time, as a means of grappling with tensions between tradition and modernity, city and country. The thematization of temporality is self-consciously metatextual, since in their pioneering attempts to establish the parameters of a new literature, the narration of the passage of time would have been one of the most fundamental issues to address.[116] To create a modern Chinese realism, writers first had to devise new ways of narrating temporality, and narrating poverty aided this innovation. I assert that modern Chinese realism featuring the impoverished and the oppressed reinvents the narrative depiction of the passage of time in the age of wage labor and colonial exploitation. Narrative attention focuses on very small units of time (day to day life,

---

[115] As Perry Link has remarked, "In its literary content, May Fourth writing did, of course, frequently portray lower class life and express great sympathy for the downtrodden. But the readership who found these portraits of the lower classes appealing was not the lower classes themselves; it was, at least until the thirties, a highly educated minority. And the sympathetic feelings of privileged people toward the less privileged must be distinguished from the feelings of the less privileged themselves" (*Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 19-20). The fiction of this era was often preoccupied by this problem and dwelt metatextually upon it.

[116] One can hardly talk about the one without the other, as Paul Ricoeur has reminded us in his magisterial *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

hourly patterns in a rickshaw puller's schedule, the necessities for subsistence moment by moment) mimicking in chronology and rhythm the exigencies of survival under conditions of material privation. This valuation of labor in terms of time moreover provides a way for the laboring writer to access the temporal exigency in the experience of the poor: one possibility for bridging the gap between the manuscripter and the manual laborer.

This fine-grained treatment of time is tied to the narrative depiction of very small denominations of space (a room, a courtyard, a piece of land), so the next chapter tackles this problem of spatiality. I contend that modern Chinese realism represents space in new ways as a result of narrating poverty. From Russian realist writers such as Dostoevsky, Chinese writers acquired the topos of the squalid room, bedchamber, and boarding house. A character's immediate, contiguous surroundings (living quarters filled with furniture, clothing, and personal possessions) could metonymically shed light on socioeconomic status as well as psychological state. Thus arose in realist writing the assumption that no detail or object was too trivial for narrative attention, giving rise to the analogous conviction that no geographic space or region was too remote or insignificant to be worthy of notice. The logic of metonymy, in other words, obtains on a national scale: that which happens in the geographic core (a metropolis such as Shanghai or Beijing) ramifies across contiguous geographic spaces such that even obscure villages of rural Sichuan or Shandong will feel these repercussions and generate far-reaching social ripples of their own. As fiction by Yu Dafu (1896-1945), Ye Shengtao (1894-1988), and Li Jieren (1891-1962) demonstrates, any distant place is still metonymically connected to major events that happen in the major coastal cities, just as people living adjacent to one another rub off on each other in their cramped and derelict quarters. I challenge the logic of existing scholarship which tends to spatialize modern China along a city/country axis, showing that realist fiction provides a much more fine-grained breakdown of contiguous geographic regions ranging from metropolis to suburb to provincial town to village.

In spite of their focus upon different narrative concerns, the chapters build upon one another: the study of metonymy in chapter two segues into an emphasis on the synecdochal hand in chapter three; the problem of representing the social other, tackled in chapter three, informs chapter four's scrutiny of the use of temporality in representing the experience of a different class; chapter four's attention to temporalities of city and country rhymes with chapter five's examination of spatiality in city and country. And as I mentioned, the chapters' conceptualization of modern Chinese realism culminates in the conclusion, which theorizes the ways in which realism in this new cultural context synthesizes and exceeds the Western models it absorbs.

My account of the narrative interest in poverty of this period provides a diachronic sense of how its portrayal evolved over time, in correlation with writers' changing political allegiances. At first writers tended to depict poverty for its ability to trope abstract concepts (such as the weakness of the nation, or the impotence of the reform-minded intellectual), but as the 1920s and 30s went on, they became increasingly interested in portraying the experience of poverty for its own sake. This is of course only a rough approximation of a trend, as many counterexamples could certainly be found. But there is a correlation with the increasing enmeshing of art and politics, and the "somber reassessments of the writer's social conscience" that Leo Lee has identified in the transition from the 1920s to the 30s.[117] A comparison between the Anhui-born writer Wu Zuxiang's (1908-1994) 1934 "Tianxia taiping" ("All Peaceful under Heaven"), and

[117] "Literary Trends: The Road to Revolution, 1927-1949," *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, ed. Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-fan Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 196.

the stories by Lu Xun that Wu riffs on, provides a helpful case in point.[118] Wu's story takes place in a village called Fengtan, whose great temple, its residents believe, has protected them from calamity since time immemorial. On the roof of the temple rests an ancient red cinnabar vase, which reportedly emits a mystical glow, and from which protrudes three halberds, each emblazoned with the golden characters, "All peaceful under heaven." Neighboring villages have succumbed to foreign invasion, warfare, revolutionary agitation, and other disasters, but the lore is that so long as the temple and its vase remain standing in Fengtan, then the village will remain untouched. A central irony throughout the story is that even while the villagers fall deeper into unthinkable poverty (*pinqiong* or *qiongku*),[119] they remind themselves that, thanks to the venerable temple, at least their lives are at peace. The protagonist is a longtime shopkeeper in town, Wang Xiaofu (his name, "Little Fortune," is another irony), who loses his livelihood when shops start going out of business. Wang tries to make money as a short-term laborer, but there is no work to be found, so his wife sells her breastmilk to wealthy townspeople to keep the family alive, ultimately sacrificing the life of their infant daughter. When her milk dries, the family begins to starve. Their twelve-year-old son, who has "a headful of scabs and sores and was so skinny he hardly looked human," shuffles around hawking oil crullers in a pair of oversized shoes salvaged from the garbage:

> The dry corners of his mouth cracked as he shouted out his wares, desperate to sell every last one. Once noon had well passed, he…trudged home like a sickly little pack animal, wheezing and sniffling, oil oozing from his scalp with each trembling step….Several times, after this wretched little thing had endured both hunger and abuse, he stopped to drink some cold water from an irrigation ditch on his way home. This always made him violently ill. His eyes would roll up in his head, he would vomit and heave, and his little face would turn from purply red to ashen green.[120]

The narrative is merciless in illustrating, with unstinting bodily detail, the excretions of every variety that flow from these characters' bodies. Each page is riddled with these grisly details. Under the hot summer sun, Wang's wife "was forced to slave until midnight every night. Perspiration soaked her hair and her ragged vest, leaving salty white patches where it dried. The sweat soaked her skin, and it began to crack from the salt. It itched and was painful, producing a smell she could barely endure herself. But the fact of the matter was that she simply didn't have time to bathe."[121] The family lives in unspeakable squalor, their own excrement littering the floor of their rundown hut. With its sensory excess, the narrative is clearly invested in laying bare every detail of the physiological and psychological experience of poverty, following the family's decline day by day and hour by hour, tracing their footsteps as they wander around desperately seeking sustenance.

When Wang's mother dies of dysentery (details of which are unsparingly enumerated in the narrative), Wang borrows money at usurious rates from a widow who repeatedly declares her money to be her own flesh and blood: "If you have the stomach for it, then you can eat this piece

---

[118] David Der-wei Wang has called Wu "one of the best interpreters of Lu Xun's ethics of writing"; see *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 62. Wu was known for his satirical portrayals of gentry and peasants of Anhui province.
[119] "Tianxia taiping," in *Su cao ji: xiaoshuo juan* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1988), 177, 178.
[120] "All Peaceful Under Heaven," trans. Linda Jaivin, in *Green Bamboo Hermitage* (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1989), 97.
[121] Ibid., 99-100.

of flesh"—and she later takes away the Wangs' every possession when they cannot pay the debt.[122] Eventually, Wang's wife comes up with the idea to tear down the walls of their house and sell the bricks, and they dig crazedly in the rubble for the ancient treasure that their ancestors are rumored to have buried there.[123] Finding nothing, Wang finally becomes desperate enough to overcome a lifetime of superstitious veneration, climbing the roof of the temple one night to pluck the sacred vase off, with the intention of selling it. The story ends with him falling from the roof of the temple to his death.

There are three stories by Lu Xun from the previous decade or so that Wu's story calls to mind. The first is the 1918 "Kuangren riji," in which the madman becomes convinced that his family once cannibalized his little sister, and cannibalism comes to stand in for the social rapaciousness and inherent cruelty of Chinese society and Confucian tradition. In Wu's story, Wang's wife, driven to the extremity of desperation, threatens to eat her newborn daughter and even tries to kill her, while Wang himself acknowledges that the food he eats, paid for by the sale of his wife's breastmilk, is the flesh and blood of his wife and daughter.[124] The widow, too, takes up this language of consuming flesh and blood. Whereas in Lu Xun's story the cannibalism is largely hypothetical (except for one particular case, which I will discuss in the following chapter) and symbolic, Wu Zuxiang takes a step toward literalizing it with the consumption of breastmilk, sustenance provided by human flesh. His well-known story, "Guanguan de bupin" ("Young Master Gets His Tonic") makes the same move, with the sale of both blood and breastmilk.[125] In Lu Xun's story, poverty provides the backdrop for the plot, as I will show; whereas in Wu Zuxiang's story, poverty moves into the glaring spotlight as the primary narrative obsession. And cannibalism for Lu Xun, only occurring offstage, is sublimated as an idea about the backwardness of Chinese culture and society, whereas the degradation of human flesh is explored in every possible gory facet, with unshrinking immediacy, in Wu Zuxiang's story.

Of course, the implication of China's backwardness as a nation underlies "All Peaceful under Heaven" as well.[126] The Wang family's conviction that their ancestors left buried treasure for them to find ironizes the conviction that traditional culture (for which the temple and its treasured vase serve as synecdoches) can keep China safe in the modern reality of imperialist incursions. This is a detail drawn from Lu Xun's 1922 "Baiguang" ("White Light"), in which the impoverished scholar, repeatedly failing the traditional civil service examinations, loses touch with reality and digs up his dilapidated dwelling to seek his ancestors' buried treasure. Wu Zuxiang takes this plot point, resulting from an extremity of poverty, and fleshes it out in as much sensory detail as possible. Lu Xun mentions the scholar's destitution in order to convey figuratively the poverty of traditional culture. These figurative implications persist in Wu Zuxiang's text, but the literal and urgently material ramifications of poverty, which drive the Wangs to this frenzied undertaking, take precedence in Wu's narrative landscape.

---

[122] "Tianxia taiping," 195. Translation mine.
[123] Ibid., 197.
[124] Ibid., 188, 191.
[125] Leo Lee comments that Wu "dramatizes" Lu Xun's idea of cannibalism; see *Lu Xun and His Legacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 48; and David Der-wei Wang states that Wu "literally takes on cannibalism" in this story (*The Monster That Is History*, 63).
[126] Fengtan Village is impoverished in absolute terms, but it is also shown as impoverished in relative terms too: Wang's mother can no longer sell cloth she weaves herself because the market is flooded with fabrics made by foreigners ("Tianxia taiping," 176). The village and its environs are afflicted by both the economic and military brutalization of imperialist incursions.

The final story by Lu Xun that Wu's evokes is the 1925 "Changming deng" ("The Lamp of Eternity"), in which the village madman tries to put out the ever-burning lamp at the altar of the temple, in order to avert natural disaster. When that fails, he threatens to burn the entire edifice down. The alarmed villagers are equally convinced that extinguishing the flame can only bring calamity upon them. Like the temple's vase in Wu Zuxiang's story, the lurid glow of the lamp here is said to have sanctified origins in the mists of history, the handiwork of a hallowed emperor. The madman in Lu Xun's story is described as shabbily dressed, filthy and squalid like the family in Wu's story. But Lu Xun's madman is motivated not by poverty but by an abstract and unexplained conviction that symbolizes the drive to reform traditional culture—interpreted as madness by those around him mired in superstition. In other words, Wu Zuxiang once again takes Lu Xun's plot device and embeds it in a story engrossed and motivated by the circumstances of poverty.

What I want to suggest, then, is that Lu Xun's fiction from the 1910s and 20s deploys the topic of poverty largely for figurative purposes, indicating the poverty of Chinese culture and the moral poverty of Chinese people; and by the time Wu Zuxiang writes his stories in the mid-1930s, marshalling some of Lu Xun's favorite motifs and plot devices, the narrative interest in poverty and squalor is more sustained, material, and explicit.[127] I wish, moreover, to give a sense of the lineage of writing about poverty in this period. The earliest practitioners of modern Chinese fiction took up this topic, and subsequent generations of writers continued to rework and intensify this kind of narrative, often in dialogue with those that came before. The three stories by Lu Xun that I have mentioned contain resonances of works by Gogol, Chekhov, Gorky, Andreev, and Garshin, as I will explore in the next chapter. These Russian writers provided inspiration for Lu Xun, who indigenized these elements; and then his disciples—such as Wu Zuxiang and, as Chapter 3 examines further, Xiao Hong—bring these textual moments to a more bodily, anguished pitch, sometimes while engaging with Russian intertexts of their own (one critic has pointed out Wu's affinities to Turgenev).[128] The writing of poverty and squalor, and the Chinese reading of Russian literature that informed it, not only enabled the burgeoning vernacular fiction; it also gave rise to a new modern tradition and lineage of realism and literary culture.

Throughout the twentieth century, each subsequent period's literature, drama, film, and art present a different structure of feeling in the aesthetic depiction of poverty. Concomitantly, the nature of Chinese investment in Russian literature continued to evolve. In the 1930s and afterward, there was increasing interest in leftist or proletarian works, by writers such as Gorky, Aleksandr Fadeev (1901-56), or Nikolai Ostrovsky (1904-36).[129] During wartime, literature about deprivation was harnessed to the struggle against Japanese oppression. Starting in the 1940s and continuing into the socialist period, poverty was elevated as a source of wisdom and ideological potential, particularly after Mao Zedong's 1942 talks at the Yan'an forum: as a

---

[127] I have contrasted specific works by Lu Xun and Wu Zuxiang for the sake of throwing the one into relief with the other, but of course in both writers' oeuvre there was a change in aesthetic and political articulation from the 1920s to the 30s: see Leo Lee, "Literature on the Eve of Revolution," *Modern China* 2, no. 3 (1976): 277-326; Gamsa, "Writers from Anhui and Provinciality in Modern China," *Twentieth-Century China* 36, no. 2 (2011), 180; and Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 197-200.

[128] See Philip F. Williams, *Village Echoes: The Fiction of Wu Zuxiang* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 3.

[129] For studies of Chinese interest in Soviet culture after the period that this dissertation focuses on, see Nicolai Volland, *Socialist Cosmopolitanism: The Chinese Literary Universe, 1945-1965* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); and Yan Li, *China's Soviet Dream: Propaganda, Culture, and Popular Imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

bourgeois intellectual, he says, he used to think workers and peasants were dirty, but now he realizes that "the cleanest people are worker and peasants; their hands may be dirty and their feet soiled with cow dung, but they are still cleaner than the petty bourgeoisie."[130] Exhorting artists and intellectuals to learn about the masses by dirtying their own hands, Mao turns the squalor of poverty inside-out, making it not the affective excess of dehumanization and hopelessness, but instead the very means by which the people can be educated, and eventually, according to party ideology, be lifted out of poverty. In 1958 Mao reinforces this sentiment:

> Apart from their other characteristics, the outstanding thing about China's 600 million people is that they are "poor and blank." This may seem a bad thing, but in reality it is a good thing. Poverty gives rise to the desire for change, the desire for action and the desire for revolution. On a blank sheet of paper free from any mark, the freshest and most beautiful characters can be written, the freshest and most beautiful pictures can be painted.[131]

Again, what was once deplorable and seemingly inescapable is now the positive driving force of ideological and aesthetic transformation. As I have indicated, in early twentieth-century texts, the depiction of poverty was an engine for forward-moving plot because of characters' desire (usually futile) for change; and Mao mobilizes this function of poverty in one medium (realist fiction) by presenting real poverty as a medium itself: to be squalid and dirty is actually to be clean—so clean, so pure, that the nation's future plot can be inscribed upon the poor.[132] No longer the source of vice and despair, poverty is now the wellspring of hope and the greatest virtue of all. Accordingly in aesthetic production throughout the socialist period, poverty is often the cause of moral probity and great ideological courage, because the poor have nothing to lose and everything to gain; and in this art, poverty must find a solution, which had been so elusive in the fiction written a few decades before.

Since the reform era, the structure of feeling in aesthetic representations of poverty has continued to shift, and artistic production probes how China's rapid assimilation into global capitalism has left many people behind, in spite of the contemporary rhetoric that China has in recent decades lifted millions out of poverty. Fiction by Yu Hua, Mo Yan, and science fiction writers; films by sixth-generation directors like Jia Zhangke; documentaries by Wang Bing—to name only a few prominent examples—are continually experimenting with new and daring ways to represent poverty and squalor, and its nexus of themes, forms, and affects that have defined, and continue to define, the aesthetic articulation of China's experience of modernity. This dissertation's object of inquiry is how modern Chinese literature takes shape in its effort to portray poverty and how project that has crucial implications for the new literature's forms, in the particular due to its dialogue with Russia models. And my argument points the way forward to contemplating the ways in which writing about poverty remains a constant and a central lynchpin of modern Chinese literature in its later developments, as it continues to engage with Russian and other foreign cultural artefacts. The formative moment I focus on in fact becomes a

---

[130] Mao, Zedong, *Mao Zedong's 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art': a Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, trans. Bonnie S. McDougall (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies: University of Michigan, 1980), 61.

[131] "Jieshao yige hezuoshe" ("Introducing Co-operative"), in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, vol. 7 (Beijing: Central Documentation Press, 1992), 177-8. Translated and quoted in William Schaefer, "Poor and Blank: History's Marks and the Photographies of Displacement," in *Representations* 109, no. 1 (Feb., 2010): 1.

[132] Ibid., 5.

tradition, and can help us think through what happens to the depiction of the socially downtrodden during the socialist and postsocialist eras.

Chapter 2
Material Poverty, Textual Poverty, and the Backwardness of the Nation

"The feasts of human flesh are still being prepared, and there are many people who wish to see them continue. The mission of our young people today is to wipe out these eaters of human flesh, upend these feasts, and destroy the kitchen!"
—Lu Xun, "Jottings under Lamplight"[133]

"Cannibalism. Absorption of the sacred enemy. To transform him into a totem. The human adventure. The earthly goal."
—Oswald de Andrade, "Cannibalist Manifesto"[134]

"Our ancient worthies," Lu Xun alleges in his 1925 essay "Dengxia manbi" ("Jottings under Lamplight"), "have sacrificed our children and treasures to provide sumptuous feasts for our conquerors. The Chinese people's ability to endure hardship (*nailao*) and its practice of having many children are the stuff of these feasts….the time to put on feasts for the Westerners has come."[135] Chinese history is a litany of foreign invasions that have made the people into slaves (*nuli*), such that no one can think or exist outside of the master (*zhuren*) / slave dialectic.[136] Now, Lu Xun broods, it is asymmetrical encounter with the West that engenders hardship, not only the humiliation of spiritual enslavement but also the physical travails of "war and drought."[137] For it is material poverty that he has in mind here:

> …we still see before our very eyes all manner of feasts: we have barbeque, shark fins, home-style cooking, and Western cuisine. But we also have plain rice consumed under thatched eaves, scraps eaten by the side of the road, and famine stalking the countryside; we have those of immeasurable wealth consuming barbeque even as we have children on the point of starvation selling for eight coppers a pound (see issue number 21 of *Contemporary Review*).What we call our Chinese civilization is actually nothing more than a feast of human flesh prepared for the delectation of the rich, and what we call China is nothing more than the kitchen where these feasts of human flesh are prepared.[138]

Not only are the material riches of China a sumptuous buffet for the Westerners who came, ate, and conquered, but internally the circumstances of adversity make for untrammeled class-based rapacity and cannibalism as well. Poverty is for Lu Xun always symptomatic of the state of the nation vis-à-vis wealthy foreign nations. As such it figures prominently in much of his fiction, whose goal is to articulate and critique the circumstances that make China such easy prey. The argument of this chapter is that the topic of material poverty equipped writers like Lu Xun with the narrative strategies to represent the nation in narrative form: this was a project of portentous moment in a period when the nation was understood to be feasted upon by foreigners, whose

---

[133] Trans. Theodore Huters, in *Jottings Under Lamplight*, ed. Eileen J. Cheng and Kirk A. Denton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 150.
[134] Trans. Leslie Bary, *Latin American Literary Review* 19, No. 38 (Jul.-Dec. 1991): 43.
[135] In *Jottings Under Lamplight,* 147-8.
[136] See Takeuchi Yoshimi on "the equivalence between European advance and Oriental retreat," in "What is Modernity? (The Case of Japan and China)," in *What is Modernity?: Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*, trans. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 58.
[137] "Jottings under Lamplight," 149.
[138] Ibid.

textual traditions paradoxically provide the narrative strategies that writers could appropriate in order to ameliorate China's comparative cultural poverty.

Poverty for Lu Xun is also always understood in bodily terms, with attention to the fleshly experience of squalor. China is a feast, and Chinese bodies become measurable, quantifiable, and saleable under conditions of destitution; according to his account, they can be butchered, dismembered, and priced. The flesh of children sells for eight coppers a pound, Lu Xun reports; no wonder, then, that the peasants in his story "Fengbo" ("Storm in a Teacup") are named after their weights at birth: Mrs. Ninepounder (*Jiujin laotai*), Mrs. Sevenpounder (*Qijin saozi*), and representing the woefully inadequate youngest generation, Sixpounder (*Liujin*).[139] In Lu Xun's stories, the reality of material poverty means that people think in terms of metonymy and its subtype, synecdoche[140]: a fleshly attribute stands in for the person as a whole because, he implies, people are no more than the sum of their fleshly parts, barely held together by their empty stomachs.

Poverty and squalor are everywhere in Lu Xun's fiction, which is, as a result, subtended by the metonymic logic characteristic of realism. I will show how these metonymic narrative strategies arise from his appropriations of Gogol's narrative techniques, as well as how Lu Xun's intertextual engagements with Russian writers like Chekhov and Andreev brought into focus the theme of poverty in his fiction. It was Lu Xun's sense of the comparative textual poverty in China that led to his impulse to cannibalize literary modes and motifs from Russia, elements whose depiction of material poverty were meant to address the problem of the backwardness of Chinese culture. Thus, in his stories material poverty acts as a trope for the poverty of Chinese culture and the backwardness of the nation.

"I have found more in Russia than in any foreign culture," Lu Xun is reported to have said in 1926. "There is a certain sympathetic relation between China and Russia, a common bond in culture and experience….China is facing the same human struggles which the Russian novelist met." Among his favorite writers he lists Chekhov, Gogol, Andreev, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, all affiliated (some more equivocally than others) with the lineage of literary realism in Russia.[141] Lu Xun wrote repeatedly throughout his life of Russian realism's interest in poverty and squalor. In 1927 he declares in an essay "Wenxue he chuhan" ("Literature and sweat") that writing about real human experience entails examining these distasteful bodily facts:

> Take sweating, for example. I imagine men sweated in the distant past, they sweat today and will sweat for some time to come. This should therefore count as a comparatively 'eternal' human quality. But the sweat of 'exquisite' young ladies is sweet (*xianghan*), while the sweat of workers 'dumb as oxen' is rank (*chouhan*). If one wants to write works that will live and win an immortal name for oneself as a writer, is it better to describe sweet sweat or rank sweat?...
>
> I hear that in England, for instance, most of the earlier novels were written for ladies; thus, naturally, sweet sweat predominated. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, under the influence of Russian literature, there was

[139] See "Storm in a Teacup," trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, in *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, 47-55.
[140] See Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in *Language and Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 111. See also Elaine Freedgood, *The Idea in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 12-3, for the centrality of metonymy (and its subtype, synecdoche) to realism.
[141] Bartlett, "Intellectual Leaders of the Chinese Revolution," quoted in Kowallis, "Lu Xun's Early Essays and Present-Day China," *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 12, no. 1 (2013), 13.

> quite a reek of rank sweat. Which type will outlive the other is still too early to say.[142]

Unmistakably, Lu Xun's fiction reeks of rank sweat. For Lu Xun, the fortitude not to turn away from "the ugly, the revolting, the low"[143] was fortified by his encounters with Russian literature. His own fiction eschews any squeamishness (here problematically gendered feminine) about depicting the bodily travails of the lower classes (here gendered masculine, or rather cast in sub-human, bestial terms, a recurring motif in his writings).

Yet in spite of his deliberate choice of subject matter Lu Xun remains self-deprecating about his ability to write about poverty. In a 1933 preface to the English edition of his stories, Lu Xun recalls his earliest efforts to write about "the suffering of the underclass" (*xiaceng shehui de kutong*).[144] He reflects that traditional Chinese fiction describes the lower classes "as if they were birds or flowers, happy and content."[145] This is the attitude that his upbringing instilled within him, but Lu Xun recollects that visiting his grandmother in the countryside taught him that peasants were "oppressed and suffered much pain all their lives, hardly the picture of happy birds and flowers. But I had no means of getting this message across to the public."[146] It is only when he came across novels from abroad ("especially those from Russia, Poland, and the smaller countries of the Balkans"[147]) that he learned ways to communicate the suffering of the masses in literary form. As a result, Lu Xun claims, when he began to write short stories, he could recall the scenes he witnessed in the countryside and describe "the depravity of the 'upper class' and the misfortunes of the 'lower class.'"[148] Of course, we must take this retrospective account of his motivations for writing with a requisite critical distance, given the later Lu Xun's increasing interest in Marxism.[149] But it remains indisputable that Russian literature was a key mediator for Lu Xun between the poverty he witnessed and the poverty that he then became able to write. From those intertexts he learned a method.

Memorably, in this piece Lu Xun likens the process of learning to write about the hardship of the masses to the process of learning to walk, borrowing an allegory from *Zhuangzi*: "The inhabitants of Handan were widely admired for their elegant gait. Someone went there to study it but wasn't able to learn it properly. Meanwhile, he had forgotten his own way of walking. So he ended up having to crawl (*pa*) back home. Crawling is what I'm doing right now. But I will keep on learning until I can stand up."[150] Lu Xun has repudiated the traditional Chinese forms of fiction which describe happy peasants as "flora and fauna," just as the visitor to Handan

---

[142] In *Lu Xun Selected Works*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1980), 382.

[143] Wellek, "The Concept of Realism," 241. In 1928, Lu Xun would claim that he "always thought low-class better than high-class people" ("Two Letters," in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 3:36), though he is aware that the former are capable of behaving like the latter the moment their interests are threatened. Lu Xun's fictional portrayals of lower classes are in no way idealizing.

[144] "Yingyi ben *Duanpian xiaoshuo xuanji* zixu" (Preface to the English translation of *Selected Short Stories*), in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 7 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 411-2.

[145] Lu Xun, "Preface to the English Edition of *Selected Short Stories*," in *Jottings Under Lamplight*, trans. Kowallis, 52.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., 53.

[148] Ibid.

[149] As Feuerwerker comments, "It may well be that it was only in retrospect that Lu Xun viewed his stories in such a light; after all, by 1933, with several years of fierce debates about revolutionary literature behind him, his 'proletarian consciousness' had been raised to an extraordinary degree" (*Ideology*, 77).

[150] Ibid.

rejected his habitual gait[151]; but just as this visitor could not master the new style of walking in time to transport himself home, so too is Lu Xun professing that his short stories have not mastered the new literary forms from abroad. The rejection of the old forms left a vacancy only partially filled with the inexpert applications of imported ideas.[152] That Lu Xun likens his writing to crawling aligns himself with the previous image of the subhuman "birds or flowers," "flora and fauna" to which traditional Chinese narrative likens the poor.[153] Lu Xun, as the writer of short stories, felt himself as impoverished, as hapless and feckless, as the prostrated masses he labors to represent. To write in innovative ways is as demanding and mortifying as crawling. Lu Xun humbles himself by writing.

To write about the lower classes is to crawl, aligning himself with the degradation of being poor. After all, in Lu Xun's 1925 piece "On Self-Sacrifice" ("Xisheng mo"), the wealthy, educated narrator repeatedly commands the voiceless beggar he encounters to do just this: "Can you manage to walk a few steps? No? That's rather awkward—well, can you crawl (*pa*)? Good! Then crawl."[154] As I will discuss in this chapter and the next, Lu Xun was ever beset by the worry that his narrative appropriation of the plight of the poor was an ineluctably asymmetrical exploitation, so it is little wonder that he would wish, in his writing, to debase himself to crawl alongside them.

If we take him at his word in 1933, then his short stories were imperfect experiments in writing about the suffering of the masses: it is true that while poverty does appear as a pervasive theme throughout his fiction, the stories are not necessarily interested in the depiction of poverty and squalor for their own sake. For his stories make use of material poverty as a trope for their main thematic interests: the textual poverty of Chinese literature, the cultural backwardness of China as a nation. His stories are interested in poverty but above all they demonstrate an awareness of the poverty of form which Lu Xun attempts to remedy by nourishing himself with (to wit, by cannibalizing) his Russian intertexts. Westerners may feast upon China's material riches, but Lu Xun can in turn feast upon the textual riches of a foreign literature.

In some ways Lu Xun's textual cannibalism anticipates, albeit with his usual equivocalness, the 1928 "Manifesto Antropófago" ("Cannibalist Manifesto") published by Brazilian modernist poet Oswald de Andrade. This Manifesto reclaims cannibalism (regarded by Western imperialists as emblematic of the native Brazilian savagery so in need of civilizing colonial influences) as the means by which the Brazilian subject can create an original, rather than derivative, national culture. Leslie Bary writes, "Oswald's anthropophagist—himself a cannibalization, not of Rousseau's idealized savage but of Montaigne's avowed and active cannibal,—neither apes nor rejects European culture, but 'devours' it, adapting its strengths and incorporating them into the native self."[155] My analysis of Lu Xun's texts pushes back against

---

[151] The richness of irony here is, of course, that Lu Xun borrows an allegory from a premodern Chinese text in order to talk about his rejection of premodern Chinese textual models. Yet another layer of irony lies in the fact that all of this is to be translated into a non-Chinese language for the English language publication of Lu Xun's stories. This short preface is about the influx of the Western as a substitute for the traditional, but by means of this premodern Chinese analogy he makes his writing a vehicle to be transmitted to Western audiences.

[152] Though of course, as Cheng has explored in *Literary Remains: Death, Trauma, and Lu Xun's Refusal to Mourn* (Honolulu University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), Lu Xun never fully eschewed the Chinese past.

[153] Crawling also calls to mind the ignominiously debased Kong Yiji, representative of the dying scholar-official class who by the end of his eponymous story is reduced to dragging himself along the ground, symbolizing the moribund traditional ways of engaging with textuality.

[154] In *Lu Xun Selected Works* 2:131.

[155] "Oswald de Andrade's 'Cannibalist Manifesto,'" 35-6.

theories of world literature in which "the local is overwhelmingly presented as produced by the global."[156] I want the visceral carnality of the trope of cannibalism to evoke the pain and trauma these literary encounters often entailed, and I want to emphasize the agency of the so-called "peripheral" writer in these bloody predicaments: the global does not produce the local so much as the local cannibalist produces this textual instantiation of global literary exchange.

Intertextuality as Cannibalism

In his 1922 Preface to *A Call to Arms*, Lu Xun famously declares his fiction's target audience and subject matter to be the "nation's benighted and weak people" (*yuruo de guomin*).[157] It would be pointless to treat his countrymen's medical ailments as a doctor, he decides, so long as their spirit (*jingshen*) remains diseased, numbed, or backward. Fiction about and for the entire nation's patients is Lu Xun's prescription for this spiritual ailment. He has set himself something of a gargantuan task, then: to depict the nation in narrative form. Traditional Chinese literature offers some precedents for doing this. One strategy is to depict characters roaming far and wide across the geographic expanses of the country. The drama—*Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting*), *The Palace of Everlasting Life* (*Changsheng dian*), or *Peach Blossom Fan* (*Taohua shan*)—as well as vernacular *huaben* stories (by Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu, for instance) provide examples of spatial travel as means of mapping out the polity.[158] Another strategy is allegory: the licentious household in *Jin ping mei* and the sinking boat in *The Travels of Lao Can* (*Laocan youji*) can be read as microcosmic representations of the macrocosmic decline of the empire.[159] Though he uses methods similar to these, Lu Xun turns explicitly not to traditional Chinese precedents, however, but to Russian ones in his self-assigned task of depicting the nation in narrative form.

For the first story in *A Call to Arms*, also considered the first modern Chinese short story, takes as its title the name of Nikolai Gogol's 1835 "Zapiski sumasshedshego" ("Diary of a Madman"), whose preoccupation is precisely the backward state of the nation in terms of culture and literacy vis à vis Western Europe. Lu Xun's longstanding admiration for Gogol's fiction as

---

[156] Francesca Orsini, "The Multilingual Local in World Literature," *Comparative Literature* 67, no. 4 (2015), 351. See, for instance, Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* for a seminal and controversial articulation of this core-periphery model. And as I have mentioned, Heekyoung Cho has demonstrated that such a view of world literature is already complicated by both Russia and China's statuses as semi-peripheries, engaged not in a competitive but rather a collaborative or sympathetic literary relationship (see "Rethinking World Literature"). As I discuss in my introductory chapter, the Chinese attitude toward Russia at this period was at once one of commiseration (the former saw in the latter an example of outsider to the West) and one of conflict (the former saw in the latter an example of triumph in overcoming subservient status and becoming itself an imperialist power on Chinese soil). Both these ways of relating to Russia informed Lu Xun's use of Russian fiction as a model for his work.

[157] *Lu Xun quanji* 1:439. Translation mine.

[158] See Tina Lu, *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, and Other Peculiar Encounters in Late Imperial Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), for an account of how late imperial literature mapped communities and empire. I will consider the problem of spatiality in depth in a later chapter.

[159] Here it is worth noting that Fredric Jameson's controversial "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Autumn, 1986), 65-88, defines the central mechanism of Lu Xun's stories "Diary of a Madman" and *The True Story of Ah-Q* (and indeed of all third-world literature) as allegory: the literal cannibalism in "Diary," Jameson explains, is figuratively the social ruthlessness endemic in China and causing it to disintegrate (see Jameson, "Third-World," 71). Allegory is certainly at work in Lu Xun's fiction, but I will make the case that the figure of metonymy (a strategy gleaned from Russian realist intertexts) is the more prominent and salient one for Lu Xun because of its materiality: cannibalism is a very real, fleshly attribute of the wider problem of China's material poverty and backwardness, not simply an abstract allegorical figure.

well as his play *Revizor* (*The Inspector General*) has been well documented;[160] as early as 1906 Lu Xun began reading and studying Gogol, and mentions him in the 1908 essay "Moluo shili shuo" ("On the Power of Mara Poetry"). Gogol, he claims, "inspired his countrymen with imperceptible tear-stained grief."[161] Lu Xun here notes that Gogol's audience was an entire nation of people (*bangren*); this would become Lu Xun's own aspiration in writing fiction.[162]

Lu Xun translated several stories by Gogol and was working on an unfinished translation of *Mertvye dushi* (*Dead Souls*) at the time of his death. In the appendix to this translation he included an essay about Gogol, underscoring "tearful laughter" as the defining trait of a work like *Dead Souls*.[163] The source of Gogolian "tear-stained grief" and "tearful laughter" is often the depiction of degradation and banality in material poverty and the mental poverty it engenders.[164] I want to call attention to Gogol's narrative strategy of troping national backwardness as material poverty and squalor, which is the method that Lu Xun adopts not only in "Diary of a Madman" but also in much of his other fiction.[165] Gogol deploys a singular instantiation of material poverty to illustrate a wider national issue of cultural deficiency: his eponymous madman is the impoverished low-ranking civil servant Poprishchin, whose squalid and uncultured living circumstances represent Russia's out-of-jointness with Western European history.[166]

Lu Xun's master trope for China's moral poverty and cultural poverty on a national scale,

---

[160] See Kowallis, "Lu Xun and Gogol," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 28, no. 1-2 (2002), 101-12; and Hanan, "The Technique of Lu Xun's Fiction," in *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Essays by Patrick Hanan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 217-50.

[161] Trans. Shu-ying Tsau and Donald Holoch, in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought,* ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 98.

[162] Indeed, in his account of "How I Came to Write Fiction," reading Eastern European literature, especially that of Russian, would be a pivotal point in that genesis, and Gogol at the center of that fulcrum. Lu Xun recalls, "Because the works I sought out were about outcries and resistance, my inclinations turned toward Eastern Europe; for that reason, I read an especially large number of works by authors from Russia, Poland, and various small countries in the Balkans….I remember my favorite authors at the time were Gogol from Russia and Sienkiewicz from Poland" (in *Jottings under Lamplight*, 54).

[163] *Lu Xun quanji* 6:382-4. The ironic and satirical potential of Gogolian style is, as Hanan has pointed out, also a hallmark of Lu Xun's.

[164] As Kowallis points out, Gogol himself called it *poshlost'*, a Russian version of banality that incorporates notions of vulgarity and self-satisfaction, in an 1843 letter ("Lu Xun and Gogol," 111). See Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (Norfolk: New Directions Books, 1944), 63-74; and Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 41-52, for further discussion of this almost untranslatable word.

See David Herman, *Poverty of the Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature about the Poor* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2001), 78-142, for an account of the relationship between depictions of material poverty and poverty of sympathetic imagination in Gogol's fiction. Poverty and social ills were not necessarily Gogol's primary concerns in his fiction, and Lu Xun's own narrative methods seem to pick up on that strategy of thematizing poverty for other aesthetic ends.

[165] As is well known, sickness was for Lu Xun as for other writers of this period a useful metaphor for this sense of national backwardness as well; see Ari Larissa Heinrich, *Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 6. But I want to point out that for Lu Xun sickness went hand in hand with destitution: the former is an epiphenomenon of the latter. Consider, for instance, the stories "Medicine" ("Yao," 1919), "Tomorrow" ("Mingtian," 1919), or "Upstairs in the Tavern" ("Zai jiulou shang," 1924). Even in his 1926 essay about his father's death, "My Father's Illness" ("Fuqin de bing"), the attempts to cure the latter's sickness bankrupt the family as the young Lu Xun must pawn household possessions in order to afford outlandish medicinal ingredients.

[166] See Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 20-7, for an analysis of the story's depiction of chronology and temporality as a rumination on Russia's entrance into a history defined by Western Europe.

cannibalism, also arises from a textual instance of material poverty. In "Diary," material poverty is everywhere implied as the background to the moral outrages that the madman decries, suffusing the story thematically like the ubiquitous glow of moonlight that is the object of his fixation. The madman hears reports of a famine in the nearby Wolf Cub Village (*Langzi cun*), as the result of which "a notorious character in their village had been beaten to death; then some people had taken out his heart and liver, fried them in oil, and eaten them as a means of increasing their courage."[167] It is well known that Lu Xun bases this fictional incident upon the execution of Xu Xilin (1873-1907), the anti-Qing revolutionary who murdered a Manchu governor; at his execution Xu's heart and liver were reportedly ripped out and eaten. This actual instance of cannibalism arose from a political situation in which the luckless revolutionary took it upon himself to remedy the weakness and backwardness of the nation. Lu Xun rewrites this scenario of national struggle as one of struggle against material poverty in Wolf Cub Village. Importantly, this is the event that strikes the fear of cannibalism into the madman's heart, as he immediately begins to suspect the people around him of looking at him hungrily.

Because villagers are in desperate straits, they literally cannibalize one another with a grisly conviction that imbibing the flesh and blood of a man absorbs something of his boldness and dastardliness of spirit. In other words, in Wolf Cub Village (as well as in Lu Xun's story "Medicine"), poor people in their ignorance substitute the physical for the spiritual. Analogously and conversely, in his writing Lu Xun substitutes a physical phenomenon (the eating of human flesh) as a trope for the spiritual problem of the backwardness of the nation. The madman in his madness understands the trope (cannibalism) not in its figurative but in its literal meaning: the eagerness of people to take advantage of one another, to humiliate and injure one another for personal advantage, particularly in situations of economic exigency, is what the consumption of human flesh comes to stand in for in his mind. In this story, cannibalism,[168] the trope for the nation's deficiencies, is an epiphenomenon of famine, of poverty. More accurately we might say that cannibalism is a synecdoche of material poverty (the practice of eating human flesh is part of the larger problem of starvation and inadequacy of resources), which is itself a synecdoche for the problem of alleged Chinese backwardness as a nation (material poverty is part of the larger nexus of problems that were thought to be holding China back).[169] The topic of poverty is what allows Lu Xun to introduce and embed the topic of national struggle and cultural backwardness into his narrative.

Right before he hears the fearful news from Wolf Cub Village, the madman observes uneasily the frightened, fierce-looking people around him, "some of whom have been pilloried by the magistrate, slapped in the face by the local gentry, had their wives taken from them by the

---

[167] Lu Xun, "Diary," 9.

[168] See Lung-Kee Sun, "To Be or Not To Be 'Eaten': Lu Xun's Dilemma of Political Engagement," *Modern China*, no. 4 (Oct., 1986), 459-85, for a sketch of uses of cannibalism in Lu Xun's oeuvre. In Gang Yue's discussion of cannibalism, he locates Lu Xun's fear of being devoured (cannibal complex) in autobiographical accounts of childhood experience; see *The Mouth that Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism, and the Politics of Eating in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 67. "Diary" features a "working out of his oral anxiety through visual dissemination" (Ibid., 78). See also Jameson, "Third-World," for a discussion of orality in this story.

[169] Elsewhere Lu Xun articulates the notion that China's national standing compared to the West is manifested in the problem of material poverty. Foolish patriots, he satirizes in 1918, may try to assert that "'Foreign countries have beggars too.' Or alternatively: 'They, too, have mud huts, prostitutes, and bedbugs'" ("Impromptu Reflections No. 38," trans. Kirk A. Denton, in *Jottings under Lamplight,* 125). In other words, the problem of poverty epitomizes China's underdevelopment.

bailiffs, or their parents driven to suicide by creditors…"[170] These scenarios involve the preying of authority and wealth upon the resources of the impoverished. We later discover that the madman's own family, and by extension the madman himself, are complicit in this violent class structure. The madman confronts his elder brother about the problem of cannibalism, encouraging him to do his part in changing his ways and ameliorating this social evil. He reproaches his brother that two days before, "when the tenant wanted the rent reduced, you said it couldn't be done."[171] This refers, we must assume, to the tenants from Wolf Cub Village. The madman discovers that problems of exploitation are closer and closer to home.

References to poverty continue to appear throughout the story, providing a material backdrop to moral poverty. In one entry the madman records a conversation with a nameless young person, "about twenty years old" (and thus a textual stand-in for the madman himself and for his target audience, the readers of *New Youth*) whose facial features he cannot clearly discern. The madman strikes up a conversation about his favorite topic, cannibalism. His interlocuter smilingly replies, "When there is no famine how can one eat human beings?"[172] The madman is disturbed, not only because he suspects this young man to be "one of them" but presumably also because his remark implies that cannibalism in a state of dire extremity such as famine would be normalized and acceptable. The implication here is that the moral poverty of Chinese society has been shaped by situations of material poverty in which terribly unethical practices become commonplace, and this sense of dog-eat-dog desperation has contaminated the entire fabric of society even when no famine is imminent.

The madman tries his luck with the young man because he has failed to convince his elder brother of the evils of cannibalism: he recollects that his brother, that patriarchal and pedagogical figure disseminating Confucian values in his family, once said to him, "People exchange their sons to eat" (*yizi er shi*).[173] This phrase originates, of course, from the Confucian classic *Zuozhuan,* where it refers to a historical situation in which the capital of the kingdom of Song was besieged by armies from the kingdom of Chu. In their extremity they had only their children left to eat, but in order to soften the blow the hungry parents exchanged offspring so that they would at least not have to eat their own. The textual record of this threat to the young precipitates the madman's fear for the state of children around him. This anecdote from the *Zuozhuan* once again combines the two topics of material poverty and threat to national sovereignty (the famine arose from a threat to the kingdom's survival).[174] Cannibalism is the topic that allows Lu Xun to make the turn (the *trope*) from the former (material insufficiency) to the latter (national insufficiency in comparison to the West). Lu Xun's "Diary" does not explicitly mention the West at any point,[175] but the relationship between China and the West is

---

[170] Lu Xun, "Diary," 9.
[171] Ibid., 16.
[172] Ibid., 14.
[173] Ibid., 12.
[174] In 1928 Lu Xun would again use cannibalism to refer to the material conditions of destitution, with a historical reference point to as illustration: "The well-fed may quite likely love the starving, but the starving never love the well-fed. In the days of Huang Chao when men ate each other, the starving did not even love the starving" ("Literature and Revolution," in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 3:26-7). Literal cannibalism is linked in Lu Xun's writings to the danger of the toppling of the state, conditions of national survival.
[175] Huters, too, observes that "the actual presence of specific references to the West are [sic] scarce in Lu Xun's narrative work" but that "the figural presence of the West and its new ideas spectrally hovers over the construction of each of Lu Xun's stories. Only in ''Kuangren riji'' (Madman's diary)…does the image of the West become considerably more palpable, though in the end it remains only an abstraction" (*Bringing the World Home*, 271). Westerners, the originators of the theory of evolution, are implied as the superior humans that the madman describes

everywhere implied precisely because the story's name so unmistakably points to Gogol, whose own story thematizes the backwardness of a nation in comparison to Western Europe.[176]

To examine Lu Xun's appropriations from Gogol's story is to recognize that the cannibalism in his story is not just literally about the eating of flesh, and not just figuratively about the rapaciousness of a culture in which people prey mercilessly upon one another. It is also a textual cannibalism: it is what Lu Xun does to Gogol's story in order to write his own. In fact, we must remember that in addition to Gogol's "Diary" Lu Xun borrows from Andreev's *Red Laugh* (*Krasnyi smekh*, 1904) in writing "Diary."[177] Barthes has said that "every text is a new tissue of past citations,"[178] and as I will show, in "Diary" the textual tissue is like the cannibalized fleshly tissue. The story expresses the idea that traditional Chinese texts have been instruments of violence, inducing people to prey upon and consume one another: in between the lines of all these old books, the madman discovers, is scrawled the words "eat people" (*chiren*). Lu Xun responds with a commensurate act of textual violence, carnivorously cannibalizing the fleshly tissue of his Russian intertexts. By swallowing and digesting and spitting them out in this new form he can imbibe some of their daring and force, just like the people who ate Xu Xilin's heart and liver, or the cannibals in Wolf Cub Village—but with a renovated moral purpose.

Lu Xun throughout his life would describe writing and textuality as a carnal business. Writing for him is self-dissection, the pen as scalpel revealing his "blood and flesh"[179]; within his writing "there is buried a body that was once alive."[180] Facts should be "written in blood,"[181] and the "blood on my pen" will splatter.[182] These metaphors come from medical science, of which he was an erstwhile student, but they also hint at the butchery of the body necessary for cannibalism. This is made clear in his 1930 essay "'Hard Translation' and the 'Class Character of Literature'" ("'Yingyi' yu 'wenxue de jiejixing'"), in which he polemicizes with the critics that dissect and devour him:

> Today we cannot avoid dissecting and devouring our enemies; but if we had books on anatomy and cookery and were guided by them, we should be clearer

---

in his scheme of evolution, Huters goes on to explain (Ibid., 273). These superior humans are the ones that the madman fears will eventually exterminate all the animalistic Chinese cannibals: "If you don't change," the madman shouts to his neighbors in warning, "you may all be eaten by each other. Although so many are born, they will be wiped out by the real men, just like the wolves killed by hunters. Just like reptiles!" (Lu Xun, "Diary," *Selected Stories*, 17). I think another palpable nod to Western thought in the story is the madman's reference to the *haiyina*, which he vaguely remembers having read somewhere. This is the direct transliteration of "hyena," so the madman has clearly been reading zoological texts from outside China, texts that, as an alternative to the classical Chinese texts (which hint at cannibalism between the lines while couching their approval of human savagery in terms of traditional Confucian ethics), explicitly enlighten the madman to the cannibalism present within the animal kingdom, thereby alerting him to the cannibalistic rapacity inherent in humanity's animalistic nature.

[176] This theme is overdetermined because it is implied both in this intertextual gesture itself and in the content of the Russian text to which it gestures.

[177] Scholars have noted other intertexts: see Gálik, *Milestones in Sino-Western Literary Confrontation: 1898-1979* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986), 29-31. Lu Xun is an omnivore. He recalls that to write this first story "I must have relied on over a hundred of the foreign works I had read previously and a bit of medical knowledge" ("How I Came to Write Fiction," 55). See my concluding chapter for further discussion of his adaptation of narrative techniques from Andreev's novella in "Diary."

[178] "Theory of the Text," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader,* ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 39.

[179] "Afterword to *Graves*," trans. Theodore Huters, in *Jottings under Lamplight*, 32.

[180] Ibid., 35.

[181] "Roses without Blooms, Part II," trans. Hu Ying, in *Jottings under Lamplight*, 73.

[182] "Two Letters," in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 3:36.

> about the structure of the body and produce something tastier. Revolutionaries are often compared to the legendary Prometheus, because in spite of the torture to which Zeus exposed him he had so much love and fortitude that he never regretted stealing fire for mankind. But I stole fire from abroad to cook my own flesh, in the hope that if the taste proved agreeable those who tasted it would benefit more, and my sacrifice would not prove in vain.[183]

Here anatomy, the medical discipline, overlaps with the alimentary, and texts are something cooked to be eaten. More to the point, cooking requires fuel from abroad, and the cannibalism that characterizes the intertextual processes of translation, writing, and reading is taken to its furthest extreme here as autophagy, the eating of the self.[184] Intertextuality is a bloody business for Lu Xun, from which he does not emerge unscathed. All of this gruesome cookery is only possible by bringing foreign textual apparatuses back home.[185] By characterizing his intertextual engagement with Russian literature as cannibalistic, I foreground his active selection and discrimination in sorting through the foreign texts he encountered and joining together disparate elements from disparate texts in Frankensteinian ways. Cannibalistic intertextuality involves an awareness of literary bloodshed: Lu Xun considers it an imperfect way of remedying textual poverty and hunger,[186] but in desperate times it fills the literary stomachs of Chinese readers until

---

[183] "Hard Translation," in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 3:92. This is perhaps the place to express surprise that someone advocating hard translation would elect to translate so many Russian texts (by means of Japanese or German translations) even without the appropriate Russian language proficiency: no doubt an indication of just how urgently vital Lu Xun considered the translation of Russian texts into Chinese to be.

[184] Pu Wang has noted the relationship between the characterization of translation in Lu Xun's essay and the cannibalism in "Diary": see "The Promethean Translator and Cannibalistic Pains: Lu Xun's 'Hard Translation' as a Political Allegory," *Translation Studies* 6, no. 3 (2013), 324-38. Shuang Shen's notes Lu Xun's portrayal of the translator as both "life ('a parent') and death ('a martyr')"; see *Cosmopolitan Publics: Anglophone Print Culture in Semi-colonial Shanghai* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2009), 107) Shen and Wang both comment upon Lu Xun's 1931 letter to Qu Qiubai, in which the former declares that in his work, he wants to "digest (*xiaohua*) and imbibe as much as possible, transmitting what is useful" (in *Lu Xun quanji* 4:392) from foreign languages. Lu Xun favors the figure of bodily consumption for the practice of borrowing from abroad. See also Gloria Davies, *Lu Xun's Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 271-3, for a discussion of Lu Xun's interest in the Ouroboric autophagic device.

[185] Lu Xun was always aware of the risk of importing ideas from other cultures. The danger of cannibalism reflects the potential dangers inherent in borrowing ideas from abroad. Huters has discussed Lu Xun's early essays, in which is "imbedded anxiety about adopting the voices of another historical tradition as one's own…. In thus keeping the European at arm's length, he is perhaps also on guard against the possibility of becoming locked up in a new totalism of subjectivity as potentially dangerous as the one he is speaking against" (*Bringing Home the World,* 258). Cheng has also examined Lu Xun's satires of new-style intellectuals who fail to think critically about the Western knowledge they embrace; see "Recycling the Scholar-Beauty Narrative: Lu Xun on Love in the Age of Mechanical Reproductions," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006), 1-38. Elsewhere, Cheng writes that "Lu Xun's attitude toward cultural exchange was fundamentally an ambivalent one…. He cautioned that the ills plaguing modern Western nations—rampant materialism and erosion of moral values—might inadvertently be transmitted to the countries that mindlessly mimic Western ways"; see "'In Search of Voices from Alien Lands': Lu Xun, Cultural Exchange, and the Myth of Sino-Japanese Friendship," *Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 3 (2014), 590-1. Yet throughout his life he would insist upon the importance of reading, writing, and translation of Western ideas, albeit with a discriminating eye. And his views on Russian literature in particular are not to be lumped together with "the West" in general, as I discuss in my introductory chapter (see also "The Power of Mara Poetry," *Lu Xun quanji* 1:89, in which he indicates that Slavic thought is different than that of Western Europe). Lu Xun remained an ardent translator and reader of Russian and Soviet fiction until his death.

[186] Lu Xun is always aware that importing ideas from other cultures is a fraught and sometimes perilous endeavor, and the danger inherent in the figure of cannibalism reflects this. See Huters, *Bringing Home,* 258, and Cheng, "Recycling," and "In Search," 590-1).

domestic culture becomes enriched enough to sustain itself.[187] It is a survival mechanism, as in Wolf Cub Village, and Lu Xun knows that it must be approached critically and discriminatingly.

Animality and Textuality, Metonymy and Poverty

In addition to modeling the connection between material poverty and national backwardness, Gogol's story is fodder for Lu Xun's cannibalistic intertextuality because of the link it draws between the topics of material poverty and textual poverty. Gogol's madman Poprishchin is obsessed with his status as a nobleman, and this is because he seems painfully aware that even as a member of the gentry he is hardly in the highest echelons of rank. As a lowly government bureaucrat he finds himself sneered at by superiors. He is poor, intensely ashamed of his tattered clothing, and in no way poised for official advancement. His work consists of sharpening and mending the pens of his superior, preparing someone else to write while writing nothing himself[188]: his economic status of material poverty mirrors the poverty of his textual output, which he attempts to remedy by means of this diary. In it, he can at last write rather than copy. He prides himself on the fact that "Only a gentleman"—such as himself—"can write correctly. Of course, there are sometimes merchants' clerks and even certain serfs who can write a bit; but their writing is mostly mechanical – no commas, no periods, no style."[189] Presumably this diary is his means of demonstrating to himself his linguistic and stylistic ability, and there is of course irony in the fact that his style becomes increasingly irregular, with frequent self-interruptions, interjections, and non-sequiturs, while the content of his writing becomes increasingly fantastic. Poprishchin certainly demonstrates his ability to use "commas" and "periods," but rather to excess. The fact that in one diary entry he attributes the words of a minor poet to Pushkin and displays a taste for popular theater further belies his pretentions to aristocratic literary taste.[190] His material poverty is both a direct cause of and a metaphor for the poverty of his textual or literary sensibilities. Lu Xun makes use of this thematic connection between material and textual poverty: his madman decries the bad faith, the inadequacy of the Chinese textual tradition, which for thousands of years has urged readers to cannibalize one another. The literal cannibalism in Wolf Cub Village, brought about by material poverty, is thereby a natural consequence of the poverty of the textual tradition and the rapaciously immoral ecosystem it has encouraged.

In his ravings, Gogol's madman discovers that in fact not only gentlemen, and not only men, but even dogs too possess the ability to write. Poprishchin is hopelessly in love with his

---

[187] Consider, for instance, his injunction toward critics to nurture the Chinese literary soil so that "geniuses" can sprout, in "Before the Appearance of Geniuses" (trans. Roy B. Chan, in *Jottings under Lamplight*, 141). In this essay Lu Xun acknowledges that readers are sick of translations of Russian literature, because "when Chinese writers do emerge, the good ones among them cannot help but borrow a little technique and expression from foreign works. However fine the writing style, their thoughts often can't match those of translated works. They will even inject traditional ideas into their work to suit Chinese people's outdated tastes. And readers fall into their traps, their horizons receding ever more, as if confined in an old snare." The bloodiness and inherent danger of cannibalistic intertextuality indicates its imperfections as a measure employed by writers in this barren aesthetic soil from which geniuses have yet to arise.

[188] As Simon Karlinsky points out, his name comes from the word for profession (*poprishche*); see *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 117. So even his name is a mockery of himself (the name can also be traced to *pryshch*, pimple).

[189] Gogol, "Diary," in *Nikolai Gogol: The Collected Tales*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 275.

[190] Robert A. Maguire comments ironically on the lowbrow literature that Poprishchin finds "accessible and even profound"; see *Exploring Gogol* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 52.

boss's daughter, and records overhearing that her lapdog Medji is able to write—a discovery that he views as a slap in the face—and that Medji writes letters to a fellow pup Fidèle (note that the pups have foreign-sounding names, unlike Poprishchin) mocking the madman himself. Here, the themes of language, social hierarchy, and animality overlap: Poprishchin's consternation at his discovery (or rather, his delusion) that even a dog can write (and arguably just as well as the madman himself—for it is Poprishchin who in his diary writes what the dog has supposedly "written") undermines his last source of self-esteem in the midst of a social hierarchy that crushes and reduces him to a nobody. Here is Poprishchin's evaluation of Medji's writing: "Extremely uneven style. Shows at once that it wasn't written by a man. Begins properly, but ends with some dogginess."[191] This is a metatextual gesture, because Poprishchin's own writing in his diary entries (which includes the dog's purported letters) likewise begins with a certain measure of rationality that gradually degenerates. The motif of animals in this story thus encapsulates the indignity of man in such an oppressive social structure.

In her letter, Medji herself compares Poprishchin to an animal: "Ah *ma chère*, if only you knew how ugly he is. A perfect turtle in a sack…"[192] The madman himself concedes that "our fellow clerks—like pups," live "one on top of the other" in unconscionably cramped conditions.[193] He and his ilk may have been reduced to the status of turtles, "pigs,"[194] and pups, crawling creatures, but his boss's daughter is a soaring "canary" in her refinement and elegance.[195] Perhaps in an imaginative effort to upend this animal hierarchy, the madman reports that "in England a fish surfaced who spoke a couple of words in such a strange language that scholars have already spent three years trying to define them and still haven't found anything out. I also read in the papers about two cows that come to a grocer's and asked for a pound of tea."[196] In his madness, Poprishchin conjectures that even the lowliest of animals have linguistic ability, that dogs are perhaps "much smarter than people"[197]—if the pecking order of the natural world can be overturned, then perhaps he, too, can suddenly morph from the status of impoverished clerk to that of highest, most powerful man in the social order: the monarch. Accordingly, soon Poprishchin begins to announce gravely that he himself is nothing less than the king of Spain.

