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The Edge of Knowing: Dreams and Realism in Modern Chinese Literature

by

Roy Bing Chan

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Andrew F. Jones, Chair

Professor Eric Naiman

Professor William Schaefer

Professor Barbara Spackman

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Abstract

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Roy Bing Chan

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Andrew F. Jones, Chair

This dissertation examines the relationship between discourses of realism and dreaming in modern Chinese literature from the Republican period to the end of the Mao era. It examines how the interplay of oneiric and realist discourses illuminated the way in which the realist mode juggled its professed fidelity to scientific values and historic critique with the utopian desire that propelled the mode's will to embody these empiric attitudes in the first place. Dream discourse constituted an "unconscious" of the realist mode through which utopian desires otherwise suppressed in the realist narrative proper could be expressed within brackets. The friction between dreaming and the real in literary texts was thus evocative of the contradictory relationship between revolutionary utopian desire and grim political reality that marked China's ordeal of modernity.

This study argues for reading dreams as a supplementary form of historical knowledge that transcends the limitations of conventional narrative through its innovative reconfiguration of the relations between language, bodies and history. It goes on to consider how the May 4th advocacy of science granted dreams a new

intellectual legitimacy by recasting them in the paradigmatic mold of psychoanalysis. The relative simultaneity of psychoanalysis and literary realism in China, both emblems of Western scientific discourse, culminated in an arresting problematic between empirical restraint and utopian desire that found its symptomatic literary expression through the presence of dream discourse within realist texts.

This dissertation explores in detail the vexed relationships between dream, reality and history in four writers: Lu Xun (1881-1936), Mao Dun (1896-1981), Yang Mo (1914-1995) and Zong Pu (b. 1928). By focusing on careful textual analysis of oneiric discourse in these writers' texts, this study reveals the conflict between literature and the historic reality to which it sought to be commensurate. However, it also argues that the dream form, while highlighting the problem between literature and its social referent, also suggested an allegorical reconciliation between narrative, history and utopia.

For my mother

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Introduction

There is a wholly unique experience of dialectic. The compelling – the drastic – experience, which refutes everything "gradual" about becoming and shows all seeming "development" to be dialectical reversal, eminently and thoroughly composed, is the awakening from dream. For the dialectical schematism at the core of this process, the Chinese have often found, in their fairy tales and novellas, a highly pregnant expression.

-- Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades*

Project (389)

Part I: Dreams and the Residue of History

Zhang Dai's (1597-1689) two sets of nostalgic recollections written after the catastrophic fall of the Ming dynasty, *Dream Reminiscences of Tao'an* (*Tao'an meng yi* 陶庵梦忆) and *Searching for West Lake in Dream* (*Xihu meng xun* 西湖梦寻 pref. 1671) provide us with an example of how historic collapse can evoke an aesthetic response.¹ While products of the traumatic fall of the Ming, neither collection references in its content that great historic rupture in any sustained way. And yet, the use of the word "dream" in both of these titles alludes to the evanescence of past delights, swept into dust by the chaos of history itself. Dream as metaphor for the illusory nature of reality, the impermanence of all things, is a trope one finds often in Chinese letters, a concept illuminated by Daoist concepts of change and Buddhist notions of emptiness. The well-known adage familiar to most cultures that life is but a

¹ Brigitte Teboul-Wang notes that the dates mentioned in *Dream Reminiscences* span from 1612 to 1657, but the complete collection was probably not compiled until near the end of his life (10). She has produced a full, annotated French translation. Philip Kafalas has recently published a fine monograph on Zhang Dai's literary writings. Jonathan Spence has written a biography of Zhang. Robert Hegel has also produced an essay about his work. Li Wai-yee discusses Zhang Dai at length in her monograph about illusion in Ming and Qing dynasty culture.

dream is, as Stephen Owen argues, "one of the most well-worn metaphors of sixteenth- and seventeenth- century [Chinese] literature" (138). In the sense that framing past experience as a dream helps to create intelligibility out of a present and traumatic loss, this gesture of oneiric categorization can provide both insight and solace. On the other hand, such a collapse of reality into dream vitiates the role and meaning of history. If life is but a dream, what happens to historic temporality, the sense of events, peoples and nations moving in time, unfolding in a clear or not-so-clear direction? To abruptly say it is all a dream forecloses the possibility of autonomous historical meaning. If dream acts as a kind of ontological doubt, the proverbial rug being pulled from what we understood to be reality, then this doubt's invocation, its arrival, is itself a product of history.

Although this dissertation focuses on the relationship between dreams and reality in the 20th century, I turn here to the late-Imperial period, and in particular, a time of deep historic crisis, to draw arresting and instructive parallels that inform my thinking and approach in the later chapters. I want to rethink the links between dream and history so that we may approach an understanding of the historical that takes us beyond mimetic narrative. Dreaming refuses the sober, reflective and analytical demeanor of historical narrative; it operates instead through combining images, words and sounds that both tantalize and bemuse. Dreams are a harbinger of complex signs, the passion plays of signifiers searching for their lost signifieds. Unlike historical narrative, which seeks to logically map out the unfolding of events in time, and to provide reasons for historic change, dreams frustrate the very ability of its dreamer to come to such a linear comprehension. How can this rough, jagged semiotic texture of

dream, then, act as an icon of history that has itself become rough and jagged, impervious to conventional knowledge?

In his later *Epitaph to Myself*, Zhang Dai expresses his inability to understand the world after the rupture of 1644. Reflecting on his past, he runs against “seven things that could not be understood” (*you qi bu ke jie* “有七不可解”). The paradoxes which he cannot resolve are sudden transvaluations between opposed symbolic series, for instance in the case of noble birth and wealth: “In the past, though a mere civilian, he (Zhang Dai) was able to rival dukes and marquises in his lifestyle; later, despite his noble pedigree, he lived no better than a beggar. The highborn and the lowbred were thus reversed. This was the first thing he could not understand” (Ye 99). The remaining six paradoxes follow a similar dynamic. What Zhang Dai suggests is the crisis of knowledge after catastrophe, the inability to recognize the world within a code to which one had grown accustomed. The world has become a semiotic paradox, a hard Gordian knot that he finds himself unable to untie. That Zhang Dai employs dreams as the discursive frame through which he situates his memories suggests that dreams themselves are the very texture formed by the failure of History to come to terms with itself.

The preponderance of dream lore and belief in Chinese culture needs no elaboration. Ideas about dreams were rich, varied and sometimes contradictory, and as Richard Strassberg suggests, there was no homogenous philosophy of dreams in pre-modern China (1). Dreams had both practical as well as philosophical uses and implications. Divination through dreams was an important tool in statecraft and thus a special vehicle for political knowledge. Roberto K. Ong reminds us of traditional

notions that claimed the entire universe, and all phenomena occurring within it, was pregnant with meaning and significance; the cosmos was not random but a deliberate, organized semiotic latticework. Gleaning such significance from nature's divine portents was a task of great intellectual and spiritual esteem, and among all of the various hermeneutic operations, "the interpretation of dreams reigned supreme" (174). The notion that the universe is meaningful unto itself, however, sometimes elides the fact that achieving such meaning is but the endpoint of hermeneutic investigation. To get there, however, is to struggle within the dark forests of meaninglessness, to be overwhelmed by signs that remain opaque. If dreams mean anything, it is not necessarily a repressed desire, a prediction of the future, or a cherished recollection of the past as precisely the very meaninglessness of dreams, the very form of the sign that refuses to become transparent and allow its content to melt into significance. If dreams inherently foreground a hermeneutic impulse, they also simultaneously prove startlingly resistant to such interpretation. It takes work, creativity and a measure of fortitude and patience to wrest the dream's meaning from its labyrinthine puzzle; however, this act of wrestling, the intimate contact and struggle with the dream's own signs, are themselves symptomatic of our trying to come to terms with a world and with a history that can seem at times unfathomable, traumatic, and meaningless.

I am thus suggesting a degree of solidity and historic materiality to a notion of dreaming that retrieves it from being an evanescent trope for "timeless" insights into the nature of reality. I want to make visible the formal and social materiality of the very utterance that seeks to erase such historicization. In attempting to think through

the materiality of dreams, I find Bill Brown's work on "thing theory" suggestive. He writes about the distinction between "things" and "objects." Objects are those bodies, entities and concepts made intelligible to the subject, those things that can be "read." "Things," on the other hand, straddle the limit between intelligibility and opacity; they are usually made palpable through disruption in our modes of behavior and knowledge:

They are occasions of contingency – the chance interruption – that disclose a physicality of things. [...] A *thing*, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.

[...]Temporalized as the before and after of the object, thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or the not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects). But this temporality obscures the all-at-onceness, the simultaneity, of the object/thing dialectic and the fact that, all at once, *the thing seems to name the object just as it is even as it names some thing else.* (4-5)

Following Brown's evocative inquiry, we can think of dream as that "thing" which arises from a "breakdown" in signification. Dream is that which is not known, but which confronts us, imposes itself on our habits of knowledge. It is both the "thingness" of dreams, as well as the sense of surprise and impact with which such dreams bear down upon us that make them significant, and which make us question their referential function in relation to our own lives and to the world at large.

Returning to Zhang Dai's work, we must address the relationship between dreams and memory. The vast majority of his essays are nostalgic recollections, not dreams

in either the literal or literary sense. How, then, can we make any sense of the notion of dream in relation to memories of an intensely lived yet bygone past? We can at first consider issues surrounding generic form. Philip Kafalas discusses the designation of Zhang Dai's essays as *xiaopin* (小品), a genre of personal, occasional and short essays describing seemingly trivial persons, things and events that was popular during the late Ming period. However, as Kafalas contends, "[*xiaopin*] is so vaguely defined and, in its most familiar and specific incarnation so overlaid with later anachronistic projections, that I am not even entirely convinced that there was a thing called late-Ming *xiaopin*" (8). Kafalas' reluctance to rest on any pat definition of the genre in which Zhang Dai wrote his essays is insightful, and I do his complex arguments a certain injustice by not combing through the history of the generic term and its connotations. But perhaps we can take the use of the word "dream" in the titles of both of Zhang Dai's collections as itself a generic signal, a figure perhaps, for the form of writing to which Zhang Dai could ascribe no other name. That is to say that "dream" becomes allegorical of generic form without ever having to specify what that form is. The dream presents itself as a formality that resists definition. While the content of many of these essays are quaint exercises in recollection, their otherwise unnamable, indecipherable form is a product of History. Although the recollections are not explicitly dreams, it is clear that they are meant to be read under the sign of the dream.

For Zhang Dai himself, the notion of dream was not merely an empty trope to describe his past life. In his preface to *Searching for West Lake in Dream*, he insists that his dreams about the beauty and luster of West Lake, now demolished and ruined

because of the Manchu overthrow, are *real* (*zhen* 真). In the last vignette of *Dream Reminiscences of Tao'an*, “Blessed Land of Langxuan” (*Langxuan fudi* 琅嬛福地), Zhang Dai describes a recurring dream in which he enters a stone grotto filled with books written in a fantastic, unknown script:

I opened a few at random to take a cursory look, and they were mostly printed in a kind of inscription (seal) script that resembled tadpoles, the footprints of birds, or thunderbolts. Yet in my dream I was able to read the script and seemed to understand everything in spite of its abstruseness. (Ye 97)

开卷视之, 多蝌蚪鸟迹, 霹雳 篆文. 梦中读之, 似能通其棘涩. (138)

The narrator’s dream self-referentially stages the hermeneutic drama involved in its own analysis. The secret text featured in the dream refuses transparency as it foregrounds the sensuality of its own presence, taking the form of animal tracks or acts of nature, thus suggesting the inscrutable, yet undeniable, presence of the phenomenal world. However, while in the dream, Zhang Dai acts *as if* he is able to comprehend this mysterious language; the power of the modal word “*si*” (似), “seemed,” implies that Zhang Dai is placed on the edge between knowledge and non-knowledge, taking in words that at once drift into meaning, but then just as easily drift into the traces of physical presence. Zhang Dai, an impoverished recluse trying to deal with the sudden senselessness of the world around him after the Manchu takeover of 1644, seizes upon the temporal gap between words and meaning, one made more noticeable by cataclysmic, historic trauma. However, this gap, this sudden realization of the failure of signifier and signifier to connect, becomes the very metonymic index to materiality (and history) itself, a void that is materiality’s token.

But in tandem with the searing brand of history over these dreams lies the presence of a persistent utopian impulse. There is, of course, nostalgia as itself a kind of utopian envisioning, whereby the recollected past becomes a veiled hope for a possible other world. For the Zhang Dai scholar Philip Kafalas, nostalgia in *Dream Reminiscences* is an attempt to reconstruct, even if in piecemeal fashion, a world to which a person can feel he truly belongs, a narrative of origins that renders his identity and self both intact and meaningful:

From a longing for a place [nostalgia] became a longing for a part of the past, and thus a way of transforming the past into something approximating what we thought we needed to have had in order to be as we imagine ourselves – which is very much what we see in Zhang Dai. It allows us to construct a complete point of origin that can forever lie safely and unproblematically in the past so that we can move on, always able to say that we were *from there*. Ultimately, the point of origin that nostalgia constructs is then really less a representation of the past than it is functional precursor of what has not yet come, of what we can only dimly, hopefully envision. (158)

Zhang Dai's memories of the past are never really about the past, but about a present utopian wish that articulates itself through the vehicle of a past that is faithful to memory but phantasmatic at the same time. Yet alongside nostalgic utopianism runs a parallel current of semiotic utopianism. His frustration at his inability to understand the world post-1644 finds its own fantastic resolution in a dream of magical comprehension, an ability to read an impossible script. It is this triumph of meaning in the end that bears the persistent utopian impulse despite all the pain of not understanding. Of course, in his dream Zhang never tells us what the script actually means, and thus his ability to act "as if" he understood is at best figurative of a deferred utopian moment of true comprehension.

What sense, then, do we make of the fact that Zhang Dai's memories exist under the sign of the dream? I think Zhang's monumentalization of his past by paying literary homage to his fleeting experiences of worldly pleasure both substitutes a semiotic materiality for a lost historic existence as well as renders such symbolic construction itself the scar and the effect of an historic loss. As much as Zhang himself insisted on the reality of his dreams in contrast to the destruction and ruins that presently surrounded him, what he recovers always bears the indelible stain of history. What makes Zhang's memories so powerful is this paradoxical combination of possession and loss, of being and nothingness, an existential oscillation that can never find a happy medium.

With this hermeneutic frame, one that insists upon the dialectical relationship between memory and dream, recovery and loss, we can approach the tension between materiality and nothingness within Zhang's essays themselves. Among the most evocative pieces in Zhang Dai's treasure trove of dream memories is one titled "The Crab Association" (*Xie hui* 蟹会) in which Zhang reflects back on the sublime pleasures of enjoying one of nature's most appetizing seasonal gifts:

Among the foods that carry all five flavors without the addition of salt and vinegar are clams and river crabs. Along with rice and millet, river crabs come into season in the tenth month, with their shells as big as plates and swelling, their purple pincers as big as fists, the flesh from their legs gleaming like millipedes. Tearing off the shell, the unctuous yolk gathers still like jade wax gilded by amber scales, viscous and steadfast in texture, its rich sweetness unsurpassed by the eight treasured flavors. Once the tenth month arrives, my friends and I resurrect the Crab Association, and meet in the afternoon. We boil and eat crabs, six to a person. Worried that once cooked, their flavors might spoil in the cold air, we only boil the crabs in batches. Accompanying them are smoked, fatty duck, curdled milk, drunken clams that resemble amber, white cabbage cooked in goose fat that

resemble jade tiles, and for fruit we have oranges, chestnuts and water chestnuts. For libation, we had Jade Pot Ice wine, for vegetable, Bingkang bamboo shoots, for starch, the new crop of Yuhang rice, and for refreshment, Orchid Snow tea. Reflecting upon it now, it truly was like the provisions from heavenly cooks, having been drunk on wine and sated through food, alas, what regret, what regret!² (99)

What immediately strikes the reader about this fond reverie are all the messy, gooey, sticky foods involved: the unctuous, rich yolk of a crab, its wet and succulent flesh, the decadence of cabbage covered in glistening goose fat, the richness of a delicate milk curd, the satisfying bite of clam meat. The “purple pincers” are as “big as fists,” and they metonymically signify the human hands that are never mentioned specifically, but must also be present, breaking the shells, scooping out the meat, bringing it to one’s mouth.³ This passage not only invokes a body engaged in delightful eating, but a group of bodies, a communion of men and crabs and other animals. Rarely do memories reach this height of sensual intensity, and what is breathtaking about this passage is its sheer tactility, images that tantalize because of their appeal to touch and taste, to mass and depth. The exquisite, hyperbolic attention to the crab yolk as a kind of jade covered in amber seems to suggest the overwhelming and naked materiality of past experience, whose density stretches the

² In offering this rendering, I want to cite the assistance of two previous excellent translations, Teboul-Wang’s (151) and Kafalas’ (30-1).

³ Readers will also note that there is an extended crab party scene in Chapter 38 of Cao Xueqin’s *Dream of the Red Chamber*, where Jia Baoyu, his family and coterie of female companions dine on autumn crabs while composing poetry. Again, what is noted is the physical pleasure of playing with one’s food. While the servants crack the crab shells for the elderly matriarch, Grandmother Jia, Aunt Xue (Xue Baochai’s mother) refuses any assistance in her dining: “I don’t need anyone to do it for me. I like doing it myself and getting crabby fingers. I think they taste better when you eat them with your fingers” (*Story 2*: 243).³ The verb Aunt Xue uses to designate shelling the crabs, as is featured in the 1982 *Renmin wenzue* edition of *Dream*, is *bai* (掰), which means “to shell” or “to pull apart”. The character, 掰, pictorially represents two hands (*shou* 手) with the verb “to divide” (*fen* 分) in between them (*Honglou meng* 1: 505). The crab party scene is one of many scenes involving delectable dinner parties, and the careful detail the author pays to every detail of the feast emphasizes both the sheer materiality of the material culture he describes, but also sets the reader up for the very dramatic epiphanic de-leveraging in end when the Jia household falls.

ability of words to embody such texture. While beholden to the suggestive power of metaphor, the coagulating effects of the greasy yolk and the curdled milk suggest a drive to convey experience beyond words, to bring signification to its very limit and perhaps transgress into the viscous sublime.

In this essay, however, the narrator also suggests a temporal distance between past and present. The last line projects the narrator in the barren now thinking of that succulent past, and here he evokes the dreamlike evanescence of his storied existence. Such fullness of experience, such drunkenness and satiety, now seems otherworldly, derived from the high heavens, and now, in the blink of an eye, gone. The essay features a brilliant reversal of a past so pregnant with the yolk of experience, and a present as bare and plain as the one Zhang Dai lived out to the end of his days. While this memory is not *per se* a dream, the notion of dream nevertheless adheres to the edge of the piece in an irreducibly tangential way. It helps us understand the "pastness" of the past through its ability to simultaneously hold in its grasp both the exquisite fullness of life and its density, as well as its utter emptiness. The last four words, "Alas, what regret! What regret!" (*cankuicankui* 惭愧惭愧) fulfills both a semantic function (*cankui* means "shame"), but also an extra-semantic function as well, as a heaving sigh that ultimately conjures a body in the throes of loss. By immersing us into the sensuous world of memory, and then evacuating it through a regretful sigh, this seemingly trivial piece about epicurean pleasures makes us feel, in ways more profound than expected, the pain of History. The way in which the notion of dream looms as a generic frame over memory rather than merely become conflated

with such memory ironically serves to even more explicitly highlight the presence of dream as material manifestation of loss.

The themes of texture and touch that I have traced in this passage figure what I think of as the haptic semiotics of the dream form itself. It is not merely the content of dreams that suggests such tactile sensuality, but their form and poetics as well. I point to the friction between jumbled, entangled signs, as well as the friction between the diegetic embrace of a dream narrative by a wakened narrative that surrounds it, and the collision between individual desire and worldly demand that results in the unconscious repression through which dreams spring forth. These haptic semiotics, I believe, index how dreams can bring us back to history, but not through the usual diegetic, narrative forms that we are used to, but through “touch,” through the dense, tactile incomprehensibility of history. I emphasize the role of touch not at the expense of the other senses, and certainly not to discount the obvious fact that each sense often works in concert with the others. But I am interested in how the dream communicates through the liminal space between signification and materiality.⁴ Moreover, I am interested in the dream itself not only as “symptom,” a fleeting index of higher “reality,” but as a “thing” in its own right, a figure that flirts with the fullness of presence – dream as an entity that announces its own fragile embodiment. While Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* made sure to discount somatic stimuli as the

⁴ Daniel Tiffany, in his *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric*, promotes a conceptual linkage between lyric poetry and scientific materialism by arguing that both modes of thought employ visual tropes to produce, via analogy, a sense of materiality that is otherwise inaccessible to sense perception. These visual tropes, among which Tiffany counts toys and dolls to be major exemplars, become the modular forms through which materiality can be ascertained. The “history of philosophical materialism,” Tiffany goes on to argue, “is nevertheless conditioned by the invisibility of material substance and by the regime of analogy associated with it” (4). It is thus the job of visual tropes, the “iconography of materialism” (3), to provide vision in place of materialism’s fundamental invisibility.

originary source of dreams, a necessary move in order to ground the unconscious as the true source (and hence his discovery of a “psychic reality” that was distinct from a material one), it is undeniable that dreams are not, on a fundamental level, disembodied entities, but ones that imply the close involvement (at least phenomenologically) of our own corporeal activity and consciousness. What makes dreams so uncanny is precisely how involved our bodies are in the experience of dreaming. If we think of dreaming in terms of the haptic, then Merleau-Ponty’s remarks on the tactile offer some insight: “Each contact of an object with part of our objective body is, therefore, in reality a contact with the whole of the present or possible phenomenal body” (369). While phenomenology has been critiqued for its elevation of a transcendental body-subject over and above history, I think Merleau-Ponty’s own words “*present or possible*,” whether intentionally on his part or not, allow a space for us to think of that body’s possible and variable instantiation as contingent upon other causes, not least the historical. If dreams “activate” the body, or a *certain sense of the bodily*, it is important to remember that dreams themselves do not simply appear *sui generis*; they are “overdetermined,” either (in small scale) by the drama between individual desire and the constraints of civilization, or (in large scale) between the past and future of a historic break. The body, the dream’s dialectical extension, is thus doubly conditioned.⁵

⁵ Here I gesture towards a conceptual mediation between poetic materiality and materialism in the Marxian sense. It is methodologically essential for us to be able to critique poetic forms within a tentative material autonomy; on the other hand, we also need to see the emergence of such poetic materiality as itself the effect of a complex convergence of historic factors. In my first chapter I articulate more fully how poetic and corporeal materiality straddle the divide between ontological presence and historic dynamism.

I have attempted to employ the rhetoric of touch as a way of articulating the friction between signs that refuse easy transcoding, suggesting how the tactile is itself an effect of a tragic incomprehension. Dreams, then, are in part the result of a tactile collision between individual and history, a by-product of the individual's inability to reconcile himself with a new historic symbolic order. In this sense I have used touch "negatively," to suggest a lack of meaning or a friction between competing meanings. On the other hand, the haptic is in its own way a utopian desire as well – it can be an accusatory finger as well as a comforting embrace. Zhang Dai's rhapsody about the fullness of the crab yolk is most certainly a utopian expression of the full sensuousness that life can offer. The most famous dream of the late-Ming era, that of Du Liniang in Tang Xianzu's 1598 play *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹亭), features the young maiden meeting a spectral lover and losing her virginity. The dream opens the possibility of not just gustatory and sexual forms of consummation, but historic as well. While the dream suggests a kind of beating against the wall of history, it also holds out hope for an eventual embrace into history as well, the incorporation of self into the world. Dream's desire is one that lurches for both difference *and* identity. On one hand, it is a desire for radical alterity, for suffering life to become mere dream, and for reverie to become reality. On the other hand, it is also a desire for the reintegration of waking self with its dreaming other, the dissolution of the barrier between dream and reality, and the transfiguration of the body that no longer need endure a fragmented existence.

In 1954 a young Michel Foucault wrote an introductory essay in which he offered his interpretation of Ludwig Binswanger's 1930 monograph on existential psychology, *Dream and Existence*. Foucault faulted Freudian dream hermeneutics for relegating the dream's symbolic structure to a functional fulfillment of a repressed wish, thus refusing the autonomous value and meaning of the dream by subordinating it to demands of the unconscious (41). For Foucault, the identification of dream as an index to the unconscious overshadows consideration of the dream as an independent realm of experience. Freudian theory erred too far on the side of dream as a form of "objective indication" (42), as that which merely pointed to the unconscious but did not autonomously signify. Foucault looked approvingly to phenomenology for ways to grasp the immanent and inherent truth of dream symbolism, to "mak[e] images speak" (42). But whereas Foucault criticized Freudian theory for focusing too much on determining the unconscious cause of dreams at the cost of sustained interpretation of dream symbolism, he faulted phenomenology for doing the opposite.

Phenomenology focused far too much on the interpretive side of dream analysis, but failed to "justify comprehension" (42), to provide a causal or structural mechanism for dream formation, thus rendering it an ungrounded and floating cascade of images. Foucault argued that Binswanger's work resolved this problem by approaching dreams as an autonomous form of existence and experience on par with waking life itself. Moreover, the dream presents itself as the "index of transcendence": "In its anthropological significance, the history of the dream teaches us that it both reveals the world in its transcendence and modulated the world in its substance, playing on its material character" (49). In Foucault's rendering of Binswanger, dreams are not a

faulty, fleeting imitation of a world, but the very modular form through which we can come to know any world at all.⁶ In the sense, then, that dreams bring the experience of the world home to us while we lie in bed, they are also the field in which we can work out our own existence and our own freedom:

By breaking with the objectivity which fascinates waking consciousness and by reinstating the human subject in its radical freedom, the dream discloses paradoxically the movement of freedom toward the world. The cosmogony of the dream is the origination itself of existence. This movement of solitude and of originitive responsibility is no doubt what Heraclitus meant by his famous phrase, “*idios kosmos*” (51).⁷

Foucault’s formulation of the dream as its own autonomous world is important in helping us recuperate the valuable materiality of dream substance and signification. It also helps us understand the power of Zhang Dai’s nostalgic dreaming not as mere reverie, but as the active recreation of a world that can be known, understood and felt. However, as Keith Hoeller suggests, Foucault’s early meditations on dream seem at odds with his other work that focuses on power and genealogy; in his dream essay Foucault appeared to subscribe to the idea of a phenomenological subject transcending over historically specific conditions (10-11). However, most of Foucault’s most celebrated work talks about how the subject is itself constituted through the ever changing configurations of power, knowledge and history. Important as it is to allow dream a certain autonomy from waking hermeneutics so one does not

⁶ Foucault’s assertion of the dream as modulated world coincides well with Daniel Tiffany’s argument that toys are modular illustrations for materiality that cannot otherwise be made intelligible or visible. See *Toy Medium*, 52.

⁷ Pun Ngai discusses Foucault’s essay at length when writing about the traumatic dreams of a girl working and living in an electronics factory in Shenzhen, where the author conducted fieldwork by working as a factory girl herself. She argues that the girl’s dreams, often ending with a violent shriek that woke the girl up, were where the girl struggled to reclaim her own existence and search for her own freedom away from the shackles of poverty and sweatshop labor (554).

mistakenly reduce its power, at the same time one must still take into account the ideological horizon of History with which dreams must nevertheless engage. In Foucault's own words, "[to] dream is not another way of experiencing another world, it is for the dreaming subject the radical way of experiencing its own world" (59). An ideologically rigorous corrective would be to ask "what" kind of subject we are dealing with, and to add the term "history" alongside "world." For dreams, even in their ostensibly flagrant denial or rejection of history, nevertheless suggest a supplement to the way we habitually experience and feel history. Dreams ask us to reconsider History and the bodies that act within it as "things" in themselves, not easily assimilable to mimetic and narrative forms of knowledge. Dreams can be said to be a radical phenomenology of historic experience.

My long excursus into the work and dreams of Zhang Dai is meant to give the reader a sense of how I choose to treat dreams in this study; not as mere fantasy to be swept away by the hard light of reality, but as itself a product of history, a thing whose form tells us something crucial about the contradictory historic circumstances that created it. The approach I bring to my study of dreams and dream discourse in modern China employs insights from structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism and formalism, but more than anything, seeks to look at dreams from an historically informed materialist perspective, one that attends to the very tenuousness of materiality as such.