It is significant that Poprishchin imagines himself to be the monarch of a Western European nation, for earlier in the diary Western European texts mark the rarefied echelons of cultivation and cultural sophistication that his boss has attained but that Poprishchin himself has not: Poprishchin notices the French and German books in his superior's apartment, "none of which he can read—further evidence of a world from which he is excluded."[198] Poprishchin's need to declare himself a legitimate Western European monarch is thus for bet part of the story's metaphor for the "Russian historical dilemma under Nicholas I": how to enter into a Western notion of history, out of joint as it was with that of Russia,[199] and how to deal with the sense of poverty in Russia's cultural tradition vis-à-vis Western Europe.[200]

---

[191] Gogol, "Diary," 283.
[192] Ibid., 284.
[193] Ibid., 275.
[194] Ibid., 285.
[195] Ibid., 276.
[196] Ibid., 275.
[197] Ibid., 279.
[198] Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, 23.
[199] Ibid., 27.
[200] Ibid., 4.

Poprishchin's material poverty physically manifests his sense of textual and cultural poverty, and his attempts at writing in the diary are symbolic of the Russian quest for literary innovation in the face of established Western European precedents. Lu Xun's story adopts this narrative logic of textual, cultural, and material poverty: the material and textual poverty in China render necessary the madman and Lu Xun's written interventions. Moreover, the pecking order of animals that comes to symbolize these hierarchies becomes, in Lu Xun's story (whose cultural context is saturated with the scientific language of evolutionary theory) the trope of flesh-eating, dog-eat-dog cannibalism that plagues a materially, morally, and textually impoverished nation.[201] Like Poprishchin, Lu Xun's madman is fixated on a dog, that of the Zhao family (*Zhaojia de gou*). The dog eyes him in the same alarming way as its owner. Human cruelty to one another is an extension of the savagery inherent in the natural world; hence the village where starving people are cannibalizing one another is named for the carnivorous wolf. For Lu Xun's madman, animals exist in a hierarchy, as they do for Poprishchin, but this is a hierarchy that obtains not just at that moment in time (synchronically) but diachronically as well, over eons of evolution (this diachronicity is important because the madman is also obsessed with historiography).[202] He lectures his brother: "…probably all primitive people ate a little human flesh to begin with. Later, because their outlook changed, some of them stopped, and because they tried to be good they changed into men, changed into real men. But some are still eating—just like reptiles. Some have changed into fish, birds, monkeys and finally men; but some do not try to be good and remain reptiles still."[203] The evolution of humans, from primitive savages to enlightened non-cannibals, is analogous to, and an extension of, the evolution of insects to fish, birds, and monkeys, and eventually to men. The gradual betterment of human nature takes place after animals have evolved into humans and, we assume, ought to be the continuation or culmination of evolution in the animal kingdom, yet the human who has not progressed to a non-cannibalistic state is perhaps even lower in status than the insect. What used to be a natural propinquity is now an atavistic leftover that disrupts the moral hierarchy of humans and animals. Mr. Zhao is equated with his dog because humans are as savage as the lowest orders of beasts.

Whereas in Gogol's story the motif of animals implies the indignity of humans within violent hierarchies, in Lu Xun's story it tropes the bestial cruelty of humans under similar circumstances. Lu Xun thus takes the trope from Gogol's story and invests it with the scientific discourses saturating his own *Zeitgeist*, tying the motif of animals to the themes of moral poverty and material poverty by means of the idea of cannibalism. In other words, Lu Xun cannibalizes Gogol's trope of animals and makes it about cannibalism. The ultimate danger of cannibalism, according to Lu Xun's madman, is that if Chinese people do not reform themselves, then the "real humans" (*zhende ren*) at the top of the evolutionary food chain will come and destroy them

---

[201] Notably Lu Xun deploys animal imagery as it relates to social strife in a markedly different way than the premodern Chinese narratives that, as he claims in 1933, portray the underclass like happy birds and flowers. See Todd Foley, "Between Human and Animal: A Study of New Year's Sacrifice, Kong Yiji, and Diary of a Madman," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 6, no. 3 (2012), 374-92, for a discussion of Lu Xun's deployment of animality read through the lens of Agamben's "The Open Man: Man and Animal."

[202] As Andrew F. Jones has observed, this story is "shadowed by the prospect of evolutionary degeneration, of historical process running awry" (*Developmental Fairy Tales*, 25).

[203] Lu Xun, "Diary," 15. Critics have discussed Lu Xun's indebtedness to Nietzschean thought here: see J. D. Chinnery, "The Influence of Western Literature on Lǔ Xùn's 'Diary of a Madman,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 23, no. 2 (1960), 319; Gálik, *Milestones,* 26; Lee, *Voices*, 56. In his 1933 preface, Lu Xun likens his attempt to represent properly the plight of the lower classes to the man who must learn the walk upright: it is a process of evolution like the one the madman describes.

all, "as a hunter kills off wolves":[204] the implication is that Chinese society will go extinct from the (imperialist) invasion of these fearsome specimens of advanced humanity. As in Gogol's story, here the moral and physical abjection of the (semi)peripheral subject is highlighted or rendered insupportable by contact with foreign nations.

As Holquist has observed, Gogol's madman thinks metonymically (transferring his attentions from Sophie to her dog) because the truth of Sophie's lack of interest is too much for him to bear, and he must cushion the blow by arriving at the realization circuitously by means of Sophie's contiguous canine companion.[205] When reality is too agonizing, metonymy, by substituting an "attribute" for "the thing meant,"[206] makes the truth apprehensible. In Lu Xun's story, cannibalism is a metonym for the larger problem both of material poverty and of moral poverty; it is the concrete, fleshly metonym for gargantuan national problems that makes the overwhelming complexity of the latter digestible and comprehensible. But this sidestepping or circuitous arrival at a central problem is not the only narrative logic that metonymy provides in these two stories, as I will illustrate. I submit that the master trope of Lu Xun's fiction is metonymy, a strategy he honed by studying Gogol, and I will show that metonymic objects are so important in his stories because his characters are poor.

Gogol's madman is profoundly agitated about his state of dress, convinced that it is a primary reason for his failure to attract the attention of the pampered, wealthy Sophie: "She didn't recognize me, and I tried to wrap myself up the best I could, because the overcoat I had on was very dirty, and old-fashioned besides. Now everyone wears cloaks with tall collars, and mine is short, overlapping; and the broadcloth isn't waterproof at all."[207] When he later begins to fantasize about a sudden change in social rank, he muses, "Suddenly, for instance, I walk in wearing a general's uniform: an epaulette on my right shoulder, and an epaulette on my left shoulder, a blue ribbon over my shoulder—what then? How is my beauty going to sing?...But can't I be promoted this minute to governor general, or intendant, or something else like that? I'd like to know, what makes me a titular councilor?"[208] The answer is, of course, his clothes. The clothes make the man, Poprishchin believes, so that when he discovers that he is the king of Spain, "[t]he only thing holding me up is that I still don't have royal attire. If only I could get some sort of mantle."[209] Metonymy defines this narrative because persons have been emptied of intrinsic ontological qualities that might define them and render social relationships meaningful; the degradation of social hierarchy and rank dehumanizes people until they are empty husks, no more than the sum of what they wear, of their contiguous possessions.

Lu Xun's madman practices this logic of metonymy as dehumanization: the Zhao family's dog looks at him in the same way as its owner because when people become inhuman and bestial, they resemble their metonymic animals (just as for Poprishchin Sophie's metonymic dog stands in for her). In fact I would suggest that Lu Xun's madman takes the logic of metonymy, the association "based on contiguity,"[210] to its logical extreme: when two entities adjacent to one another come, in their state of essential moral hollowness, to define one another, they start to incorporate the contiguous other into themselves. They cannibalize each other.

---

[204] "Kuangren riji" (Diary of a Madman), in *Lu Xun quanji* 1:453. Translation mine.
[205] See Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, 23.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Gogol, "Diary," 274.
[208] Ibid., 286.
[209] Ibid., 289.
[210] Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language," 105.

Those who are most metonymically close to one another (close friends, neighbors, family members) are most at risk of rubbing off on one another, passing on this moral disease to one another, and consuming one another. This is metonymy turned bloody.

Gogol's other stories are defined by the device of metonymy as well: the impoverished civil servant Akaky Akakievich stakes his entire life on one garment in "The Overcoat"; a nobleman's nose detaches from his face and walks around town, to his consternation, in "Nos" ("The Nose"); when the soul is dead, a person's attributes are defined by his belongings and vice-versa: this is true of the lackey Petrushka in *Dead Souls*, who "managed to drag his overcoat and with it a certain smell of his own, which had also been imparted to the sack of various lackey toiletries brought in after it."[211] The poor above all are desperately attached to their few meager metonymic possessions, for their livelihood and survival are literally determined by the state of these objects. Metonymy in narrative takes on particular urgency when the characters are impoverished. We see this at work in Lu Xun's story "Kong Yiji," in which the narrator, recalling a period twenty years ago when he worked in the local tavern, categorizes the customers according to their garments: the wealthier patrons wearing long gowns may enter the inner room and "sit and drink at leisure," whereas the average manual laborer wearing a short coat must stand at the counter.[212] The state of Kong Yiji's precarious livelihood is announced by the state of his increasingly shabby and dirty long gown. Gogol's degraded clerks and especially Akaky Akakievich, who makes his living by (and takes real delight in) copying documents and who becomes defined by the single fine garment he has ever been persuaded to purchase, could very well have been a model for Kong Yiji.[213]

Like Gogol's "Overcoat,"[214] "Kong Yiji" explores how placing a literatus figure in poverty makes it harder, not easier, for others to sympathize with him. Lu Xun raises this issue in the scene when Kong Yiji, hiding the aniseed-flavored peas with which he becomes metonymically associated, shoos importuning children away by declaring, "There isn't much. I haven't much as it is….Not much! Verily, not much, forsooth!"[215] Here he is quoting from the *Lunyu* (*Analects*) of Confucius, in which the sage mildly castigates his disciple for thinking that his sagely capabilities are heaven-sent; rather, Confucius claims that because he grew up in debased, impoverished circumstances, he acquired his skills through this experience (*wu shao ye jian, gu duo bi shi*). He concludes by asking, "Do noblemen have so many [abilities]? They do not have so many" (*Junzi duo hu zai? Buduo ye*). This last is the line that Kong Yiji applies incongruously to the counting of peas, as though oblivious to the irony of applying the elevated register of classical language to something as mundane and trivial as his food. The power of metonymy for the poor is such that a plate of peas is of solemn importance to him. The ultimate irony is that Kong Yiji inadvertently makes himself the butt of the joke: "Do noblemen have so many abilities?" Confucius asks. Kong Yiji, the déclassé literatus, has very few. Lu Xun uses this opportunity to demonstrate that the richness of classical language and thought, applied in a

---

[211] Gogol, *Dead Souls: A Novel*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 5.
[212] Lu Xun, "Kung I-Chi," in *Selected Stories,* 19.
[213] Akaky Akakievich's name, a copy of his father's because his mother was evidently too impoverished in imagination to come up with an original, is evocative of defecation and thus as mocking of the bearer of the name as Kong Yiji. Douwe D. Fokkema has asserted that Lu Xun's "underdogs" are inspired by Russian realism; see "Lu Xun: the Impact of Russian Literature," in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 98.
[214] See Herman, *Poverty of the Imagination*, chapters 3 and 4.
[215] Lu Xun, "Kung I-Chi," 22.

situation of quotidian material poverty, gives the lie to Confucius's insistence that poverty need not preclude (and in fact can give rise to) talent, sagehood, and ethicality. There is nothing sagelike or morally upstanding about the poor people in Lu Xun's story. Kong Yiji's earlier blustering protestations against accusations that he stole books further ironize the application of Confucian notions of virtuous impoverishment: "A gentleman keeps his integrity even in poverty,"[216] he asserts, quoting from the *Analects*: in his mouth, a patent falsehood.

The narrative centrality of metonymy in representing the dynamic between poverty and morality is so prevalent in Lu Xun's fiction that an unexhaustive list of examples must suffice. Hair is perhaps the most prominent metonym in all of Lu Xun's oeuvre[217]: when disaffected intellectuals, commoners, or peasants (disillusioned by or laboring in ignorance about the real meaning of revolution) can only attend to revolution's outward trappings, the presence or absence of a queue comes to stand in for a person's ideological stance, and for the poverty of their understanding. We find this usage of hair in "Toufa de gushi" ("A Story about Hair") as well as "Storm in a Teacup." As I have indicated, the latter story foregrounds metonymy by naming the characters after their bodily attribute, in illustration of the linguistic impoverishment of the rural poor.

The same is true in Ah Q, in which the queue fills the vacancy where a name (a label indicating membership in a linguistic tradition) ought to be, simultaneously serving as the metonymic definition of a hollow personal or national identity. The other prominent metonym is clothing, which Ah Q steals in his career as a thief. Zhou Zuoren, in an article about this story, lists Gogol's "Diary of a Madman" and "Overcoat" among its major foreign intertexts, which makes sense considering the role of clothing in these stories.[218] In *Ah Q*, as in Gogol's texts,

---

[216] Ibid., 20.

[217] He writes at length about queues in his essays as well, including his own experience of cutting off his queue; see "More Random Thoughts After Illness—On 'Releasing one's frustrations'" ("Binghou zatan zhi yu—guanyu 'shu fenmen'") and "A Few Matters Recalled in Connection with Mr. Zhang Taiyan" ("Yin Taiyan xiansheng er xiangqi de er san shi"), in *Jottings under Lamplight*. In "Random Thoughts (35)" ("Zagan 35"), in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 2:29-30 and "On Moustaches" ("Shuo huxu"), in *Lu Xun quanji* 1:183-9, he touches upon the problem of national characteristics represented by carbuncles, queues, and facial hair, synecdoches of the body. In "Sudden Notions (1)" ("Huran xiangdao" 1), in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 2:111-2, he revisits the topic of dismembered body parts (teeth, knees, buttocks) as synecdochal indicators of traditional Chinese culture's cruelty and backwardness compared to the West. After writing "A Story about Hair" and "On Moustaches," Lu Xun was critiqued by Zhang Shizhao for having a downward roving imagination, since talking about moustaches would allegedly lead him eventually to talk about buttocks. Lu Xun mocks this notion of metonymic slippage down the parts of the body in the piece "Rambling from moustaches to teeth" ("Cong huxu shuodao yachi"): he begins to discuss his teeth, a region fraught with danger because below the teeth is the throat, "below that is the esophagus, stomach, large and small intestines, rectum…plus in the vicinity of the rectum there's the bladder, alack!" (in *Lu Xun quanji* 1:261). He takes this opportunity to critique Chinese medicine (which was unable to diagnose properly his childhood toothaches) and the policing of bodies (especially women's bobbed hair). Synecdochal body parts are always useful grist for Lu Xun's ironic mill.

[218] Zhou Zuoren, "Ah Q zhengzhuan," in *Chenbao fukan*, March 19, 1922. It is worth noting that after the publication of *Ah Q*, a number of readers reported indignation that the story was written about them. Lu Xun quotes a report of this in his essay "How 'The Story of Ah Q' Came About" ("Ah Q Zhengzhuan de chengyin"); quoted in Gloria Davies, "The Problematic Modernity of Ah Q," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 13 (Dec., 1991), 58: "One friend actually told me he was sure the instalment published the previous day had been an attack on him and therefore he believed that the author was so-and-so, the only man who knew about this incident... After that he grew hypersensitive, imagining all his secrets were being attacked in Ah Q and suspecting everyone connected with the paper which published the story of being its writer. When he finally learned the author's name and realized that he had never met him, a great load was lifted from his mind and he went about telling everyone that the story was not an attack on him after all" (translated in Gloria Davies, "The Problematic Modernity," 58). This

fixation on outer trappings of identity indicates the evacuation of any inner, intrinsic center of identity. As Ah Q's social status sinks, he loses more and more articles of clothing, and eventually his employer's wife uses his tattered shirt to make shoe soles—the ultimate debasement (literally). He steals clothes to improve his status and begins to dress well so that the wealthy want to associate with him and buy his wares. The story is consistently attentive to articles of clothing, for instance in its descriptions of the fake foreign devil and the soldiers who sport white calico uniforms. In the last scene Ah Q can only apprehend his questioners in court as "the long gowns" (*changshan ren*).[219] Clothing is indicative of social position, but it is empty because clothing is so easily changed and borrowed and torn apart and reconstituted. Ultimately this reflects the internal emptiness of the revolution, which for most people seems to bring change no more profound than a change of clothing. Its meaning is not even skin-deep. Lydia Liu has noticed that "the making of this story involves as many as four different languages (English, Japanese, Polish, Chinese)"[220]: I wonder if the piecing together of fabrics thematized in the clothing of the story is another kind of image for the cannibalistic intertextuality of this story, pieced together with flesh from a number of different sources.

For Gogol as for Lu Xun, metonymy expresses circuitously something so fearful and complex that only circumlocution will do (cannibalism in "Kuangren riji"); metonymy arises from poverty in which contiguous personal possessions take on outsized significance because of material scarcity (the clothing and peas in "Kong Yiji," the red hair ornament in "Upstairs in the Tavern," Ah Q's clothing); metonymy indicates the poverty of imagination and understanding when the poor mistake the external trappings of a concept for the intrinsic thing in itself (the lamp in "Lamp of Eternity" is another example); and metonymy expresses dehumanization and an emptying out of moral values, for instance in the description of the idle spectators in "A Public Example" ("Shizhong"), as dismembered, dehumanized body parts and clothing suggests the inhumane nature of the crowd.[221]

---

scenario uncannily plays out the fear expressed ironically by the narrator in Gogol's "Overcoat," who opens the story thus: "In the department of…but it would be better not to say in which department. There is nothing more irascible than all these departments, regiments, offices—in short, all this officialdom. Nowadays every private individual considers the whole of society insulted in his person. They say a petition came quite recently from some police chief, I don't remember of what town, in which he states clearly that the government's decrees are perishing and his own sacred name is decidedly being taken in vain. And as proof he attached to his petition a most enormous tome of some novelistic work in which a police chief appears on every tenth page, in some places even in a totally drunken state. And so to avoid any unpleasantness, it would be better to call the department in question *a certain department*. And so, *in a certain department there served a certain clerk*…." (Gogol, "Overcoat," in *Nikolai Gogol,* 384). He goes on to introduce the protagonist of the story, Akaky Akakievich, having set him up as a character type that paradoxically has the power to represent through his anonymity an entire class of persons, thus accomplishing precisely, consciously, and satirically what the narrator has professed to wish to avoid. Lu Xun opens the story of Ah Q with a similarly chatty narrator who temporizes about how to introduce, identify, and name the eponymous protagonist of the story, similarly setting him up as a type who by means of his metonymic queue allegorically represents all of China.

[219] Lu Xun, *Ah Q zhengzhuan*, *Lu Xun quanji* 1:549.

[220] *Translingual Practice*, 73.

[221] For example, Lu Xun writes, "Noticing the white waistcoat engaged in studying the shiny bald head, the fat boy decided to join him in his researches, though discovered nothing of particular note—a burnished expanse of skin, with a tuft of greying hair behind each ear"; see "A Public Example," in *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*, trans. Julia Lovell (London: Penguin, 2009), 217. The implication is that in the cannibalistic contemplation of the crowd, humans are dehumanized and objectified, dismembered into the sum total of their body parts, fleshly objects of apathetic spectatorship. They would like to see the victim dismembered as well.

Even Poorer than Chekhov

Lu Xun's interest in metonymy, in how things or persons contiguous to someone can come to define her intrinsic nature, is played out in the concrete details that depict the squalid living conditions of the protagonists in many of his stories. This is the case in "Xingfu de jiating" ("A Happy Family"), whose title evokes Tolstoy's novella 1859 "Semeinoe schast'e" ("Family Happiness"), as well as the famously cryptic opening line of the 1878 *Anna Karenina* (especially in light of the narrator's ruminations on Russian novels in Lu Xun's story).[222] This is perhaps the story that most neatly encapsulates the intertwined themes of the impoverished home, the culturally impoverished homeland, and the attempt to remedy both problems by means of intertextual engagement with Western texts. The protagonist, a progressive intellectual much like Lu Xun himself, attempts to write a story named "A Happy Family" in order to make some money. The story opens with his musings: "…whatever he writes—or chooses not to write—is an expression of the self," and this wishful thinking is immediately belied when he decides to write for a particular magazine because it pays well, when he cannot decide on a setting for his story because any Chinese city he can think of is beset by war and violence (or is too expensive to live in due to foreign concessions), and when his work is repeatedly interrupted by his wife's strident shouting about mundane household matters. The point is that writing is so far from being a pure expression of the self that the writer's metonymic environs (economic, national, political) impinge incessantly upon the writing process and the content of what's written. As if to counteract these hard necessities of quotidian living, the protagonist dreams up a family for his story as far removed from these circumstances as possible: the man and wife both studied in the West, read Western literature (especially Oscar Wilde's 1895 *An Ideal Husband*, of which they own two copies), and speak politely in English to one another—unlike the writer's own short-tempered exchanges with his wife, who five years ago was fresh, young, and starry-eyed but has been transformed by the harsh exigencies of domestic survival into a fierce, shrewish termagant without time, inclination, or resources to read *An Ideal Husband*. Ironically, the writer himself has not had a chance to read *An Ideal Husband* either, lacking the money to purchase a copy.

Feeling hungry, he tries to imagine the most resplendent and tempting meal for his fictional family, deciding to serve Chinese food because "Westerners are always saying how delicious and healthy and progressive Chinese food is,"[223] calling to mind the cannibalistic feast for Westerners that Lu Xun describes in "Jottings under Lamplight." Similarly, in a 1925 piece from the collection *Huagai ji xubian* (*Sequal to Inauspicious Star*), Lu Xun quibbles that foreigners often praise Chinese food for its tastiness and hygiene, but he is not sure what exactly Chinese cuisine is: in some parts of China, people eat scallions, garlic, and buns; in other areas they eat vinegar, chilis, and pickled vegetables with rice; in other places people lick black salt; and in still other places, people do not even have black salt to lick. In conclusion, the cuisine that people consider delicious and hygienic must be "the sumptuous feasts of the rich, the upper classes."[224] "A Happy Family" is conscious not only of wealth disparity, but also of its consequences for cultural production, and by extension of its impact upon the image projected by China into the global arena. The beleaguered writer in this story, beset upon all sides by tangible economic worries that interrupt his labor of cultural production, clutches his aching head that feels "like a globe hanging between two mighty pillars"[225]: the story keeps the global in view

[222] This was first translated into Chinese in 1917 (see Ng, *The Russian Hero*, 16).
[223] Lu Xun, "A Happy Family," in *The Real Story of Ah-Q,* 190.
[224] "Mashang zhi riji," in *Lu Xun quanji* 3:339-359. See also fn. 9 in *Lu Xun quanji* 2:43-4.
[225] Lu Xun, "A Happy Family," 189.

even when portraying the vicissitudes of the local and the quotidian.

In this story, the problem of China's national standing vis à vis the West (in cultural as well as military matters) is also a problem of China's textual poverty vis à vis all the Western models the writer thinks of (Keats, Byron, Wilde, Marx, and so on). This problem is brought even more sharply into focus by the story's marked similarities to Chekhov's "Tsss!" ("Hush!" 1886).[226] Chekhov's story is about a "fourth-rate journalist" who, degraded at work, lords it over his household by terrorizing his wife, children, and neighbor with irascible demands for silence while he writes. He claims sanctimoniously to be subjecting himself to the rigors of working through the night for the sake of his family's livelihood, but the narrator mocks his puffed up sense of self-importance: "Coquetting and posing to himself and the inanimate objects about him, far from any indiscreet, critical eye, tyrannizing and domineering over the little anthill that fate has put in his power are the honey and the salt of his existence. And how different is this despot here at home from the humble, meek, dull-witted little man we are accustomed to see in the editor's offices!"[227] Like Gogol's Poprishchin, Chekhov's writer must compensate for his shame in his poor literary capabilities by preening about his writing after working hours. Lu Xun likewise satirizes his writer's inability to produce good work in "A Happy Family." But I want to point out that whereas Chekhov's writer imagines material impediments in order to be able to admonish his family members who are tiptoeing fearfully around him, Lu Xun's writer is legitimately beset by material conditions that persistently interrupt his work.

In other words, Lu Xun takes the premise of Chekhov's story and makes his writer even more impoverished, such that problems of economic scarcity really do matter. At the end of the story, Lu Xun's writer is so overwhelmed by domestic disturbances that he crumples up his sheet of paper (with its paltry one line of text, surrounded by arithmetic with which he tried to calculate the cost of firewood) into a ball, then unrolls it to wipe the eyes and nose of his weeping daughter, who has been beaten to tears by her irate mother. Textual production is put to use for the benefit of the next generation, as Lu Xun would exhort, but in a bodily rather than intellectual way. The crumpled piece of textual detritus lands in the wastepaper basket. As in "Diary" and any number of Lu Xun's short stories, the narrative link between the theme of Chinese national backwardness and Chinese textual backwardness is material poverty. The protagonist cannot produce any writing because his unhappy family is too beset by economic demands. He cannot clear his mind of petty, pedestrian concerns like the price of firewood and cabbages, so they eventually not only put a stop to his writing but invade the realm of textuality as well: "Six cabbages had materialized next to the bookcase behind him, looming up—in a three-two-one formation—into a large A-shaped mound."[228] Even language is broken down into its simplest form and made mundane when a writer lacks the material circumstances for his craft. The basic unit of signification, the single letter A, is cut off from the signified: it no longer holds meaning as a unit of language but can only signify cabbages, a reminder of material anxieties. It is crucial that this letter A comes from a Western language, and not Chinese: what use is the study and imitation of Western culture when the Chinese writer is poor?[229]

---

[226] Hanan briefly mentions this intertext to underscore its difference in method from Lu Xun's ("Technique," 85).
[227] Chekhov, "Hush!," in *The Schoolmaster and Other Stories,* trans. Constance Garnett (New York: MacMillan, 1921), 286. For a general discussion of Lu Xun's realist resonances with Chekhov's work, see Wang Dan, "Lu Xun yu Qihefu chuangzao bijiao lun," *Lu Xun yanjiu yuekan* 3 (1996), 46-9.
[228] Lu Xun, "A Happy Family," 191-2.
[229] His inability to write is a state of emasculation, too, as indicated by the "piece of rope now stretched over the floor like a dead snake" under his marital bed (Ibid., 192). Cheng discusses the bad faith of this Westernized scholar in writing his sugar-coated story; see "Recycling the Scholar-Beauty Narrative," 27.

Lu Xun has warned of this since his famous speech about Ibsen's Nora, who having left home can only starve: "Human beings have one major defect: they are apt to get hungry."[230] Progressive ideals are all very well, but there must be an economic basis for their implementation first, because "people cannot wait quietly with empty stomachs for the arrival of an ideal world."[231] Lu Xun has always insisted upon material poverty as the underlying problem behind moral poverty, textual poverty, and the problem of national backwardness. In a 1925 essay he reiterates, "How can those who are desperately poor and nearly dying of grief have either time or inclination to write?"[232] And in another essay he reflects that in China "If anyone wants to live solely by his pen, my experience is that placing an article takes from one month to a year or more; so by the time the money arrives the author will have starved to death; in fact, if it is summer, he will have rotted away and will have no stomach left for food."[233] The material conditions in China are not ripe for the production of new culture.

In "A Happy Family" material exigencies cause textual poverty and by extension the problem of national cultural backwardness. Lu Xun problematizes his own writing (the story Lu Xun writes bears the same name as the doomed story that his protagonist writes, after all) and his practices of cannibalistic intertextuality: until there is an appropriate material context for the institution of literature—until the national home is no longer impoverished—Chinese cultural production, like Lu Xun's stories (which have attempted to invite home elements of foreign cultural production), are perhaps destined only for the wastepaper basket. The writer in "A Happy Family" decides that his own fictional family is "too happy to like Russian novels…Russian novels devote far too much space to the lower classes…"[234] Lu Xun, avid reader and translator of Russian texts, self-consciously writes what his protagonist eschews, portraying a situation of material and textual deficiency by means of the wealth of foreign literary resources to which the story continuously alludes.

Dismembered Bodies, Dismembered Texts

Scrutinizing Lu Xun's Russian intertexts brings into focus the material poverty that tropes textual poverty and national backwardness. We could perform this kind of dissection upon any number of his short stories while determining the DNA from different Western intertexts. Perhaps the most productive case would be the story "Medicine," which uses material poverty to emphasize the benightedness and backwardness of the Hua family (who along with the Xia family of the hapless revolutionary, represent China as a whole). As in "Diary," Lu Xun attempts to remedy this backwardness (crystallized in the cannibalistic practice of consuming the blood-dipped steamed bun) by cannibalizing Russian intertexts to write this story. The result is a heteromodal realism.[235]

---

[230] Lu Xun, "What Happens After Nora Walks Out?" in *Jottings under Lamplight,* trans. Bonnie S. McDougall, 258.
[231] Ibid., 261.
[232] Lu Xun, "After 'Knocking Against the Wall'" ("'Pengbi' zhiyu"), in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 2:171.
[233] Lu Xun, "Not Idle Chat (3)" in *Lu Xun Selected Works,* 208. Lu Xun is like a Chinese Belinsky, setting himself up as a critic who can give writers guidance or encouragement in a time when Chinese society has not provided a nurturing environment for them (Ibid., 210). Compare Lu Xun's declaration, "China also has writing, but a writing quite divorced from the mass of the people," in "Silent China," in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 2:329), with Belinsky's 1934 lamentation, "U nas net literatury!" ("We have no literature!") (from *Literaturnye mechtania* 1834).
[234] Ibid., 189.
[235] See Ann Huss for a reading of "Medicine" as "both a realistic interpretation of traditional life and a symbolic parable on revolution and modernity," in "The Madman that was Ah Q: Tradition and Modernity in Lu Xun's

Scholars (and Lu Xun himself) have noted that "Medicine" seems to echo certain tonal and stylistic elements of Andreev's fiction. Gálik has alleged that "*Medicine* would probably never have been written (at least not in the form known to us) without Andreev's short stories *Ben-Tovit* and *The Silence*."[236] Andreev's "Ben-Tovit" (1905) was translated into Chinese by none other than Lu Xun's brother, Zhou Zuoren, in 1919.[237] In Andreev's story, Ben-Tovit is a tradesman living in Jerusalem whose toothache so pains and absorbs him that he is completely oblivious to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Golgotha, taking place that very day. Accordingly, Zhou Zuoren's translation is entitled "Chitong" ("Toothache"), a title that places emphasis on bodily experience, just as Lu Xun's story will largely elide the revolutionary's execution (and its world-historical implications) in order to focus on the bodily illness of the Hua family's boy. Both "Ben-Tovit" and Lu Xun's "Medicine" satirize the all-consuming nature of personal monetary and bodily preoccupations, to the exclusion of any loftier ideals.[238]

I would add that the stories share a temporal structure as well: in both texts, as the time of world-historical events marches past, both the main protagonists and the narratives themselves hardly register these cataclysmic executions and instead are entirely distracted and obsessed with the individual's affective present of bodily pain. Whereas the crucifixion of Christ, "the great crime of earth" has ramifications for the arc of human history,[239] Ben-Tovit and the narrative itself can only experience time by means of tiny increments, moments that stretch out and dilate in the experience of pain: "Ben-Tovit sat up in his bed and swayed back and forth like a pendulum. His face wrinkled and seemed to have shrunk, and a drop of cold perspiration was hanging on his nose, which had turned pale from his suffering. Thus, swaying back and forth and groaning for pain, he met the first rays of the sun, which was destined to see Golgotha and the three crosses, and grow dim from horror and sorrow."[240] The sun, the marker of world-historical time, shines down upon the crime on Golgotha that day; Ben-Tovit, transformed figuratively into a pendulum, has his own completely different solipsistic experience of time. Similarly, in "Medicine" the sun gradually rises upon the throng that gathers to watch the execution of Xia Yu, but the narrative elides direct description of the execution itself, mimicking the Hua family's fixation on the interminable coughing of Xiao Shuan.

If Lu Xun cannibalizes tactics of focalization and strategies of temporality from "Ben-Tovit," his appropriations from "Molchanie" ("Silence" 1900) are made more subtly complicated by processes of (mis)translation. In "Silence," the protagonist, Father Ignatii, alienates his daughter Vera with his habitually stern and sanctimonious demeanor. Vera has recently returned from St. Petersburg harboring a secret that eventually drives her to suicide. The title refers to the resounding, reverberating silence that deafens Father Ignatii after Vera's death, as his belated attempts to communicate with the deceased Vera and his paralyzed wife meet with no response. Andreev's story was translated twice into Chinese in the first decades of the twentieth century. Lu Xun first translated the story for his 1909 collection, relying upon a prior German translation. Liu Bannong translated Andreev's story into Chinese again in 1914, but this time basing his

---

Fiction," *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature,* ed. Joshua C. Mostow et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 139.

[236] *Milestones*, 33.

[237] See Gamsa, *Chinese Translation of Russian Literature,* 181.

[238] Gálik adumbrates the similarities in "plot construction" between the two stories in terms of character roles (Ben-Tovit, his wife Sarah, and the young donkey are analogous to Hua Shuan, his wife, and their son) (*Milestones*, 35).

[239] Andreev, "On the Day of the Crucifixion," *The Crushed Flower, and Other Stories* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1916), 48.

[240] Ibid., 44.

version upon John Cournos's 1908 English translation.[241] Thus, separating Andreyev's original story from both Chinese versions was a layer of linguistic mediation, first German and then English.

But whereas Lu Xun's version "Mo" remains close to the original in terms of plot, detail, and description (with slight linguistic deviations as expected from a translation of a translation), Liu Bannong's version "Moran" seems to flout all attempts at faithfulness in language and detail. Indeed, in Liu's version, which only comprises the latter half of Andreev's original story, Vera seems to have died of illness rather than by suicide. The new premise in Liu's translation seems tenuous: Vera has withered away from the anxiety of having caused a rift between her parents, who are perennially at loggerheads because they show their parental love in contradictory ways. Liu adds a note at the end of his translation that interprets Andreev's story about a family of private individuals as a national allegory:

> Doting on a child is common. Censuring one another because of doting on a child is also common. It leads inadvertently to a bad ending….Indeed, the world's political parties all use benefitting the state and people as an excuse; they all use the calamities of the people and the mistakes of the state as fodder for mutual denunciation. This ultimately makes life unbearable for the people and causes a tragic ending.[242]

According to Liu's interpretation, Andreev's story features two parents whose differing styles of caring for a child leads to domestic conflict and tragedy; and this is poignant for Liu because he reads in this scenario an allegory for political parties whose diverging ambitions lead a nation into turmoil (no doubt referring to warlordism in China). Similarly, Lu Xun's "Medicine" deploys the story of the Hua and Xia families transparently as an allegory for the nation.

Though she does not mention this consonant element of national allegory, in her discussion of the ending of "Medicine" Zhang Lihua argues that Lu Xun worked embellished elements of Liu Banning's "Moran" into his own story. In the story's final scene, the mother of the deceased consumptive youth encounters the mother of the executed young revolutionary at the cemetery, where both women (strangers to one another) are visiting the graves of their respective sons. The mother of the young revolutionary finds a wreath of red and white flowers, left anonymously on the grave of her son; convinced that her son's spirit is reaching out to her, she exhorts him to make a crow (perched on a nearby tree) fly onto his grave. There is no response. In the story's closing line, the crow flies off toward the horizon like an arrow.[243] What Zhang finds surprising is that Lu Xun's "Medicine" features in its cemetery scene precisely the red-and-white flowers and the figure of a bird that, though missing in Andreev's original story and in Lu Xun's translation thereof, were additions that Lu Xun must have read and then lifted from Liu Bannong's loose translation of "Silence."[244] I hypothesize that the symbolism of the crow here is lifted from the second to last fragment of Andreev's *Red Laugh*: the madman's brother reads a letter written by a now deceased soldier, in which he describes the cannibalistic bloodshed and repeatedly says, "The crows are cawing. Do you hear, friend, the crows are cawing. What do they want?" Here, as in Lu Xun's story, they are associated with the grim death of a national struggle gone awry.

---

[241] Lihua Zhang, "'Yiwen' yu chuangzao," *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* no. 1 (2016), 68.
[242] Andreev, "Moran," in *Zhonghua xiaoshuo jie* 17 (1914), trans. Liu Bannong, 13. My translation into English.
[243] See Lee's *Voices*, 67, and Doleželová-Velingerová's "Lu Xun's 'Medicine,'" in *Modern Chinese Literature of the May Fourth Era*, 221-32, for readings of these symbols.
[244] Lihua Zhang, "'Yiwen,'" 72.

This wreath is one of those distortions (*qubi*) that Lu Xun claims he was forced to add to his stories in order to relieve their unremitting gloom.[245] Both Huss and Yue have described this wreath of flowers as a distinctly Western object, such that there forms a contrast "between the naturally grown, 'homemade' emblem [on the other graves] and the human-made, imported symbol (the wreath was introduced to China)."[246] The wreath was not present in Andreev's original story "Silence" but appears out of nowhere in Liu Bannong's translation and Lu Xun's story, just as intradigetically the wreath of flowers springs out of nowhere onto the grave of the executed revolutionary. This ornamental object is a Western invention, but written into being by a Chinese pen, like the formal quality of Lu Xun's stories themselves. The wreath is a detail that overflows the reality of the story (the mothers cannot fathom how it got there), just as it overflows what could have been produced in China by a Chinese writer working in a vacuum. I wonder if we can read this wreath, then, as a sign of the textual surplus or residue that arises out of the encounter (involving translation, mistranslation, appropriation, imitation) with Western texts. It is not a Barthesian reality effect, signifying that "this is real," since its appearance on the grave is not at all realistic according to the logic of the story; rather, it is an "intertextuality effect," signifying that this story is the product of intertextuality.

The wreath is made of red and white flowers, forming a visual rhyme with the red flower that Lü Weifu tries to bring Ah Shun in "Upstairs in the Tavern"; she dies of illness before he can give it to her, so it becomes a symbol of the fundamental disconnect between the social underclass and the educated intellectual whose ideals of reforming the backwardness of Chinese society (once again represented by the material poverty of Ah Shun and her family) are bankrupt. I propose that the textual DNA for these red flowers comes from Vsevolod Garshin's story "Krasnyi tsvetok" ("Red Flower" 1883), in which a madman becomes convinced that snuffing out the life of the scarlet flowers in the asylum's courtyard will rid the world of evil; he dies, Christ-like, in his efforts to do so, taking the picked buds with him to the grave. Lu Xun translated some of Garshin's fiction, and Zhou Zuoren points out the similarity between this story and Lu Xun's "Lamp of Eternity," in which the madman becomes similarly obsessed. The symbolism here is clear, aligning this story thematically with "Diary," whose logic of a madman paradoxically speaking more sense about the insanity of traditional Chinese values thus makes Garshin's "Red Flower" a plausible intertext for it as well.

What we have, then, is a situation in which images, themes, and narrative logics from a Russian intertext (Garshin's "Red Flower") have been cannibalized by multiple stories of Lu Xun ("Medicine," "Upstairs in the Tavern," "The Lamp of Eternity," and "Diary of a Madman"). Bits and pieces of the textual body of Garshin's story float around in Lu Xun's oeuvre, the fragmentation of narrative elements showing up like dismembered body parts, analogous to the ones that litter Lu Xun's writings intradiegetically (eyes, mouths, noses, queues, and so on) thanks to his ubiquitous use of metonymy and synecdoche. This is the other side to the same coin of heteromodality. Lu Xun's stories are often heteromodal cannibalizations of multiple foreign intertexts (as Liu has said about *Ah Q*); "Medicine" and "Diary" are prime examples, as is "New Year's Sacrifice," which appropriates elements from two stories by Chekhov, "V rodnom uglu" ("At Home" 1897) and "V ovrage" ("In the Ravine" 1900). Lu Xun's stories piece together the textual flesh of disparate sources; and at the same time, dismembered textual elements from his Russian intertexts can be found scattered throughout many of his stories.

---

[245] See his "*Nahan* zixu" ("Preface to *A Call to Arms*"), in *Lu Xun quanji* 1:441.
[246] *The Mouth that Begs*, 95. See also Huss, "The Madman," 139.

Impoverishing Poverty

Most of Lu Xun's stories from *A Call to Arms* and *Panghuang* (*Hesitation*) describe material penury in some form. As in Gogol's fiction, usually poverty is not the thematic center of Lu Xun's stories,[247] but a narrative strategy for evoking the textual poverty in Chinese culture and by extension the backwardness of Chinese society. The squalid poverty of the crazed, decrepit old scholar in "White Light" is a physical manifestation of the poverty of classical Chinese learning and letters, gone bankrupt by Lu Xun's time. The destitution of the widows in "Tomorrow" and "New Year's Sacrifice" is indicative of the poverty of their imagination and understanding (enslaved as they are to superstition and the quackery of Chinese medicine) and the moral poverty of those around them.[248] The abjection of the ragged beggar girl in "Soap" is meant to emphasize the moral poverty of Siming (who tries to pass off his lascivious gaze as the benignity of the would-be reformer) as well as the backwardness of China in contrast to the West.[249] After all, Siming is dismayed that some youths mock him with foreign words he cannot understand: "*e-du-fu*," the genius of which is that what it signifies in Chinese, as Siming hears it, makes a perfect insult for him ("poisonous woman"), while at the same time his inability to understand its intended signification in English ("old fool") proves the English insult to be correct. In this gap of understanding between Chinese and English, between the self-satisfied Confucian patriarch and the foreign language promising progress and reform, falls the shadow of material poverty in the figure of that beggar.[250]

Siming exploits the destitution of the beggar woman to publish sanctimonious newspaper editorials about reversing "the process of national degeneration": the would-be reformer makes use of the illiterate poor for his own textual ends. This is a very self-referential move that Lu Xun makes in more than one story. He thematizes the intellectual's textual exploitation of the salubrious moral example provided by someone poor, in order to self-referentially problematize Lu Xun's own frequent, potentially exploitative, thematizations of poverty.

This is the case in "A Minor Incident" ("Yijian xiaoshi"), in which the nameless narrator, a stand-in for Lu Xun himself, deprecates his own lack of sympathy for an old woman knocked over by the rickshaw he has hired, in contrast with the rickshaw puller himself, who stops to take the victim to the police station. The narrator ends with a paragraph of oddly pleasurable, sanctimonious self-flagellation:

> Even now, I often think back to that morning. It fills me with discomfort—it forces me to look hard at myself. None of our country's recent political or military achievements has any more meaning for me than the Confucian primers that tormented my boyhood. The only thing that has stayed with me is this minor incident, clearer in my memory than it was even in reality, shaming me, urging me to change, bolstering my sense of courage and hope.[251]

---

[247] As Feuerwerker has remarked, "it is Lu Xun's pioneer writing about peasants that has more than anything else established 'realism' (*xianshi zhuyi*) as the main stream of modern Chinese literature….but the 'reality' of peasant life in its specificity is not the focus of his attention" (*Ideology,* 53).

[248] See Huters, *Blossoms*, 68, for a discussion of the narrator's complicity in the rural hypocrisy and superstition.

[249] See Cheng, "Recycling the Scholar-Beauty Narrative," 597, for a reading of the story's implied uneasiness about the appropriation of foreign discourses.

[250] There is a similar logic in "In Memoriam," in which the poverty of the would-be progressive couple represents the inadequacy of material circumstances in China for the adoption of practices that would reform a backwards society. Cheng reads this story "as a cautionary tale of the dangers of indiscriminately importing foreign theory" ("Recycling," 598).

[251] Lu Xun, "A Minor Incident," in *The Real Story of Ah-Q*, 54-5.

For a paragraph meant to express ruminations redounding to the glory of the nameless rickshaw puller, the first-person pronoun referring to the narrator appears a dizzying number of times, indicating that even an edifying encounter with a morally superior member of the working classes has only intensified the naval gazing of the intellectual. Indeed, even the name of the story gestures at his fundamental narcissism, for what was a mere trifling incident to him was likely of terrible, life-changing import for the other two impoverished characters of the story. Like Siming, this narrator textually exploits their misfortune in order to further his reformist ambitions, without paying close attention to the actual circumstances of those victims' penury.[252]

Anderson has pointed out that Lu Xun's unreliable first-person narrators demonstrate the inability of intellectuals to aid those who suffer; their pity for these victims, and the sense of relief or purgation at the close of these stories, call into question the socially transitive nature of realism. This limiting factor Anderson designates the "catharsis"[253] provided by realism, a theorization that critics like Peter Button have pointed out have little grounding in the Western forms of realism that Chinese writers like Lu Xun took as their model.[254] I would suggest that the problem of realist representation as encapsulated in Lu Xun's stories is not one of catharsis but one of epistemology. It is not so much that an encounter with the poor purges reform-minded intellectuals of feelings of pity or interest in their cause (this is not always the case, after all). Rather, these intellectual figures (like Siming or the narrator of "A Minor Incident") can only apprehend and write or talk about the travails of the impoverished imperfectly because they cannot *know* and understand their lived experience with any real intimacy; neither do they make a good faith effort to do so. Lu Xun and other writers' self-awareness of this epistemological distance between the intellectual writer and the impoverished object of representation will be the subject of the next chapter.

Lu Xun is very aware that this is what he does in his writing: his depictions of poverty must be impoverished because as an educated intellectual like the ones in his stories he cannot fully capture the experience of penury and can only write about it at a comfortable (or uncomfortable) remove. He writes about poverty almost everywhere, but uses depictions of harrowing material poverty as a figurative device in his fiction, to convey the topics that are of more central importance to him: the backwardness of the nation, the poverty of Chinese texts. He empties out material poverty of its literal signification and instead imbues it with figurative ones. Here we might recall Lu Xun's 1933 preface in which he apologetically describes his early fiction's attempts to narrate the suffering of the lower classes as incomplete and unsuccessful, crawling rather than walking. For though material poverty makes its presence felt as the metonymic context for cultural backwardness, Lu Xun's stories exploit images of poverty for their figurative potential. And read in this way, his engagement with Russian intertexts—figured as a profoundly creative act of cannibalism—has everything to do with the correction of textual poverty purportedly plaguing Chinese literature, for Lu Xun gorges himself on the flesh of Russian intertexts to nourish the flesh of his own fiction, to remedy the alleged backwardness of Chinese society.

---

[252] As Feuerwerker puts it, "The peasant does not appear so much as a subject in his or her own right, but rather as someone who is encountered by an intellectual" in Lu Xun's fiction (*Ideology*, 77).

[253] See, for instance, *Limits of Realism*, 92.

[254] See *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 58-60.

Chapter 3
Manual Labor and Manuscript

"And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
Pity me, then, and wish I were renewed…."
—William Shakespeare, Sonnet 111[255]

"The conclusion must be this: having wealth to spare does not mean being able to produce art; but producing art requires having wealth to spare. Therefore "o flowers, o moon" does not originate in the mouths of those who wail from hunger and cry out from cold, and 'single-handedly (*yishou*) establishing China's world of letters' is indeed not something that manual laborers and coolies (*kugong zhuzai*) dare to dream of."
—Lu Xun, "On the Bell Tower"[256]

Modern Chinese realism's interest in the poor and downtrodden gave rise to quandaries about the ethics and feasibility of depicting the social other. In the late 1920s, the matter was taken up in the so-called debate on revolutionary literature, launched by the Creation Society (*Chuangzao she)* and Sun Society's (*Taiyang she*) critique of realist writers like Lu Xun and Mao Dun. The critical exchange questioned the political role of literature and the ability of literature (written by the bourgeois intellectual) to represent the proletariat. Lu Xun expressed skepticism about the project of proletarian realism. In a 1927 speech delivered at the Whampoa Military Academy, he describes an unbridgeable chasm between the writer and the worker:

> Of course, there is no people's literature in China; indeed, there is no people's literature anywhere in the world yet. All literature that exists now—songs, poetry, and whatnot—in the main is written for the elite. With full bellies, they recline on a couch and read….If today someone writes a novel or poem about the people—workers or peasants—we call it people's literature. But in truth this is not people's literature for the reason that the people have not yet begun to speak. This is the writing of someone else observing the life of the people and adopting the people's manner of speaking. There are some writers before us who, although poor, are still better off than workers or peasants, otherwise they couldn't afford to read or write.[257]

---

[255] In *Shakespeare's Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 241.

[256] In *Lu Xun quanji* 4:29-39.

[257] "Literature in Times of Revolution" ("Geming shidai de wenxue"), in *Jottings under Lamplight*, trans. Andrew Stuckey, 206. See Anderson, *Limits of Realism,* 46-55; Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 48-50; Sylvia Chan, "Realism or Socialist Realism? The 'Proletarian' Episode in Modern Chinese Literature," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 9 (1983), 55-74; and Lee, "Literature on the Eve of Revolution: Reflections on Lu Xun's Leftist Years, 1927-1936," *Modern China* 2, no. 3 (1971): 277-326, or "Literary Trends: The Road to Revolution 1927-1949," in *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 197-202, for further commentary upon these debates. Lu Xun wrote copiously about the incommensurability of the privileged writer's status with that of the poor. His 1925 "After 'Knocking Against the Wall'" establishes that writers who consider themselves downtrodden cannot presume to understand the experience of those who are desperately poor: "I often tell my young students that the ancients' statement that 'books are born of poverty and grief' is not really true. How can those who are desperately poor and nearly dying of grief have either time or inclination to write? We have never seen men chanting poems in the gutter as they starve to death, and the sound uttered by convicts beneath

As I have demonstrated, Lu Xun's 1924 story "A Happy Family" examines the impossibility of writing when one's stomach is empty, or when economic exigencies crowd the litterateur's mental space. Here Lu Xun reiterates the conviction that the writer cannot fully identify with the plight of the truly indigent, for having access to literacy is already a sign of privileged social standing. In his December 1927 talk "Wenyi yu zhengzhi de qitu" ("The Divergence of Art and Politics"), he again muses, "Let's just consider: life is hard enough without the inconvenience of pulling a rickshaw and turning out a fine prose style at the same time. There were some ancients who did manage to write poems while farming, but they surely didn't farm with their own hands; they hired some men to do the farming for them so they could chant their poems. If you really want to farm, there's no time to write poems."[258] According to this reasoning, the hand that tills the soil cannot be the hand that writes.

Chinese texts of this period are keenly self-aware of the social and ontological distance between the writer and the object of representation.[259] This problem is one that writers like Lu Xun and Xiao Hong labored to solve, or at least to gain purchase on, in their narrative representations of material poverty. In the previous chapter I made the case that narrating poverty provided writers like Lu Xun with the opportunity to innovate literary themes and forms for representing the nation in narrative form; in this chapter I show that narrating poverty allowed Chinese writers to make thematic and formal innovations in representing the intrinsically inaccessible experience of the social other. My account demonstrates that Lu Xun and his protégé Xiao Hong engage in a cross-generational dialogue to work through this central problematic in writing about poverty, often with methods gleaned from Russian materials. I trace how Xiao Hong places herself within a new modern Chinese literary tradition of exploring the chasm between intellectual work and the work of suffering or squalor. The birth of the modern Chinese realist canon is thus inseparable from writers' attentiveness toward poverty.

As will become clear, the image of the hand, as the crystallization of these problems of critical realist representation, becomes an important motif in this lineage of modern Chinese literature. Elaine Scarry has written that "throughout the literature of creation the hands become the most resonant and meaning-laden part of the human anatomy."[260] The hand serves as a convenient synecdoche for physical and mental labor both: the hand of the writer must depict the

---

the lash is simply a cry—they never express their suffering in euphuistic essays filled with purple patches. So when a man grinds his ink and wets his brush to describe his down-at-heel condition, he is probably wearing silk socks" (in *Lu Xun Selected Works* 2:171). Literature arises from a position of socioeconomic privilege. In the March 1927 essay "The Old Tunes are Finished" ("Lao diaozi yijing changwan le") he asks, "The things we call culture, what relationship do they have to the common people, and of what benefit are they?...The cart driver has no money to make ceremonial robes, and the best food available to most peasants in the north is grain. What do these things have to do with one another?" (in *Jottings under Lamplight*, trans. Nick Admussen, 174). Literature can have little to offer to those who are struggling simply to subsist. In the 1931 essay "A Glimpse at Shanghai Literature" ("Shanghai wenyi zhi yi pie"), he states of left-wing writers, "As for the proletariat and its world, which have no relationship whatsoever to their own lives, they would either be unable to depict them or would depict them inaccurately" (in *Jottings under Lamplight*, trans. Roy B. Chan and Yu Chih Chou, 234). Even as he became more left-leaning himself toward the end of his life, he remained troubled by the distance separating the well-meaning writer and the object of representation.

[258] In *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, trans. Donald Holoch and Shu-ying Tsau, 332.

[259] Anderson, Jian Xu, and Feuerwerker have explored this in discussions of Lu Xun's fiction. See Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 76-92; Xu, "Retrieving the Working Body in Modern Chinese Fiction: The Question of the Ethical in Representation," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 126; Feuerwerker, *Ideology*, 77.

[260] "Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novelists," in *Resisting Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 75.

struggles of the manual laborer, whose hand bears upon it marks of suffering and pain that the writer herself has not necessarily experienced.[261] In the previous chapter I explored how metonymy and synecdoche served as realist methods for representing the nation in narrative form; in this chapter these master tropes remain prominent as the means by which writers thought through the problem of social divisions. As we shall see, the motif of the hand in these texts often draws attention to the distance between orality (province of the poor and uneducated) and written language (instrument of the privileged and educated), and the related dichotomy of classical and vernacular registers. The image of the hand thus acts as a reminder that the writer is not necessarily able to represent or assist the socially downtrodden. Depicting subjects mired in material poverty inevitably suggests the moral poverty of the writer and textual poverty of language itself. The hand, which in Peircean semiotics is the pointing index of signification,[262] is a particularly felicitous metonym for writers interrogating the ability of realist fiction to "touch" reality, for it in fact continually points to the inadequacy of literary realism to come into contact with or index the reality of poverty.[263]

[261] This usage of the trope appears prolifically, for instance in fiction by Ba Jin, Mao Dun, Ye Shengtao, and Mu Shiying. Print culture of the Republican era presents hands ubiquitously in images and text, as Jing Jiang has explored, relating the hand to discourses on modernity, labor, and gender; see "From Foot Fetish to Hand Fetish: Class, and the New Woman," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 2, no. 1 (2014): 131-59. See images below.

[262] To illustrate the function of indexicality, Charles S. Peirce writes, "If *A* points his finger to the fire, his finger is dynamically connected with the fire, as much as if a self-acting fire-alarm had directly turned it in that direction; while it also forces the eyes of *B* to turn that way, his attention to be riveted upon it, and his understanding to recognize that his question is answered"; see *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 171. The pointing hand thus indexes a relationship between the object and the person for whom it serves as a sign.

[263] Alex Woloch, too, has described the image of hands (which appears over 450 times in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*) as "the end point of the novel's metonymic logic, the most common way in which narrative attention is deflected from an entire person to an exterior aspect of the person"; see *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 247: the hand is that limit point at which self makes contact with other.

Hands as indexical of social status, in *Liangyou* 96 (1934): 11, and 115 (1936): 21.

Hands as synecdochal of authorship, in *Xiandai* (*Les Contemporaines*) 2, no. 3 (1933): n.p..

Ivan Turgenev's 1878 prose-poem "The Workmen and the Man with White Hands" is the starting point of my account, for Chinese writers such as Lu Xun and Xiao Hong appropriated images and techniques from this and other pieces in Turgenev's collection. I go on to examine Lu Xun and Xiao Hong's texts that grapple with the distance between the writer and the object of representation, a body of work in which images of the hand return insistently. Furthermore, these images point to the thematization of textuality: how a narrator or character relates to language, literacy, and literature reflects the social and experiential distance between those with the privilege of learning and those without. While drawing attention to these texts' problematization of language itself, I also suggest ways in which they marshal the resources of literary rhetoric (such as free indirect discourse or experimentation with narratorial point of view) to try to access the experience of the social other. Often the real work is at the level of form rather than of content. I show that these works of modern Chinese realism are metatextually aware that the writer of rich language is not necessarily equipped to overcome mental or moral poverty in herself or others, but contrives to do so while always problematizing through language (the instrument of separation as well as of communication between social classes) this experiential gap between the subject and object of representation.

Lu Xun and (More of) His Russian Realist Intertexts

Among Turgenev's prose poems are a number that explore how the indigent and the infirm interact with those who are in a capacity to lend them succor. This piece, whose symmetrical title means literally the "black-worker"—unskilled laborer—and "white-hand," depicts social identity as inscribed upon the flesh:

> THE WORKMAN. Why do you come crawling up to us? What do ye want? You're none of us. . . . Get along!
> MAN WITH WHITE HANDS. I am one of you, comrades!
> THE WORKMAN. One of us, indeed! That's a notion! Look at my hands. D' ye see how dirty they are? And they smell of muck, and of pitch—but yours, see, are white. And what do they smell of?
> THE MAN WITH WHITE HANDS offering his hands. Smell them.
> THE WORKMAN (sniffing his hands). That's a queer start. Seems like a smell of iron.
> THE MAN WITH WHITE HANDS. Yes; iron it is. For six long years I wore chains on them.
> THE WORKMAN. And what was that for, pray?
> THE MAN WITH WHITE HANDS. Why, because I worked for your good; tried to set free the oppressed and the ignorant; stirred folks up against your oppressors; resisted the authorities. . . . So they locked me up.
> THE WORKMAN. Locked you up, did they? Serve you right for resisting![264]

The "white-hand" describes the "black-worker" and his ilk, who await rescue, as "the oppressed and the ignorant" (literally *serykh, temnykh liudei*: grey, dark people—on the same color spectrum as the "blackness" of their hands). The visual proof of skin color seems to belie the white-hand's insistence that he is "one of them," their "brother" (*Ia vash, bratsy!*). When visual proof fails him, he relies upon olfactory proof. Yet this bodily proof of his suffering on the workmen's behalf cannot seem to stir their impoverished imaginations: the irony is that the very

[264] "The Workman and the Man with White Hands: A Dialogue," in *Dream Tales and Prose Poems*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: MacMillan, 1906), 271-3.

qualities in the oppressed which motivate the white-hand to labor for their salvation (their ignorance and benightedness, their "greyness, darkness") are the obstacles preventing the oppressed from appreciating the efforts of their would-be saviors. Turgenev, the literate "white-hand" who penned the piece, at the same time metatextually problematizes his own textual representation of the "black-worker," which can after all only be read by other literate "white-hands."

Like its title, the prose poem itself contains a formal symmetry: the first half of the piece describes this initial interaction; the second half describes a conversation between the workmen two years later, on the day of the white-hand's execution. Just as in the first half of the piece the white-hand's declaration of devotion to the workers' cause elicits derision rather than gratitude, so too does the prospect of witnessing the white-hand's punishment elicit not compassion but self-interested anticipation: "THE SECOND WORKMAN. Ah! . . . Now, I say, mate, couldn't we get hold of a bit of the rope they're going to hang him with? They do say, it brings good luck to a house!" The white-hand's earlier appeals to brotherhood are echoed ironically and symmetrically at the end, when the two workmen refer to each other as brothers (*brat*). True brotherhood, for the workmen, is the result, not of a leap of imaginative sympathy transcending class lines, but of shared privations and (superstitious) beliefs. The smell of iron chains on the activist's hands failed to stir the sympathies of the workmen, and here the chains find their echo in the hangman's rope that the workmen are keen to acquire, binding themselves further in their own "grayness, darkness."[265]

Lu Xun read Turgenev avidly,[266] and certainly his own prose poem collection, *Yecao* (*Wild Grass*), echoes Turgenev's in form and content. Critics have noted *Wild Grass*'s resonances with Baudelaire's prose poems,[267] but when it comes to the theme of poverty, it

---

[265] In an era fraught with social unrest and attempts at reform, Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* likewise problematizes the project of representing the other. The narrator immerses himself in the landscapes where peasants dwell, but there are moments when he is jolted out of his dreamy immersion in the beauties of nature by a pesky reminder that he himself, as a wealthy landowner, is complicit in structures of oppression. This is quite explicit in the piece about "Ovsyanikov the Freeholder" ("Odnodvorets Ovsianikov"), whom the narrator describes, at first, as a type: "He was one of the last representatives of that former age" (in *Sketches,* 70). Ethnographic typology of this kind had been a hallmark of realism since the Natural School's physiological sketches and Gogol's fiction, and finds its way into modern Chinese realism, as we shall see. In *Sketches,* not only does the narrator describe Ovsyanikov as a member of a general category of landowners, but he also describes Ovsyanikov's typical habits in general terms. However, his typological way of speaking impersonally about this individual is suddenly disrupted when the narrator realizes that, rather than being a member of an abstract category that the narrator can observe at an objective distance, Ovsyanikov's very particular family history is violently and irrevocably tied to that of the narrator's own: Ovsyanikov's father was long ago beaten and imprisoned by the narrator's grandfather until the former gave up a piece of land to the latter. The land remains in the narrator's possession, a matter of which he seems blissfully unaware until Ovsyanikov tells him: "Go and ask your peasants what that piece of land's called. 'Cudgel's Piece' they call it, because it was taken away with a cudgel'. . . . I didn't know what to say to Ovsyanikov and didn't dare look him in the face" (Ibid., 73). The very land whose bounty sustains the hunter's lifestyle, and that synecdochally represents the natural setting in which he roams for his sport of leisure, is underwritten by a history of bloodshed and exploitation, one that the narrator himself does not correct. Though Herman does not discuss Turgenev, see his *Poverty of the Imagination* for a study of the depiction of poverty as a means to interrogate the limits of sympathy in Russian literature from Karamzin to Dostoevsky.

[266] Zhou Zuoren recollects that in Tokyo he and his brother once splurged on a 15-volume collection of Turgenev's works: "At that time we really admired Turgenev, yet we never translated his fiction, probably because we admired him and so didn't dare rashly turn our hands to it"; in *Zhitang huixiang lu*, vol. 1 (Taipei: Longwen chubanshe, 1989), 279.

[267] See, for instance, Nicholas Admussen, "A Music for Baihua: Lu Xun's Wild Grass and 'A Good Story,'" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 31 (2009: 1-22; Jaroslav Prušek, *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of*

would be remiss not to note Lu Xun's appropriations from Turgenev's texts.[268] For instance, both Turgenev and Lu Xun's collections contain a piece entitled "The Beggar." Turgenev's beggar stretches out a "red, swollen, filthy hand" for the narrator to clasp.[269] The image of the hand makes its way into Lu Xun's 1924 piece about beggars ("Qiuqi zhe") as well, but here the hands of the two parties never meet: the narrator detests the way the young beggar holds out his hands, and later when he seems to morph into a beggar himself (perhaps in a dream) he puzzles over how best to beg with his hands.[270] The piece ends with a reassertion of solipsism: "Several other people are walking alone."[271] If we compare this with the tenor of Turgenev's piece, in which the narrator and the beggar clasp hands and make poignant eye contact, claiming one another as brothers even if the narrator has no money to give,[272] then by contrast the enduring isolation in Lu Xun's piece seems to undercut any potential suggestion of communion across experiential divides.[273]

These boundaries remain in Lu Xun's other prose poems about the experience of poverty, for which hands become a trope. Lu Xun's "Tuibai xian de chandong" ("Tremors of Degradation" 1925), in which the impoverished elderly woman's hands are lifted in desperation: "She raised both hands then with all her might towards the sky and from her lips escaped a cry half-human, half-animal, a cry not of the world of men and therefore wordless."[274] She is deprived of humanity and therefore of language, a lack which the narrator/writer can fill in with his status as a white-hand, a writer. The piece ends when the narrator, who has witnessed all of this in a dream within a dream, observes, "It was a nightmare, yet I knew this was because I had pressed my hands on my chest. And in my dream I strained every nerve to remove these overpowering, heavy hands."[275] Roy B. Chan has argued that the text "reveals a formal parallel between the woman lying on the couch, pinned down by the man, and the narrator, pinned down by his own hands while lying on his bed."[276] I think we might consider, as well, the symmetry of

---

Modern Chinese Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 56-7; and Gloria Bien, *Baudelaire in China: A Study in Literary Reception* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), 90-9.

[268] For example, both writers' collections contain a piece entitled "The Dog." In Turgenev's 1878 "The Dog" ("Sobaka") the narrator declares that the dog and man, locked in eye contact as they wait out a fearful storm outside, are equals: "the same life huddles up in fear close to the other" (*Dream tales*, 247). The shared experience can dissolve the ontological boundaries of species. Lu Xun's 1925 piece about the dog is in fact named "The Dog's Retort" ("Gou de bojie"), as if both the dog and Lu Xun himself wish to utter a rebuttal to Turgenev's piece. In Lu Xun's prose poem, the dog inspires nothing but fear and derision in the man; see Roy B. Chan (*The Edge of Knowing,* 64) for an account of how this piece represents the arbitrariness within social difference. But whereas in Turgenev's piece the dog and man remain locked in one another's gaze ("They are the eyes of equals, those eyes riveted on one another"), Lu Xun's narrator / dreamer can only flee from their encounter with the other. The "retort" seems to be an insinuation that Turgenev's wishful overcoming of epistemological and ontological boundaries proves implausible.

[269] *Dream tales*, 250.

[270] *Wild Grass*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2013), 16-8. See Roy B. Chan, *The Edge of Knowing*, 63, for a reading of how "Beggars" exposes "the fragility and artificiality of the 'I' that seeks to anchor his identity by disavowing such a beggar," while preserving the ambiguity about whether the beggar and passerby are separate or the same.

[271] *Wild Grass*, 18.

[272] *Dream tales*, 250.

[273] Chan too acknowledges that *Wild Grass's* utopian gestures are "an aesthetic flicker of an intervention," fragile and unsustainable (*The Edge of Knowing*, 72).

[274] *Wild Grass*, 88.

[275] Ibid.

[276] *The Edge of Knowing*, 58.

the two sets of hands. Chan observes that this piece "is a critique of realism as a form of naïve ontological reflection that does not engage with the problems of how we come to know the 'real' and how suffering bodies can be made intelligible and morally significant."[277] The piece dissolves the ontological boundaries between dream realms and between subjectivities. The outstretched hands of the poor woman are in her realm of existence rendered impotent, but in the dreamer's they can exert concrete physical force upon his body: a connection is implied. At the same time, the old woman's ontological status as a dream within a dream places her at a double remove from the narrator/dreamer: her raised hands may be the ones choking the narrator, but this suffocation is also happening within a dream. That somatic asphyxiation (and whatever epistemological access it provides onto the suffering of the Other) has not yet penetrated into the narrator / dreamer's waking reality. The prose poem's doubly nested frame suggests that the ontological distance between writer/dreamer and Other that has not been fully traversed.

This seems to be the case in "Congming ren he shazi he nucai" 1925 ("The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave"), the other piece from *Wild Grass* that bears thematic resemblance to Turgenev's "The workmen and the man with white hands." But in this text the white-hand has been split into the wise man and the fool, as if in acknowledgement that an activist can be simultaneously enlightened and delusional. The slave approaches the wise man and the fool in succession to describe his backbreaking labor:

> "All I have to live in, sir, is a tumble-down, one-roomed hut, damp, cold and swarming with bedbugs….The place is stinking and hasn't a single window…."
> "Can't you ask your master to have a window made?" ….
> The fool followed the slave to his hut, and began to pound the mud wall with his hands.
> "What are you doing, sir?" The slave was horrified.
> "I am opening a window for you."
> "This won't do! The master will curse me."[278]

He sounds the alarm, and a troop of slaves drive the fool away. The master praises the slave for his role, much to the slave's delight. The attempt at activism is futile when the object of salvation cannot think and exist outside the power structure of master and slave:[279] to manually (or textually?) break down a wall and change the status quo would be unthinkable, but praise from the master provides the slave with just enough hope to continue enduring the social structure of oppression. Similarly, Turgenev's workmen are nonplussed by the prospect of rebelling against authority, but to gain a bit of hangman's noose and improve things incrementally "at home" (*v domu*) is a seductive prospect. In both texts, it is ironically the victimization of the luckless would-be reformer that provides hope for the workmen and slave.[280] In both cases, the home of the poor, the edifice of oppression—that suffocating iron house—remains standing.

---

[277] Ibid., 59.
[278] *Wild Grass*, 110. I have amended the translation.
[279] Takeuchi Yoshimi writes of this story that "the pursuit of salvation itself is what makes [the slave] a *slave*" ("What is Modernity?," 71).
[280] Cheng writes of Lu Xun's prose poem, "The parable illustrates how slaves who have submitted to the logic of enslavement are instrumental in perpetuating the conditions of their own oppression, even threatened by the prospect of emancipation" ("In Search of New Voices," 593). Lu Xun's "Medicine" operates by the same logic: the would-be activist is incomprehensible to those whom he would save, and it is his blood which satisfies the superstitious medicinal needs of the poor. Hanan, citing Sun Fuyuan, has noted Turgenev's prose poem "The workmen and the man with white hands" as an intertext of "Medicine" ("Technique," 224).

For it is impossible to read "The Wise Man, the Fool, and the Slave" without thinking of Lu Xun's famous allegory of the iron house, as described in the 1922 preface to *A Call to Arms*: "Suppose there is an iron house: without a single window or door and virtually indestructible. Inside are many inhabitants sleeping soundly, all about to suffocate to death. Since they would die in their sleep, they wouldn't feel the agony of death. Now if you were to call out, awakening those few who are dozing lightly, leading these unfortunate few to suffer the agony of facing a sure death, do you think you would be doing them any good?"[281] Can writing about suffering, privation, and poverty alleviate these conditions when they have engendered a seemingly insuperable poverty of the mind, a moral or imaginative poverty? Can language transcend these boundaries, or does the very wielding of literacy as a weapon inscribe insurmountable difference and perpetuate exclusion? As I have contended, material poverty in literature was frequently portrayed as the source of mental and moral poverty. Development of vernacular language and literature could presumably reveal and help to reform these ills, but modern Chinese writers are haunted by the limitations of language (instrument of the bourgeois intellectual, often unrecognizably Europeanized) to represent the social other—a preoccupation that, as we have seen, also dogged their Russian realist models.[282]

Turgenev's writings would not have been Lu Xun's only Russian intertexts when it came to the problem of the intellectual's fundamental disconnect from the plight of the downtrodden. In 1921 Lu Xun translated Andreev's story "Kniga" ("The Book").[283] In it, a dying writer strokes the manuscript of his book, *V zaschitu obezdolennykh* (*In Support of the Destitute*), with his gaunt, bony hand (*kostliavoiu rukoiu*). The typesetters who must toil for the actual publication of his book, however, do not bother to read any of the words, for to divide the task of setting type, they literally tear words in half: the word love (*liubov'*), for instance, becomes for one worker the labor of setting the letters *liu,* and for another the task of setting the letters *bov'*. The very word that signifies the intellectual's sympathy for the plight of the poor loses its semantic signification in the hands of these workers, and the rending of the word symbolizes the chasm between the writer who would offer his love and those who are meant to benefit from it. For these laborers' hands are quite different from those of the literate intellectual: cursing the writer, they work with knotted arms and fingers "blackened from lead dust,"[284] which also covers their faces and poisons their lungs. After the published book enters bookshops, a peasant boy named Mishka, who is given the errand of delivering it to a customer, is reduced to tears by the weight of his bundle: far from lifting the burden of poverty from the shoulders of the needy, the book has in fact physically added to it. As Mishka stands weeping in the street, a police officer drags him and his books to the station, and asked to read the title of the book, Mishka responds simply that he is

---

[281] In *Jottings under Lamplight*, trans. Eileen J. Cheng, 23. Lu Xun would have been inspired by Artsybashev's *Rabochii Shevyrev* (*Worker Shevyrev* 1909) (which he translated just three years before writing the preface to *Call to Arms*), in which the eponymous character castigates the would-be reformer, a student named Aladiev, for purporting to help the helpless: "It's terrible, to make something pure, beautiful, and precious out of the human soul in order that its torments become keener, its sufferings more acute," in *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Terra, 1994), 318-9, translation mine. This thought Lu Xun recasts as the cruelty of waking up sound sleepers so that they can be conscious of the agony of asphyxiation in the iron house. See Gamsa, *Translation*, 141-167, and Lu Xun, "Ji tanhua," *Lu Xun quanji* 3:374-9, for accounts of his interest in Artsybashev.

[282] These debates would continue until Mao Zedong in his 1942 Yan'an talks declared that all writers must learn the language of the proletariat in order to produce literature suitable for the revolutionary cause.

[283] See Gamsa, *Translation*, 235.

[284] Andreev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem: v dvadtati trekh tomakh,* vol. 7 (Moscow: Nauka, 2007), 160. Translation mine.

illiterate. Laughing, the police write a report of the incident, to which Mishka signs his name as a cross. Lu Xun translated this story in September of 1921, and began publishing *The True Story of Ah Q* a few months later. Ah Q's humiliating attempts to write his name at his trial must have been an echo of Mishka's wretchedness. The clear divide between the laborer and the educated literatus figure in Lu Xun's novella,[285] as in his other fiction, owes something as well to the articulation of this theme, by means of the images of hands, in Andreev's "The Book."

Language is in many of Lu Xun's stories not the instrument of salvation or communion, but rather of bondage or separation. Kong Yiji is defined by his obsession with the moribund classical language (as his moniker, taken from the first characters of an old primer, would attest). He attempts to teach the narrator, at the time a boy working at the tavern, how to write a character: "My patience exhausted, I scowled and made off. Kung I-chi had dipped his fingernail in wine, in order to trace the characters on the counter; but when he saw how indifferent I was, he sighed and looked most disappointed."[286] Wine is, in this and other stories like "Upstairs in the Tavern," associated with the attempt to forget, to numb or dull the senses, to reminisce about the past rather than take action. That Kong Yiji uses wine as ink indicates his word's status as a mere intoxicant, failing to nourish while hankering for the past. Significantly, the character that he is poised to write here (茴 *hui*) is homophonous with the word for return (回 *hui*), implying regress and nostalgia rather than progress.

Lu Xun is persistently attentive to the morphology of the hand, whose long fingernails synecdochally represent the literati class's "white-hand-ness"—the mode of their labor, as the amanuensis or the manuscripter, allows a lifestyle removed from manual labor. In "Tomorrow," the doctor "stretched out two fingers to feel the child's pulses. His nails were a good four inches long, and Fourth Shan's Wife marveled inwardly, thinking: 'Surely my Pao-erh must be fated to live!'" The long nails are for her indexical of the doctor's level of education and skill. When she goes to pick up his prescription at the pharmacy, the "assistant raised his long finger-nails too as he slowly read the prescription…." The attainment of literacy is again associated with fingernails grown long through not having to do manual labor. The medicine proves ineffectual, so the effeteness of the long nails is indicative of the effeteness of traditional Chinese practices and beliefs. This is again the case at the end of "White Light," when the corpse of the old-style scholar is found with dirt under the fingernails, because having failed the official examinations yet again, he drove himself frantic digging for his family's mythical buried treasure. The dirtied hand here is a synecdoche of the déclassé literatus.

Something similar happens to Kong Yiji, for the representative of the dying class of scholar-officials in a changing social milieu cannot maintain immaculate hands. At the end of the story, his legs have been broken after he is caught stealing from the foremost family in town, eliciting only more jibes: "…I saw that his hands were covered with mud—he must have crawled here on them."[287] Kong Yiji is literally lowered in status. He is now a "black-hand" himself, but his plight elicits no real solidarity or sympathy from the "black-workers" around him. Yet perhaps Lu Xun's own language, no longer the dead language of Kong Yiji's classical Chinese but the new vernacular in which the story is written, may successfully communicate the problem of sympathizing with the Other. The "black-worker" narrator, reminiscing about long ago events,

---

[285] Both Cheng (*Literary Remains*, 75) and Martin M. Huang ("The Inescapable Predicament," *Modern China* 16, no. 4 (Oct., 1990): 434) discuss the crisis of representation caused by the distance between the intellectual narrator and the peasant subject.

[286] I have slightly amended Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang's translation in *Selected Stories*, 22.

[287] Ibid., 23-4.

remains largely deadpan in his description of the townspeople's callous treatment of the "white-hand"-turned-"black-hand" Kong Yiji, but the very fact of remembrance is perhaps indicative of the possibility of the narrator's sympathy.

Yet these glimmers of hope remain equivocal in Lu Xun's fiction. In "My Old Home" the narrator is afraid (*haipa*) of his own hope that the next generation will overcome the barriers separating him from his childhood friend Runtu, an impoverished farmer who bears on his hands the marks of the ravaging passage of time: "…nor was his hand the plump red hand I remembered, but coarse and clumsy and chapped, like the bark of a pine tree."[288] The unforgiving sun, wind, and rain have etched their mark upon Runtu's skin, making his flesh resemble the natural materials with which he labors. Lu Xun's "In Memoriam" also uses hands to index the insurmountable division between different types of labor. The young woman's hands "grew rough"[289] as she throws herself into housework, while the young man smudges his dictionary with fingerprints[290] as he attempts to earn money with his translations. The different occupations of their hands highlight their diverging paths (and the man's comparative privilege) as their relationship slowly disintegrates. In all the texts I have considered, the hand serves as a convenient synecdoche for both physical and mental labor, acting as a reminder that the latter is not necessarily commensurate with or able to represent and reform the former. The writer of rich language is not necessarily equipped to overcome mental or moral poverty in himself or others.

Poverty in Xiao Hong's Early Fiction

If the gap between the writer and those whom he wishes to aid is consistently problematized in Lu Xun's fiction, it may be illuminating to ask how it is treated differently at the hands of Xiao Hong (born Zhang Naiying), his young protégé. Xiao Hong, like Lu Xun's privileged narrators, was born into a "white-hand" family, but she had an abusive father and ran away from home to escape an arranged marriage. Living in poverty herself, she fled from one city to another, becoming romantically involved in (sometimes abusive) relationships with writers Xiao Jun and Duanmu Hongliang, and eventually dying very young of tuberculosis in wartime Hong Kong.

The memoir *Shang shi jie* (*Market Street*) describes Xiao Hong's experiences of material poverty while living in Harbin with Xiao Jun, but even in the depths of privation she is still a writer, and the text remains keenly aware that while she may sometimes feel as unfortunate as the ragged beggars on the streets, she and her lover Langhua (Xiao Jun) remain in a class apart from them. The latter makes money as a tutor after all, a sure sign of his literacy even if his wages are pitiful. The first time they enter a little restaurant frequented by rickshaw men and other laborers, Xiao Hong feels like a fish out of water, hesitant to seat herself at the large communal tables and uncomfortably aware of the dirty, greasy cloths used to wipe them.[291] But she soon comes to see the place as her own milieu, seating herself comfortably and ordering with confidence.[292] Xiao Hong documents the ease with which she has become déclassé. So hungry that she seriously contemplates stealing her neighbors' Russian bread (*khleb*), she sees a beggar

---

[288] Ibid., 60.
[289] In *Selected Stories*, 202, 205. He works in fits and starts, and his satisfaction at the traces left by his hands (indexing his heights of intellectual attainment) hint at the superficiality with which he approaches the substance of his learning. See Cheng, "Recycling the Scholar-Beauty Narrative."
[290] Lu Xun, *Selected Stories*, 204.
[291] *Market Street: A Chinese Woman in Harbin*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 14.
[292] Ibid., 28.

woman out the window and thinks, "She was exactly like me: I was sure she had gone without breakfast and maybe last night's dinner as well."[293] Yet if the first half of the text shows her and Langhua struggling in common with the urban underclasses, the second half focuses on their attempts to publish their first collection of fiction, and their preoccupations become increasingly divorced from that of the indigent.[294] At one point she lucks into a ten-yuan bill and, seeing a beggar on the other side of the street thinks to herself, "*I'll bet he doesn't have a ten-yuan bill!*" She rejoices in having surpassed the pauper's status, yet even as she walks away she could still "hear the moans of the beggar… …"[295] The prolonged ellipses ending this chapter indicate the lingering sound in her ear, hinting at a niggling sense of guilt in her moment of rejoicing at someone else's comparative misfortune.

Throughout this memoir Xiao Hong uses images of hands to point to these distinctions. The opening paragraph of the text draws attention to her hands as indices of material suffering: "I grasped tightly onto the bannister and forced myself to keep going. After a few steps, my hand was trembling almost as violently as my legs."[296] Hunger, illness, and cold have reduced her to this state of physical weakness. "One of my hands lay on the white bedsheet as I drank the water with the other," she recounts; "I traced circles on the bedsheet with a trembling finger, back and forth, back and forth."[297] She often describes her hands hurting from the cold, and as she struggles to play housewife and scrape together a meal in their meager accommodations, she burns her hands so badly that a part of her nail falls off.[298] As she begins to turn her attention away from quotidian matters of survival and instead toward the completion of her book, though, Xiao Hong stresses that her hands suffer in a different way. While she writes Langhua remarks, "Your hand must be tired," and mosquitoes bite her until "my knuckles were all swollen, and my hand became so sore from scratching mosquito bites that I had to stop."[299] Though her hands now are occupied in bourgeois literary endeavors, their continued pain indicates that even as a manuscripter she is still living in straitened circumstances. *Market Street* hovers between an awareness that the writer remains separate from the laboring poor, and a supposition that her experiences living amongst and like them renders her able quite literally to touch, sense, or feel what that poverty entails.

It is worth noting that the portrayal of Russianness in this text is indicative of the complexity with which Chinese writers apprehended their northern neighbor. Harbin in *Market Street* is very explicitly a multicultural place, indicated by the narrator's move in the opening chapter to the Hotel Europa, run by white Russian émigrés. Xiao Hong and her lover are barely able to gain a toehold in this residence, and are threatened with eviction (the police come to confiscate Langhua's sword, with which he threatened the Russian rent-collector[300]). The relative

---

[293] Ibid., 26.

[294] An encounter with scrupulously honest woodcutters who insist on deducting the cost of a meal from their wages leaves her "with a sense of shame. I watched the two oldtimers' retreating backs for the longest time, tears of remorse and sadness welling up in my eyes" (Ibid., 88). This echoes, of course, Lu Xun's "A Trivial Encounter," in which the protagonist is put to shame by the self-effacingly honest rickshaw puller: "His dusty, retreating figure seemed larger at that instant. Indeed, the further he walked the larger he loomed, until I had to look up at him" (in *Selected Works*, 43). Both stories stress that the narrator figure is materially better off than the morally superior laborer.

[295] *Market Street*, 69. I have amended Goldblatt's use of punctuation in this translation.

[296] Ibid., 3.

[297] Ibid., 4.

[298] Ibid., 33.

[299] Ibid., 97-8.

[300] Ibid., 6.

wealth of Russians in the city is emblematized by the maddening aroma of the rings of black Russian bread that Xiao Hong can never afford to purchase. Yet even while Russianness represents the violence of socioeconomically and racially oppressive hierarchies, it is in fact a beacon of hope in the midst of Japanese occupation. Specifically, Russian literature comes to represent the freedom of learning and thought that Japanese censorship suppresses: afraid that they will be searched, Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun burn a number of documents, including a photograph of Gorky.[301] Someone tells them that the Japanese are even confiscating copies of *Voina i mir* (*War and Peace*). Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun are so nervous that "we couldn't study our Russian."[302] Eventually when Xiao Hong falls ill, she goes to a Russian clinic for free medical care, yet her multiple trips to the clinic prove fruitless as she discovers that they do not provide medication free of charge. In other words, the Russians are a source of physical or spiritual succor in the midst of adversity, yet the aid can only go so far. Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong eventually leave Harbin.

Russian literature would continue to serve Xiao Hong as a guide in her writing. Turgenev was a particular inspiration. In a 1938 essay she defends him from his detractors: "Turgenev is rational, beautiful, serene, and righteous; he is a writer who arrives at instinct by means of the soul."[303] The gentleness and lyricism she admires would become the hallmark of much of her own fiction. Moreover the sensibility in Turgenev's work that I have discussed—the narrative attentiveness to the physical suffering of the poor, complicated by the writer's awareness of dislocation from it—permeates Xiao Hong's writing as well, crystallized in her consistent attentiveness to the hand.[304]

---

[301] Ibid., 103.

[302] Ibid., 112-3.

[303] In "No title" ("Wuti"), *Xiao Hong quanji*, vol. 4 (Harbin: Heilongjiang daxue chubanshe, 2011), 200 (translation mine). Turgenev's prose poems had been translated into Chinese starting in 1915, and his *Sketches* had been available in Chinese since the late Qing. See Rudolf G. Wagner, *Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 359; Admussen, "A Music for Baihua," 2; and Bien, *Baudelaire in China*, 97. See Gamsa, *Translation*, 32, and Sun Naixiu, *Tugeniefu yu Zhongguo* (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1988), for further discussions of the translation of Turgenev into Chinese in the early twentieth century.

[304] The appearances of this synecdoche are too numerous to list in full, but a few examples include the 1933 "Deaf Old Man" ("Ya laoren"), which describes a mendicant who drags himself on the snowy ground with his carrot-red hands (*Xiao Hong quanji* 4:19); "The Street in Early Morning" ("Qingchen de malu shang"), which mentions crippled beggars who wear shoes on their hands to crawl around (*Xiao Hong quanji* 4: 23-4); "The Garden Out Back" ("Hou huayuan"), in which the impoverished miller examines his hands, whose knuckles are "the same as always, gnarly, hard knots"; see in *The Selected Stories of Xiao Hong*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (Beijing: Guoji shudian, 1982), 63. Observing the laborers around him, the miller notes that sorghum spikes "tore the skin of hands or the soles of feet, bleeding injuries that did not stop them from toiling" (Ibid., 67). In "A Vexing Day" ("Fanrao de yiri" 1933), the narrator sees a decrepit old beggar whose hand is like "a lifeless thing," but she is unable to offer meaningful help (*Xiao Hong quanji* 1:49). In "A Dilapidated Street" ("Poluo zhi jie" 1933), the narrator and her lover dine at a fly-infested restaurant like the one described in *Market Street*. There, an oil merchant eats with his dirty, dyed hands (*you yanliao de shou*), but the narrator remarks that she did not find it unsanitary because they lived the same way (*yidao shenghuo*) (Ibid., 272). Yet at the end of the piece, the narrator reflects that they have not been back to that restaurant in a year: they have escaped those squalid circumstances, but those people are still mired there, as their children and their children's children will be for generations to come. There is always a limit to the writer's ability to identify with the poor. These two stories, "A Vexing Day" and "A Dilapidated Street," come from Xiao Hong's 1936 collection *Bridge* (*Qiao*), whose title story is about a poor woman who must cross the bridge to work as a wet-nurse for a rich family, leaving her own child behind. The bridge is at first the sign of the division between her and her own family, and later it becomes the means by which her growing son can run back and forth between the two worlds, eating the leftover meals from the master's household. Finally the bridge becomes the instrument of the poor child's death as he falls into the water and drowns. Xiao Hong is in this collection and

The book that she describes writing with Xiao Jun in *Market Street* is their 1932 collection *Bashe* (*To Trudge*), in the postface of which Xiao Jun describes walking by ragged beggars sleeping on the road and in the ditches. Seeing them, he "wanted to burn all the drafts and fling aside my pen forever" because "I know that all this is not what they need."[305] The writers remain embarrassed by their inability to succor the poor even though stories in this collection, such as "Wang Asao de si" ("The Death of Wang Asao"), describe their suffering in sympathetic detail. In the second story of the collection, "Guanggao fushou" ("The Advertising Assistant"), a young woman named Qin thinks of the red paint as their own blood being poured across the movie advertisements.[306] For the fumes are so noxious that their boss's wife scolds him for staying to critique the work done with the red pigment, since the doctor has ordered him to stay away from the toxic fumes of the workshop.[307] The bloodred paint is therefore symbolic of the cannibalistic exploitation inherent in socioeconomic exploitation. This is a precursor to the dyer's hands in the 1936 short story "Hands," in which the protagonist Wang Yaming's older sister once worked only with red paint and looked terrifyingly like a murderess with blood on her hands.

Xiao Hong's narrators (often semi-autobiographical) are attuned to the distance that their status as wielders of the pen places between them and the impoverished objects of their representation. This is the case in "Hands," in which Wang's impoverished family of cloth-dyers has scrounged together money to send her to school. Her bid for literacy and education is the anticipated means of improving the entire family's future, but Wang is ostracized and ridiculed by her classmates and school authorities for her blackened hands that bear the markings of her working-class background. In part due to this Foucauldian insistence upon disciplining her unruly body, she becomes ill with consumption and fails out of school. Jing Jiang has shown that the school's fetishization of clean white hands is symptomatic of racist, classist, and sexist discourses, and that the first-person narrator develops critical awareness of her own complicity in these discourses when she lends Wang a copy of Upton Sinclair's *Jungle* and then hears Wang's own reaction to the novel.[308] The narrator previously read Sinclair's novel and pitied its character Marija, experiencing the kind of emotional purgation that Anderson propounds to be the moral impediment to realism's impulse for transitive social change, but it is when Wang describes how Sinclair's writing resonates with her own lived reality that the narrator understands the limits of her own sympathy.[309]

What I want to add to Jiang's account is the fact that it is precisely the narrator's own use of language that functions as a site of change in critical consciousness: it is textual representation of material and mental poverty that bears witness to the narrator's growing self-awareness of moral poverty. This narrator is referred to by the school staff as Miss Xiao (*Xiao xiansheng*) and is thus a kind of stand-in for the writer,[310] telling Wang's story in a series of flashbacks. Turns of phrase that start out as merely ornamental or figurative for the narrator later become literalized or

---

throughout her oeuvre reflecting upon how exactly to bridge the experience of different classes, how she herself as a writer can try to erect this bridge, and what dangers are inherent in this endeavor—what must fall into the cracks.

[305] In *Xiao Hong quanji* 1:37.

[306] This is the name that Xiao Hong goes by in *Market Street*, one chapter of which documents her and Xiao Jun's brief experience painting movie advertisements.

[307] Ibid., 14.

[308] "From Foot Fetish to Hand Fetish," 151.

[309] Xu similarly comments that the symbolism of Wang's hands "compels an ethical position from the reader" ("Retrieving the Working Body," 137).

[310] Xiao Hong herself attended such a school herself in Harbin.

excised once she becomes aware of the violence that language itself can inflict. The narrator begins the story with a memory of Wang's hands, blue, black, and purplish (*lande, heide, you haoxiang zide*). She immediately cuts to a memory of roll-call, in which Wang's gauche cries of "Here!" provoke jeers from her peers. Wang's English pronunciation is abysmal, so "here" becomes *hei'er*: the narrator has made the choice to transcribe "Here" as the Chinese characters meaning "black ear." In other words, the much-derided blackness of Wang's hands has been placed into her own mouth by the narrator's choice of words, making her not just the target of mockery among the students but within the textual fabric as well. The narrator's use of language is complicit in deriding Wang's pronunciation and shamefully blackened body parts, and moreover gestures at a distinction between written and spoken language, between full literacy and partial linguistic mastery. The narrator demonstrates this distinction multiple times, using meaningless strings of Chinese characters to transcribe Wang's botched English pronunciations, but ceases to do so immediately after the pivotal scene in which, as Jiang comments, Wang's self-narration prompts the narrator to recognize her own moral limitations. In this last scene, Wang is frantically following along in a lesson:

> She copied down every single word from the blackboard during the English class into a little notebook. She read them aloud as she did so and even copied down words she already knew as the teacher casually wrote them on the board….When class let out I took a look at her notebook, only to discover that she had copied it all down incorrectly. Her English words had either too few or too many letters. She obviously had a very troubled heart.[311]

Wang is a poor student because of her impoverished imagination, unable to identify important information or devise methods of learning beyond rote copying.[312] Crucially, the narrator has chosen not to transcribe Wang's botched pronunciations or spellings here, avoiding another deployment of language that perpetuates the mockery of Wang's semi-illiteracy. Furthermore the narrator here reads in Wang's own use of language (and what's more, her handwriting) a symptom of Wang's emotional state. The descriptions of Wang's poor use of language earlier in the story only depict her hands, body parts, and verbal enunciations as metonymic, synecdochal, fragmenting, dehumanizing representations of her coarse exterior, without bothering to access Wang's interiority. But here, at the end, the narrator demonstrates through a change in her own language that she has become not only a more sensitive wielder of words but also a more sensitive reader of Wang's own words.

Early in the story, the narrator's use of language subtly drives home Wang's material poverty in other cavalierly cruel ways, as when the narrator first describes the snow, which heralds the winter cold that will waste away Wang's health: "One morning during a heavy snowfall, when the trees outside the window were covered with a velvety layer of white, I thought I spotted someone sleeping on the ledge of the window at the far end of the corridor in our dormitory."[313] Wang is repeatedly portrayed as framed by a window, about which I will have more to say below. The narrator persistently aestheticizes the ice and snow, describing them as

---

[311] "Hands," trans. Howard Goldblatt, in *A Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 172.

[312] Ironically, the impoverished imagination that prevents her from learning English does not prevent her from reading Sinclair's English novel well (presumably in translation)—whereas the narrator, whose literary or linguistic imagination is not impoverished, as displayed in her rhetorically skillful descriptions of the school's events and natural surroundings, realizes that she suffers from moral or mental poverty that can only be remedied through her interactions with Wang, the materially impoverished other.

[313] "Hands," 162.

white (unlike Wang's hands) or woolen. Textiles appear a number of times in the narrator's figurative language: "Our spirits, which had been imprisoned by the winter weather, were set free anew, like cotton wadding that has just been released."[314] This white cotton wadding becomes literalized in descriptions of clean blankets that protect students from the winter cold—but that Wang conspicuously lacks. Nobody wants to bunk with her because her bedding is dirty; even the dormitory attendant mocks her: "Look at this, have you ever seen cotton wadding as filthy as that?"[315] She points at the "blackness" of Wang's cotton wadding, which now stands in marked contrast not only to other students' bedclothes, but also to the winter landscape itself as described by the narrator. Even nature is set against the ostracized girl. What for the narrator is mere linguistic ornamentation in describing the white, velvety wintry landscape is, for Wang, a dire material reality of lack.

But thanks to her wakened critical consciousness, by the end the narrator demonstrates an awareness that language, even innocuously aestheticized figurative language, can wound. Before her pivotal moment of critical awareness, the narrator converses with Wang without really seeing her: "when we talked I kept looking at the shadows cast on the wall; the shadows of her hands as she scratched her head were the same color as her black hair."[316] The narrator looks not at the reality of the girl whose blackened hands do in fact match the color of her black hair; instead, she looks at the unreality of shadows, which reflect the same matching colors of hand and color, but that also disguise the visually jarring effect of these colors in reality. In shadow, everything is the same color: looking at the shadow allows the narrator to see the colorful evidence of Wang's bodily suffering without truly having to see it. This comes to stand in for how the narrator has all along been observing Wang's ostracization at school without really recognizing the cruelty and coming to her aid; but when the narrator reads Sinclair's account of the fictitious Marija in *The Jungle,* the narrator professes to be deeply moved—she reads the literary shadow of a reality and responds to that, rather than the real flesh-and-blood person before her eyes. But during the scene in which Wang tells the narrator her family history and opens the narrator's eyes to her own hypocrisy in pitying the fictitious Marija without extending the same compassion to the real Wang, the narrator is no longer looking at shadows: "I sat up in bed, but she moved away, her face still buried in hands as black as the hair on her head."[317] The narrator notices that the hands match the hair in color: she is looking at reality, the reality of the body, rather than its shadowy representation in a fictional text.

The narrator opens her eyes to see, and I think this is why the narrative frequently shows Wang framed through a window (the glass partition illustrating not only the barrier separating Wang from what she can gaze at longingly but not attain, but also framing her as a spectacle). This is why the story closes with the narrator watching through the window as Wang leaves the school with her father after her expulsion: "The snow looked like shards of broken glass, and the farther the distance, the stronger the reflection grew. I kept looking until the glare from the snowy landscape hurt my eyes."[318] She looks through a window, but perhaps the metaphorical glass partition that acts as a barrier (between minds, between classes) has figuratively shattered. For the first time, the narrator feels bodily pain, and while it cannot begin to match the bodily pain that Wang and her family members have undergone, it is fitting that the glare of light

[314] Ibid., 165.
[315] Ibid., 167.
[316] Ibid., 168.
[317] Ibid., 171.
[318] Ibid., 173.

(symbolic of seeing Wang's experience clearly) causes this pain in the narrator's eye. To see clearly is metatextual: to see clearly the narrator has had to read clearly, or at least to understand Wang's reading of *The Jungle*, allowing her to read and write with greater sensitivity to Wang's inner state. Xiao Hong urges us as readers to see clearly, to stare at the light even if it glares and pains the eye, to allow our reading to inflict pain upon us.[319]

Free Indirect Discourse as Feeling-With

Xiao Hong's fiction encapsulates but then elaborates further upon the concerns implied in Lu Xun's stories: Lu Xun's narrators, as in "New Year's Sacrifice," fail to recognize their own hypocrisy and complicity in neglecting the plight of the downtrodden; the narrator in "Hands" is able to attain this recognition of self and other (but of course the practical efficacy of having the narrator's eyes opened by her conversations with Wang is far from certain—at the end Wang leaves the school, probably only to die of consumption before she can return and give the narrator a chance to remedy past negligence). Xiao Hong's 1940 semi-autobiographical novel *Tales of Hulan River* in fact repurposes Xianglin Sao from "New Year's Sacrifice" in its first chapter, when it introduces a poor Widow Wang who sells bean sprouts in the town. When Wang's only son drowned in the river, her crazed grief elicited compassion before everyone, Wang herself included, returned to the exigencies of survival: "Whenever neighbors or other passersby witnessed the scene of her crying on the temple steps, their hearts were momentarily touched by compassion, but only for a moment."[320] Moral poverty is again related to material poverty, because onlookers' preoccupations with daily subsistence prevent them from dwelling on another's anguish. As in "Hands," in the opening chapter of *Tales of Hulan River*, the ethnographically minded narrator makes it clear that limitations of understanding both across and within class boundaries are inscribed in the usage of language. Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie have noted, "Despite Xiao Hong's original rejection of this society, distance has softened her attitude to such an extent that the sketches are as poetic and haunting as their probable model, Turgenev's *A Hunter's Notes*."[321] I think that an important element of the "poetic and haunting" in both these texts arises from Turgenev and Xiao Hong's shared awareness of the gulf between the textual representer and those who are textually represented.

Tales of Hulan River begins with hands as well, and by now we know that it is not by mere coincidence that this synecdochal body part appears in a chapter about manual labor and its handwritten representation. The narrator begins by describing the earth that has frozen into cracks: "After the harsh winter has sealed up the land, the earth's crust begins to crack and split."[322] Those who toil and labor in these pitiless wintry conditions have likewise formed cracks upon their hands: "The back of his hand is a mass of cracked, chapped skin. The freezing cold

---

[319] That Wang is always positioned to catch the light from windows in order to read indicates that she is the only one among the students who cares genuinely about enlightenment; that the narrator discovers light to be eye-piercing in the end reveals that the process of enlightenment must entail some pain. Many thanks to Theodore Huters for this insight. I want to draw attention to the emphasis on hand-eye coordination in this story, which suggests that in order to write well about the laborer, one must first observe carefully and faithfully. Audition must come into play too (signaled by the *hei'er*, black ear): looking and listening together provide greater access to the plight of the downtrodden than just partial sensory attention.

[320] *Hulan River*, 113.

[321] *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 235.

[322] *The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (Boston: Cheng & Tsui, 2002), 101.

splits open the skin on people's hands."[323] As in Runtu's case, the elements have weathered human flesh to resemble nature. Immediately, then, in the opening of her novel, Xiao Hong introduces the problem of how nature and humans interact: on the one hand, nature is violent (one laborer likens the cold to a dagger[324]), imprinting itself cruelly on the bodies of those who labor in it. Yet the human/nature relationship is not that straightforward. Xiao Hong juxtaposes the small, insignificant figures of these laborers against the vastness of the earth and the heavens: as they make their way through the harsh wintry landscape their flesh comes to resemble the earth while their heads seem to butt against the stars (*dingzhe sanxing*). Already there is a hint that even while the earth and cosmos dwarf and threaten to obliterate them, their persevering toil in these elements lends them some of the grace of the infinitude and might of nature.

The chapter begins as it ends, with hands: when the weather warms, the townspeople cover their cracked hands with a plaster that allows manual labor to continue, without actually healing the wound: "Even if it's applied for two weeks, and the hand remains unhealed, the plaster is, after all, durable, and money paid for it has not been spent in vain. They go back and buy another, and another, and yet another; the swelling on the hand grows worse and worse….Since the final outcome is always unpredictable, why not just muddle through the best one can?"[325] We must think, here, of the delusive glimmers of hope that momentarily satisfy Turgenev's workmen and Lu Xun's slave. Xiao Hong's copious use of free indirect discourse allows for irony in the gap between her praise for the plaster (mimicking the townspeople's idiom and thoughts) and the implication that these ineffectual remedies can only prolong suffering in the status quo (the mental poverty of the poor leads them to avoid the frighteningly newfangled Western medicine practice in town[326]).

What is interesting in the narrator's use of free indirect discourse here and throughout the chapter is that even while directing irony at traditional practices, her linguistic circumspection implicitly colludes with the villagers who, by refusing to articulate social ills with language, give themselves a narrow path to muddle through—much as they muddle through the dangerous mud quagmire that runs through a main street in town and swallows birds, horses, chickens, and ducks during the dry season. People love to look on during these emergencies, and the spectators are divided into two types: "Some are attired in traditional long gowns and short jackets, and are spotlessly clean. Apparently none of them will move a finger to assist in this drama because their hands are clean. Needless to say, they are members of the gentry class. They stand off to the side and observe the goings-on."[327] The white-hand only claps his hands as the drama unfolds, while the working-class passersby roll up their sleeves to pull the animals out. Xiao Hong's narrator turns an ethnographic eye on the townsfolk, and attempts to explain the practical function of the mud pit in their lives. When discolored, putrid pork appears at a discount at the market, everyone rushes to buy it, telling themselves that this is the meat of a pig that has drowned in the mud pit—certainly not the unsanitary meat of pigs that have died of plague. The narrator wonders

---

[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Ibid., 129.
[326] Unlike the more straightforward signs outside the other shops in town, this practice has a placard depicting a larger-than-life set of human teeth. Townspeople gather around to gawk at it, but never enter the door: not only does the sign confuse them, but "If people are in need of something, like cooking oil, some salt, or a piece of fabric, then they go in and buy it. If they don't need anything, no matter how large a sign may hang outside, they won't buy anything" (Ibid., 103). Poor folk with no extra spending money in this pre-capitalist economy are not susceptible to the allures of advertisement.
[327] Ibid., 107.

why, though elaborate strategies for securing the thoroughfare through the quagmire are bandied about, nobody comes up with the simple solution of filling in the pit with dirt. She concludes: "Were there no quagmire, how could they have their plague pork? Naturally, they might still eat it, but how do they explain it away? If they simply admit they are eating plague pork, it would be too unsanitary for words. But the quagmire solves their problem: plague pork becomes the meat of drowned pigs, which means that when they buy the meat, not only is it economical, but there are no sanitation problems either."[328] Whether or not the meat is indeed that of drowned pigs, and whether or not the townspeople really believe it in their heart of hearts, is not as important as the fact that the existence of the mud pit allows them to call the pork what they wish: language has the power to dispel uncomfortable realities.

The narrator coyly avoids articulating the root of the problem, which is that officials and merchants are so corrupt that the townsfolk can only muddle through with an elaborate structure of self-delusions, enabled by the quagmire in which imaginary pigs can drown. One recalcitrant child insists to his family and neighbors that the pork they have eaten is diseased, embarrassing his mother and grandmother because even though he is patently correct, to allow the truth to be spoken before the neighbors would unmask the hideous degradation that they have all been forced to endure. The child is mercilessly beaten: "By then, the spanked child is screaming and crying uncontrollably, so hard that no one can make heads or tails of his shouts of 'plague pork this' and 'plague pork that.'"[329] At the crux of the matter is language: the child's voice must be suppressed until he can no longer form intelligible words to designate the origins of the mystery pork. For the townspeople to say aloud the truth of what they consume, or for the narrator to expose directly the structure of oppression in her writing, would make these circumstances of squalor unbearable. Hence, poverty of the imagination is portrayed as a necessity for enduring material poverty, and the language of the poor folk and of the narrator alike avoids puncturing these willful illusions. Language has the power to perpetuate the reality of these privations while making them just barely endurable.

Language in this chapter is elsewhere associated with the oppressive power of the rich. In the workshop where laborers fashion the miniature paper objects that the wealthy burn for their dead, a charming replica of a well-to-do home is peopled with tiny slaves, each of which is labeled with a piece of paper on which is written a name: the carriage driver is "Long Whip" (*Changbian*), the groom is "Fleet of Foot" (*Kuaitui*), the slave girl is "Virtuous Obedience" (*Deshun*), and so on. The names are either metonyms and synecdoches that dehumanize the servants, rendering them no more than a tool for serving their master, or words that linguistically enslave them ("Virtuous Obedience"). Moreover, the paper figurine of a steward holds a page of text in his hand: "Twenty-two catties of wine are owed to the northern distillery. Wang Family of East Village yesterday borrowed 2,000 piculs of rice. Niren Hamlet of White Flag Village yesterday sent land rent of 430 strings of cash" and so on.[330] Literacy—written as opposed to spoken language—is a weapon for calculating and enforcing the debts owed to the rich, thereby perpetuating systems of inequality.

The back of the shop, where the replicas are made, is noisy and chaotic, and the workmen "muddle" by (*hulihutu de guoqu le*) in squalor: "Long scraggly hair, short bristly hair, twisted mouths, crooked eyes, bare feet and legs; it's hard to believe that such splendid and dazzlingly

[328] Ibid., 112.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid., 116.

beautiful lifelike human figures could have been created by those hands."[331] With their hands these poor craftsmen create replicas of houses and servants for the benefit of the rich, just as Xiao Hong the craftsman of words creates with her hand linguistic replicas of the poor folk in Hulan River, as well as her well-to-do childhood home with its servants (this will come in later chapters).[332] I read these miniature figurines metatextually: they, like the text itself, are the product of a craftsman's handwork (*shouyi*). The charm of the funerary figurines is their silence: "there are still many who are envious of this grand house, which is so indisputably elegant, peaceful, and quiet (silence reigns)."[333] The slaves and laborers are present in miniature, but the sounds of their labor are suppressed, just as the noise of the workmen who make the figurines must be sequestered in the back of the shop. Silence (*jimo* or *mo*) is associated throughout the novel with suppression of the poor who, unable to articulate their anguish, quietly "muddle" through their quotidian lives of hardship. The barren courtyard homes are silent all day long; the crazed widow Wang must silence her wails to carry on selling her sprouts; at the end of the chapter, the narrator tells us that "these people are quietly and wordlessly taken from this life and this world."[334] When the poor are dispossessed and deprived of the linguistic ability to articulate or alter their lot, the result is silence. Presumably, then, Xiao Hong the writer can wield her pen to put into language that which has been silenced. She refers obliquely to her project as one of recording (*jizai*) the events of the town—but as we have seen, the narrator circumlocutes, borrowing the townspeople's idiom to talk around the root causes of oppression.

Moreover, the narrator is keenly aware that the language of the literatus is disconnected from that of the everyman. At the Agricultural school, students learn "the characters for 'man,' 'hand,' 'foot,' 'knife,' and 'yardstick'"—incidentally, all words that are used repeatedly in this chapter describing the daily lives of the poor. At the Higher Elementary School, the advanced student may write home in a casual register (his homely letter is transcribed in the text), but he argues the niceties of archaic punctuation in the classroom, clutching the 47,000-character *Kangxi Dictionary* in his hand. The student insists that the character 乾(*qian*) used in an antiquated phrase (*wanli qiankun,* roughly, "the limitless heaven and earth") is written differently than the character used in the prosaic word for "dried vegetables" 乾菜 (*gancai*)—language amenable to daily usage is distinguished from the language of the intellectual.

The ingenuity of this detail is that Xiao Hong has herself been using both kinds of language (the vernacular sprinkled with antiquated turns of phrase) to describe the humble poorfolk (whose lives are depicted as pedestrian, like dried vegetables) in the majestic context of the "limitless heavens and earth" (*wanli qiankun).* In this way Xiao Hong's narrator, even while seeming to deride or deplore the ignorance or supposed coarseness of the poor, describes them with a measure of dignity[335]: borrowing their idiom to circumlocute about the diseased pork or the medicinal plasters generates irony about these self-delusions, but is also a tacit sign of respect for the mechanisms to which the poor much resort in order to survive physically and

---

[331] Ibid., 118.

[332] Just as the poor folk of Hulan River cannot afford to buy the replicas of houses and servants, so too would they be unable to read or enjoy Xiao Hong's written descriptions of Hulan River (except perhaps a fictional Wang Yaming). The novel is uncomfortably aware of this irony, which is a hallmark of much of native soil (*xiangtu*) literature written in that period. A later chapter will consider this aspect of native soil literature in greater detail.

[333] Ibid., 117. The figurines are also implausibly clean (Ibid., 115): Xiao Hong, by contrast, is not squeamish about portraying harsh realities in all their filth and squalor.

[334] Ibid., 129.

[335] As Mao Dun writes in his preface to the novel, "And the author's attitude toward [the characters] is perplexing. Flaying them ruthlessly, she nevertheless sympathizes with them" (Ibid., 100).

psychologically. Writing free indirect discourse in their idiom demonstrates compassion: writing-with is feeling-with.[336]

In one scene the townsfolk gather to watch the fiery sunset, whose light paints their bodies in a gorgeous array of colors: "The children's faces all reflect a red glow, while the big white dog turns red, red roosters become golden ones, and black hens become a dark purple. . . . a man out for a refreshing evening stroll walks by and comments: 'Old man, you're sure to live to a ripe old age, with that golden beard!'"[337] Their hands may be cracked and disfigured like the tortured earth of winter, but there are other, more resplendent ways in which nature imprints itself upon the poor townsfolk. The cosmic lends its ethereal beauty to the mundane, just as the humble, earthy, and the commonplace become imprinted upon the sky itself: "The variations of the 'fire clouds' here are many: one moment they are a glowing red, a moment later they become a clear gold, then purple-half yellow, then a blend of gray and white. Grape gray, pear yellow, eggplant purple—all these others appear in the sky."[338] For people whose daily vocabulary revolves around the food they struggle to grow and eat, empyrean unknowns can only be apprehended by pedestrian language accessible to them. This is a moment of consonance between the infinitude of the cosmic and the finitude of their hard, humdrum lives. The narrator shows that people downtrodden in their impoverished reality experience moments of beauty in the "limitless heaven and earth" (*wanli qiankun)*—like the gilded sunset colors, the narrator's language paints them with an ethereal dignity.

The hands of the poor, in this chapter, are not only wounded but also blackened by filth:

> The child sticks out its hands, which are far blacker than any of the other four children's – the hands of the other four are filthy black, all right, but at least they still look like human hands and not some other strange objects. Only this child's hands are nondescript. Shall we call them hands? Or what shall we call them? I guess we can call them anything we like. They are a mottled mixture of blacks and grays, darks and lights, so that looking at them, like viewing layers of floating clouds, can be a most interesting pastime.[339]

In this passage, material poverty is dehumanizing, to the point that hands no longer look like hands. But the narrator recognizes that it is language (whether we *call* them hands or not) that has the last word in undermining or restoring human dignity. We who have facility with language "can call them anything we like": there is a potentially dangerous power in how we wield the word. The narrator is playfully ironic in describing the fascinating filth of these hands, but she gestures, albeit facetiously, at a painterly aesthetic interest (clouds and lights reflected on skin, as they are in the scene of townsfolk gazing at sunset) in illustrating or contemplating even the meanest instantiation of squalor. Qualities of the "limitless heaven and earth" are reflected in something as mundane and pedestrian as dried vegetables or the dirty hands of a poor child. Certainly throughout the rest of the novel Xiao Hong will remain leery of spectating the poor for

---

[336] Once again Xiao Hong seems to draw attention to a difference between written and spoken language, for the former can capture nuances of the latter, generating both distance and sympathy, with suppleness and delicacy. Dorrit Cohn has written about the affordances of free indirect discourse (narrated monologue in her terminology) for allowing identification between narrator and consciousness, a demonstration of sympathy or irony, and the capacity for "pensée avec" ("thinking with"); see *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 111-7.

[337] *The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*, 125.

[338] Ibid., 125.

[339] Ibid., 121. Actually the original Chinese version likens the particolored hand to a magical Daoist practice of emitting light from the palm (*geshan zhao*), further elevating and spiritualizing the child's filthy hand.

entertainment, but this narrator's aesthetic attention and manipulation of language can be gently interested, reverent and redemptive.

Enter the Narrator

Like Turgenev's *Sketches*, Xiao Hong's *Tales of Hulan River* provides an overview of the lives of peasants and laborers in the landscape where she herself has dwelled: the first chapter describes the realities of material life (*shiji shenghuo*), whereas the second details the highlights of spiritual (*jingshen*) life in the town.[340] And like many of Turgenev's sketches, in which the narrator first describes the landscape and surroundings at length before introducing his own figure into that context, rambling through the steppes and the forests, so too does Xiao Hong only introduce the figure of the narrator (the figure of the author as a young child) after establishing her milieu. As we have seen, in the opening chapter of *Tales of Hulan River,* the identity of the narrator is still unspecified, a disembodied ethnographic observer who maintains an impersonal distance from the villagers described. This remains true in the second chapter, but in the opening of the third chapter the I-narrator—whose voice is markedly different in ways we shall explore—enters the picture. This delay in shifting from a disembodied narrator (only later in the novel do we discover that this is likely the voice of the grown Xiao Hong) to the narrator as a young Xiao Hong allows for a contrast between the former's understanding of social difference and the latter's need to gradually discover the pitfalls of alterity. Moreover, establishing the milieu of poverty and suffering in the opening chapters throws the child narrator's comparative privilege into relief when she enters in the third chapter. For she is born into a landlord's family, and need never lift a finger in labor. Images of the hand throughout this and following chapters continue to indicate that even the worst travails of this young narrator, daughter of the landlord's family, cannot begin to compare to those of her neighbors and tenants.

The young child's earliest memories involve exploring the back garden with her grandfather. Her hands are endlessly engaged in play:

> Everything touched by the sunlight was healthy and beautiful, and when I smacked the trunk of the big elm tree with my hand, it resounded; when I shouted, it seemed as if even the earthen wall standing opposite me was answering my shouts.
>
> When the flowers bloomed, it was as if they were awakening from a slumber. When the birds flew, it was as if they were climbing up to the heavens. When the insects chirped, it was as if they were talking to each other. All these things were alive. There was no limit to their abilities, and whatever they wanted to do, they had the power to do it. They did as they willed in complete freedom.
>
> If the pumpkins felt like climbing up the trellis, they did so, and if they felt like climbing up the side of the house, they did that. If the cucumber plant wanted to bring forth an abortive flower, it did so, and if it wanted to bear a cucumber, it did that; if it wanted none of these, then not a single cucumber nor a single flower appeared, and no one would question its decision. The cornstalks grew as tall as they wished, and if they felt like reaching up to the heavens, no one would give it a second thought.[341]

Whereas the opening chapter described the poor townspeople's relation to nature as one of enslavement and exigency, here the narrator demonstrates that the rich family's child, blissfully

[340] Ibid., 129.
[341] Ibid., 155.

free to roam about her natural surroundings in play, projects her own sense of untrammeled liberty (committing the pathetic fallacy) onto the flora and fauna around her. Animals in the opening chapter are trapped in the mud pit, or else slowly poisoning the poor families who delusively consume diseased pork. But here they are agents of flight and freedom, the burgeoning of life and hope. In the perspective of the young child, it is all the same whether or not the pumpkins, cucumbers, or cornstalks bear fruit: she never suffers from a shortage of food, for she can pick and eat the bounty of the garden at will, and when ducks or pigs fall into the well in her family compound, her grandfather brings the meat home for her to eat. Xiao Hong sets this up as a direct parallel to the pigs who drown in the mud pit in the opening chapter. The young narrator, delighted with the delicious meal that the well has provided for her, attempts to herd more ducks into the well so that she can eat another. Her grandfather stops her: "There's no need to do that. Granddad will catch one for you and take it home and cook it."[342] While the impoverished townspeople must pretend to themselves that the cheap diseased pork they can afford is the flesh of pigs drowned in the mud pit, the narrator does not need to engage in any such mental contortions to eat meat whenever she pleases. She gorges herself, her "hands dripping with oil."[343] There are broken household implements lying around her yard, such as piles of clay or bricks, an old vat, a rusting plow. These are all metonymic of labor and toil, but the narrator relates to them only as playthings, probing them with her fingers.[344] By contrast, a poor old servant of their family, Second Uncle You (*You erbo*), has hands so coarse and thick that he must mend his filthy, tattered bedding with a needle large enough for his trembling hands to manage.[345]

Xiao Hong narrates the novel in such a way that we sense the gap between her understanding now as a grown, literate adult and her understanding as a child then, uneducated and frolicking about the household in ignorance of the harsh realities of life.[346] It is the adult

---

[342] Ibid., 177.

[343] Ibid, 176. Meanwhile, the mushrooms growing upon the roof of a dilapidated shed that her family rents out to a poor family is an incomparable delicacy for them, but the narrator's grandpa refuses to eat them for fear of being poisoned (Ibid., 183).

[344] Ibid., 179.

[345] Ibid., 239. This man's history with the family is a fascinating one: he was left behind to mind the property when the masters fled the invaders during the Russo-Japanese war several decades before. Second Uncle You seems to have been traumatized by the violence he witnessed, and voices his complaint: "Those shiny swords the Russian 'Hairy Ones' carried…they killed and butchered at will. As for all those fearless people who disdained death, the instant they heard that they abandoned everything they owned and fled for their lives. If it hadn't been for this "coward," who took good care of their belongings for them, when they returned home after fleeing from the 'Hairy Ones' there wouldn't have been even a pair of pants left for them to wear. Now here they are today, with food to eat and clothes to keep themselves warm, but any thoughts of the outstanding debts they owe for their present situation have scattered to the farthest reaches of the universe" (Ibid., 249). Now while the narrator and her family eat and sleep in comfort, warmth, and plenty, Second Uncle You scurries from one sleeping place to another, walking around in broken shoes and pilfering objects from the household to sell. Accused, he threatens to drown himself in the well. The parallel between him and the animals who fall into the well, and which the narrator enjoyed eating as a child, indicates that the grown narrator has some inkling of her family's guilt in cannibalizing the flesh of the impoverished Second Uncle You. It is ironic that this marginalized figure remembers the Russians as murderers whereas the grown Xiao Hong turns to them for literary inspiration in the depiction of the very people who were terrorized by the white invaders.