A Circuitous Road to (Non)-Knowledge: The Insight of the Illegible

I claim that dreams suggest avenues of knowledge that are both radically different but supplemental to conventional narrative and analytical epistemological modes. While dreams may be illusory and fantastic, they nevertheless tell us, if obliquely, something about reality. Daoist and Buddhist ideas about the impermanence and unreality of phenomena have for centuries used the formula of dream as illusion to express this fundamental religious idea. Writing about the foremost dream text in the pre-modern canon, *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 红楼梦), Anthony C. Yu wonders about the efficacy of fiction to enact the insight of the illusory dream:

Fiction is thus the dream product of “false language,” much as plot is actually a progeny of rhetoric [...] In view of such intimated parallels between Buddhist tenet and literary theory, does it mean that Cao Xueqin has played the ultimate Buddhist trick on the reader? In inventing such a grand and irresistible illusion of art to break down the illusion of human life and world, is he not resorting to the most subtle exercise of the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means (*upaya*)? Does not art, in the final analysis, finally serve the cause of faith? Although one is tempted to answer yes to all three questions, I believe there is one crucial difference. [...] For Bao-yu of the narrative, a life of detachment must be carried out, in fact, by leaving the family, by cutting all ties to his human community. On the other hand, the effect of reading for Vanitas is anything but detachment. Having gone through *The Story of the Stone*, “he changed his name from Vanitas to Brother Amor, or the Passionate Monk (because he had approached Truth by way of Passion), and changed the title of the book from *The Story of the Stone* to *The Tale of Brother Amor*”. So captivated is he, in other words, with the illusion conjured up by the text that henceforth its reality will completely supplant his identity. (169)

Yu plays both sides of the coin. The hero's protagonist, Baoyu, is allowed to pursue true enlightenment by complete renunciation of all desires and possessions, and, in the end, escapes the narrative web of *samsara* completely. For the monk Vanitas, the extra-diegetic figure who, in the beginning, discovers the novel and is transformed by

it, he becomes so immersed in fictive fantasy that it effectively becomes his reality. Intriguing is Yu's identification of dream-narrative as a kind of "*upaya*" (*fangbian*), a Mahayana Buddhist term that can be translated as "skillful" or "expedient means." *Upaya* denotes how the enlightened savior, or Bodhisattva, uses "convenient" and oblique ways of pushing the ignorant towards enlightenment that are more effective than direct religious preaching. It is the Buddhist version of hanging a carrot on a stick. Fundamental to this idea of "skillful means" is the notion that unenlightened humans are too ignorant and too blinded by their self-interest and passions to listen and absorb religious discourse. It requires far more wisdom for a Bodhisattva to master the communicative context and use "sneaky" ways of enlightening a fool than a preacher who only knows how to hold forth. The Bodhisattva does not so much reveal reality as she points to it; the dream does not uncover the truth in as much as it is directly in contact with the truth.

However, in the end Yu is doubtful whether fiction, which is dependent on the motility of narrative desire and on the sensuousness of its own figures, can in the final instance be a tool of enlightenment. Quoting Candrakirti's seventh-century introduction to Madhyamika philosophy, the *Madhyamakavatara*, Yu writes:

Thus "even though he has awakened, a foolish person may remember the objects apprehended during his dream and become attached to them." Some foolishness indeed, for Brother Amor as affected reader must henceforth exist in a state of endless contradiction implied by the oxymoronic predicament structured in his name: knowing something as illusory, unreal, and dreamlike as fiction, he nonetheless must live by the need of constant attachment to it. He lives in the siege of contraries – perception and delusion, knowledge and obsession. The talismanic inscription on the stone of fiction ("mislay me not, forget me not"), which is also the fiction of Stone, thus realizes its efficacy in its erotics, the power for perpetual engagement. (171)

For Yu, fiction, as figured in oneiric terms, is simply incapable of canceling the very desire that brings it into being. However, while Yu zeroes in on the persistence of stubborn “desire” such as that which sustains fiction and prevents its transcendence, I prefer to consider another reason for “keeping the dream alive.” For Fredric Jameson, all narratives, dream-like or not, must by necessity abide within the great narrative of history itself, and all fictive plots “can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic a form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme – for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity” (19). *Dream of the Red Chamber* is as much about spiritual salvation as it is about a catastrophic economic and social fall from grace. The imperial confiscation of the Jia estate was directly inspired by the Yongzheng Emperor’s confiscation of the author’s family’s own household in 1728 (Hawkes 30). Yongzheng, having only taken over from his father Kangxi six years earlier, persecuted the loyal followers of his predecessor, including the Cao family. The Cao family was so well regarded by the Kangxi Emperor that they were bestowed the privilege of hosting him four times during his trips to the south (Hawkes 27). While scholarly attempts to try to map the events and characters of the novel with those of the Cao family have been, in David Hawkes’ words, “extremely flimsy” (31), it is undeniable that the novel must be read as one that engages with the historical, even if it is not itself a historic novel. *Dream of the Red Chamber* provides a rich and sensuous fictive phenomenology of a historical catastrophe. It is not so much a persistent, floating desire that keeps the

fictional dream alive as it is History's unresolved contradictions. Baoyu's decadent and corporeal delight as he pulls apart a crab claw (evidenced by the poem he composes in honor of the gustatory event) is as much a form of sensual consolation from the blows of History as it is a nervous foreshadowing of a coming catastrophe.

Part II: Groping for the Real: May 4th and Fantasies of Knowledge

Zhang Dai's dreaming is exemplary of how those who lived through the cataclysm of 1644 tried to salvage meaning and make some kind of sense of what had happened to the world around them. Nearly three centuries later the people of China found themselves in an analogous, though vastly different, situation of confronting a world gone mad. The May 4th movement (1919) was sparked by the unequal terms of the Versailles treaty that handed Chinese territory from German colonial hands to Japanese ones, a severe blow to Chinese sovereignty and a betrayal of China's alliance with the victors. However, the movement was also a response to decades of being cowed into *de facto* submission by relentless colonial aggression, the failure of the 1911 revolution to produce meaningful state reform and progress, and the profound fear that Chinese civilization might disintegrate. Moreover, intellectuals faced a new world that seemed to not only have gotten ahead of them, but was also using its technological, scientific and epistemological leverage to thoroughly unseat Chinese sovereignty. For Chinese intellectuals, it was not merely an issue of trying to salvage meaning from this slow and painful cataclysm, but also one of seeking to interpret and decode this new world for the sake of surviving in modernity.

The May 4th movement intensified the desire for a more thorough social revolution, one that would not merely replace the figurehead of government, but would also radically change cultural attitudes. It became clear that no meaningful transformation of the state and nation was possible without the transformation of social consciousness. Such revolutionary utopianism seemed to persist even more doggedly as China faced wave after wave of attack and calamity. Dream as a trope for revolutionary utopianism became a common feature in public discourse. As an illustration of the power of this trope, all three chapters of my project refer in one way or another to a remarkable 1933 issue of *Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志), the main intellectual journal of Republican China and a strong advocate for social reform (of course, references to dreams as utopia appear well before the 1930s). After the abrupt stop to *Eastern Miscellany's* run because of the 1932 Japanese invasion of Shanghai, the editors produced a special New Year's issue that printed "dreams" for a new China submitted by its readers, and to which many of the major literary and cultural figures (as well as politicians and bankers) either contributed and/or critiqued. Dreaming seemed to capture two intimately linked affective aspects of revolutionary utopia. On one hand, the power of a dream experience and the desire to manifest such a dream as reality captured the urgency and necessity of realizing revolutionary desire. On the other, the fragility and evanescence of dreams bespoke the difficulty, if not impossibility, of realizing such utopian yearnings in a time of crisis. For May 4th intellectuals, dreams thus embodied both the sense of insurrectionary excitement as well as the despair of disillusionment,

a clarion call to agitation on one hand and a warning of the dangers of misguided adventurism on the other.

May 4th thinkers thus understood the need for sober, critical reflection and analysis to act as a check against overly exuberant revolutionary enthusiasm. While it was well and good to be able to imagine an emancipated future, equally important were the steps to be taken in order to get there. Science, in all of its various manifestations, was at the intellectual heart of cultural and philosophical reform. "Science and democracy" was the watchword of the May 4th movement and, as Wang Hui notes, there was a conscious and profound linkage between epistemological and civic reform, one that could be traced to the late-Qing era. Wang argues that the rise of science went hand-in-hand with modern nation-state building, as science promoted an objective recognition of citizens that overlooked their religious, ethnic or regional ties (127). Science thus had a "social" value as well as a technological one in building and organizing the nation-state and its modern subjects. Elsewhere Wang points to the culturalist turn of the May 4th movement as a response to the stultifying and confusing national politics between warlords and would-be restorers of the monarchy; the May 4th exhortation for China's youth to rise up and take the nation's matters in their own hands was symptomatic of the need to produce a new political subjectivity that could successfully do the work of re-imagining the state in a way that the veterans of 1911 were helpless in achieving.⁸ Rather than engage in Realpolitik, according to Wang, May 4th intellectuals advocated a "spiritual politics," the need to build new political subjectivities by emphasizing culture and art. The values of

⁸ This is from a talk Wang Hui gave in a UC Berkeley Conference titled "Variations of Culture and Politics" on April 3, 2009.

scientific thinking were upheld within the broader field of culture; Wang Hui prefers the term "discursive community of science" to denote the way scientific ideas and values were championed and promoted by those outside the strict boundaries of scientific research (136). The "spirit" of science, its liberation from dogma and tradition, its emphasis on individual investigation, and its emphasis on practical application, became incorporated within the cultural ethos of the May 4th movement.

The promotion of realism in Chinese literature was part of this cultural wellspring. As Theodore Hutters contends, realism represented simultaneously two cultural tendencies that were otherwise diachronic in Western Europe: the power to objectively represent social reality as well as the ability to critique the modern world:

At its origin then, the "modern" embodies for China a conflation of two attributes that from the standpoint of Western literary history are mutually exclusive. One of these is the profoundly critical spirit of the modern and the other is a supreme faith in the powers of representation. Realism thus came to be pressed into service as the critical spirit of the modern age. (13)

"Criticism" and "faith" were the contradictory tendencies within the Chinese realist mode; on one hand a utopian desire to model the world into discourse and thus make it intelligible and, better, changeable, on the other a contrarian spirit that otherwise dispenses with wishful thinking. As Wang Hui notes, the entire "discursive community of science" he describes was vexed by the productive tension between "positivist method" and "metaphysical characteristics and totalism" (133).

The new scientific orientation of literature, carrying both its critical and utopian functions, also inaugurated a new relationship between literature and history. Realism coincided with a new view of history that saw the historical process as, in Lukacs'

words, “the mass experience of hundreds of thousands, of millions” rather than “isolated and mostly adventurous-minded individuals” (24). In 1917 Chen Duxiu, frustrated by political stagnation, advocated the “plain, expressive literature of the people” as opposed to the “ornate, syncophantic literature of the aristocracy” as one way of renewing Chinese culture (141). Literature was not only supposed to be “blind” to status, but also expressly take up the cause of representing the majority, those who had been left behind from previous literature and history. Moreover, realism was charged with the task of illuminating the relationship between individual experience and historic totality.

What interests me is how the critical orientation or realism, couched in scientific discourse, also aligned itself with a utopian impulse of aesthetic creation, and following the observations of Hutters and Wang, how these two conflicting tendencies were mediated by realist texts themselves. It is not enough simply to negate the past; what is also needed is, in Slavoj Žižek’s words, “the invention of a new life – not only the construction of a new social reality in which our utopian dreams would be realized, but the (re)construction of those dreams themselves” (*Introduction* 24).⁹ What I want to suggest is that this conflict between critique and faith is not the aporetic death knell of realism, but in fact the very radical hope that brings realism to being, a mode that thrives on a seemingly untenable contradiction between critical knowledge and fantastic non-knowledge. I am disinclined to uphold a static notion of “realism” and the real as denoting a verisimilitude in relation to a world and social

⁹ Žižek here also quotes Jameson to explicate his point: “we might think of the new onset of Utopian desire as a kind of desiring to desire, a learning to desire, the invention of the desire called Utopia in the first place” (*Introduction* 24).

existence “out there,” thus allowing our ideas about the real to be dependent on ontology, whether it be empirical, literary or psychological. I would like to instead suggest of thinking about the real in terms of a dynamic and critical movement of thought itself, one that always seeks to transcend its own bounds as well as those of language. This perpetual movement, the sheer dynamism implied by the concept of the real, is fueled by a utopian epistemological desire – achieving knowledge is not only a step towards eventual liberation and modernization, but is in itself a conceptual figure and model for freedom and utopia. The "translingual" origins of the word for reality, or *xianshi* (现实), are derived from a Japanese loanword (*genjitsu*), which in turn was the Japanese translation for a key concept of the Western enlightenment.¹⁰ Thus we can see the real, as embodied by *xianshi*, as an epistemological desire that spans the historic and geographic space of modernity, in marked contradistinction to pre-modern terms for the 'real,' in particular *zhen* (真), which emphasized moral truth and authenticity over the more scientific, empiric thrust of *xianshi*. As Lydia Liu has shown, these reverse neologisms carry within their lexical genealogy the very historic trajectory of modernity along which China traveled. We can see reality, and realism, that literary mode which sought to give access to knowledge of reality, as orientations towards knowledge itself that were conditioned by the sense of historical, temporal and geographic belatedness, the "gap-in-knowledge" that so beguiled Chinese thinkers as they faced a "superior" but hostile West.

¹⁰ However, it is important here to note that the term *xieshizhuyi* (realism [literally, “write reality-ism,” 写实主义]) and *xieshi pai* (写实派 realist school) predated the use and later dominance of *xianshizhuyi*. Marston Anderson traces *xieshi*'s arrival from Japan (J: *shajitsu*), and points to Liang Qichao's work as the "first significant Chinese use of the term" (28). Lydia Liu categorizes *xianshi* as a "Sino-Japanese-European loanword in modern Chinese" (294). The literary term “realism” (Ch: *xianshi zhuyi*; J: *genjitsu shugi*) is an example of a suffixed compound from modern Japanese (345).

It may be worthwhile to ponder the critical difference between a pre-modern word like *zhen* and a modern word such as *xianshi*. Hutters critiqued Rey Chow's effective conflation of the two when she claimed that premodern Chinese literature was also interested in issues of verisimilitude:

I would suggest that Chow is correct only if *zhen* and *ziran* mean "true" and "natural" precisely in the platonic sense of referring to a transcendent realm of "reality." It would seem, however, that for the most part *zhen*, for instance, refers to the degree of accord between personal emotion as manifested in the wording of a poem and as felt in the author and/or reader rather than fidelity of the verbal depiction to some imagined natural or ideal realm. (14, footnote #12)

But rather than dwelling on the issue of whether the "real" refers to mimesis or the sense of emotional resonance between poem and poet, I would like to suggest that there is also a materialist way of trying to distinguish between the modern and pre-modern notions. Let us take, for example, Zhang Dai's preface to his *In Search of West Lake in Dream*. Heartbroken from the destruction of all the scenic sights surrounding West Lake as a result of the Manchu invasion, he decides to preserve his dreams as a way of holding on to memory and resisting the present: "The way I dream about West Lake is like dreaming about home and garden and family – all in my own possession in the past, so my dreams are all reality (*zhen* 真)" (Ye 102). Dream becomes couched within the nostalgic comforts of home, garden and family; personal memory becomes an authentic personal reality in the face of phenomenal destruction. However, as Philip Kafalas argues, this seemingly personal nostalgia is also a commitment to an ideal past; moreover, it is not merely an expression of political loyalty to a bygone regime, but also one of "a late-Ming subject's loyalty to a better Ming that had already disappeared before he was born" (175). That is to say

zhen here acts as an utterance that carries a utopian thrust towards an idealized, native, Chinese past, one unsullied either by internal disintegration or external intrusion. *Zhen* implies not only the aesthetic authenticity of poet to his creation, but also his fealty to a cultural ideal. The fact that modern intellectuals felt moved to replace *zhen* with the foreign inflected *xianshi* implied that the new utopian reality was not to be sought within the borders of Chinese cultural memory, but had to be sought beyond national borders. Whereas *zhen* traverses a temporal distance into a mythic past, *xianshi* travels a geographic distance to the modern world.

Expanding on this motif of movement in terms of thinking about the real, I would like to refer to Roman Jakobson's 1921 essay "On Realism in Art," in which he attempted to elucidate realism not as a static artistic mode, but rather as a contingent stance taken by an artist and an observer in relation to the prevailing aesthetic codes, and sought to bring "the extreme relativity of the concept of 'realism' into sharp relief" (*On Realism* 42).¹¹ Rebels against of the dominant aesthetic ideology will recognize works that defy convention as more realistic, while "conservatives" will maintain that only those works that follow the established rules are faithful to reality (*On Realism* 41). Even when a particular, localized set of conventions from "one

¹¹ What I find particularly intriguing about Jakobson's article is how he starts out lamenting the lack of "science" (наука) in contemporary literary criticism, characterizing it as inconsequential and arbitrary "causerie" (the French is not translated in the Russian edition; I have been unable to see if this is the case in the original Czech, although I suspect it is). He goes on to characterize current scholarship as a mere imitation of a simulacrum rather than a description of life itself: "It is such a gratifying and easy task to chat about life and times using literary works as a basis, just as it is more gratifying and easier to copy from a plaster cast than to draw a living body" (живое тело) (*O khudozhestvennom* 38). Just a few pages later, he points to how sexual euphemisms, such as "Dutch" and "walrus-like" to describe a prodigious member, are more realistic in their effect than denoting the organs directly. The fact that he uses a French term to reduce current literary scholarship as "causerie," as a copy of a copy, rather than a "living body," to both suggest the unreality of such scholarship as well as to make this "unreality" more "real" through euphemism, implies that what Jakobson is attempting to create, despite his critical denigration of Realism as a mode, is a realist literary "science," and that his own Formalist exercises find themselves indebted to the epistemological aspirations of his 19th century Realist predecessors.

specific artistic current of the nineteenth century" (*On Realism* 39) proclaimed itself as Realism, artists within the mode immediately sought to identify their own work as exhibiting a "higher" realism in relation to their fellow practitioners (*On Realism* 43). Moreover, certain modes of writing can alternately be seen as more realistic in relation to its context; thus, figuration and euphemism may be seen as realistic precisely because "[they] sound more impressive" in contrast to descriptive denotation (*On Realism* 40). Certainly Jakobson was arguing against certain pieties of Realism as a mode that claimed a higher ontological ground by showing how all practitioners of art, regardless of school, have appealed to the real. However, what I find particularly striking in Jakobson's essay is the way he ascribes both a relationality and motility to the concept of realism; "extremely relative" on one hand, but also irrepressibly dynamic. It is this epistemological movement that I want to emphasize in realism; while on one hand realism denotes a certain set of conventions imported from Europe (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, etc.), it also implies the potential movement of knowledge along an open-ended vector. Realism relies on a notion of scientific empiricism, but can also transcend such an ontology when necessary.¹² For May 4th intellectuals, even more important than the truth claims that science expounded was what scientific thinking contributed to critical knowledge, an

¹² Vera Schwarcz has pointed out that early May 4th interest in science was not the dogmatic "scientism" it is often accused of being. Rather, they were very much invested in the epistemological stakes and issues that science foregrounded: "*New Tide* [a major journal of the May 4th period] intellectuals, focusing on the presuppositions of knowledge, were far more interested in how scientists reach their conclusions than in how infallible or enduring those conclusions might be. Their epistemological emphasis has been overlooked by most historians [...]" (100).

indispensable tool that was essential in trying to think through the national and historic crisis.

The real has often been seen as an “agent of demystification” (Anderson 17), that which unmask (and thus arrests) desire and forces the observer/reader to confront reason. However, while reality and literary realism, with its narrative roots in objective, empiric observation, have appealed to dispassionate science for legitimacy of their claim to truth, the very drive towards the real is undeniably in itself a desire. Desire lurks within the very structure of reason itself, a volatile potential that cannot be completely contained by the reality principle or by realist convention. In this sense, then, realism carries within it an unconscious, the very epistemological utopianism that brings the mode into being but must be disavowed within the diegesis. It is this deformative slippage within realist texts that I want to examine and exploit, the moments of maximum tension when realist texts bare the utopian desire that informs their pursuit of knowledge. The movement of the real between critical levels that Jakobson identifies is best understood through the dynamic vector of desire.

In examining the linkages between the binaries of critique and desire, the real and utopia, observing self and represented other, etc., as part of the fundamental structure of realism itself, and not merely as incapacitating contradictions, I use the following heuristic model of realism as one that is amenable for my interpretive purposes: realism involves a compact between narrative/text and reader whereby the reader is asked to suspend consciousness of form in return for the unmediated knowledge/revelation that the text is supposed to offer. However, when such

revelation itself becomes stultified, static, in itself *formalized*, and thus impervious to the kind of dialectical knowledge it is ostensibly meant to provide, the text will try to salvage its claim to truth by reflecting on its own formality and its own discursive and symbolic structure. Verisimilitude must be forsaken when it proves an obstacle to knowledge. It is these moments of transvaluation, whereby the pencil lines suddenly come into view, that the realist text finds an avenue to re-create a new space of revelation. In this sense, realism's relation to knowledge is fetishistic; it very well knows that reality is discursively constructed, but all the same it will operate as if this were not the case. However, when the aim of the fetishistic practice becomes infeasible, when anti-knowledge is being produced rather than knowledge, then the fetishistic enchantment is revealed. Realism thus involves both a conscious forgetting and a strategic and recuperative recollection of form that happens in a dynamic, open-ended trajectory.

This study treats narrative dreams and dream discourse as symptomatic sites where realism lays bare its utopian desire. It argues that the dream's liminal and multifunctional formal presence within the realist narrative is the space where the contradictory impulses of the mode cleave together. At once the description of a character's inner fantasy, as well as a mode of expression of the text's broader desires, the dream becomes a vital supplement to the realist text, both excluded from the wakened narrative and yet necessary in suggesting the text's gesture towards a hoped for reality. Dreams also figure suggestively as a philosophical doppelganger of the realist text: at once a totality, a world unto itself, while also a fleeting fiction, an ephemeral discursive creation.

Literary realism and a renewed interest in dreams were both manifestations of Chinese intellectuals' desire to get closer to a better understanding of the "real"; they were both enfolded within the broader "discursive community of science." In the May 4th frenzy of knowledge importation from the West, dreams became part of an intellectual fascination with psychology and psychoanalysis. While psychoanalysis of the Freudian type was not, as Jingyuan Zhang has noted, the dominant school among Chinese psychologists (behaviorism being by far the most popular), it flourished in intellectual and popular discourse through journal discussions and translations of introductory monographs into Chinese (34-5). Few actually read Freud's work in the original, and *The Interpretation of Dreams* was not translated until 1932 by Zhang Jingshen (J. Zhang 86). Nevertheless, the Chinese reading public was already well aware of Freudian dream theory in the early 1920s, and Freud "was considered to be the first person to try to offer a scientific explanation for dreams. Freud's way of interpreting dreams was the best known part of his theory and drew a great deal of attention from Chinese intellectuals" (J. Zhang 86). Dreams, not surprisingly, mirrored the fate of literature in this revolutionary period: at once upheld as a vehicle of self-expression, they were also seen as a quasi-scientific mirror to reality, and itself subject to empirical examination.

The importance for Freud of dream analysis in establishing the presence and function of the unconscious is well known. Dissatisfied with explanations for dream phenomena rooted in physiology, Freud pointed to another source in the mind as the generator of dream thoughts. Dreams pointed to a reality separate from external,

material reality, one that could not be directly represented, but whose basic contours and function could be inferred:

The unconscious is the true psychical reality; *in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense organs.* (Interpretation 651)

If we look at unconscious wishes reduced to their most fundamental and truest shape, we shall have to conclude, no doubt, that *psychical reality is a particular form of existence not to be confused with material reality.* (Interpretation 658-9)

In this last section of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, after having painstakingly examined dream phenomena and their mechanisms, Freud triumphantly presented his vision of the unconscious, and the primary and secondary processes. Moreover, what Freud demonstrated was the existence of a new "reality" that transcended the material and physiological senses of the word. Freud's rhetoric of the "real" resonates with Jakobson's relational conception of realism as an aesthetic category; his "discovery" and articulation of the unconscious can be read as his contribution to the post-Enlightenment discourse on reality. Dreams, for Freud, played a far more important role than merely as a diagnostic tool for identifying his patients' psychic maladies; dreams were the heuristic vehicle through which he could produce a new body of scientific knowledge.

In the nascent field of Republican-era (the period beginning from the 1911 revolution through the Communist takeover in 1949) Chinese psychoanalysis, dreams were widely recognized as a source of scientific knowledge. By 1922 a periodical devoted to psychoanalysis, *Xinli zazhi* (Journal of Psychoanalysis), had already been

established (one editor boasted that they created such a journal one year before the Japanese formed their own [Zhang Yaoxiang 3]), and featured articles by prominent scholars that popularized key topics.¹³ Editor and contributor Zhang Yaoxiang wrote that the original impetus for the journal was to "propagate the newest science" (1). While Freud was a major interlocutor, so were other psychologists such as Carl Jung, Havelock Ellis and Isador Coriat among others. A number of articles were devoted to dreams, and they tried to wrest dreams from traditional practices of prognostication, declaring these as mere "absurdity" and "superstition" (Du 377), and instead use the tools of scientific analysis to discover the real unconscious and somatic sources of dream phenomena. This new scholarship on dreams was a repudiation of the past cultural heritage of dreams and an effort to extract true knowledge from the superstitious non-knowledge in which dreams had been mired. However, in addition to this paradigm shift from traditional to modern perceptions of dreams, scholars were also aware of the need to suggest a bridge between the past and modernity by finding resonances between new Western conceptions and native canonical sources. Thus affirmative references to the *Zhuangzi*, the Buddhist canon, Tang-dynasty romances and so on abound as well.

Inspired by the scientific approaches to dreams they read about in the West, Chinese psychologists conducted their own "empirical investigations" (*shiji diaocha*).

Du Yuanzai, for example, had 54 university students, male and female, fill out a

¹³ I unfortunately could not locate the original run, but came across a compendium of the most important articles, organized by subject and published in 1931 and republished the year after. By 1931 the journal had been out of print, and in all only fourteen issues were produced. While the articles bear the name of their authors, they do not have dates attached, so the articles mentioned hereafter can only be dated sometime in the 1920s. Zhang Yaoxiang, the compiler, wrote that the impetus for publishing the anthology was to make up for previous journals that had been lost, as well as to provide a ready reference for seminal native research on psychoanalysis (1).

questionnaire asking what they dreamed about the night before. He divided the recorded dreams into various subject categories, and each dream was designated as "happy" or "unhappy." Thirty-eight of the 54 dreams were unhappy ones, and the two subjects that claimed the largest share were "examinations" and "fear" (each subject claimed twelve respondents), perhaps not surprising for college students in a time of national crisis (382). Only four students recorded sexual dreams; one student speciously claimed to have had intercourse with a sow, describing their congress as "truly exuberant and dripping wet." His dream was declared a "happy" one. Another student described a dream in which he struggled in tears to fulfill his Oedipal desire to sleep with his mother, only to be rebuffed and then fall into a deep melancholy upon waking. His dream was "unhappy" (380). Despite the scintillating variety of dreams collected, Du Yuanzai's final conclusions to his investigation were somewhat disappointing: most dreams were unhappy, the fact that examination dreams claimed a plurality was surely connected to the students' immediate and long-term professional situations, and the vast majority of dreams seemed to emanate from a powerful emotive source (382). However, what was significant about this kind of survey was the treatment of dreams as an empirical source of psychological and sociological knowledge. To be sure, pre-modern Chinese scholars such as the Ming polymath Chen Shiyuan (1516-1595) compiled dream encyclopedias that rival modern attempts in sophistication and comprehensiveness.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the attempt to empirically and statistically analyze actual dreams bespoke the

¹⁴ See Richard Strassberg's recent translation and introduction to Chen Shiyuan's "Lofty Principles of Dream Interpretation" (*Meng zhan yi zhi* 梦占逸旨) in his *Wandering Spirits: Chen Shiyuan's Encyclopedia of Dreams* (2008). His introduction provides an instructive survey into the variety of dream culture in pre-Modern China.

psychologists' adherence to a Western scientific paradigm. That realism employed dream discourse could be read as in keeping with the mode's interest in science in all its forms. However, I want to also emphasize how dreams in realist texts offer a form of knowledge that is different from the rational knowledge of empiric mimesis. Dreams' ability to be inscribed within a scientific discourse guarantees their legitimacy; however, what insight they provide straddles the border between supplementary knowledge and non-knowledge.

While May 4th writers for the most part had only mediated access to Western works of psychology, they were nonetheless familiar with their basic ideas and terms. As Jingyuan Zhang has suggested, this popular interest in the new discourse in dreams produced a literary effect: dream as a narrative trope starts to become more apparent in May 4th writing. She points to how fictional texts from the very first decades of the 20th century featured longer and more elaborate dreams of their characters, a trend that Zhang claims was directly influenced Lin Shu's translations of Western novels (85). However, such dreams still engaged with the native discourse of the supernatural and predestination. Zhang goes on to state that by the 1920s and 1930s, literary dreams were more psychological in nature, and revealed engagement with the Western psychological discourse that was rapidly gaining intellectual currency in China (85).

It is against this vibrant intellectual background that I intend to explore the relationship between dreams and realism, and more broadly, the dialectic between dreams, reality and history in modern Chinese fiction. I seek to attend to the unique kinds of labor both the dream form and the realist mode perform in trying to reveal

the real within literary texts. On the surface, this seems simple: literary realism tries to capture a snapshot of social relations within their historic context and the dreams contained therein give us a glimpse into the individual psychology of the characters. But dreams contain a more subversive thrust that goes beyond a rationalist scientism of consciousness. I wish to push further and elucidate how dreams force realism to lay bare its own utopian yearnings, those that are otherwise suppressed by the narrative proper and legitimized by their encapsulation as individual, rather than textual, dreams. In other words, I seek to show how realist dreams gesture towards a utopian historic horizon that transcends the immediacy of the realist present.