[346] Enhua Zhang calls this the novel's "double-vision"; see *Space, Politics, and Cultural Representation in Modern China: Cartographies of Revolution* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 118. Interestingly, this device mirrors the narrator's use of free indirect discourse elsewhere, which as I have articulated sometimes interweaves with the voice of a character and sometimes departs to generate distance or irony. Some of her descriptions of the poor do seem child-like.

narrator who hints at the child's inabilities to recognize the gap between rich and poor, and her family's own complicity in this oppressive hierarchy. The child notices that the miller's infant has hands red from cold, and is delighted at the novelty of seeing people live in a shack that does not protect them from the elements: "'Wow, that's cold!' I said with rising spirits. 'That's the same as it is outside, isn't it?'"[347] Her own hands, meanwhile, are warming by a charcoal brazier.[348] The child narrator can only spectate the plight of the poor, but the grown narrator can enter into their subjectivity with a leap of imaginative sympathy. The adult narrator's voice sometimes intrudes into the narrative told from the child's perspective, with words that the young Xiao Hong would not have been capable of conjuring at the age of three or five: "Stoically they accepted their hardships: 'You say that the life I live is a pitiable one? Well, that's all right with me. In your eyes I'm in mortal danger, but my life gives me satisfaction. And if I wasn't satisfied, so what? Isn't life made up more of pain than pleasure anyway?'"[349]

The young Xiao Hong would not have been able to articulate this worldview from the perspective of the indigent, but the novel does reveal how the child begins to realize that her world is made up of more pain than pleasure. Through the gap between these two narratorial consciousnesses, the novel documents the birth of authorial self-awareness about the gap between manuscripter and manual laborer. Her account of childhood begins with a depiction of the carefree hours she spent in the sunny back garden, and gradually Xiao Hong discusses different areas of the family compound and the poor tenants who live there. The spatial compass of the narrative enlarges, just as the compass of the young child's awareness of the world widens. With this growing consciousness of the unpleasantness and suffering outside the idyllic garden comes an increasing melancholy in the narrator's descriptions, moving away from the purity of sunshine to the dusky, shadowy interiors of these homes where people are slowly starving or freezing to death. "My home was a dreary one" (*Wojia shi huangliang de*) becomes an echoing refrain with which, in some variation or another, she begins many of these descriptions.

The way this young narrator is introduced to literature indexes her increasing awareness of the world's dreariness: language and literacy are related to the problem of the chasm between rich and poor, but are also implied as a means for the writer to attain sensitivity and awareness to the realities of existential hardship. At first her grandfather teaches her lines from classical Chinese poetry without explaining their meanings, and the young child gleefully belts them out from memory, savoring the sounds of the words. She yells out the line "The servant, summoned often, still cannot sweep them away" from the song dynasty poet Su Shi's "Huaying" ("Flower Shadows") without any cognizance of the cavalier description of servitude. Learning the line "I left home young, I return an old man" from another poem, she has no inkling of the evocation of the passage of time, for she has no conception yet of aging: "I couldn't have told you what the words meant, but they sounded good when I said them, so I shouted them gleefully along with Granddad, and I was always louder than he was."[350] When her grandfather explains the meaning of the words to her sometime later, she begins to fret:

> "Will I be leaving home, Granddad? Won't even you recognize me when I come home with a long white beard?"
>
> My heart was filled with foreboding, but Granddad laughed and said:
>
> "Do you think your granddad will still be around when you get old?"

---

[347] *The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*, 259.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid., 183.
[350] Ibid., 173.

After he said this, he could see I was unhappy….[351]

Though her grandmother has recently passed away, this is the first time the meaning of death is driven home for the young child. This moment of innocence lost moreover prefigures the epilogue of the novel, in which the grown woman Xiao Hong reflects upon how she has indeed left home, and how her grandfather has already passed away. To attain the critical distance (and spatial distance) necessary to write this novel and to apprehend the cruel realities of life in Hulan River, the narrator has needed to experience parting, aging, and dying.

Eating of the tree of knowledge is, in this text, associated with death and misfortune: for instance when the young Xiao Hong's grandmother dies, visiting kin take the narrator down to see the river, farther than she has ever been from home. "And so I lost a grandmother, but gained some wisdom," she reflects. Women above all are, here and throughout Xiao Hong's oeuvre, vulnerable to the ravages of time and nature and men. One of the narrator's favorite Tang poems, Cui Hu's "Ti ducheng nan zhuang" ("In a village south of the capital"), introduces the young child to idea of the fragility of a woman's fate: "This time last year behind this gate / The face and the blossoms glowed in the peach trees. / Now the face is no more; only the blossoms / still smile in the spring breeze."[352] Much of the rest of the novel, as we shall see, concerns precisely the passage of time and seasons that blots out the lives of fair young women, especially the Hu family's child-bride and Harelip Feng's (*Feng waizui*) wife, both of whom are brought into laboring families residing in the narrator's compound (to some fanfare), and both of whom expire tragically within a short period of time. These portrayals of gender exploitation dovetail with Xiao Hong's assessments of class exploitation, as we shall see.

Gender and Class, Hand in Hand

Xiao Hong draws an analogy between her grandmother's treatment of her and the Hu matron's treatment of the child-bride by means of rhyming images of hands. The first dissonant note that enters the narrator's sunny descriptions of the prelapsarian garden of her childhood innocence is the anecdote of how her grandmother pricked her finger with a needle: the serpent's fang in paradise. The young child often amused herself by poking holes in the house's paper windows: "One day, when Grandmother saw me coming, she picked up a needle and went around to the outside of the window to wait for me. The moment I poked my finger through, it began to hurt a lot, and I screamed in pain. Grandmother had pricked my finger with the needle."[353] This is the first time her freedom to disport herself as she pleases is trammeled. She avenges herself with impunity, scaring her grandmother by knocking her fist loudly against the wall.[354] Other than this incident, and her mild apprehension that her fingers might be pricked by the thorns in her garden's rosebushes,[355] no other concerns cloud those earliest carefree days.

When the Hu family brings home a child-bride for its youngest grandson, the twelve-year-old girl provides a foil for the young narrator's experience of childhood. The child-bride arrives looking hearty and hale, with a quick smile and a proud spirit. But her mother-in-law begins to beat her, taking out every frustration on the child, to the point of having her strung up and thrashed to the point of illness, or branding her feet with irons: "She could hit the cat, but

[351] Ibid., 174.
[352] Ibid., 175.
[353] Ibid., 157. I have slightly amended Goldblatt's translation.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid., 159. Later, though, she describes her father's violent abusiveness, and it becomes clear that the young girl's idyll is spoiled above all by the intrusion of the patriarch.

was afraid she might never see it again, or she could hit the dog, but was afraid it might run away. If she hit one of the pigs, it might lose a few pounds of weight, and if she hit one of the chickens, it might stop having eggs. The only one she could hit with impunity was the child bride."[356] Poverty conditions a system of thought whereby human life is weighed and measured as less valuable than that of birds and beasts. The mother-in-law pricks the child-bride's fingertips with a needle and reaches out her hand to pinch the girl's thighs until they "became a welt of black and blue bruises…."[357] Xiao Hong as a child had her finger pricked once and nursed the grudge forever, avenging herself on her sick and dying grandmother. The child-bride is not so lucky.

The narrator, waking up in the middle of the night, sometimes hears the child-bride weeping. To distract her, her grandfather encourages her to keep reciting classical poetry: "I got up very early, and just as I was reciting, 'I slept in spring, not conscious of the dawn,' the crying sounds from the southwest corner started in again. This continued for the longest time, and only when winter arrived did the sounds of her crying finally come to an end."[358] In other words, the child-bride dies before springtime comes around again. This well-known poem, about the fall of flower blossoms during the stormy night, takes on new significance in the context of the child-bride's nocturnal weeping; so too does Cui Hu's poem about the disappearance of a young woman's blossom-like face from a springtime tableau. Whether or not Xiao Hong the child cottons on to this eerie consonance between her beloved poems and the fate of the child-bride is left unsaid[359]; certainly Xiao Hong the narrator has drawn this connection very meaningfully. Literature and the acquisition of letters is the means by which the narrative underscores the gap between social classes. The traditional Chinese literature which is meant to distract the young narrator from cruel reality, inducing her to ignore the violence around her while she recites poems, is unexpectedly allowed to resonate with and comment upon the abuse that befalls the child-bride. Belles-lettres like the Tang poem are at once divorced from the experience of the suffering poor (and in this scene even meant to distract attention from the pain of the child-bride), yet poignantly and lyrically expressive of their plight—like this novel, *Tales of Hulan River*. Xiao Hong the writer takes poetry from a tradition of textuality that allegedly perpetuated (or at least turned a blind eye upon) systems of inequality and uses it to critique them instead: this gesture is emblematic of modern Chinese realism's departure from the conventions of literary tradition in its treatment of poverty and squalor writ large. It moreover resonates with Lu Xun's preface to the first English publication of his stories, in which he describes traditional Chinese literary portrayals of the poor as flora and fauna, but aspires to learn a new method of writing about the underclasses by means of Russian literary models.[360] Xiao Hong quite consciously continues this endeavor.

In *Tales of Hulan River*, the child-bride soon falls ill from the unremitting abuse, and to cure her the Hu family brings in a series of soothsayers and sorceresses, charlatans all. The last

---

[356] Ibid., 219.
[357] Ibid., 221.
[358] Ibid., 199. The narrator's childhood recitations of classical poetry pick up on the thread of the distinction between literacy and orality (which runs sometimes parallel but sometimes orthogonal to the classical / vernacular binary) that I have traced throughout this chapter: here, traditional literacy seems to produce a meaningless, even callous form of orality.
[359] Chinese poetry is what allows her to realize that there is grief in life, and perhaps that increasing awareness allows her eventually to sympathize with the poor. It is part of her learning process and development into the writer of the poor.
[360] See *Lu Xun quanji* 7:411-2.

time the narrator interacts directly with the child-bride, the former offers the latter a marble to play with, but when the child-bride gingerly touches it with her finger, her mother-in-law comes immediately to put a stop to the fun. Her hands are not meant for play, but for pain. In a series of increasingly lurid "cures" involving physical torments of escalating brutality, the child-bride faints multiple times when dunked repeatedly in a vat of scalding water. The sorceress pricks her finger with a needle in order to wake her up for the next dipping.[361] She soon falls into a coma and eventually dies, her death quickly passed over and forgotten.

Her mother-in-law has been the agent of her demise, but even while laying bare the heinous brutality of the former's treatment of the child-bride, the narrator is able to draw a parallel between the victim and the abuser. For this mother-in-law, too, has her finger pricked: to make the money that pays for the child-brides many ritual treatments, the mother-in-law scavenged all autumn for soybeans fallen in the fields, which she sold for almost a thousand strings of cash. The work was grueling, and she was injured: "Ai! On account of those few beans, the mother-in-law of the child bride had visited the Li Yongchun Pharmacy to buy two ounces of safflower. That she'd been forced to do because the thorn of a bean plant had pricked her under her fingernail while she was crawling along the ground looking for beans….But for some unknown reason, after a night's sleep, she woke up to find her finger swollen to the size of a small eggplant."[362] As indicated by the interjection "Ai!" the narrator here employs free indirect discourse to enter the perspective of the mother-in-law, who is so unwilling to spend the twenty or thirty strings of cash for safflower oil. Soon her hand swells to the size of a small melon, and then a winnowing basket: "For years she'd bemoaned the fact that she was too thin, saying that people who were too thin had less than their share of good fortune. This was especially true for those with skinny arms and legs, an obvious sign of a lack of blessings, and even more so for those with bony hands; looking like claws, they were a sure indication of ill fortune."[363] Xiao Hong deploys this motif of the hand to indicate that the cruelty of the hand that torments the child-bride is also a hand itself tormented by poverty and misfortune. People's savage treatment of one another is systemically conditioned.

Xiao Hong is always attentively intersectional when evoking the plight of women and the plight of the poor, for the twain are inseparable. This becomes one of her potential strategies for bridging the gap between her own experience and that of oppressed social classes. In the Hu's household, young women are beaten by their husbands: "What man doesn't beat his wife?"[364] The systemic oppression of women is something already clearly laid out in the novel's ethnographic second chapter (in which the sorceress's crafty ability to hoodwink poor superstitious families out of vast sums of money has also already been established). For that chapter laid out in detail a series of annual rituals and festivals conducted in Hulan River, at all of which women seem to get the short end of the stick.[365] That the first chapter of the novel

---

[361] *The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*., 225.
[362] Ibid., 215.
[363] Ibid., 217.
[364] Ibid., 191.
[365] For example, the narrator explains how marriages are arranged during the annual opera performances, when both parties are still in the womb. This is the practice of wealthy families hoping to unite their dynasties, but if one family falls into poverty before the affianced children reach marriageable age, then the situation is far worse for a girl than for a boy, regardless of which family has suffered the reversal of fortune: "If it is the girl's family that has suffered reverses, then the matter is easily disposed of, for if the marriage agreement is not honored, there is nothing they can do about it. But in cases where the boy's family has fallen on bad times, it will insist on the marriage; if it is canceled, the girl's reputation is ruined. People will say that she 'brought injury' to so-and-so's family and then

details the sufferings of the poor, and the second chapter hints at the sufferings of women, implies a congruence between the two, and that the former serves to exacerbate the latter. In the opening chapter Xiao Hong takes it upon herself to record journalistically (*jizai*) the silenced, forgotten sufferings of the disenfranchised and the marginalized; similarly, in the second chapter she takes up the mantle of amanuensis for women who have been silenced by the Chinese tradition:

> Then why is it that no words of praise for the courage of these women who jump down wells are included in the memorial arches for chaste women? That is because they have all been intentionally omitted by the compilers of such memorials, nearly all of whom are men, each with a wife at home. They are afraid that if they write such things, one day, when they beat their own wife, she too may jump down a well; if she did she would leave behind a brood of children, and what would these men do? So with unanimity they avoid writing such things, and concern themselves only with "the refined, the cultured, and the filial…"[366]

The irony with which she elevates the despair of women whose hopelessness leads them to acts of self-annihilation unthinkable for men of allegedly superior valor is a rebellious gesture upending received hierarchies of heroism. Most importantly it is women's lack of voice that she objects to, for what is written—and more to the point, not written—defines what is forgotten or what is valorized. Like Lu Xun's madman, she must read between the lines of the classical text's sanctimonious preaching of morality in order to espy signs of the cannibalistic patriarchy. Textuality is the difference between visibility and invisibility, silence and voice, agency and oppression.

Xiao Hong has taken upon herself to ventriloquize, or take up the pen, on behalf of the poor, and of silenced women. So when the child-bride is being tortured to death, it is unsurprising that the narrator again comments upon the proceedings, "But these grand events went unrecorded, since the town was without a local newspaper."[367] Through paralepsis, or the rhetorical strategy of mentioning something by pretending to elide it, Xiao Hong insists upon her own role as the journalist who will record the snuffing out of the young woman's life.[368] Since Xiao Hong sets herself up as the fearless scribe for the forgotten, alternate history of the dispossessed, it is critical that the novel details the young narrator's *bildung* (truncated as it is) as a process of learning to read (one early scene describes her learning characters with a cousin as

---

would not marry into it the superstition surrounding the words 'brought injury' is that a certain family has been reduced to poverty owing to the harshness of the girl's horoscope. From that time on it will be extremely difficult to find a family that will accept her as a daughter-in-law, and she will be labeled an 'undesirable spinster'" (Ibid., 141). The narrator goes on to predict that these hapless daughters-in-law will be mocked and mistreated in their husbands' households, to the point that "some jump down wells, others hang themselves" (Ibid.). Life in Hulan River is unforgiving to women, and this becomes the context for the later chapters' descriptions of the Hu household and the mistreatment of women passed down over generations. After all, in this town even the female gods are ridiculed and said to live in terror of beatings from the male gods, as the narrator mentions in the second chapter when describing the annual temple festivals: the patriarchal system of oppression is thought to carry over into the next world as well (Ibid., 147-9).

[366] Ibid., 141-2.

[367] Ibid., 222.

[368] Of course, there is an inherent risk here: the narrator remarks ironically that anyone suffering from disease or paralysis who were not able to come see the rousing spectacle of the child-bride's ritual torments was only to be pitied, for missing the show was "the calamity of a lifetime" (Ibid., 223). Is Xiao Hong, then, recording these dreadful events only to provide them as sensational fodder for the reader's consumption? The narrator, more self-aware than those in Lu Xun's stories, goes on to problematize this problem of spectatorship, as we shall see.

their grandmother lies on her deathbed—once again knowledge is associated with mortality), and especially to read between the lines of accepted historiographies and patriarchal narratives. She begins to question the fables that define how people think in her hometown: told that the evening star is the Kitchen God's lantern, the young narrator interrogates her grandfather and Second Uncle You about the plausibility of this story until neither of them can think straight. The young girl questions the veracity of tales propagated by her patriarchs.[369]

If throughout this novel Xiao Hong is problematizing how the educated intellectual can possibly represent the poor and the oppressed, the fact that she is a woman can potentially help to bridge this gap; her description of being kicked brutally by her father grimly cements her membership in this marginalized group.[370] There is a sense in Xiao Hong's oeuvre that if her

---

[369] That she even has the mental space to do so is a sign of her comparative privilege, for as Second Uncle You argues, "The poor concern themselves not with heavenly phenomena…." (Ibid., 234). The evening star is one of those elements of the cosmos that has appeared throughout the novel's first two chapters, providing an ethereal context to the earthy, mundane struggles of the poor. The poor never bother to ask where the stars come from, for their relentless fight for survival leaves them no time for intellectual, spiritual, or aesthetic sensibilities: "If someone were to ask them what man lives for, they would not be confounded by the question, but would state unhesitatingly, directly, and unequivocally: 'Man lives to eat food and wear clothes.' If they were then asked about death, they'd say: 'When a man dies, that's the end of it'" (Ibid., 120). The poor folk may come out to watch the fiery clouds in the sky at sunset, but unlike the young Xiao Hong they never ask what the celestial bodies are. When they watch the river lanterns float away into the darkness during the annual festival, they may feel "an involuntary emptiness" and wonder, "Where do those lanterns float to, after all?" but it is the narrator who takes these vague questions and yearnings and translates them into existential rumination. For when she describes the dance of the sorceress in the second chapter, it is the narrator, and not the townspeople, who asks, "what is human existence and why must it be so desolate?" (Ibid., 131). Xiao Hong as a young child does not know what to make of the evening star; grown up and educated, she knows exactly what to do with it: in her narratives about the poor folk of Hulan River, she describes the stars and the heavenly bodies (*wanli qiankun*) to provide a cosmic context for their sufferings. In her narrative, stars and moons often descend to the lowly mortal realm, as we have seen: "The moon's rays do not strike the river as they do the ocean, where splinters of gold flash about on the surface; here the reflection of the moon sinks to the bottom of the river, making it seem as if a fisherman could simply reach out and lift it into his boat" (Ibid., 135). This is yet another instance in which the narrator dignifies the travails of laborers by bringing them into poetic contact with heavenly orbs. But as Second Uncle You would assert, the poor have no time for this fanciful way of thinking. To have reached this point of narrating poverty, Xiao Hong has had to experience privileges precluded by that kind of poverty. Her distance from the poor does make it impossible for her to fully represent them, but it gives her the critical distance to draw attention to what needs critiquing.

[370] The narrator describes playing with the lid of a vat found in her garden, wandering with it into the house where the corpse of her grandmother lies. Her father "gave me a kick that sent me sprawling, nearly knocking me into the wood fire burning in the stove. The vat lid crashed to the ground, where it was rolling around" (Ibid., 170): the idyll of her garden is interrupted by death and violence, paradise lost. David Wang has pointed out that "the 'hungry woman' has been made into an archetype of modern Chinese literature"; see *Monster,* 134. Xiao Hong's sensitivity to the intersectionality of gender and class is already prefigured in *Market Street*, as Jing Tsu has discussed (see *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature* 155-8), and in her 1934 novella, *Field of Life and Death* (*Shengsi chang*), in which the indexicality of hands with regards to social class conflates with the indexicality of hands with regards to gender. Hands that are dirty and coarse from poverty are associated with peasant women (*The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*, 6); a woman washing a fish has hands as red as carrots (Ibid., 30). The hands of men, however, are associated with the violence of sexual predation. When a young woman meets someone for a tryst, the man "clutched savagely at her body with his large hands, as if he wanted to swallow it, to destroy that warm flesh…his hands traveled under her clothes" (Ibid., 16). Later, a rapist is described as having thick, pudgy hands (Ibid., 82). The victimized woman, however, can only press helplessly on her swelling belly with her hands (Ibid., 19). This novella seems to have taken stylistic cues from Turgenev's work. As I have shown, the story of Yueying in *Field of Life and Death* draws from the story of "The Living Relic" in Turgenev's *Sketches*. Turgenev's narrator offers to bring Luker'ia to a hospital, but she begs him not to, fearing the doctor's painful poking and prodding. The wealthy landowner, with all his material resources and access to the latest science, has not only failed to pay

social class prevents her from identifying with the plight of the poor, then perhaps her status as a woman lends her some insight as a member of the oppressed. In the 1936 essay "Eternal Yearning and Pursuit" (*Yongjiu de chongjing he zhuiqiu*), she describes her landlord father's brutality toward her and toward his tenants: because he was a man, she reflects, he dominated over her, her elderly grandfather, and the poor.[371] Gender, the infirmity of age, and the vulnerability of poverty are aligned in their common weakness against the violent patriarch.

The intersection between gender and class set Xiao Hong up as a writer poised to make an effort to ally herself with the socially downtrodden. In doing so, she thematizes language as both the instrument of separation between social classes (the rich have access to literacy while the poor do not) and a potential instrument of bridging this separation (if one is optimistic about the outcome of her own writing project). Her metatextual awareness of these capacities and limitations of language involves experimentations with elements of formal elements of language that both express and try to minimize the distance between manual laborer and manuscripter: the synecdoche of the hand, the use of free indirect discourse, and the perspective of the narrator(s).

So in Xiao Hong's work we see meditations on and continuations of Lu Xun's line of thinking about how it might be possible to represent the impoverished other, notions that both writers encountered in their Russian intertexts. Fiction by Lu Xun and Xiao Hong reveal that the writer herself is never safe from the pitfalls of moral and imaginative poverty. Moments of possible success are ever equivocal. Xiao Hong once reminisced, in her piece "A Remembrance of Lu Xun," about the ignominious fate of Lu Xun's translation of a Russian realist text:

> I once discovered a manuscript page from Lu Xun's translation of *Dead Souls* in a fried-dough-twist shop on Ladu Road. They were using these pages to wrap the dough twists, so I wrote to tell him about it, but he seemed unaffected by the news. Xu Xiansheng, on the other hand, was terribly upset.
>
> Lu Xun used his galley proofs for things like cleaning his desk. When he had dinner guests, halfway through the meal he would reach over, pick up some galley proofs and pass them to everyone. This always made us feel awkward until Lu Xun said: "Use them to wipe the grease off your hands."
>
> In his bathroom, too, one would find galley pages.[372]

The work of the white-hand, the manuscript, has found its way back into the soiled hands of manual laborers, who have left an oily mark upon the pages of text. Lu Xun urges his fellow intellectuals to wipe their own dirty hands (and worse) on these pages, blithely displaying his own lack of concern for the sanctity of the written word, of the intellectual's labor. There is

---

attention to the plight of his serf for six or seven years (for that is how long she has been ill) but even now is unable to aid her. "Yes, master dear, but who can help another person? Who can enter into another's soul?"; see Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30-ti tomakh,* vol. 3 (Moscow: Nauka, 1982, 333; translation mine. Luker'ia asks. Xiao Hong takes this existential chasm, and a narrative situation about the inability of the rich man to help the poor woman, and turns it into a narrative of gender violence. Yueying's husband beats her for her physical frailty and takes away her bedding, propping her up with bricks instead (*The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*, 34). Throughout *Field of Life and Death*, the landlords prey upon the tenants, and the poor men prey upon the women: the oppression of women at the hands of men is inseparable the oppression of the poor at the hands of the rich in Xiao Hong's writing. See Amy Dooling, "Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death*," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature,* ed. Kirk A. Denton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), and Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 199-213, for readings of the female body in this novel. See Jing Tsu, *Failure*, 155-8, for a discussion of the feminine management of poverty and physical suffering in *Market Street*.

[371] *Xiao Hong quanji* 4:165.

[372] Trans. Howard Goldblatt, in *Renditions* 15 (1981): 174.

nothing in the inherent dignity of text, he implies, that should elevate it above the quotidian, messy concerns of ordinary people in their ordinary lives.

Chapter 4
Hard Times: The Temporalities of Realism and the Rhythms of Poverty[373]

"The sun rose in the east, then set in the west; amidst suffering, struggle, and starvation, time crawled and crawled in anxiety and hopelessness…"
—Ding Ling, "Water"[374]

"If the mere quantity of labour functions as a measure of value regardless of quality, it presupposes….that labour has been equalised by the subordination of man to the machine or by the extreme division of labour; that men are effaced by their labour; that the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Therefore, we should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time's carcase. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything; hour for hour, day for day."
—Karl Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy"[375]

Xiao Hong drives home the idea, in the two opening ethnographic chapters of *Tales of Hulan River*, that it is repetition of miseries that inures the poor to cruelty and pain. Widow Wang, like Xianglin *sao*, is only piteous to onlookers when disaster first befalls her, but they soon grow used to her periodic weeping and forget to feel sympathy for her. Women are beaten so regularly by their husbands that it raises no eyebrows. People are so used to eating rancid pork that they hardly bat an eyelid. Life in Hulan River is defined by cyclicality, as the structure of the first chapter indicates. Xiao Hong opens the novel with a description of the frozen wintery landscape, and ends the chapter with the same image after having moved full circle describing the town through the seasons:

> Spring, summer, autumn, winter—the seasonal cycle continues inexorably, and always has since the beginning of time. Wind, frost, rain, snow; those who can bear up under these forces manage to get by; those who cannot must seek a natural solution. This natural solution is not so very good, for these people are quietly and wordlessly taken from this life and this world.
>
> Those who have not yet been taken away are left at the mercy of the wind, the frost, the rain, and the snow…as always (*rengjiu*).[376]

The cycles of suffering, of violence and poverty passed down over generations, leaves no prospect of escape for those mired within. In her descriptions of the passage of time in the first chapter, the narrator has made a point of showing how the townspeople calibrate chronology by means of natural phenomena: "when the winter comes, they put on their padded clothes, and when summer arrives, they change into their unlined jackets, as mechanically as getting up when the sun rises and going to bed when it sets. Their fingers, which are chapped and cracked in the

---

[373] Part of this chapter has been published; see Keru Cai, "The Temporality of Poverty: Realism in Lao She's Camel Xiangzi," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 1-36.
[374] Ding Ling, "Shui," in *Ding Ling quanji*, vol. 1 (Shijiazhuang shi: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2001), 423.
[375] Karl Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon," in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 6, trans. Jack Cohen et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 128.
[376] *The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*, 129.

winter, heal naturally by the time summer arrives."[377] This is true on a macro-scale of years and seasons, and also on a micro-scale, for every day is much the same, and defined by predictable natural phenomena: "After the crows have flown over, the day has truly come to an end."[378]

In the midst of this monotonous cyclicality, the poor people's only respite from brutal and banal realities is to spectate the misfortunes of others. These events, such as the entrapment of an animal in the mud pit, or the ritual torture of a young child-bride for medicinal purposes, break up the routine of everyday life: "Ever since the death of the child bride, the compound had suffered a long spell of boredom," until they discover a new spectacle to gawk at, the misfortunes of Big Sister Wang and her newborn child.[379] To escape ordinariness and sameness, the townspeople seek out a singular, extraordinary incident. In fact, Xiao Hong's novel is structured analogously, for she starts out by describing generalities in the opening two chapters, and then narrows down to a singular narrative of her own family compound and its inhabitants in the rest of the novel. It is as though the narrator first inducts us into the expectation of repetition and cyclicality, and then gifts us with the spectacle of something horrifying, dramatic, and violent in order to break the potential tedium of generalizations. This is the logic that in Lu Xun's "New Year's Sacrifice" leads to the villagers' initial grisly fascination with Xianglin sao's sad story, which then becomes tedious and finally irksome for them as the novelty wears off. Xiao Hong in her work is ruminating upon the furthest extension of Lu Xun's narrative logic: how might it be possible as a storyteller or writer not to allow the narrator, characters, readers, or audience members become inured to repetitive spectacles of suffering such that they are always seeking bloodthirstily for the next shock of sensationalism?

The narrator, the young Xiao Hong, is not exempt from the guilt of complicity in this thirst for spectacle, for she and her grandfather (members of the landlord class collecting rents from the poor) are part of every crowd that gawks at the misfortunes of the child-bride, and of Big Sister Wang. Growing up and coming into her consciousness in Hulan River, she is swept into the repetitious cyclicality of life there, with its corollary cannibalism. Formally her writing reflects the cyclical rhythms of life in Hulan River, for her paragraphs are filled with repetitions of words, phrases, and sentences mimicking that numbing monotony. Examples abound, but one will suffice here: "When it's time to eat, they eat (*gai chifan, chifan)*; when it's time to sleep, they sleep (*gai shuijiao, shuijiao)*….Back home they must carry on as before….They dream neither of mournful nor happy events, but merely grind their teeth and snore, passing the night like every other night (*yiye yiye de jiu zheyang de guoqu le*)." The fact that every day is filled with the same tedium and toil means that their minds are fully occupied with the problems of subsistence and have no interest in probing beyond the tautological logicalities and illogicalities of lived reality. Not only are Xiao Hong's paragraphs and chapters filled with repetitions on a micro-scale, but in fact her entire novel as a whole circles back, in the last pages, to images that were brought up in the opening chapters: the fire clouds form the context for Big Sister Wang's death at the end; the crows bring in the sunrise and sunset on the day of her burial.[380] In terms of cyclicality and repetitiveness, novel has the structure of a fractal, in which the construction of each cyclical part mirrors the construction of the cyclical whole.

When the force of repetition is such that the narrator herself becomes hypnotically caught up in it, and furthermore propagates it by sweeping the reader up along in this mesmeric rhythm,

---

[377] Ibid., 128.
[378] Ibid., 127.
[379] Ibid., 264.
[380] Ibid., 269.

then the problem becomes the one that Anderson claims limited Lu Xun's practice of realism: does the realist representation of cruelty merely propagate the spectatorship of violence? Do the intellectual writer and reader, so far divorced from the real lives of the poor, merely prey upon them textually the way their landlords prey upon their flesh? The epilogue of the novel attempts, I think, to break continuities even while acknowledging them:

> The butterflies, the grasshoppers, and dragonflies that were in the garden may still return year after year; or perhaps the place is now deserted.
>
> Cucumbers and pumpkins may still be planted there every year; or perhaps there are no more at all.
>
> Do drops of morning dew still gather on the flower-vase stands? Does the noonday sun still send its rays down on the large sunflowers? Do the red clouds at sunset still form into the shape of a horse, only to shift a moment later into the shape of a dog?
>
> These are things I cannot know.
>
> …
>
> The tales I have written here are not beautiful ones, but since my childhood memories are filled with them, I cannot forget them; they remain with me—and so I have recorded them here.[381]

The phases of the natural world continue as ever, so many things in Hulan River will remain predictably constant, but in her state of exile Xiao Hong cannot know the fates of everyone described in the novel. Throughout the novel, the narrator has disguised her adult voice in the perspective of the child, only occasionally making her presence felt by saying things a child would not have had the wisdom to say. But here the adult Xiao Hong steps unabashedly forward, putting an end to the ingenuous perspective of the child. Formally, then, this epilogue enacts a shift in perspective and in voice, breaking the spell of the earlier chapters of remembrance by commenting upon them with a frank acknowledgement of the time that has passed. It is only by departing that place that she has managed to escape those rhythms and cast a critical eye upon those practices. Her status as a white-hand, while divorcing her from the experiences of the poor, has at least given her the ability to break out of the cycles of repetition. Writing poverty, escaping poverty, and sympathizing with the plight of the poor are all tied up in problems of temporal rhythm.

Poverty in Real Time

Chinese intellectuals would continue to negotiate the problem of representing the social other, and after Mao's exhortations at Yan'an in 1942, the ascendency of socialist realism entirely changed the conversation about how the writer was to relate to the masses. But in the 1920s and 30s, the quandary was a thorny one, eliciting narrative strategies of all kinds, which both highlighted the problem and made attempts to solve it: the figural implications of the hand; the experimentation with free indirect discourse as we have seen in Xiao Hong's work; her intimation that inequalities of gender might allow her to claim allegiance with the socially downtrodden. These were just a few of the ways in which realism stove to gain purchase on this narrative challenge of alterity and class discrepancy. Another means to this end, a strategy that this chapter will explore, arose in the realist representation of temporality in depictions of material poverty.

---

[381] Ibid., 273.

As we have seen, the topic of poverty underpinned and enabled the formation of modern Chinese realism, shaping the basic parameters of narrative in the early twentieth century. These changes in the subject matter of fiction were concomitant with changes in form. A new literary interest in the lower orders, in the abject little man (the laborer, the peasant, the mendicant, the vagrant, as opposed to the emperor, the scholar destined to become a great official, or the trumpeted military commander) gave rise naturally to a narrative obsession with small increments of time—not the rise and fall of dynasties, but instead the quotidian life of these poor people. We have seen this at work already in the work of Lu Xun and Xiao Hong: the hour-by-hour breakdown of illness in "Tomorrow," for instance, or the day-by-day account of hunger in *Market Town*.

Mao Dun's story "Chuncan" ("Spring Silkworms") dramatizes the clash between different ways of conceptualizing time, the old versus the new. Homophonous with the word for "contradiction," Mao Dun was the nom de plume of Shen Yanbing, an influential May Fourth critic and writer who remained a prominent figure of the Communist cultural establishment after 1949. He is best known for his promotion and practice of the naturalist and realist modes during the May Fourth Movement, in essays such as the 1922 "Ziran zhuyi yu Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo" ("Naturalism in Modern Chinese Fiction") and novels such as the 1933 *Ziye* (*Midnight*).[382] His 1933 *Nongcun sanbu qu* (*Village Trilogy*) traces three successive seasons in the lives of villagers on the cusp of starvation and ruin: "Spring Silkworms" documents their failed attempt to make money at sericulture; "Qiushou" ("Autumn Harvest") follows their desperation to recoup losses by means of a rice harvest; "Candong" ("Winter Ruin") ends the trilogy with the rise of peasant insurgents. The poverty in these stories is fleshly, squalid, and metonymic: "Spring Silkworms" describes the peasants' relationship to their silkworms as a bodily and parasitic one. But rather than the humans deriving sustenance and livelihood from the silkworms, it is the other way around. As the silkworms grow bigger and plumper, the farmers grow thinner and gaunter, sacrificing food and money to purchase more leaves that feed the silkworms.[383]

The farmers' identification with the silkworms goes so far that their names, many of which contain the word "treasure" (*bao*), are similar to what they call the silkworms (*baobao*). The linguistic identification with silkworms is ironic because of course the silkworms fail to

---

[382] Mao Dun often blurs the line between naturalism and of realism; see David Wang, *Fictional Realism in 20th-Century China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 69, and Galík, *Mao Tun and Modern Chinese Literary Criticism* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1969), 36. Huters remarks that during the May Fourth movement, realism and naturalism were used in such a way as to be "virtually indistinguishable"; Huters himself uses the terms interchangeably in his discussion of Mao Dun's literary theory; see "Ideologies of Realism in Modern China: The Hard Imperatives of Imported Theory," in *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourses in Modern China*, ed. Liu Kang and Xiaobing Tang (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 153-7. Yu-Shih Chen makes reference to only the realism, not the naturalism, of Mao Dun's *Vacillations* in *Realism and Allegory in the Early Fiction of Mao Tun* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). The same is true in Berninghausen's "Central Contradiction in Mao Dun's Earliest Fiction," in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*. Similarly, though Anderson acknowledges that over the course of the 1920s, "Mao Dun began to differentiate realism and naturalism" (*Limits,* 43), Anderson consistently discusses only the "realist" (Ibid., 151) attributes of Mao Dun's work. The blurry boundary between realism and naturalism in this period will be germane to my discussion of Lao She's *Camel Xiangzi* below.

[383] The women incubate the silkworms against their own bosoms: at one point, A Si's wife nurses them as though they were her infant, and her husband is made to sleep in another room that night so that she can rest undisturbed with the silkworms. As the silkworm eggs move against her body, she is reminded of the first time she was pregnant. The silkworms become both husband and fetus for the women.

bring them any sort of treasure or fortune, and the story implies that this is in part because of the characters' inability to handle a new kind of temporality that has intruded into their lives. The peasants tell time by means of the body, and the narrative faithfully follows the incrementally and viscerally felt passage of time. The rate of mulberry growth is their clock: at first the leaves are the size of a human finger, then the size of a human palm (again the human body gets displaced onto the crops upon which it depends for survival). Lao Tongbao feels the heat of the sun on his back on the day of the Qingming festival and thus recollects that only one other time in his life, forty years ago, has the sun been this warm on that day of the calendar year. This sense of time is a cyclical one: Lao Tongbao relies upon the cyclicality of the calendar and its customs and rituals; in his conviction, the family was once prosperous, has fallen on hard times, and must rise again in its fortunes. The text portrays this understanding of cyclical temporality in the opening section of the story, focalized through Lao Tongbao's perspective, as he sits by the canal and thinks back first to forty years ago (the peak of the family's fortune), then farther back to the Taiping rebellion (the beginning of the family's rise), then to five years ago (a time of ill omen, when Guomindang representatives came by proclaiming the need to contend against foreigners, only to quickly drop their crusade), and then to one year ago (the worst the family fortunes had ever been up till then, when foreign silkworms fetched a much higher price than their own). The narration follows Lao Tongbao's recollections in a circular fashion, first moving gradually backward and then coming gradually forward in time, modeling his perception of cyclical temporality.

But this is not how time is going to work anymore, and Lao Tongbao's daughter-in-law has picked up on this sea change. She insists that they invest in more foreign silkworms, but Lao Tongbao objects, ridiculing the idea that every year will be like last year. He believes in cyclicality, so there cannot be a straight vector of time and its attendant misfortunes heading in one inevitable direction. But the new time, brought by the foreigners and their imperialism and capitalism, is precisely this forward-moving temporality. This collision of temporalities is illustrated by a scene of boats along the canal, whose water provides an image of time flowing forward, of connection to Shanghai, and also of division (with some houses in the village separated from others along two opposite banks). In this scene, Lao Tongbao watches as a foreign riverboat chugs along, towing three other large boats behind it down the river in a straight path. This boat agitates the water such that a peasant sitting in a small *chibo chuan* ("naked to the waist boat": again bodily imagery is associated with peasant labor) is rocked up and down as if it is on a seesaw or swing (*da qiuqian*) in the water. The peasant technology or labor has no forward movement and merely rises and falls in place, whereas the modern, foreign technology moves in a forward vector, industriously towing its merchandise along. The old convictions of temporality, associated with the body and with the cyclicality of the calendar and its ritual superstitions, is rendered obsolete by foreign modern technology.[384]

---

[384] Citing thinkers such as Chen Duxiu and Yan Fu, Lee has asserted that Chinese modernity was marked by a redefinition of time, from the cyclical awareness of temporality, to "a mode of consciousness of time and history as unilinear progress" due to the influx of Darwinian evolutionary thought; see "In Search of Modernity: Reflections on a New Mode of Consciousness in Modern Chinese Literature and Thought," in *Ideas Across Cultures: Essays in Honor of Benjamin Schwartz*, ed. Merle Goldman and Paul A. Cohen (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1990), 122. This new conceptualization of temporality infused New Literature, in which "writers were eager to create realistic narratives that incorporated the unilinear sequence of historical time" (Ibid., 125). See Ricardo K. S. Mak, "Yan Fu's Conception of Time and Evolution," in *Notions of Time in Chinese Historical Thinking*, ed. Chun-chieh Huang and John B. Henderson (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006), 157-74, for a further elaboration of Yan Fu's changing ideas of time in contrast to Herbert Spencer's.

The story signals the thematic importance of time—especially of the small increments most salient for labor and survival—by the frequent repetition of the word "daily" (*tiantian* or *yitian yitian*) as the peasants await the growth of silkworms with bated breath. Crucially, the word *tian* (with multiple meanings of day, heaven, sky, and climate) is also repeated several times when Lao Tongbao thinks to himself of the might of Old Man Heaven (*laotian ye*) under whose dominion he believes all fortunes lie. This word *tian* is also used to describe the weather, as in the story's opening when Lao Tongbao bakes in the unseasonable heat of the sun and thinks to himself, "Even the weather's not what it used to be!"[385] (*Zhenshi tian ye bianle!*) The climes of the heavens have changed, but the multivalence of *tian* here implies that so too has time become irrevocably altered. And so too has the identity of this Old Man Heaven (*laotian ye*)—the almighty power over their lives is no longer the divinity of ancient superstition but the foreigners with their modern contraptions and markets.

There is a fascinating moment when Lao Tongbao reflects that in the previous year their crop was poor because they used old newspapers in the silkworm trays in an attempt to save money. The presence of the written word in the technology of their labor was held to blame, so that the family goes hungry for a meal this year in order to purchase (language-less) specialized paper for the silkworm trays. The printed word signifies literacy, progress, knowledge; the newspaper signifies being in touch with the outside world and with modernity[386]: all of which Lao Tongbao's family rejects. The narrative, in its attentiveness to the linguistic, furthermore frequently uses martial or military imagery to describe the peasants' silkworm campaign, for instance the so-called martial law under which the harvest takes place. The implication is that the peasants are going to war against the wrong thing: unable to take up arms against the true enemy and imperialist intruders, their fight is futilely displaced.

Certainly the rest of the trilogy will document their gradual shift, such that after the death of Lao Tongbao, representative of the older generation, his younger son takes up arms to join the farmers' insurrection against the landed and the wealthy. David Wang has commented, "According to Mao Dun's plan, the climax of his *Village Trilogy* portrays a progression of history towards the goal of Revolution."[387] Wang concludes, however, that the forward vector is ever at odds against the narrative's inherent sympathy for cyclicality: the villagers' understanding of mythic time and the Order of Heaven that governed it is not in the end truly subordinated to the drive toward revolution. Pointing to the titles of the three stories, Wang suggests that "the mythical rhythm formed by the cycle of seasons is only too well reestablished at the level of discourse."[388]

It is true that the trilogy opens at the beginning of spring and closes as the winter snow falls, coming full circle. Yet the fact that one of the four seasons (summer) is conspicuously absent from this cycle of story titles hints that old cyclical notions of temporality now have something crucially missing (summer is after all the time of flourishing, of plenty). It is incomplete, and in this disruption a new kind of forward-moving temporality has arisen alongside it, based upon the incremental, day by day, season by season accrual of necessities and accumulation of urgency in the poor folk's struggle for survival. Of course, it is not the case that

---

[385] Mao Dun, "Spring Silkworms," trans. Sidney Shapiro, in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 56.
[386] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, for commentary on the role of the newspaper in building national consciousness.
[387] *Fictional Realism*, 55.
[388] Ibid.

one new narration of temporality becomes dominant, and I certainly do not generalize that cyclicality served as the primary way of understanding time in premodern China[389]: for as we shall see modern realist texts show the layering of different types of rhythm, antiquated and modern, urban and rural. This realist fiction is exquisitely sensitive to these conflicting ways of understanding time, especially in narrating the exigencies of survival in the race against time (the rice must be irrigated before the land becomes too parched, the vegetables eaten before frost sets in), an exhaustingly relentless preoccupation of impoverished characters.

The rest of this chapter provides a case study of how another writer, Lao She (pen name of Shu Qingchun), negotiated these layered or competing temporalities in narrative, innovating the novelistic representation of temporality by means of the portrayal of poverty and squalor.[390] My reading of Lao She can, I hope, serve as a blueprint or at least a gesture inviting interpretations of temporality in a similar vein throughout realist fiction of this period. Born in 1899 into a poor Manchu family, Lao She lived and taught in London from 1924 to 1929 and was known first for his humorous and satirical novels with a Dickensian flair, and later for his play *Chaguan* (*Teahouse* 1957), which chronicles the vicissitudes of Chinese history in the early twentieth century. Lao She himself did not survive the continued convulsions of history and met a tragic end during the Cultural Revolution, ultimately committing suicide in 1966. He is remembered as a writer of Beijing and the Beijing dialect, a prime example of which is *Luotuo Xiangzi* (*Camel Xiangzi*, 1936-7), the focus of this chapter. This novel is perhaps his most popular work, as well as the most famous of the many narratives about struggling rickshaw pullers written in China during the early twentieth century. Unlike Mao Dun's trilogy, which deals with seasonal rhythms in a rural community, Lao She's novel is set in a city, but urban temporalities are still impossible to disentangle from the non-urban[391]: this spatial relationship is something that my next chapter will investigate further.

Camel Xiangzi is obsessed with the calculation of time, a preoccupation that reveals itself on the novel's first page. Beiping's rickshaw pullers, the narrator tells us, fall into several categories, some who work "round the clock, starting work or knocking off whenever they please," others who take on a "monthly job," and still others who "cannot afford to let a day go by without earning anything."[392] Of this last category, some "work round the clock, some only half days…the more energetic take the night-shift all the year round."[393] These laborers are

---

[389] See, for instance, Chen Chi-yun, "Immanental Human Beings in Transcendent Time: Epistemological Basis of Pristine Chinese Historical Consciousness," in *Notions of Time,* 48; Liu Shu-hsien, "In the Formation of a Philosophy of Time and History through the Yijing," in *Notions of Time,* 91-2; Henderson, "Premodern Chinese Notions of Astronomical History and Calendrical Time," in *Notions of Time,* 100; N. Sivin, "On the Limits of Empirical Knowledge in the Chinese Traditional Sciences," in *Time, Science, and Society in China and the West*, ed. J. T. Fraser et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 152-3; and Synnove Vinsrygg, "Time in Archaeological Thought: China and the West," in *Time, Science, and Society,* 239.

[390] My claims about temporality can readily be extrapolated to characterize long and short fiction by realist writers of this period including Mao Dun, Ye Shengtao, Ba Jin, Ye Zi, Ding Ling, Yu Dafu, and so on. Realist representation of poverty seems to give rise organically to the kinds of narrative temporality I will describe, as we shall see.

[391] Georg Simmel has claimed that the tempos of the city are quicker than those of rural life; see "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (Englewood: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), 48. But modern Chinese realist fiction demonstrates similarly exigent temporal rhythms in both when inhabitants are under similar constraints of poverty and the need to survival: the human body will perish at the same rate if deprived of food and sustenance, no matter the setting.

[392] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi: Chinese-English Bilingual Edition*, trans. Shi Xiaojing (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005), 2.

[393] Ibid., 4.

defined and differentiated by the temporal rhythms of their labor, so we are introduced to multiple ways of accounting for time, whether hour by hour, day by day, month by month, or year by year. The next paragraph further dilates the timescales under narrative consideration: "The pullers over forty and under twenty find it hard to join either of these categories."[394] From counting minutes to tracing the arc of a worker's entire lifespan, the novel's first pages thus reveal the temporal calculations that will drive its protagonist. It soon becomes clear why temporality makes its exigency immediately felt in this novel: "It took one year, two years, at least three or four years—one drop of sweat, two drops of sweat, untold tens of thousands of drops of sweat—before he earned enough for that rickshaw."[395] For a laborer like the eponymous Xiangzi, the passage of time can be measured by drops of sweat, that is, by increments of pain exacted from the body.

After all, this novel takes place in the age of wage labor, when the body has become machine, the laborer alienated from the labor. The calculation of wages means an enthrallment to the exquisitely exact and exacting passage of time. Marx in *Capital* indicates the primacy of temporality in the opening pages of his first chapter: the use-value of an article is measured by the quantity of labor contained within it, Marx asserts; this quantity "is measured by its duration, and the labour-time is itself measured on the particular scale of hours, days etc."[396] The discussion of labor is immediately underpinned by the calculation of time.[397] "Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself," Marx writes in *Grundrisse* (1857-8).[398] So, too, are all of Xiangzi's calculations as a "thrifty *homo economicus*" ultimately reducible to a calculation of time.[399]

The narrative's obsession with temporality arises from its usage of free indirect discourse or psychonarration, which Lydia Liu has examined: because the novel is focalized through the consciousness of a rickshaw puller fettered by the constraints of time, the narrative itself must carefully count minutes and hours as Xiangzi frets over the basic necessities of survival (food, clothing, shelter) and the danger of their scarcity. Our protagonist begins as a fresh, sturdy country lad newly arrived in the city—to him, a land of promise—determined to maintain independence by purchasing and pulling his own rickshaw. Over and over again he comes within reach of his dreams of rickshaw possession and self-possession, but in each instance loses his rickshaw with dizzying senselessness and rapidity. By the end, the physical and moral robustness of the ingenuous country boy have become thoroughly corrupted by an increasing acceptance of the futility of striving, and the novel leaves us with the image of Xiangzi numbly scraping a corpse-like existence by hiring himself out to protests, funerals, and wedding processions.

---

[394] Ibid.

[395] Lao She 2005: 8. I have altered the translation to reflect the incrementality in its accountancy.

[396] Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 129.

[397] Scholars such as William James Booth have commented upon the centrality of temporal considerations to Marxist thought; see "Economies of Time: On the Idea of Time in Marx's Political Economy," *Political Theory* 19, no. 1 (Feb., 1991): 13, 19. See also Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), for a discussion of socially necessary labor time. For a further account of how "naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation," see Elizabeth Freeman's account of "chrononormativity" in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

[398] *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, tr. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 173.

[399] See Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice, 114*.

What I want to underscore in my sketch of the plot is the sense of repetitiveness that very quickly makes itself felt: the novel opens by alerting us to its temporal awareness and then proceeds to track unflinchingly the frequency with which misfortunes repeat themselves. When we attend to the novel's temporalities, then, we become aware of its temporal rhythms. To be good readers of this novel we have to be good rhythmanalysts, as Henri Lefebvre has exhorted in his examinations of the body under capitalism. "The rhythm that is proper to capital," he writes, "is the rhythm of producing (everything: things, men, people, etc.) and destroying (through wars, through *progress*, through inventions and brutal interventions, through speculation, etc.)."[400] *Camel Xiangzi* oscillates between production and destruction, such that what is at first shocking (the loss of a rickshaw, the theft of a small fortune, the death of a loved one) soon becomes predictably mundane. To give an account of the novel's temporalities, then, I propose to trace its temporal rhythms, its patterns of repetition and changes (which themselves become repetitive) over time.[401] The novel is defined by rhythms both within the content of its plot (patterns of temporality that are thematically salient for the characters) and within the arrangement of its plot (patterns of temporality that are structurally apparent to the reader). Thematically, the narrative is dominated by rhythms of nature, of the modern city, of the workday, and even of Xiangzi's footsteps. Structurally, the narrative itself moves at varying speeds: fast-forwarded descriptions of general activities during a long span of time are punctuated by singular events that are depicted slowly, in greater detail.

I scrutinize narrative rhythms in both content and form to show that this mimesis of proletarian temporality constitutes the novel's formal realism.[402] Insistence on thematic rhythms

---

[400] *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life,* trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Continuum, 1992), 55. Rhythmanalysis is particularly pertinent in the modern city (Ibid., 28), and Lefebvre opens his study with an account of urbanization and the birth of the machine and the engine (Ibid., 15). David Strand describes Beijing's rickshaw pullers as "joined through their work to the basic rhythms of city life…"; see *Rickshaw Beijing: City, People, and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 23. Lao She's chosen setting and subject are thus the ideal targets of rhythmanalysis.

[401] Tellingly, Lefebvre finds in repetition a principle of breaking in or dressage to which humans (like animals) submit themselves in order to join a society, adopt a system of values, learn a trade, or simply be (*Rhythmanalysis,* 39-40). Xiangzi, nicknamed Camel after the beast of burden that he becomes through his labor, is similarly broken in and broken. Marx too, draws the analogy between human and animal under the constraints of time: "Within the 24 hours of the natural day a man can expend only a definite quantity of his vital force. A horse, in like manner, can only work from day to day, 8 hours" (*Capital,* 341). Coercive repetition and temporal rhythms (of the workday, for instance) are at the root of the dehumanization of the rickshaw puller. As Strand remarks, the image of the rickshaw puller, with "'human animals' being dragged by 'machine animals,'" became a symbol for "backwardness and exploitation" (*Rickshaw Beijing*, 36).

[402] Some readings of the novel have stressed its realism: see Hsia, *A History*, 187. Others comment upon its naturalism: see Joseph Lau, "Naturalism in Modern Chinese Fiction," *Literature East and West* 12, no. 2-4 (1968), 150, and Fredric Jameson, "Literary Innovation and Modes of Production: A Commentary," *Modern Chinese Literature* 1, no. 1 (Sept., 1984): 70. For the purposes of my argument I do not draw fine distinctions between realism and naturalism, for the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in China might productively be considered a case of *uneven modernity,* which as Harsha Ram has described, constitutes "the condition in which cultural forms, socio-economic structures and ideological projects associated elsewhere with distinct historical periods or modes of production coexist in close proximity"; see "Introducing Georgian Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 27, no. 1 (Jan., 2014): 285. The result of this compression in time means that writers like Lao She were deploying an array of literary modes (realism as well as naturalism, for instance) in the construction of a text like *Camel Xiangzi*. In an essay on literary trends written a few years before *Camel Xiangzi*, Lao She himself discusses Zola under the generic umbrella of realism. He goes on to insist that there is not much difference (*meiyou duoshao fenbie*) between *ziran zhuyi* and *xieshi zhuyi*, except that the former tends to be more deterministic, a trait that we certainly see in *Camel Xiangzi*; see "Wenxue de qingxiang (xia)," in *Lao She quanji*, vol. 16 (Beijing:

is the result of a narrative fixation on the travails of surviving day by day, moment by moment, squalor by squalor, in conditions of poverty and limited agency. The objects of narrative attention are precisely those mundane and often sordid objects that make up Xiangzi's material economy and the conditions of their physiological or psychological exigency: bodies and bodily effluvia, disease, coins, weather, clothing, food, shelter.[403] These details of daily subsistence are described with a continuous, relentless rhythm that unfolds in chronological sequence mimicking the actual lived experience of poverty. Concomitantly, the rhythms structuring the narrative itself (especially the sped-up generalizations) enact Xiangzi's single-minded focus on survival, while singular wrenching events become increasingly iterative in the context of inescapable poverty. In this text extraordinary travails become ordinary, with Xiangzi ultimately offered no respite, and the reader allowed no purging of this temporally ongoing suffering: an inconclusiveness that is fundamentally constitutive of Lao She's unflinchingly realist mimesis of a vast, crushing, systemically produced vortex of poverty in defiance of which both individual and collective will seem equally unavailing. Here, Fredric Jameson's conceptualization of the temporal antinomies of realism, in which the past-present-future trajectory of the récit is dialectically at odds with the eternal present of bodily affect,[404] is useful in making sense of the temporal rhythms of Xiangzi's experience. The inconclusiveness of the narrative ending can be read as a manifestation of the temporal pole of affect in realism, which is central to Lao She's depiction of the impoverished body.

Realism since its inception in the West has been defined by its capacity and groundbreaking willingness to depict "the ugly, the revolting, the low." So when Chinese intellectuals began to adopt and appropriate Western literary forms in the early twentieth century, realist narrative provided a way to portray in intimate and sympathetic ways the travails of the working classes. But Lao She's novel is not just about "the ugly, the revolting, the low," but about the ugly, the revolting, the low, over and over again. The building blocks of the plot are mundane and pedestrian to begin with, their monotony relieved only by the misfortunes that befall the hapless hero, yet these *peripeteia* become increasingly predictable as well. We have seen this kind of rhythm of quotidian squalor, punctuated by communally anticipated spectacles of calamity and salacious schadenfreude, in the work of Xiao Hong. For instance in *Tales of Hulan River,* the rhythms of the narrator's language evoke—sometimes with an incongruously soaring or tender lyricism—this numbing, banal cruelty of systemic poverty, from which the young narrator (and perhaps we complicit reader/spectators as well) are not immune. Lao She's novel also inflicts this kind of wearying, deadening, repetitious suffering, and contemplates the corollary problem of escaping from it, intra- and extradiegetically. David Wang describes the increasing predictability of disaster in *Camel Xiangzi* as a wearing down of melodrama, contributing to Lao She's "comic/farcical vision" and "skepticism about the boundary of the real."[405] Yet I prefer to read the increasing monotony of predictably periodic catastrophe as

---

Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2013), 106-7. In Jameson's reading of Zola's novels, he considers both their realist and naturalist tendencies fluidly: hallmarks of naturalism manifest the telltale markers of realism (*Antinomies*, 179).

[403] These objects are metonymically related (by contiguity or adjacency) to the protagonist and his plight. As I have mentioned, theorists like Jakobson have articulated the centrality of metonymy to realism. Peter Brooks and Harry E. Shaw both apply Jakobson's reasoning to their respective investigations of the representation of objects in French and English realist texts, and of the concept of historical metonymy; see Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), and Shaw, *Narrating Reality* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). My account will also demonstrate the crucial role of metonymy in the realist narrative of Xiangzi's poverty.

[404] *Antinomies*, 10.

[405] *Fictional Realism*, 148.

realism's narratological strategy for depicting unrelenting hardship. Realism affords for this novel a temporal delineation of repetitive squalor, an everyday experience in which the poor and indigent constantly obsess over the same worries and are repeatedly clobbered by the same misfortunes.[406] For in *Camel Xiangzi* poverty is not just an abstract sociological or economic phenomenon, but a repetitive, moment by moment, intimately affective and bodily experience.

The mimetic realism of this novel forces us to experience the quotidian repetition of suffering, and in such a way that no catharsis is possible. In this sense it challenges Marston Anderson's account of the limits of realism, and its alleged inadequacies in furthering writers' socially progressive goals in the 1920s and 30s.[407] Anderson claims that realist narrative proper provides the reader with an experience of catharsis "by arousing and then purging the unpleasant emotions of pity and terror from their minds."[408] According to Anderson, for writers like Lu Xun the denial of catharsis constitutes an "impediment" to the deployment of realism. And though Anderson does not discuss Lao She's fiction he notes that writers of the 1930s gradually relinquished use of the realist mode because they found it unable to enact their socially transitive aims. I call into question whether a narrative denial of relief (from painful identification or pity) necessarily constitutes an impediment to realism at all. Button has explained the problematic nature of Anderson's conceptualization of catharsis as a cornerstone of realist aesthetics.[409] I add my skepticism by considering the insistent denial of catharsis in *Camel Xiangzi*. I make the case that even though *Camel Xiangzi* avoids conclusiveness, denying relief for the reader's pity, this reveals not the limitations but the necessary conditions for realism in depicting quotidian poverty.

As Button observes, Anderson quickly sidelines the discussion of *mimesis* in realism in favor of Aristotelian *catharsis*;[410] but I draw attention to the primacy of the former over the latter in *Camel Xiangzi*'s portrayal of quotidian poverty by means of a temporal structure involving the repetitive grinding and spinning of narrative wheels. Mimetic realism involves this imbrication of the individual, no matter how lowly, with a milieu, not only in space but also in time. As Eric Auerbach writes, "The serious treatment of everyday reality, the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation, on the one hand; on the other, the embedding of random persons and events in the general course of contemporary history, the fluid historical background—these, we believe, are the foundations of modern realism."[411] *Camel Xiangzi* treats seriously the prosaic needs of its socially downtrodden protagonist, and by means of overlapping mimetic narrative rhythms illustrates his inescapable subjection to demands of temporality arising from his historical and cultural moment.

Thus this chapter focuses on Lao She's novel, but aligned with the previous chapters, it also makes the case for revising our understanding of modern Chinese realism as a whole. I end

---

[406] My ultimate goal is not to define Lao She's novel as realist or not, but rather to make use of generic designations as a means to an end. Rather than considering the potential open-endedness or limitations of the realist mode, I propose to give realism the benefit of the doubt, as it were: if we read *Luotuo Xiangzi* as a realist text, what can the form tell us about the content? What, in other words, are realism's affordances; what potentialities "lie latent—though not always obvious" in this form? See Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 6.

[407] *Limits*, 25.

[408] Ibid., 24.

[409] *Configurations,* 59.

[410] Ibid., 58.

[411] *Mimesis*, 491.

with an account of how this realist mimesis of the lived temporalities of poverty makes itself felt not just within the text but beyond it as well. According to Lao She's 1945 essay, "How I came to write the novel 'Camel Xiangzi,'" the temporally exigent drudgery of his writing process mimics and provides him affective access to the experience of poverty that he writes. Mimetically represented poverty is shown to be inescapable and produces a transitive effect whereby even the author, as documented in his autobiographical account, seems to feel what he describes. Lao She and Xiangzi alike must submit to the disciplining rhythm of labor-time. The world of the novel and the world of its writer are mutually interpenetrating—the drudgery of the writing process is reflected in the form of the text, or the form infects the writing process, prefiguring its transitive impact on the implied reader.[412]

Time and Time Again: Temporal Rhythms within the Narrative

Camel Xiangzi's narrative investment in the struggles of the poor necessitates its multilayered attentiveness to temporality. In the novel, temporal patterns on micro- and macro-scales of experience, from the intimately personal awareness of minutes to the planetary motions of time that hold an entire city in thrall, are overlapping, at odds, and persistently thrust before the reader's attention, just as the inhabitants of Beiping are unable to ignore them. The fine-grained account of Xiangzi's everyday life is embedded in and intersected by rhythms of a larger scale, which imply the futility of day to day struggle against poverty when even whole cycles of generations are unable to escape the colossal social mechanisms of systemic inequality. Great cultural, epochal conflicts are inscribed on Xiangzi's bodily experience, for example in the clash of the modern and the premodern. This is enacted in the tension between Xiangzi's rickshaw pulling, powered by nothing other than the natural resources of his flesh, and faster speed of mechanical means of transport such as bicycles and automobiles: the sturdy, "tree"-like body of the country boy is pitted against the impersonal, inorganic machinery of the modern city.[413] This tension between man and machine begets the corollary tension of man as machine, dehumanized and instrumentalized.

Premodern versus modern, city versus country: these are dissonances of temporal rhythm. Arguing that temporal experience is multifariously, contradictorily patterned, Caroline Levine complicates the notion that modern mechanical rhythms overtook, coopted, or disrupted premodern natural rhythms.[414] In *Camel Xiangzi*, life in Beiping is inescapably defined by natural rhythms such as the seasons and their concomitant climates and agricultural availabilities, which in turn determine the social rhythms of the calendar, whose periodic holidays and festivals shape quotidian behavior. The narrative notes that war, though a phenomenon of man, has become so regular that it, too, takes on the rhythm of nature: "Nearly every year, rumours and news of war sprang up with the spring wheat. For Northerners, ears of wheat and bayonets could be said to symbolize their hopes and fears."[415] That nature and natural imagery become imbricated with the affairs of men is symptomatic of the novel's naturalistic inflections.[416]

In the city the tempos of nature are overweening on a macrocosmic level, such as in the changing of seasons or patterns of weather, as well as on a microcosmic level: the diurnal

---

[412] Criticism on *Camel Xiangzi* often discusses the reader's affective response to the text, as we shall see.
[413] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 14.
[414] *Forms*, 50.
[415] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 30-2.
[416] Naturalism catachrestically ascribes social behavior and conflict to the natural world: the ideologies of the social world are so nefariously inescapable for the lone individual that they seem to be products of nature.

passage of time and the duration of daylight hours determine the rhythms of a rickshaw puller's workday. As the narrator explains in the opening chapter, depending on the rickshaw puller's level of fitness and experience, he can either choose (or be forced) to work particular hours of the day and days of the year, or to work at night; alternatively, working for a family is a stable source of income, but then he is at the mercy of their daily rhythms. Owning a rickshaw means he can determine his own rhythm of work. These conditions set the course of Xiangzi's behaviors and aspirations, and we can trace his relative professional success and failure based upon fluctuations in his diurnal rhythm. At Xiangzi's peak, he opts for a packed workday, taking as many fares as he can find; after his rickshaw is stolen, he is driven by desperation to hasten his pace of work, stealing other men's fares, sleeping less, and overworking to the point of illness; and finally as he begins his decline into jaded laziness, he takes fewer and fewer fares so that the rhythm of his workday slows lackadaisically.

As a result of temporal rhythms, the rickshaw puller's life is characterized as a constant race against time: the race against the fading of daylight, the race to pay off a day's rickshaw rental fee, the race against the decay of the physical body, to attain financial security before the decline in wage-earning ability. Narrative depictions of temporal exigency culminate in an instance when time is given agency: "It was as if time had suddenly developed consciousness and emotions which compelled people to think along with it and busy themselves according to its wishes."[417] Persons are enslaved by time. Due to the primacy of temporal calculation, Xiangzi is defined by the rhythm of his footsteps. He thinks to himself that "Xiangzi had always been synonymous with 'speed,'"[418] so he is ashamed to be seen pulling a rickshaw slowly even when physically unwell. This is in contrast to the rhythm of his mental life: "Xiangzi's mind worked slowly but thoroughly, and once an idea occurred to him he immediately acted on it."[419] His mental rhythms are plodding but his physical rhythms quick.

Mimetically depicting the exigent temporal experience of an impoverished laborer means that the narrative—like Xiangzi himself—is persistently attentive to the speed of pulling a rickshaw. The fluctuations of Xiangzi's physical pace allow us to chart his cyclical trajectory of (brief) rise and (steep) fall throughout the plot. His speed is correlated with his psychological state: when he is at last able to purchase a rickshaw, "[t]his new happiness brought greater courage, and with his own rickshaw, Xiangzi ran even faster."[420] This is the peak of his career, when his speed is described as just right, not too fast and not too slow:

> With his brawn and his beautiful rickshaw . . . he owed it to them both to run really fast. This was not out of vanity but a sense of duty. For after six months this lovable rickshaw of his seemed alive to what he was doing . . . . They were never at cross-purposes in the least. Whenever they came to a flat open stretch, Xiangzi would run with only one hand steadying the shaft; the soft swish of rubber tyres was like a brisk little wind spurring him on to run swiftly and steadily. . . . Daring is not the same as foolhardiness, and Xiangzi though daring was never foolhardy. If dawdling would be unfair to his passenger, speeding so that he damaged his rickshaw would be unfair to himself.[421]

His calculations of velocity are determined by a sense of principle: respect for his own abilities,

[417] Ibid., 106.
[418] Ibid., 450.
[419] Ibid., 52.
[420] Ibid., 28.
[421] Ibid., 28-30.

for his rickshaw (which is figured as his mechanical double or else his harmonious lover[422]), and for his transaction with each customer. Xiangzi's gait is delicately controlled, almost effortlessly, as if he need expend only half his energies ("only one hand") when his other half, his metonymic mechanical double, is so beautifully attuned to his movements. The rickshaw tires are likened through simile to a brisk wind, which seems to motivate Xiangzi's forward motion.[423] Wind appears throughout the narrative as a figure for the brutal elements of nature that determine the lives of the city laborers, so when the figurative wind is for once on Xiangzi's side, as in this passage, it is a rare moment of triumph. The rickshaw is portrayed as an active participant in the labor, interacting almost sentiently with Xiangzi, thus crystallizing the metaphysical and physical unity between the man and his machine. That this sense of unity is mediated by a natural and naturalistic image, the wind, is aligned with the text's articulation of the physics and physicality of labor as inescapably at the mercy of internalized supraindividual forces.

The figure of wind reappears in later scenes that display a modulation in Xiangzi's speed. When conditions start to spiral downward in his life, his running rhythm spirals out of control. After Xiangzi begins working for Mr. Cao, he is tormented by misgivings about his physical relationship with Huniu, the daughter of the man from whom Xiangzi used to rent a rickshaw.[424] These worries precipitate him to accelerate dangerously as he pulls Mr. Cao's rickshaw:

> There were few people on the wide, flat street, a cool wind blew gently, and the street lamps were still. He really got into his stride. For a while, the pad of his footsteps and the slight creaking of the rickshaw springs made him forget the depression which had weighed him down for so long. He unbuttoned his jacket and felt the cool wind on his chest. How invigorating! He could have run on and on to some unknown destination, run until he dropped dead and was done with everything. He had speeded up now so that he overtook each rickshaw in front of him. In a trice, Tian An Men was left behind. His feet were like springs, barely touching the earth before bounding up again. The wheels of the rickshaw were turning so fast, the spokes were invisible and the tyres seemed to have left the ground, as if both rickshaw and puller were borne aloft by a strong wind. Mr. Cao was probably half-asleep, fanned by the chilly wind, otherwise he would certainly have forbidden Xiangzi to run so fast. Xiangzi was running for all he was worth, with the vague notion that if he could have a good sweat he would sleep soundly that night instead of brooding.[425]

The speed of Xiangzi's running is effortless here,[426] as in the previous passage, but his headiness indicates that the decision to run fast is no longer a carefully calculated and modulated ethical choice, out of duty and honor to himself, his machine, and his client. Instead, Xiangzi runs fast in order to escape his fears. Clothing throughout the novel serves as a metonymic marker for

---

[422] See Wang, *Fictional Realism,* 145-146, and Ching-Kiu Stephen Chan, "Split Consciousness: The Dialectic of Desire in 'Camel Xiangzi,'" *Modern Chinese Literature* 2, no. 2 (Fall, 1986): 171-95.

[423] Ibid., 29.

[424] It is of course fitting that the figure who represents the "predator" (preying on the hapless draft animal, Camel) should be named the "Tigress," Huniu.

[425] Ibid., 160.

[426] Here Xiangzi's labor feels good to him, but as Marx comments, capitalist production "not only produces a deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal moral and physical conditions of development and activity, but also produces the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself. It extends the worker's production-time within a given period by shortening his life" (*Capital*, 376-7). The intensified rhythm of work that Xiangzi pursues becomes unsustainable.

Xiangzi's psychological, physical, and economic status, and here he unbuttons his jacket as though to release his mental preoccupations. Whereas the image of wind in the previous passage is only a figure of speech, the murmur of rickshaw wheels likened to a benignly brisk breeze, in this passage there is an actual wind, described more threateningly as coldly blowing.[427] In addition to the literal wind, this passage also features a figurative one: Xiangzi and his rickshaw both seem to be "borne aloft by a strong wind (*jifeng*)."[428] An intensification of the nimble breeze from the previous passage, this urgent wind seems to control the movements of both Xiangzi and his rickshaw. Whereas in the previous passage the rickshaw's wheels themselves seem to generate the figurative whistling wind that then motivates Xiangzi, unifying man and machine in harmonious communication and physical collaboration, here man and machine are unified but equally at the mercy of what feels like an external force, the urgent wind. This passage shows Xiangzi turning into a machine, his feet likened to mechanical springs, underscoring his loss of self-determination; and the mechanics of his rickshaw are themselves rendered blurry and indeterminate, the spokes turning so quickly as virtually to disappear, the wheels losing traction with the ground, flying with Xiangzi into some kind of oblivion. The blurriness of physical mechanics extends to Xiangzi's mental state as well: the word "forget" (*wangji*) is repeated twice, alongside language of Xiangzi's psychological indeterminacy and uncertainty—"did not know" (*buzhi*) and "vague" (*miaomang*). Xiangzi and his rickshaw are borne aloft far too quickly, spurred on by his mental agitation, leading to his first collision and besmirching the beautiful professional record in which he has taken so much pride. His indeterminate psychological mood is an affective state that directly involves the functions of his physical body. This is a characteristic of Xiangzi we see repeatedly throughout the narrative: he feels emotions by means of his body.

Just as the uncontrolled increase of Xiangzi's speed marks his deteriorating personal circumstances, so too does the slowing of his gait later mark his loss of ambition and hope. Toward the end of the narrative, when Xiangzi has relinquished all concern for professionalism, though his running speed is not exactly slow, its rhythm is no longer motivated by principle: "He still ran fairly fast, but would not speed up for nothing. If his fares hurried him, he would scrape his big feet along the ground and ask, 'How much for going faster?'"[429] He has become a better capitalist, realizing that everything, not just the salient parts of his body ("his big feet") but even his principles, can be monetized and marketized. Whereas in the passage describing Xiangzi's former ideal speed, it is the whisper of his rickshaw's tires that seems to hurry (*cui*) him forward, here he has lost internal motivation (and lost touch with his machine) so much that it is the customer who must hurry him.[430] Later, when Xiangzi is nearing rock-bottom in both morale and financial means, he fortuitously picks up Fourth Master Liu, the estranged father of his deceased wife Huniu, and does not even bother to take off his long padded jacket, a sure sign of his moral and pecuniary bankruptcy. Xiangzi trots erratically along: "He wasn't pulling a rickshaw, just messing around."[431] When he loses all moral commitment to his profession, he loses all attentiveness to his gait. Still later, when he feels buoyed by a sudden burst of hope (in the decision to approach his former employer Mr. Cao for help and then reunite with his lover Xiao Fuzi), Xiangzi runs with a spurt of speed, supposedly like his old self, but we can sense in this

[427] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 161.
[428] Ibid.
[429] Ibid., 508.
[430] Ibid., 509.
[431] Ibid., 513.

rhythm a difference from his old ideal: "These plans pleased him and his eyes, shining like an eagle's, darted this way and that. He saw a fare and rushed over, throwing off his padded coat before even settling the fee. As he started to run, his legs were not as strong as before, but a gust of hot air buoyed his whole body, so he threw himself into it."[432] The camel (beast of burden) becomes an eagle (bird of prey). He is ruthless toward his quarry, his competitors, and himself. His bodily conditions have deteriorated, and his rhythm of work is too reckless, not steady as before. The wind from previous passages has returned, but now as a gust of steam. This is the speed of last-ditch feverish desperation.

Xiangzi's deployment of his body reflects what are affective rather than emotional states, since Xiangzi himself cannot articulate the nature of his moods. Here I follow Jameson's usage: affect "somehow eludes language and its naming of things (and feelings), whereas emotion is preeminently a phenomenon sorted out into an array of names."[433] Edward Gunn observes that Xiangzi, laconic by nature, lacks command of the local idiom for which Lao She was famous: "He never becomes an articulate exploiter, never commands the language of the environment."[434] The narrator's psychonarration or free indirect discourse conveying Xiangzi's mental state communicates his immediate reactions to different situations but does not often enable him to self-reflexively identify or sum up the nature of what he feels.[435] Even in the critical scene when Xiangzi does cathartically narrate his own story to Mr. Cao, he describes what he did, rather than how he felt. Liu points to this self-narration as the crux of the entire novel, the moment at which "the young man seems to discover the power of speech in himself."[436] Yet it seems significant that the actual contents of his speech are not even narrated or quoted in the text, and moreover he hardly seems to have agency over his language: "One episode after another leaped out of his heart, seeming of their own accord to find the right words."[437] Xiangzi's linguistic inexperience is widely conducive to the conjuration of affect rather than emotion in the novel's representation of his interiority. Affects are "bodily feelings,"[438] and accordingly Xiangzi experiences psychological states via his body (the responsive rhythms of his running), with only a "vague notion" of his own motivations.[439]

The evolution of Xiangzi's running speed leads ultimately to an affective state of defeat in which Xiangzi does not need to run anymore. At the end of the novel, when he has given up rickshaw pulling, he earns a living by shuffling along in crowds of people, not even walking at his own gait—indeed, venereal disease makes it hard for him even to move:[440]

---

[432] Ibid., 520. I have amended this translation.
[433] *Antinomies*, 29.
[434] *Rewriting Chinese: Style and Innovation in Twentieth-Century Chinese Prose* (Stanford: Stanford, University Press, 1991), 115.
[435] For instance, when Xiangzi purchases his first rickshaw, his "hands were shaking even more violently as he tucked the guarantee away and pulled his rickshaw out, feeling ready to burst into tears…. Well, today he had bought his own rickshaw, why not make it his birthday too?" (Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 24). His body expresses the reaction that he does not verbally articulate, and the free indirect discourse relating Xiangzi's plans for a joint birthday celebration hint at his identification with the machine he has acquired, as well as his sense that time itself can start anew for him now.
[436] *Translingual Practice*, 123.
[437] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 526.
[438] Jameson, *Antinomies*, 32. The novel taps into the democratic potential of affect, since its untethering from language makes it available to those without literacy, without command of the word.
[439] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 586.
[440] Ibid., 586.

> Bearing his light burden, he hunches slowly along, head bowed, a cigarette stub picked up from the ground dangling from his lips. When everyone stops he keeps going, when everyone moves forward, he remains still, as if he does not hear the commands clashed out on the gong. He never pays any attention to the distance between himself and the row ahead of him, nor cares whether he is in line with those behind him. He shuffles on, his head lowered as if in a dream, or pondering some deep thoughts. . . . The gong player hits him with the gong stick, he rolls his eyes and peers around blearily. Ignoring all, he searches the ground carefully for any cigarette-end worth retrieving.[441]

Though the bridal parasols or funeral tablets that he carries now are far lighter than the weights he used to bear on his rickshaw, Xiangzi's posture is huddled, his proud tree-like stance a thing of the past. If the novel charts Xiangzi's transition from individualism to collectivism, then when Xiangzi stops running at his own speed and instead shuffles along slowly (symbolic of his loss of will to live and strive) with the collective group, then this image is cynically representative of how "he degenerates to the level of the despicable crowd."[442] Yet, largely indifferent to the motions of those around him, Xiangzi goes his own way (*ta zou ta de*—a telling repetition of the personal pronoun in a passage describing group behavior), only stopping or going when the continuation of his oblivious movements becomes impossible. Though his motions are restricted by the speed of the group, he is not quite in sync, symbolically indicating that he has not been fully absorbed into the movement or the ideology of collectivism.

If the state of Xiangzi's personal affairs and affective state can be inferred from his running speed at any given point in his hapless trajectory, it is because his very livelihood depends on the speed at which he can run. If rhythm involves periodic repetition, and running speed is the rhythmic repetition of footfalls such that Xiangzi can travel a certain distance per unit of time, then by extension the realist narration of Xiangzi's inner life must be defined by his pervasively compulsive attention to measurement of units of time. As we shall see, the temporal rhythms of the seasons (determining the rate at which certain foods, resources, and jobs are available) and of the workday (determining the rate at which Xiangzi can work and earn money) are themselves depicted and deployed in a relentless rhythm mimicking the exigencies of having to calculate the necessities for survival under conditions of poverty.

Like Clockwork: Temporal Rhythms that Structure the Narrative

We have identified the multiplicity and heterogeneity of temporal rhythms depicted within the text, some clashing (the speed of automobiles threatening to collide with the slower machinery of the human-rickshaw bond(age)), others mutually reinforcing (the rhythmic alternation of seasons magnifying the urgent need to hasten diurnal work rhythms), the bewildering agitation of these imbricated rhythms seeming to create an ethos in which Xiangzi's very identity is ineluctably defined by his physical running speed. These temporalities in the content of the narrative convey the affective experience of poverty, an evocation given further nuance by the temporalities in the structure of the narrative. The narration of *Camel Xiangzi* moves at different speeds: in the portrayal of many years of Xiangzi's life, the narrative shuttles between sped-up description of general activities that take place over a long period of time, and slower description of singular events that take place over a short period of time. This might at first glance seem similar to the alternation of scene and summary that Gérard Genette identifies

[441] Ibid.
[442] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 107.

within classical Western novelistic narrative, "the strong periods of the action coinciding with the most intense moments of the narrative while the weak periods were summed up with large strokes and as if from a great distance."[443] Summary, which Genette defines as "the narration in a few paragraphs or a few pages of several days, months, or years of existence, without details of action or speech,"[444] is in fact missing from Proust's *À la recherché du temps perdu,* the centerpiece of Genette's study. Instead, in the *Recherche* Genette identifies the alternation of the iterative and the singulative: descriptions of multiple occurrences of the same event alternate with descriptions of one-of-a-kind, singular events. I would like to suggest that while *Camel Xiangzi* employs a handful of summaries (for instance, to introduce quickly the background of a character the first time he or she appears), for the most part Lao She's novel is, like Proust's, defined by the alternation of the iterative—narration of an event that happens repetitively over an extended period of time—and the singulative.

Wang notes the "mechanical repetition of misfortune" in Xiangzi's tale: "While the parade of disasters highlights the melodramatic essence of the novel, indicting a society devoid of justice and sympathy, it also evokes, perhaps unexpectedly, a tacit humor: like the predictable Chaplinesque victim, Camel Xiangzi finally enacts farce."[445] To echo Marx's famous dictum, then, the second time a tragedy befalls Xiangzi it becomes farce. Wang perceives in the physicality of Xiangzi's portrayal a humor that stretches realist boundaries.[446] Rather than reading the repetitive depictions of bodily travails as melodramatically stretching the boundaries of "hardcore" realism,[447] I wonder if we can conceive of them as manifestations of the temporal architecture of realism. If the body is, as Wang affirms, so prominent a locus of meaning in *Camel Xiangzi*, this is not because we are invited to laugh at and thereby attain ironic distance from these physical gestures, but because these evocations of bodily affect convey the ongoing presentness of Xiangzi's bodily scourge.

Bodily affect is most densely conveyed in the iterative sections of the novel, which seem to feature a faster rhythm than the singulative sections because the former can cover in only a few pages or paragraphs the span of weeks, months, and even years, whereas the singulative narrations describe over the course of dozens of pages the events of a few hours or days. The iterative sections involve a lot of "telling" rather than "showing":

> Among rickshaw pullers, personal wrongs and difficulties are food for common talk, and whether at rickshaw-stands, in little teahouses or in the large crowded courtyards, everyone reports, describes or bawls out his troubles. These then pass from mouth to mouth like folksongs, becoming public property. Xiangzi, being a country boy, was not as glib as city-dwellers.[448] If volubility is a natural gift, then he was clearly not endowed with it, so he did not try to imitate the townsfolk's spiteful talk. He minded his own business and held his tongue, which gave him more time to think, as if his eyes were always directed inwards. His mind made up, he embarked upon the course he had mapped out; and if he made no headway,

[443] *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 56.
[444] Ibid., 95.
[445] *Fictional Realism*, 147.
[446] Ibid., 149.
[447] Ibid., 18.
[448] Iterative passages like this engage in typology, long acknowledge as a trait of realism. See, for instance, Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle,* trans. John and Necke Mander (New. York: Merlin Press, 1962), 6.

> he would lapse into silence for a couple of days, gritting his teeth as if gnawing at his own heart.[449]

Passages such as this, describing in general sweeping terms the lives of the city's inhabitants or generalizing about the habits of Xiangzi's quotidian experience, offer few concrete details about specific places and events, implying that these situations and contexts can be found everywhere throughout the city, on a daily basis: mundane trivialities that occur again and again. These passages are characterized by the use of imperfective verbal aspect, indicating incomplete or ongoing action.[450] This imperfective aspect is usually signaled by adverbs like "always" (*lao*) or the construction verb-*zhe*: the average rickshaw puller "reports, describes or bawls" incessantly, overlappingly, reiteratively (*baogao zhe xingrong zhe huo chaorang zhe*).[451] The verbs characterizing Xiangzi's habitual actions in this passage are imperfective as well: *xianzhe, lao kanzhe, suizhe, yaozhe*.

The novel is littered with these iterative passages, which may provide some details of action and speech, without bothering to sketch out specific contextual information about setting and situation. The imperfective, generalizing quality of these iterative passages is indicative of the monotony of Xiangzi's single-minded, labor-intensive life:

> Tight-fisted as he was about spending money, Xiangzi let slip no chance of earning it. When he wasn't hired by the month he worked round the clock, taking his rickshaw out early and bringing it back late, determined to earn a certain sum every day no matter what time it was or how tired his legs were. Sometimes he would not stop at all for a whole day and night in a row. Previously, he had refrained from grabbing fares from others, particularly from down-and-out old, weak pullers. With his strength and superior rickshaw they were no match for his if he competed with them. But now he had no such scruples. All he thought about was money, the more the better, regardless of what the job was like or whom he snatched it from. If he could get a fare nothing else mattered—he was like a ravening beast. When he got a fare he raced off, relaxing somewhat, feeling that keeping on the move was his only hope of buying a rickshaw. One way and another, Xianzi's [sic] reputation now fell far short of what it had been before he became known as 'Camel'. He often ran off with somebody else's fare, followed by a volley of curses. Instead of shouting back he raced on with lowered head, thinking, "If I didn't have to buy a rickshaw I would never be so shameless!"[452]

Adverbial phrases such as "sometimes" (*youshi*) or "many times" (*you xuduo ci*) indicate habitual, repeated action. Genette writes that adverbs such as this function as "specification" for iterative narration, indicating the "rhythm of recurrence."[453] These frequent imperfective descriptions of Xiangzi's propensities blur together multiple experiences into one, precisely because in general Xiangzi's experience varies little from one day to the next. The narrative speeds through large expanses of time in his life without needing to slow down and devote attention to each individual day because Xiangzi himself is trying to speed through each day to meet his simple biological and fiscal needs. Many of these passages are narrated by means of

---

[449] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 14.
[450] Genette characterizes the iterative as a narrative "aspect" often represented by the usage of imperfectives (*Narrative Discourse*, 121).
[451] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 15.
[452] Ibid., 104.
[453] *Narrative Discourse*, 128.

free indirect discourse. The narrative rhythm thus enacts on a formal level Xiangzi's single-minded obsession and drive to just get by day to day, an affective state involving both mind and body. Xiangzi is not particularly interested in other pastimes or people; as we have seen, he is laconic and solitary, and the paucity of dialogue and singulative description mimics that. Formal poverty reflects the character's material poverty.

But the novel features, of course, a sizable number of singulative descriptions as well, events that mark important turning points in Xiangzi's trajectory. Yet singulative events serve as merely the basis for more iterative narration. At the beginning of his rickshaw pulling career, Xiangzi gets a lucky break. This singulative event is described in one short sentence: "He really did manage to get a monthly job,"[454] with a perfective verb (completed action indicated by *le*). But this is followed immediately by lengthy iterative descriptions of the conditions of monthly employment: "But reality does not completely accord with hopes, and though he gritted his teeth for a year and a half his wish was still unfulfilled. . . . Sometimes after two or three months, sometimes after only a week or ten days, he had to look around for a new job."[455] We are back in the realm of imperfective action. At the end of the novel, after he discovers that Xiao Fuzi has died, Xiangzi takes out a rickshaw again after sleeping for two days, "his mind and soul a blank."[456] But after this culminating singulative trauma of Xiangzi's life, the return of iterative narration signals Xiangzi's return to the old cycle of degraded habits: "Gradually, he sold everything, not only his clothes but also anything that was not immediately useful. . . . He no longer bathed, or washed his face or clothes…."[457] Singulative events merely mark the beginning of yet another long, repetitive expanse of drudgery.

Indeed, singulative descriptions even seem encroached upon by iterative narration: sometimes, we find iterative narration within descriptions of singulative events. When Xiangzi is taken prisoner by soldiers and his rickshaw taken away, narration of the singulative event describes what he is forced to do for the many days he is held captive: "When on the move, he had to carry, push or pull their equipment; when they halted, he had to fetch water, light the cooking fires and feed the pack animals."[458] Even when something that seems so traumatic as to (surely!) be unrepeatable befalls Xiangzi, his experience of it is one of repetitive, imperfective, iterative drudgery. After Huniu's death, Xiangzi again experiences a wrenching singulative jolt: "Xiangzi sold his rickshaw!"[459] Faced with unwieldy funeral expenses, Xiangzi loses his rickshaw again. Significantly, the original Chinese sentence contains no agent; the sentence grammatically avoids indicating what subject completed this action, underscoring Xiangzi's sense of impotence in the face of crushing external forces: "Xiangzi de che maile!" Here again is the *le* particle indicating completed action. But in this passage, descriptions of the singulative ordeal of preparing for the funeral contain iterative narration: "He watched woodenly as everyone bustled about, while all he did was fork out money."[460] Iterative narration creeps into singulative events, as if extraordinary traumas threaten to become iterative and ordinary themselves. In fact, they do.

We may even say that the novel as a whole is in the imperfective aspect, because the

---

[454] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 20.
[455] Ibid., 20.
[456] Ibid., 550.
[457] Ibid., 554.
[458] Ibid., 40.
[459] Ibid., 472.
[460] Ibid., 472.

narrative does not end with Xiangzi's death; we do not know when action will be completed: "Xiangzi, so decent, willing, fond of day-dreaming, selfserving, solitary, strong and admirable, had been an attendant at countless funerals, but has no idea when and where he will be buried himself, where his despairing ghost, product of a sick society, degenerate, selfish, unfortunate and individualistic will finally be laid to rest."[461] If we conceive of the entire narration as a verb,[462] an action, then we find at the end that it is incomplete, continuing action, as if Xiangzi's endless monotonous drudgery will never reach a merciful conclusion. Indeed, even the syntactic structure of this closing sentence contributes to this sense, with its seemingly endless stream of modifiers. Ming Yan asserts that the strategy of withdrawal is Xiangzi's means of coping with the shame and traumas of poverty; and one possible response "to hardship, adversity, and tragedy is to commit suicide, an act of terminal withdrawal."[463] This is Xiao Fuzi's fate, yet we must note that Xiangzi demonstrably has not opted for this solution at the end of the novel. Xiangzi lingers on, without putting an end to his torment. We might even say that he increasingly becomes only a body (a locus of affect), focused upon satisfying his animal needs of hunger, thirst, and lust, hiring himself out as nothing but a warm body to add to the numbers in protests and processions.

Moreover, as Xiangzi loses hope in planning for his long-term future, his own sense of temporality shrinks until he no longer thinks ahead (as he did at the beginning of the narrative, saving to buy a rickshaw in three years' time) but increasingly lives in the present moment. The motif of clothing returns when Xiangzi sells his winter garments upon the arrival of spring: "Who cares about the winter? He would worry about that when the time came, if he was unlucky enough to live that long. Before, whenever he stopped to think, his past life would come to mind; now he thought only of the present. Experience had taught him that tomorrow is just an extension of today, just a continuation of today's wrongs and injustices."[464] Xiangzi has internalized the lesson that singulative sufferings become iterative. Bodily sufficiency in the present moment is all that concerns him by the end of the novel.

Xiangzi feels that today extends into tomorrow. The imperfective nature of Xiangzi's narrative as a whole implies that Xiangzi's struggle against poverty, with its affective burdens and bodily indignities, could continue indefinitely into an eternal present. This inconclusive ongoing state may strike us as paradoxical considering that there seems, even at the beginning of the novel, a foregone conclusion about Xiangzi's luckless fate: we are told the beginning how the novel will end (badly). After all, at the end of the first chapter, the narrative divulges "But most hopes come to nothing, and Xiangzi's were no exception."[465] The naturalist mode of *Camel Xiangzi* necessitates, as Jameson finds in Zola, that the "mark of destiny" be "melodramatically intensified into an extravagant sense of impending doom (doing double-duty as the usual naturalist pessimism)."[466] Xiangzi himself seems to be physically marked by destiny from the very beginning, when in the first chapter the body parts and muscles relevant to his physical labor are described one by one: a *blason* for a beast of burden. Xiangzi even thinks of his own

---

[461] Ibid., 586.
[462] Here, again, after Genette (1980: 30): "Since any narrative, even one as extensive and complex as the *Recherche du temp perdu*, is a linguistic production undertaking to tell of one or several events, it is perhaps legitimate to treat it as the development—monstrous, if you will—given to a verbal form, in the grammatical sense of the term: the expansion of a verb."
[463] "Poverty and Shame in Chinese Literature," in *Poverty and Shame: Global Experiences*, ed. Elaine Chase and Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 68.
[464] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 550-2.
[465] Ibid., 26.
[466] *Antinomies*, 46.

body instrumentally: "to him, his face was another limb and its strength was all that mattered."[467] His entire person and identity are subordinated to his labor. It seems that Camel Xiangzi was marked or branded long ago for his destiny as a draft animal: "running from his cheekbone to his right ear was a large, bright, shiny scar—legacy of a donkey bite received while napping under a tree in his childhood."[468] We sense immediately that Xiangzi is destined to the unforgiving lot of a human beast of burden, with its monotonous and ultimately self-destructive drudgery. The camels that he finds in his lucky escape from the soldiers who kidnapped him, and that give him his nickname, metonymically signify Xiangzi's status. Xiangzi himself eventually discovers that his aspirations are destined for failure. One evening at a teahouse, he meets Xiao Ma'er and his grandfather, the old rickshaw puller who owns a rickshaw but is nevertheless at death's door due to starvation and cold. Xiangzi realizes that even attaining his cherished goal, saving up for a rickshaw, will provide no lasting security and will be of no avail in the face of inevitable depredations in a social system based upon war, inequality, and a capitalist structure whose sieve leaves little for those at the bottom of the hierarchy.

We know from the beginning that Xiangzi is doomed, a lesson he learns in his grim *bildung,* but we still experience through the narrative's "unswerving dramatic focus on the fact of struggle" a vivid sense of his bodily need and pain,[469] left unterminated at the novel's close. Moran illustrates a similar tension when he states that the reader's moral indignation at Xiangzi's inexorable, grinding plight "is canceled by reluctant nihilism."[470] Jameson's reading of *Camel Xiangzi* adumbrates, too, "the alternating rhythm of our expectations" as we "hope against hope" that his next endeavor will be the successful one, even while we know this to be impossible in the logic of the narrative's wheel-of-fortune periodicities.[471] The text admits openly to nihilism from the beginning, yet leads us repeatedly to hope for a happy ending,[472] just like Xiangzi. It is my contention that we can make sense of this paradox (a temporal one) in *Camel Xiangzi* with the help of Genette's narratological categorizations of the singulative and the iterative. On the one hand, the sequence of singulative disasters coalesces as Xiangzi's irrevocably downward naturalist trajectory. At the same time, the rhythm of the iterative interspersed with the singulative (which itself seems on the cusp of being subsumed into the iterative) in *Camel Xiangzi* generates an affective eternal present. Jameson's explication of the temporal antimonies in realist narrative offers a complementary way to reconcile these conflicting tendencies in the novel: the past-present-future temporality of the récit, which delivers an irrevocable state of affairs, is at odds perennially with an affective present open to "repetition or rectification, which now comes to be seen as the time of everyday life or of routine."[473] Throughout the story, Xiangzi's routine is that of the body in survival mode, governed by exigent rhythms of eating, sleeping, drinking, running. These are affects, whose temporality is an eternal present. The doomed trajectory of Xiangzi's life moves in a forward vector, but at every moment we experience with him the bodily present of his affective struggle. Herein lie the temporal antinomies of the novel's realism. Time moves forward, but time also feels constantly held in abeyance, conveying the poor man's sense that every day feels the same, that run as he might, he

[467] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 14.
[468] Ibid., 12-4.
[469] Hsia, *A History*, 186.
[470] "The Reluctant Nihilism," 456.
[471] "Literary Innovation," 71.
[472] As David Wang puts it, "Originally, one keeps one's fingers crossed," but eventually "One is left with a growing ironic curiosity that leads one to wait and see just how bad things can become" (*Fictional Realism,* 147-148).
[473] *Antinomies*, 19.

is getting nowhere. This latter pole of affect is what we find, too, at the end of the story, when his life is technically still moving forward in time but Xiangzi is reduced to a body living for sensory gratification in the eternal present, with no explicitly articulated end in sight. Since he has not died, perhaps his body will continue to bear these repetitive daily scourges of poverty, indefinitely.[474] There can be no catharsis at the end of this novel because Lao She is committed to portraying mimetically the unrelenting pain of poverty and squalor.

Third Time's the Charm: Lao She as Laboring Writer

With its inconclusiveness and its pessimism about individualism and collectivism alike,[475] the realism of *Camel Xiangzi* may well recall debates about the alleged intransitivity of realism, which had been an urgent worry of modern Chinese literature since Lu Xun's 1922 preface to *A Call to Arms*.[476] In the late 1920s and 30s, the matter was taken up in the debate on Revolutionary Literature, launched by the Creation and Sun Societies' attack on realist writers. The critical exchange, involving figures such as Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and Guo Moruo, questioned the political role of literature and the ability of literature (written by the bourgeois intellectual) to represent the proletariat, the social other.[477] From this debate Lao She remained largely absent.[478] His neutrality contributed to his election as leader of the All-China Resistance Association of Writers and Artists (*Zhonghua quanguo wenyi jie kangdi xiehui*) in 1938,[479] during which time he spearheaded the wartime effort to make literature more accessible to the masses. *Camel Xiangzi* was written shortly before these efforts began; and though Lao She absented himself from the fierce revolutionary literature debates, I propose to read this novel as Lao She's implied polemic in favor of realism's ability to provide access into the experience of the social other.

Lao She was by no means a proletarian laborer like Xiangzi, but throughout his life emphasized his firsthand experiences of deprivation.[480] In a 1935 essay, Lao She laments that

---

[474] Qiguang Zhao has remarked that the exact historical context for the novel is difficult to pinpoint to a specific year or period; see "Who is Ruan Ming? A Political Mystery in Lao She's *Camel Xiangzi*," *China Information* 12, no. 3 (Dec., 1997): 106. I think that the paradoxical temporal vagueness in a text that is otherwise so undergirded by attentiveness to temporality contributes to the sense that its events have an indeterminate location in historical time—they can take place at any point in time and perhaps continue to do so.

[475] Despite Hsia's assertion that "there is positive affirmation for the necessity of collective action" within the text (*A History*, 180), its naturalism undercuts this. The grandfather of Xiao Ma'er (the horse to Xiangzi's camel) figures the collective as a force of nature, a plague of locusts (Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi,* 542). As Gunn remarks of this image, Lao She seems to envision collective action in "the most negative terms" (*Rewriting Chinese*, 113). Moran likewise interprets the parable of locusts as an intimation that "mass revolution would be catastrophic" ("The Reluctant Nihilism," 453).

[476] Must fiction remain at a hopeless aesthetic remove, sealed off impotently and intransitively from the real world which it aims to represent? Would a realist text like *Camel Xiangzi* prove to be yet another instantiation of "aesthetic withdrawal" as opposed to the "activist engagement" (Anderson, *Limits*, 25) that Chinese writers of the 1920s and 30s sought to encourage? According to Moran, Anderson's estimation "that many Chinese novels of the 1930s contain an allegory by which authors explore fiction's inability to mirror or change reality applies to Lao She's novel" ("The Reluctant Nihilism," 454). I complicate this claim.

[477] Lydia Liu discusses this debate at greater length (1995: 192-3). For additional coverage of and texts from this debate see Anderson (1990: 52) and Rao et al, eds. (1985).

[478] See Stephen R. MacKinnon and Robert Capa, *Wuhan 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of a Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 71.

[479] See Charles A. Laughlin, "The All-China Resistance Association of Writers and Artists," in *Literary Societies of Republican China*, ed. Kirk A. Denton and Michel Hockx (Lanham: Lexington Books, 384).

[480] Ranbir Vohra, *Lao She and the Chinese Revolution* (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1974). Vohra makes a good point that as a child "Lao She first studied with a private tutor and then went

poverty diminishes his enjoyment of life in Qingdao.[481] Another essay written later that same year regrets that the sensation of being frantically busy and alienated from his labor makes him feel like a dog, a horse, or a donkey: "Human and beast are undifferentiated: this is the crime of being busy!"[482] In other essays, he draws a connection between literary production and poverty. At one point Lao She laments the plight of playwrights who are "starving" because of insufficient remuneration.[483] He cites his own case as proof: with his "heart's blood" (*xinxue*) he wrote plays that did not earn enough to pay his "living expenses" (*shenghuo feiyong*). A 1934 essay about his experience as a writer links his labor and his body: he can never grow fat, he insists, because of the energy required in his labor of writing. Writing drives him to smoke cigarettes, which blacken his lungs;[484] we must think of Xiangzi's pathetic search for cigarette butts on the ground. In 1940, Lao She complains in "How to maintain the livelihood of writers" that they are literally on the brink of starvation (*kuai e si*) because (as in his own case) royalties have dwindled during wartime.[485] One cannot write, he reasons, on an empty stomach. When cost of living rises, rickshaw pullers and sedan chair carriers (*chefu jiaofu*) raise their prices, and so too must writers.[486] He makes clear the points in common between the intellectual laborer and the physical laborer: elsewhere Lao She maintains that a writer as an artisan should aim to be like a carpenter, cobbler, or furrier, without feeling that these tradesmen are beneath him.[487]

These attitudes toward pecuniary lack are reflected in his account of temporality while writing *Camel Xiangzi*. As we have seen, the novel is crisscrossed with coercive temporal rhythms; and from the 1945 essay called "How I came to write the novel 'Camel Xiangzi,'" we can even witness how the coerciveness of these intradiegetic rhythms seem to exert an extradiegetic force on the writer such that Lao She begins to think of himself as a kind of literary cart-pusher, engaged in Sisyphean, financially desperate labor. Lao She recounts that the germ of the novel came from two allegedly true stories that he heard from a friend:

> The man had bought his own rickshaw but was forced to sell it. This occurred three times and he remained wretchedly poor. I said at the time: "One could write a story about that." My friend went on to say: "Another rickshaw man was once nabbed by some soldiers. Who would have thought that good luck could come out of such a calamity. While the soldiers were marching, he slipped off with three camels."
>
> I never bothered to ask the names of the two rickshaw men or where they came from. I only remembered what he'd said about them and the camels. That

---

to school and this can hardly be called a state of impoverishment," but it is undeniable that straitened circumstances after his father's death made a lasting impression on him.

[481] "Youqian zuihao," in *Lao She quanji* 15:263-4.

[482] Lao She, "Mang," in *Lao She quanji* 15:272. The translation is my own. This prefigures, of course, *Camel Xiangzi*'s characterization of the rickshaw puller as beast of burden.

[483] "Buyao esi ju zuojia," in *Lao She quanji* 14:337-8.

[484] Lao She, "Wode chuangzuo jingyan," in *Lao She quanji*, 17:70.

[485] "Zenyang weichi zuojiamen de shenghuo," in *Lao She quanji* 17:246.

[486] Ibid., 248.

[487] See Lao She, "Yishu yu mujiang," in *Lao She quanji* 15:379. Carles Prados-Fonts has discussed the relationship between Lao She's early novels and his experiences as an ethnic Manchu and as a Chinese national living in England and Singapore; see "The Anxiety of Fiction: Reexamining Lao She's Early Novels," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 26, no. 2 (Fall, 2014): 177-215. It may be that his alienated identity as an ethnic and linguistic other (a "double peripheral position" is inseparable from his literary interest in the social other; see Prados-Fonts, "Beneath Two Red Banners: Lao She as a Manchu Writer in Modern China," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader,* ed. Chien-hsin Tsai and Shu-mei Shih (New York: Columbia University Press), 355.

> provided the inspiration for the story *Camel Xiangzi*. Spring changed into summer, as I thought about expanding this simple story and turning it into a novel of roughly a hundred thousand words.[488]

A number of suggestive details emerge from this account, the most prominent of which is the recurrence of the number three: three camels, rickshaws thrice purchased and thrice sold. The ternary repetition of events makes its way into the novel's plot, as we have seen. As Peter Brooks propounds, the number three "is perhaps the minimum repetition to suggest series and process"[489]—and if a patterned series is constitutive of rhythm, then Lao She is being alerted to a kind of rhythm of misfortune and fortune that catalyzes his fiction-making instinct. Jameson, too, notes these alternations of success and failure in *Camel Xiangzi*, which he characterizes as the narrative rhythm "of the wheel of Fortune."[490] In Lao She's account of beginning to write the novel, an awareness of the "wheel-of-Fortune" rhythm transitions seamlessly into an awareness of time in his own extradiegetic context. As soon as Lao She sets out with the intention of writing, he conceives of his work within the seasonal rhythms that are also so powerful and ubiquitous in defining Xiangzi's work: spring turned to summer, Lao She recounts, and "[b]y early summer, I had finished it, twenty-four chapters to be exact. With the magazine publishing two chapters a month, it was just the right number for one year."[491]

Lao She's essay is persistently preoccupied with calculating the rate of his literary production, matching Xiangzi's obsessive need to calculate time, money, and distance covered in his work. Lao She feels hemmed in by the time constraints on his writing: "Because it was coming out in installments, I had to write exactly twenty-four chapters. In fact, I should have written two or three additional chapters to round off the story."[492] The temporal requirements of producing a chapter per installment in the rhythm of serialization causes him to view units of writing as units of labor output. Just as Xiangzi's productive potential as a rickshaw puller is curtailed by his inability to best the oppressive rhythms imprisoning his life, so too does Lao She feel that his productive potential has been curtailed by the temporal demands on his writing. Producing the novel *Camel Xiangzi* was his first attempt at supporting himself as a full-time writer, so he was keen "to produce two novels a year," and failing that, he would take up teaching again, or else give up writing in disappointment.[493]

The pragmatic urgency of Lao She's labor thus explains his preoccupation with the calculation of productivity, and why writing this novel was "a crucial period in [his] development as a writer."[494] Lao She's very livelihood depends on the rate of his work, so he describes his act of writing as a physical labor analogous to Xiangzi's: "Though I wrote more than one or two thousand words a day, when I put my pen down I did not stop but carried on working out the story in my head. Intensive thinking enables the pen to sweat blood and tears."[495] Again, it seems that Lao She cannot stop mentioning the concrete numbers in the calculations of

---

[488] Lao She, "How I Came to Write the Novel 'Camel Xiangzi,'" in *Camel Xiangzi*, trans. Shi Xiaojing (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 231.
[489] *Reading for the Plot* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9.
[490] Jameson characterizes the alternation of fortune and misfortune as "the form of the classical tale" ("Literary Innovation," 69). The stories that Lao She hears from his friend have the ring of folk or fairy tales, in which repetitions tend to occur in sets of three.
[491] "How I Came to Write," 234.
[492] Ibid., 235.
[493] Ibid., 232.
[494] Ibid.
[495] Ibid., 234.

his work rhythm: how many words per day, how many chapters per month. The pain and suffering of his (metonymic) pen, corporealized and anthropomorphized, finds its analog in the protagonist it produces. This is a far cry from the "aesthetic withdrawal" that Anderson cites as a fundamental limit of realism's capacity for social activism. Of course, the writer's blood and tears are, one would imagine, largely figurative and cannot possibly equal the physical labor's bodily pain. But Lao She's account implies that by means of language, he attempts to gain access to and identify with the temporal conditions of striving to make ends meet. As we have seen, the Marxian calculation of labor is based not upon the particular form of labor that goes into a commodity, but rather upon the quantity of labor expressed as labor-time. Lao She's essay suggests that whether the laborer pulls a rickshaw or writes a novel, the fact that these forms of labor can both be expressed in terms of labor-time makes draws a conceptual equivalence between them, even though their respective qualitative experiences of suffering are incommensurate.

Lao She seems to wish to identify with his protagonist. The pen and its wielder are relentless, mutely battling on at great personal cost, "my pen never straying from the subject or branching off at a tangent. There was no padding."[496] The pen travels as though in a straight trajectory, spatially mirroring the physical path of the rickshaw puller, never straying or branching off from his path. Lao She's single-mindedness of purpose translates (or rather, transcribes) into Xiangzi's unswerving obsession, giving himself no quarter in the desperation to complete his work, for as Lao She acknowledges in this essay, the rickshaw puller's "life must be one endless torment, not only regarding his meager diet but also regarding a gust of wind or a sudden shower of rain, grating on his nerves."[497] If Lao She is marking his writing progress by the changing seasons within the year, so too is his protagonist buffeted by the fluctuating intradiegetic seasons and their concomitant natural elements. The author strives to match his protagonist's asceticism: "I resolved, right from the beginning, to renounce witticisms and concentrate on writing seriously."[498] The comic style that had previously marked Lao She's work—as in *Lao Zhang de zhexue* (*The Philosophy of Old Zhang*), *Zhao Ziyue,* and *Mao Cheng ji* (*Cat Country*)[499]—appears to be no longer appropriate for this task, for the writer seems to experience the conditions of work that he writes into the novel, eschewing all fun and games in order to immerse himself in labor, just like his protagonist. His style then becomes commensurately spartan. According to his own account, then, the rhythms implied in his friend's story become so compelling that the writer himself operates under the hegemonic rhythmic constraints that give rise to affective conditions of arduous, dogged suffering: "It forced me to peer into hell itself."[500] After all, as Liu has shown, to write about the rickshaw puller Lao She insisted upon studying and interpreting their psychology, "the inner mode of" their lives.[501] In the

[496] Ibid., 234.
[497] Ibid., 233.
[498] Ibid., 234-5.
[499] As scholars such as Prados-Fonts (2014) and Brian Bernards have illustrated, Lao She's earlier works contain serious political or ideological ruminations in their own right, particularly with regards to ethnicity, colonialism, and diaspora; see Prados-Fonts "The Anxiety of Fiction," and Bernards, "From Diasporic Nationalism to Transcolonial Consciousness: Lao She's Singaporean Satire, Little Po's Birthday," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 26, no. 1 (Spring, 2014): 1-40. We cannot read *Camel Xiangzi* as simply a "culmination" (Bernards, "From Diasporic Nationalism," 2) of earlier literary experiments, but it is worth noting Lao She's own perception of differences in style among the different texts.
[500] Ibid., 234.
[501] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 118.

early 1930s, Lao She declares that the writer should first and foremost attend to the depictions of characters' affects in order to evoke sympathy in the reader (*duzhe tongqing*).[502] The characters, the readers, and the writer find their emotions enmeshed as a result of a skillfully wielded pen. Lao She further avows that the author always reveals himself in the character: "The characters in the text are the writer's creation; he has given them all that they are, so this cannot but express the writer himself."[503] The identities of writer and character are inextricable.[504]

Whether Lao She did truly manage to place himself in the shoes of the proletariat remains a moot point. My point is that Lao She portrays his realist experiment as an attempt to gain and give access into the temporal conditions of labor. Xiangzi's instrument of labor is his rickshaw and his body; Lao She's is his pen and his hand. What Xiangzi lacks, the facility of language, is what Lao She his creator wishes to provide. Throughout the novel Xiangzi is held back in crucial ways by his inability to communicate orally with comrades, or by his ignorance and distrust of the written word.[505] When encouraged to place his savings into a bank, he demurs because the prospect of trading in cold, hard cash for nothing but a slip of paper strikes him as foolhardy and ridiculous: "Bright, shiny coins went over the counter, and were replaced by some scrawls on a piece of paper. He wasn't going to fall for a trick like that!"[506] The illiterate Xiangzi, as we have seen, feels and knows by means of his physical body. Coins he can hold in his hand to feel their weight, see their brightness, and hear their jingle. Sometimes he takes out his savings to caress them lovingly in the solitude of his private chamber.[507] Xiangzi distrusts the bank slip because they take away the physical, affective ownership of the coins, replacing it with language whose signification eludes him. And as we know, Xiangzi is very soon robbed of his coins by the corrupt policeman precisely because he has not taken the opportunity to place the money in a bank. Disenfranchised and dispossessed because of his reliance upon bodily affect and his ignorance of language, Xiangzi's wrongs can be in no way righted, but metatextually he can be championed: Lao She renders into language the affectively laden narrative of Xiangzi's sufferings.

Poverty and Vernacular Modernism

Camel Xiangzi's realism entails narrative attentiveness to rhythms of temporality in Xiangzi's experience of poverty, accompanied by formal rhythms that reinforce the relentless depiction of repeated bodily suffering under conditions of material want. These mimetic narrative temporalities moreover seem to facilitate an identification between the laboring writer and the laborer he depicts. Whether or not we believe his attempt to be fully successful, in the novel Lao She embraces the temporal affordances of realism to try to bridge the gap between the intellectual and the rickshaw puller, to portray the socially downtrodden without smothering the voice of the subaltern.

---

[502] "Di si jiang: Wenxue de tezhi," in *Lao She quanji* 16:44.
[503] "Di qi jiang: Wenxue de fengge," in *Lao She quanji* 16:66.
[504] The translation of this essay and the ones cited below is mine. Of course, Lao She's identity and ideologies fluctuated throughout his long life. During the socialist era he wrote apologetically about elements of *Camel Xiangzi* that were less palatable in the Maoist climate. See, for instance, his postface to the novel's 1955 reprinting, "*Luotuo xiangzi* houji," in *Lao She quanji* 17:668. But in the 1930s and 40s, at least, we can perceive a consistent thread in his writings about writing, labor, and poverty.
[505] Significantly, the scion of the family representing the educated scholarly class—Mr. Cao's son Xiao Wen—is named precisely for this attainment of *wen*, language, and learning.
[506] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 182.
[507] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 180.

The bodily experiences of poverty represented in *Camel Xiangzi* arise from circumstances of urbanization and changes in labor practices due to the migration of workers from rural areas to the city (a movement in which Xiangzi himself has participated). Like other cosmopolitan centers in China, Beiping was undergoing these effects of industrialization, foreign contact, and modernization in the first decades of the twentieth century. Zhen Zhang has examined the new sensorium produced in "the stressful and alienating conditions of modern life," exploring cinema "as a modern global vernacular" that helped urbanites to grapple with "the dehumanizing effects of industrial capitalism and colonialism."[508] With particular attention to gender relations, Zhang (2005: 5) writes that the cinematic sensorium "helped absorb, deflect, and overcome the shocks and stress of modern life…." But what about the city dweller who could not afford to attend the cinema, who is so preoccupied with stashing away his hard-earned coins that "the theaters, amusement halls, teahouses, parks, cafes, dance halls" and other loci of vernacular modernism hold no attraction for him?[509] Xiangzi is such a man.[510]

At one point when Xiangzi is working for Mr. Cao, he waits in a freezing teahouse while his employer watches a film.[511] In this teahouse he first meets Xiaoma'er's grandfather, who nearly faints from hunger. This interaction so troubles Xiangzi that he prefers to wait outside in the cold, "standing outside the cinema."[512] If the impoverished laborer is shut out from the locus of vernacular modernism provided by the cinema, then it is Lao She's realist representation of the rickshaw puller's bodily suffering which expresses the affective experience of poverty on behalf of Xiangzi. As Zhang has illustrated, the experience of modernity was very much an experience of the body: dazzling electric lights of a nascent film industry, fast moving vehicles, the noise of a modern metropolis. But for many the bodily experience of modernity was unremittingly one of poverty and squalor. Realist fiction strives to evoke the poverty that both plagued and defined the Chinese experience of modernity.

In a 1931 essay about literary description, Lao She observes that realist fiction can present ugly, socially debased subjects in a beautiful fashion. In a work by Chekhov, for example, "the factory is indeed an ugly thing, but the way he writes it is so ugly yet beautiful!"[513] The realist writer, then, can take a hideous story of poverty and render it textually compelling. To this end Lao She urges a particular attentiveness to the narrative representation of time: "Temporality is perhaps even more important than the setting and content, because even if narrative sometimes does not mention a setting, it always has temporality."[514] The writer may attend to time on the scale of days, years, or decades, he says; the choice of temporal focus can depend upon the social class of the represented characters and their setting (whether city or country). The writer may skip around in time as well: there would be no need to trace something day by day (*yitian yitian de*) if jumping over a period of time would better suit the exposition of

---

[508] *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1.
[509] Ibid., 4.
[510] Strand documents that "Rickshaw men frequented the opera and other kinds of theatrical performances, drinking establishments, brothels, and teahouses" so it is certainly not the case that the type of vernacular modernism that Zhang describes is off limits to them (*Rickshaw Beijing*, 57). But as Strand observes, Xiangzi "hovers on the edges of these small communities, anxious that he not squander his savings" (Ibid., 58). I mean to point out that for a poor laborer with limited interest in these entertainment venues, a different instantiation of vernacular modernism may be more salient in articulating the sensorium of poverty and suffering.
[511] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 228.
[512] Ibid., 244.
[513] Lao She, "Xiaoshuo Ii de jingwu," in *Lao She quanji* 17:29.
[514] Ibid., 32.

the narrative.[515] Five years later, he seems to have followed these principles in writing *Camel Xiangzi*. Strand notes, "The physical proximity of the intellectual in the city and the puller on the streets, and the symbolism suggested by the image of a long-gowned or Western-clad rider perched behind and above a working-class puller, encouraged the use of the rickshaw as a marker for the class and cultural fault-lines running through Chinese society."[516] In the streets of Beiping the bodies of the rickshaw puller and the intellectual are in physical proximity when the latter hires the services of the former, but the fault-lines remain. In Lao She's novel, however, the bodies of rickshaw puller and intellectual exist in a different kind of textual proximity, for Lao She and Xiangzi both submit their differing forms of labor to the same rationalization of value, with temporal calculation as its basis.

[515] Ibid.
[516] *Rickshaw Beijing*, 36-7.