However, this study is not limited to the utopian aspects of dream discourse. In addition to their hopeful visions of a splendid future, dreams also carry a powerful critical perspective that is brought to bear upon the realist mode. I will explore how dreams function to reveal the materiality of discourse itself, the looming weight of language that persists despite realism's attempt to transcend discourse and promise an immediate view of reality. In what ways do dreams disrupt the circuit between text and world and force us to contend with the materiality of text alongside the world it seeks to convey? Thus I am interested in the way dreams, as the fictive foil of realist narrative, highlight the discursiveness of realist texts themselves, how they compel us to reflect critically about modes of representation and the presence of language that both constructs and conveys reality. In this vein, dreams thus highlight the spectral, yet barely tangible, presence of language, at moments transparent, an immediate

vehicle for the “blood and tears”¹⁵ that realist literature is supposed to transmit, at other moments itself a constantly shifting corporeality, one to be considered alongside the human bodies that are the mode's ostensible subjects. It is language's fundamental instability, its fungible nature, that dreams so vividly capture, and it is this constant semantic shape-shifting that brings into relief language's texture, its presence as a *thing*. Dreams in and around realist texts are symptomatic of a broader aesthetic-ideological anxiety over language's competing claims to reality and to itself.

While realist texts seek to represent society in a way that is accessible to readers' knowledge, dreams within those texts point to the perennial crisis that afflicts the very heart of representation; if dreams function as an allegory of the illusive nature of fictional narrative itself, then can such representation be truly believed? Can such representation bear meaning if it is but a dream? But alongside fears about fiction's failure to truly convey a sense of reality lies an always persistent utopian hope of language's semiotic possibility; its ability to signify, however tenuous, is itself allegorical of redemption. The disruptions that dreams cause for the realist mode are not meant to subvert it through contradiction; rather, what I am trying to argue is that this is part of the contract of realism itself, its ability to radically correct itself at moments of mimetic distress. What dreams imply is that even the seeming meaninglessness within the crisis of representation is itself meaningful, a harbinger of a revelation that might perhaps transcend mimesis altogether. Dreams bring the reader to the very edge of what is knowable.

¹⁵ As Marston Anderson tells us, it was Zheng Zhenduo, as well as Mao Dun, who issued a call for a “literature of blood and tears” (44).

I plan to tell my story by looking at four authors writing at different moments from the beginning of the May 4th movement through the very end of the long Chinese revolutionary trajectory – the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Chapter One focuses on the crisis of realism and its possible formal resolution in the work of Lu Xun (1881-1936), arguably China’s greatest modern writer. Marston Anderson’s work has helped us immensely in understanding Lu Xun’s discomfort with the realist mode’s formal inability to reconcile observer and observed, its tendency to turn the objects of representation into objects of contempt as well as its failure to spur dialectical ethical and political reflection on the part of the reader. By focusing on Lu Xun’s fantastic and bizarre work of dream-like prose poetry, *Wild Grass* (*Yecao* 野草 1927), I argue that Lu Xun’s self-conscious use of the dream trope allowed him a way to address the fundamental problems of representation as well as suggest a radical way of rethinking representation altogether. Although Lu Xun wrote a number of fictional texts that have been categorized as realist, *Wild Grass* has more often than not been considered as a form of modernist experimentation. I argue for a way to read realism not simply as a particular type of text, but as a mode of literary ideology that can exert its epistemological force against a text that otherwise would not be seen as “realist.” While Lu Xun was no stranger to psychoanalytic theories and approaches, I suggest that it is primarily the formal innovation of the dream trope that is key in spurring Lu Xun’s rethinking of realism’s epistemological premises.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lu Xun translated Kuriyagawa Hakuson's "Symbols of Mental Anguish," an essay that argued for psychological sources of creative and aesthetic inspiration. As Jingyuan Zhang notes, Lu Xun had a number of Freud's works in his library as well, among them *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* and *Studies on Hysteria* (95).

Chapter Two will examine the mature work of Mao Dun (1896-1981), a writer who by the late 1920s upheld the power and supremacy of realism in illuminating the truth of history. It highlights Mao Dun's efforts to know the elusive real through literary practice, and his disavowal of modes of romantic fancy, including dreaming. However, despite his self-conscious stance of objectivity, this chapter will focus on the persistence of dreams in his fictional texts, and examine the textual disruptions these dreams occasion in his narrative. The texts I consider are his revolutionary trilogy *Eclipse* (*Shi 蚀* 1930) and *Midnight* (*Ziye 子夜* 1933), a novel about financial and personal intrigue in Shanghai. I argue that Mao Dun's authorial self-consciousness about maintaining objectivity produces repressive effects on the body of the realist narrative itself, resulting in symptomatic moments of diegetic psychosis that are as much indices of mimetic distress as they are opportunities for utopian revelation. I examine how dreams reveal the hysteric pressures against both a mode that is seeking to be broadly encyclopedic and dispassionate in its representation of the world, and against an author-persona who is trying, even straining, to claim his identity as a realist writer in a period of manic tumult.

Chapter Three takes us out of critical realism and headlong into the field of socialist realism, a mode that sought to reflect reality "in its revolutionary development." For supporters of the 1949 revolution, the Communist triumph marked the realization of dreams that sprang from the dark, desperate era of the Republican period. Contemporaneously, the popular discourses of psychoanalysis, which had laid the "scientific" basis for the Republican interest in dreams, were quickly dismantled in favor of Soviet-influenced materialist and Pavlovian conceptions of the psyche.

When official discourse proclaimed that utopian dreams had become a reality, what happened to the presence of dreams as allegories for futurity and alterity in socialist realist literature? This chapter examines the way dreams recede from the socialist literary imaginary, and along with it, any viable space for imagining alterity.

Examining Yang Mo's (1914-1995) celebrated (and savaged) novel *Song of Youth* (*Qing chun zhi ge* 青春之歌1958), a historical work about the pre-Liberation struggle, I look at how the lingering presence of dreams and dream-related discourse both gestures towards a formal nostalgia towards Republican literature as well as its socialist realist transformation. Rather than suggesting socialist realism as a politicized aberration from "proper" realism, or a partisan version of modernism and the avant-garde, I offer an interpretation of socialist realism as manifesting the very utopian desire that remains veiled in earlier realist texts. In other words, I claim that realism in its more "critical" manifestation and socialist realism both contain the same desire at their very heart; the difference is not so much the desire's content as it is the form in which such desire is conveyed. Whereas in critical realism it is necessary to maintain a diegetic distance between dream and wakened narrative to suggest a space in which History can play its progressive role, in socialist realist texts such a space is often collapsed, and dream and wakened life unite at pivotal, epiphanic moments that suggest socialism's triumph over History. However, towards the end of the chapter, I ask how socialist discourse, in its efforts to dispel the dream-like non-knowledge of the past and promote the illumination of Marxist epistemology, in the end ignored its own oneiric fantasy making.

In my concluding epilogue, I look at the end of the long Chinese revolution, specifically, the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). As the mass upheaval deconstructed itself and left a political and cultural landscape scarred and traumatized, was it possible to yet again imagine an alternative future when the dream seems to have failed? I look at critical responses to the speeches and statements of Jiang Qing, Mao's notorious wife and alleged ringleader of the Cultural Revolution, and examine how they sought to dismantle Jiang Qing's elaborate political dreamwork as a way of trying to salvage the legitimacy of Communist rule. However, by focusing on Jiang Qing's ability to conjure up a horrifying political phantasmagoria, such critics inadvertently let on to the hysteric nature of the authoritarian system itself, one given to manic leaps of destructive fantasy. I focus on Zong Pu's (b. 1928) "A Dream on Strings" (*Xianshang de meng* 弦上的梦 1978), a short story about the end of the Cultural Revolution that deftly weaves together varying themes of dream as symptom of psychological and physical trauma, political nightmare, and finally, as a persistent utopian hope that history can be redeemed. Whereas dreams receded from view in the socialist cultural imagination, in Zong Pu's story, they return both as an affirmation for utopian hope, but also as a powerful index to the need to rethink the future of the socialist project. Moreover, Zong Pu's story speaks to the persistence of dreams as a narrative trope during a time of reflection and renewal, one that has not lost its compelling force to the present day.

The complicated dreamwork of the long revolutionary period seems, in some ways, to have been discredited by thirty years of market reforms. State sponsored free enterprise could do what thirty years of centralized planning could not: produce

greater personal wealth, spur rapid urban and industrial development, encourage integration into a global culture, and create a vast consumer middle class among other achievements. As a way of showcasing these accomplishments, the capital hosted the 2008 Olympic Games. I was in Beijing during the summer of 2005 thinking about writing a dissertation about the interplay of dreams and reality in modern Chinese culture when the organizing committee unveiled their slogan: “One World, One Dream” (*tong yi ge shijie, tong yi ge mengxiang* 同一个世界，同一个梦想). It struck me how the government was retrieving this old rhetoric of dreams to promote the vision of a “harmonious” Chinese society working in concert with a globalized, capitalist world, and how such a unified “dream” both co-opted and elided other visions of a possible world. There was something immediately trite and clichéd about the slogan, but this was perhaps deliberate. The tight, even glib, parallelism through which the sameness of “*tong yi*” was reproduced in the formal structure of the couplet, as well as the conflation of world and dream, embodied a sentimental, folksy desire for a unified realm that is hard to oppose, but even harder to substantively define. The slogan was a brilliant elaboration of Foucault's formulation of dream as *idios kosmos*, a world unto itself, lying in the very bosom of Communist power. This slogan and the winsome, child-like anthropomorphized mascots basked in mass sentimentality. However, the media campaign's melodramatic contortions, its exhaustive efforts to be “cute,” betrayed the hard edge of authoritarian power. When I returned to China in 2007 for a year of research, this “dream” was proclaimed everywhere, on Olympic banners and advertisements hanging from school walls, factories and subway billboards. Most people with whom I talked, whatever their grievances about the

government, were swept up in a wave of national pride and enthusiasm, and endorsed, if with some reservation, this dream. It was simply too cute to resist.¹⁷

Caught up in a mode of triumphant nationalist celebration, few were prepared for the subsequent crisis of global capitalism that has struck China particularly hard. This crisis has revealed and further exacerbated the long simmering inequities between rich and poor, the urban and the migrant. It has also led many to question the destructive effects of unchecked development on China's environment and natural resources and the dismantling of a state welfare system for those left behind by such growth. These problems were always there, and only became steadily worse, but were treated as short-term dilemmas that would resolve themselves once the invisible hand got around to lifting everyone up. To question the excesses of unbridled economic liberalization was to declare oneself an enemy of reform, an unrepentant stalwart of the destructive legacy of the Cultural Revolution. It seems clearer, however, that China has predicated its economic and political stability on an exaggerated rate of growth that is likely unsustainable. After thirty years of free-market dogma and the demise of state socialism, it might be possible again at this critical historic juncture to refresh our thinking about China and, ultimately, the world's political, economic and cultural future. While "One World, One Dream" was always a hackneyed slogan, it

¹⁷ "Cuteness" as a manifestation and culmination of state discipline was on broad display in the Beijing Olympics. In particular, the use of an adorable female "body double" during the Opening Ceremonies to lip sync a melody sung by a more homely girl revealed the blunt machinations at work. As critical and even cynical as I was to the "cute" overkill, I also could not help but give in to it from time to time.

seems that a new vision of a transfigured world is precisely what is needed should we want to survive long in our new century.¹⁸

Thus it is with an eye to China's future, and ultimately, the world's, that I offer this study of the dreamwork of past writers ranging from the late-Ming to the beginning of the "reform" period. I want to salvage the dream from its relegation to idle fantasy or irrational wishful thinking, and to assert that the dream form performs important and necessary ideological labor. Dreams shake up our ways of understanding our relationship to history, and offer other avenues of examining our historic situation in ways not beholden to conventional narrative logic. Dreams force us to contend with the discursive materiality that limns our social existence and to examine how such materiality affects the way we relate to others. I would like to suggest that dreams can bring us back to the very heart of historic experience itself. What follows is both a tribute to those from the past who dreamed about China, and to those in the present who continue to dream.

¹⁸ In December 2008 a Chinese online petition, known as the *Charter 08* and signed by many intellectuals, called for greater political liberalization as well as even more neoliberal economic "reforms". It was modeled somewhat on the famous Czechoslovakian *Charter 77*. The petition caused a great splash in the foreign media, and its chief proponent, Liu Xiaobo, was put into detention. In the last sentence the writers echo the Olympic slogan by stating that they hope to "realize the people's unflagging wish and dream (*mengxiang* 梦想) of the last hundred years" (*Charter 08*). Of course, no one party or faction has the moral or political monopoly on what China's "dream" should be, as the varied contents from the special 1933 New Year's issue of *Eastern Miscellany* so well demonstrated. Yu Hua relates a story about seeing a Central Chinese Television special that asked children from various parts of the country about their "dreams." A boy who hailed from Beijing noted that he wanted a Boeing airplane, while a girl from the more impoverished northwest region simply wished for white sneakers. "These two children were the same age," notes Yu Hua, "but their dreams were unimaginably distant from one another." For him, the vast gulf between these two dreams, one an extravagant wish to soar into the stratosphere in a state of the art vehicle, the other a humble desire to be able to walk and play in relative comfort, were themselves startling indices to the effects of starkly uneven economic development. Surely any dream about a truly emancipated future must, in addition to addressing civil and political rights, also address the basic human and material right of being able to walk on one's own feet, free from hunger and want.

Chapter One

Dreaming as Representation: Lu Xun's *Wild Grass* and the Contradictions of Realism

Making Bodies Matter: Revisiting Lu Xun's "Preface" to *Call to Arms*

Critics and teachers habitually point to the infamous “lantern slide affair” in the oft-cited preface to his first collection of short stories, *Call to Arms* (*Nahan* 呐喊 1923), as the critical turning point in Lu Xun's life that sets off a crisis of personal and national identity and which culminates in his abandonment of medicine and a commitment to a life of letters. The author recalls his time as a young exchange student studying medicine in Japan's Sendai University. At the end of a lecture, the professor of microbiology stops showing slides of various bacteria and instead produces slides showing scenes from the Russo-Japanese war currently being waged. In one slide, a crowd of Chinese bystanders gathers around one of their own, kneeling on the ground, about to be executed by a Japanese soldier. Apparently, the Chinese prisoner was spying for the Russians, subsequently caught by the Japanese, and soon to be punished. The crowd, Lu Xun tells us, curiously seems to exhibit no reaction at what is about to happen. Aghast at the “numb expression” (*mamu de jingshen* 麻木的神情) of his fellow countrymen as they watch another Chinese man about to be decapitated by the Japanese military, Lu Xun famously declares that the problem with the Chinese was spiritual, not physical:

No matter how healthy, how sturdy their bodies may be, if they only served as meaningless material for public display and as spectators, then even their death by sickness would not necessarily be considered

unfortunate. Therefore our first need was to transform their spirits. I thought at the time that promoting literature was conducive to transforming spirits, and thus I decided to advocate the literary movement.

即使体格如何健全，如何茁壮，也只能做毫无意义的示众的材料和看客，病死多少是不必以为不幸的。所以我们的第一要着，是在改变他们的精神，而善于改变精神的是，我那时以为当然要推文艺，于是想提倡文艺运动了。(1: 439)

Readers have long read this passage as Lu Xun's rejection of the merely corporeal in favor of the spiritual and meaningful. As the narrator observes, strong bodies are no better than sickly ones if they serve as nothing more than military cannon-fodder and senseless spectators. In order to "cure" the souls of his countrymen, Lu Xun points to literature as the ideal vehicle for uplifting the spirits of the Chinese people. The narrator thus recapitulates Liang Qichao's famous exaltation of the novel as the means by which a nation can undergo spiritual transformation.¹

Eager to see in the narrator an acknowledgement of Liang Qichao's assertion on the power of literature, some forget to note that the narrator's discovery of literature's ostensible spiritual power is doomed to pathetic failure; his first enterprise, a

¹ Both Lydia Liu and Rey Chow have written significantly about this "literary fact." For Chow, the horror of the scene derives as much from the "disorientation" of modernity and the sudden intrusion of new visual media in a heretofore dominantly literary culture as the violence depicted on the lantern slide; Lu Xun's decision to take up literature and not, say, filmmaking, constitutes a sort of reactionary gesture on a formal level: "What fails to be considered in the exclusively literary approach is the fact that Lu Xun's explanation is already a retroactive attempt to verbalize and narrativize a mute visual event" (7). Perhaps to expect Lu Xun, steeped in both a classical and Western literary education, to take up more visual formal media is a bit much; nevertheless he continued throughout his literary career to engage with film, photography and other visual art, in particular woodblock prints. Liu argues that violence as a form of ethically compromised spectacle becomes a motif that becomes endlessly reproduced throughout Lu Xun's fictional career: "[S]tagged as a representation of Chinese national character, the drama of violence in these texts also unfolds at the level of reading where the reader is shocked to discover that she or he is implicated in the violence of representation by being induced to play the role of a witness to the same spectacle of horror enacted over and over again" (64). Lu Xun scholars' perennial return to this *locus classicus* of his work may likewise be seen as a kind of neurotic repetition, much in the same way the author himself keeps returning to the topos of the violent spectacle. However, I hope to show that there is still much in the preface to be considered and mined, and too often only the "lantern slide affair" is mentioned at the expense of the rest of the piece.

magazine known as “New Life,” is suddenly aborted due to an unexpected withdrawal of necessary capital. While inaugurating a socially committed literary magazine doubtless has its share of thrills and hope, the process of getting such a magazine that will create and sustain spiritual life up and running is still stubbornly beholden to material vicissitudes. In one of the narrator’s deliciously ironic turns of phrase, he refers to the failed enterprise as “the *New Life* that failed to be born” (*weichansheng de Xinsheng* 未产生的〈新生〉, 1: 439). The “new,” spiritual “life” the narrator and his comrades sought to deliver ends up being nothing more than an aborted fetus, as much of a waste as the numb spectators that so mortified the young narrator and precipitated his turn to letters.

I point to this failure because I believe that the narrator’s erstwhile advocacy of the “spirit” over the body cannot be sustained without a certain irony that becomes apparent when we take stock of Lu Xun’s actual literary practice, both in the preface to *Call to Arms* and in much of his later work.² The project of consciousness raising is inseparably tied to the poetic struggle of finding an appropriate method for

² Ban Wang points out that Lu Xun is not rejecting the body in favor of the spirit, but searching for a “rejuvenated body,” a strong body that has been fused with spirit – the project of creating such a rejuvenated body is essentially an aesthetic project. He sees a similar aspiration for the strong, poetic body in Lu Xun’s study of Mara poetry (12). For another treatment of the body in *Wild Grass*, see Li Rong’s wonderfully thoughtful and very recent article. She employs the insights of a number of Western philosophers, including Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and most importantly, Merleau-Ponty. She writes that the use of the body in *Wild Grass* “can be seen as the point where language is helpless (语言无奈之处), and thus acts as a new form of language” (206). Where I part ways with Li Rong is in her tendency to see the body as somehow more elemental than and prior to language (doubtless because of her phenomenological orientation), and which thus can act as a necessary compensation when ordinary literary language fails to impress. For Li Rong, the body is the origin of subjective experience (214); *Wild Grass* enacts a poetics of a return to the body and therefore to a more sensuous meaning and a sensitive subjectivity (可感的主体) (218). As I will hope to show, the problem of the body consists in that while it bears the potential for radical realization, it can also all too easily be subsumed within ideological apparatuses, its seemingly “visceral” and intimate nature being made to serve the ends of power.

representing and thus discursively creating the body in the text. The problem of the body's representation correlates with a similar problem of what it means to "know" a body, to register its existence and to draw the appropriate significance from it. How a body can be "known" as such, how a body can be constructed so that it can impress itself upon the conscience of the reader, constitutes a dilemma that Lu Xun grapples with throughout his *oeuvre*. Certainly there is no spirit that can be identified without a recognition of the body that serves as its vessel.³

Ban Wang has written about the body as allegory for the nation, and the ways in which aesthetics seeks to symbolically bond the body of the individual with the body politic through the category of the sublime (12, 64-70). My interest is perhaps humbler. What concerns me is how the body, the vehicle by which we come into contact with the Other, becomes intelligible in the first place.⁴ Realist representation is not only about unveiling the desperate situation of social others – at its most fundamental, realist representation seeks to reproduce, on a semiotic level, "actual" bodies that can be seen, heard and felt, bodies whose very corporeality (should) force us to open our eyes to the "real conditions" of society. The ostensible power of realism is that its narrative practice seeks to move us away from mythic ciphers and romantic heroes, and instead confront us with the hard, gritty, irrevocable presence of actual bodies. It might be helpful to think of realist narrative practice as a kind of

³ Li Rong, citing Merleau-Ponty, makes a similar point, arguing that the supposed Cartesian split between body and spirit is in fact much blurrier (206).

⁴ My use of the word "intelligible" here is inspired by Judith Butler's use of the word in her book, *Bodies that Matter*. While I cannot claim to use the word in the exact same sense with which Butler employs it, I hope the word serves as a constant reminder that there is no "body" that simply and comfortably exists "there" or "here;" the sense of the body's fixedness and realness is always subject to epistemological and discursive operations, even if the "body" precisely claims to signify what is immediate and therefore unsignifiable.

“body laboratory,” engaged in the production of actual human bodies on a literary and linguistic register. In realist practice, then, to tear away the film of mythic, archetypal idealization from our eyes, and instead visually confront the body “as is” constitutes an advance in knowledge. Within the recognition of a body also ostensibly lies an acknowledgement of our social and ethical responsibility to real people. The realist work aims to be the literary lens through which we can learn about social others in our midst. On the other hand, there is also something of the prodigal son in our realization of the other, for what can be more natural than to return to the body, to return to that which seems so basic and elemental? This accounts, in part, for the uncanny power not just of the body, but of the “real” itself; on one hand we have come to a new level of understanding, and yet the source of our new knowledge seems to have been right in front of our nose the whole time.⁵

To promote the “spiritual life” of the Chinese people through literary practice does not mean to negate the value of the body – instead, what needs to be done is to create, so to speak, “bodies that matter,” bodies whose very form and constitution are significant and meaningful.⁶ If we recall the lantern slide incident, we note that the

⁵ Marston Anderson argues that the body itself acts as the limit of “realist metaphysics” and as such is the site of linguistic rupture in the realist text: “[...] the text itself, as a linguistic construct, is helpless before [the body and the natural forces inflicted upon it]; perceived as external to language, the Real and its agents are finally unrepresentable and can at best be pointed to” (18). Anderson’s equivalence of the body and the Real, to argue that conveying the body through language “amounts to the text’s reestablishing a linguistic reign over the world” and “redefining the Real as the benign product of human endeavor, as determinate language,” seems to assert a belief in an ontological separation between discourse and the world. However, as I think Lu Xun’s preface to *Call to Arms* clearly shows, the “body,” even if it is “the Real,” can never fully escape linguistic mediation, its very intelligibility is fundamentally linked to language even while it suggests its transcendence of language.

⁶ Ban Wang asserts that Lu Xun is not dismissing the body in favor of the spirit, but is rather trying to promote that body’s spiritual “rejuvenation.” “It is not that Lu Xun emphasized spiritual enlightenment more than the revival of the body or vice versa. What mattered for him was rather the ways in which the enlightenment of consciousness is articulated in relation to the invigorating of the body” (64).

problem does not necessarily lie in an overemphasis on the body at the expense of the spirit, but, ironically, on the fact that the sight of a man about to lose his head simply does not seem to signify – on the contrary it renders the spectators “numb.” However, in contrast to the spectators whose muteness seems to be amplified by the fact that they are flattened by a two-dimensional medium, the narrator himself is very moved, to what extent we discover later on. What affects the narrator more than the scene’s violence is its reduction into meaninglessness, into bodies that are desensitized by a spectacle that fails to impress. The opaque stillness of the Chinese bodies he sees in the slide is doubtless made more obvious by his observation of the restless and jingoistic Japanese classmates that applaud in approval around him and yell patriotic slogans.⁷ In this sense, the spy’s body also matters for the Japanese students, but in a very different way; the image of the imminent decapitation confirms the sense of rightness in Japanese imperialism, and rather than registering shock, the spy’s death serves to reassure the Japanese students of their manifest destiny. Moreover, the silence and numbness of the Chinese crowd seems to figure as a symbol of colonial docility and obedience, only furthering the Japanese sense of national pride.

It might be more appropriate here to name the lack of response on the part of the Chinese as a “zero-reaction;” their inability to register any kind of shock seems to imply that they have tacitly submitted to the symbolic logic and juridical practice of colonialism. The spy acts as a reminder of what will happen to them if they work

⁷ Lu Xun’s two accounts of this scene, one found in the *Preface to Call to Arms* and the other in the essay “Fujino Sensei,” differ. The hooting and hollering happens only in the latter, not the former. Moreover, in “Fujino Sensei,” the victim is to be shot, not decapitated. However, former classmates of Lu Xun who were interviewed a half century after the purported incident deny that the event ever happened at all (Yoshida Tomio).

against their colonial oppressors, a consequence that they have accepted through their stillness and silence – the very means by which they preserve the integrity of their bodies. The spy, or most specifically, his decapitated body, acts as that mutilated and illegitimate body against which they must disavow any identification.⁸ So, in fact, the execution does register a “meaning,” but this is one that has been applied from above and which disciplines the spectators into obedience. Moreover, the public display (示众) serves as a kind of ritualized performance through which the spectators not only reconfirm their colonial subjectivities, but is also a process through which their colonized bodies are brought into being and instantiated. But as the narrator observes, while they are “alive” in the strictest sense of the word, they are only so barely. Instead, they are bodies seemingly without spirit, and perhaps more importantly, without any meaning (*haowu yiyi* 毫无意义); they are bodies that fail to signify. And yet, in another ironic twist, this meaninglessness seems to be the most meaningful thing of all for the narrator; the inability of these bodies to directly signify becomes an index of national and racial ills that the narrator hopes to redress.

The fact that the spy creates three different reactions – in the Chinese spectators, a zero-reaction, in the narrator, shock and “trauma”,⁹ and in the Japanese students,

⁸ See Butler’s discussion about the disavowal of abject identification in *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

⁹ Nicholas Kaldis, in his reading of the same scene, takes critics, in particular, Lydia Liu, to task for ignoring Lu Xun’s “real” experience of shock and trauma, and flatly rejects what he terms Liu’s “abstraction” of Lu Xun’s experiences as merely “translingual practice” (*Aesthetic Insight* 21). He is also unsatisfied with Liu’s “frequent attempts to give discourse constructive primacy over subjectivity and ontology” (ibid). I suspect that Kaldis will probably not find my work a notable improvement, for I share with Liu the poststructuralist premise that “lived experience,” “reality” and even “trauma” are only intelligible through discursive and semiotic practice, and “subjectivity and ontology,” if they are able to be talked about at all, are always co-terminous with the linguistic structures that contour them. Žižek argues that a “secondary trauma” takes place when the sufferer finds himself unable to situate his traumatic experience within a symbolic order; the source of this secondary trauma resides not the

national pride, points to the fragility of the body as a stable signifier. Marston Anderson's work confirms this idea – the image of a suffering body does not necessarily elicit from the reader compassion and sympathy, and might instead evoke a kind of cathartic relief and experience of abjection. However, despite this possibility of perverting the body into a simply another apparatus of ideology and power, representing and reproducing a new, radical and meaningful sense of corporeality remains for Lu Xun one of the central concerns of his literary practice.

Returning to the preface, I want to note how the narrative's poetics at points ironically undercut the narrator's goal of advocating the "spirit". Near the beginning the narrator explains how, as a boy, he had to go back and forth from the herbal pharmacist and pawnshop in order to procure the necessary herbs that eventually, according to the author, did nothing more than hasten his father's demise. He writes about having to confront the pawnshop counter that was twice his size to hand over clothes, only then to go to the pharmacist counter that was just his height. The narrator sensuously reproduces his childhood self's helplessness as he is forcibly compelled to figure out his way in a grown-up world in order to save his father. The social forces that have forced the narrator and his family into destitution are

sublimity of the experience itself, but within the perennial inability of language to "tell everything" (Zizek, *Plague of Fantasies* 216). It is the inability of discourse to directly refer to the traumatic Real that is constitutive of the Real itself. I refer to Butler's discussion of this problem: "For there is an 'outside' to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute 'outside,' an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive 'outside,' it is that which can only be thought – when it can – in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders" (8). However, I find a point of sympathy of Kaldis in the fact that Lu Xun, while very much aware of the discursive, fictional and narrative aspects of the autobiography he presents, is masterfully conscious of and manipulates the lure of the "real," of "personal experience," that seem to lie outside of language. This is precisely where I think much of the power of Lu Xun lies – he plays with our desire for a comfortable "reality," but at the same time always seeks to transform what we think to be reality through semiotic manipulation. Ultimately, I think this demonstrates Lu Xun's sympathy, not disdain, for the aims of conventional realist ontology.

symbolized by a top-down exchange of money and clothes, and the monolithic, forbidding presence of the counter is only bolstered by the fact that the pawnshop owner remains unseen. He characterizes his family's ruin as a kind of descent: "From a mildly prosperous family we fell into financial despondency" (1: 437).

Later on, when the narrator, mired in solitude and despair over his literary failure, lands in Beijing, he describes his habit of sitting underneath a tree from which, reportedly, a young girl hung herself. While gazing at the specks of blue sky in between the tree leaves, worms hanging on those leaves begin to fall on the back of his neck, causing an icy-cold sensation: "Through the thicket of leaves I could see specks of the blue sky, and as night fell the locust tree silkworms fell one by one and landed icy cold on the back of my neck" (1: 440). The emphasis on physical verticality, of the narrator being "under" something, of the girl hanging from the tree, echoes his experience as a child at the pawnshop. Moreover, the "icy" worms falling on the narrator's neck seems to suggest the blade that cuts the spy's neck, further implying the verticality of a falling head.¹⁰ To extend the metaphor, there is a silkworm known as "hanging ghosts" (吊死鬼), thus cementing the link between these worms and death by the noose. The narrator seems to be symbolically enmeshed in a web of death – his father, the spy, the demise of *New Life*, and the girl hanging from the tree – and this death is associated with a materiality and corporeality that run counter to the spiritual life (symbolized by literature) that he once advocated. It seems that the narrative cannot escape the pull (both literal and symbolic) of *gravity*. The

¹⁰ David Der-Wei Wang has written much about the symbolic value of decapitation in Lu Xun's literary practice. He argues that Lu Xun's obsession with decapitation, in particular, and with bodily rupture, in general, prefigures his "imaginary nostalgia for the semantic and somatic plenitude of China." See *The Monster that is History* 23-25.

scientific understanding of gravity is the attraction of mass-carrying bodies to each other, the most apparent one being the attraction of objects to the ground. Whatever Lu Xun's own understanding of gravity was, what cannot be denied is the sense of materiality the concept always implies, the presence and pull of things. The spiritual uplift he seeks through literature constantly seems bogged down not only by the weight of life itself, but also by the weight of poetic language. Furthermore, what becomes immediately palpable is the sense of the narrator's own body, his physical coordinates in various stages of his life, and the physical limits he runs up against. We get a sense of the weight that the narrator himself carries around him.

Materiality thus haunts what was meant to be an exaltation of the spiritual – if we are to find an authorial presence in this preface, it is precisely in the deft way that the preface's poetics complicate the supposed split between material and spiritual matters. The very substance of the spiritual, ultimately, is the symbolic, the creation and transmission of meaning.¹¹ However, the mechanism by which meaning is produced is itself material – the vehicle of metaphor is concrete, seemingly tangible. If we return to the narrator's discussion of the failed magazine *New Life*, and in particular the way he employs the phrase *wei chansheng* 未产生 (*chansheng* means to produce, to give birth to, *wei* is a modal particle denoting that an action has yet or was unable to take place), we find that what haunts the creation of a new, enlightened "life," by implication, is a stillbirth, an inert body. What makes such a body mortifying is that, unlike a baby or a child that acts as a utopian signifier for a redeemable future, the

¹¹ See Ban Wang's discussion of the body, allegory and symbol in *The Sublime Figure of History* 61-79.

body of a fetus ultimately signifies nothing. This refusal to signify something other than itself forces us to come face to face with an unredeemed and seemingly meaningless present – we become aware of the dead tissue that merely lies before us and which frustrates our attempt to extract any significance from it. So the narrator's choice to later join a magazine called *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian* 新青年) seems almost like a macabre joke when put alongside the disastrous failure of *New Life*. However, the narrator's final stance should not be seen as either a renewed, enthusiastic faith in the future (for he still has his convictions: *Wo suiran zi you wo de quixin* 我虽然自有我的确信), nor should it be seen as a cynical capitulation to political fashion (for, after all, hope belongs to the future and the future cannot be dismissed or disavowed, and one must allow for the possibility for redemption). It is a careful calculus between the two: while he joins in the “call to arms” in support of the youth who act as a harbinger of a utopian future, he simultaneously bears with him the bodies of the dead that have followed him throughout his life.

I want to suggest here that the presence of bodies (in particular, dead bodies) are not merely the evidence of a lingering trauma that haunted Lu Xun, as some scholars have argued. Nor is the body merely an empty vehicle serving as a convenient and lyrical metaphor; instead, I want to argue that, for Lu Xun, these corporeal poetics constitute a philosophical stance about knowledge. Spiritual transformation is not achieved through a rejection of the body, but through a radical re-appreciation of it. A similar example of this might be found in the famous passage about Butcher Ding in the *Zhuangzi*. Wisdom and insight are epitomized in the character of a butcher who so understands and penetrates the being of the ox in front of him that he can easily

dissect the ox with his eyes closed and his blade practically unfazed by what is usually a pretty gory process. While the story is a parable, the fact that it uses such a visceral, even carnivalesque, image suggests that the sacred is to be found precisely within the corporeal, not away from it. However, our understanding and appreciation of both Butcher Ding's *métier* and the object of his profession are ultimately transformed as well.

Furthermore, I find it appropriate that Lu Xun's implied argument exists in the *form* of the narrative as opposed to the stated content – this angle is to be found primarily in the formal materiality of the text itself. Thus the topic of bodies and materiality cannot be viewed through the seemingly transparent lens of literary representation. The self-referential tendency of literary language, its *literariness*, and the materiality of related literary structures (such as genre and mode) become bodies of sorts that must be viewed alongside the “real” bodies such language seeks to convey.¹² Thus, our understanding of how the body “works” is impossible without closely relating that issue with the problem of literary form, *pace* to those who seek a sort of pure philosophy from Lu Xun's literary works. Corporeal “form” and literary “form” are inseparable.

Here I want to advance some theses about Lu Xun's literary practice that will guide my later reading of selections from *Wild Grass*, his collection of prose poems that he wrote between 1924 and 1927: 1) Disembodied knowledge is false – true knowledge can only be attained through some kind of engagement with the body, 2) the body which acts as the epistemological ground for knowledge, however, is never

¹² In the end, in fact, the materiality of literature itself is the closest we ever get to the “body” through our (that is, literary scholars) particular hermeneutic practice.

fixed or stable, it must be constantly rediscovered and re-imagined, and 3) the body is always externalized and implicated within intersubjective relations – every body that is posited implies the presence of another body that observes and witnesses.

Consequently, the body is never merely personal, but irreducibly social. When we put the first two theses together, we find that Lu Xun’s fantasy of knowledge simultaneously involves stasis and dynamism– at the same time he grounds knowledge in *bodies* (and, most often, within his “own” body), the way these bodies are cast and configured are in constant flux (and thus, the comforting stability and intimacy of Lu Xun’s “own” body is always transforming). The third thesis allows us to see that Lu Xun’s body is not a narcissistic creation, but rather a vehicle by which we can examine and understand social relations at their most fundamental level.

Wild Grass: Dreams, the Body and Realism

Wild Grass (*Yecao* 野草) is a collection of 23 prose poems (*sanwen shi* 散文诗) that Lu Xun wrote between 1924 and 1926 and published serially in the literary journal *Yusi* (*Threads of Language* 语丝). It was published as a book with a preface from the author in 1927. The contents defy easy description, but the pieces, ranging from impressionistic vignettes to poems and skits, evoke highly visual and sensual mindscapes, and often dwell in intense emotional territory. Seven of the dreams explicitly take the form of a dream, although the collection as a whole can be read as a sort of nocturnal fantasia. Moreover, a high degree of attention is paid to the body in many of the pieces, including one that dwells explicitly on Jesus Christ’s crucifixion (see “Revenge II”).

I suggest that *Wild Grass* constitutes an intervention in the moral contradiction inherent in realism's attempt to narrate the lives of social Others, a problem famously discussed by Marston Anderson. He asserts that realist writing in the May 4th literary movement, and particularly in the work of Lu Xun, which aimed to expose and critique a degraded society through realist description, often risked reifying the abject as objects of curiosity and contempt. The narrator, unable to free himself from his own compromised subjectivity, experiences an alienation from the people whose liberation is supposed to be somehow aided by his narration. "The realist narrative," Anderson writes, "by imitating at a formal level the relation of oppressor to oppressed, is captive to the logic of that oppression and ends by merely reproducing it" (91). Anderson argues that in his later fiction, Lu Xun recognizes the morally compromised nature of realist narrative, and in an effort to subvert the "violence of observation," uses techniques such as multiple narrators, fractured points of view and irony in order to break down the oppressive illusion of the narrator's objectivity over and against the represented abject. To extend Anderson's critique further, realism, in its attempt to discursively reproduce social others as a way of facilitating our knowledge of the world, ultimately offers up bodies that again fail to illuminate. For Anderson, Lu Xun's realist practice in the collections *Call to Arms* and *Wandering* attempt to go beyond merely "reproducing" on a "formal" level the hierarchy between observer and observed. Lu Xun seeks to relate to conventional realist practice ironically, and thus hopefully reveal the problematic nature of such representation while still persisting with it.

Critics have gone as far to argue that *Wild Grass* constitutes a rejection of realism and an embrace of modernism, romanticism, symbolism, or a mixture of all three. In his literary biography of Lu Xun, Leo Lee insists that *Wild Grass* displays “certain configurations of (Lu Xun’s) inner tensions which certainly go beyond the realistic confines of politics and political ideology” (91). The surreal and frightening mindscapes of *Wild Grass* express Lu Xun’s struggle between “hope and despair,” and his struggle to understand his vocation as writer in front of a vicious and cannibalistic crowd. “The poet’s inner self,” he writes, “entrapped in an impasse constructed of a series of insoluble paradoxes, embarks on an absurd quest for meaning” (107). For Lee, then, *Wild Grass* is an intimate portrait of an artist’s inner turmoil, an invitation to peer inside the private thoughts of a despairing and frustrated poet. If *Wild Grass* is a “mirror,” it is only a mirror of a particular tortured soul, not of a grim social reality. Lee also rejects claims that *Wild Grass* has an explicit or even implicit relationship to the social and political upheavals that surrounded its author. He characterizes *Wild Grass* as a product of Lu Xun’s sense of personal crisis, either as a result of his falling out with his brother Zhou Zuoren in 1923 and/or his administrative battles with the leadership of Peking National Women’s University in 1925 (90). For Lee, the “personal” transformed into “art” is the aesthetic model on which we should base our reading of *Wild Grass*. Lee argues that Lu Xun’s own claim that the work was a reaction to oppressive political circumstances in Beijing was merely a “‘public’ explanation” the author offered only after his conversion to left-wing literary activism (91).

Leo Lee's reading of *Wild Grass* is essential to his reading of Lu Xun as a whole; *Wild Grass* is perhaps the key text that allows Lee to argue for a portrait of Lu Xun as a tormented artist, given to fits of depression, and deeply cynical of society and political activism. The last paragraph of his study encapsulates his project: "These 'dark' meditations, which follow logically from my rather dark portrait of Lu Xun in this book, can offer little consolation to anyone except to Lu Xun's ghostly alter ego in *Wild Grass*. After half a century of pain and suffering, may he finally rest in peace" (199). Lee's Lu Xun resembles the Buddhist figure of the *preta*, or hungry ghost, ravaged by insatiable worldly passions. By contrast, Lu Xun's spirit has been tortured by five decades of socialist obsessions and public overexposure, and the critic's self-appointed mission is to free this ghost from the shackles of utopian desire. It is Lee's mission to restore Lu Xun's status as a Byronic poet, much like the figures (including Shelley, Mickiewicz, Pushkin and Byron himself) Lu Xun so lauded in his earlier treatise *The Power of Mara Poetry* (1907).

Ban Wang goes even further in highlighting Lu Xun's personal and literary despair. For him, *Wild Grass* expresses disillusionment with language and representation, constituting a collection of "allegorical ruins" (79). Moreover, rather than be an expression of a unique aesthetic individuality, the work instead stages the very "breakdown of the subject" (87) and expresses the inability of self and language to be commensurate with each other. The somber content of *Wild Grass* "can be seen as effecting a relentless demystification of the imaginary unity between writing and reality" (88). For Wang, *Wild Grass* not only demonstrates the failure of socially

engaged writing, but the failure of language itself to establish any coherent and lasting meaning.

While *Wild Grass* cannot be categorized as a “realist” work *per se*, my contention is that much of *Wild Grass* nevertheless engages with the problematic of realist representation in an original and multifaceted manner. The hermeneutic task of investigating and appreciating *Wild Grass* yields insights when we approach the work as being in dialogue with the epistemological, ethical and formal premises of realism. As Li Rong has noted, one of the most notable things about *Wild Grass* is its emphasis on bodily representation. However, whereas she tends to insist on the autonomy and value of the body “as is” over social and textual-formal considerations of the body (218), I instead suggest that the way bodies and their relations to each other are represented make compelling sense when viewed through the epistemological and formal lens of realism.¹³

Wild Grass features an attempt at finding new ways of understanding and recognizing bodies, and the relations between them. The author seeks to find a more radical method of representation in order to yield meaningful bodies and resolve the problem of corporeal desensitization that occurs in realism. One major formal technique that enables the author to attempt a new way of bodily representation is the dream.¹⁴ Dreaming enables a new way of generating bodies, some realistic, others

¹³ Ban Wang makes an excellent point when he argues that in order to experience our bodies, we cannot rely merely on “biological” sensations, but must also rely on a “figurative construction of our bodies” to feel truly “whole” (69). On the other hand, a point I will make towards the end is how it is the very shocking and non-normative sight of the monstrous body, the freakish body, that returns to us the sensation and awareness of a body otherwise made invisible by its “wholeness”.

¹⁴ Carolyn T. Brown has a fine essay that argues how Lu Xun’s use of the dream form in *Wild Grass* is his attempt to “heal” the “Chinese body” and “spirit” analogous to the way a psychoanalyst may heal a

more poetic, and yet still others that seem simply fantastic. Dreaming allows bodies that would otherwise be impossible to exist alongside more conventional bodies, and thus enables one to reconsider the way we habitually experience and conceive of the body. Moreover, dreaming also re-imagines the intersubjective relations among bodies. Unlike traditional realism, where the relationship between the narrator and his hero is that of observer and observed (thus implying a moral hierarchy between the two) the dreamscape more freely allows for the observer to become the observed. The bodies the dreamer sees are simultaneously other bodies as well as his own.¹⁵

Dreaming thus removes the ontological distance within conventional subject-object relations and brings the two into direct contact; subject-object relations are transformed into a radical and often bewildering contiguity whereby the familiar comforts of hierarchy are replaced by pure adjacency. Not only do the figures within the dream seem to melt into each other, but the relationship between the dreamer and that which he dreams also refuses the distance between subject and object; the dreamed is an essential part of the dreamer himself.

In addition to the dream description in *Wild Grass*, the constant somatic orientation of the narrator is also significant. The collection as a whole seems to suggest a narrative arc of sleeping: in the first piece (not counting the Preface), “Autumn Night” (*Qiuye* 秋夜), the narrator ponders the beauty of nature in the evening. He observes that the flowers and leaves around him are dreaming. At the end of the piece, he yawns and drags on his cigarette. In the second piece, “The Shadow’s

patient by bringing the unconscious “into awareness and to be integrated with the conscious” (77). Her approach engages far more with Freudian psychoanalysis than this essay.

¹⁵ As Brown notes, in more psychoanalytic fashion, “(The) dream provides the means for splitting the dreamer’s mind and allowing [...] two parts of the psyche, to directly address one another” (71).

Leave Taking” (*Ying de gaobie* 影的告别), the narrator discusses how his shadow appears to him and bids farewell right at the moment he is about to enter sleep. The order of the pieces suggests a narrative logic wherein the following prose poems can be interpreted as visions that the narrator has had after having fallen asleep. The last piece, “The Awakening” (*Yijue* 一觉), features the narrator again smoking a cigarette, having a “long, long dream,” but then suddenly waking up. The few explicit dream sequences are unique in that they thematize the somatics of dreaming, the physical position of the narrator in bed, his body’s reaction to a dream, or his body’s reaction after a dream. The dream is not, as it were, a spiritual flight from the confines of the corporeal into the wide expanses of the ethereal. In at least one piece the object of the dream-representation is the narrator himself lying in bed. Dreaming is not an escape from the corporeal, but instead a kind of radical re-embodiment, a way of approaching the body in a new, more complicated, and sometimes paradoxical way. Here I want to make a clarification that only seven of the twenty-three prose poems explicitly mention the narrator actually dreaming. It is perfectly possible, as many critics have done, to interpret the other pieces as simply prose poems and not as dream visions. However, because the work as a whole is bookended by the narrator’s emphasis on nocturnal imaginings, and because of the strong presence of dreams in the work as a whole, I think it is justified to analyze the non-dream pieces under the sign and logic of the dream. The reader of *Wild Grass* is invited to discard waking, rational and cerebral thought in favor of a more sleepy, poetic and sensual experience. It does no good to attempt to square the circle and argue that *Wild Grass* is “realist;”

however, a more compelling suggestion would be that *Wild Grass* is the product of what might occur if the realist mode itself were to dream.

The representation of a dreaming narrator and his body constitute a more “personal” level of writing. We are not merely talking about “any” body, but “my” body (i.e., the narrator’s). On the one hand we can interpret the use of *ich- erzählung* narration as merely personal, autobiographical expression; as Leo Lee and, in a more sophisticated way, Nicholas Kaldis, have suggested, *Wild Grass* serves as a window to Lu Xun’s psyche and his inner demons. However, I find more convincing Yi-Tsi Mei Feuerwerker’s contention, in her discussion of Lu Xun’s fiction, that the “self” Lu Xun produces is no more authentic or true than any other textually created character:

Lu Xun’s admission that he was “mercilessly dissecting” himself in his writings should not, nevertheless, encourage us to take his fictional representations as simply reflections of himself. In fact, what his stories strongly dramatize is the complex relationship or the fluctuating distance between the historical author and fictional self-representation that much of recent Western criticism has been emphasizing. [...] These ideas about split selves have combined with post-Saussurian linguistic theories to emphasize a provisional, discursively constructed self, a self that comes into being in each instance of language. If the human being is so split, unstable, and fragmented, is it even legitimate, in our reading of the narratives, to speak of one specific individual author, a certain identifiable “Lu Xun” “out there,” who enters into a group of fictional texts in an array of different guises? (61)

The question of whether we can “know” the historical Lu Xun through his work is first and foremost a methodological one, of what can and cannot be achieved through literary scholarship. The appropriate question for the literary critic is not whether the narrator’s self-description accurately reflects the “real” Lu Xun. Rather, the question

should be why such a personal type of narration is deployed at this juncture of a literary *oeuvre*. I think the use of self-narration is a textual strategy meant to frustrate the reader's attempt to distance himself from the object of narration. It is far easier to reject a "he" or "she" rather than reject a speaking "I" that can slip and suddenly turn into the "I" of the reader's own subjectivity.

Sociolinguist Greg Urban makes a distinction between the "indexical 'I'" and the "anaphoric 'I'", whereby the former refers to the conventional speaking "self," and the latter refers to a broader, more cultural "self" that the speaker adopts, much like a theatrical role (36-7). Borrowing Urban's analysis, I contend that the power of Lu Xun's textualized bodily self consists in the fact that it combines both "indexical" (the "speaker-I") and "anaphoric" (the "theatrical-I") "I's", or what Urban terms the "de-quotative" I. This suggests that the quotation marks that frame the anaphoric "I" as direct quotation have suddenly been erased, creating the illusion that the anaphoric "I" is in fact indexical. On one hand, this "de-quotative 'I'" gestures indexically to the presence of "the author" with whom we seem to come into personal contact. We seem to be able to delve "internally" into the depths of the author's being, an illusion made more convincing because of the physicality and sensuousness of this authorial presence. On the other hand, it constitutes yet another textual, provisional body, an externalized semiotic matrix under the sign of "I." I term this fusion of the personally intimate and the externally textual "semiotic intimacy," whereby the promise of proximity to authorial presence acts as a lure for the reader to keep on engaging with the narrative. The recurrent linkage and de-linkage of body and authorial-subjective agency in Lu Xun's text reveals the tactical and conditional nature of each operation;

they each possess the potential for momentary, critical epistemological transformation as well as that for stultification and stagnancy.

My reason for problematizing the narrative “I” is to point out its essential formality; too often in Lu Xun studies, and certainly in dealing with *Wild Grass*, we are presented with an embattled and embittered author seeking to find a symbolic resolution to his spiritual torment. This is not to dismiss such readings; they are often very thoughtful and insightful. But I want to suggest that a literary and formalist methodology that refuses to conflate the narrative “I” with the historic “I” yields more interpretive possibilities. Moreover, Lu Xun’s own complicated and even artificial relationship to his authorial persona (his frequent change of pen-names, his differing recollections of supposedly biographical memories, his concern with his own photographic image, etc.) should caution us as literary scholars in attempting to pin down the “true” Lu Xun.¹⁶

In the case of *Wild Grass*, I want to suggest that this narrative “I,” this sensuous, intimate, sensitive and nocturnal subject, is not the sign for a tortured authorial soul, but instead the very symptom of the conflict of narrative authority in Lu Xun’s early and concurrent realist fiction. This new “I” arises from two separate “parallax gaps,” which Žižek defines as “the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible” (*Parallax View* 4). The first is the incommensurable gap between the omniscient narrator’s formal and moral ascendancy over his objects of observation and its ostensible mission to record the

¹⁶ As Lu Xun’s greatest Japanese critic, Takeuchi Yoshimi, notes, Lu Xun was one “who tended not to speak of himself in his works. He early on abandoned turning himself into an object in the literary world he was constructing” (27).

lives of others objectively and dispassionately. The second is the unbridgeable gap between a first-person narrator that is meant to embody sympathy for the lives he observes, and the fact that he simply cannot relate, respond or sympathize with those abject characters, instead responding with silence. These two conflicts are themselves incommensurate with each other, an omniscient narrator that seeks to encompass the world in an encyclopedic vision of knowledge and a first-person narrator that seeks to apprehend the lives of others through feeling, sympathy and bodily experience; there is thus a “gap” between “gaps”. I want to suggest that the new “I” of *Wild Grass*, the corporeal, somewhat solipsistic, yet always dreaming, self that bridges both an inner world but at the same time an outer, oneiric landscape, a subject that seeks to know through logical paradox and to feel the extremes of bodily experience, is the resulting symptom of irresolvable contradictions within realism itself.

Turning to the narrator’s dreams, I do not feel that we are enjoined to read these dreams solely as emanations of the narrative self. Much analysis of the dreamwork in *Wild Grass* has followed the Freudian vein of trying to discover the “latent content” hidden within Lu Xun’s own psyche. Even if we accept that the narrator is not (necessarily) Lu Xun, there is still no reason we must assume that the “self” narrated in the dreams need be read as part of a “continuous self” that links waking-narrative and dream, especially when the waking self is itself so tenuous. While a conventionally psychoanalytic approach is possible, it does not render a more formalist and semiotic reading mutually exclusive. Moreover, Lu Xun at various points (which I will take up later) expresses a degree of irony towards the belief that dreaming is necessarily “personal” at various parts of his career.

By placing emphasis on the narrator's body, Lu Xun may not be fleeing from realism after all, as Leo Lee suggests. I would like to offer the term "somatic realism" as a way of trying to understand *Wild Grass* as a complex mediation between a certain kind of dream representation (one that is often social in character), and its projection upon the body of the narrator. Rather than view the individual psyche as being projected upon one's social environment, I want to turn the model the other way around and see the effects of the social not only on the psyche, but on the very body of the narrator. In effect, I want to argue that *Wild Grass* is an important intervention into the moral problem of realism by means of the sudden insertion of the narrator's body into the narrative, a body that suffers because of the narrative and cannot avoid its effects.

In addition to our consideration of bodily materiality, we should also consider how dreaming transforms narrative materiality as well. Dreaming renders narrative into a doubled form; it allows the possibility for a narrative to generate a new narrative within its own body. All dreams in the end imply this doubled-narrative, a waking portion and a sleeping portion that are intimately connected as if by an umbilical cord. A dream-narrative cannot exist without also implying its waking double. Literary theorist Yuri Lotman, in one of his late essays, looks at dreams as a kind of discursive *doppelganger*:

When entering the world of dreams, archaic man, not yet having writing, found himself in front of a space that resembled reality and, simultaneously, was not reality. This world, as he was naturally inclined to infer, had a meaning, but this meaning was unknown. (They were) signs of an unknown something, or, signs in their pure appearance (в чистом виде). [...] A semiotic experiment was thus posed in the very beginning. [...] Later, in more developed

mythological spheres dream becomes identical with the Other prophetic voice, that is it presents His attention towards me. In the earlier stage, it is possible to infer that there occurred something [in dreaming] that reminds us of our experience of cinematography – the first and third faces meld together, and are not distinct. “I” and “he” are interchangeable and identical. In the next stage arose the problem of dialogue. We see a parallel sequence in children’s acquisition of language. This nature of dream as *pure form* allows it to be a space ready to be filled – the shaman who interprets the dream is as “scientific” as any experienced Freudian – dream is a semiotic window, and each sees in it the reflection of his own language. (221-2, italics mine)

What is insightful about Lotman’s meditations on dream is his observation that the world of dreams is one of signs without, as of yet, signifieds, or “pure” signs. He underscores the materiality of the signifier as a presence in its own right. Moreover, he points to the structure of the dreamwork (whose latent content is yet to be determined) as a “pure form,” the outline of a semiotic structure that awaits decoding. It is a “window” – only the frame is stable, but what appears inside is always variable. It is fair to note that perhaps all signs are signifiers waiting to be decoded, but with dreams the time that elapses between signifier and signified is much more apparent (an interstice made more noticeable by the fact that dreams often require the help of a skilled Other to decode it). There is something fantastic in Lotman’s vision of dream as a “pure form,” for it is impossible to realistically think about any form without immediately envisioning content, and vice versa. But it is precisely this fantasy of pure form that dreaming enables – dream-narrative compels us to envision narrative itself as pure form, to imagine narrative as a structure apart from the *fabula* it narrates. While dream-narrative seems to emanate from within the narrative itself, by working through this dream form we end up approaching narrative from the outside. In this

sense the dream form acts as a wormhole; it allows us to burrow deeper into the structure of the narrative only to lead us outside. Also notable in Lotman's discussion is the fact that what the dream reflects is not repressed desire, or buried experience, but language itself. The "stuff" which fills the window is nothing more than the materiality of the signifier, the substance of discourse.

Slavoj Zizek, while discussing Freud, similarly emphasizes the "form of the dream" over its content. For Zizek, the "secret" of the dream is not the hidden latent content, but instead lies in how the latent content is so to speak "wrapped up" in the "manifest content". He argues that the unconscious desire that propels dream formation is found not within the dream, but on "the surface":

This desire attaches itself to the dream, it intercalates itself in the interspace between the latent thought and the manifest text; it is therefore not "more concealed, deeper" in relation to the latent thought, it is decidedly more "on the surface", consisting entirely of the signifier's mechanisms, of the treatment to which the latent thought is submitted. In other words, its only place is in the form of the "dream": the real subject matter of the dream (the unconscious desire) articulates itself in the dream-work, in the elaboration of its "latent content". (*Sublime Object* 13)

For Zizek, the true discovery of the dream's unconscious desire only happens through a meta-observation of the formal workings of the dream itself. In this sense, dreams fit well the Russian Formalist understanding of narrative, for dreams are always self-referential (it seems that one never narrates a dream without beginning with "I dreamed...") The dream's self-referentiality seems to lie at the very heart of what a dream is. But, in contrast to other narratives, this is precisely the tragedy of dream-narrative – once dream becomes accessible to knowledge, it has already lost its ability to enchant. One is always made aware that dream is only but a play of surfaces, and is

not allowed to indulge in the joys of verisimilitude and virtual reality that other narratives offer. Where narratives appeal to a need for pleasure, dreams on the other hand appeal to a person's desire for knowledge as an object in its own right.