Chapter 5
Spatial Metonymy: Poverty in City and Country

"All I have to live in, sir, is a tumble-down, one-roomed hut, damp, cold and swarming with bedbugs. They gorge on me when I lie down to sleep. The place is stinking and hasn't a single window…."
—Lu Xun, "The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave"[517]

"The crisis of poverty, which was so marked in towns and villages alike…was a result of this social and economic process as a whole….The essential connections between town and country, which had been evident throughout, reached a new, more explicit and finally critical stage….whatever happened to the market, anywhere, whether in industrial or agricultural production, worked its way through town and country alike, as parts of a single crisis."
—Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*[518]

In *Camel Xiangzi*, the narrative's attentiveness to the passage of time, moment by moment, day by day, season by season, is accompanied by an equally detailed attentiveness to the layout of space. The narrative conscientiously provides minute descriptions of Xiangzi's decrepit dwelling places—this is the logical extension of the metonymic interest in his clothing and personal possessions, as we have seen. Here is the impoverished tenement in which he lives with his wife Huniu:

> There were seven or eight families living in their tenement courtyard, most of them crowded seven to eight, old and young, into one room. Among them were rickshaw pullers, peddlers, policemen, and servants. Each went about his or her job with never a moment to spare. Even the children went off with small baskets to fetch rice gruel in the morning and to scrounge for cinders in the afternoon. Only the very youngest remained in the courtyard, tussling and playing, their little bottoms frozen bright red in their split pants. Ashes, dust and slops were all tipped into the yard, which no one bothered to sweep. The middle of it was a sheet of ice which the older children used as a skating-rink when they came back from scrounging cinders, shouting loudly as they slipped and slid about. The worst off were the old folk and women. Hungry and threadbare, the old people lay on icy cold brick-beds, waiting anxiously for the pittance the able-bodied ones earned to buy them a bowl of gruel.[519]

The sense that poor families have no time to spare—since anyone with any wage-earning ability is too busy morning to night to bother with cleaning the filthy courtyard—is concomitant with the sense that they have no space to spare. Every nook and cranny of the compound is crammed with human bodies or nonhuman debris, to the extent that the former becomes difficult to distinguish from the latter in their jumbled metonymic squalor. Each part of the tenement does double duty as both refuse heap and recreational area (the ice-rink in the yard), or as sleeping

[517] In *Wild Grass*, 110.
[518] *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 98.
[519] Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi*, 374-6.

area by night and waiting area by day (the bed). Lack of space is correlated with lack of time: this is the chronotope that arises from lack of monetary resources.[520]

The narrator goes on to explain why women, like the old and infirm, are trapped here:

> The small room was icy cold, for the freezing wind which whistled through the cracks in the walls carried off what little warmth there might have been. Dressed in rags, with a bowl or half of gruel in their bellies, maybe six or seven months pregnant, they must first let old and young eat their fill though they too had to toil. Riddled with disease, they were bald by thirty yet could never rest; and when illness carried them off their families had to get "philanthropists" for a coffin. The girls of sixteen and seventeen had no trousers and, wrapped in rags, stayed in the room—their natural prison—helping their mothers out. To go to the latrine, they first made sure the yard was empty before slipping out. The whole winter they never saw the sun or the blue sky.[521]

The state of poverty, lacking adequate resources for survival, means an entrapment in space. The porousness of the walls matches the porousness of these women's bodies, which function as vehicles through which other beings are constantly passing, in childbirth and otherwise (we learn later that some women sell sexual services in these rooms). Because they do not have enough clothing to go around, the most vulnerable members of the family are imprisoned until they reach an age when their bodies must make space for new members of the family (pregnancy); and finally when their bodily space-making capacities are exhausted, their corpses are evacuated from the dwelling in a space they can finally call their own (the coffin). Realist description of these living quarters captures the physical exigencies of survival (the cold that encroaches upon the warmth of enclosed space, the predatory men whose salacious gaze must be avoided, the filth and garbage that rubs off on, taints, and sickens human bodies) under conditions of material poverty. Because they are poor, therefore they must squeeze into this tight, unsanitary space; and because of the close, airless, sunless space, therefore the poor are portrayed as squalidly wretched.

The concussive interactions between bodies and their immediate surroundings, and particularly between impoverished bodies and their squalid living spaces, is a ubiquitous topos in modern Chinese realism.[522] We might think of the cluttered, noisy household in Lu Xun's "A Happy Family"; or of "Tomorrow," in which Shan Sisao's poverty—and later her bereavement—are reflected in the dinginess and meagerness of her room; there is moreover the cramped, suffocating, and dimly lit cottage of "Tremors of Degradation," and the sunless, rancid hut of "The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave." Xiao Hong's impoverished characters waste away in their cramped, makeshift dwellings; her autobiographical *Market Street* details each room that she inhabits, trapped in bed with illness and weak from hunger and cold. Ye Shengtao's narrator in "Xiaoxing" ("Morning Walk" 1921) peeks invasively into a peasant's poor hut; "Fan" ("Rice" 1921) gives a glimpse of the rural schoolteacher's dark, rundown chamber; in "Pan xiansheng zai nanzhong" ("Mr. Pan in Distress" 1923), Ye sketches the small

---

[520] Bakhtin defines the chronotope as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature"; see "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press:, 1981), 84.

[521] Ibid., 376.

[522] It was not an uncommon setting for films (particularly left-wing cinema) of the same period, too: *Shizi jietou* (*Street Angel* 1937) and *Malu tianshi* (*Street Angel* 1937), to name a few. Laikwan Pang has suggested that the relative poverty of filmmakers, living in cramped quarters, caused their films to display "a unique sensitivity to the spatial relationships among characters" (*Building a New China*, 174).

hotel room, reeking of urine and fried food; and "Gudu" ("Alone" 1923) illustrates the old man's filthy, dimly lit bedchamber. Wu Zuxiang's family of starving villagers in "Tianxia taiping" ("All Peaceful under Heaven" 1934) is crammed together with their own excrement in one room, until in desperation they break down the very walls of their house to sell for money; in his "Mouri" ("A Certain Day" 1936), the hovel is clouded with smoke and crammed with farm implements, its walls water-stained and soot-blackened. The first chapter of Ba Jin's first novel, *Miewang* (*Destruction* 1927-8), provides a description of the young student-turned-revolutionary's abode, with its shabby furnishings piled high with old books.[523] The impoverished intellectual's bedchamber becomes something of a favorite topos in narratives describing pecuniary deficiency, as we shall see.

In this chapter, I anatomize the narrative breakdown and pile-up of poor characters' living spaces,[524] and the cluttered possessions within them, as a continuation or spatial proliferation of the versatile metonymic logic that we have already seen at work in modern Chinese realism. These elements of spatial metonymy enable the narratives to gesture outward toward problems of social class (and the unbridgeable space between classes) as well as the larger-scale problem of the nation's material and textual poverty—overarching concerns of modern Chinese realism, as I have explored.[525] I begin with a case study of fiction by Yu Dafu (1896-1945), a founding member of the Creation Society, known for fiction of an autobiographical bent expressing the male intellectual's crises of sexuality and national shame.[526] Yu Dafu's cohort was often critiqued for their promotion of "art for art's sake,"[527] whereas Ye Shengtao (1894-1988, born Ye Shaojun), whose work I go on to discuss, was a founding member of the "Literary Association" (*Wenxue yanjiu hui*), associated with realism or "art for life's sake."[528] Though affiliated with opposing camps, the two writers both deploy narration of space, on micro- and macro-scales, in a realist mode. By examining narratives of spatial stasis as well as migration, I show how the realist interest in intimate personal spaces informs Chinese realism's imagination of the vast geographic expanses of the nation.[529] So I am scaling down and then up: on one level, I invoke the room as a central unit in my poetics of space, which includes also the corridor, the garret, the tenement house; and on the other level, mobility or travel

---

[523] In *Ba Jin quanji* 4:13-4. See Ng, "Ba Jin and Russian Literature," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 3, no. 1 (1981), 67-92, for an account of Russian influences on this most "Russian-flavored" of Ba Jin's works.

[524] Though the chapter is about the narrative depiction of space as opposed to time, I am really talking about "place" rather than "space" in Yi-fu Tuan's sense in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), because these microcosmic impoverished environments are always defining and being defined by the humans trapped in or traversing them—though not necessarily providing the "security and stability" that Tuan ascribes to "place" (Ibid., 6). However, when I zoom out to talk about the macrocosmic space of the nation as a whole, this may in some ways correspond to Tuan's "space."

[525] What takes place indoors is metonymic of what takes place outdoors.

[526] See Denton, "Romantic Sentiment and the Problem of the Subject: Yu Dafu," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, for an overview.

[527] See Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 56.

[528] See Michel Hockx, *Literary Societies*, 79-82.

[529] As such I am sensitive to what Robert T. Tally terms topophrenia, "that condition of narrative…in which the persistence of place and of the subject's relation to it must be constantly taken into account"; see *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 22-3. Tally gives an account of the recent "spatial turn" in the humanities (Ibid., 36). See also Josephine McDonagh's interest in the "sense of place" evoked in English realism, as well as the role of mobility that "is both the concealed provocation to and secret subject of" the realist fiction she considers; see "Space, Mobility, and the Novel," in *Adventures in Realism*, 66.

becomes a cartographic trope enabling a survey of both individual and national poverty.[530] On this larger scale, narrative gives shape to the nation as a modern economic unit, and gestures at how that nation is incorporated into a global economic system. Many of the major late-Qing novels tended to feature characters of the scholar-official class traveling about the tottering empire (or beyond it) and witnessing its corruption and collapse: I am thinking, for instance, of Liu E's 1903-4 *Laocan youji* (*The Travels of Lao Can*), as well as Wu Jianren's 1903 *Ershi nian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang* (*Strange Events Witnessed over Twenty Years*), 1905-6 *Xin shitou ji* (*New Story of the Stone*), and 1905 *Hen hai* (*Sea of Regret*); Jin Tianhe and Zeng Pu's 1903 *Nie hai hua* (*Flowers in a Sinful Sea*) focuses on the adventures of the courtesan Fu Caiyun, who travels with her husband, a government official. But starting in the May Fourth period realist fiction instead often follows impoverished characters (whether penniless students, peasants, workers, or vagrants) as they move from one geographic space to another, tracing the overarching societal architecture of inequality and oppression that renders poverty ubiquitous.

Messy Rooms and How to Escape Them

Interest in the physical spaces where characters dwell is as old as realism itself in nineteenth century European literary traditions. Honoré de Balzac's *Père Goriot* (1835) opens with a lengthy and painstaking description of the rooms in Madame Vauquer's shabby boardinghouse, with their ugly furnishings and appointments:

> An odor rises from this *salon* for which, alas, the language has no word, so we must call it "the *pension* smell." It is a stale, musty, mouldy scent, rancid, and it makes you freezing cold, it makes your nose water, it bores into your clothes; it has the flavor of a room where people have eaten; it stinks of kitchens and servants and the poorhouse. You might be able to describe it, if someone had invented a technique for analyzing all the tiny, nauseating particles that each and every one of the lodgers, old and young alike, dumped into the air with their nasal effluvia, and all their other highly personalized bodily exhalations….In short: poverty rules, and there's no poetry to alleviate it—and it's a poverty that's tight-fisted, intense, grating (*une misère économe, concentrée, râpée*). If it hasn't reached a state of utter filthiness, it's certainly showing the signs; if it's still not afflicted with holes and rags, it's clearly starting to rot.[531]

The salon, heinous as it is, fairly sparkles in comparison with the dining room, the narrator tells us. This passage is insistently metatextual, dwelling first on the textual labor of inventing a term commensurate with the disturbing odor in the room, and then elaborating that such a stench could only be articulated if narrative description were tediously minute, microscopic, and patient enough to document every atomized detail of human bodies, the ways they pollute their surroundings, and vice-versa. In short, the narrator here implies that only realist writing can strive asymptotically toward this painstakingly fine-grained descriptive practice. This passage is as much a self-reflexive commentary (about the way its textual acrobatics give rise to, and are

---

[530] Here I take inspiration from the work of, among others, Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994), Roger Luckhurst, *Corridors: Passages of Modernity* (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd, 2019), Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), as well as Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), and *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005).

[531] Balzac, *Père Goriot: A New Translation: Responses, Contemporaries and Other Novelists, Twentieth-Century Criticism*, trans. Burton Raffel (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 9.

enabled by, the techniques of realism) as it is a realist description of the intradiegetic setting. Just as these rooms have a symbiotic relationship with their inhabitants, so too do the descriptions of these rooms have a symbiotic relationship with realism itself.

Madame Vauquer's physical appearance, the narrator continues, "matches this room where misery fairly oozes (*suinte*) out of the walls"[532]: there is a conflation, here, of the physical and the psychological, and of the dwelling with those who dwell within it. Their state of mental or moral squalor becomes a kind of condensation upon the walls, manifesting itself as tangible markers of poverty. Auerbach has written about this passage: for Balzac, "every milieu becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas, activities, and fates of men, and at the same time the general historical situation reappears as a total atmosphere which envelops all its several milieu."[533] In the representation of reality, the metaphysical and physical are imbricated, the characters and their immediate spatial surroundings are interpenetrating. And as I will explore further, these immediate metonymically adjacent surroundings are inseparable from broader social or historical circumstances farther afield.

Balzac's fiction arises in the midst of a print culture in Paris and other Western European cities flooded, in the early nineteenth century, with a plethora of writing about the urban topography, its places and institutions, its denizens and histories.[534] The *physiologies*,[535] sketches about urban types, were very generative for writers such as Balzac and Charles Dickens (1812-70), who themselves wrote physiologies and sketches, and whose novels were then informed by the characteristics of this genre: witness, for instance, Dickens's grim relish in evoking the squalor and rankness of a dilapidated dwelling, orphanage, workhouse, or urban slum.[536] Sharon Marcus has explained the shared characteristics between realist novels and *physiologies* in their approach to urban space: "emphasizing the need to contain the city's multiplicity within a unifying narrative or narratorial viewpoint; mapping the city in terms of social types and topographies; assuming the transparency of urban signs; and representing the mobility made possible by the variety of exchanges that could take place in urban space."[537] The physically mobile figure of the *flâneur* emblematized the sense of curiosity about reading urban surfaces and spaces.[538] The 1841 *Physiologie du flâneur* (*Physiological of the flâneur*) shows that the

---

[532] Ibid., 10.

[533] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 473.

[534] See, for instance, Alexander M. Martin, *Enlightened Metropolis: Constructing Imperial Moscow, 1762-1855* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 262-3; and Priscilla P. Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 58-9. Ferguson insists upon metonymy and synecdoche as dominant figures in literature about the city (Ibid., 68): I will have more to say about metonymy in the narration of spatiality.

[535] See Anne O'Neil-Henry, *Mastering the Marketplace: Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 26-9, for an account of *physiologies* as a type of "panoramic literature," a term coined by Walter Benjamin (Ibid., 25). See also Richard Sieburth, "Same Difference: The French Physiologies, 1840-1842," in *Notebooks in Cultural Analysis: An Annual Review*, ed. Norman F. Cantor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984), 163-99; and Martina Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century: European Journalism and its Physiologies, 1830-50* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[536] Dickens's close friend and biographer John Forster called this an "attraction of repulsion"; see *The Life of Charles Dickens*, vol. 1 (London: Dutton, 1969), 39. Victorian social reform in the 1830s and 40s focused upon the homes of the poor, a preoccupation that also marked the realist novel: "realism is defined through housing of the poor"; see Barbara Leckie, *Open Houses: Poverty, the Novel, and the Architectural Idea in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 17.

[537] *Apartment Stories*, 51.

[538] See Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century*, 8-9.

flaneur's wanderings and observations throughout the city are inherently generative of narrative, a notion that Balzac took up; but by the time of Flaubert's 1869 *L'Éducation sentimentale* (*Sentimental Education*) the *flâneur* had become a figure of failure.[539] It was based upon Baudelaire and Poe's *flâneurs* (in, for instance, the latter's 1840 story "Man of the Crowd") that Walter Benjamin would later famously describe the *flâneur's* self-abandonment to the phantasmagoric marketplace.[540]

The ethnographic and scientific nature of these physiologies made a splash in the Russian literary arena, in which the 1845 publication of Nicolai Nekrasov's *Physiology of Petersburg* was meant to help Russia join "with European confreres to move fictional realism (and all it meant) to new and greater heights."[541] Part of the project to develop a specifically Russian literature, and to place Russian literature on an equal footing with literatures from England, France, and Germany, these physiological sketches of the Natural School included depictions of the seamier elements of urban life, including the filthy cellar room of a Petersburg yardkeeper, the dank apartment of the Petersburg organ-grinder and the streets he wanders for his trade, and the vermin-infested courtyards and subterranean tenements where the poor must live.[542] These sketches inherited the figure of the *flâneur* in its pre-1848 iteration, describing the sites of the city "with a blend of objectivity and pathos,"[543] but with a difference: no longer bourgeois and gossipy, this Russian *flâneur* is instead a working man, struggling to make ends meet as a writer or feuilletonist.[544] The meandering *flâneur* had wandered into a new cultural and literary context, lending a greater seriousness to the Russian physiologies, committed as they are to ethnographic inquiry into the poverty of the city, in comparison to their pleasure-oriented French predecessors.

---

[539] See O'Neil-Henry, *Mastering the Marketplace*, 88-95.

[540] See, for example, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999), 14. See Lauster, "Walter Benjamin's Myth of the 'Flâneur,'" *The Modern Language Review* 102, no. 1 (2007): 139-156, for a discussion of how Benjamin's representation of the *flâneur* as icon of modernity obfuscates the differing representations in the earlier *physiologies*.

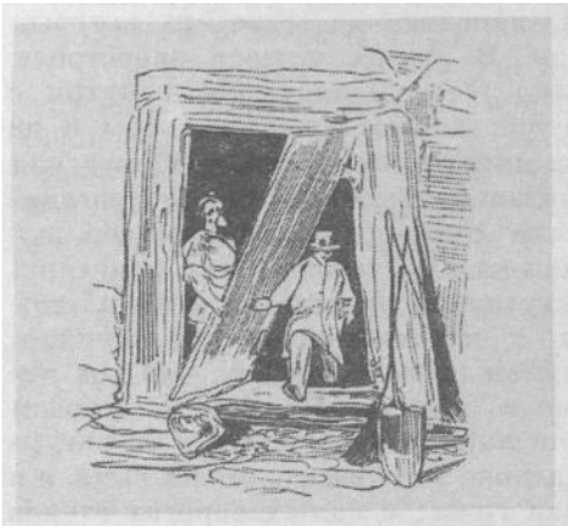
[541] Thomas Gaiton Marullo, "Editor's Introduction," in *Petersburg: The Physiology of a City,* ed. Nikolai Nekrasov and Thomas Gaiton Marullo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), xlvi. See also Brunson, *Russian Realism,* 30-1; and A. G. Tseitlin, *Stanovlenie realizma v russkoi literature; russkie fiziologicheskie ocherki* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 186-269.

[542] See works by Vladimir Dal', Dmitrii Grigorovich, and Nekrasov in *Petersburg: The Physiology of a City*.

[543] Brunson, *Russian Realisms*, 40. The itinerant narrator of Nekrasov's "Petersburg Corners" is named Trostnikov, and since *trost'* means "walking stick," his name metonymically hints at his *flâneur*-like characteristics.

[544] Ibid.

Y. Kovrigin, Illustration for Dmitrii Grigorovich's "Peterburgskie sharmanschiki" ("Petersburg Organ-grinders"), 1845, in *Fiziologiia Peterburga*, 57.



R. Zhukovsky, Illustration for Nikolai Nekrasov's "Peterburgskie ugly" ("Petersburg Corners"), 1845, in *Fiziologiia Peterburga*, 94.

Considered foundational for the development of Russian realism,[545] these sketches introduced the topos of the poor person's living space,[546] one that would reappear in the fiction of, for instance, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Gorky.[547] Dostoevsky's shows his characters walking through the streets of the city and sleeping in dilapidated attic chambers.[548] Witness the squalor of the Marmeladovs' residence in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (*Crime and Punishment* 1866):

> At the head of the stairs, at the very top, a small, soot-blackened door stood open. A candle-end lighted the poorest (*bedneishuyu*) of rooms, about ten paces long; the whole of it could be seen from the entryway. Everything was scattered about and in disorder, all sorts of children's rags especially. A torn sheet hung across the back corner. Behind it was probably a bed. The only contents of the room itself were two chairs and an oilcloth sofa, very ragged, before which stood an old pine kitchen table, unpainted and uncovered. At the edge of the table stood an iron candlestick with the butt of a tallow candle burning down in it. It appeared that this room of Marmeladov's was a separate one, not just a corner, though other tenants had to pass through it (*komnata ego byla prixodnaia*). The door to the further rooms, or hutches, into which Amalia Lippewechsel's apartment had been divided, was ajar. Behind it there was noise and shouting. Guffawing. Card-playing and tea-drinking seemed to be going on. Occasionally the most unceremonious words would fly out.[549]

The room is almost not a room, but a liminal space, through which other tenants must pass, and through which noise and indecency are regularly transmitted. Those who live within therefore lose the dignity of privacy and are perched on the edge of a materially and morally precarious existence (Marmeladov's daughter Sonia has indeed fallen into the profession of prostitution). The items within the room are similarly provisional, makeshift, and on the cusp of decay or dilapidation: a sheet serves as a partition, the sofa is losing its shape, the table has not been finished as a table. The nature of the space is reflected upon its inhabitants, human and nonhuman, and indeed upon the texture of the narrative, for the syntax—as in the abrupt single-word sentence "Guffawing" (*khokhotali*)—reflects the disjointed, jarring spatial and aural landscape of the room.

Raskolnikov's room is not too much better:

> It was a tiny closet (*kletushka*), about six paces long, of a most pathetic appearance, with yellow, dusty wallpaper coming off the walls everywhere, and with such a low ceiling that a man of any height at all felt creepy (*zhutko*) in it and kept thinking he might bump his head every moment. The furniture was in keeping with the place (*Mebel' sootvetstvovala pomescheniiu*). There were three

---

[545] See Tseitlin, *Stanovlenie realizma*, 90, and Marullo, "Editor's Introduction," lxxxviii.

[546] See G. Z. Kaganov, *Images of Space: St. Petersburg in the Visual and Verbal Arts*, trans. Sidney Monas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), for an account of how these physiological sketches' discovery of the "dark, crowded, and ill-smelling womb of the city" of Petersburg entailed "a very substantial shift in the spatial imagination," in which vision and audition were no longer reliable sensory organs for apprehending spatial surroundings, ceding ground to touch and olfaction (Ibid., 103-4).

[547] As Brunson puts it, "In this continual movement into the spaces of the sketch's subjects, the Natural School's writer-narrators transform Petersburg's overlooked "cellars and garrets" into subjects worthy of artistic representation" (*Russian Realism*, 41).

[548] See, for instance, Fanger, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 166, 168.

[549] Trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 24-5.

> old chairs, not quite in good repair; a painted table in the corner, on which lay several books and notebooks (from the mere fact that they were so covered with dust, one could see that no hand had touched them for a long time); and finally a big, clumsy sofa, which occupied almost the entire wall and half the width of the room, and had once been upholstered in chintz but was now all ragged and served as Raskolnikov's bed. He often slept on it just as he was, without undressing, without a sheet, covering himself with his old, decrepit student's coat, and with one small pillow under his head, beneath which he put whatever linen he had, clean or soiled, to bolster it. In front of the sofa stood a small table.[550]

His belongings metonymically tell the story of his social, economic, and psychological conditions. The space, the furniture, and the physical or mental state of the inhabitant all impinge upon one another: the low ceiling bends the body of the man and is constantly on his mind. The furniture (makeshift and on the last legs of functionality, as in the Marmeladovs' household) and the personal possessions arrayed upon it hint at the lifestyle of their owner. His pillow is cobbled together, as are his bedclothes, indicating that his attitude toward sleep, rest, and quietude is impatient and compromised: he is psychologically on the brink of some kind of destabilization.

These qualities of spatial description make their way into Yu Dafu's fiction, for instance "Yinhui se de si" ("A Silver-Gray Death" 1920),[551] which one critic has observed to be indebted to Dostoevsky.[552] Yu Dafu's affinity for Russian writers, especially Turgenev and Dostoevsky, is well documented.[553] The 1924 "Chunfeng chenzui de wanshang" ("Nights of Spring Fever"), which an early critic compared to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment,*[554] deploys the topos of the impoverished scholar's apartment, a space that according to the narrator imprisons the body like a birdcage (*niaolong*) or jail cell (*jianfang*). We might compare the narrator's room to Raskolnikov's:

> These rows of houses on Dent Road stood, from floor to roof, no higher than twenty feet. The loft I lived in was extremely small and low. If, standing upright, I had wished to stretch my arms and yawn, my hands would have gone through the dusty grey room.

---

[550] Ibid., 27-8.

[551] The chronotope of the impoverished dwelling also appears in, for instance, "Bodian" ("A Humble Sacrifice"), "Weixue de zaochen" ("Snowy Morning"), and *Luori* ("The Setting Sun"). Shu-mei Shih notes that Yu Dafu's protagonists tend to live in "dimly lit, unheated, small rooms, in which they are secluded alienated from other human beings"; see *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 120-1.

[552] Michael Egan, "Yu Dafu and the Transition to Modern Chinese Literature," in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, 323.

[553] See Liu Jiuming, *Yu Dafu yu waiguo wenxue* (Wuhan: Huazhong keji daxue chubanshe, 2001); "Yu Dafu yu Tuosituoyefusiji," *Jianghan luntan* 5 (2003): 83-5; and "Yu Dafu yu Eguo wenxue," *Nankai xuebao* 4 (2003): 96-104; Yang Yungeng, "Tuosituoyefusiji yu Yu Dafu xinli miaoxie yitong lun," *Ankang shizhuan xuebao* 1 (2000): 48-51; Ng, *Russian Hero,* 83-127; Leo Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (ambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 86; and Wu Maosheng, "Langman zhuyi yingxiong? Lun Yu Dafu xiaoshuo li de lingyu zhe," in *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao*, ed. Wang Zili and Chen Zishan (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1986), 475-507. In Yu Dafu's story "Weibing" ("Stomach Illness"), the narrator compares a character to a Dostoevskian protagonist; see in *Yu Dafu quanji*, vol. 1 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2007), 84. In a 1923 essay, "Wenxue shang de jieji douzheng" ("Class Struggle in Literature"), Yu Dafu expresses admiration for "magnificent Russians" (*weida de Eguo ren*); see *Yu Dafu quanji* 10:46, trans. Denton in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 267. Elsewhere he claims that the foreign literature with the greatest influence in China is Russian ("Xiaoshuo lun," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 10:142.

[554] Jin Ming, "Dafu de san shiqi," in *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao*, 334.

> Coming in from the lane through the front door, one entered first the landlord's room. In the midst of heaps of tattered rags, tin cans, glass bottles, and old ironware, if one edged sideways a few steps, one came to a rickety ladder (*heng dang xian luo de tizi*) leaning against the wall. Using this ladder to ascend through the pitch dark (*hei youyou de*) opening—two square feet—one could then go up to the second story. This story was really only a small, profoundly dark (*hei chenchen de*) loft (*benlai zhiyou mao e nayang da*), but the landlord partitioned it into two tiny rooms. A woman who worked in the N Cigarette Company lived in the other room; I rented the small room with the trapdoor. Because the other tenant had to enter and exit through my room, my monthly rent was a few dimes cheaper.[555]

The characteristics of the physical space act directly upon the physical bodies and minds of the inhabitants, bending and contorting them. The spatial layout means that one must turn sideways to get through the landlord's room to the ladder. In the narrator's own room, the ceiling is low, as in Raskolnikov's chamber, limiting the occupant's bodily movements, a symbolic spatial manifestation of the ways in which material poverty demarcates the boundaries and conditions of his existence. Yu Dafu's narrative enters the house and makes its way upstairs into the protagonist's personal chamber, much as Dostoevsky's narrative follows Raskolnikov and Marmeladov in from the street and through the domicile into the latter's living quarters. Like Marmeladov's "room," the one that Yu Dafu describes is a walk-through space, an area of would-be repose that is consistently thrown out of stasis by its liminal status as a threshold into the other tenant's room. Privacy is precarious, as are the existences of the poor people and squalid objects populating this space. Indeed, privacy is only available in the opacity of people's thoughts, as the narrator and his neighbor constantly peer at one another to try to guess at interiority—the shadowy darkness of the rooms reflects this mutual unintelligibility. It is this very denial of privacy, accompanied by the attempt to preserve or penetrate it, that generates the plot of the story that follows.

Leo Ou-fan Lee has written about the garret apartments, *tingzijian* (pavilion rooms), that many poor Shanghai writers of this period inhabited, "usually a small room upstairs in the passageway between the front and back sections of a typical Shanghai townhouse, often just above the kitchen."[556] A shabby liminal space, the room would be " hot in summer and cold in winter, owing to its poor ventilation and year-round lack of sunshine (its windows faced north). Consequently, the rent was cheap: for less than four yuan per month, two or three writers could squeeze into a space no larger than ten square meters."[557] This type of living situation was so common that Shanghai's writers became known as *tingzijian wenren* ("writers from the pavilion room"), half-parodying their "bohemian lifestyle" and turning "their poverty-stricken existence into a source of romantic inspiration."[558] In a way Yu Dafu does so in "Nights of Spring Fever," but he also records with realistic precision the unromantic material realities of living in such insalubrious quarters.

In this story, the narrator is a writer squeezed into a space not with other *tingzijian wenren*, but with representatives of a different social class, as well as with their inanimate

---

[555] Yu Dafu, "Nights of Spring Fever," trans. Tang Sheng, in *Nights of Spring Fever and Other Writings* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2009), 18-9. I have made extensive changes to this translation and the ones below.
[556] *Shanghai Modern*, 33.
[557] Ibid.
[558] Ibid., 34.

possessions. Due to spatial proximity, people and things in this story literally rub against and rub off on one another such that they metonymically, concussively start to impact and define one another. In 1926 essay about fictional forms, Yu Dafu discusses various strategies of oblique description, including "Environment" (*huanjing*): "The personality of characters is unwittingly reflected in the things in her environment, as everyone recognizes. For instance, you enter a tiny study and see that on the table are some textbooks, fountain pens, and elementary journals; you can thereby deduce that the owner of this study is a student of some level. So the indirect description of characters can be achieved in the description of the environment."[559] It is telling that his foremost example of the coincidence between person and setting is the small enclosed chamber of a scholar, for this is a metonymically dense topos he seems to favor in his fiction. Yu Dafu goes on to cite Dostoevsky (in particular *Crime and Punishment*) as a primary example of writers who use environment or setting to add to characterization. In a work like *Crime and Punishment,* Yu Dafu expounds, the things surrounding a protagonist are simply "a part of his character." [560] Accordingly, in "Nights of Spring Fever," settings and characters actually resemble one another: the landlord's back is hunched (just as his house is low and huddled), as though permanently bent by the low ceilings of his rooms, and his face is sallow from the darkness within; the word "dark" (*hei'an*) is used to describe both the shadowy space and the greasy gleam of the landlord's face.[561] His physiognomy is uneven and jarringly craggy, like his spatial surroundings: "His eyes were unequal in size, and his cheek bones were sharp and protruding. The lines on his forehead and face were filled with coal dust which seemed indelible despite his daily morning wash."[562] In a dark space where visibility is occluded, it makes sense for the eyes to be at a permanent squint. And the grime in his rooms cannot be scrubbed from his face: the spatial surroundings imprint themselves upon the body. Later the narrator remarks that the other tenant's things are very tidy and clean, but he already spies some oily grime besmirching them.[563] This other tenant, Chen Ermei, is portrayed as hard-working and physically vulnerable, but her belongings are already being tainted physically by her unhealthy environment, just as her physical person is being sexually threatened at work. Poverty means that the state of one's few precious personal possessions immediately impacts and reflects the state of one's own body. Those meager belongings form, after all, the thin barrier between surviving and perishing. For this reason, metonymy in realism that describes the spatial environment of poverty is particularly laden with dire meaning.[564]

The inhabitants here are desperate to make ends meet, so every belonging in their territory feels intimately personal and vital, even if they are in a state of decay (like their bodies)—or perhaps precisely because these objects are at constant risk of disappearing, ceasing their function, or slipping out of their owners' possession. The ladder feels provisional at best,

---

[559] "Xiaoshuo lun," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 10:158-9. Translation mine.
[560] Ibid., 162
[561] Yu Dafu, "Nights of Spring Fever," 19.
[562] Ibid.
[563] Ibid., 23.
[564] Yu Dafu has been considered a representative of romanticism in May Fourth literature; see, for instance, Anna Doležalová, *Yü Ta-fu: Specific Traits of His Literary Creation* (Bratislava: Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1971), 118-9, but as Denton has demonstrated, the distinctions between literary factions and "isms" in this period blur; see "The Distant Shore: The Nationalist Theme in Yu Dafu's 'Sinking,'" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews (CLEAR)* 14 (1992): 108. I will explore this further in my concluding chapter. "Nights of Spring Fever" is not without its realist characteristics, as Jin Feng has commented; see *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2004), 81).

and the junk downstairs is hauled in and out on a daily basis. The protagonist's furniture is as makeshift as Marmeladov's or Raskolnikov's:

> When the rapidly failing spring light had already almost reached darkness, at five o'clock, I lit a candle and began to arrange the dilapidated books (*po shu*) I had brought with me from the hotel. I first set them up into two stacks (*fangkuai*), one big and one small. On the bigger stack I placed two 24-inch picture frames. Because I had sold all my furniture, my arrangement of books and picture frames could serve as a desk during the day and a bed at night. Having arranged the desk and boards, I then sat smoking on the smaller pile of books, facing the book-pile desk, with my back toward the trap door. As I sat smoking and staring blankly at the candle placed upon the desk, I suddenly heard a noise at the trap door.[565]

Here and throughout the story, the onset of darkness is multivalently symbolic, not only of the grimness of material poverty, but also of the gloom of its concomitant mental state;[566] the encroaching darkness is simultaneously evocative of the veil of mystery surrounding both the inscrutable self and unknowable other, in their condition of mutual alienation in spite of spatial proximity. The scholar's piles of books mirror the piles of junk downstairs. He is so poor that he must use books as furniture, literally living on them. The symbolism is clear: can one live on books? Can intellectual labor bear one's physical weight, offer sustenance and a means of survival? In this scene the narrator sits at his desk, with a candle that could enable him to read, but he demonstrably elects not to, just as in later scenes he scatters his open books before him to effect a pretense of reading while really his mind is in stasis.[567] His books are about as useful to him as Raskolnikov's, covered in a thick layer of dust. The spatial setting and its furnishings, then, open up one of the story's principle thematic focal points, the contrast between intellectual and physical labor, the former embodied by the narrator, the latter by his next-door neighbor, the young woman who works at the cigarette factory. They must rub shoulders daily as the latter passes through the former's space to enter hers. The two soon form a kind of bond, occasionally offering alimentary and conversational companionship to one another, and the story culminates in a moment when the narrator feels, and stifles, a potentially amorous impulse toward his fellow tenant, with the self-admonition that he is in no condition to offer love to anyone. The denouement of the story devolves into a kind of extended interior monologue, in which the narrator wallows in self-pity about his impecuniousness and contemplates suicide as a way out. Finally he goes out for another walk in the dark, and the story ends inconclusively.

The narrator spends so much time walking outside at night because his physical space detrimentally bears upon his mental state, just as Raskolnikov's low ceiling is a constant bother on his mind.[568] In contrast to Gaston Bachelard's assessment that a house, offering shelter and protection, "allows one to dream in peace,"[569] in realist fiction the stifling house of the poor is inimical to the life of the mind. Yu Dafu's narrator laments, "During the past few days, in my lone world, the putrid, stuffy air in the dim little room was like the steam in a steam oven. It was so oppressive that it made me dizzy and faint….So during those nights, when the streets were

---

[565] Ibid., 19-20.
[566] See also An Chengxiong, "Li Xiang *Chibang* yu Yu Dafu 'Chun feng chenzui de shang' de bijiao yanjiu," *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue* 1 (1999): 122.
[567] Yu Dafu, "Nights of Spring Fever," 21.
[568] *Crime and Punishment* opens as Yu Dafu's story closes, that is, with the protagonist going out for a walk.
[569] *The Poetics of Space*, 6.

quiet, I often went out for walks."[570] He finds that the exercise exhausts him, helping him to sleep and improving his appetite, so that he can think and write better. Poverty and its concomitant spatial and material conditions are the ultimate tyrant over the state of the body and thereby the state of the mind, only overcome when the narrator becomes a kind of *flâneur*. At one point the narrator manages to write a few stories in the style of Edgar Allan Poe, metatextually implying that Yu Dafu's own story is infected with the shadowy mysteriousness of Poe's macabre style,[571] and also gesturing toward the latter's 1840 "The Man of the Crowd" (whose *flâneur* Benjamin would later analyze). In this story of impoverished urban space, the *flâneur* is reincarnated in a new and impoverished guise.[572] The narrative of socioeconomic stasis (being mired in poverty) is characterized by constant physical wandering, the only kind of movement (walking that ultimately gets nowhere, reaches no destination) that the character can indulge in when he feels unable to change the circumstances of his existence in more meaningful ways.

There is a correlation in this story between the cramped, stifling space of poverty and darkness; and conversely the outside world of economic activity and potential affluence is that of broad daylight. The narrator exists nocturnally, burning candles during the day in his dim chamber and only coming alive to stretch his legs under cover of night. When he finally earns a few dollars from some literary translations, he has the wherewithal (and a reason) to emerge into the light of day, going to purchase food and clothing, and finally to indulge in a bath, since dirtiness must also be correlated with poverty in the logic of this story, as we have seen. So too are loneliness and silence associated with the spatial conditions of poverty, whereas once the narrator has money and can interact with others out of doors, he is overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of teeming city streets during the daytime.[573] This kaleidoscopic urban world is manifestly not his proper milieu, for in his giddiness the narrator is almost run over by a trolleybus. By the time he returns to his room, night is falling again as the streets empty. No matter how much he wanders, he can only ultimately return to his dark, grimy dwelling space, the outermost husk of his impoverished existence that imprints upon and encages his body and mind.

Close Quarters

Yu Dafu's fiction appropriated from Western literary traditions the topos of the impoverished urban living quarters of the poor, and the corollary figure of the *flâneur* who is, in

---

[570] "Nights of Spring Fever," 26.

[571] Yu Dafu's narrator notes at the end that the clouds outside are bearing down like "decaying corpses," a hint of the macabre that also leaves it ambiguous whether this character will perhaps realize his fantasies of committing suicide; cf. Yu Dafu's famous ending in "Chenlun" ("Sinking").

[572] Many of Yu Dafu's other stories feature the nocturnal walker or *flâneur* as well, for instance "Bodian," "Huaixiang bing zhe," ("The Homesick One"); "Luori" ("Setting Sun"); and the essay "Lingyu zhe" (The Superfluous One). Shih observes that many of Yu Dafu's characters "walk the streets for long hours, especially at night, to seek solace for their mental unease in the enveloping darkness, to escape from people's hostile glares, or simply to waste away lives already too broken to mend" (*The Lure of the Modern*, 121). Leo Lee declares that early twentieth Shanghai did not develop the character type of the Parisian *flâneur*, and that Yu Dafu's characters "are not *urban* strollers in the *flâneur* mode" (*Shanghai Modern*, 37, 39). Certainly the type conjured by Baudelaire and other French writers was not transplanted outright into the modern Chinese context; rather, this new penniless *flâneur* is slightly delirious with physical exhaustion and malnutrition, like Dostoevsky's protagonists. These material circumstances naturally impact his mindset toward the city and his ability to observe it during nocturnal perambulations. This Chinese iteration of the *flâneur* is also affectively laden with the burden of being Chinese, in ways that I will explore below.

[573] Ibid., 28-9.

his stories, both a product of, escapee from, and observer of these spaces. In these dwellings, persons, things, and spatial layouts define one another, simultaneously imprisoning and isolating the individual while throwing her into constant contact with neighbors.[574] This friction—between people and spatial surroundings, between people and objects, or between people and other people—generates plot. The narrative interest in microcosmic units of space allows the writer to cram together characters from contrasting walks of life, to experiment with how they might interact. Hence small, internal, physically concrete spaces allow narrative to comment upon vast external, abstract topics. In "Nights of Spring Fever," the narrator, a writer and intellectual, moves in to live and work amongst the laboring poor (this is how some narratives of Dostoevsky or the Natural School begin too). Yu Dafu wrote this story in the early 1920s; later in the decade the topic of how the bourgeois intellectual might relate to the laboring proletariat comes into sharp focus in the debates over proletarian literature, as I have mentioned. In 1923 Yu Dafu was already thinking about these topics, as reflected in the essay "Class Struggle in Literature," in which he expresses admiration for Russian writers. So "Nights of Spring Fever" is, like the 1924 story "A Humble Sacrifice," exploring the question that has haunted so many of the writers I have discussed: how are intellectual labor and physical labor different or similar; can the intellectual lend succor to the proletarian laborer?[575]

The prime exemplar of the working class that the narrator interacts with is his neighbor Chen Ermei, who is being harassed by the foreman at her cigarette factory. She begs the narrator not to smoke, or at least not to smoke cigarettes from her factory. He continues to do so throughout the story, indicating his passive complicity in a capitalist system that exploits workers like Chen—and this in spite of his vague wishes and feeble efforts to help her. In their exchanges, she gives him nourishing food, like raisin bread and bananas, whereas he gives her chocolates, a recklessly extravagant foreign curiosity that does not nourish in the same way (just as he is constantly smoking cigarettes that are orally consumed without being nourishing). The story implies that perhaps intellectual labor is like this, an interesting foreign-influenced curiosity that ultimately cannot be nourishing or substantive. By having his protagonist move in amongst these urban poor, Yu Dafu asks how people from different social classes can coexist or bond with one another, whether they have enough points in common to become friends and fellow citizens of the same nation. The answer revealed by the two characters' interactions is that any communication is highly circumscribed, and they do not become lovers by the story's end (the narrative stubbornly resists the possibility of becoming a love story). Can intellectual and physical laborers unite in this allegory, enabled by the microcosmic space they both inhabit? Not really, the narrative implies.

Though their physical living spaces are not fully separated, there are other barriers between them, foremost that of language. The first time the narrator describes seeing Chen Ermei, he uses an ornate literary turn of phrase: emerging out of the shadows, her face and figure "imprint upon my eye" (literally *yanlian*, the screen or curtain of his eye), a semantic figure

---

[574] See Anna Kornbluh, "The Realist Blueprint," for a theorization of how realism, in its modeling of relational space and fabrication of sociality, is isomorphic with architecture. See also Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture: Essays toward a Tradition: Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, Henry James* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), for meditations on literary architecture as gesturing toward consciousness: "self 'imprinted' onto furniture and walls" (Ibid., 139) in Marcel Proust's work, or in Henry James's, architecture and furniture facilitating "descriptions of thought processes" (Ibid., 196).

[575] These stories have been seen as part of Yu Dafu's leftist turn; see Jin Feng, *New Woman*, 75-6. Yu Dafu himself would later acknowledge that "Nights of Spring Fever" contains some socialist flavor (see "*Dafu zixuan ji* xu," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 11:32).

blatantly divorced from her own level of education and at odds with their humble spatial surroundings. The first time they converse, the narrator records, "She spoke in a soft Suzhou dialect; the feeling this charming tongue produced is impossible to describe, so I can only translate her words into ordinary vernacular."[576] He immediately draws attention to his ability to write, as opposed to her ability only to speak: their occupations and family backgrounds are drastically different, though they both find themselves in the same impoverished domicile now.

Yu Dafu's story is thus metatextually skeptical about the ability of his own writing to be intelligible to the working poor, to succor the social other or even himself.[577] The story undercuts any notion of the intellectual's superior status. In the opening paragraph, the narrator describes one of his earlier residences, in which thievish tailors (*tong qiangdao xiaoqie yiyang de xiong'e caifeng*) and poor anonymous litterateurs (*kelian de wuming wenshi*) lived together. Any prejudice he might feel against purportedly unprincipled manual laborers (as opposed to manuscripters) gets ironically turned on its head when he moves in to the room next to Chen Ermei's, for when he goes out for his nocturnal walks she begins to suspect *him* of being in cahoots with thieves and gangsters.[578] There is nothing more honest about his means of livelihood than anyone else's, and indeed Chen Ermei's lifestyle is portrayed as the more virtuous, with her regular long hours of work, whereas the narrator spends most of his time wandering aimlessly or staring unseeingly at his books.[579] The narrator wants to think of poverty as the ultimate leveler, allowing them to live together, communicate with and help one another, yet it ultimately keeps them apart, since he concludes that he is too impoverished to be able to think about having a lover. After a brief attempt at sympathizing with someone else, the narrator returns unremittingly to self-pity, deciding that his own troubles outweigh those of his neighbor.[580] That the story ends with him very much alone, without having provided any concrete

---

[576] Yu Dafu, "Nights of Spring Fever," 21. Later when the trolleybus driver curses at the narrator, the latter again draws attention to the difference between written and spoken language when he transcribes both the sounds of the driver's spoken dialect and, in parentheses, the actual words that make semantic sense in his sentence (see "Chunfeng chenzui de wanshang," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 1:284). This defamiliarizing transcription emphasizes the narrator's sense of disconnect from the urban workers around him. Yu Dafu uses this form of transcription elsewhere when conveying a difference in dialect or social class: see, for instance, the scene in "Huanxiang hou ji" ("Sequel to Reminiscences on Returning Home," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 3:42-3) when he wishes to give money to a pair of farmers in need, but silently laments his own desperate straits by quoting a poem in English. The linguistic distance between them mirrors his inability to reach over the chasm of class to lend them economic succor (and reflects rather poorly upon his wallowing in self-pity, an ironic move that critics have discerned elsewhere in Yu Dafu's stories).

[577] One critic has read this as Yu Dafu's redeployment of the figure of the "superfluous man"; see Liu Jiuming, *Yu Dafu yu waiguo wenxue*, 25.

[578] Yu Dafu, "Nights of Spring Fever," 31.

[579] Ibid., 33. At a few points in the story, he wonders whose plight is worse, and consistently decides that he himself is more worthy of pity than Chen Ermei, because at least she is gainfully employed, whereas he could not make a living as a laborer even if he tried: "Oh, oh, but my useless muscles couldn't even cope with a rickshaw." He feels emasculated by poverty. His lamentations about his own uselessness are aligned with Yu Dafu's preoccupation with, and self-posturing as, the "superfluous man" from Russian literature (see, for instance, his essay "Lingyu zhe," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 3:66-72, which is similarly preoccupied by his inability to make much money).

[580] Zheng Boqi remarked in 1927 that the narrative stops short of giving us an objective, realistic look at Chen Ermei's suffering, returning insistently to the narrator's personal problems ("*Han hui ji* piping," in *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao,* 322). Hence the story devolves into his quoted interior monologue at the end, and he commits the pathetic fallacy in thinking that his immediate surroundings reflect his changes in mood. When he restrains himself from embracing Chen, he feels proud of his self-restraint and thinks that the room seems suddenly more brightly lit (Ibid., 32). And at the very end, he goes outside and thinks the sky seems gloomy and sad, reflecting his hopelessness (Yu Dafu, "Nights of Spring Fever," 34). See also Wing-ming Chan, "The Self-Mocking of a Chinese Intellectual," in

help to Chen Ermei, is aligned with Yu Dafu's viewpoint during the debate on revolutionary literature of the late-1920s: objecting "to the complacency of his fellow radicals,"[581] Yu Dafu opined that only the proletariat can write on behalf of the proletariat; a petty bourgeois writer like himself can in no way transform himself into a spokesman of the working class.[582]

That the penurious writer is ultimately unable to help either himself or others is allegorically significant because, as we have seen elsewhere, material poverty is a trope for the textual poverty of Chinese literature and its inability to succor the nation. Yu Dafu alludes to this wider sense of cultural inferiority when the narrator of "Nights of Spring Fever" nicknames his former residential area "Yellow Grub Street," a racialized reference to the seedy street in London that for centuries was populated by poor hack writers, periodical publishers, and booksellers.[583] Is the narrator's writing, and indeed Yu Dafu's own story, a second-rate copy of Western writing? Just as the stories of Dostoevsky and the Natural School grew out of a sense of Russian textual inferiority, a need to catch up to the West and transform Russian literature with narratives describing the impoverished urban spaces, so too does Yu Dafu's story seem haunted by the problem of defining modern Chinese literature vis-à-vis Western culture. The narrator translates German stories, writes fiction influenced by Poe, and hears a Russian balalaika on the street: everywhere he turns he is bombarded with Western influences (just as he cannot get away from reminders of his own degraded racial status; the trolleybus driver calls him a "yellow dog," a curse that he contemplates again at the end of the story).[584] The story thus parodies the narrator's (and by extension Yu Dafu's) attempt to pastiche Poe and Poe's *flâneur*. A narrative that fixates upon very small units of impoverished space not only spills outward onto the streets (and social strata) of the city, but also gestures further outwards at the largest possible units of space, the dynamics between nations and national cultures.

There is a resemblance between Yu Dafu's Shanghai and Dostoevsky's Saint Petersburg, both Westernized cities, spaces where the transnational intrudes in the form of cosmopolitan culture or Western economic power.[585] Both Shanghai and Saint Petersburg are port cities built recently on the margins of Eurasian continental empires, and as such became the point of entry for Westernized culture and modernization[586]; both are the first in Russia and China to develop modern industry, an industrial proletariat, and thereby Marxist revolutionary politics. Both cities,

---

Interliterary and Intraliterary Aspects of the May Fourth Movement 1919 in China (Bratislava: Veda, 1990), for an ironic interpretation of the narrator's portrayal. This is contra Jin Feng's unironic reading of the male intellectual's problematic self-positioning as spokesperson and protector for the proletarian female other this story (see *New Woman*, 77-82). Denton has summarized the two types of critical responses (unironic sentimentality versus ironic mockery of the protagonist) to Yu Dafu's "Sinking" (see "The Distant Shore," 107-8). Valerie Levan prefers to read Yu Dafu's fiction as both emotionally expressive and analytically detached; see "The Confessant as Analysand in Yu Dafu's Confessional Narratives," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 34 (Dec., 2012): 34.

[581] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 193.

[582] Yu Dafu expressed these opinions in, for instance, "Wuchan jieji zhuanzheng he wuchan jieji de wenxue," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 10:261-4. This essay was written the same year that Yu Dafu broke with the Creation Society. See also "Duiyu shehui de taidu," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 10: 446, and Yin, *Politics of Art*, 152-3.

[583] It is more specifically a reference to 1891 novel *New Grub Street* by George Gissing (1857-1903), which explores the problem of the commercialization of literary art, the poverty of aspiring writers in this cynical new ethos, and the impact of social class upon the professional and romantic lives of these young professionals. See "Jizhong yu *Huangmian zhi* de renwu," *Yu Dafu quanji* 10:85, for Yu Dafu's praise for Gissing and associated writers.

[584] Yu Dafu, "Nights of Spring Fever," 29, 33.

[585] See also Stephen A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[586] See Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 45.

while defined by their cosmopolitanism, might be synecdochal of Russia and China's semi-peripheral development, a shared condition of which Chinese intellectuals of this period were keenly aware. These cities encapsulate a tension between the excitement of learning about the West and the anxiety about China's semi-peripherality and cultural, economic, or political subordination to the West; this is perhaps another set of concerns that Yu absorbs from Dostoevsky and the Russian tradition in writing about Shanghai.

There Is No Escape

I am arguing that realist fiction depicting poverty features small denominations of space, rooms and apartments in which the poor are crammed with their possessions, such that the inherently metonymic logic of realism is made spatially manifest: inevitably people and things rub off on one another. The logical extension of this spatial metonymic logic is that from very small and contained places, narrative concatenates outward, for if one space adjoins another, and that space joins yet another, then that which happens in one area spills forth into the next, and the next, and the next. What at first seem like insurmountable barriers and distinctions between different places are eventually revealed as factors in common that connect them. We see this in Yu Dafu's 1926 story "Yanying" ("Smoke Shadows"), in which the damaging effects of poverty cannot be confined to a single room or urban milieu. The protagonist, Wenpu, is also a new incarnation of the *flâneur*, who is in fact too impoverished, and consequently too ill and morose, to do what a leisurely Parisian *flâneur* might like to do—that is, take in the sights and sounds of the city with relish. Instead he usually walks "like a sleepwalker, eyes fixed on the empty air ahead, his concentration entirely directed inward, absorbed in disconnected fantasies."[587] He bears resemblance to the Dostoevskian urban wanderers who are likewise semi-delirious from their material impoverishment. So this figure of the *flâneur* is an example of the semi-periphery to semi-periphery dynamic of Russian-Chinese literary interaction: rather than hailing directly from English and French language sources, this Chinese *flâneur* has been mediated by his transformation in Russian realist writing about urban space, linking Shanghai writing to Petersburg writing.

In the story's opening sentence we are told that Wenpu (whose name means something like "unadorned narrative," almost in mockery of his inability to make a living from writing[588]) is not making enough money: he is an impoverished intellectual, living with a poor family in Shanghai. The syntax of this first sentence is worth a closer look; I translate adhering as closely as possible to the original, in spite of considerable awkwardness:

> Every day wanting to go home, wanting to go home, but in the first place because of coughing too hard, and fearing that making a move would cause an accident, and in the second place because a few payments for his writings were insufficient, [therefore] finally moving in with a poor Shanghai family, Wenpu, on this afternoon, again in a depressed mood, on the autumnal sun-warmed and low-swirling dust-ridden Connaught Road, tried to go for his lonely stroll.[589]

We are denied a subject of the sentence for a long time, almost till the end; and the verb of the sentence comes even later—the uncertain "tried" (*shi*). The basic skeleton of the sentence is the subject-verb combination "Wenpu tried," but these words are lost amongst so many modifiers

[587] Yu Dafu "Smoke Shadows," in *Nights of Spring Fever and Other Selected Writings*, 70.
[588] This is metatextually moreover something of a cheeky gesture at the intricacies in Yu Dafu's seemingly simple narrative.
[589] "Yanying," in *Yu Dafu quanji* 1:400.

that the agency of this subject, with his weak action of "trying," is doubly undercut. The inability of the sentence to arrive at a concrete subject and predicate for a long time mimics essentially the character's mental state, feeling as though he cannot arrive at the destination he longs for. The sentence begins with repetitions of his wish to go home—we soon discover that home is in the countryside, a train and boat ride away—and since he lacks the means to make the journey, he instead goes out for meandering walks that, rather than getting him from point A to point B, inevitably bring him circling back to point A, his impoverished abode in Shanghai. The idea of returning and repetition with which the sentence begins (*xiang huiqu*) becomes salient thematically throughout the story, because the character is always being brought back to recollections he would rather suppress, or he is trying to get away from a particular set of life circumstances but finds that he keeps returning to them, or they return to haunt him. We will encounter the frequent return of the repressed in the narrative structure. So the fact that the subject of this opening sentences arrives so late syntactically contributes to the sense that Wenpu is at the mercy of the circumstances of material lack that are described earlier in the sentence; agency and subjecthood are syntactically held in abeyance as a result of these physical and financial conditions. The sentence begins with the abstract and the general (returning home),[590] gradually narrows down the location to the city of Shanghai, and ends with a more particular point in space (Connaught Road), and as we shall see the story's field of vision continually expands and contracts, from a focused perspective to a gradually widening gyre of spatial awareness, and back again.

By tracing his movement through the city, the narrative hints at the many Western influences that make up this space, from the names of the streets to the Western style houses, acacias (written out in Chinese phonetically, *agexiya*, to preserve a defamiliarizing foreign quality) and platanus (*boladannusi*) trees that line the streets; even the old friend Wenpu bumps into was educated in the West and tries to take him to meet a foreign lady (*waiguo xiaojie*). This friend gives Wenpu the money necessary to travel back to his home village, where Wenpu hopes to convalesce in the bosom of his family. For he is in no condition to enjoy this cosmopolitan city (literally, this place filled with Westerners, *shili yangchang*). As soon as Wenpu departs Shanghai, the narrator remarks that the scenery around the Fuchun River must be the most beautiful in the world: "If Chinese people had a little boldness of spirit, and didn't fight and slaughter one another year after year, then perhaps the tourist trade of all of Switzerland would be taken over by the inhabitants of the region round Hangzhou."[591] Oddly, the narrator here speaks as though from his own point of view, rather than focalizing these thoughts explicitly through Wenpu; switching out of the character's perspective seems to present these thoughts as objective observations, or at least implies through free indirect discourse that Wenpu considers his observations to be objective. This mention of Westernness posits that China is doing something wrong in comparison to the West: internecine warfare prevents the economy from flourishing, and prevents the country's natural splendors from occupying its rightful position of international fame. The recurring figures of lack in this story (the protagonist's economic and physical deficiencies, lacking the means to make his own way literally and figuratively) dovetail with this broader sense of China's national deficiencies in comparison to the West.

So the city is where Western influences are felt, whereas the countryside is dense with traditional Chinese resonances. The narrator continues to wax lyrical about the scenery outside Hangzhou: "The reason why Yan Ziling of the Han Dynasty would not leave here for an official

[590] See Denton, "Romantic Sentiment," 148-9, on the significance of returning home in Yu Dafu's work.
[591] Yu Dafu, "Smoke Shadows," 76.

position was partly because his wife was more beautiful than Yin Lihua, but to a large extent it may have also been because the scenery of the Fuchun River made him think less highly of wealth and immortal fame."[592] It is as though the landscape here were somehow so classically Chinese that the narrator must reach far into antiquity for adequately evocative turns of phrase. Gendered feminine, the countryside here is traversed by slowly winding boats, as opposed to the aggressively fast automobile that Wenpu barely managed to dodge in the Westernized city. The narrative thus sets up a clear city/country divide, which is mapped onto the Western/Eastern binary. Wenpu is worn down by the rigors of urban living, having fled from Beijing to Shanghai due to political tumult, and unable to make his way back due to the dangers of civil war disrupting travel along the Tianjin-Pukou line.[593] He hopes to enrich his health and fiscal circumstances in the comfortingly traditional, feminine, and maternal Chinese countryside, in a place of ancient stability, his native village.[594] In Shanghai, Wenpu kept track of time by means of his pocketwatch, whereas in the village, the night watchman strikes the hour: antiquated time versus modern time. He welcomes this sense of the village being stuck in time, even if its backwardness mirrors the national backwardness of China compared to the West.

But these easy binaries are almost immediately disrupted. In Shanghai Wenpu felt interminably ill, and it is true that once he leaves the city behind he feels almost instantly better. The winding syntax of the story's opening sentence returns here: "After arriving in Shanghai and spitting blood for over a month, courage eroded and exhausted, afraid even to stretch himself lest he dislocate his spine, Wenpu, suddenly finding himself immersed in this scenery more beautiful than a painting, felt that some vitality was returning to his breast."[595] That the subject of the sentence (and its verb) arrive so late once again contributes to the sense that his agency is still in doubt. Wenpu may have fled debilitating conditions in the city, but the narrative hints that he is not going to discovery greater self-determination and strength with this sojourn into the countryside. Indeed, the next sentence tells us that Wenpu "spat several more thick gobs of blood-streaked phlegm into the clear waters of the river."[596] If the countryside is, in his mind, the bastion of pristine, uncorrupted cleanliness, Wenpu has ironically brought the disease and squalor of the city to infect it. In a moment of spatial contagion, the fluids of city and country have mixed.