The Usefulness of Dreams: Disavowing Dreams as Only Private Experience

Before I go on with my analysis of *Wild Grass*, I want to first examine what dreams meant to Lu Xun. I want to turn to Lu Xun's own comments on dreams by looking at two pieces he wrote, one before *Wild Grass* and one after. The first piece, in his introduction to a volume of translations by the blind, Russian anarchist writer Vasilii Eroshenko, is contemporaneous with the publication of his first volume of short stories, *Call to Arms* (1921). The second was written twelve years after, and not long after Lu Xun began to adopt Marxism and class analyses in earnest. In the preface, Lu Xun comments on the preponderance of dream narratives in Eroshenko's work:

[...] I felt that what (Eroshenko) wanted to announce to humanity was the tragedy of those who were not loved even though there was no one in the world unworthy of such love. But what I discovered was his child-like, beautiful, and yet realistic (*zhenshi xing de* 真实性的) dream. Is this perhaps nothing other than simply the writer's veil hiding the tragedy? If that is so then perhaps I have also dreamed the dream too much (*guoyu meng meng le* 过于梦梦了), but I wish for the author to never abandon this dream of child-like beauty, and moreover, for him to call on others to enter this dream, to see for themselves the real rainbow (*zhenshi de hong* 真实的虹), (and through this realize that) we are not merely *somnambulists* (in the original text, the English term is placed alongside the Chinese term *mengyouzhe* 梦游者, or "dream-traveler"). (10: 290)

One is struck by Lu Xun's enthusiasm for a writer seemingly cut from such a vastly different cloth, a man who professed anarchist politics and wrote children's tales and

fables where animals talk and dream beside their human counterparts. Lu Xun's discourse veers between belief and skepticism, between a certain incredulousness at the innocence and idealism of Eroshenko's work and yet his enthrallment by the sheer beauty of the blind Eroshenko's prophetic vision. The preface in the original Chinese is tough to read, full of hesitations, double-negatives and disjunctive particles, evidence of the epistemological difficulty inherent in trying to come to terms with the "reality" and "truth" of Eroshenko's dreams. Lu Xun's preface betrays a tension between skepticism of and faith in utopia, and in particular, his locutions "realistic dream" and the dream's "real rainbow" are problematic. In order to transform his skepticism of Eroshenko's beautiful visions into belief, he offers a brilliant, if seemingly foolhardy, twist: to dismiss Eroshenko's dream as simply a veil that covers up the tragedy that lurks in his tales is not an act of demystification, but instead, of further mystification, of sinking into yet a deeper dream without hope for epistemological illumination.

What is also striking about this preface is how the words "dream" and "real" are combined in a seemingly symbiotic binary. It seems the writer simply cannot disavow the existence of the dream, and in fact, regards the dream as a necessary supplement to reality itself.¹⁷ The complicated dance between these two words, to see the "real rainbow" within a dream, to approach a "realistic dream," reveal how both words serve not only symbolic functions, but indexical ones as well. "Real" suggests a

¹⁷ A curious fact that seems to support this is that in Lu Xun's diary entries of 1921 and 1922, he mentions several times presenting both *Call to Arms* and his translations of Eroshenko together as gifts to his friends, suggesting not only the relative importance he felt Eroshenko's translations had to his own work, but also, in an indirect manner, how he saw his own more realist work and Eroshenko's more symbolist fables as existing side by side.

reality outside of language. It acts as a way of pointing to a truth that words cannot contain, and in this sense points outside of language. The word “dream,” however, implies that one has entered a reality that is not, and the term acts as a kind of index to the discursivity of language and narrative itself, of “giving up the ghost” and revealing that our reality is but another reverie. Rather than pointing outside of language, it instead points back to the materiality of language itself. Both terms serve the functions of enchantment and disenchantment, and both terms affirm and disavow each other. It is hard to come to a solid conclusion as to what Lu Xun means by linking these two words together, but I think we start to get a picture Lu Xun’s dynamic and complex view of “reality”. What comes to mind is a conception of reality not as ontology, but rather as a complex form of critical thought that is constantly questioning itself and folding in within itself. This reality seems to always want to shy away from its own reification, and relies on paradox to break out of any possible stultification.

Furthermore, Lu Xun seems to reject the notion that Eroshenko’s dreams are merely private expression. As befitting a prophecy, such a vision belongs to all. Lu Xun calls on others to enter the dream and catch a glimpse of that “real rainbow.” Such people are not “sleepwalkers,” or merely travelers within a dream, but people bestowed with a special vision of reality.¹⁸ Therefore, Eroshenko’s dreams are not an

¹⁸ In some ways we have here a prototype of the classic fetish model as formulated by Octave Mannoni. He finds anthropological evidence for the fetish in the Native American Hopi tribe, where young boys are raised to believe in the power of the Katchina masks, worn by the men of the tribe during ceremonial dances. The Katchina are ferocious spirits who must be satiated lest they dine on children. However, when the boys become old enough to wear the Katchina masks and perform the dance themselves, the illusory nature of their belief in the Katchina is revealed to them. However, they are instructed to mystify the next generation as to the power of the Katchina. Thus the older generations, even after having disabused themselves of believing in the Katchina, nevertheless

escape from reality, or a blanket over reality, but a necessary lens through which reality can be better ascertained.

Lu Xun's 1933 essay "*Tingshuo meng*" (听说梦 "On Hearing Others Speak [about/their] Dreams") is a response to the New Year's publication of *Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志). The editors sent out a call for readers to submit their "dreams" about "China's future" and "individual lives." At least 140 submissions were received, and they were published in the magazine under the heading "Dreams of the New Year." A magazine reporter contributed an article in which he criticized those who submitted pieces that were too political, too sloganeering, arguing that, according to Freud's theory of dreams, such propagandistic dreams were only instances of "daydreaming," and did not fit the "orthodox" model of dreams.

The reporter divides the dreams into two camps: those that "carry forward the way" (*zai dao* 载道) and others that "express what is intently on the mind" (*yan zhi* 言志). "Carry forward the way" is an abbreviation of the slogan *wen yi zai dao* (文以载道, "The purpose of literature is to carry forward the way"), a call associated with Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan of the Tang dynasty, the founders of the Archaism, a

maintain this belief (and this is considered necessary to the society's religious functioning) via their children (14-5). Turning to Lu Xun, in what way is he, although ostensibly disavowing the dream's "reality," maintaining his own belief in this reality through his invitation to others to enter Eroshenko's dream? In what way is the "reality" of the revolutionary dream Lu Xun's own fetish, an oscillation between an avowal of the non-existence of that "reality" (analogous to an avowal of castration), and yet a maintained belief in that "reality" (disavowal of castration)? Lu Xun's revolutionary dream is, through Eroshenko, already one step removed from himself, and yet this dream still lingers through his championship of Eroshenko. Indeed, Mannoni's famous formula, "Je sais bien, mais quand même" ("I know very well, but all the same") could be applied to Lu Xun's own complicated belief in revolution; it is not a matter of personal belief, but a collective production of confession.

movement that sought to push literature away from excessive decorativeness and formality, and to restore a sense of political and ethical values by emulating the prose of the ancients, in particular the pre-Qin writers and Sima Qian of the Han. “To speak what is intently on the mind” is an abbreviation of *shi yan zhi* (诗言志 “Poetry speaks what is intently on the mind”), a line that comes from the Zhou *Book of Documents* and is recapitulated in one of the foundational texts of classical literary theory, the Han *Great Preface to the Book of Odes*. According to this notion, one that was dominant throughout the history of Chinese literature until the rise of the modern vernacular, all literature, and in particular, poetry, was an unmediated expression of personal intention.¹⁹ Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun’s brother and well known critic, popularized these two slogans in literary debates as a form of shorthand denoting utilitarian (that which “carries the way”) and expressive literature (that which “expresses intent”). The reporter argues that only the dreams of the latter, those that express the personal, individual wishes, can truly be considered “orthodox” dreams, whereas the other more political dreams are simply forced and inauthentic.

Lu Xun responds to the reporter’s own bias by challenging the notion that dreams are private. He argues against understanding Freud as merely a psychologist of the personal:

Freud considers the repressed (*bei yayi* 被压抑) to be the root of all dreams – but why are men repressed (被压抑)? This is connected with things like the social system and customs. And yet dreaming is not considered something to be taken seriously, so to tell a dream, to ask

¹⁹ However, as Marston Anderson reminds us, what was conceived of as “personal” in the premodern period did not necessarily entail an individual acting separate from society and the world, but rather as a vehicle for expressing the fundamental pattern of the cosmos: “Even according to expressive theories, however, the author was understood less as an autonomous creator than as a vessel or channel through which the patterns of nature and society manifest themselves” (13).

about a dream, to analyze it, this suddenly becomes inappropriate. (4: 483)

It is interesting to note that Lu Xun intentionally, and perhaps sneakily, borrows the Chinese term for Freudian repression (*yayi* 压抑) to also denote social repression. Lu Xun de-emphasizes Freud's stress on society's repression of the libido, and instead points to a more corporeal cause of psychic repression: hunger (4: 483). However, as he also points out, the bodily experience of hunger is inextricably linked with social and political realities. Hunger is as much a social reality as it is a private torment. The dreams of a hungry man, then, cannot be separated from the social mechanisms that create hunger in the first place.

Moreover, Lu Xun expresses a thoroughgoing skepticism as to whether it is possible to voice a dream that "speaks what is intently on the mind" when all printed materials undergo one kind of censorship or another. Lu Xun doubles Freud's theory of psychological mechanisms of censorship by alluding to Nationalist censors that emend and abridge all media, including the magazine issue carrying dreams.²⁰ Just as psychic repression finds its mirrored double in social repression, so Lu Xun demonstrates that what are considered merely psychological mechanisms, like censorship, also exist in the wider social realm. In this vein, the (contradictory) formality of the individual's psyche is made homologous to the formal structure of an oppressive social and political reality; the mind is not a category shut off from the public and social, but in fact illuminates and is illuminated by social categories lying outside it. No dream that can be published, then, escapes the stain of contamination

²⁰ Kaldis, in his dissertation, has also pointed out Lu Xun's witty and ironic use of the word "censors" (*Aesthetic Insight* 257).

from the censor's pen; Lu Xun argues that the most a-political dreams are in fact more propagandistic than those that openly advocate social change. The "orthodox" dreams implicitly prop up an illusion of spiritual freedom and act as an invisible affirmation of power and oppression.

Lu Xun dismisses the notion that the writers of "un-orthodox" dreams are motivated by an overarching political mania, a need to agitate at any opportunity. He argues, in rather Marxist fashion, that economic and political considerations underlie all psychic activity, whether conscious or not. In another wonderful ironic twist, he defuses the reporter's charge that the vulgar agitators have subscribed to the pedantic *wen yi zai dao*. Rather than "carrying forward the Way," he argues that intellectuals have merely been "carried by the Way": "But it is certainly not 'carrying forward the Way,' rather, (the intellectuals) have been carried about by 'the Way' for a bit, and if we want to be concise about it, we should say that (these dreams) are 'Way-carried'" (4:482).²¹ A dreamer does not choose to speak out against social conditions; she is rather compelled, "carried" about by the needs of real circumstances. Besides, because a dream arises from the unconscious, there is no self-willing agency that can choose to produce dream representation at whim – all dreams, even socially committed dreams, emanate from a place other than the ego. Dreams, often seen as solely being situated within the province of the individual, instead arise from a "psychic reality" that not even the individual can access, and yet is also bound up within social relations. Lu Xun insists on the ineluctable social nature of dreams, and on their usefulness as an index to social conflict. Dreams thus function similarly to

²¹ "但其实并非 '载道'，乃是给 '道' 载了一下，倘要简洁，应该说是 '道载' 的。"

ideology – they are not produced at will and *ex nihilo* by a subject, but arise from “real” circumstances, whether they be psychic, material, social or economic. They are thus products of history itself. Terry Eagleton writes that dreams and ideology are:

"doubled texts", conjunctures of signs and power; so that to accept an ideology at face value would be like falling for what Freud terms "secondary revision", the more or less coherent version of the dream text that the dreamer delivers when she wakes. In both cases, what is produced must be grasped in terms of its conditions of production. (*Ideology* 134)

However, what is ironic about Lu Xun’s explanation of the ideological and social overdetermination of dreams is his poeticized and artistic way of explaining this materialist theory of dreams. His ironic take on the pedantic Archaist slogan *wen yi zai dao* to “*gei ‘dao’ zaile yixia*” (给“道”载了一下) demonstrates how he transforms a trite cliché about the utility of literature into a witty gem. By breaking apart the adage, switching the terms around, then cloaking the phrase in the garb of vernacular grammar, and then finally resting with the revised term “Way-carried” (*dao zai* 道载), Lu Xun demonstrates how by making a cliché strange he restores the sensuous materiality of shopworn language. His symbolic manipulation of the phrase seems to mimic the way dreams work in reorganizing lived experience into a mystified code. Dreams give us insight into reality precisely because they refuse to offer an unmediated view of such reality. They are hermeneutic “palimpsests”. My use of this word is meant to suggest the way in which dreams are to be rigorously interpreted; a reader must strive to discover the “deep structure” of their form to arrive at substantial meaning. Dreams, like symptoms, foreground both the necessity and difficulty of interpretation. However, the very barriers to interpretation, the

excess and gratuitousness of symbol, the obstacles of discourse, are in themselves the very index to the historic Real, the artery through which the Real can make itself known. Lu Xun thus aligns himself with the Archaists in affirming the social utility of literature (and dreams), but only by first ironically indulging in a little word play himself.

I find it appropriate that *Wild Grass* lies in between these two statements discussed above. While “*Tingshuo meng*” was written after *Wild Grass* and after Lu Xun’s “conversion” to Marxism, this does not mean that its themes do not resonate with the philosophical concerns of *Wild Grass*. Sun Yushi, in his discussion of the dream pieces in *Wild Grass*, argues that “under Lu Xun’s pen, no matter how bizarre the objects and scenes that he sees in his dreams are, no matter how strange, not a single one does not bear the deep, burning scar of real life” (142). In other places Sun Yushi uses the metaphor “brand” to describe the imprint of “real life” on the dream pieces; that is to say that however absurd and fantastic the content of the dreams, the dream as a whole nevertheless operates under the burning, lacerating sign of the real. I would go farther and say that the pieces I discuss later not only engage with the pressures of “real life,” but of social reality as well, and moreover, with the poetics and polemics of a “realist” mode that seeks to expose and critique social reality.

Bodily Waves: “Tremors of Degradation”

For my analytical purposes, the central piece of *Wild Grass* that I will discuss is “Tremors of Degradation” (*Tuibaixian de chandong* 颓败线的颤动). In this prose poem the narrator dreams up a story about a woman who sells her body to feed her

daughter and eventually faces the dire consequences of her sacrifice. The tragedy of a woman degraded through prostitution, raising a daughter in abject poverty, and then callously driven out by her daughter years later, is certainly an image of social degradation that would make a likely candidate for the kind of social representation that realism of the May 4th movement sought to create. However, were this a conventional realist story, it would indeed be at risk of committing the kind of moral trespass that Anderson argues realist narrative tended to make. The tragedy of a poor Chinese woman, while pitiable, is nevertheless at a distinct remove from a conventional narrator – she is an object of curiosity, amusement, and perhaps even contempt for a narrator who is free to walk away. The problem of ethically representing such a subject reminds us of the subaltern’s resistance to representation, the subaltern’s inability “to speak” without performing a ventriloquization of the colonizer’s/academic’s own hierarchical discourse. As John Beverley argues, the subaltern is “something like Jacques Lacan’s category of the Real: that which resists symbolization, a gap-in-knowledge that subverts or defeats the presumption to ‘know’ it” (2). Indeed the question involves one of how to make such a woman touch the reader and author, in a way that not only transcends conventional representational discourse, but perhaps even language altogether. Recasting this narrative as a dream suggests a formal resolution to this problem.

The narrator begins with the line “I dreamed I was dreaming” (*wo mengjian ziji zai zuomeng* 我梦见自己在做梦). It would help to think of the second “I” (*ziji* 自己) in the opening sentence as separate from the first “I” (*wo* 我), as an independent figure of dream representation. What the original narrator has dreamed up, then, is a

meta-vision about the process of representation itself. “He” is unsure of his surroundings, but similarly we are unsure as to who “he” is, the original dreamer, or the secondary dreamer the former has produced? It is from this ambiguous and tenuous subject position that this shaky “I” is confronted with a strange sight:

The globe of the paraffin lamp on the wooden table had been newly polished, making the room very bright. In this light, on the rickety couch, under the hairy, muscular flesh of a stranger, a slight frail body trembled with hunger (*jie* 饥饿), pain (*tongku* 痛苦), shock (*jingyi* 惊异), humiliation (*xiuru* 羞辱) and pleasure (*huanxin* 欢欣). (*Wild Grass* 46)

This unknown body, frail and trembling under the weight of a similarly unknown stranger, embodies something degraded, bereft of subjectivity or personality. It seems like an act of sexual intercourse. The narrator acts as voyeur, looking upon the violent coupling of two beings as non-descript as mating animals. However, to merely acknowledge the sexual nature of the representation would be one-sided. The woman’s “hunger” and “humiliation” suggest a socially tragic dimension to her experience that is equal to, if not overshadows, whatever “pleasure” she may be feeling.

In his psychoanalytic reading of the dream, Nicholas Kaldis argues that the dream’s kernel is essentially a morally forbidden sexual desire on the part of the narrator. Because the girl’s pleasure is “too shockingly sexual” (*Aesthetic Insight* 255) the superego immediately conjures a narrative context in the form of a social critique of starvation, hunger and degradation in order to mask the author’s guilty desire; the dream as a whole depicts the “unconscious actually rebelling against being erotically invested then cruelly repressed into a more socially acceptable context of

social sympathy and criticism” (255). My emphasis, however, would be on the defamiliarized nature of corporeality depicted. What lies before us are hunks of flesh, whose gender can be determined not by pronouns, but only by the contrasting descriptions of muscularity and frailness, of domination and submission. Certainly it is an alluring scene, and what proves more intriguing is imagining the “self” dreamed up by the primal narrator as identifying with either one or the other entities of the sexual encounter. The overriding feeling, however, is that of being smothered and pressed upon by another body. While pleasure may be one of the results of this bodily contact, so are the “hunger,” “pain” and “humiliation.”

The narrator continues by describing his surroundings: “[...] the air was still pervaded, pulsating, with a wave of hunger, pain, shock, humiliation and pleasure...” The “interior” experience of the one being pressed upon becomes external, palpable in the very atmosphere. The wave of “hunger, pain, shock, humiliation and pleasure” becomes a mantra of sorts suggesting a kind of universal, undifferentiated bodily experience, by which the whole atmosphere becomes as sensitive as a body, but does not insist on a particular identity or subjectivity. The “frail body” proves stronger than she seems, for her bodily experience threatens to overrun the limits of the text itself. The dream suddenly skips a few temporal frames and the narrator now envisions a young girl of about two, hungry and pleading to her mother for food. Her mother, holding on to a last silver coin that she will use to buy food for her daughter, assures her that she will soon be fed, and gently nudges her to sleep. We might assume that the coin was earned from the sex described in the beginning. Suddenly the atmosphere is pervaded by another wave that soon overtakes the narrator and causes

him to “be unable to breathe,” at which point he wakes up “groaning.” The tragedy of this scene creates somatic effects within the dreaming narrator; he becomes unable to breathe.

Kaldis argues that the narrator’s inability to breathe is a “physical symptom” created by “the conflict between the unmediated sexual desire of the individual and the dictates of social morality” (*Aesthetic Insight* 251). While there might certainly be a tension between the need for politically sanctioned representation and less inhibited forms of sexual expression, I do not think this is the overriding problem that runs throughout the piece. Even more “pressing” than libido is the persistent role of hunger in the piece, one that drives the young woman to prostitution and makes her small daughter cry. In his later essay “*Tingshuo meng*” that I discussed earlier, Lu Xun will insist on hunger being far more powerful than libido:

Surely, (Freud) will also tell us that because of the attraction between the sexes, daughters will love their fathers, and sons will love their mothers. However, not long after a child is born, no matter if it’s a boy or girl, the child will purse together its lips, and move about this way and that. Is it not because the child wants to kiss someone of the opposite sex? No, we all know, the child simply wants to eat! (4: 483)

Another way to interpret the narrator’s inability to breathe is his body’s sympathetic likeness to the female’s body crushed under the weight of the male. Recall that the mother is trying to get her daughter to sleep in order to make her persistent feeling of hunger go away. It is precisely when she is coaxing her daughter into sleep that this “wave” appears. With this in mind, it becomes fair to say that at this moment the speaker (either the original dreamer or the second) identifies with the daughter as much as the mother, because in an effort to escape hunger the speaker wishes to

remain ever deeper within sleep. This sleep within sleep is a hoped for escape from the experience of the body, and on the part of the speaker, an ironic escape from dreaming itself. However, the sleep within sleep, the promised escape from bodily torment, is refused by the “wave” of hunger, pain, humiliation and pleasure.

Moreover, the mother lays her daughter on the very “rickety couch” upon which she herself sold her body; thus the daughter’s sleep and escape from the pain of the body is shrouded in a deeply portentous and ironic gloom.

Rather than fall into an even deeper sleep that might perhaps escape the dream, the narrator is instead roused from sleep altogether:

All of a sudden from the middle of the atmosphere arose yet another great wave, and it collided with the wave from before, spinning until it had become a great whirlpool, submerging everything, including me, and neither my mouth or nose were able to breathe.

I groaned and woke up, outside my window the air was filled with silver moonlight, and it seemed to be still very far from daylight. (2: 210)

The sensation of drowning, and the panic that it inspires, seem to epitomize the effort of the body to resist death, the need to assert itself against forces bent on its destruction. In the beginning of the piece we are introduced to a secondary “self” who dreams of the sex scene. In what ways does that figure, that doubled self, act as a kind of buffer, a promise of distance between the narrator and his dream? On one hand, the creation of the secondary “self” is a way to stage an ironic view of the process of dream representation itself, to look upon the process of how an individual creates bodies through dreams. It is a way of reminding us of the formality and structure involved in all representation, either of “others” or “myself”. On the other hand, such

an ironic distance threatens to dull the visceral impact of the scene, and it seems as if the author feels compelled to restore this impact by taking away the narrator's sense of ironic self-awareness. Removing the buffer, taking away the "fourth wall" (after already having laid bare its existence), makes the sense of the narrator's suffering all the more stronger. The description of the narrator drowning and then waking up reveals to us the power of bodily experience described in the prose poem; it overrides even this provisional self and makes contact with the narrator himself. However, I do not think irony has been simply made to disappear to make room for "real bodily experience". Instead, this ironic consciousness has simply been exteriorized. If irony can be seen as a form of critical knowledge, and the corporeal descriptions as a sort of sensuous knowledge, we can see them as existing, paradoxically, side-by-side, each supplementing and emending each other, but in different modalities.

While being awake seems at first to save the narrator from his nightmare, he inevitably sinks again into another dream, and realizes that his new dream is a continuation of the prior one. This time many years have passed, and the young mother is now an old and frail grandmother. Her daughter is now married with children, living in poverty. The entire family rises in resentment against the old woman for having raised her daughter by means of prostitution. Her son-in-law accuses her of shaming the entire family, of depriving the family of "face": "We have no face to show people, and it is precisely because of you" (2: 210). It would have been better, he says, to allow her daughter to starve than to be condemned to a life of shame. The daughter also accuses her mother of causing shame, and her son-in-law accuses the mother of having now implicated him: "*hai yao dailei le wo*" (还要带累

了我)。The daughter rejoins by averring that her mother has implicated her own grandchildren to a doomed fate: “*hai yao dailei tamen li*” (还要带累他们哩!) Even the grandson points a reed at his grandmother, as if holding a sword, and simply yells “Kill!” (*sha* “杀!”).²²

The term *dailei* (带累) means to carry over a kind of harm or suffering to another person. It suggests the mobility of harm, and also its ability to, so to speak, drag or weigh down the person unlucky to receive it. The son-in-law hardly conceals his resentment for having to carry a woman’s shame, no less because he is not related to her by blood. The daughter is anguished over the fact that her mother’s shame has now been transferred to her own children, and perhaps more cogently, carried over to the male heirs. It is worth noting how this “carrying over” and “implication” are analogous to the wave of bodily sensation that overwhelms the narrator at the end of the first dream. The burning shame the family feels mirrors the bodily force that causes the narrator to gasp for air. Whereas in the first dream the young girl is pressed under the weight of male oppression (both figuratively and literally), in the second dream, the girl, now an old woman, is smothered by a relentless front of verbal abuse. The family has felt this “wave,” and resentful of having experienced it, is throwing it back against the mother. In disavowing their own kin, they exhibit an extreme opposite of sympathy, a contempt that overwhelms even the fundamental bonds of filial piety.

²² As Kaldis points out, the child, in his innocence, says “in straightforward terms what the adults are doing to the mother’s psyche” (*Aesthetic Insight* 252).

Having been driven out of the house, our dream heroine wanders aimlessly and listlessly: “While naked she stood like a stone statue in the middle of the wilderness. In an instant she saw everything from her past: hunger, pain, shock, humiliation, pleasure, and as a result she trembled; (she also saw) suffering, shame, implication (*dailei* 帶累), and as a result she convulsed; kill!... and she grew quiet” (2: 210-1). Her body convulses in tremors, and these tremors, “radiating like sunbeams,” break through the confines of her own body and overrun the universe, causing the narrator to feel the same tremors. The narrator suddenly wakes up: “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.” The piece thus ends.

The brilliance of the dream sequence is that it connects, through the somatic logic of dreaming, the “conventional” representation of “social degradation” with the body of the narrator himself. Certainly the representation of the woman is made surreal by the fantastic elements of the dream, are not realistic in any conventional way. While the dream is certainly not “real,” it is symptomatic of realism’s aim to depict and expose some kind of social dilemma, in this case the abject status of poor women. The woman’s tragedy, nevertheless, has direct physical effects upon the narrator. When he awakes he realizes that his hands are pressing against his chest, but while dreaming his hands had become a crushing weight that he could not remove. One cannot but notice the parallel between the woman lying on the couch, pinned down by the man, and that of the narrator, pinned down by his own hands while lying on his bed. The rickety bed of shame upon which both mother and daughter lie in the dream

is metonymically linked to the very bed on which the narrator sleeps. The narrator and the object of his representation occupy the same position of being oppressed by a larger weight from above. The crushing weight becomes a signifier for social oppression that the narrator himself feels by proxy. Through this parallel the narrator and the woman relate to each other not hierarchically, but contiguously. The narrator is not separate from that woman, untouched by her suffering; he suffers with her in an analogous way. The text thus embodies the logic of contiguity, both literally (in the way the woman “touches” the narrator via his hands) and figurally (in the use of symbolic metonymy), a form of adjacency that obviates a top-down hierarchy. This bodily contiguity takes the place of the narrative contiguity that is absent in this piece, interrupted by the dreamer’s moments of awakening.

It is instructive to remind ourselves that the reaction of contempt and rejection has already been depicted within the dream; the woman’s family rises up against her and expels her from the house. The family refuses to share in the pain of the mother, to feel what she has felt. The most vociferous anger comes from the son-in-law who is so incensed by the mere thought of having to carry a woman’s shame. There is arguably a streak of misogyny in his refusal to identify with his mother-in-law, a stubborn refusal to engage in any kind of cross-gender identification with her. In contrast it is the male narrator who, through the logic of the dream, is made to feel, precisely because the woman is a product of his own psyche, a separate figural entity, but simultaneously himself as well, as Eve was born of Adam.

“Tremors of Degradation” is an intriguing formal intervention into the problem of representing the social other and the oppressive relationship between author/narrator

and hero. One may level the charge that the narrator is simply indulging in an egoistic, solipsistic fantasy, that the woman does not really “exist,” but is simply a figment of his fancy. However, the piece is concerned with the problem of “accurately” reflecting suffering women ontologically; the weight of concern, rather, is on the epistemological quandary of how we can come to notice, view and feel an Other in the first place? In this vein, “Tremors of Degradation” is a critique of realism as a form of naïve ontological reflection that does not engage with the problems of how we come know the “real” – how suffering bodies can be made intelligible and, more importantly, morally significant. The collision of the bodies of woman and narrator is undoubtedly uncomfortable, and yet the possibility of creating an equivalent of bodily consciousnesses between the two allegorically signals the possibility of Utopia, of the empathy and reconciliation between atomized individuals. The dream form thus effects a formal and functional solidarity between observed and observed, a formality which is itself allegorically symbolic of utopian desire. Consequently, this piece elaborates on a hidden desire within conventional realism itself – the desire to overcome individual subjectivity. Of course, realism can never completely overcome discrete subjectivities (whether of the omniscient narrator, the first person narrator, or any of the characters) and indulge in a Utopian consciousness; to do so would be to utterly evacuate the possibility of knowledge itself -- a knowledge predicated on a gap between self and other, and self and the world. While this piece cannot enact Utopia (for to do so would be to vitiate the

necessary role of History), at the same time it seeks to go further than a conventional realism that simply represents, but does not strive to “know” the Other.²³

The complex framing device in the beginning – “I dreamed that I was dreaming” – is an attempt to de-center the role of the narrator as originating source of representation and meaning, to defer the source of authorial presence into yet another dream representation. The self is just as textual as the woman being represented; both ontologically exist on the level of symbolic discourse itself. Even though this secondary self dissolves, I think the formality and “structured-ness” of the dream reflects back onto the structured-ness of the solipsistic narrator himself. Here we have an instance of what I term “semiotic intimacy;” on one hand we are lured by the candid welcome of the sensitive, first-person narrator – it becomes easy to identify with him, to join him in his sleepy presence – on the other hand we become paradoxically aware that this narrative self is itself contingent, subject to the same over-determination that rules over the dream. If the narrative “I” looms large in *Wild Grass*, it is one that is conscious to an almost obsessive degree to its rough edges, the tenuous boundaries of its own existence, the very liminality that both threatens its existence but also provides the foundation for transcendence.