Moreover, physical attributes of his life in the city seem to follow him into the countryside. The story is named "Smoke Shadows," and indeed the descriptions of the urban setting are wreathed in both; the setting sun and the dust cast shadows, as does his friend's automobile; his friend's cigarette emits blue smoke.[597] As in "Nights of Spring Fever," shadowy darkness in this story represents the protagonist's mental indeterminacy (his capacities handicapped by his physical illness) and pessimistic gloom. Night falls as Wenpu enters his cramped, messy apartment in Shanghai: "After a while, seeing the electric light switched on in the grocery store opposite, he quietly made his way up to the front room he was renting there, wishing to lie on the bed and rest for a little while, but the many tattered old books scattered

---

[592] Ibid.
[593] Ibid., 71.
[594] His exuberance about returning to the wholesome countryside is evoked by the narrative's sudden turn to the second person, directly addressing the reader about how "you" can sit in the steamboat and enjoy the passing scenery (Ibid., 76-7). It is as though Wenpu were switching into the travelogue genre, writing a brochure in his head for the tourism industry that could be thriving there.
[595] Ibid., 77 (with my deliberately awkward alterations).
[596] Ibid.
[597] Ibid., 73.

around all over, and the hubbub of the city drifting in from who knows where, kept pushing his thoughts back to scenes from his native village when he was a boy."[598] In his mind only the countryside will give him space to breathe and stretch out, in contrast to the unhealthily confined space of his city residence. We find here another iteration of the topos of the impoverished scholar's chamber, littered with unhelpful books that interfere with his physical well-being (taking up space on the bed) more than they contribute to his livelihood. The winding syntax of this long sentence reflects Wenpu's feeling that the repose he seeks keeps getting deferred.

When he finds himself in the peaceful riverside landscape, then, the refreshing sunlight and waters feel at first deliciously clean and clear, as opposed to the turbid air of the shadowy city, but the narrative hints immediately that Wenpu cannot escape whatever ailed him in Shanghai: he cannot escape his own shadow, which now wanders about the deck of the steamboat.[599] And there are "smoke shadows" in the village, too, as smoke from household cooking fires curls into the clear sky—an old and venerable poetic trope for home, made unhomely. No place is free of contamination: "He thought of his family, hidebound by centuries-old tradition, thought of his old mother who loved to meddle in other people's affairs, thought of the many petty squabbles among the villagers," and was filled with terror and disgust.[600] To be stuck in time, away from the frenetic chaos of Westernized modernity, has its downsides, Wenpu remembers unpleasantly. The rural idyll was only ever a figment of his imagination, for the same troubles he thought to leave behind in the city—ill health, lack of monetary resources, reminders of his personal failings—are revisited upon him even more insistently at home, with his mother's querulous entreaties for money.[601] Poverty in the city is still a problem in the country. Moreover, the personal background that the narrative has deliberately left obscure to us until now—Wenpu's marital history, plus the fact that his wife and child are still stranded in Beijing, with communication cut off for months—is suddenly divulged, since it comes back to haunt him as soon as he arrives at his ancestral home.[602] The countryside is not just a space associated with ancient Chinese history, it is also a space in which Wenpu must be confronted with his own personal history.

In the end, the same topos that he escaped in the city—a solitary bedchamber in which the light of day is fading—is precisely what awaits him in the countryside. The family home in the village is dark and shadowy, and his absent wife is a ghostly presence within "the dark, grey walls, on the battered furniture and on the huge wooden bed."[603] Sun sets on another day in much the same way, as Wenpu is imprisoned within these suffocating walls. In the end the smoke shadows have been replaced by the screen of tears that shadow Wenpu's eyes as he tries to comfort his mother about money.[604] The easy binary of city versus country is exploded, for the same underlying circumstances of national hardship and backwardness (civil war and political squabbling) trouble Wenpu and prevent him from making a living and regaining his health no matter where he flees. Yu Dafu uses the isolated spatial setting of the impoverished bedchamber to demonstrate that its problems of material deficiency are in fact not at all isolated, but radiating

[598] Ibid., 75.
[599] Ibid., 76.
[600] Ibid., 77.
[601] Ibid., 81.
[602] Ibid., 79-80.
[603] Ibid., 79.
[604] Ibid., 82.

outward in widening expanses of space, and ultimately subtended by the deeper problem of China's deficiencies that hold it back from catching up to the West.

No Exit

Scholars often speak of a division between country and city in the literary, cultural, social, and political imagination of modern China.[605] But I take inspiration from Raymond Williams, who in *The Country and the City* teases out the ways in which English literary texts reveal the fundamental capitalist and social structures that subtend and entangle the interests of "wicked town and innocent country."[606] Though there certainly exists an urban-rural binary in many works of modern Chinese literature, I want to make the case that in realist fiction there exists a body of work in which the fundamental geographic principle holds that the same underlying conditions of social disorder and economic deficiency render ineluctable and palpable the connections between city and country. This is expressed in Yu Dafu's "Smoke Shadows," as we have seen, as well in some of his other work.[607] What's more, the spatial metonymic logic that in "Nights of Spring Fever" concatenates from a person, to his contiguous possessions and living space, to the living space of his neighbors and the streets of the city just outside—this same metonymic attention to space means that in realist fiction, that which transpires in the city concatenates outward to its outskirts and onwards into the countryside, across provinces to remote county towns and villages.[608] In other words, the country/city binary is not fine-grained enough to capture the spatial imaginary of this realism.

We find this implication in many stories that involve characters attempting to move from one space into another, only to find similarly bleak conditions no matter where they go. This is often the case in Ye Shengtao's work. One of the May Fourth Movement's earliest fiction writers, Ye was a schoolteacher for many years and frequently engages with pedagogical themes, notably in his 1928 novel *Ni Huanzhi*.[609] An avid reader of Western literature, Ye's first story "Qiongchou" ("Sorrows of the Poor" 1914), about a destitute pancake seller, was written with

---

[605] See, for instance, David Wang, "Introduction," *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3-6; Leo Lee, "Literary Trends," 264 and "In Search of Modernity: Some Reflections on a New Mode of Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Chinese History and Literature," in *Ideas Across Culture: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz*, ed. Paul A. Cohen and Merle Goldman (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 133-4; Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3-5; Jacob Eyferth, *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots: The Social History of a Community of Handicraft Papermakers in Rural Sichuan, 1920-2000* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2-9; Myron L. Cohen, "Cultural and Political Inventions in Modern China: The Case of the Chinese 'Peasant,'" *Daedalus* 122, no. 2 (1993): 156; David Faure and Tao Tao Liu, "Introduction," *Town and Country in China: Identity and Perception*, ed. David Faure and Tao Tao Liu (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1; Laikwan Pan, *Building a New China,* 176-9; and Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks*, 3.

[606] 53.

[607] See, for instance, "Weixue de zaochen," "Chuben," and "Gei yiwei wenxue qingnian de gongkai zhuang."

[608] Here I am in accord with Harry E. Shaw who, drawing up Jakobson's work on metonymy, proposes that modern realism (including works by Scott, Eliot, and Austen) involves a "historicist metonymy": "a play of mind over a web of systematic historical and cultural connections, often causal in nature, among phenomena existing at all levels of our experience…. Metonymy would impute to these phenomena and the ways in which they are connected an existence and validity independent of the mind observing them: it would claim to represent what we might call 'real-world connections'"; see *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 106. My focus, however, is on spatial metonymy, the chains of cause and effects that link contiguous geographic areas.

[609] See C. T. Hsia, *A History*, 60-6.

the style of Washington Irving in mind.[610] Though he claimed to write primarily about intellectuals and urban bourgeoisie because they were the social strata he himself knew and understood,[611] poverty and squalor appear insistently throughout his fiction,[612] with destitute characters from different social strata attempting to transition from one space to another, and thereby improve their lot. The scale of these movements across space ranges from the smallest (from one room or building to another) to the largest (from one geographic region to a contiguous one). The 1920 story "A Ju" describes a spatial transition on the smallest scale, starting with a description of the squalid hovel in which the eponymous protagonist was born and spent the first eight years of his life, and abruptly moving into a school whose spaciousness is a shock to A Ju's system. As in Yu Dafu's stories, the characteristics of the living space imprint upon the inhabitants:

> In his home there was only a table and two old broken long benches, such that his little body did not have room to turn around; half of a plank door was propped up, and weak light seeped in from the street,—because of the high walls of the pawnshop storeroom across the way,—making it so that he had never seen his mother's face clearly; outside, the corner of the wall was a urination spot for passersby; often there would be someone carelessly trying to suit his own convenience there, making A Ju accustomed to breathing foul air.[613]

As in the previous stories we have examined, here the coordinates of space constrain the movement of the body—even what the body inhales—and ultimately determine what it excretes: his whole family is afflicted with reddened, bloodshot, teary eyes, his mother is always coughing, and her breastmilk is thin.[614] The passage does not shy away from describing bodily effluvia, and the status of the hovel as a kind of public toilet indicates the family's status as the detritus of society, living literally under the shadow of a predatory institution that perpetuates inequality and degradation (the implication is no doubt that the family has made frequent use of this pawnshop). The furnishings and appointments are makeshift and ramshackle, and the boy has grown up sleeping on a nest of grass shared with his drunken father. Grass is a tool for their household survival, as his mother ceaselessly, numbly, wordlessly—like a "machine"[615]—binds grass together to make rope, symbolic of the conditions that bind them to this squalid life. The

---

[610] See Ye Shengtao, "Zatan wode xiezuo," in *Ye Shengtao yanjiu ziliao*, 245-7. Jaroslav Průsek has commented upon the similarities between Ye Shengtao's fiction and Chekhov's work, in form, content, and bleakness of mood, concluding that in fact Ye "goes farther than his Russian predecessor—that he creates pictures that could well find a place in the gallery of the most anguishing existentialist visions of hopeless despair and human loneliness…."; see *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of Modern Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 190. See also Peng Xiaofeng, "Chuangzuo xing de beili: Ye Shengtao xiaoshuo fengge de xingcheng ji duiwai lai yingxiang de tonghua," *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 1 (1986): 151-64; and Wang Ruqing, "Ye Shengtao yu Qihefu," *Tianjin shida xuebao* 3 (1986): 75-6, for comparisons of Ye's work to Chekhov's.

[611] See Ye Shengtao, "*Ye Shengtao xuanji* zixu," in *Ye Shengtao lun chuangzuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 195.

[612] See Ren Guangtian, "Cong *Gemo* dao *Ni Huanzhi*," *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 4 (1980): 219; Jin Mei, "Niliu zhong de xianshi zhuyi—tan Ye Shengtao zaoqi de wenyan xiaoshuo," *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 4 (1981): 192-6; and Yang Yi, "Lun Ye Shengtao duanpian xiaoshuo de yishu tese," *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 2 (1980): 204-5.

[613] Ye Shengtao, "A Ju," in *Ye Shengtao*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958), 28. The translations of this story are my own.

[614] Ibid., 29.

[615] Ibid.

monotony of their spatial surroundings, with no variation in visual or sensory stimuli, means that the characters who dwell here are portrayed as mute, dumb, and virtually blind—barely sentient.

Indeed, they seem to hardly have the capacity for language, for when A Ju is unexpectedly thrown into a completely different space, that of a school, he cannot comprehend the words that others speak to him, having never before been engaged in questioning or meaningful conversation of any kind; seeing children play ball, he is incapable of even reacting to the utterly alien spectacle. The sensory overload simply overwhelms him, and when a stray ball hits him on the head, he wonders what it could be:

> Was it mother's palm? It wouldn't be this light. The edge of the table? It wouldn't be this soft. This object was really strange and terrifying. In his timid heart he thought: this is not a safe and secure place, but a mysterious place; as he thought this, his two feet kept moving backwards, not stopping until his back came up against a wall. He turned around, stroking that light bluish wall, forehead pressed against it, as if he wanted to bore his body into it. But the wall was made of brick, how could it know to take care of him, open up its hard, cold embrace to accommodate him…?[616]

A Ju's sensory understanding of the world is so profoundly conditioned by the characteristics of the space he grew up in that he attempts to process and articulate new sensory input by means of the sensations he has felt within the confined space of the family hut. The concussiveness of spatial metonymy is here literalized in the concussiveness of the table, the mother's hand, and the ball. The expansiveness of the schoolyard is so bewildering that A Ju instinctively strives toward spatial confinement, finding comfort in the impenetrable solidity of the wall, another symbol for the barriers of space, as well as of social hierarchy, that cannot be traversed.

The space of the school frees his body but subjects him to a different kind of physical, Foucauldian conditioning. His seat in the classroom is so different than what he is used to that the teacher has to demonstrate to him how to sit, to no avail, for A Ju's body cannot help but shrink back into its habitual posture: "His upper body was completely sprawled upon the desk, his chest knocking against the desk edge, making him breathe faster; his two feet were curled up, the mud-caked shoes pressing against the flowery shirt of the child who shared his seat."[617] The spatial conditions of poverty have so imprinted upon his body that it is incapable of unfurling from its twisted up position, and he carries spreads around him the unsanitary conditions he is accustomed to at home. Poverty sticks to him, no matter where he goes. When the teacher brings out some dolls to show the class, A Ju is so flummoxed by the delights of the toy that reaches his hand out longingly toward them, "wanting to grab them, but having fully extended his arm, it still did not reach the teacher's desk."[618] His body is so accustomed to the tight spaces of his home that he has not fully processed the increased distances in these new surroundings. For his spatial awareness is not just ingrained in his body but in his mind as well: when the teacher asks the students what the dolls live in, and what the door to their house would be like ("Would it be taller than the dolls' bodies? shorter? sider? narrower?" she asks),[619] every student in the class answers "Wider, taller"—except, in a lone, weak voice, A Ju, who responds, "Shorter."[620] The child of poverty is incapable of thinking outside the parameters of space and enclosure in which

---

[616] Ibid., 31.
[617] Ibid.
[618] Ibid., 32.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Ibid., 33.

he has grown up. Invited to try opening the door to the classroom, every other student succeeds, except A Ju, who pushes with all his might but does not manage to open it even a sliver: "he could not help but release the handle and pound upon the door. But how could there be anyone waiting to answer the door outside?"[621] We have here yet another spatial symbol of the social enclosures of poverty and inequality; indeed the collection in which this story was published is called *Gemo* (*Barriers*).[622] Finally the students gather to sing a song about butterflies in flight, fluttering freely high and low across the garden; and of course, A Ju is the only one who cannot sing or even comprehend the lyrics, his body dancing wildly out of sync with the rest of the students, undisciplined in the orderly social structures of the educational institution. The story ends with A Ju inevitably going home after school, returning to the "narrow world" in which his mother is still interminably, wordlessly making rope, and A Ju "crouched in the dark corner."[623] Going full circle to end where it began, the story indicates that poverty is so enmeshed in immediate metonymic spatial surroundings that the contorted, maimed body takes the conditions of poverty with it even when it attempts to go somewhere else.

Other stories in this collection speak to the conditions of poverty that follow characters from the country to the city and back again. In "Yisheng" ("A Life" 1919), a village-born woman, sold into an abusive marriage, runs away from her husband's impoverished home in the countryside and flees to the city to find work. When her in-laws find her and attempt to drag her home, her master offers to help her file for divorce. But his wife interjects: "Of course it's good to get her a divorce. But she may not be working for us all her life. Suppose she leaves us and nobody hires her, what's to become of her?"[624] As a result, her husband relinquishes his initial impulse to help the young woman. The same social structures that render the woman powerless in the country haunt her no matter where she flees, and when her husband dies her in-laws pay for his funeral by selling her to a new family. There is a similar logic in "Kucai" ("Bitter Greens" 1921), in which a peasant seeking to escape the unbearable cycle of suffering and penury in his village brings the bitterness of his old life with him, literally manifested in the bitterness of the greens he grows for the white-hand intellectual who has hired him.[625]

Many of Ye Shengtao's characters are on the move, as in "Morning Walk," and observe scenes of poverty unfolding before their eyes. Mr. Pan, traveling back and forth by train in "Mr. Pan in Distress," finds conditions of war-torn squalor no matter where he is, and tries to take advantage of poorer people in Shanghai and his hometown alike. In "Bei'ai de zhongzai" ("Sorrowful Burdens" 1921) and "Lulu de banlu" ("Traveling Companion" 1921), the narrators travel by steamboat and observe fellow passengers, from different walks of life, described in varying degrees of physically detailed squalor, traveling among cities, counties, and villages in attempts to improve their lot. There is a sense of the interconnectedness of disaster and the penury it brings. In "Duo shoule sanwu dou" ("Three to Five Bushels More" 1933), hopeful peasants arrive in town laden with the fruits of a bountiful harvest at last, only to find that merchants have dropped the price criminally low. The peasants' threat not to sell to merchants is neutered when the manager retorts: "Do you think folk are going to starve because you won't

---

[621] Ibid., 33.

[622] See Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 96-9, for an account of these stories' depictions of barriers to sympathy and understanding. Anderson focuses on elements of temporality that erect social barriers; I focus instead on space.

[623] "A Ju," 35.

[624] Ye Shengtao, "A Life," in *How Mr. Pan Weathered the Storm* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1987), 16.

[625] The narrative draws attention to the narrator's weak hands, compared to those of the peasant, when it comes to tilling the plot of land; this difference in experience is augmented by the narrator's pedantic use of language and limited ability to sympathize with the peasant's sad life story.

sell? The whole country's full of foreign rice and flour. Before the first lot's finished, foreign steamboats are shipping in a second."[626] Even places far away are connected in the most immediate ways to the peasants. One peasant considers traveling to sell his rice in a nearby town. But the idea is quickly abandoned when the manager claims that "our rice guild has reached a common agreement," and the price there would be the same; going to another closer town would likewise be foolish because "you have to pass two toll-houses, and there's no knowing how much they'd charge by way of tax."[627] Every geographic region is interconnected in the capitalist and imperialist structure that conspires to bear down mercilessly upon the peasants, who soon give in and sell their rice in despair, for this money is "precisely what the empty pockets of those tattered cloth jackets lacked."[628] The peasants are referred to dehumanizingly by means of their metonymic possessions: tattered jackets, empty pockets, and, repeatedly, their old felt hats.

We have already seen the manifold ways in which metonymy takes on particular salience in narratives of poverty, for the contingency of adjacency allows objects and persons to confer particularly volatile meaning upon one another when, in a situation of pecuniary instability, those contiguous objects may soon be parted from their temporary owners. The peasants possess tattered garments and hats, and now they have acquired money to put inside their pockets, but just as their jackets are always on the edge of disintegration, so too is their hard-earned cash immediately on the cusp of being detached from their ownership and their physical person: "of the wad of notes in their pockets not half a note or ten cents was truly their own….they had no idea how they were going to satisfy their creditors"—and so, to counteract the inescapable sense of hopelessness, they make a few sparse purchases in town.[629] Because poverty means that possessions are at risk of detachment and escape, these peasants are analogously thinking of ways to counteract this danger of detachment by themselves making metonymic movements; they try to harness the spatial slipperiness of metonymy to their advantage: "Give up the land, I say, and take to the road," one of them suggests. "Tramps have a better time of it than we do." His companions discuss the idea of becoming famine refugees, and perhaps finding work in Shanghai. But these escape fantasies are quickly shot down: "What outdated calendars and old almanacs are you reading! In Shanghai the Japs are fighting. Most of the factories have closed down," and their one acquaintance who used to make a tidy wage at a factory is now a beggar. "Every road is cut off" (*lulu duanjue*) the narrator concludes, both literally and symbolically, on behalf of the dazedly despondent peasants.[630] The same conditions of oppression and social disorder perpetuate exploitation so that geographically sidestepping the local problem is futile. Urban, rural, and everything in between: places are linked in an infinite network of spatial interconnectedness in poverty.

Trafficking Realisms

My contention is that modern Chinese realism appropriated and adapted from Western realisms a narrative attention to very small, enclosed units of space in which the logic of metonymy—the way in which people and objects adjacent to one another impinge upon one another—is played out forcefully due to the proximity imposed by poverty: limited space, limited resources. And this logic of metonymy proliferates outward spatially from these confined

[626] Ye Shengtao, "A Year of Good Harvest," in *How Mr. Pan Weathered the Storm*, 117.
[627] Ibid., 117-8.
[628] Ibid., 119.
[629] Ibid., 121.
[630] Ibid., 366; I have amended the translations.

rooms, such that the flow or attempted flow of people and objects from one space to adjacent spaces demonstrates the way that contiguous geographic areas impinge on one another too; no space is an island. In these stories, characters find that poverty propagates from one geographic space to the next, so even when they manage to make the move from one space to another in search of a better livelihood they find no improvement in their lot. This is true in fiction whose settings straddle country, city, and everything in between, as well as texts focused upon a particular region or locale (for instance *xiangtu* or native soil fiction)[631]: think of Wu Zuxiang's "All Peaceful Under Heaven," in which town and village alike afford no relief from hardship; or Jiang Guangci's *Shaonian piaobo zhe* (*The Youthful Tramp* 1926) in which the abject orphan leaves his village on the brink of starvation, wanders as a feckless beggar through countryside and townships, and ultimately makes his way to Shanghai where conditions for laborers are insupportable; Mao Dun's "Spring Silkworm," in which circumstances in town and concatenating through China from abroad (due to the imperialist presence) impact conditions in the village[632]; Wang Tongzhao's fiction, such as "Chenchuan" ("The Sunken Boat") and *Shanyu* (*Mountain Rain* 1932); the examples are legion. These works of realism take pains to illustrate that minutia of daily life in a seemingly confined and isolated rural place are intimately connected to what happens in the nearest county town, what happens in the metropolis, and ultimately what happens in other nations. The peasants in *Mountain Rain* blame worsening conditions on foreigners, such as Germans who built railroads and enabled the influx of foreign goods, likening the flow of objects and persons to a network of arteries.[633] This novel begins in a confined, darkened subterranean chamber, a basement in which villagers gather at night to bemoan these circumstances, and then gradually the narrative widens out from one home to another, from village to county town and eventually to the city where the protagonist Xi Dayou must go to seek a better livelihood. Predictably, he encounters oppression wherever he goes. So the master trope of realism, metonymy, traces the contiguity of one room and one house to the next, the repercussions of adjacency, as in Yu Dafu's stories; and this eventually maps onto larger geographical expanses, each space overlapping and acted upon by the next.

I will end with a meditation upon the flow of goods, people, and information from one space to another, connecting far-flung geographic regions, in Li Jieren's *Dahe* (*Great River* 1936-7) trilogy, which details the historical and social upheavals of Sichuan in the period spanning the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. Known for translating works of French realism and naturalism into Chinese, Li Jieren has been called the "Chinese Zola."[634] Commenting upon the trilogy's first novel, *Sishui weilan* (*Ripples on Stagnant Water* 1936), Kenny Kwok-kwan Ng notes that the novel foregrounds traffic networks that

---

[631] See Prasenjit Duara, "Local Worlds: The Poetics and Politics of the Native Place in Modern China," *South Atlantic Quarter* 99, no. 1 (2000): 13-48, and Rosemary Haddon, "Chinese Nativist Literature of the 1920s: The Sojourner-Narrators," *Modern Chinese Literature* 8, no. 1/2 (1994): 97-125, for a discussion of different guises of writing about the native place in early twentieth century China. David Wang too discusses *xiangtu* fiction and shows that the realistic mode of Shen Congwen's *Biancheng* (*Border Town* 1934) "breaks the closure of the tranquil," such that the idealized locus of the native soil cannot escape historical forces (*Fictional Realism*, 271).

[632] As David Wang observes, "Mao Dun constructs a picture of China in the early thirties where at least three time/space junctures or *chronotopes*—rural, urban, and metropolitan—coexist….They threaten each other's existence…" (*Fictional Realism*, 50). Mao Dun's corpus of writing, including the *Village Trilogy*, *Ziye* (*Midnight* 1931-2), and short works like *Linjia puzi* ("The Lins' Family Store" 1932) as a whole demonstrate the interconnectedness of space due to widespread economic and political factors.

[633] Wang Tongzhao, *Shanyu*, in *Wang Tongzhao wenji*, vol. 3 (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1980), 9.

[634] See Guo Moruo, "Zhongguo Zuola zhi qidai," in *Zhongguo wenyi* 1, no. 2 (1937): 260-72.

transform a rural backwater, for "news about the Boxer Uprising and the siege of the imperial city of Beijing spreads in only a matter of days to Sichuan, dramatically changing the fate of the protagonists."[635] Ng considers the locality to be a "synecdoche of the nation" in Li Jieren's writing,[636] but it would be as generative, I think, to emphasize the metonymic relationship between different spaces, as characters gradually move from "periphery" to "center" (from the village to rural town and eventually down the highway to Chengdu, the provincial capital).[637] In *Ripples,* one minor character, a young girl kidnapped from the countryside and trafficked as a servant into Chengdu's wealthy Hao household, allows us a glimpse into the seedy underworld,[638] implying the interconnectedness of spaces that underpins the perpetuation of inequality and exploitation.

Just as people move around (or are moved forcibly) in this novel, so too do objects flow through huge networks, including goods from abroad. Though the Hao family owns many Western products, these items are not without their disadvantages. Western oil lamps are much brighter than domestic ones, but Hao Dasan laments the much higher price of the Western oil that it burns. The family acquires Western-style portraits and even a photograph, but the first mistress is terrified that the camera will capture her soul and kill her. The family find themselves addicted to Western opium needles, rubber cushions, music boxes, phonographs, cut-glass windowpanes, toothbrushes—the list runs on. Of course, there is a great deal of irony in descriptions of characters' ignorance and suspicion of Western technology, but in an early scene the narration does take note of Chinese consumers making informed decisions to use domestic products instead of Western ones. At the market in the county town, "a flow of goods, a flow of money, a flow of people" across space has formed a confluence of East and West[639]:

> There are also those supremely delightful Western threads and Western needles, of which the latter are quite popular, for although more expensive than local needles, the eye is elongated and has a notch to facilitate threading, the only pity being that there aren't any of the largest sort, which are needed for stitching soles on soles and patching quilts….although Western thread is even and glossy, it's somewhat stiff, so not many people use it.[640]

The Western needles are useful and popular, but they are not entirely suited to all the needs of Chinese shoppers. And Chinese threads, if less superficially attractive, are actually a better and more practical choice than their Western counterparts. When characters in the novel interact with imported Western goods, whether by selecting or rejecting them, this is analogous to the writer's

---

[635] In the third novel of the trilogy, *Dabo* (*The Great Wave* 1937), "another modern system of transportation—the railway—triggers a political movement and transforms Sichuan into the greatest locus of political turmoil within the whole nation"; see Ng, *The Lost Geopoetic Horizon of Li Jieren: The Crisis of Writing Chengdu in Revolutionary China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 65.

[636] Ibid., 90.

[637] Ibid., 69.

[638] Li Jieren is minutely attentive to interior and exterior space throughout the novel. See also Wan Zheng, "Li Jieren bixia de Sichuan xiangtu kongjian yanjiu—yi *Sishui weilan* zhong de wuge dianxing kongjian weili," *Dangdai wentan* 3 (2013): 110-3.

[639] This gestures at the water imagery in the titles of the trilogy of novels, and its *roman-fleuve* ("river novel") format from nineteenth-century France, attempting to depict the social totality of an epoch by means of the flowing networks of objects, persons, and ideas. See Ng, *The Lost Geopoetic Horizon*, 42-5.

[640] I have amended Bret Sparling and Yin Chi's translation in *Ripple on Stagnant Water: A Novel of Sichuan in the Age of Treaty Ports* (Portland: MerwinAsia, 2014), 50.

own self-conscious borrowing from and modification of Western literary techniques.[641] Even on the periphery of the periphery of the periphery, in the backwaters of Sichuan province, the process of cultural change is not a passive one: Chinese agents such as the consumers in Li's novel and Li Jieren himself enjoy the advantages of imported objects and ideas, but also push back against and add their own innovations to the imports that have crossed Chinese borders—including realism,[642] a narrative mode that traveled across geographic space and in turn shaped the writing of spatiality in modern China. In the next chapter I consider more closely the fate of realism's globetrotting.

I want to end this chapter by suggesting a final way to understand how the smallest denominations of space relate to the largest. When tiny, suffocating rooms evoke national space, this inevitably takes us back to the primordial image in modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's iron house, his allegory in the Preface to *A Call to Arms* for the doom awaiting the obliviously sleeping Chinese people. Famously, Lu Xun ultimately decides to take up his pen anyway, calling the slumberers to arms: for so long as a few are awakened, there is still hope of destroying the iron house. The stories that follow his preface—"Diary of a Madman," "Medicine," "Tomorrow," the rest of Lu Xun's oeuvre, and indeed the work of Chinese realist writers heeding his call to arms—describe the bare, stifling iron rooms of the poor, which are metonymically tied to the material, textual, and cultural poverty of the Chinese nation. And these writers produce their stories by engaging with Western realist intertexts, so that these Chinese textual spaces are the impoverished cousins of the derelict literary spaces in European realisms. And though materially impoverished, these derelict rooms house a formally enriched mode of realism in China.

[641] See Ng, *The Lost Geopoetic Horizon*, 80-5, for Li Jieren's engagement with French and traditional Chinese intertexts. See also Liu Yong, "Yingzhao 'qianqi baiguai shixiang' de duo lengjing—Li Jieren changpian sanbuqu de jiegou tese," *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 3 (1988): 81-2.

[642] See Yang Lianfen, "Li Jieren changpian xiaoshuo yishu piping," for a discussion of Li's adoption of French realist techniques.

Chapter 6
Conclusion: Heteromodal Realism

The preceding chapters have centered upon close textual analyses of how Chinese writers appropriated thematic and formal elements from Russian intertexts to portray poverty and squalor, a central topic that shaped their approaches to representing the nation in narrative form, the social other, time, and space. The writing of material poverty thus defined the development of modern Chinese fiction, an endeavor to remedy China's purported textual poverty. This concluding chapter, while still grounded in close-reading, does more theoretical work on the mode of realism itself. As we have seen, in many ways modern Chinese realist fiction behaves as theorists have described Western realism behaving, with "its receptivity to subaltern communities hitherto ignored or merely ridiculed in high literature; its capacity for capturing intensive totality; its openness to temporalities of becoming and to the dereifying laughter of the folk."[643] But modern Chinese realism also behaves in ways that are figured as madness—deviation from mental and formal sanity—in a text like "Diary of a Madman." In what follows, I return to Lu Xun's story as a case study, to unpack how this formally groundbreaking piece of fiction, structured around the intertwined problems of material, textual, and cultural poverty, reveals the ways in which cannibalistic intertextuality gave rise to a new mode of realist writing. I circle back to Lu Xun's "Diary," a seminal text of modern Chinese realism, because my method for anatomizing the realist qualities of this publication can shed light upon the realism of fiction that proliferated in the decades that followed.

Given the radical nature of Lu Xun's use of vernacular language and imported literary form in this story, it is little wonder that so much ink has been spilled attempting to define its literary mode. Though Lu Xun has been considered a foundational writer of realism in modern China, critics have complicated this designation and pointed out his modernist or symbolist proclivities.[644] But to understand the formally slippery nature of Lu Xun's story, we must scrutinize the formally slippery nature of his Russian models. To intervene in recent debates about peripheral realism, in longstanding discussions about the nature of realism in modern China, and in our current understanding of the reading of Russian literature outside Russia, I redefine the realism of what is usually considered the first modern Chinese short story, by articulating what happens when literary modes cross borders into an intertextually voracious cultural context.[645]

---

[643] Joe Cleary, "Realism after Modernism and the Literary World-System," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2012): 260. Cleary, in this Foreword to the *MLQ* special issue, cites Auerbach, Lukács, and Bakhtin.

[644] Ming Dong Gu notes that the "scholarly consensus that he is a master of critical realism remains unchanged," but Lu Xun's texts "exhibit features common to symbolism, surrealism, supernatural realism, grotesque realism, magic realism, and other experimental forms"; see "Lu Xun and Modernism/Postmodernism," *Modern Language Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2008): 29. See also Xiaobing Tang, "Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' and a Chinese Modernism," *PMLA* 107, no. 5 (1992): 1222-34; Cui Wenjin, "The 'Symbol of Angst' and the Poetics of Remembrance: Lu Xun and Chinese Literary Modernity," *Modern Chinese Literature and Cultures* 28, no. 2 (Fall, 2016): 140; Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 45, 87, Leo Lee, *Lu Xun,* 58, 61, 65, Patrick Hanan, "The Technique," 222; David Wang, *Fictional Realism,* 3, 10; Wang Hui, "Intuition, Repetition, Revolution: Six Moments in the Life of Ah Q," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*, ed. Carlos Rojas and Andrea Bachner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 702-21; and Song Binghui, "Cong Zhong-E wenxue jiaowang kan Lu Xun 'Kuangren riji' de xiandai yiyi," *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue* 4 (2014): 140. Yan Jiayan has described the neglect of other "isms" present in Lu Xun's fiction; see *Lun Lu Xun de fudiao xiaoshuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 78-9.

[645] See Brunson, *Russian Realism*, 3 for an articulation of realism as a transhistorical mode.

In Chapter 2, I suggested that Lu Xun cannibalized a number of elements from Gogol's story in writing "Diary": the thematic interconnections between material poverty, textual poverty, and national backwardness is one important example. Furthermore, Gogol's oeuvre provided a model for the Lu Xun's master trope of metonymy: both writers populate their fiction with characters obsessed with contiguous personal possessions such as clothes, hair, and animals (like the Zhao family's dog). Altogether, the elements that Lu Xun appropriates from Gogol's story are multifariously rhizomatic:[646] the fixation on children,[647] which Lu Xun redeploys with an ironic twist[648]; the duality with which the diary encourages us to consider the ravings of the

[646] See also Song Binghui, "Cong Zhong-E wenxue jiaowang," 135, which largely focuses on differences between the two stories. Ditto for Peng Ding'an, "Lu Xun de 'Kuangren riji' yu Guogeli de tongming xiaoshuo," *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 1 (1982): 293-301.

[647] Gogol's madman ends with a cry of help for a child, but in this case the child is himself: "Dear mother, save your poor son!" ("Diary," in *The Collected Tales,* 293) He makes this plea after suffering a series of beatings in the asylum. Huters has noted the imagery of the pietà evoked by this passage, the divine grace of which he reads in contrast to the "worried," "anxious" narratorial voice at the end of Lu Xun's story (*Bringing the World Home*, 273). However, it is crucial to remember that throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "the image of Russia as a mother suffering under the yoke of the autocrat, deserted and maimed but kind and self-sacrificial, appeared widely in the writings of the intelligentsia"; see Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 230; see also Helena Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood Before and After Glasnost* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 32. Poprishchin is here above all calling out to Mother Russia, which he feels has made him an "orphan" because of its cultural and material barrenness in contrast to the superior resources of the West. I would stress not the divine transcendence of Poprishchin's closing attitude but rather his similarity to Lu Xun's madman, who calls to the bitter end for mercy for the motherland's children. Poprishchin's diary entries leading up to this last one are littered with references to Western European politics and personages. But at the moment when he can take the abuse no longer, the madman is no longer the king of Spain but a child of Mother Russia: "Save me! take me! give me a troika of steeds swift as the wind! …Here is the sky billowing before me; a little star shines in the distance; a forest races by with dark trees and a crescent moon; blue mist spreads under my feet; a string twangs in the mist; on one side the sea, on the other Italy; and there I see some Russian huts. Is that my house blue in the distance? Is that my mother sitting at the window?" ("Diary," in *The Collected Tales,* 293). He spots European Italy in this vision, but it is toward the motherland that he turns. For Poprishchin to fantasize in his delirium of physical pain and emotional anguish that a quintessentially Russian mode of transport (the troika) has taken him to see traditional Russian peasant dwellings where his mother(land) could save him is a desperate turn back to the non-urban pre-Westernized and pre-modernized forms of temporality and hierarchy outside of St. Petersburg.

[648] If the child and parent are some form of national allegory for Gogol, they are no less so for Lu Xun, whose madman hopes to save the next generation of Chinese youths from millennia of cannibalistic, mercenary tradition. Of note is the difference in how Gogol and Lu Xun perceive of kinship. For Poprishchin, whose oppression arises from an impersonal social order, the fantasy of salvation lies in contemplation of his next of kin, however impossible this salvation may be. For Lu Xun, by contrast, it is the nearest of kin who are themselves the most terrifying threat, as elders not only eat their younger siblings and children, but go on to teach the surviving children to eat others in turn. Perhaps Lu Xun's madman has not recovered from his insanity, as the story's preface informs us, but has in fact been eaten by his elder brother, who then perpetrates the conspiracy of labeling his victim a madman, thereby undermining the radical threat of his epiphanies. Family is dangerously powerful precisely because of the intimate access provided by close kinship.

madman;[649] the use of temporality and dates;[650] and the symbolism of the moon. Lu Xun's

[649] Either he is the single enlightened and sane man among the cannibalistic savages, or he is the single madman amongst perfectly upstanding citizens. Yet this duality is rendered asymmetrical by the narrative frame in which the preface is not bookended by a postface at the end of the entries. We begin with an unnamed narrator who tells us to consider this diary only as a psychiatric specimen, but because this "sane" voice does not reappear at the end of the entries to safely tie up loose ends and remind us of the madman's insanity, the story leaves with only the madman's resounding, stricken cry of help. It is this plea that is the story's final word, not a recuperation or undermining thereof. This potential for equivocalness in how we are invited to relate to the madman is a narrative strategy that Lu Xun borrows from the ending of Gogol's story, in which Poprishchin is treated with a similar ambivalence. Throughout the entries he unwittingly depicts himself as contemptibly snobbish, delusive, absurd, pretentious, and vulgar. Yet at the same time we are invited to sympathize with him, particularly in the final entries when he seems to gain some clarity and realize that he is not in fact being ordained as the next monarch of Spain but in reality suffering from ruthless torture in the asylum. As we have seen, his last diary entry leaves the realm of the ridiculous for that of the sublime (vast landscapes with mist, water, celestial bodies and wind). Huters and Holquist have both noted this sudden moment of sanity, clarity, and even divinity at the end of Poprishchin's story. But there is a final bathetic jolt: "Dear mother! pity your sick child! . . . And do you know that the Dey of Algiers has a bump just under his nose?" (Ibid., 293) Gogol does not allow the tale to end with Poprishchin's lingering cry for mercy, the image of the pietà, but instead must undercut his hero one last time. So it is all the more telling that Lu Xun does not deploy this final undercutting maneuver at the end of his story: he allows the madman's desperate plea to resound, without cutting it off.

[650] Poprishchin starts to label his entries with luridly impossible dates. In the beginning they are intelligible enough (December 3rd, December 5th), but as his mental state deteriorates we have "The Year 2000, 43rd of April"; "The 86th of Martober"; Between day and night"; "Date none. The day had no date"; "The 1st"; and so on. The last entry is dated as follows: *Чи 34 сло Мц гдао. ɐvɒdвəФ 349.* ; see Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvatsatitrekh tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Nasledie, 2001), 222. "February" (*Февраль*) is here written upside down, and the word "date" (*число*) interrupted by the number 34, and the word for "year" (*года*) written in an anagram. His sense of time and history has been turned literally upside-down (much as he desires to upend the prevailing social hierarchy and national hierarchies between Western Europe and Russia). The Russian entry into a Western definition of temporality and history (emblematized by Peter I's decree that the Julian calendar would prevail in Russia) means that everything is scrambled or topsy-turvy for Russian culture (like the letters in the date); but it also enables the Russian man of letters, Gogol himself, to take elements of Western thought (like numbers and dates) and turn them upside-down, play fast and loose with them, incorporate them into the Russian language. Indeed, the number 34 literally cuts the Russian word for "date" (*число*), in two, indicating that Western dates and ways of thinking have abruptly cut into Russian culture, but also that the Russian language is capacious enough to swallow up these external ideas and generate something entirely new, even if slightly crazy. If as Holquist conjectures this is about Russia's fraught entry into a Westernized definition of history and temporality, then Gogol's play with dates keeps the idea of national history in constant thematic focus throughout the narrative. Lu Xun riffs on Gogol's deployment of temporality within his "Diary": Lu Xun's madman is likewise obsessed with reading between the lines of historiography and with his own pen's potential ability to change its future course. Just as Poprishchin's contorted dating system implies Russia's out-of-jointness with Western history, so too does Lu Xun's madman find that in Chinese history books, there is no proper dating system (*zhe lishi meiyou niandai*): it is out of step with the rest of world history. The story's preface draws attention to the fact that the madman's diary entries are not dated: *buzhu yueri*, which literally means he does not write down the "moon" (*yue*) and "sun" (*ri*). It is true that the madman does not date his entries, but he plays plenty of attention to celestial markers of the passage of time, in particular the moon. Of course, his sense of time, like that of Gogol's madman, is hopelessly confused, for his first diary entry claims that he has not seen the moon in over thirty years. The writer of the preface, on the other hand, marks his own sanity, his ability to remain in touch with the normative flow of time, by dating the preface the second day of the fourth month of the seventh year of the Republic (*qinian siyue er ri*); see "Kuangren rii," in *Lu Xun quanji* 1:444-56. Yet though the ability to remain rooted in societally recognized temporality is meant to represent this preface writer's sanity in contrast with the madman, the irony here is that though the preface is dated to the seventh year of Republican China, the narrator divulges in the preface that the madman is fully recovered and preparing to take up a position with the Qing bureaucracy, an entity that has not existed for seven years. So the world of the sane, to which the madman has purportedly returned, is in fact convoluted and implausible in its accounting of temporality. Unlike in Gogol's story, where there exists a realm of sane texts (like the newspapers that the madman obsessively reads)

longstanding admiration for Gogol's work has been well documented.[651] Many of the elements he admired are realist (*xieshi*).[652] In an essay about Gogol's *Dead Souls*, "Jihu wushi de beiju" ("An Almost Plotless Tragedy"), Lu Xun mentions Gogol's penchant for using character types (*dianxing*) and for depicting the everyday, the banal.[653] Gogol's attentiveness to the grim reality of Russian life endeared him to Belinsky, who claimed him as a member of his Natural School (the forebears of realism in Russian literature).[654] In developing methods for literary mimesis, Lu Xun practices a mimesis (with his own innovations) of Gogol's realist methods, above all those governed by metonymic logic. And, as we have seen throughout the preceding chapters, metonymy has been the undergirding trope of many formal aspects of modern Chinese fiction about poverty.

But Gogol's oeuvre has tended to defy generic categorizations. He has been read as a realist, but also as a romanticist (or an equivocal version of either).[655] Just as Gogol's madman is nervous about temporality, registering the Russian anxiety about entering into a Western historical episteme, so too is it difficult to impose Western aesthetic periodizations upon Russian (and for that matter, Chinese) writers. Brunson, writing about Gogol's visual aesthetic, makes such a claim:

> Gogol leverages Russia's precarious position, both in and out of sync with the West, to advance a literature that is rife with productive incongruities….And he also, despite this connection to realism, pioneers a visual aesthetic so unique that it is sometimes considered commensurate with a twentieth-century modernist sensibility. What we discern in these aesthetic and critical distinctions is not a writer caught between modes, between histories, between cultures, but rather a writer who fully inhabits a space of simultaneity.[656]

---

that record a normative benchmark system of temporality, in the world of Lu Xun's story there is no temporality that makes sense, whether in the minds of the "sane" or of the "insane."

[651] See Kowallis, "Lu Xun and Gogol," and Hanan, "The Technique."

[652] "'Si hunling baitu' xiaoyin" ("Preface to *Illustrations of* Dead Souls"), in *Lu Xun quanji* 6:460. One critic has contrasted the later Lu Xun's attitude toward the realist Gogol with the early Lu Xun's discussion of Gogol (in "On the Power of Mara Poetry") alongside writers of a "romantic" vein such as Pushkin and Lermontov (see Gao Wenbo, "Lu Xun suo zhuan yiwen xu ba zhi yu E-Su wenxue de piping gaishuo," *Wenyi lulun yu piping* 2 (2011): 107.

[653] The use of types has been considered a hallmark of realism since Lukács; see *Studies in European Realism*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), 6, 8. Fokkema has asserted that Lu Xun favored the "typicality of character" in Russian Realism; see "The Impact of Russian Literature," 92; but I disagree with his assessment that Lu Xun was more drawn to "romanticism, symbolism than realism in Russian literature" (Ibid., 90).

[654] See Paul Debreczeny, "Nikolay Gogol and His Contemporary Critics," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 56, no. 3 (1966): 13. Belinsky praises Gogol for being the poet of real life (*poet zhizni deistvitel'noi*); see "O Russkoi povesti i povestiiakh Gogol'ia," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1953-9), 284.

[655] See Maguire, *Exploring Gogol*, 6, 17, and 20; John Kopper, "The 'Thing-in-Itself' in Gogol's Aesthetics: A Reading of the *Dikanka* Stories," in *Essays on Gogol: Logos and the Russian Word*, ed. Susan Fusso and Priscilla Meyer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 60-1; Melissa Frazier, *Frames of the Imagination: Gogol's Arabesques and the Romantic Question of Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 179. Fanger discusses Gogol as a writer of "romantic realist" and the grotesque (see *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism*, 101-126); he was read as a "civic-realist" but also a "visionary-symbolist" (Fanger, *The Creation*, 8). See also Renato Poggioli, "Realism in Russia," *Comparative Literature* 3, no. 3 (1951): 253-67, Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol,* and Bely, *Masterstvo Gogol'ia* (Moscow: MALP, 1996).

[656] Brunson, "Gogol Country," 375.

Early twentieth century Chinese literature was another space of aesthetic simultaneity, in which a writer could experiment with multiple modes or genres at once. Brunson insists that Gogol's use of perspectivism in *Dead Souls* demonstrates how to bring the world into view and how easy it is to distort this view.[657] Similarly, I think his use of metonymy shows off what realist narrative can do with seemingly trivial details while at the same time indicating how distorted that sense of "reality" can be. After all, the madman who thinks with the logic of metonymy takes it to such an extreme that he goes mad with the explosion of associations he can discern among things and persons adjacent to one another. The same might be said of Lu Xun's madman. So both Gogol and Lu Xun's usages of metonymy traffic in a realist technique while at the same time taking it to such an extreme that realism distorts. If metonymy in realism relates to the narrative possibility of proliferating outward from a single point and capturing more and more social connections and phenomena, then Gogol and Lu Xun's metonymy is in some ways the opposite: exaggerated fixation upon contiguous objects or persons suggests an inability to think rationally about wider social reality or totality, signaling the collapse of logical causal connections and the breakdown of the body or body politic (as in cannibalism).

If Gogol is one of Lu Xun's models then the latter's realism is predictably capacious; this is even more true when we consider Lu Xun's relationship to Andreev's fiction.[658] Lu Xun first translated Andreev's short stories "Molchanie" ("Silence") and "Lozh'" ("The Lie") in the 1909 collection *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*. He later translated parts of Andreev's *Red Laugh*, which consists of the fragmented diary entries of a soldier driven insane by the horrors of the Russo-Japanese war, followed by the diary entries of his brother who is in turn driven mad by the repercussions of war on the home front. It is no accident that in composing such a daringly iconoclastic story as "Diary," Lu Xun should have been drawn to Russian models of first-person narrations written by madmen, as though recognizing that many readers would consider his daring textual experimentation to be mad (*kuang*) in form and content.[659] Ventriloquizing through a character of dubious psychological stability allows Lu Xun to express a view about China's untenable backwardness while at the same time ironically undercutting so dastardly and sweeping an allegation in his typically ambivalent fashion.[660] It also allows him to play fast and loose with literary modes and styles, as we shall see.

In the past century critics have teased out Andreev's affinities to realism, decadence, romanticism, impressionism, existentialist and absurdist drama and prose, symbolism, and neo-realism.[661] Lu Xun himself marveled that Andreev "harmonized symbolism and realism," and

---

[657] Ibid., 387.

[658] According to Gamsa, "Andreev was one of the sources of influence (alongside Gogol and, possibly, Chekhov) on the style and mood of his early stories" (*The Translation,* 236).

[659] See Tang's explication of why Lu Xun opted for *kuang* as opposed to *feng* in his translation of madness ("Lu Xun's 'Diary,'" 1226).

[660] Moreover, both Gogol's "Diary" and Andreev's *Red Laugh* stage madness as the result of a humiliating national confrontation: in Gogol's story, the madman Poprishchin is a lowly clerk who feels degraded not just within the Russian social hierarchy but also in the face of rarefied echelons of Western European culture to which he has no access; and Andreev's novella documents the first war that Russia (or any modern Western nation, for that matter) lost to an Asian military power. So too does Lu Xun's "Diary" grow out of the clash between China and hegemonic world powers (the West, Russia, Japan) documented in the lantern slide from Lu Xun's preface.

[661] See Stephen Hutchings, *A Semiotic Analysis of the Short Stories of Leonid Andreev, 1900-1909* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1990), 2-9; and Frederick White, *Memoirs and Madness: Leonid Andreev through the Prism of the Literary Portrait* (Montreal: MQUP, 2006), 185. See also V. Bezzubov, *Leonid Andreev i traditsii russkogo realizma* (Tallin: Eesti raamat, 1984), 9-21, 73-5, 333-4; Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian*

that even though his works are very infused with "symbolist flavor, yet still they do not lose their realist quality."[662] Hanan comments (erroneously) upon the lack of similarities between Lu Xun's story and Gogol's,[663] and declares Andreev's *Red Laugh* as the "closest parallel" to Lu Xun's method in "Diary."[664] There are an uncanny number of elements in Andreev's story that we have already found in both Lu Xun and Gogol's "Diaries": narrative framing; the confusion of temporality[665]; writing as a means of working through the problem of the nation and its moral bankruptcy[666]; the dangers of kinship[667]; the dangers of and to children[668]; the animality of

---

Symbolism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 268; and James B. Woodward, *Leonid Andreyev: A Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 100, 121-2.

[662] "'Andan de yan'ai li' yizhe fuji" ("Translator's note to 'Into the Dark Distance'") in *Lu Xun quanji* 10:201. Translation mine. See also Gao Wenbo, "Lu Xun suo zhuan yiwen xuba," 101-2. Gao considers *Kuangren riji* to be a blend of symbolism and realism. So too do Zhou Yin and Li Kechen, writing about Andreev's influence on Lu Xun; see "Lun Lu Xun de 'Kuangren riji' yu Antelaifu de 'Qiang,'" *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 4 (1982): 237. They mention other stories by Andreev that possibly find an echo in "Kuangren riji."

[663] Gálik likewise erroneously insists that "Gogol's story gave Lu Xun's nothing more than the title" (*Milestones,* 26).

[664] "The Technique," 224. Hanan calls Andreev's *Red Laugh* a symbolist novel, which is not strictly true. See Pyman, *A History,* 268, and Woodward, *Leonid Andreyev,* 122-3.

[665] The horrors of war warp the passage of time for Andreev's first narrator, a temporal distortion that eventually infects his brother, too, though the latter has himself never been to war: "Night approached imperceptibly, and before we had time to notice it and wonder where it had come from, the sun was again burning above our heads…to us it appeared as one endless day without any beginning"; see Leonid Andreev, *The Red Laugh* (Sawtry: Daedalus, 1989)*,* 20. Unlike Gogol and Lu Xun's protagonists, Andreev's madman in *Red Laugh* is obsessed not with the moon but with the sun, whose heat and red light eventually synaesthetically coalesce in his sleep-deprived and shell-shocked mind to generate the ubiquitous "red laugh" symbolizing the senselessness of human depravity in war.

[666] Like Lu Xun's madman, Andreev's strives to recuperate from the horrors of human bestiality by means of writing. In both cases, text is bloody: "Your pen is not dry," the soldier's brother pronounces after his death; "it is steeped in living human blood" (Ibid., 163), like the Chinese books that according to Lu Xun's madman have "eat people" scrawled between the lines ("Diary," *Selected Stories,* 10). Andreev's madman was a literary critic before he became a soldier. He used to read a great deal of foreign literature (*Red Laugh*, 107), but upon his return he can no longer write properly (Ibid., 108-9). Like his legs, which have been blasted away, his fingers "are still at the front" (Ibid., 112). Physical dismemberment is connected to mental dismemberment. As he approaches death, he begins to write furiously (presumably he is writing the very fragments that we have before us) and "sleeplessly" (Ibid., 113), like Lu Xun's madman. He dies at his task, and his brother picks up where he leaves off, as though handing over the pen passes on mental infirmity as well. The foreign (Western) literature that the first narrator used to read is thereby counterposed as the prelapsarian, civilized marker of sanity, as opposed to the insanity of war against a non-European nation and the raving texts that it engenders. As we have seen, the phantom presence of Western texts in Lu Xun's story likewise embody a counterpoint to the destructiveness of traditional Chinese writings.

[667] Andreev's novella describes cannibalistic crowds in which family members turn upon one another: "A convulsive wave of madness would overwhelm their still limbs. They would jump up, yelling and howling like animals; they would forget that they had wives, sisters, mothers, and would begin casting themselves about like men stricken with sudden blindness, in their madness throttling each other with their white fingers fragrant with scent.... They would tear at each other's ears, bite off each other's noses…." (*Red Laugh,* 139). As in Lu Xun's story, the moment when kinship is forgotten, or when kin turns upon kin, signals the most chilling extremity of human depravity. Like Lu Xun's madman, Andreev's yearns for solace in the bosom of his family but can find none, and indeed can only transmit his insanity by his proximity to his brother. Whereas the two brothers are consonant in their mental state in Andreev's novella, reinforcing the potency of the narrators' message, Lu Xun makes the supposed reconciliation of the two brothers (in his preface) an instrument of irony that undermines the convictions of the madman.

[668] Andreev's first narrator makes frequent note of the youthfulness of his fellow soldiers, and in passages alluding to the cannibalistic, animalistic furor of human crowds, they are likened to children (Ibid., 84). A late entry describes a nameless anti-war orator addressing a crowd, "You, who are young, you, whose lives are only just beginning, save yourselves and the future generations from this horror, from this madness" (Ibid., 177). This injunction echoes in Lu

humans[669]; repeated references to staring eyes and leering mouths; and cannibalism as manifestation of the ultimate dehumanization.[670]

Xiaolu Ma conjectures that it is via Japanese intermediation that cannibalism was introduced into Lu Xun's story.[671] I propose a different triangulated source: Andreev's *Red Laugh*, in which animals become a trope for the savagery of humans brought out by, but not limited to, the context of war:

> "Listen," said the doctor, looking aside. "Yesterday I saw a mad soldier that came to us. An enemy's soldier. He was stripped almost naked, beaten and scratched and hungry as an animal, his hair was unkempt, as ours is, and he resembled a savage, primitive man or monkey. . . . What do they eat? Probably nothing, or, maybe, they feed on the dead bodies together with the beasts, together with those fat wild dogs, that fight on the hills and yelp the whole night long."[672]

This must immediately call to mind the Zhao family's hungry-looking dog, or the hyenas that fascinate Lu Xun's madman. Andreev's story features many such passages that describe feasting upon human flesh, which tends to happen in crazed group settings, often with bloodthirstily cheering spectators (Lu Xun too, as critics have noted, wrote frequently about the violence of spectatorship). Lu Xun cannibalizes Andreev's thematization of cannibalism, but it is in the context of poverty and famine, rather than of war, that Lu Xun's madman first recognizes the bestiality in Chinese people.[673]

Andreev's novella is about the very war whose image, in the form of a lantern slide,

---

Xun's "Save the children!" In Andreev's text these exhortations prove futile, for the second narrator begins to see signs of the corruption within even the youngest children: "Those children, those innocent little children. I saw them in the street playing at war and chasing each other…and something shrank within me from horror and disgust. And I went home; night came on—and in fiery dreams, resembling midnight conflagrations, those innocent little children changed into a band of child-murderers" (Ibid., 146). In his nightmares or hallucinations, he sees "monstrous, misshapen children, with heads of grown-up murderers. They were jumping lightly and nimbly, like young goats at play, and were breathing with difficulty, like sick people. Their mouths, resembling the jaws of toads or frogs, opened widely and convulsively….and they were killing each other at play. They were the most terrible of all that I had seen" (Ibid., 146-7). The motif of animals coalesces with that of children here, along with the image of the mouth which throughout the story signifies not only the madness of the red laugh but also the bestiality of human cruelty and cannibalism. Lu Xun's madman, we must remember, is also terrified of images of leering, smiling mouths, with their bloody fangs.

[669] There are innumerable instances of this motif: humans are dehumanized in the gore of warfare (Ibid., 33, 44, 65, 69, 81-2, and so on); humans are cannibalistic like animals (Ibid., 123); dogs make frequent appearances too, along with wolves (Ibid., 154, 169, 176), as in Lu Xun's story. Hanan has noted this as well (see "Technique," 225).

[670] In fact the number of thematic similarities among the three stories are so legion that it turns us readers into Lu Xun's madman: just as he sees in all the traditional Chinese texts proof of his conviction that Chinese literature promotes the eating of people, so too do we begin to find in these Russian intertexts confirmation of thematic and imagistic consonance between the three stories. The paranoid logic of the text infects the reader: the hermeneutic power of Lu Xun's story is such that it infuses the reader with its hermeneutic.

[671] See "The Missing Link." As Zhou and Li have pointed out, Andreev's "Stena" ("The Wall"), which they claim shows some resemblances to Lu Xun's "Diary," also features cannibalism ("Lun Lu Xun de 'Kuangren riji,'" 239). And we must not forget that in a 1918 letter to Xu Shoushang (in *Lu Xun quanji* 11:365), Lu Xun professed to have recognized the ubiquity of Chinese cannibalism when reading the Song dynasty historiographical work *Zizhi tongjian* (*Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance*). So there are both foreign and indigenous precedents to this idea.

[672] Leonid Andreev, *Red Laugh*, 82.

[673] For Lu Xun, Andreev, and Gogol, contact with a foreign nation (Russia with Western Europe or Japan, or China with Japan and Russia) prompted the writers to describe animality or cannibalism in this vein, implying that one's own kind (one's own countrymen or fellow humans) is as deadly a threat as the other (the animals, the foreigners).

catalyzed Lu Xun's decision to write stories like "Diary," according to his preface. Nowhere in *Red Laugh* is the Russo-Japanese War explicitly named, though it is everywhere obvious; and nowhere in Lu Xun's story is this war mentioned, though the humiliating condition of Chinese nationals (as in that infamous lantern slide) during a war in which two foreign powers jostled over Chinese territory is part of the implied historical context of national backwardness that "Diary" deplores. This war and the traumatic historical trajectory of China that it emblematizes are repressed in the story, and in the consciousness of the madman. In fact, I want to make the case that in addition to the array of themes and images that Lu Xun cannibalized from Andreev's novella, above all his intertextual engagement with *Red Laugh* is characterized by the return of the repressed, which emerges in increasingly non-realist details.