The Edge Of Dreaming, and the Articulation of Difference: “The Dog’s Retort”

Little attention has been paid to this rather short piece, and the more recent evaluations of it have been on the whole negative.²⁴ In “The Dog’s Retort” (*Gou de*

²³ In terms of gender, there is something undoubtedly “queer” about this text, how the male gaze on the woman’s corporeality reflexively becomes a discovery of the male’s own physicality, gives rise to and instantiates his own bodily experience, and how the metonymic contiguity between the two blurs the male narrator’s own gendered subjectivity.

bojie 狗的驳诘), the narrator dreams that he is a beggar dressed in rags (this detail is significant because beggars are a subject of another prose-poem to be discussed later). He runs into a dog that barks at him, and in response he insults the dog by calling him *shili* (势力), roughly meaning “snobbish”. The dog retorts that he is “not up to man in that respect” (2: 203). The dog explains that he does not yet know how to tell the difference between “copper and silver, between silk and cloth, between officials and common citizens, between masters and their slaves, between...” (2: 203). Before the dog can explain more, the narrator, suddenly terrified by the dog’s lecture on social distinctions, flees. While the dog tries to persuade the man to come back, the narrator will have none of it. “But I ran straight on as fast as I could,” the narrator writes, “until I had run right out of my dream and back in my own bed.”

What scares the narrator in this dream is ambiguous. It could be his shock upon discovering a dog with the human capacity of speech, and moreover, speaking to the contradictions of humanly created distinctions. The dog points out a number of socially constructed differentiations, for example, the difference in value between “copper and silver.” As he continues with his list, he mentions the differences created among humans, “between officials and common citizens, between masters and their slaves”. Before he can go on with his list, the narrator takes flight. What might inspire the narrator’s fear is the reality of a human society that has created distinctions among things and people. The narrator in his dream takes the guise of a beggar, a product of

²⁴ Kaldis, in his analysis of the piece, argues that the piece is far inferior to the more “introspective” prose-poems, and in its attempt to be a form of social satire, lacks “originality”. Moreover, he argues that this satire reveals “the inefficacy of the prose poem form [...] to this kind of sharp, unambiguous, and didactic type of social criticism. [...] the dog’s retort sounds less like a cur’s bark than a pedestrian’s unspirited whimper” (*Aesthetic Insight* 234). Indeed, I hope to show that piece is far more than a simplistic exercise in social didacticism.

socially created difference. Despite his own status as a degraded subject, he nevertheless replicates the operation of social differentiation, telling the dog to “shut up” in an attempt to assert his superiority over the animal. But there is a strange reversal whereby the dog is endowed with eloquence, and the human is rendered into a degraded and mostly speechless beggar, capable of only saying one full complete sentence in the piece. Most of his speech seems to consist of barely articulate grunts and exclamations: he “thunders” (*chizha* 叱咤), makes the onomatopoeic sound “*dai!*” (呔), orders the dog to “shut up” (*zhukou* 住口!) and asks “What?” (*shenme* 什么! ?) in a way that parallels how an English-speaker might quizzically exclaim “*Huh?*” As Kaldis points out, the “ironic twist” of the articulate dog (and, as I have just noted, the inarticulate human) highlights the problem of difference (*Aesthetic Insight* 232). This seems to be a reality that the narrator finds difficult to endure, and so he runs as far as the dream is wide, until he finally breaks out of the dream and finds himself in his own bed. The crisis, perhaps, is one of unbearable embodiment, trapped in the body and clothing of a beggar, bested by a loquacious dog, and unable to put up any possible spoken response (when the narrator runs away, the dog pleads with him to stay and “discuss it further,” something of which the speaker is surely incapable). The crisis that tears the speaker apart is the fact that the social distinctions that were meant to safeguard his superiority have now come back to bite him from behind.

By waking up, the narrator has escaped his dream (he has certainly escaped the dog) and seemingly reached freedom. However, while he has crossed out of the

threshold of his dream (*tao chu mengjing* 逃出梦境), he ends up within the confines of his bed, ready to dream yet again. Whether in dream or in waking reality, his “self” is always bracketed, subject to the pressures of what lies beyond the self. The narrator is trapped not only by the physical confines of his bed, but by the constant discursive repetitions that suggest the somatic rhythms of the body. *Wild Grass* is rife with such repetition; for example, in the dog’s speech mentioned above, he uses the phrase “*hai bu zhidao fenbie*” (还不知道分别: “I still do not know how to differentiate”) five times before the narrator decides that he cannot bear it any longer and runs away. The hypnotic, pulsating rhythms displayed in the narrator’s somatic language maintains the sleepy atmosphere of the work, and keeps both narrator and reader under its dreamy spell.

It is intriguing how the piece conjures up the topography of the dream as a sort of space. As significant as the topsy-turvy world depicted in the dream is the fact that the narrator can run through the borders of the dream and straight into his bed. On one hand this affirms the boundedness of the dream itself, its sense of self-containment – on the other, the ease with which the “I” moves physically moves from dream-space to waking-space suggests that waking reality and dream are locked horizontally, neither more ontologically real than the other. The edge that seems to seal off the dream from reality in fact reveals itself to also be the same edge that lines the contours of the narrator’s own bed. Wherever the narrator runs, there is no freedom from confronting the edges of his own existence. The portrait of reversal between the speechless beggar and the gabby dog would be rather tepid were it not for the fact that it is bound-up with the dialectic between dream and waking reality.

The “critical difference” which spawns the semiosis of antagonistic human relations revealed in the dream corresponds to the “critical difference” between dream and wakefulness itself, and in this vein, while these edges are a portent of entrapment, they are also an opportunity for knowledge. The narrative threshold between dream-narration and waking-narration stands in for the threshold between conventional existence and its other.

The Performance of Suffering: “The Beggars”

Here I want to discuss another prose-poem that deals more explicitly with the issue of beggary. “The Beggars” (*Qiuqizhe* 求乞者) was written earlier than “The Dog’s Retort,” and is not explicitly a dream-poem. However, it was originally published in the journal *Yusi* on the same day as “The Shadow’s Farewell” (September 24, 1924, nine days after the opening “Autumn Night” that ends with the narrator yawning), a piece that begins with this line: “When one has slumbered into a time which is unknown, that is when one’s shadow will bid farewell...” (2: 169). Many critics have commented on the fracturing of subjectivity that occurs in the dialogue between speaker and his own shadow; moreover, this disintegration of unified subjectivity only happens in deep sleep, thus suggesting dreaming or some similar state. That “The Beggars” appears along with “The Shadow’s Farewell” suggests that the two can both be possibly read as oneiric visions, landscapes of illusion and reverie.

The topic of “The Beggars” could not be more socially relevant, however. This piece deals with a perennial experience of urban life, the pedestrian’s encounter with

a panhandler.²⁵ The contact between passer-by and beggar perhaps encapsulates the quintessence of the experience of looking at a social Other, and the conflicting feelings of pity, annoyance, contempt and self-contempt are the complex and contradictory emotional by-products of an intense social contradiction. Moreover, beggars demonstrate one of the most notable forms of the Other's embodiment. A beggar is essentially his body itself in all its various poses of prostration, kneeling on the ground, hands outstretched, head kowtowing on the ground, etc. Such bodies are meant to evoke pity, or more cynically, enough irritation that the passer-by has to pay some tithe to the beggar in order to be free of harassment.

The piece opens with the narrator walking along a bare, stripped and decaying wall, stepping on ashen earth. He sees several children begging on the street, some are mute and gesticulating for alms, others are pleading and prostrating himself for charity. The narrator's reaction is not sympathy, but coldness and contempt: "For him I have only disgust, suspicion and hate" (2: 171). Herein lies the paradox of the beggar's self-representation in society: to earn his living, he must present a form of embodied suffering that proves meaningful enough to a passerby that he will pay a price in exchange for the spectacle. And yet the challenge the beggar must overcome is the fact that most urbanites have already numbed themselves to the sight of

²⁵ Much of this dissertation was written in Beijing in the year leading up to the 2008 Olympics held in the capital city. While the Beijing Olympics, with its hopeful motto "One World, One Dream" sought to present a modernized, prosperous, and even "civilized" China (*wenming* 文明 – one of the key words used in public etiquette campaigns, along with *rangli* 礼让, "yielding with propriety"), I could not help but be struck by just how many beggars plied their unfortunate trade on the city streets. While I was not surprised, it was somewhat astonishing to realize personally that an experience Lu Xun surely felt on a daily basis was still occurring with frequent regularity in 21-century, post-reform China. For a in-depth historical study of begging and mendicancy in China, please see Lu Hanchao's *Street Criers: A Cultural History of Chinese Beggars*.

suffering bodies; the pain and misery that is inscribed through their performance registers nothing. The narrator is cynical of the beggars' sincerity; some of them seem to be even cheery and playful, and moreover, their thick winter jackets seem to downplay whatever misery they hope to project. One mute beggar is in fact play-acting, the narrator concludes, merely employing a "kind of begging device" (*yi zhong qiuqi de fazi* 一种求乞的法子). For the narrator there is a difference between what may be called "authentic suffering" and "performative suffering," and for him, only authentic suffering is worth his charity. Of course, what the narrator does not examine is how one can gauge such "authenticity"; if one is to recognize suffering, must there not be some external sign that indicates such pain? But if these signs are external, that implies their ability to be replicated, to be mimicked and performed. When the performance and "re-iteration" of such signs are possible, how can one tell between a sign of suffering that is "genuine" and one that is merely performative? The narrator has thus fallen into a hermeneutic trap; his insistence on being able to distinguish "inauthentic" and "authentic" forms of suffering covers up the fact that such a distinction is inherently false. As other critics have pointed out, his insistence that these beggars are "false" only serves to justify his indifference and contempt.²⁶ While one may attempt to judge a beggar's street performance as "real" or "false," his status as a social being is not affected because this status is beyond his control; socio-economic identities are produced collectively by relations of power, and not by individual choice. The narrator's wish to believe that these beggars have "chosen"

²⁶ Kaldis refers to this self-justification as "inner sophistry" (*Aesthetic Insight* 68); however, rather than see the narrator's misrecognition as a kind of "inner choice" in order to allay his guilt, it makes more sense to read it as the internalized functioning of ideology itself; the "structure of feeling" that works within us to create an illusion of interiority and will.

their lot belies a fanciful wish to believe that social status is a product of rational choice; moreover it hides how his own seemingly secure existence as a passerby is in fact completely contingent upon social forces, not his will. With the mere flip of a coin the passerby himself may be compelled to perform his own spectacle of suffering.

This seems to be what happens midway through the piece. The “I” is now walking along a similar crumbling wall, this time made of mud and full of cracks and crevices. He feels the sharp autumn atmosphere penetrate his own winter coat; the beggars featured in the beginning were also wearing such a coat. The narrator wonders how he will beg: “I am thinking about what methods I will use to beg: if I make sounds, what tone will I use? If I play the mute, what gestures shall I employ?” (171). The “I” finally concludes that he will use the method of “non-action” and “silence” to beg, and thus earn the “irritation, suspicion and hate” of those who see themselves as being above charity. As disparate individuals continue to walk the streets, the piece dissolves into:

dust, dust,

.....

dust.....

and thus ends.

In his article on *Wild Grass*, Nicholas Kaldis has argued that the second half of “The Beggars” demonstrates the narrator’s stubborn inability to truly know the other:

His brief attempt to empathize quickly degenerates into a self-aggrandizing egoistic fantasy, in an attempt to restore his self-righteous antipathy for the beggars. He imagines that his behavior as a

beggar would be characterized by a unique stoicism and lack of artifice. [...] A fantasized ideal beggar-self is thereby substituted for the flesh-and-blood beggars whose existence the speaker wishes to negate. (*Aesthetic Cognition* 66)

For Kaldis, this second half is nothing more than an exercise in egoism, evidence of the narrator's utter inability to think beyond himself. Such a reading is supported by the premise that the speaking subject before and after the halfway mark are one and the same, that the "I" is continuous, progressing along in time from the very beginning of the piece itself.

However, certain elements in the piece suggest that this "I" is not nearly as stable or solid as Kaldis suggests. The repetition of elements at this juncture -- a crumbling wall, a breeze, and the pervasiveness of dust -- seem to suggest, if not a kind of temporal rewind, then a sudden disorientation from the temporal progression that was initiated in the beginning of the piece. Moreover, the fact that this "I" notices the cold autumn air piercing *his* winter jacket (remember that the child beggars are themselves wearing a similar coat) immediately creates a certain kind of suspicion as to the identity of this speaker. Is he the same "I" as before, or is he a beggar himself? How can we be sure that the speaker "fantasizing" about being an "ideal" beggar is not an "actual" beggar, one inured to the hatred of others and defiantly resisting against humanity's indifference?

My argument is not to claim that this second "I" is most definitely not the "I" which begins the piece, nor is it to claim that this "I" is most definitely a beggar. Instead, this sudden recapitulation in the middle seems more like the repetition of a dream sequence, but with a sudden uncanny reversal of embodiment – whereas in the

first half one was merely a passerby, in the second, one now takes on the guise of the beggar (but not leaving out the possibility that the “I” was a beggar all along). Rather than exposing the “falsity” of the beggar, this piece instead exposes the fragility and artificiality of the “I” that seeks to anchor his identity by disavowing such a beggar.

However, following Kaldis, one might argue that this “beggar-I” is disingenuous, “stoic” and not “flesh and blood”. But to argue that the speaker at this juncture has failed to conjure up an identity as a “flesh and blood” beggar reiterates the epistemological mistake made by the speaker in the beginning of the piece; the insistence between “authentic” suffering and mere performance. The “beggar-I”, it should be noted, always uses the modal particle *jiang* 将 along with each verb; *jiang* indicates the incipience of the action. It suggests a certain premeditation in regards to the action, a lack of spontaneity, and a hint of theatricality. One can simply argue that the presence of *jiang* shows that the beggar-I cannot be genuine, for every action is preceded by a forethought. On the other hand, I would suggest that the presence of the modal particle stages the very problem of “authenticity” that is foregrounded in the beginning. All beggars must “perform” in one way or another, but to not perform, to “naturally be” what one is, is itself an impossible choice. If the “beggar-I” of the second half is just as “false” as the beggars featured in the first half, then they are both “real” in their falsity.

The fact that this piece was published along with “The Shadow’s Leave-Taking” suggests that both works elaborate on the topic of duality. In “The Shadow’s Leave-Taking,” it is the nocturnal self that becomes split into a sleeping body and his shadow, one who bids farewell and sinks into darkness. In the other piece, however,

the beggar appears as one's "social shadow," the reality of social suffering that not only makes our existence possible, but follows us everywhere we go, asking for our charity and compassion. Any and every attempt to discredit, disavow and question the authenticity and reality of this embodied shadow only serves to disavow oneself. The crumbling, decaying walls along which the speaker walks not only suggests the fragility of separation between self and other, but also between dream and waking reality – the "I" skirts along the "edge" not only of the reverie, but on the borders of his own being. The persistent refrain of "dust" everywhere evokes the Buddhist and Daoist usage of the word to denote phenomenal reality as being but an illusion, a dream to be awakened out of, a façade of dust to be brushed away. Existence itself is an ephemeral performance whose curtain must be drawn, and whose enchantment must end. It also, of course, evokes the Christian notion of the return to dust after death. The dusty ground underneath the speaker's feet is forever shaky, just as his own subjectivity threatens to dissolve and transmute at any moment. Consequently, the author is evoking a reality that goes even deeper than the rifts between social classes. A question that the text poses, but does not (and cannot) resolve, is whether the reduction of all reality, of self and other, into "dust" invites a kind of socially disengaged quietism, a rejection *tout court* of all ontological reality and thus an unwillingness to resolve social contradiction. Ultimately I believe the text holds in suspension two different kinds of realities: the "historic" reality of class struggle and the "spiritual" reality of the emptiness of all being. Perhaps the "truest" reality in this case is the very incommensurability, the parallax, between these two ways of understanding the Real, each true and functional in its own right. Like many a great

writer and critic of social injustice, a sense of the tension between dual modalities of the Real is something to be acknowledged and accepted, not brushed aside.

One's "Own" Body Made Strange: "The Epitaph" and "After Death"

Moving from the bodies of others, I now want to move on to how Lu Xun problematizes the experience of one's own body. Both "The Epitaph" (*Mujiwen* 墓碣文) and "After Death" (*Sihou* 死后) appeal to the sense of a visceral, unmediated access to one's "own" body, while at the same time complicating and defamiliarizing the idea of the body as "a matter of course". The uncanny result both causes the reader to seek knowledge in an embodied, sensuous fashion, but also to be attuned at how these intimate "senses" can be radically transformed. In "The Epitaph" the narrator reads an inscription on a tombstone. When he walks behind the tombstone, he discovers another, more sinister inscription on it: "... I tore out my heart to eat it, wanting to know its true taste. But the pain was so agonizing, how could I tell its taste?..." (*Wild Grass* 45). Behind the tombstone the grave has been dug up, and he sees a corpse "disemboweled, its heart and liver gone."

Dissection (*jiepu* 解剖) was, for Lu Xun, a favorite trope for characterizing how he felt socially engaged writing should be, no surprise coming from his experience as a medical student in Japan. Lu Xun admitted that he "more frequently used his scalpel to dissect himself than to dissect others" (Anderson 76). The body in the grave is the remains of a violent self-dissection undertaken in the body's attempt to cannibalize itself. As most critics aver, this body is a double for the narrator himself. There are

two acts of self-dissection; one is the body's self-mutilation in an attempt to devour its own heart (thus, more than a simple self-dissection, there is also a self-consumption). The other is the speaker narrating upon viewing the mutilated body, his doppelganger. The violence of representation has turned inwards, so to speak, with the narrator voyeuristically looking upon not another abject being, but his own body in various stages of degradation. In such an arrangement catharsis or complacency is impossible; the narrator cannot clean himself of the degradation he sees because he *is*, strangely and oddly, that very degradation and decay that he observes. What results is a malfunction in the Kristevan operation of abjection: the task of creating others involves excreting the "other" out of one self, and then naming that excreted substance as "Other." Here, it seems as if the grotesque, monstrous body has been excreted, but it hangs in a kind of temporal suspension, unable to crystallize into a nameable Other, still pledging allegiance to the self that seeks to disavow it – the self becomes mired in pool of his own filth. What seems to be an observation of a body "outside" one's self becomes a very interior meditation on one's own mortality; the result is a conflation of "internal" and "external" whereby the distinction becomes meaningless. Moreover what gets staged is the "suicide" of observation itself. If observation always necessarily implies a subject position from which the observing takes place, what then happens when the corporeal seat of such looking is mutilated and destroyed? The text asks the reader to attempt to move beyond the conventions of realist epistemology, to imagine for a second a kind of seeing where the divisions between external and internal are erased.

While this corpse is a “double,” it should not be reduced to a mere symbolization of the author’s psyche. Instead, the disemboweled body speaks to the discursive power of the dream form to reproduce bodies, including one’s own body, in disturbing, uncomfortable, and insightful ways. Rather than engage in the usual Freudian analysis and diagnose the image as merely a “symptom,” it is also significant to see the dream as a way of recreating the body as self and other simultaneously. Similarly, in “After Death” it is the narrator’s body that is the center of the action. The first line reads, “I dreamed I had died by the roadside” (*Wo mengjian ziji si zai daolu shang* 我梦见自己死在道路上 2: 214). Again, we have a fracturing of the narrative self between the dreaming narrator (“我”) and the object of the dream representation (“自己,”) in this case, a corpse.

The narrator is quite surprised to find that his mental functions are quite alert, but frustrated by the fact that his body has become recalcitrant to his will, refusing to budge. Self and body become separate entities, the one unable to will the other into action. The narrator becomes very interested in what reaction his dead body will receive from people crowding around the corpse: “I felt a sudden longing to hear what they were saying. But just then I remembered how in my lifetime I used to say that criticism was not worth troubling about. Perhaps I didn’t mean what I said: no soon was I dead than I betrayed myself” (*Wild Grass* 53). The narrator is soon disappointed to find that his dead body, while provoking general curiosity, has also met with pure indifference, as no one recognizes the body. The narrator ironically states that he is glad because he has not caused anyone the great trouble of either grief

or elation: “Good, then I have treated people the proper way!” (2: 215). The only truly provocative reaction the body elicits is from the irritated man who has to pick up the body from the roadside and prepare it for burial. “Why did he have to die here?” exclaims the frustrated man. “I used to think that although a man could not choose where to live on earth, he could at least die wherever he pleased,” the narrator quips. “Now I learned this was not the case, and it was very hard to please everyone.” While dead, the narrator’s body is still somehow called into the social realm, still subject to the irritation of the man who wonders why the body chose to die where it did. In short, the body is not a privileged space for private experience; it still functions in the social world and is vulnerable to structures and relations of power. The body that can be spoken and thought of remains a social subject, implicated within the complex web of human relations. At the very location in which the speaker hopes to have time to himself he is suddenly thrust into a realm of gazes, scrutiny and almost embarrassing over-exposure.

Later the corpse is placed in a coffin, and the narrator becomes vexed by a palpable crease on the back of his shirt, all the more annoying because he is lying on his back. When his body is put on display, the only person who recognizes him is an old bookseller, who offers his former patron a collection of prized Ming commentaries. Finally the narrator is alone, saddened that he has died unbeknownst to anyone except the old bookseller. He tries to cry, but is unable: “There was a sort of flash before my eyes, and I sat up” (*Wild Grass* 56). By waking up, the narrator has not escaped the coffin. The description of the crease on the back of his shirt sounds uncannily like the kind of irritant that might trouble one’s sleep. The coffin and the

bed are both somatic spaces in which the body is confined. In both instances the narrator remains in a “stuck” position because of physical constraints, and in both instances what becomes the object of his careful attention is his body. Does the bed, then, become the site of an impasse, an “iron house,” a coffin, from which Lu Xun cannot find his way out? In this sense, Leo Lee is right, there is something absurd about Lu Xun’s quest in such dire circumstances. However, the bed and coffin act as focalizers for the speaker’s awareness and observation of his own body, always serving as visible coordinates for this body’s location. Just like the wall along which the beggar walks in an earlier piece, these barriers, borders and edges serve as tactile, visual and semiotic landmarks that instantiate the materiality of the body, contours that both limn the body’s form and also simultaneously bring it into being. They act as the body’s tokens. Thus *Wild Grass* need not be considered purely a lament about a certain feeling of psychological imprisonment.

The text also implies something stranger. Rather than merely viewing a coffin making its way through the streets of Beijing, the text instead implicitly invites us to view the coffin’s metonymic double, that is, the narrator’s bed, traveling through the city. The “coffin” thus symbolically conceals a short circuit between the narrator privately lying in bed and the bustling urban social landscape he seeks to escape, thus collapsing the boundaries between “bedroom” and “world”.²⁷ Moreover, in addition to the formal homology between bed and coffin, there is also a third party to add to this analogy: the form of the dream. The dream mediates between the bedroom and the city, the personal and the public, life and death. In a more formalistic view, the

²⁷ My use of and understanding of this metaphor is indebted to Slavoj Žižek, in particular in his book *The Parallax View*.

dream mediates the modernist emphasis on personal, intimate experience with realism's demand to evoke the totality of social being. The dream thus acts as the wormhole that allows us to access a deeper knowledge of the social "outside" by delving deeper into ourselves.

Realism's bedtime: "The Awakening"

In the last piece, "The Awakening" (*Yijue* 一觉), the narrative register suddenly shifts to a more historical footing.²⁸ It opens with a description of planes conducting bombing missions of Beijing in the morning, a result of internecine fighting among warlord factions, causing fear and silent panic that makes the narrator deeply aware of the fragile line between life and death; moreover, it brings to sharp awareness the contingency of his bodily existence, one that can easily disintegrate in a second. In the midst of warfare, the narrator goes through manuscripts sent by young writers, excited by their energy, exuberance and commitment, but worried by their nascent cynicism.

In addition to representations of fear and violence and tokens of a palpable reality and bodily presence (and its destruction), the piece is also overrun with inscriptions of discursive materiality that permeate the atmosphere. The regular morning bombings have a regularity that "seem like attending lessons at school" (2: 228). His bed is

²⁸ However, Kaldis perceptively notes, the way the historical description employs metaphor blurs the line between the "real" and the aesthetic, although I would not go so far as to say that this figuration "robs the image of its historical objectivity" (*Aesthetic Insight* 290). Certainly Lu Xun is aware of the problems that narrative technique, representational considerations and ideology pose in presenting history, something he demonstrates to full effect in *Old Stories Retold*, but I do not think his awareness of the formal constructedness of history leads him to discount the importance of historical objectivity *tout court*. Simply because we cannot help but use figurative language to articulate historical reality does not negate or even diminish (and, in fact, often enhances) the sense of history's actuality.

completely covered by a mess of newspapers (*sanluan man chuang de ribao* “散乱满床的日报”). The disarray of the newspapers not only reflects the chaos in the city, but the papers themselves serve to give the narrator a journalistic knowledge of what is happening. Moreover, the fact that these newspapers are on his bed suggests the interpenetration of language/text and the body of the narrator that is so prominent in the earlier pieces. It tantalizingly suggests that the narrator’s sleeping body and this pile of old newspapers are in fact metonymically related, one standing in for the other. In what ways is the narrator’s manifest corporeality, his bodily instantiation within a particular social space and time, overdetermined by a discourse, both printed and verbal, that circulates throughout the land?

After having picked up the newspapers and tidied up his room, he sets upon his editing work. In the midst of warfare, the narrator goes through manuscripts sent by young writers, excited by their energy, exuberance and commitment: “The spirits of the youth that refused to whitewash [reality] stood up in succession in front of my eyes” (2: 228). These spirits correspond to the youths’ manuscripts themselves, piled upon his desk. He wishes to “kiss upon the formless, colorless roughness dripping with fresh blood” (*wo yuanyi zai wuxingwuse de xianxue linli de cubaoshang jiewen* 我愿意在无形无色的鲜血淋漓的粗暴上接吻). These youth spirits pose a descriptive paradox; as spirits, they should be “formless,” and yet they are pulsating with fresh, warm blood, and rough rather than smooth and ethereal. What the narrator seems to be describing is the nature of language itself; at once “formless” and transparent, a clear mirror to reality, and yet on the other hand framed, textured and

intricate just as any other material artifact. The fact that he wants to “kiss” these spirits/youths/manuscripts suggests a kind of bodily communion between the narrator and the youths with whom he wishes to connect. It should not be read as a belated desire to be “young” again; we are reminded of the narrator’s desire to serve the youth with his writing in the “Preface” to *Call to Arms*. Reading their wistful and romantic tales, he finds that instead of having his spirit transported to faraway fictive landscapes, the texts remind him that he is “living in the world of men” (*huo zai renjian* 活在人间 2: 228), a statement he repeats later in the piece. The narrator thus demonstrates his self-conscious awareness of his editing and mentoring responsibilities – his devotion to the youth is not an attempt to quaff from the fountain of youth, but to take part in a vital continuity between old and young, much in consonance with Lu Xun’s own evolutionary thinking. Through the narrator’s mystic kiss, old and young are united into a greater, ever progressing, dynamic body.

The text continues to make symbolic linkages between text, youth, life and corporeal/biological materiality. He recalls three years earlier being handed a youth literary magazine called “Shallow Grass” and being very moved by the writing inside. He relates the story of how Lev Tolstoy was so moved by the struggle of a thistle to bloom that he writes his novella *Hadji Murat*. Writing is figured as a form of fragile, botanic life. The narrator continues to relate how plants and trees in the desert burrow their roots deep in the ground to find water, and thus manage to flourish as well as provide shade and nourishment for thirsty travelers. Text is thus seen both as life and as a giver of life, something that makes bodily existence possible.

The narrator’s editing work takes him well into the evening:

While I have been editing the sun has set, and I carry on by lamplight. All kinds of youth (*qingchun* 青春) flash past before my eyes, though around me is nothing but dusk (*shenwai dan you hunhuang huairao* 身外但有昏黄环绕). Tired, I take a cigarette, quietly close my eyes in indeterminate thought, and have a long, long dream. I wake with a start. (*Wild Grass* 68)

This last paragraph of *Wild Grass* puts into doubt the idea that Lu Xun has stepped out of his bed, so to speak, and entered the properly social realm. The collection ends at the same time it started, the evening. The “youth,” who have already transmuted into spectral images before his tired eyes, yet standing in an indefinite but certain relation to his body which is surrounded by the dusk. The narrator has a “long, long dream,” but does not, this time around, describe its contents. Is he dreaming about the youth whose manuscripts he is editing, the youth to whom the nation’s hopes are entrusted? We do not know, and ultimately, we do not need to know what the dream is about. What is important is not the dream’s content, but its formality. Like the youthful manuscripts he has been editing, the dream is also a text, a discursive transfiguration of the narrator’s body. The narrator returns to the somatic space, the place where impressions that are repressed in the social order during the day manifest themselves upon the body of the sleeper at night. Moreover, there is reason to believe that this content-less dream is particularly utopian – he has surrounded himself with the sanguine words of youth; it seems likely that his dream is not only a configuration of his own self, but that of the young as well, a corporate fusion of the generations epitomized by his desire to “kiss” the young.

The narrator suddenly wakes, finding himself in a space both mundane and enchanted:

Suddenly I woke, still wrapped around me was the yellow dusk; the seal-script cigarette smoke floated upwards within the still air, like several small, wispy summer clouds, softly conjuring images that are difficult to name.

忽而惊觉，身外也还是绕着昏黄；烟篆在不动的空气中上升，如几片小小的夏云，徐徐幻出难以指名的形象。(2: 229-30)

The collection ends here, with a return to the sleepy body of the narrator, enveloped in a haze of twilight and tobacco. The title, “Awakening,” suggests in the original language a singular moment of awakening, a unique epiphany (*yijue* 一觉). However, there are at least two moments of awakening, not one. In addition to the narrator waking after his “long, long dream,” the prose-poem itself, with its representation of contemporary Beijing undergoing warfare, is a kind of formal awakening from the dreamy sequences of images that followed beforehand. It acts as a kind of belated nod to the demands of reality and socially-engaged writing, to attempt to depict the waking world in historic and panoramic perspective. And yet the movement of this piece progresses inexorably towards the telos of twilight and evening, towards the somatic and personal experience of sleep and dreams. The text acts as a critique of a seemingly transparent realism that seeks to repress its nocturnal other, its dark inverse. When the narrator awakes from his dream, his corporeal, waking experience is still permeated with a sleepy, hypnotic haze, and upon closer inspection, there is also something dreamy about the beginning of the piece as well. The sensuous, yet strange and unfamiliar, ether of the dream leaks out of its boundaries and infects waking reality.

The haze, though, is not simply some kind of sublime, sensuous air. The narrator figures the cigarette smoke as a form of “seal-script” whose meaning is as yet unclear.

Thus what constitutes the sensual, dreamy “haze” is, once again, the mystery of writing itself, characters in an arcane calligraphic form whose decipherment is difficult. Again, it is the materiality of the signifier that is emphasized here, not just what the characters mean, but how they look, how they appear in their own, independent, form. The difficulty in trying to “name” these quasi-discursive images is in consonance with the fullness of dream language; signifiers whose meaning is made difficult because of their sensuousness that defies semantic transparency. The end of *Wild Grass* stages a “return” to the body, but this body is thoroughly cloaked in the garb of discourse whose significance is always subject to displacement and deferment. We should take note that seal script (*zhuanshu*), like dreams themselves, has traditional associations with divination and access to hidden knowledge.²⁹

The “Plenitude of Form” and its Ethical Possibility

The generic and modal form of *Wild Grass* has been a topic for scholars for years. The work is usually classified as a form of “prose-poetry,” or “*sanwen shi*” (散文诗); as Sun Yushi has pointed out, the development of *sanwen shi* had its roots in the very beginnings of the May Fourth movement, and well before Lu Xun began writing his own prose-poems many other May Fourth writers, including Guo Moruo, were publishing their own works (190-1). Moreover, the prose-poems of Baudelaire and Turgenev were translated and published in the top literary journals (Sun Yushi, 190;

²⁹ I thank my colleague Stephen Kory for this insight. Also keep into mind the similarities between this passage and the Zhang Dai’s dream discussed in the previous chapter, whereby the script that Zhang Dai can magically comprehend is also in seal script.

Kaldis, *Aesthetic Insight* 72).³⁰ However, as Sun also relates, the form's novelty did evoke the opposition of some more conservative elements who refused to accept prose poetry as a kind of poetry by virtue of its lack of verse and meter (195). Kaldis notes the difficulty in defining the features of the prose poem itself, a hybrid form that seems to encourage "vagueness" in critics' attempts to define it, "occup[ying] hazy literary territory on the borders between prose and poetry" (*Aesthetic Insight* 63). It is his contention that Lu Xun's adoption of the prose poem constitutes his attempt to find a literary form appropriate to his (traumatic) experience of modernity, to find a literary expression that most effectively "embod[ies] a poetic understanding of the moment Lu Xun is *experiencing*" (*Aesthetic Cognition* 47) and "acknowledges the three-way interaction of the unconscious, consciousness, and the surrounding world" (48).

In his pioneering investigation of Baudelaire's prose poems, Jonathan Monroe advances a dialogical and socially informed theory that accounts for the prose poem's

³⁰ Kaldis points out a dichotomy in positions regarding who had more influence on Lu Xun's work, or as he puts it, "the prose poetry-realist-Turgenev connection and the prose poetry-symbolist-Baudelaire connection" (*Aesthetic Insight* 72). While he discounts the possibility of drawing a clear connection of influence of either writer on Lu Xun, he nevertheless appears to dismiss the Turgenev connection and lean more towards Baudelaire and more generally towards symbolism as a model, drawing on Leo Lee's analysis of the influence of Kuriyagawa's symbolist tract "Symbols of Mental Anguish," which Lu Xun translated in 1924. After disavowing any clear connection to either realism or symbolism, Kaldis goes on to simply focus on the symbolist elements of Lu Xun's work, leaving the realism far behind, although he maintains "the need to escape the interpretive tradition of arranging modern Chinese poetry into distinct schools or eras, and to instead take poets and poems on an individual basis" (88). Moreover, he goes on to say that he wants to "stress the open-ended, non-proscriptive nature of [his] attempt to define *Wild Grass*'s literary modernism, be it its Chinese or Western aspects." While his approach is "open-ended," it only seems to be after effectively jettisoning realism from his discussion. It is precisely my attempt to argue that, while *Wild Grass* is steeped in the techniques and motifs of modernism and symbolism, it also engages in dialogue (though not wholly, and not in every piece) with the formal, ethical and epistemological premises of realism, and that engaging in this kind of analysis yields important interpretive possibilities; it also requires us to rethink and expand our notion of what "realism" entails, and to not treat it as modernism's more philistine cousin, or unable to infiltrate the very bosom of what has been often considered Lu Xun's modernist turn.

generic hybridity. In *A Poverty of Objects*, Monroe argues that because the prose poem foregrounds not only the conflict between the two generic forms of poetry and prose, it simultaneously proposes a “dialectical” solution between them, and thus becomes an opportune form for addressing conflict between social classes as well as envisioning a possible resolution of social contradictions. For this reason, he characterizes the prose poem as an essentially “utopian” genre (37). I think there are certainly traces of this “utopian” resolution in Lu Xun’s text; on the other hand, the use of dream as one of the reigning tropes in the collection not only expands on the work’s association with utopian thought, but also suggests an entirely new level of mediation between self and other that I have pointed out earlier. For Monroe, the prose poem genre is itself the metaphor for social contradiction and resolution. In Lu Xun’s handling of the genre, this “metaphor” is displaced by yet another metaphor: the dream.³¹

As a consequence of its self-consciously hybrid nature, the prose poem calls attention to its own form precisely because its contours are always unclear and “hazy”. The prose poem acts as a kind of generic “monstrosity,” whose corporeality is foregrounded precisely because the genre is by virtue aberrant. In other less hybrid forms, like a poem or a short story, we tend to pay little attention to form; form becomes naturalized in the very process of reading and is thus transparent. Even with

³¹ To be sure, beyond the poem/prose dichotomy, *Wild Grass* flaunts a heterogeneity in form and structure, one to be seen in his later literary works, including *Old Tales Retold* and the more autobiographical *Dawn Flowers Plucked at Dusk*. One piece is not a prose poem at all, but a poem in verse that parodies both the classical love poetry of Zhang Heng (Eastern Han) and the ribald, satiric verse of Zhang Dayou. “The Passerby” is a dramatic sketch featuring three characters. The complexities of hybridity are not simply confined to the shifting polarity between poetry and prose.

a form as notoriously hybridized as the novel, its blatant piracy of other genres often slips below the radar as we are lured into the narrative. In these established genres, form becomes naturalized in the process of reading, and often seems transparent. The prose poem, on the other hand, refuses the transparency of form because it foregrounds the collision of different genres.

The Russian Formalists, who were flourishing at the same time Lu Xun was writing his masterpieces, aimed to show that all art ultimately referred to its own artifice and construction. Boris Eikhenbaum, in his “Theory of the Formal Method” (published 1925, the same year Lu Xun was working on *Wild Grass*), summarized the findings of he and his colleagues, and argued that reigniting an appreciation of form was essential to understanding the function of literature:

The understanding of “form” started to take on a new meaning – not as a mere shell, but as a plenitude, as something both concrete and dynamic, full of content in its own right, independent from any corollaries. In this (new understanding) was expressed a decisive departure from the principles of symbolism, which held that one should illuminate some kind of content “through form” (125-6)

Viktor Shklovsky, in his earlier and celebrated work, “Art as Device” (1917), argues that the purpose of art is to not to reflect reality, but to in effect distort it, to make it strange and thus wrest it away from the deadening effects of “automatization”:

It is in order to regain the feeling of life, to feel things, in order to make the stone stone-like, that such a thing called art exists. The goal of art is to give the sensation of things, as an image, and not simply as mere fact; the device of “making things strange” (*остранение*) and the device of belabored form are the very devices of art. They increase the difficulty and time of perception in as much as the perceptive process in art is a value to itself and should be prolonged; art is the means of experiencing (“living through”) the making of a thing; that which is already made in art is not important. (13)

Here we have the classic Formalist position on art, and more specifically, literary theory. The content of a literary work is form itself, its own making. However, there is something “un-Formalistic” about Shklovsky’s own formulation of art as a resistance against “automatization;” the Formalists themselves abandoned or never adopted Shklovsky’s more philosophical position about perception, and instead concentrated on the apprehension of the work’s form as an end to itself, as its own kind of “plenitude.”³²

From this point I want to return to an earlier assertion I made about the connection between recognizing human “bodies that matter” and the form of the text itself. As the Formalists were aware, for many readers the form of a work often threatened to disappear from view; it was the primary task of the literary critic to discover how a work was “made,” to extract and explicate its form. While formal analysis is not the only task of criticism, it is one of the few that is explicitly *literary* in nature. There is something uncannily corporeal about the whole enterprise, the work of conjuring a “plenitude” of form into plain view. Along with “making strange” is the famous notion of “laying bare the device,” a technique by which a text points to its own artifice. This “laying bare” also metaphorically implies a kind of body that is suddenly exposed, brought to view, but one that cannot be equated with the mere “content”. “Making strange,” at first meant to renew our perception of the world,

³² As Victor Erlich writes, “[...] it may be plausibly argued that, in spite of his descriptive point of departure, [Shklovsky] came to define poetry not in terms of what it is, but in terms of what it is for. The Formalist theory turned out to be a new ‘defence of poesie’ rather than a definition of ‘literariness’. Furthermore, it may be noted [...] that his notion of art as a rediscovery of the world had more in common with traditional or popular views than the Formalist critic would have cared to admit” (179).

more and more referred to our deeper perception of the artistic text itself and nothing more.

As the end of my discussion on *Wild Grass*, I want to ask whether we can add a certain social and ethical dimension to the idea of “making strange”. Certainly, when Shklovsky first formulated his idea of “making strange,” he had a philosophical aim in advancing the term, one that was later not taken up by future Formalist investigations. In *Wild Grass*, not only do we have bodies made strange, but we have a form that is made strange as well. The “monstrous form” and the “monstrous body” share a structural and epistemological homology, each enhancing the other’s “strangeness”. However, if we bring back Shklovsky’s idea of “automatization,” my point starts to become clearer. It is important to make bodies and the literary forms that convey them strange because otherwise the body would disappear, “swallowed” by the automatization of quotidian perception and conventional form.³³ Indeed this was the problem with “conventional realism”; reflecting human suffering only served to make it even less noticeable to a readership already habituated to everyday images of human suffering. It was not merely the fact that they were not noticed, they in effect disappeared.

Thus what *Wild Grass* allows us to see is the body “made strange,” distorted, reconfigured, made monstrous. What comes into view are the body’s unruly edges, what captures our attention is not so much the body’s “form” as a complete, stable

³³ In Shklovsky’s essay, it is remarkable how many corporeal motifs he uses while discussing *ostranenie*, including genitals in Russian folk ballads (*блудницы*), horses, the bizarre gesticulation of opera singers, and corpses. Moreover, when he says that automatization “swallows things, dresses, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war” (13), he resorts to a visceral corporeal metaphor to capture the deadening effect of prosaic language. What Shklovsky’s poetics make so apparent are the interpenetrating links between things (*вещи*), bodies, and language, and the overriding materiality that saturates all of these.

image, but the strangeness of its very formality. In the case of generic form, what results is not a new, stable poetic genre, but the foregrounding of generic hybridity itself – the monstrous formality made possible by the collision of generic and modal registers. However, the aim is not to provide a corporeal freak-show; the point is to rediscover the body, to be cognizant of its existence, and moreover, our ethical responsibility to such bodies that exist before us. The body in *Wild Grass*, then, is not merely a ground through which we can anchor feeling and knowledge, the body is itself, in every instance, an epistemological revelation. However, such a revelation cannot be possible by relying on automated and manufactured corporeal common sense; it is only through radically redefining the body's edges – a redefining that also acts as a form of that body's instantiation – that the body and our responsibility for such bodies become intelligible.

It is not merely a matter of recognizing the bodies of others – it is also a question of orienting one's own body to that of the other, and moreover, of wholly transforming one's whole conception of one's body. I think this is one way to account for the strong autobiographical and first-person orientation of the work. What *Wild Grass* introduces is a way of thinking about the representation of the Other which explicitly inserts the body of the observer into play – no more is he a disembodied eye, but he is also figure who is as vulnerable to the power of his own work of representation as that of the object of such representation. We begin to sense representation as a uniquely ethical act, not as mere observation, but as an attempt at reconciliation between self and other. Thus we have a first-person narrator, presumably “Lu Xun,” who is constantly aware of his own entrapment by the gates of

his dreams and the edges of his bed, limits that bring to relief and instantiate the contours of his bodily existence. And yet these “borders” also paradoxically serve as critical foils that allow him to rethink the intersubjective relationships between him and others, him and the world(s) around him. It is through a renegotiation of the borders of our bodies, that of others, and the relation between them, that reconstitutes the plenitude and value of the body.

Wild Grass, while often and rightly seen as Lu Xun’s engagement with modernist and Symbolist literary technique, is also a work still very much in dialogue with the promise and problems of realism. It imagines a resolution to the problems of realist representation by taking realism’s conventions and making them strange, forcing us to rethink representation in far more flexible, egalitarian and ethical ways. At the same time, *Wild Grass* unlocks and expresses a hidden desire within realism; the wish to express a utopian solidarity between self and other, oppressor and oppressed, language and the world it seeks to both reflect and change. The dreams of *Wild Grass* not only implicitly suggest a hope for a transfigured world, but also suggest a different way of representing and modeling that world. Lu Xun’s transformed style of representation acknowledges the presence of language, text and discourse as important corollaries to the bodies they make intelligible to knowledge.

Chapter Two

The Hysterical Body of Realism: Narrative and Oneiric Counter-narrative in Mao Dun's Fiction

Sticking to the Real

The Lu Xun we saw in the preceding chapter was someone unafraid to work on the sidelines of realism in order to make the social other more visible, an author who had little patience with the pieties of generic and literary conventions and saw fit to alter them as he pleased. Mao Dun (1896-1981), journalist, editor, revolutionary, and foremost realist novelist of the Republican period, presents quite the opposite; he appears as a writer who steadfastly held close to the promise of realism to evoke a social and historic totality, one who embraced his role as meticulous social observer. As China descended into economic crisis and domestic political chaos, and contended with imperialist threats from outside, Mao Dun became ever more realist in orientation, convinced of the power of realism's mission to convey critical knowledge about society and thus aid in its transformation.

It was not simply Mao Dun who believed he was capable of acting as liaison between reader and society through his writing; by the time he published *Midnight* in early 1933, this seemed to be expected of him. In the first issue of *Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang zazhi*) of that year, we find a promotional advertisement giving prospective readers a summary of the scale and ambition of this work, soon to be published by Kaiming *shudian* (Enlightenment Bookstore). *Eastern Miscellany*

(*Dongfang zazhi*), a Shanghai periodical, was the leading intellectual journal in China from the mid-1910s throughout the 1930s. According to the advertisement copy, Mao Dun's new novel aims to answer the perennial question haunting many of his contemporaries: "Exactly what kind of society is China?" The advertisement then boasts of the novel's loquacious length (more than 30,000 words), its seemingly Tolstoyan roster of characters (more than 80), and its encyclopedic breadth of subject matter (the global financial collapse of 1930, Chinese economy and society during a time of continued internecine fighting, the decline of national industry, the intensifying struggle between labor and capital, etc.) as proof of its ambitious attempt to take a long sociological shot of Chinese society. Eager, however, to persuade prospective readers that the novel is not mere "social science," or pure empirical reflection, the copy goes on to argue that this rather dense material has been reshaped through Mao Dun's "artistic hands" (certainly a reflection of Mao Dun's attempt to adopt a more supple form of critical realism), and that within its vast tapestry of more than 30,000 words there is not a single "dry or bland moment." But beyond its claims to entertainment, the advertisement notes that the novel is the first of its kind to extend its scope beyond the mere confines of the romantic drama among men and women intellectuals, and to include all levels of society, from the capitalists on top all the way down to striking workers. The blurb in essence promotes *Midnight* as an *ur-*work that both magisterially conjures a panoramic and empirical vision of Chinese society while meeting aesthetic demands for pleasure and distraction, albeit in an educational manner.

This advertisement in short reflects the implicit faith readers and writers had in socially reflective and engaged realism to offer critical insight or even solutions to the crises of the time. *Midnight*, a work that is laden with discussion about national industry, the stock market and labor struggles, was thus emblematic of the continued promise of narrative to synthesize, analyze and critique current events. Mao Dun's own participation in the many turbulent events that he wrote about in his fiction only seemed to cement the identification of his narrative with history itself. The 1933 publication of *Midnight*, a novel set mainly in Shanghai, was indeed a timely intervention in a period of great turbulence for both the city and the country at large. The Kuomintang, the ruling Nationalist party, led by an increasingly right-wing Chiang Kai-shek, had been conducting a ruthless campaign of terror against suspected Communists and their sympathizers for a number of years beginning in 1927. In January 1932, Japanese troops invaded Shanghai and set off a bloody skirmish between the two countries that lasted three months and ended with a formal peace agreement that saw China unable to station its own troops in the city. The Shanghai invasion directly impacted *Eastern Miscellany*; the magazine's printing presses and offices were destroyed by Japanese air raids, thus halting production until October, when the magazine relocated.¹ In February, the Japanese, having invaded Manchuria

¹ The violence deliberately wielded against *Eastern Miscellany* and its publisher, the Commercial Press, was nothing short of traumatic. When the magazine rose from the ashes in October 1932, the magazine featured a photo spread of the burned ruins. Among the most painful losses was the destruction of the Eastern Library (*Dongfang tushuguan*), a vast repository of native and foreign literature that aided the Commercial Press in its publishing and editorial work. 260,800 Chinese and more than 80,000 foreign works perished. Many valuable and rare antique books were also lost in the conflagration (He Bingsong, 5). The total financial losses for the Press and *Eastern Miscellany* totaled, according to their own estimate, 16,330,504 yuan (9). Editor Hu Yuzhi raised a clarion call for the enduring need for intellectual discourse in a time of crisis:

in 1931, established the puppet state of Manchukuo. The novel's title aptly captured the sense of the dark abyss into which many Chinese felt the country was being steadily pushed.

However powerful realist narrative claimed to be in explaining and making digestible the tumult of history, it was certainly not the only way to do so, something borne out when we examine the surrounding context of the *Midnight* advertisement in *Eastern Miscellany*. It comes at the very end of a special New Year's supplement devoted to "Dreams of the New Year." I briefly touched upon Lu Xun's reaction to reading this supplement when discussing his essay "*Tingshuo meng*." Here I would like to talk a little more about this unique publication.² A few months before the editors put out a call to its readers to submit their answers to two questions:

- 1) What does the future China of your dreams look like? (Please provide an outline or narrative of one aspect of a future China.)
- 2) What dreams do you have in your personal life? (Of course this dream need not be one that is capable of being realized [*bu yiding shi neng shixian de* 不一定是能实现的].)

As an unnamed reporter notes in his summary article analyzing the submissions, the 142 participants who mailed back their answers exceeded the editors' modest expectations ("Xinnian" 79). Illustrating his statistics with chart graphs the reporter informs us that the majority of respondents were from Shanghai (79 people), with contributions also coming in from Nanjing, Beijing, Hangzhou and Guangzhou. Only

With the power of words to analyze and direct reality, and wage popular and social struggle, we thus herald the rebirth of our journal, as well as the rebirth of China's intellectuals. We do not believe that we will necessarily achieve our goals. But if we can make a contribution, then that contribution we shall make. (12)

² Jing Tsu discusses this issue briefly, mostly in order to discuss Lu Xun's critique of this issue in his essay *Tingshuo meng*, which I also discuss in Chapter 1 (212-215).

four respondents were women. Thirty-eight respondents were university professors, thirty-nine were writers and editors, and twelve were government officials. The reporter laments that 90% of the respondents were “middle class” and for the most part belonged to the “cultural aristocracy” (81), thus being highly unrepresentative of the vast majority of the Chinese people (regardless of the fact that probably precious few people across the population read journals such as *Eastern Miscellany*).

“Although these 244 ‘dreams,’” the reporter notes, “cannot represent the 50,000,000 ‘dreams’ (in China), they at the very least can represent the dreams of a large part of the intellectuals.”

It was in this same summary article that the reporter makes a distinction between “orthodox” dreams (those that express a genuine, personal wish of the dreamer) and “heterodox” dreams (those that are programmatic calls for social change), a distinction that Lu Xun went after with particular gusto in his essay. It seems a little paradoxical for the reporter to denounce programmatic dreams as heterodox when the call for submissions explicitly asked for dreams of a “future China” alongside those of a more “personal” nature. Moreover, the careful analysis of this collective dreamwork, replete with chart graphs divided by class, profession, geographic origin and gender seems to betray the editors’ own treatment of these submissions as a kind of specimen for scientific study, a sociological reflection of the intellectuals’ innermost wishes. The reporter thus contradicts himself: on the one hand he actively promotes dreams as the unmitigated expression of personal desires that have been otherwise blocked by the psyche’s “censors”; on the other his very methods of analysis imply the inextricable social and material basis of these dreams. Dreams are

on one hand the voicing of a wish unsullied by reality; on the other, they are a very function of that reality.

Moreover, the confused nature of the article, as well as the journal's explicit separation of "national" and "personal" dreams, touch upon a certain complexity of the dream form with which the editors were perhaps ill-equipped to grapple. The dream form implicates the presence and desire of the dreamer in a way unique among forms of representation and narration; it is a *personal* and intimate genre, one made recognizable by the individual "stamp" of its author. However, what is dreamed often exceeds the bounds of the strictly personal – the symbolic language of dreams often relies on a semiotic grammar that belongs to the culture as a whole, and addresses longings and desires not just of the dreamer, but of the entire society. Thus the dream form uniquely collapses both collective and personal desire, making what is personal and intimate also speak to the yearnings of the whole nation. That the editors decided to split their call for submission into two parts is symptomatic of how the form encourages an often uncomfortable slippage between the intimate and the social.

That so many responded to *Eastern Miscellany's* call for dreams bespeaks how desperate the national situation had become, and how keenly readers felt this crisis. Readers responded powerfully to the call for dreams because the dream form provided one of the few ways to envision their political conception of the present in face of the traumatic horrors of the current reality. Moreover, these representations of an imagined future included the seemingly palpable presence of the dreamer herself. The dream form provided what reality could not; a coherent and utopian vision of the way China ought to be. While this might be construed as desperate fantasy, it is well

worth noting that many fantasies, and the substance of much of ideology, appear as “necessary” fantasies: enabling structures of thought and desire that actively mold the way people think, feel and act personally and politically. The summary article in the supplement ends with advocacy for the necessity of dreams in order to further the cause of humanity:

We believe that dreams are the driving force of human evolution. All of human creation and discovery have, of course, come about through first relying upon “logical inference” and “planning.” But before “logical inference” and “planning” there surely must have been a dream. Doubt is the mother of discovery; dream is the mother of reality. Doubt is not in itself dangerous, only prohibiting doubt is. Not permitting dreams is the greatest danger, but only by openly proclaiming dreams can safety be most securely guaranteed. We thus uphold our belief: “Dream is the sacred right of us all!” (83)

While there is a bit of sophistic mystification involved in this passage, it is still worth appreciating a certain radical epistemological break with conventional empiricism, the professed need to envision alternative spaces both separate and yet informed by an imprisoning present. The writer conceives of dreams as prior to even “evolution” itself, suggesting the dependence of scientific thought on a seemingly numinous and enchanted source.

However, the very desperation that drove some to disavow a hopeless present and go dreaming also caused other contributors to convey deep reservations as to the very feasibility of dreaming, with some questioning aloud whether in such bleak times dreaming was indeed possible. Author Ba Jin was one of these skeptics: “In the present atmosphere, I cannot even dream up a good dream. Moreover, I cannot rely on a dream in order to deceive myself. ‘In this long winter night’ I only feel cold, I only sense hunger. I only hear the cries of people all around, and all of this only

makes me have nightmares” (4). Lao She equally had reservations: “My hope for China’s future is not great, nor do I see in my dreams see a rose-colored world. Even if I do end up dreaming, and especially if it is an auspicious one, I still am not bewitched by it. So that leaves daydreaming. I can fantasize that the heavenly kingdom is near, but if [this dream] does not solve my own hunger, then it is of even less use to your average Li or Zhang” (7).

Mao Dun’s own contribution to this collection is intriguing. Given *Midnight’s* notorious lengthiness, and the prodigious bulk of many of the other submissions (many of which had to be cut down to size, as the editors inform us), Mao Dun’s answers to the call are surprisingly, and somewhat dismissively, curt:

In regards to China’s future, I never dream; I only seek with great effort to know reality. Dreams are dangerous. In these times there are various dreamers here and there. If they haven’t now been sobered up to the point of lifelessness, then it would be difficult for them not to commit suicide. (30)

In my personal life I have two dreams, and based on reason I should very well be able to realize them, but till now I have been unable to do so; these two are 1) I hope that my nervous ailment will not get worse, and 2) I hope to get a half hour of exercise every day. (73)³

What immediately strikes the reader is just how sharply Mao Dun opposes dreams to “reality” (*xianshi* 现实), setting up a binary opposition that seems to brook no compromise. One should, as Mao Dun himself does, “know reality with great effort.” It almost seems as if the writer is compelling himself to commit to “knowing” reality,

³ “对于中国的将来，我从来不做梦想；我只在努力认识现实。梦想是危险的。在这年头儿，存着如何如何梦想的人，若非是冷静到没有气，便难免要自杀。”

“我个人生活中有两个梦想，照理是一定能够实现的，然而我至今尚未实现；这两个就是（一）我希望我的神经衰弱病不再增剧，（二）我希望每天运动半小时。”

and doing all he can to shield himself from the “dangerous” temptation of dreaming. He directly contradicts the reporter quoted earlier who argued that the danger lay in repressing dreams. Dreaming’s dangers are dire indeed, ending in both spiritual and physical demise. It is fascinating, then, that Mao Dun sees the consequences of dreaming in somatic terms – a disappointed dreamer who has fallen into sobriety (literally, coldness), and another on the verge of annihilating himself, both on the brink of oblivion. It seems that one of the major dangers of dreaming is its power to allegorize, to create a figure that stands in for reality. But Mao Dun seeks to avoid the fuzzy distraction of dreams in favor of sticking to the more genuine task of figuring out reality. Yet the force of his disavowal seemingly betrays the lingering temptation that dreams pose, a temptation that even Mao Dun falls into occasionally in his fictional work.

That Mao Dun seems to rely on a knee-jerk empiricism to broadside the importance of dreams is indeed odd, as he had, according to Cao Wansheng, transcended a strictly empirical naturalism in favor of a more fluid, fungible type of critical realism by the mid-1920s: “The realist aesthetic that united subjectivity and objectivity,” Cao writes, “comprised the theoretical nucleus of the mature period in the development of [Mao Dun’s] fundamental aesthetics” (46).⁴ Mao Dun’s unwillingness to afford any room for dreams in a conception of realism that sought to unite both empirical observation and aesthetic expression betrays a certain anxiety that his persona as a realist may be contaminated by the virus of fantasy. Mao Dun

⁴ Marston Anderson notes that Mao Dun, even when advocating a literary mode as positivistic as naturalism in the early 1920s, nevertheless related to it in a more flexible manner and warned of falling into a sterile objectivity.

certainly felt the need to uncompromisingly reject and dismiss any last vestiges of his own involvement in romanticism during the early stage of his career, and now sought to firmly project the authorial persona of an observer and critic unafraid to face reality in all its ugliness.