The Freudian sense of the uncanny, *unheimlich*, or unhomely, refers to "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar…." [674] In Andreev's *Red Laugh*, the familiarity and comfort of the home are in the opening pages an object of the narrator's fixation, its ordinariness providing a mental solace to the soldier embroiled in the war front:

> And then—I suddenly remembered my home: a corner of my room, a scrap of light-blue wall-paper, and a dusty untouched water-bottle on my table—on my table, which has one leg shorter than the others, and had a small piece of paper folded under it. While in the next room—and I cannot see them—are my wife and little son….so wonderful was this simple and peaceful picture…. [675]

The uneven table legs prefigure the loss of his own legs: the image of home contains within it an uncanny premonition. The cool blue tones of his memory of home act as a low-temperature contrast to the fiery reds saturating the landscape around him: the red of the pitiless sun beating down upon them, their sunburnt necks, the dismembered and bloody bodies of the wounded and dead, and above all the red of the hideous red laugh that begins to symbolize the insanity of warfare. The narrator remains fixated upon fantasies of home, and when he finally does return there, the same metonymic details appear: "And the cups were the same, blue outside and white inside, very pretty little cups, a wedding present….And in the study I saw once again the light-blue wall-paper, a lamp with a green shade and a table with a water-bottle upon it. And it was a little dusty."[676] Yet though these metonymic markers of domesticity are the same, nothing else provides comfort: his wife and child are still "in the next room, and I could not see them,"[677] just as they were invisible in his reveries on the war front. Coming home has not brought them closer to him, for they weep, and his brother, sister, and mother behave strangely around him: "They upset me, these discontented people," he complains.[678]

It may seem at first that home has not changed, whereas he has; yet it soon becomes clear that nothing is the same at home. Home begins to resemble war in the last fragment of the novella, when the elder brother encounters a riot during an anti-war demonstration. To escape the violence, he "rushed about the unfamiliar streets" toward home,[679] which seem strange now due to his alienation from reality after the traumatic encounter with bloodshed; and when he finally

---

[674] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 124. As will become clear, I am interested not so much in the psychoanalytic resonances of Freud's idea, but rather in its literary or aesthetic applications.
[675] *Red Laugh,* 10.
[676] Ibid., 89-90.
[677] Ibid., 93.
[678] Ibid., 95.
[679] Ibid., 181.

arrives, "the house in which I had lived for so many years seemed to me unfamiliar in that strange dead street."[680] At this point his description of home is invaded by red color and red light, as opposed to the cool blues that used to symbolize its comfort and security in contrast to the red laugh of war.[681] In his unstable mind, even the children's nursery, the precincts of calm, innocence, and regeneration, is piled with corpses.[682]

Details like the light-blue wallpaper and the dusty water bottle functioned as Barthesian reality effects for the homesick soldier, signifying the reality of that safe home space and providing a mental anchor for him in the surreal insanity of war. But they have evidently failed to do their job. The reality of the homeliness they signify does not exist any longer. When home is made unhomely, this is when Andreev departs from realism and the reality effect. Details like the dead bodies in the nursery cease to signify "we are the real"[683] and instead signify something beyond everyday, logical, sane reality. The unhomely in this text marks departures from the homeliness of realism.

Lu Xun subjects his madman to the same sense that the safety and familiarity of home have become unhomely and threatening, and this is also when his narrative departs from the sanity of the reality effect. When the madman becomes frightened of the alarming, hostile look in his neighbors' eyes, a servant "dragged me home. The folk at home all pretended not to know me; they had the same look in their eyes as all the others. When I went into the study, they locked the door outside as if cooping up a chicken or a duck. This incident left me even more bewildered."[684] Home is unhomely now because the madman has uncovered the secret of the appalling history of cannibalism: the long-repressed memory of having eaten his sister, within the purported safety of his own home, has returned to his consciousness.

The repressed often rears its head, in *Red Laugh* as in Lu Xun's "Diary," in images of uncannily dismembered body parts.[685] These are also moments when the narrative explodes the referentiality of realist detail. In *Red Laugh,* the mouth (associated with speech and laughter, but also eating and devouring) and the eyes are the dismembered body parts that, among all the mangled and mutilated bodies littering the battlefields and the madman's consciousness, appear most frequently. It is the blankly staring eyes of victims that first begin to terrify the madman, as the ever-brutal sun "pierced the thin covering" of men's eyelids "and penetrated into the tortured brain in a blood-red glow."[686] Eyes represent the "abyss of horror and insanity": "in those black, bottomless pupils, surrounded by a narrow orange-coloured rim, like a bird's eye, there was more than death, more than the horror of death."[687] What more there might be other than death is unclear (lunacy? existential nothingness?)—this is when the signified is no longer identifiable, when the signifier has surpassed its role as Barthesian reality effect with an excess of meaning implied by the image. The same is true of the crazed, laughing mouths that Andreev's madman sees everywhere: "before my eyes, in place of the white face, there was something short, blunt and red, and out of it the blood was gushing as out of an uncorked bottle….And that short red and flowing 'something' still seemed to be smiling a sort of smile, a toothless laugh—a red

---

[680] Ibid., 183-4.
[681] Ibid., 179,
[682] Ibid., 191.
[683] "The Reality Effect," 234.
[684] "Diary," *Selected Stories,* 9.
[685] Freud cites severed limbs as a primary example of the uncanny (*The Uncanny,* 150).
[686] Andreev, *Red Laugh*, 8.
[687] Ibid., 15-6.

laugh."[688] The atrocities of warfare are so unspeakable that only this synesthetic, affectively explosive image will do. The repetition of qualifiers of uncertainty ("something" or "sort of," *chto-to* or *kakaia-to*) indicates the textual space beyond the pale of articulable reality, the symbolic abyss of the abstract and the unknown.

In Lu Xun's deployment of these body parts, the eyes and mouth, symbolism overtakes realism as well. Because the madman is terrified of being surveilled and eaten, he spots staring eyes everywhere, accompanied by gaping wide mouths with bared fangs, laughing frenziedly:

> "Yet all the time she looked at me. I gave a start, unable to control myself; then all those green-faced, long-toothed people began to laugh derisively."[689]
>
> "I realize all the poison in their speech, all the daggers in their laughter. Their teeth are white and glistening: they are all man-eaters."[690]
>
> "…not only was their human fat on the corner of his lips, but his whole heart was set on eating men."[691]
>
> "I could not see all their faces, for they seemed to be masked in cloths; some of them looked pale and ghastly (*qingmian liaoya,* literally "pale of face and fierce of fang"), still concealing their laughter."[692]

These are not just realist details, for they signify not the literal reality but the lurid affective excessiveness of these body parts,[693] taking on meanings of cunning, bloodthirstiness, speaking/teaching/lying, suspicion, predation, and so on. The madman is not a good realist, but a good symbolist: he reads surplus symbolism into details, and that is the root of his madness. It is no coincidence that Lu Xun's story, as well as his two Russian intertexts, is about madness and is said to depart from the conventions of realism, for leaving reality behind is precisely the definition of insanity. Hsia comments upon Lu Xun's "failure to provide a realistic plot for the madman's fantasies,"[694] but narratives about madness set themselves up to depart from reality. Madness is a metaphor for Lu Xun's generic departures from Western realism.

Imprisoned in his room, the madman frets, "The room was pitch dark. The beams and rafters shook above my head. After shaking for some time they grew larger. They piled on top of me. The weight was so great, I could not move. They meant that I should die. I knew that the weight was false, so I struggled out, covered in perspiration."[695] Here is home made unhomely and dangerous because of the madman's disturbed and horror-stricken mental state, so fundamentally incommunicable that only pulsating bodily affect will do. This brings us to the largest-scale sensation of the uncanny in both Andreev and Lu Xun's texts, which is teased out by one of the examples of *Unheimlich* that Freud lists, "To destroy the tranquility of the homeland."[696] If the nation is the extension of the home, then it is little wonder that a wounded

---

[688] Ibid., 26-7.
[689] Lu Xun, "Diary," *Selected Stories* 9.
[690] Ibid., 10.
[691] Ibid., 12.
[692] Ibid., 16.
[693] In my usage of affect I follow Jameson who explains that affect, unlike emotion, is a bodily feeling that "somehow eludes language and its naming of things" (*Antinomies*, 29). Affect constitutes one of the antinomies of realism that Jameson identifies, an atemporal pole in tension with the past-present-future trajectory of the récit. Affective symbols like the ones I identify in Andreev and Lu Xun's texts are not beyond the pale of realist narrative, they indicate moments when the madmen express paranoid departures from objective description of concrete details, reading inarticulable abstract meanings in them.
[694] *A History*, 33.
[695] Lu Xun "Diary," *Selected Stories* 17.
[696] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 127.

soldier in *Red Laugh* tells the narrator that he cannot bring himself to telegraph his mother at home because he can no longer make any sense of his country: "Now, she is waiting for me. But I cannot. My country (*otechestvo*)—is it possible to make her understand, what my country means…"[697] Violent encounter with a racially different nation has engendered this sense of estrangement from both the home and the homeland. Lu Xun was motivated by just such an encounter in his viewing of the lantern slide. In "Diary" not only the family home but also by extension the homeland has been rendered unhomely. Let us recall again Freud's definition for *Heimlich:* "intimately, cosily homely; arousing a pleasant feeling of quiet contentment, etc., of comfortable repose and secure protection, like the enclosed, comfortable house." Lu Xun's iron house, his famous allegory for the Chinese homeland as described in the Preface to *A Call to Arms*, is such an enclosed house, but rendered no longer comfortable, no longer safe. In fact we might think of Lu Xun's lifelong project of translation (an interest which predated and outlasted his efforts in writing fiction) as motivated by the desire to open wide the doors of the national literary home (the iron house) and invite in foreign cultural resources. The 1909 *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* was the first instantiation of this goal. Lu Xun is always aware, though, that when the foreign (*yuwai*) is invited into the national home (*yunei*), the result is often unhomely, uncanny, like his story about madness.

Examining the thematic and formal elements he cannibalizes from these two Russian texts, which have historically defied straightforward categorizations such as realism, I argue that Lu Xun's resulting narrative is a *heteromodal* realism, capable of encompassing many modes of narration from a plurality of literary movements. Here I draw upon Mikhail Bakhtin's principle of the *heteroglossic* nature of language and the novel, which omnivorously absorbs a multitude of speech registers and styles (of different social classes, professions, genres, epochs, and so forth).[698] Theorists of realism tend to point out its formal capaciousness, flexibility, and resistance to easy definition. Realism has always been constituted by manifold modes and forms of writing, and this is especially true when we look to the peripheral realisms that in the twentieth century learned belatedly from Western European realist traditions and generated their own.[699] Simon Gikandi acknowledges that terms like *realism* and *modernism* "are contested and change over time and space," and moreover "the phenomena they designate emerged in specific moments and places and not all colonized writers had access to them. The situation becomes even more complicated when one considers how the terminologies themselves became available

---

[697] Andreev, *Red Laugh*, 36.

[698] See Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *Dialogic Imagination*, 259-422. The novel has always been the literary form most closely associated with the theorization of realism. Fredric Jameson echoes Bakhtin when he states, "Taken all together in bulk, the heterogeneous materials that somehow end up coalescing into what we call the novel—or realism!—include the following: ballads and broadsheets, newspaper sketches, memoirs, diaries and letters, the Renaissance tale, and even popular forms like the play or the folk- or fairy-tale" (*Antinomies*, 7-8).

[699] I will limit myself to a few examples from the *MLQ* special issue on Peripheral Realisms. In her discussion of the West African context, Susan Z. Andrade notes that realism is not a monolithic form, so that "To capture new realities, writers invent or produce new aesthetic devices or strategies"; see "Realism, Reception, 1968, and West Africa," 304. Simon Gikandi assesses that "what might seem conceptual separations (romance/realism or realism/modernism) were complicated by the terms of the colonial cultural and literary relationship itself—the encounter between forms codified in Europe and the incomplete colonial *Lebenswelt*"; see "Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History," 311. The African writers Gikandi discusses "did not consider romance, realism, and modernism separate categories" (Ibid., 312) and were able to "transform the terms of realistic representation" (Ibid., 323). Sharae Deckard observes that in Bolaño's peripheral realism, "realist aesthetics are impurely intermingled with the irreal"; see "Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*," 351.

or inaccessible to nationalist writers."[700] The peripheral realism of a writer like Lu Xun—who registers in the local the ramifications of global modernity and capitalist imperialist incursions—is just such a complicated literary mode.

Lu Xun himself in a 1934 essay advocates this kind of grabism (*nalai zhuyi*), exhorting Chinese writers to appropriate, to select from foreign models; without grabism, he concludes, the arts cannot be renewed.[701] In the early twentieth century, Chinese writers were so enthusiastically intertextual, so omnivorously grabbing and absorbing different Western literary movements and "isms" at the same time, that whatever forms realism takes in Chinese literature is necessarily informed by a broad spectrum of realist and non-realist, indigenous and foreign, highbrow and lowbrow modes of writing.[702] What I designate as *heteromodality* in Lu Xun's realism results from the *heterochronic* nature of Chinese importation of Western literary movements, the simultaneous reception of what were originally successive historical periods. The renowned translator Geng Jizhi himself proclaimed, "I look at a text's meaning, its impact on Russian society of its time, to set the criteria for whether or not I should introduce it [into Chinese]. I do not from the first pay attention to whether it belongs to classicism, romanticism, or realism."[703] The air at the time was thick with newly translated "isms" (*zhuyi*), from naturalism to modernism to symbolism to futurism, and so on. The *heteromodality* (or hetero-*ism*) of realism characterizes the work of other early twentieth century writers such as Mao Dun, Ding Ling, and Ba Jin.

In placing modern Chinese realism in conversation with the global proliferations of realism visible in the twentieth century, I align myself with Joe Cleary when he urges a reevaluation of the realism-modernism debate in which the latter has for so long held the upper hand: "the rise of Third World nationalist movements lent new impetus to various forms of anticolonial realism, many of these still hugely underappreciated not just in the Western academy generally but also in postcolonial studies."[704] Scholarship on modern Chinese realism has interrogated its limitations or epistemic crises. In contrast, I ask how writers wielded the fecund resources newly within their reach to invent provocative mimetic ways of depicting unprecedented objects of representation. Lu Xun parlays a position of supposed disadvantage (as a writer on the periphery or semiperiphery of hegemonic national cultures) into one of daring innovation precisely because his "belatedness" as a realist writer gives him simultaneous access to a diverse array of models to select from and combine. More broadly, I hope that my reconceptualized theorization of this new permutation of realism will inform how scholars articulate the nature of peripheral realisms elsewhere around the world, in places where writers were able to make formal innovations thanks precisely to their so-called peripherality, their temporal and spatial dislocation from the places where literary realism first arose.

In his 1928 essay "Bian" ("Tablet"), Lu Xun mocks the importation of Western "isms" into Chinese literature: "So people interpret them as they please. A work mostly about oneself is referred to as 'expressionism'; a work mostly about others is 'realism'; writing poetry after seeing a woman's bare calf is 'romanticism'; banning poems written after seeing a woman's bare calf is 'classicism'…." and so on.[705] The trouble, he decries, is that people do not really know

---

[700] "Realism, Romance," 312.
[701] See *Nalai zhuyi*, in *Lu Xun quanji* 6:38-40.
[702] This era might productively be considered a case of *uneven modernity,* such that what happened successively elsewhere was imported simultaneously into China. See Ram, "Introducing Georgian Modernism," 285.
[703] Preface to An Shouyi's translation of Pushkin's *Kapitanskaia dochka*, quoted in Ge Baoquan, "Geng Jizhi xiansheng," 271.
[704] Ibid., 267.
[705] "Bian," in *Lu Xun quanji* 4:88.

what these terms mean. To illustrate, Lu Xun tells a joke about two myopic country bumpkins who compete to see who can make out more characters on a tablet hung some distance away at the temple. After a tussle, they realize that "the tablet hasn't been hung yet."[706] Under conditions of ignorance and myopia about foreign literary developments, as well as the underdevelopment of a new Chinese literature, to adopt or discriminate between various "isms" would be premature and inaccurate. The same is true of the "realism" of Lu Xun's own fiction, which can hardly be tidily demarcated and distinguished from other recently imported "isms." He manifestly was not in the business of carelessly transplanting Western genres directly into impoverished Chinese soil, for he recognized that a generic categorization obtaining in one cultural context may not be meaningfully applicable in his own.

And indeed, the heteromodal realism of Ba Jin's fiction does not fit the same parameters as Tolstoy's; Xiao Hong's realism does not equal Turgenev's; Yu Dafu's does not map onto Dostoevsky's. Xiao Hong revered Tolstoy and avidly read Gorky. Yu Dafu cites, in his famous "Chenlun" ("Sinking"), to a pantheon of Western artists from Wordsworth to Gissing to Emerson to Nietzsche to Gogol; at the same time he is a reader of classical Chinese poetry.[707] We have seen that the protagonists in "Nights of Spring Fever" or "Smoke Shadows" are bombarded with Western cultural intrusions (some welcome, others a psychological burden). Mao Dun, a staunch admirer of Russian literature, was also a committed student of French naturalism[708]; Lao She lived for a long time in England and was known for his own take on Dickensian style, a kind of farce that may also be traced back to the late-Qing writer Wu Jianren.[709] I have focused upon Chinese interest in Russian realism in this dissertation, but it was only a piece (albeit an important one) of the puzzle. With the wealth of Western texts newly at their command, writers like Lu Xun, Xiao Hong, and Yu Dafu could pick and choose what they needed from the fiction of Gogol, Andreev, Chekhov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and others, to create a new literature in writing about poverty. This plethora of resources had implications for the kind of realism that would emerge in this new cultural context. The formation of modern Chinese realism was the result of a confluence of factors so varied that the body of work I have explored necessarily took on variegated heteromodal guises.

---

[706] Ibid.

[707] See Denton, "The Distant Shore," 115, and Levan, "The Meaning of Foreign Text in Yu Dafu's *Sinking* Collection," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 24, no. 1 (2012): 48-87.

[708] See his seminal 1920 essay "Ziran zhuyi yu Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo" ("Naturalism and Modern Chinese Fiction").

[709] See for instance David Wang, *Fictional Realism*, 113-23.

Bibliography

"Lun Pin Yu Yu Zhi Yinguo." *Dongfang Zazhi* 1, no. 2 (April, 1904): 40.
Admussen, Nick. "A Music for Baihua: Lu Xun's Wild Grass and 'A Good Story.'" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 31, (2009): 1-22.
An, Chengxiong. "Li Xiang 'Chibang' Yu Yu Dafu 'Chunfeng Chenzui De Wanshang' De Bijiao Yanjiu." *Zhongguo Bijiao Wenxue* no. 1 (1999): 119-132.
Anagnost, Ann. *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.
Anderson, Marston. *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
Andrade, Susan Z. "Realism, Reception, 1968, and West Africa." *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2012): 289-308.
Andreev, Leonid. "Chi Tong." *Xin Qingnian* 7, no. 1 (Dec., 1919): 65-73.
Andreev, Leonid. "Moran." *Zhonghua Xiaoshuo Jie* 17, (1914): 1-13.
Andreyev, Leonid. *The Crushed Flower*. Translated by Bernstein, Herman. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1921.
Andreyev, Leonid. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii i Pisem: v Dvadtsati Trekh Tomakh*. Moscow: Nauka, 2007.
Andreyev, Leonid. *The Red Laugh*. Sawtry: Dedalus, 1989.
Artsybashev, M. *Sobranie Sochinenii v Trekh Tomakh*. Moscow: TERRA, 1994.
Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
Ba, Jin. *Ba Jin Quan Ji*. Beijing: Ren min wen xue chu ban she: Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing, 1986.
Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Jolas, Maria. Boston: Beacon, 1994.
Bakhtin, Mikhail M. "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel." In *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Holquist, Michael and Caryl Emerson, edited by Holquist, Michael, 84-258. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Iswolsky, Hélène. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
Balzac, Honoré de. *Père Goriot: A New Translation: Responses, Contemporaries and Other Novelists, Twentieth-Century Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1998.
Barthes, Roland. "The Reality Effect." In *The Novel*, edited by Hale, Dorothy, 229-234. Malden: Blackwell, 2006.
Bartlett, Robert Merrill. "Intellectual Leaders of the Chinese Revolution." *Current History* 271, no. 1 (Nov, 19, 1927): 55-61.
Bary, Leslie. "Oswald De Andrade's 'Cannibalist Manifesto.'" *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38 (1991): 35-37.
Belinsky, Vissarion Grigoryevich. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*. Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1953.
Bely, Andrey. *Masterstvo Gogol'ia*. Moscow: MALP, 1996.
Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Eiland, Howard and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge: Belknap, 1999.

Bernards, Brian. "From Diasporic Nationalism to Transcolonial Consciousness: Lao She's Singaporean Satire, Little Po's Birthday." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 26, no. 1 (Spring, 2014): 1-40.
Berninghausen, John. "Central Contradiction in Mao Dun's Earliest Fiction." In *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, edited by Goldman, Merle. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.
Bevan, Paul. *A Modern Miscellany: Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei's Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen, 1926-1938*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
Bezzubov, V. *Leonid Andreev i Traditsii Russkogo Realizma*. Tallin: Eesti raamat, 1984.
Bien, Gloria. *Baudelaire in China: A Study in Literary Reception* University of Delaware, 2012.
Birch, Cyril. "Change and Continuity in Chinese Fiction." In *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, edited by Goldman, Merle, 385-405. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.
Booth, William James. "Economies of Time: On the Idea of Time in Marx's Political Economy." *Political Theory* 19, no. 1 (Feb., 1991): 7-27.
Boym, Svetlana. *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
Brooks, Peter. *Realist Vision*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
Brunson, Molly. *Russian Realisms: Literature and Painting, 1840-1890*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016.
Bugarevska, Kateryna. "The Beijing Institute of Russian Language and Translation of Russian Literature in 20th Century China." *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 46-63.
Button, Peter. *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
Cai, Keru. "The Temporality of Poverty: Realism in Lao She's Camel Xiangzi." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 21, no. 1 (Spring, 2020): 1-36.
Cao, Chang. "Zai Li Bianye." *Liangyou* 129, (1937): 3.
Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Translated by DeBevoise, M. B.. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
Chaadaev, Piotr. "Letters on the Philosophy of History: First Letter." In *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, edited by Raeff, Marc, 159-73. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1978.
Chan, Ching-Kiu Stephen. "Split Consciousness: The Dialectic of Desire in Camel Xiangzi." *Modern Chinese Literature* 2, no. 2 (Fall, 1986): 171-95.
Chan, Roy Bing. *The Edge of Knowing: Dreams, History, and Realism in Modern Chinese Literature*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017.
Chan, Sylvia. "Realism Or Socialist Realism?: The 'Proletarian' Episode in Modern Chinese Literature 1927-1932." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* no. 9 (1983): 55-74.
Chan, Wing-ming. "The Self-Mocking of a Chinese Intellectual." In *Interliterary and Intraliterary Aspects of the may Fourth Movement 1919 in China*, edited by Galík, Marián. Bratislava: Veda, 1990.
Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich. *The Schoolmaster and Other Stories*. Translated by Garnett, Constance. New York: MacMillan, 1921.

Chen, Chi-yun. "Immanental Human Beings in Transcendent Time: Epistemological Basis of Pristine Chinese Historical Consciousness." In *Notions of Time in Chinese Historical Thinking*, edited by Huang, Junjie and John B. Henderson. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2006.
Chen, Duxiu. "Pinmin De Kusheng." *Meizhou Pinglun* 19, (April 27, 1919): 2.
Chen, Duxiu. "Wenxue Geming Lun." *Xin Qingnian* 2, no. 6 (February, 1917): 1-4.
Chen, Janet Y. *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
Chen, Jianhua. "Lun Zhongguo E-Su Wenxue Yanjiu De Xueshu Licheng." *Waiguo Wenxue Yanjiu* 4, (2006): 108-118.
Chen, Xiaomei. "Introduction." In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama*, edited by Chen, Xiaomei, 1-56. New York: Columbia University Press.
Chen, Xiaomei. "Reflections on the Legacy of Tian Han: 'Proletarian Modernism' and its Traditional Roots." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 18, no. 1 (Spring, 2006): 155-215.
Chen, Yu-shih. *Realism and Allegory in the Early Fiction of Mao Tun*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
Cheng, Eileen. *Literary Remains: Death, Trauma, and Lu Xun's Refusal to Mourn*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013.
Cheng, Eileen J. "'In Search of New Voices from Alien Lands': Lu Xun, Cultural Exchange, and the Myth of Sino-Japanese Friendship." *Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 3 (2014): 589-618.
Cheng, Eileen J. "Recycling the Scholar-Beauty Narrative: Lu Xun on Love in an Age of Mechanical Reproductions." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 1-38.
Cheng, Eileen and Kirk A. Denton, eds. *Jottings Under Lamplight*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.
Chinnery, J. D. "The Influence of Western Literature on Lǔ Xùn's 'Diary of a Madman'." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 23, no. 2 (1960): 309-322.
Cho, Heekyoung. "Rethinking World Literature through the Relations between Russian and East Asian Literatures." *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 28, (2018): 7-26.
Cho, Heekyoung. *Translation's Forgotten History: Russian Literature, Japanese Mediation, and the Formation of Modern Korean Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016.
Chow, Rey. *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
Christoff, Peter K. *K.S. Aksakov, A Study in Ideas, Vol. III: An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
Cleary, Joe. "Realism After Modernism and the Literary World-System." *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2012): 255-268.
Cohen, Myron L. "Cultural and Political Inventions in Modern China: The Case of the Chinese 'Peasant'." *Daedalus* 122, no. 2 (Spring, 1993): 151-170.
Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Cui, Wenjin. "The 'Symbol of Angst' and the Poetics of Remembrance: Lu Xun and Chinese Literary Modernity." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 28, no. 2 (Fall, 2016): 139-182.
Davies, Gloria. *Lu Xun's Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
Davies, Gloria. "The Problematic Modernity of Ah Q." *Chinese Literature: Essays,* 13, (Dec., 1991): 57-76.
Debreczeny, Paul. "Nikolay Gogol and His Contemporary Critics." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 56, no. 3 (1966): 1-68.
Deckard, Sharae. "Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and Roberto Bolaño's 2666." *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2012): 351-372.
Denton, Kirk A. "The Distant Shore: The Nationalist Theme in Yu Dafu's 'Sinking'." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews (CLEAR)* 14, (Dec., 1992): 107-123.
Denton, Kirk A. "Lu Xun, Returning Home, and may Fourth Modernity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016a.
Denton, Kirk A., ed. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
Denton, Kirk A. "Romantic Sentiment and the Problem of the Subject: Yu Dafu." In *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Denton, Kirk A., 145-151. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016b.
Ding, Ling. *Ding Ling Quanji*. Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2001.
Dirlik, Arif. *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
Doležalová, Anna. *Yü Ta-Fu: Specific Traits of His Literary Creation*. Bratislava: Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1971.
Doleželová-Velingerová, Milena. "Lu Xun's 'Medicine.'" In *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, edited by Goldman, Merle, 221-32. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.
Dooling, Amy. "Xiao Hong's Field of Life and Death." In *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Denton, Kirk A., 189-194. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. Translated by Pevear, Richard and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
Duara, Prasenjit. "Local Worlds: The Poetics and Politics of the Native Place in Modern China." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (/01/01, 2000): 13-48.
Eber, Irene. "Images of Oppressed Peoples and Modern Chinese Literature." In *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, edited by Goldman, Merle, 127-41. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.
Egan, Michael. "Yu Dafu and the Transition to Modern Chinese Literature." In *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, edited by Goldman, Merle, 309-24. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.
Eikhenbaum, Boris. "How Gogol's 'Overcoat' is Made." In *Gogol from the Twentieth Century: Eleven Essays*, edited by Maguire, Robert A. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
Eyferth, Jan Jacob Karl. *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots: The Social History of a Community of Handicraft Papermakers in Rural Sichuan, 1920-2000*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Fanger, Donald. *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979.
Fanger, Donald. *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.
Faure, David and Tao Tao Liu. "Introduction." In *Town and Country in China: Identity and Perception*, edited by Faure, David and Tao Tao Liu. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
Feng, Jin. *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2004.
Ferguson, Priscilla P. *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
Feuerwerker, Yi-tsi Mei. *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant 'Other' in Modern Chinese Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
Fokkema, Douwe W. "Lu Xun: The Impact of Russian Literature." In *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, edited by Goldman, Merle, 63-83. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.
Forster, John. *The Life of Charles Dickens*. Vol. 1. London: Dutton, 1969.
Frank, Ellen Eve. *Literary Architecture: Essays Toward a Tradition: Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, Henry James*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.
Frazier, Melissa. *Frames of the Imagination: Gogol's Arabesques and the Romantic Question of Genre*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
Freedgood, Elaine. *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Translated by McLintock, David. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
Gálik, Marián. *Mao Tun and Modern Chinese Literary Criticism*. Weisbaden: F. Steiner, 1969.
Gálik, Marián. *Milestones in Sino-Western Literary Confrontation, 1898-1979*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986.
Gamsa, Mark. *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature: Three Studies*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
Gamsa, Mark. "Writers from Anhui and Provinciality in Modern China." *Twentieth-Century China* 36, no. 2 (2011): 169-187.
Gao, Wenbo. "Lu Xun Suo Zhuan Yiwen Xu Ba Zhi Yu E-Su Wenxue De Piping Gaishuo." *Wenxue Lilun Yu Piping* no. 2 (2001): 101-8.
Ge, Baoquan. "Geng Jizhi Xiansheng Yu Eguo Wenxue." *Wenyi Fuxing* 13, no. 3 (1947): 269-73.
Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.
Geng, Jizhi. "Bailun Duiyu Eguo Wenxue De Yingxiang." *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 15, no. 4 (1924): 1-6.
Geng, Jizhi. "Eguo Si Da Wenxue Jia He Zhuan." *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 12, no. supplement (1921): 1-22.
Geng, Jizhi. "Yizhe Xuyan." In *Yishu Lun: Tuoersitai Zhu*, 1-2. Shanghai: Gongxue she, 1920.

Gikandi, Simon. "Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History." *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2012): 309-328.
Ginzburg, Lidiia. *Literatura v Poiskakh Real'nosti: Stat'i, Esse, Zametki*. Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel′, Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1987.
Ginzburg, Lidiia. *On Psychological Prose*. Translated by Rosengrant, Judson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
Gogol, Nikolai. *Dead Souls: A Novel*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011.
Gogol, Nikolai. "Diary of a Madman." In *Nikolai Gogol: The Collected Tales*. Translated by Pevear, Richard and Larissa Volokhonsky, 273-93. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998a.
Gogol, Nikolai. "The Overcoat." In *Nikolai Gogol: The Collected Tales*, 384-413. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998b.
Gogol, Nikolai. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii i Pisem v Dvadtsatitrekh Tomakh*. Vol. 3. Moscow: Nasledie, 2001.
Goscilo, Helena. *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood during and After Glasnost*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.
Gu, Ming Dong. "Lu Xun and Modernism/Postmodernism." *Modern Language Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2008): 29-44.
Gunn, Edward M. *Rewriting Chinese: Style and Innovation in Twentieth-Century Chinese*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.
Guo, Moruo. "Zhongguo Zuola Zhi Qidai." *Zhongguo Wenyi* 1, no. 2 (1937): 260-72.
Haddon, Rosemary. "Chinese Nativist Literature of the 1920s: The Sojourner-Narrators." *Modern Chinese Literature* 8, no. 1/2 (1994): 97–125.
Han, Xiaorong. *Chinese Discourses on the Peasant, 1900-1949*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.
Hanan, Patrick. *The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.
Hanan, Patrick. *The Technique of Lu Hsün's Fiction*. Vol. 34 Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1974.
Hanan, Patrick. "The Technique of Lu Xun's Fiction." In *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Essays by Patrick Hanan*, 217-50. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
Hanan, Patrick. *The Chinese Vernacular Story*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
Hegel, Robert E. "Traditional Chinese Fiction--the State of the Field." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (1994): 394-426.
Heinrich, Ari Larissa. *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
Henderson, John B. "Premodern Chinese Notions of Astronomical History and Calendrical Time." In *Notions of Time in Chinese Historical Thinking*, edited by Huang, Junjie and John B. Henderson. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2006.
Herman, David. *Poverty of the Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature about the Poor*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
Hockx, Michel. "The Chinese Literary Association (Wenxue Yanjiu Hui)." In *Literary Societies of Republican China*, edited by Denton, Kirk A. and Michel Hockx. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008.
Hockx, Michel. *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911-1937*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Holquist, Michael. *Dostoevsky and the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
Hu, Xiansu. "Ouzhou Xin Wenxue Zuijin Zhi Qushi." 17, no. 18 (1920): 117-30.
Hu, Yuzhi. "Dujieniefu." *Dongfang Zazhi* 17, no. 4 (1920): 75-82.
Huang, Martin W. "The Inescapable Predicament: The Narrator and His Discourse in 'the True Story of Ah Q'." *Modern China* 16, no. 4 (Oct., 1990): 430-449.
Hubbs, Joanna. *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
Hui, Wang. "Intuition, Repetition, and Revolution." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*, edited by Rojas, Carlos and Andrea Bachner, 702-21. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2016.
Huss, Ann. "The Madman that was Ah Q: Tradition and Modernity in Lu Xun's Fiction." In *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, edited by Kirk A. Denton, 136-144. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
Hutchings, Stephen. *A Semiotic Analysis of the Short Stories of Leonid Andreev, 1900-1909*. London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1990.
Huters, Theodore. "Blossoms in the Snow: Lu Xun and the Dilemma of Modern Chinese Literature." *Modern China* 10, no. 1 (1984): 49-77.
Huters, Theodore. *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.
Huters, Theodore. "Ideologies of Realism in Modern China: The Hard Imperatives of Imported Theory." In *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China: Theoretical Interventions and Cultural Critique*, edited by Liu, Kang and Xiaobing Tang. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
Huters, Theodore and Xiaobing Tang. "Mirages of Representation: May Fourth and the Anxiety of the Real." In *Chinese Literature and the West: The Trauma of Realism, the Challenge of the (Post)Modern*, edited by Dirlik, Arif and Edward Fowler, 1-23. Durham, N.C: Asian/Pacific Studies Institute, Duke University, 1991.
Jakobson, Roman. *On Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
Jakobson, Roman. "On Realism in Art." In *Language in Literature*, edited by Pomorska, Krystyna and Stephen Rudy, 19-27. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1987a.
Jakobson, Roman. "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." In *Language in Literature*, edited by Pomorska, Krystyna and Stephen Rudy, 95-119. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987b.
Jameson, Fredric. "Literary Innovation and Modes of Production: A Commentary." *Modern Chinese Literature* 2, no. 2 (Sept., 1984): 67-77.
Jameson, Fredric. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* no. 15 (1986): 65-88.
Jiang, Jing. "From Foot Fetish to Hand Fetish: Hygiene, Class, and the New Woman." *Positions: Asia Critique* 22, no. 1 (2014): 131-159.
Jin, Mei. "Niliu Zhong De Xianshi Zhuyi—tan Ye Shengtao Zaoqi De Wenyan Xiaoshuo." *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* no. 4 (1981): 190-203.
Jin, Ming. "Dafu De San Shiqi." In *Yu Dafu Yanjiu Ziliao*, edited by Wang, Zili and Zishan Chen, 329-336. Tianjin: Tianjin ren min chu ban she, 1982.
Jin, Ming. "Yu Dafu De San Shiqi." In *Yu Dafu Yanjiu Ziliao 2*, edited by Wang, Zili and Zishan Chen, 329-337. Tianjin: Tianjin renmin, 1981.

Jones, Andrew F. *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.
Kaganov, G. Z. *Images of Space: St. Petersburg in the Visual and Verbal Arts*. Translated by Monas, Sidney. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
Kaldis, Nicholas. *The Chinese Prose Poem: A Study of Lu Xun's Wild Grass (Yecao)*. Amherst: Cambria Press, 2014.
Karl, Rebecca E. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
Karlinsky, Simon. *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.
Kopper, John. "The 'Thing-in-Itself' in Gogol's Aesthetics: A Reading of the *Dikanka* Stories." In "Essays on Gogol: Logos and the Russian Word," edited by Fusso, Susanne and Priscilla Meyer, 40-62. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992.
Kornbluh, Anna. "The Realist Blueprint." *The Henry James Review* 36, no. 3 (Fall, 2015): 199-211.
Kowallis, John Eugene Von. "Lu Xun and Gogol." *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 28, no. 1-2 (2002): 101-12.
Kowallis, Jon Eugene Von. "Lu Xun's Early Essays and Present-Day China." *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 12, no. 1 (2013): 1-16.
Lao, She. *Camel Xiangzi: Chinese-English Bilingual Edition*. Translated by Shi, Xiaojing. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005.
Lao, She. "How I Came to Write the Novel 'Camel Xiangzi.'" In *Camel Xiangzi*. Translated by Shi, Xiaojing. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.
Lao, She. *Lao She Quanji*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2013.
Lau, Joseph. "Naturalism in Modern Chinese Fiction." *Literature East and West* 12, no. 2-4 (1968): 149-56.
Laughlin, Charles A. "The All-China Resistance Association of Writers and Artists." In *Literary Societies of Republican China*, edited by Denton, Kirk A. and Michel Hockx, 383-4. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008.
Lauster, Martina. *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century: European Journalism and its Physiologies, 1830-50*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007a.
Lauster, Martina. "Walter Banjamin's Myth of the 'Flâneur.'" *The Modern Language Review* 102, no. 1 (Jan., 2007b): 139-156.
Leckie, Barbara. *Open Houses: Poverty, the Novel, and the Architectural Idea in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.
Lee, Leo Ou-fan. "In Search of Modernity: Some Reflections on a New Mode of Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Chinese History and Literature." In *Ideas Across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz*, edited by Cohen, Paul A. and Merle Goldman, 109-36. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
Lee, Leo Ou-fan. "Literary Trends: The Road to Revolution, 1927-1949." In *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, edited by Goldman, Merle and Leo Ou-fan Lee, 196-266. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
Lee, Leo Ou-fan. "Literature on the Eve of Revolution: Reflections on Lu Xun's Leftist Years, 1927-1936." *Modern China* 2, no. 3 (Jul 1, 1976): 277-326.
Lee, Leo Ou-fan, ed. *Lu Xun and His Legacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.
Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
Lee, Seung-joon. *Gourmets in the Land of Famine: The Culture and Politics of Rice in Modern Canton*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.
Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Translated by Elden, Stuart and Gerald Moore. New York: Continuum, 2004.
Levan, Valerie. "The Confessant as Analysand in Yu Dafu's Confessional Narratives." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 34, (December, 2012a): 31-56.
Levan, Valerie. "The Meaning of Foreign Text in Yu Dafu's 'Sinking' Collection." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 24, no. 1 (Spring, 2012b): 48-87.
Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015.
Levine, George. "Literary Realism Reconsidered: 'The World in its Length and Breadth'." In *Adventures in Realism*, edited by Beaumont, Matthew. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.
Li, Ding. "Eguo Wenxue Fanyi Zai Zhongguo." In *Eguo Wen Xue Yu Zhongguo*, edited by Zhi, Liang, 335-83. Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1991.
Li, Jieren. *Li Jieren Quan Ji 1*. Chengdu: Sichuan wen yi chu ban she, 2011.
Li, Jieren. *Ripple on Stagnant Water: A Novel of Sichuan in the Age of Treaty Ports*. Translated by Sparling, Bret and Yin Chi. Portland: MerwinAsia, 2014.
Li, Lillian M. *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
Li, Yan. *China's Soviet Dream: Propaganda, Culture, and Popular Imagination*. Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.
Lin, Carlos Yu-Kai. "The Rise of Xiaoshuo as a Literary Concept: Lu Xun and the Question of 'Fiction' in Chinese Literature." *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 8, no. 4 (2014): 631-51.
Lin, Jinghua. "Jiashe Yihuo Zhenshi." *Eluosi Wenyi* 3, (2005): 49-54.
Link, E. Perry. *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
Lipkin, Zwia. *Useless to the State: 'Social Problems' and Social Engineering in Nationalist Nanjing, 1927-1937*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006.
Liu, Jiuming. "Yu Dafu Yu Eguo Wenxue." *Nankai Xuebao* 4, (2003a): 96-104.
Liu, Jiuming. "Yu Dafu Yu Tuosituoyefusiji." *Jianghan Luntan* 5, (2003b): 83-85.
Liu, Jiuming. *Yu Dafu Yu Waiguo Wenxue*. Wuhan: Huazhong keji daxue chubanshe, 2001.
Liu, Lydia He. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, And Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
Liu, Shu-hsien. "On the Formation of a Philosophy of Time and History through the Yijing." In *Notions of Time in Chinese Historical Thinking*, edited by Huang, Junjie and John B. Henderson. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2006.
Liu, Yong. "Yingzhao 'Qianqi Biaguai Shixiang' De Duo lengjing—Li Jieren Changpian Sanbuqu De Jiegou Tese." *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* no. 03 (1988): 73-86.

Lu Xun. *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*. Translated by Yang, Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.
Lu, Hanchao. *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
Lu, Hanchao. *Street Criers: A Cultural History of Chinese Beggars*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
Lu, Tina. *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, and Other Peculiar Encounters in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
Lu, Xun. *Lu Xun Quanji*. Vol. 18 vols. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005.
Lu, Xun. *Lu Xun Selected Works*. Translated by Yang, Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980.
Lu, Xun. *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*. Translated by Lovell, Julia. London: Penguin, 2009.
Lu, Xun. "Shuqin Qianxu." In *Lu Xun Yiwen Quanji 6*, 5-6. Fujian: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008.
Lu, Xun. *Wild Grass*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2003.
Luckhurst, Roger. *Corridors: Passages of Modernity*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2019.
Lukács, Georg. *Realism in our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*. Translated by Mander, John and Necke. New York: Merlin Press, 1962.
Lukács, Georg. *Soul and Form*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974.
Lukács, Georg. *Studies in European Realism*. Translated by Bone, Edith. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964.
Ma, Xiaolu. "An Interstitial Space: Cross-Cultural Negotiation and Concession in Early Fiction Translations in New Youth." *Twentieth-Century China* 44, no. 2 (2019): 223-36.
Ma, Xiaolu. "The Missing Link: Japan as an Intermediary in the Transculturation of the Diary of A Madman." *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 8, no. 2 (2014): 331-346.
MacKinnon, Stephen R. and Robert Capa. *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
Maguire, Robert A. *Exploring Gogol*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
Maguire, Robert A. *Gogol from the Twentieth Century: Eleven Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
Mak, Ricardo K. S. "Yan Fu's Conception of Time and Evolution." In *Notions of Time in Chinese Historical Thinking*, edited by Huang, Junjie and John B. Henderson, 157-74. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2006.
Mao, Dun. "Spring Silkworms." In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Lau, Joseph S. M. and Howard Goldblatt, 56-73. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
Mao, Zedong. "Jieshao Yige Hezuoshe." In *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao*. Vol. 7. Central Documentation Press: Beijing, 1992.
Mao, Zedong. *Mao Zedong's 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art': A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Translated by McDougall, Bonnie S. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies: University of Michigan, 1980.
Marcus, Sharon. *Apartment Stories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
Martin, Alexander M. *Enlightened Metropolis: Constructing Imperial Moscow, 1762-1855*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Marullo, Thomas Gaiton. "Editor's Introduction." In *Petersburg: The Physiology of a City*, edited by Nekrasov, Nikolai and Thomas Gaiton Marullo. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009.
Marx, Karl. *Capital, Volume One*. Translated by Fowkes, Ben. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.
Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Nicolaus, Martin. London: Penguin Books, 1973.
Marx, Karl. "The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon." In *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*. Translated by Cohen, Jack. Vol. 6, 105-212. New York: International Publishers, 1975.
McDonagh, Josephine. "Space, Mobility, and the Novel." In *Adventures in Realism*, edited by Beaumont, Matthew, 50-67. Malden: Blackwell, 2007.
McDougall, Bonnie S. and Kam Louie. *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
McGuire, Elizabeth. *Red at Heart: How Chinese Communists Fell in Love with the Russian Revolution*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017.
Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*. London: Verso, 1998.
Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1, (2000): 54-68.
Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. London: Verso, 2005.
Moretti, Franco. "More Conjectures." *New Left Review* 20, (2003): 148-158.
Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Nikolai Gogol*. Norfolk: New Directions Books, 1944.
Nekrasov, Nikolai, ed. *Fiziologiia Peterburga*, edited by Kuleshov, V. I. and A. L. Grishunin. Moscow: Nauka, 1991.
Nekrasov, Nikolai, ed. *Petersburg: The Physiology of a City*, edited by Nekrasov, Nikolai and Thomas Gaiton Marullo. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009.
Ng, Kenny Kwok-kwan. *The Lost Geopoetic Horizon of Li Jieren: The Crisis of Writing Chengdu in Revolutionary China*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
Ng, Mau-sang. "Ba Jin and Russian Literature." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 3, no. 1 (Jan., 1981): 67-92.
Ng, Mau-sang. *The Russian Hero in Modern Chinese Fiction*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1988.
O'Neil-Henry, Anne. *Mastering the Marketplace: Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.
Orsini, Francesca. "The Multilingual Local in World Literature." *Comparative Literature* 67, no. 4 (2015): 345-74.
Oswald de Andrade. "'Cannibalist Manifesto' by Oswald De Andrade." *Latin American Review* 19, no. 38 (Jul.-Dec., 1991): 38-47.
Paperno, Irina. *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.
Peirce, Charles S. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1931.
Peng Ding'an. "Lu Xun De 'Kuangren Riji' Yu Guogeli De Tongming Xiaoshuo." *Shehui Kexue Zhanxian* 1, (1982): 293-301.
Peng, Xiaofeng. "Chuangzao Xing De beili—Ye Shengtao Xiaoshuo Fengge De Xingcheng Ji Duiwai Lai Yingxiang De Tonghua." *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* no. 1 (1986): 151-164.

Peterson, Dale E. "The Origin and End of Turgenev's Sportsman's Notebook: The Poetics and Politics of a Precarious Balance." *Russian Literature* XVI, (1984): 347-358.
Poggioli, Renato. "Realism in Russia." *Comparative Literature* 3, no. 3 (1951): 253-267.
Postone, Moishe. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
Prado-Fonts, Carles. "The Anxiety of Fiction: Reexamining Lao She's Early Novels." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 26, no. 2 (Fall, 2014): 177-215.
Prado-Fonts, Carles. "Beneath Two Red Banners: Lao She as a Manchu Writer in Modern China." In *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Shih, Shu-mei and Chien-hsin Tsai, 177-215. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.
Price, Don C. *Russia and the Roots of the Chinese Revolution, 1896-1911*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
Průšek, Jaroslav. *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of Modern Chinese Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.
Pyman, Avril. *A History of Russian Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
Qu, Qiubai. "Eluosi Mingjia Duanpian Xiaoshuo Ji Xu 1." In *Eluosi Mingjia Duanpian Xiaoshuo Ji*, 1-3. Beijing: Xin Zhongguo zazhi she, 1986.
Qu, Qiubai. "Xu Yi." In *Eluosi Mingjia Xiaoshuo Ji*, edited by Geng, Jizhi, Qiubai Qu and Ying Shen, 1-3. Beiping: Xin Zhongguo zazhi she.
Ram, Harsha. "Introducing Georgian Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 27, no. 1 (Jan., 2014): 283-8.
Rea, Christopher. *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China*. Berkerley: University of California Press, 2015.
Ren, Guangtian. "Cong Gemo Dao Ni Huanzhi—Lun Ye Shaojun Ershi Niandai De Chuangzuo Sixiang." *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* no. 04 (1980): 209-224.
Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Translated by McLaughlin, Kathleen and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
Rojas, Carlos. "Of Canons and Cannibalism: A Psycho-Immunological Reading of 'Diary of a Madman'." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 23, no. 1 (2011): 47.
Roy, David. "Introduction." In *The Plum in the Golden Vase Or, Chin P'Ing Mei: Vol. 1, the Gathering*, xvii-xlviii. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
Scarry, Elaine. "Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novelists." In *Resisting Representation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
Schaefer, William. "Poor and Blank: History's Marks and the Photographies of Displacement." *Representations* 109, no. 1 (2010): 1-34.
Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare's Sonnets and Poem*. New York: Washington Square Press, 2004.
Shaw, Harry E. *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.
Shen, Shuang. *Cosmopolitan Publics: Anglophone Print Culture in Semi-Colonial Shanghai*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009.
Shen, Yanbing. "Eluosi Jindai Wenxue Zatan Shang." *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 11, no. 1 (1920a): 1-3.
Shen, Yanbing. "Eluosi Jindai Wenxue Zatan Xia." *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 11, no. 2 (1920b): 1-6.
Shen, Yanbing. "Tuoersitai De Wenxue." *Gaizao* 3, no. 4 (1920c): 95-8.
Shih, Shu-Mei. *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Sieburth, Richard. "Same Difference: The French Physiologies, 1840 -1842." In *Notebooks in Cultural Analysis: An Annual Review*, edited by Cantor, Norman F., 163-99. Durham: Duke University Press, 1984.
Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life." In *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, edited by Sennett, Richard. Englewood: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969.
Sivin, N. "On the Limits of Empirical Knowledge in the Traditional Chinese Sciences." In *Time, Science, and Society in China and the West*, edited by Fraser, J. T., Nathaniel M. Lawrence and Francis C. Haber, 151-169. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986.
Smith, Stephen A. *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
Song, Binghui. "Cong Zhong-E Wenxue Jiaowang Kan Lu Xun 'Kuangren Riji' De Xiandai Zhuyi—jian Yu Guogeli Tongming Xiaoshuo Bijiao." *Zhongguo Bijiao Wenxue* 4, (2014): 133-40.
Strand, David. *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
Sun, Lung-Kee. "To be Or Not to be 'Eaten': Lu Xun's Dilemma of Political Engagement." *Modern China* 12, no. 4 (Oct., 1986): 459-85.
Sun, Naixiu. *Tugeniefu Yu Zhongguo*. Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1988.
Tally, Robert T. *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019.
Tang, Xiaobing. *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* Duke University Press, 2000.
Todd, William Mills. *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin: Ideology, Institutions, and Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
Tseitlin, A. G. *Stanovlenie Realizma v Russkoi Literature; Russkii Fiziologicheskii Ocherk*. Moscow: Nauka, 1965.
Tsu, Jing. *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
Tuan, Yi-fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
Turgenev, Ivan Sergeevich. *Dream Tales and Prose Poems*. New York: Macmillan, 1906.
Turgenev, Ivan Sergeevich. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii i Pisem v Dvadtsati Vos'mi Tomakh*. Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1960.
Turgenev, Ivan Sergeevich. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii v 30-ti Tomakh*. Moscow: Nauka, 1982.
Turgenev, Ivan Sergeevich. *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*. Translated by Freeborn, Richard. London; New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
Vinsrygg, Synnove. "Time in Archaeological Thought: China and the West." In *Time, Science, and Society in China and the West*, edited by International Society for the Study of Time. Amherst: Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1986.
Volland, Nicolai. *Socialist Cosmopolitanism: The Chinese Literary Universe, 1945-1965*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
Wagner, Rudolf G. *Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1992.
Wan, Zheng. "Li Jieren Bixia De Sichuan Xiangtu Kongjian Yanjiu—yi 'Sishui Weilan' Zhong De Wuge Dianxing Kongjian Weili." *Dangdai Wentan* no. 3 (2013): 110-113.
Wang, Dan. "Lu Xun Yu Qihefu Chuangzuo Bijiao Lun." *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 3, (1996): 46-9.

Wang, David Der-wei. *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
Wang, David Der-wei. "Introduction." In *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*, edited by Wang, David Der-wei and Ellen Widmer, 1-15. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
Wang, David Der-Wei. *The Monster that is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
Wang, Pu. "The Promethean Translator and Cannibalistic Pains: Lu Xun's 'Hard Translation' as a Political Allegory." *Translation Studies* 6, no. 3 (2013): 324-338.
Wang, Ruqing. "Ye Shengtao Yu Qihefu." *Tianjin Shida Xuebao* no. 3 (1986): 75-76.
Wang, Shengqun. "'Eguo Xiangxiang' Yu Jindai Zhong Ri Dui Eluosi Wenxue De Yinjie." *Eluosi Wenxue* 6, (2017): 63-72.
Wang, Tongzhao. *Wang Tongzhao Wen Ji*. Jinan: Shandong ren min chu ban she: Shangdong sheng xin hua shu dian fa xing, 1980.
Wang, Xiaoting. "Shandong Jihuang Canzhuang." *Liangyou* 26, (1928): 15.
Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.
Wei, Shang. "'Jin Ping Mei' and Late Ming Print Culture." In *Writing and Materiality in China*, edited by Zeitlin, Judith T. and Lydia H. Liu, 187-238. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
Wellek, René. "The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship." In *Concepts of Criticism*, edited by Nichols Jr., Stephen G., 222-55. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963a.
Wellek, René. *Concepts of Criticism: Essays*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963b.
White, Frederick H. *Degeneration, Decadence and Disease in the Russian Fin De Siècle: Neurasthenia in the Life and Work of Leonid Andreev*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.
White, Frederick H. *Memoirs and Madness: Leonid Andreev through the Prism of the Literary Portrait*. Montreal: MQUP, 2006.
White, James. "The Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Chinese Intellectuals." *Sibirica* 2, (October 1, 2002).
Williams, Philip F. *Village Echoes: The Fiction of Wu Zuxiang*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
Woloch, Alex. *The One Vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
Wong, Lawrence Wang-chi. "'The Beginning of the Importation of New Literature from Exotic Countries into China': Zhou Zuoren and Yuwai Xiaoshuoji." *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* 1, no. 3 (2014): 175-191.
Woodward, James B. *Leonid Andreyev: A Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
Wu, Maosheng. "Langman Zhuyi Yingxiang? Lun Yu Dafu Xiaoshuo Li De Lingyu Zhe." In *Yu Dafu Yanjiu Ziliao*, edited by Wang, Zili and Zishan Chen, 475-507. Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1986.
Wu, Zuxiang. "All Peaceful Under Heaven." In *Green Bamboo Hermitage*. Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1989.
Wu, Zuxiang. *Su Cao Ji: Xiao Shuo Juan*. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1988.
Xiao Hong. "A Remembrance of Lu Xun." *Renditions* 15, (Spring, 1981): 168-91.

Xiao, Hong. *The Field of Life and Death & Tales of Hulan River*. Translated by Goldblatt, Howard. Boston: Cheng & Tsui, 2002.
Xiao, Hong. "Hands." In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*. Translated by Goldblatt, Howard, edited by Lau, Joseph S. M. and Howard Goldblatt. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
Xiao, Hong. *Market Street: A Chinese Woman in Harbin*. Translated by Goldblatt, Howard. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986.
Xiao, Hong. *Selected Stories of Xiao Hong*. Translated by Goldblatt, Howard. Beijing: Guoji shudian, 1982.
Xiao, Hong. *Xiao Hong Quan Ji*. Harbin: Heilongjiang da xue chu ban she, 2011.
Xiaobing, Tang. "Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' and a Chinese Modernism." *PMLA* 107, no. 5 (1992): 1222-34.
Xiaolu, Ma. "Transculturation of Madness: The Double Origin of Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman.'" *Literature and Medicine* 33, no. 2 (2015): 348-367.
Xie, Liuyi. "Xiyang Xiaoshuo Fada Shi: Luoman Zhuyi Shidai." *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 13, no. 3 (1922): 1-11.
Xu, Jian. "Retrieving the Working Body in Modern Chinese Fiction: The Question of the Ethical in Representation." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 115-152.
Xu, Jian. "The Will to the Transaesthetic: The Truth Content of Lu Xun's Fiction." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 61-92.
Yan, Jiayan. *Lu Xun De Fudiao Xiaoshuo*. Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002.
Yan, Ming. "Poverty and Shame in Chinese Literature." In *Poverty and Shame: Global Experiences*, 60-72. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
Yang, Lianfen. "Li Jieren Changpian Xiaoshuo Yishu Piping." *Dangdai Wentan* no. 3 (1990): 47-58.
Yang, Yi. "Lun Ye Shengtao Duanpian Xiaoshuo De Yishu Tese." *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* no. 2 (1980): 201-222.
Yang, Yungeng. "Tuosituoyefusiji Yu Yu Dafu Xinli Miaoxie Yitong Lun." *Ankang Shizhuan Xuebao* 1, (2000): 48-51.
Ye, Shaojun. *Ye Shengtao Wen Ji*. Beijing: Ren min wen xue chu ban she, 1958.
Ye, Shengtao. *How Mr. Pan Weathered the Storm*. Beijing: Panda Books, 1987.
Ye, Shengtao. *Ye Shengtao Lun Chuang Zuo*. Shanghai: Shanghai wen yi chu ban she, 1982.
Ye, Shengtao. "Zatan Wode Xiezuo." In *Ye Shengtao Yanjiu Ziliao*, edited by Liu, Zengren and Guanglian Fang, 245-247. Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1988.
Yin, Zhiguang. *Politics of Art: The Creation Society and the Practice of Theoretical Struggle in Revolutionary China*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
Yoshimi, Takeuchi. "What is Modernity? (the Case of Japan and China)." In *What is Modernity?: Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*. Translated by Calichman, Richard, 53-82. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
Young, Robert, ed. *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited by Young, Robert. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
Yu, Dafu. "Class Struggle in Literature." In *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, edited by Denton, Kirk A., 263-268. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Yu, Dafu. *Nights of Spring Fever and Other Selected Writings*. Translated by Sheng, Tang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2009a.
Yu, Dafu. "Smoke Shadows." In *Nights of Spring Fever and Other Selected Writings*, 69-82. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2009b.
Yu, Dafu. *Yu Dafu Quan Ji*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang da xue chu ban she, 2007.
Zeitlin, Judith T. *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
Zhang, Enhua. *Space, Politics, and Cultural Representation in Modern China: Cartographies of Revolution*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2016.
Zhang, Guozhen. "Xiao Hong Xiaoshuo Chuangzuo Yu Zhongwai Wenxue Chuancheng Ji Meixue Jianshu." *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 1, (2012): 146-53.
Zhang, Lihua. "'Yiwen' Yu Chuangzao: Lu Xun 'Yao' Zhong 'hongbai De Hua' Yu 'wuya' De Youlai." *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 1, (2016): 64-78.
Zhang, Zhen. *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema,1896-1937*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
Zhao, Qiguang. "Who is Ruan Ming?: A Political Mystery in Lao She's Camel Xiangzi." *China Information* 12, no. 3 (Dec., 1997): 104-22.
Zheng, Boqi. "Han Hui Ji Piping." In *Yu Dafu Yan Jiu Zi Liao*, edited by Wang, Zili and Zishan Chen, 319-329. Tianjin: Tianjin ren min chu ban she, 1982.
Zheng, Zhenduo. "Eguo Wenxue Shilue 3." *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 14, no. 7 (1923): 142-152.
Zheng, Zhenduo. "Eluosi Mingjia Duanpian Xiaoshuo Ji Xu 2." In *Eluosi Mingjia Duanpian Xiaoshuo Ji*, 4-6. Beijing: Xin Zhongguo zazhi she, 1920.
Zhidang. "Zhipei Shehui De Wenxue Lun." *Wenxue Xunkan* 35, (April 21, 1922): 1-2.
Zhou, Yin and Kechen Li. "Lun Lu Xun De 'Kuangren Riji' Yu Antelaifu De 'Qiang'." *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 4, (1982): 234-246.
Zhou, Zuoren. "Ah Q Zhengzhuan." *Chenbao Fukan,* Mar 19, 1922.
Zhou, Zuoren. *Lu Xun Xiao Shuo Li De Ren Wu*. Beijing: Beijing shi yue, 2013.
Zhou, Zuoren. "Wenxue Shang De Eguo Yu Zhongguo." *Xin Qingnian* 8, no. 5 (1921): 1-7.
Zhou, Zuoren. "Xu." In *Yuwai Xiaoshuo Ji*, edited by Zhou, Zuoren and Shuren Zhou, 1-6. Shanghai: Qunyi shushe, 1929.
Zhou, Zuoren. *Zhitang Hui Xiang Lu*. Chu ban ed. Taipei: Long wen chu ban she, 1989.