The appearance of the advertisement for *Midnight* at the end of a collection of dreams thus demonstrates how a sense of historical crisis can engender two different forms of response. Mao Dun's narrative seeks to illustrate, reflect and diagnose, to walk the reader step by step through the unfolding of reality. The readers' dreams, however, encourage a form of categorical transcendence, emphasizing the possibility of transformation of reality over its careful and painful narrativization and diagnosis. Their connection to reality is constituted by a form of symbolic transcoding rather than mimesis, responsive transformation rather than reflection. And yet, despite Mao Dun's insistence on how he prefers the strain and pain of sifting through reality in order to pull out its essential narrative thread out, there is something fantastic in his belief that narrative can actually encapsulate such a reality. Hayden White, discussing Fredric Jameson's thoughts on narrative, writes about the utopian impulse inherent within narrative itself:

Among the various form-giving devices available to the imagination [...] narrative enjoys a privileged position. It is privileged because it permits a representation of both synchrony and diachrony, of structural continuities and of the processes by which those continuities are dissolved and reconstituted in the kind of meaning production met with in such forms of narrative as the novel. Narrativity not only represents but justifies, by virtue of its universality, a dream of how ideal community might be achieved. Not exactly a dream, rather more of a daydream, a wish-fulfilling fantasy that, like all such fantasies, is grounded in the real conditions of the dreamer's life but goes beyond

these to the imagining of how, in spite of these conditions, things might be otherwise. (157)

Mao Dun is not so much straining to “know” a reality that proves difficult to comprehend; one might argue that he is in fact trying to conjure it up, to create a discursive totality of that reality within his narrative. In the sense that narrative, as that which gives form, fullness and breadth to experience, can be seen as an ideal “dream,” so can knowledge that realist narrative attempts to convey be seen as a form of fantasy in itself.⁵ The attempt to model the world in thought, to synthesize, distill and recreate such a world in the pages of magazines like *Dongfang zazhi* and in the critical novels advertised therein, bespeaks the fantastical labor inherent within knowledge. In this light, Mao Dun’s strident disavowal of dreams sounds more like the guilty conscience of someone who has the sense that he is indulging in daydreaming but is trying to keep it under the rug. Mao Dun hopes to be able to equate his text with history itself, but as Fredric Jameson avers, following Althusser, history does not relate to narrative in the form of an “expressive causality”: “[H]istory is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (35).

⁵ David Wang makes a similar point, arguing for a relationship between writing and utopia: “Writing, in its ideal state, provides an ideal realm in which social problems are reflected and ideological complexities are articulated. Whatever its subjects are, writing in itself projects a utopian wish, mediating human conflicts at different levels and letting truth speak on its own terms” (*Fictional Realism* 101). If all writing, and consequently, all narrative, can be seen as an articulation of a “utopian wish” on a formal level, then what do we make of the bifurcation between a self-consciously realist narrative and its dream diversions? I hope to take up this formal problem later in this essay.

In a subtler sense, then, the impulse to narrativize and historicize, and the impulse to dream are not such different gestures at all. While dreaming involves a more self-conscious form of transcoding, one that openly invites the task of hermeneutic deliberation and decipherment, narrative on the other hand attempts to create the illusion of signifiatory immediacy; “the real” is thus a function of the contraction of the temporal and figural gap between narrative sign and historic referent.

Nevertheless, that gap, no matter how glossed over, remains, and the question persists whether there are points in the realist narrative where such a gap breaks open, and threatens the illusion of semiotic immediacy that is the cornerstone of the realist text.

Here I want to return to the thematics of the body and its relation to narrative. Revisiting Mao Dun's contribution to *Eastern Miscellany*, in his dream about his personal life, he speaks in explicit terms about the body, hoping to cure his nervous breakdown and find physical recuperation. Just like his first dream, he begins with a disavowal, saying that his personal dreams are not really dreams, as he should “very well be able to realize them (the verb “to realize” *shixian* 实现, is simply a reversal of the characters for the word “reality” *xianshi* 现实).” Realizable or not, his “dreams” involve a transfiguration of the body, namely, his own. Whereas “dreaming” of China’s future can only lead to the body’s annihilation, his own “personal” dream is about the rehabilitation of a body that already seems broken. Mao Dun’s body is one that has been tortured by a reality and history that he is straining to comprehend.⁶ The body exists wedged tightly between the proverbial rock and hard place of dreams and

⁶ David Wang, in his recounting of Mao Dun’s struggles with Communist leadership and the Sun Society, as well as his torturous relationships with his wife Kong Dezhi and mistress Qin Dejun, points to more biographical reasons for Mao Dun’s pain. See *The Monster that is History*.

reality. If narrative, as Hayden White suggests, is an attempt to create utopian “structural continuities” in forms that do not otherwise exist in reality, then in what ways does it also promise the rehabilitation of the body’s fullness and integrity? I am suggesting that we can interpret Mao Dun’s attempt to create narrative as a way to reconstitute the body, including his “own,” and by symbolic extension and necessity, that of the collective as well. Jameson argues that a proper “social hermeneutic” will mediate between both the figure of the body and that of the social community:

A social hermeneutic [...] must necessarily restore a perspective in which the imagery of libidinal revolution and of bodily transfiguration once again becomes a figure for the perfected community. The unity of the body must once again prefigure the renewed organic identity of associative or collective life [...] Only the community, indeed, can dramatize that self-sufficient intelligible unity (or “structure”) of which the individual body, like the individual “subject,” is a decentered “effect,” and to which the individual organism, caught in the ceaseless chain of the generations and the species [...] cannot [...] lay claim. (74)

Mao Dun’s realist narratives are thus as much attempts in envisioning political utopia in formal terms as they are analyses of the historic crises he and his readers faced in content. The thematics of the recuperated body were also not lost on those who put together the special issue of *Eastern Miscellany*. Author and cartoonist Feng Zikai’s special set of illustrations proves quite intriguing. In one, labeled “The Mother’s Dream,” a woman is blowing into a straw directly inserted in a boy’s navel, inflating the child until he outgrows his mother. Beside the boy-giant are a top hat and blazer, apparently his soon-to-be costume as he prematurely enters the world of adults. In “The Teacher’s Dream,” a doctor sticks a syringe into a young teacher’s arm. The boxes containing the vials tell us the contents of the injections: “Third-year History,”

“Third-year Mathematics,” “Third-year Party Platform,” etc. The other pictures project even more bizarre bodily phantasmagorias. In “The Rickshaw Driver’s Dream,” we see a driver running with four legs, presumably in order to increase his speed.⁷ In “The Writer’s Dream,” a would-be writer with three faces, each dragging on a cigarette, and three pairs of arms, trebles his literary production. Feng Zikai is not content to settle for images of merely healthy bodies; he stretches farther and produces “superbodies,” capable of superhuman abilities. It is interesting to note that nothing in these visual images, save for their fantastic content, signifies that what we are seeing is a dream. There is no oneiric frame, no “bubble” emanating from a dreamer’s head. The captions lying to the side within the frame of each image tell us what kind of dream it is. However, I would argue that, in addition to these visions of bionic bodies, the black edge that surrounds each image also suggests not only the unity of the form of the dream, but of the body that is redeemed in each fantasy. The line is, for the most part, only broken by the artist’s signature, floating in its own bubble, as if suggesting the cleavage between the artist’s own body and the body which is imagined. Each dream thus bears the brand of the originary dreamer, the artist, within its very borders.

Having outlined the connections between dream, the body, and narrative, I now turn to the implications of Mao Dun’s strong disavowal of dream and fantasy in his own realist practice. For someone who was so insistent in dismissing the value of dreams, Mao Dun uses the dream trope quite often in his fictional work. How do the

⁷ Five years later, Lao She will publish his “Camel Xiangzi,” where the eponymous, hardscrabble rickshaw driving protagonist’s body fails him, broken by overwork and sexual disease. Feng Zikai’s illustration seems to suggest what might have happened if Lao She’s novel was a magical fantasy rather than a realist exposé.

presence of these diegetic dreams complicate the coherence of the realist text? How can we see these dreams as engaging the libidinal and utopian desires the realist narrative is trying to suppress or divert? In what ways can we read these dreams as hysterical symptoms of the realist mode itself?

Hysterical realism

In early 1928 Mao Dun published a short essay in the journal *Wenxue zhoubao* (Literature Weekly) titled “Dreaming During a Hard Frost” (*Yan shuang xia de meng* 严霜下的梦). In this piece he discusses the nature of dreams, and then goes on to describe one of his own. In his memoirs, written fifty years later, Mao Dun insisted that the impetus for writing the piece was to express his “confusion, incomprehension and disapproval” of what he called “blind action-ism” (盲动主义), or what he felt to be reckless revolution-mongering by all-too-earnest rebels unchastened by the failures of left wing revolutions of the 1920s (*Wo zouguo* 1: 396). Such a concretely allegorical reading of his own dream can very well be a retroactive, “dialectical materialist” revision, and even while valid does not preclude other ways of reading the text. Mao Dun, in his recollection, argues that he used “symbolist techniques” to express his opprobrium for unthinking political action (*Wo zouguo* 1: 396).

Mao Dun begins his essay by noting that dreams are the province of childhood, and nostalgically describes how children burrow themselves in “old silk” blankets

and cross the “rainbow bridge” to the “dream kingdom.”⁸ Maturity, however, buries this world of carefree dreaming: “For adults, night is the rest after a hard day’s labor; when arms and legs have become sore, and spirits are numbed, [we] sink on our pillows and immediately lose consciousness” (*Xuanji* 3: 8). Adults are roused “mechanically” by the daylight and go about their dreary day. Dreams rarely happen, and if they do, they are merely the “interest” earned after days of toil, and “only serve to increase a feeling of trepidation afterwards, just like a good tragedy” (8).⁹ Pleasant dreams are nothing but “malicious children from the valley of sleep who are mocking the disappointment of your real (*xianshi* 现实) life” (8). The author thus sets up a bifurcated situation where waking, real, adult life is ceaseless toil, suffering and disenchantment, while dreams are the infantile remnants of a past that merely serve as an ironic figure to highlight the very drudgery of life itself. To be an adult is to bear a body battered by the vicissitudes of life, its wounds made more painful by the salt of dreams. Miffed by this oneiric mockery, the author steadfastly refuses to give in to their temptations: “With my razor-sharp rationality, I never allow myself to fall into that realm of the mystery upon mysteries, and allow the caresses of such fantasies to comfort the scars of reality” (9). Dreams are a hallucinogenic palliative to the “scars” of real life, a puerile intoxication that can only serve to make the pathology of reality all the more serious.

⁸ Freud argues that dreams derive fundamentally from childhood wishes and expresses the desire to bring back childhood to the world of quotidian reality: “For the wish which creates the dream always springs from the period of childhood; and it is continually trying to summon childhood back into reality and to correct the present day by the measure of childhood” (*Dora* 63).

⁹ That Mao Dun uses an economic metaphor to describe dreams resonates somewhat with his attempt to create an analogy between the logic of financial speculation and the trajectory of narrative desire in *Midnight*.

Nevertheless, the author goes on to describe one of his dreams. It opens with a kind of youthful, militant utopia, as a group of young revolutionaries, their faces radiating “like many little suns” speak to each other in a mishmash of various dialects, which the dreamer uncannily is able to understand. “I saw severity, I saw beauty, I saw fervor,” he recounts. “I saw all the yearnings of the future crystallize and become reality (*xianshi* 现实)” (9). As the dream reaches its utopian peak, the imagery quickly becomes even more bizarre, as the dreamer and his fellow revolutionaries find themselves regurgitating their hearts, which in turn float about in the air and coalesce into a blood red banner featuring barely legible revolutionary slogans. The dream descends into a cascade of blood-soaked images, and the final sequence features the dreamer gazing rapturously at a “valkyrie” singing the melody of the “Sirens.” Other people are gathering around, and the dreamer wonders if everyone is preparing for a wedding or a funeral. As one figure says, “Tomorrow, we either die or go dancing!” The dreamer finds himself crying, wanting to join in the dance, and in a zenith of emotion he is suddenly overcome by the smell of putrefying flesh, and hears a “girl’s cry of hysteria” (11). Wolves suddenly surround the girl and set about devouring her.

The dreamer wakes up in a terror and realizes that it was all a nightmare:

Ah, it was also a dream! A malicious, mocking dream! The cold light more tenaciously broke through the vent underneath the window, and like a mocking laugh landed on my face; the frost must have been even thicker, but when would the light of day finally come? When will the gentle fingers of Aurora chase away the rule of this cruel nightmare?
(13)

This dream is intriguing in contrast to his later remarks about dreaming. What makes it so terrifying is not its removal from reality, its wanton fantasy, but the fact that it cuts far too close to a dispiriting truth about the confusion, chaos and overall failure of revolution. The young men do not know if they are going to dance or die the next day. The sensuous, melodic “Valkyrie,” the “prize” and supposed object of a certain allegorical “wedding,” ends up being torn apart by wolves. If the narrator refuses the cloying and illusory balm of dreams over the scars of reality, he also betrays a certain affirmation of dreams’ capacity to express an ironic and critical vantage point. By cruelly “mocking” the dreamer, making him sense the agony of his real existence in relation to an illusory fantasy, the dream ends up leading the sleeper to a deeper, if more painful, cognizance of his waking reality.

But what ironically makes the dream here so unpalatable to the narrator, is not so much the fact that it is removed from “reality,” but that the dream has already been tainted, infiltrated, by the poison of such “reality”. Only for a second does the dream offer a vision of utopia before it is quickly subsumed by fire, blood and carnage. The mesmerizing sound of the Siren almost instantly becomes a cry of hysteria. While women in various stages of emotional and otherwise hysteric tumult are a common theme in Mao Dun’s work, I want to argue, however, that hysteria should not be read as merely belonging to a certain type of feminine representation. The truly hysterical body, I will argue in Mao Dun's later fiction, is the realist mode itself, ultimately unable to contain its utopian desire by means of a diegetic reality principle.¹⁰ The

¹⁰ My use of Freud’s term is of course, indebted to the way Jameson uses it in his discussion of realism and the steady receding of romantic modes in 19th century European literature (134).

author's repeated insistence on an authentic, unvarnished, reality is made more apparent by the equally frenetic and frantic disavowal of dreams that we see here and in other instances of Mao Dun's writing. In his persistent disavowal of dreaming, Mao Dun seems close to committing a literary form of Freudian "negation"; his denial of the value of dreams hints at a veiled admission of a desire and alternative libidinous reality that lurks and hides in the very heart of his outwardly dispassionate and empirical realist project. While "Dreaming Under a Hard Frost" is a sort of symbolic personal fantasy rather than realist narrative, it nevertheless foregrounds important themes of dreaming, the body and hysteria that inform the realist texts I will soon examine. In fact, I show in my later discussion how Mao Dun's fiction conjures a mutually illuminating trio of hysterical bodies: heroine, narrative, and author, each of which are central to his realist project.

Bursting the Bubble: *Disillusionment* (1930)

Mao Dun's 1930 trilogy, *Eclipse*, was written shortly after participating in the 1926-1928 revolution, or Northern Expedition, during which the Kuomintang fought warlord factions and brought the nation closer towards unification. In 1927, the Kuomintang, led by an increasingly conservative Chiang Kai-shek, turned against its own members who were suspected of being Communists, culminating in the infamous April 12 Shanghai massacre, when thousands of Communists were purged from the KMT, rounded up and executed. Mao Dun wrote his trilogy in part as a reaction to the euphoria and profound disappointment felt by radical youth involved in these events, including himself, a participant in the 1926-1928 revolution. The first

novella, *Disillusionment*, centers on the tumultuous emotional life of the main heroine Jing (“quiet,” or “tranquility”), a young intellectual. Despite her aspiration to serenity and her outward appearance of quiet (thus earning her the nickname of “stone maiden” [*Quanji* 1: 37]), Jing’s psychic life is anything but tranquil.¹¹ Along with her childhood friend Hui, Jing must wade through a series of fantasies, deceptions and disappointments as they pursue happiness, romantic attachments and a sense of meaning in their lives. “Disillusionment” aspires to a kind of feminine *bildungsroman*, and Marston Anderson argues that Mao Dun sought (but in the end failed) to productively use the “Marxist-Hegelian” notion of the dialectic in order to convey a narrative trajectory in which contradictions are transcended (131). In this sense, “disillusionment” suggests a kind of progress, a maturation and learning process fueled by the power of negation and disavowal.¹²

As such, fantasies, dreams, daydreams, rumors and wishes abound in this novella, seemingly just waiting to be deflated one after another. The word “dream” is used throughout the work in a variety of ways, both as a concrete motif (as in real dreams)

¹¹ This is in slight contrast to Marston Anderson’s claim that Jing’s name identifies her with “innocence,” whereas the name of her friend, Hui (wisdom), associates her with “experience” (132). Anderson seems to suggest that Jing’s disquiet only begins to display itself after she has been seduced and hoodwinked by the lothario Baosu; I would, however, stress that the “quiet” her name suggests is more of an ironic signifier of her inability, except in rare, fleeting moments, to reach such an emotional state. Her outward passivity seems only to mask the turmoil of her emotions, despite her lack of “adult” experience. For example, in Chapter 6, after having spent a whole morning consumed with an anger that she cannot even explain, Jing, driven by an inner despair to random, perhaps flippant, thoughts of suicide, is reduced to “mechanically repeating the word ‘destruction’” as tears fall through her fingers that are covering her face. Having achieved a measure of catharsis, “Jing’s (静) expression now seemed to have called down (*pingjing* 平静) a bit...” (1: 38). In this sense, Jing’s “tranquility” can only be understood as an occasional calmed endpoint and conceptual other of a far more frequent process of existential and sexual angst.

¹² Anderson identifies “demystification” as one of the key functions of realist fiction: “the realist plot invariably dramatizes the disappointment of conventional pretensions, desires, or ideals” (11). As I plan to argue, realism’s work of “demystification” also threatens to reveal the presence of its own mystifying ideology, imbued with its own desire.

and as a metaphor. Jing, the narrator suggests, is in the beginning “a girl who was a little behind in conjuring fantasies” in comparison to other ladies, one who “had never dreamed of the filth and dangers of humanity” (1: 10). However, at the end of the novella, she concludes that her seemingly idyllic romance with soldier of fortune Qiang Weili is “one great dream” (1: 99). The appearance of so many dreams and fantasies, then, is to provide a useful foil in order to illustrate the edifying process of disillusionment and realization. The more daydreams and fantasies a hero falls into, the more opportunity for enlightenment. As Anderson notes, “Jing's hopes are inevitably dashed by the mechanisms of the plot, but just as inevitably her disappointments generate new hopes” (136). In keeping with the conventions of the realist mode to which Mao Dun was trying so tenaciously to adhere, dreams and fantasies act as a formal apparatus of motivated functions through which the realist narrative thread can wind itself. Ideally, the end result of this process would be a heroine who is both free from all illusion and fantasy, and also committed to (and content with) the work of social progress.

It is not difficult, however, to take a deconstructive turn here; to say that reality can be apprehended by demystifying dreams and fantasies is not too far from saying that such dreams and fantasies are necessary for reality to be known in the first place, that they are the necessary “support” of such reality.¹³ This reminds us a little of that

¹³ See Žižek's discussion of “fantasy as a support of reality” (*Sublime Object* 49). He extends his discussion further to touch upon the “ideological dream,” rejecting arguments of ideology as merely false consciousness but as that ideological fantasy which structures and inheres within our everyday reality. “The only way to break the power of our ideological dream is to confront the Real of our desire which announces itself in this dream” (48). Thus the counterfoil to ideology is not a quotidian reality that lurks beneath false consciousness, but the illumination of the very desire that forms the ideology itself.

declaration in *Eastern Miscellany* that “dreams are the mother of reality.” If “unreality” is structurally necessary in the narration of reality, then perhaps reality proves to be a far more complex, fickle thing than one had thought. The realist narrative’s reliance on illusion entails a great faith in the power of the dialectic or whatever mechanism of disillusionment; should it fail, not only has enlightenment not been attained, but one is left with a sad trail of deflated dreams.¹⁴

In suggesting the notion of dream “carcasses” littering the realist narrative, I think it is important to again take into stock the notion of narrative materiality. Mao Dun attempts to create a dialectic movement on the part of the readers through which, by following the travails of the protagonist, they transition through dream to reality. Dreams, then, are a kind of “skillful means” that bring the reader to a proper end: enlightenment. Like Wittgenstein’s ladder, they are to be retired after use. We are to read these narratives merely diachronically, to be pulled by the movement of diegetic time, to realize our illusive mistake, and then to forget. But if we also take into account a “synchronic,” spatial view of Mao Dun’s narrative, these dreams do not disappear from the text -- they remain, not as mere details, but in the case of *Disillusionment*, as huge, inexorable chunks of the text. Mao Dun’s attempt to radically de-substantialize the content of his dreams in order to bolster the ontological weight of the reality he describes seems forlorn, if only because both literary dreams and reality share the same semiotic substance. I argue that this confusion causes a

¹⁴ Anderson notes that what attempted to be a dialectic movement reverted into a more traditional notion of “dyadic oppositions” (something that reminds us of Andrew Plak’s famous “bipolar complementarities”). However, even this fails to bring either the characters or the reader any peace of mind: “But the recurring alternation between binary poles in ‘Disillusionment’ does not provide the philosophical consolation of the yin-yang dualism; instead one discovers in the characters’ psychological response to the contradictions a distinctly modern sense of alienation and anxiety” (136).

deep anxiety on the part of the text, as it is forced to admit an uncomfortable identification with dream and fantasy. The text reacts by proclaiming loudly what is “real,” and what is merely “dream,” as if hoping that the performative rhetorical power of naming will keep the spheres separate. Moreover, by allowing the presence of these dreams, even if in a debased status vis-à-vis the realist text proper, the narrative risks undoing and laying bare the ideological underpinnings of the reality the text narrates. To announce the finite, contrived parameters of the dream is also to invite attention towards the finitude of the entire text, if only because the parameters of the dream constitute part of the text’s edges as well. The binary is not so much one between a fictitious dream and a triumphant reality as it is between a deflated dream and a reality that is revealed to have been a dream as well.

Here it is instructive to point to the character of Baosu, a rake and, as Jing later discovers, a right-wing spy, who manages to seduce both Hui and Jing in quick succession. He frequently divulges his amorous adventures to his friend Li Ke, who is nicknamed “Rational Man” by his college friends. Every time he plays audience to one of Baosu’s new exploits he has the same response: “He always closed his eyes and shook his head, as if mocking or not giving a care, and said, ‘I’ve listened to yet another novel (*xiaoshuo* 小说) being recited” (1: 18). It is only much later that Jing finds out Baosu’s true identity as a spy, and this discovery adds a far more sinister side to Baosu’s persona as a deceptive storyteller. Li Ke’s admonition seems to confirm his status as a “rational” person, but the fact that even he is left unawares of Baosu’s true identity proves that he has been tricked on a much deeper, and more

compromising, level (Baosu's job, apparently, is to deliver to the authorities the names of suspected revolutionary elements among the student body). His ability to seduce both Hui and Jing is analogous to his ability to weave "novels," as if hinting at the possible dangers of fiction. However, even "uncovering" the plot, so to speak, does not necessarily mean that one has successfully escaped the novel's web.

This interplay between novel and reality becomes more apparent in another scene where Jing, Hui and Baosu are in a theater watching a cinematic adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. During the intermission the three launch into a discussion of the story's themes. Hui argues that all crime is a product of social environment. Baosu proclaims his "sympathy" with criminals, arguing that everyone is thus capable of murder. Jing rebuts both of these rationalizations by asking whether the word "crime" has a meaning if it can be explained away. She challenges them both by asking why Raskol'nikov would go to such lengths to rationalize his murder of the old pawnbroker and why he would feel the pangs of his conscience afterwards if his crime were simply a function of his circumstances.¹⁵ Baosu, flustered, comes up with this reply: "Uh... but, but this is where Dostoevsky's thought is lacking, therefore he was just a writer (*wenxuejia* 文学家), not a revolutionary!" (1: 22). Hui

¹⁵ Chen Yu-shih argues that the characters' discussion of Raskol'nikov's crime is an allegory for the political and moral compromise of the alliance between the CCP and KMT in the Northern Expedition: Both [Jing] and Hui represent the CCP. The CCP during the Great Revolution years was by no means an undivided whole. Inner-party politics and factional struggles were constant. In 1926, the critical issue was the CCP-KMT alliance, and there the Party had always been split. The group that Hui represents saw it simply as an inevitable evil that could be rationalized as Raskolnikov rationalized his killing of the two old women in *Crime and Punishment*: it was the act of a superman done with the amoral conviction that the merit of the goal takes precedence over all conventional considerations of right and wrong. (64)

backs up Baosu's assertion: "Little sister Jing, again you're coming off like a bookworm. Who cares what the author originally thought? We have our own brains, our own ideas, if we rely on our observation, then what seems to be just is [...]" (1: 22). Hui accuses Jing of being a "bookworm," or more literally, a *shudaizi* (书呆子), completely mesmerized to the point of lifelessness because of reading. That *Crime and Punishment* should be unmasked as "merely" literature by Baosu, himself a weaver of tales, highlights the paradox of disillusionment itself. It seems as if disillusionment only occurs within the bosom of a far more encompassing illusion, a fantastic ground that seems transparent. These scenes seem symptomatic of the text's meta-narrative reflection on its own fictionality, and cast doubt as to whether complete disillusionment is ever really possible, if we burst one fantastic bubble only to find ourselves enveloped in an ever greater one and so on. The text thus surreptitiously gestures towards its own making. However, because of the narrative's need to perform a kind of reality, the confession of its "dirty secret" must always be kept under the covers, hidden from plain view.¹⁶

In this vein, the dreams and fantasies that act as the negative examples of the realist narrative of disillusionment can be seen against the grain not merely as straw men to be scrutinized and then cast off, but evocative of a certain kind of narrative insight in their own right. The gesture of disavowal that we see so frequently in Mao Dun's work is the necessary framing device that legitimizes his dreams' presence within his fiction. These dreams, then, are not merely empty fantasies, but represent,

¹⁶ As David Wang succinctly puts it, "[Mao Dun's] claim to transcribe history faithfully contradicts both the truth claims of official historiography on the one hand and, ironically, the inherent illusoriness of fictional writing itself on the other" (*Fictional Realism* 26).

either directly or allegorically, narrative possibilities. As a form of fictional practice, realist narrative aims to describe faithfully an objective reality that exists, both in its material and psychological substance. However, this verisimilitude is at best illusory; as Jameson notes, history cannot be actually represented but can only make its presence known as an “absent cause.” But running perpendicular to this descriptive axis is the discursively oriented line of narrative. In a realist text, this line would ideally conform to the grander, illusory, narrative of History itself.¹⁷ Yet fictional narrative is not merely a one-to-one correspondence with the movement of History – key to the story’s survival is the fictional text’s fulfillment of a narrative desire that may transcend political or empirical demands and constraints. The fictional narrative may seek to “mimic” the historical narrative, but it always remains fundamentally independent of it. Moreover, it might help us to think of the “narrative line”¹⁸ not as a complete, teleologically oriented thread, with a clear beginning and end, that structures the text, but instead as an “end-result,” a conceptual composite of a plotline

¹⁷ J. Hillis Miller emphasizes that realist verisimilitude is itself a distancing between narrative and the world at the same time it attempts an identification between the two: “Mimesis in a ‘realistic’ novel is a detour from the real world that mirrors that world and in one way or another, in the cultural or psychic economy of production and consumption, leads the reader back to it” (21).

¹⁸ Miller tries to unravel the concept of the “narrative line”:

The term narrative line, for example, is a catachresis. It is the violent, forced, or abusive importation of a term from another realm to name something which has no proper name. The relationship of meaning among all these areas of terminology is not from sign to thing but a displacement from one sign to another sign that in its turn draws its meaning from another figurative sign, in a constant displacement. The name for this displacement is allegory. Storytelling, usually thought of as the putting into language of someone’s experience of life, is in its writing or reading a hiatus in that experience. Narrative is the allegorizing along a temporal line of this perpetual displacement from immediacy. Allegory in this sense, however, expresses the impossibility of expressing unequivocally, and so dominating, what is meant by experience or by writing. (21)

I think Miller’s comments are helpful in trying to conceive of narrative as not the “writing down” of real experience, but the continual sequence of transference from figure to figure, how it generates its power not so much from the world it reflects but by the very impulse of the sign to signify, its *allegorical* drive.

that the text suggests and which the reader aims to decipher. We might think of narrative as a sequence of diegetic moves within the background of many other possible moves. What we then observe in Mao Dun's fiction is not so much a single monolithic narrative, but as one dominant, realist-oriented narrative that is shadowed by the traces of other narrative possibilities and desires. These moves left untaken, the diegetic opportunity cost, may be in the same register as the dominant narrative, or may fly off toward more fantastic worlds. In a realist text these "impermissible" storylines are often legitimized, as well as neutered, by encapsulating them within the dream form. These alternative narratives then are seen as merely fantastic, merely impermanent, evaporating under the bright sun of realist narrative, a negative example. However, reading against the grain of conventional realist epistemology, we can also see these dreamscapes as powerful narratives in their own right, alternative plotlines that hint at hidden desires (narrative, libidinal and political) from which the narrative proper must demur. What results is a complex narrative structure holding both conscious and unconscious modalities, the two often in conflict with each other. The presence of dreams is symptomatic of a fundamental instability within the text itself. The dreams reveal textual desires that must otherwise be replaced and displaced from the rest of the text.

Jameson discusses Freud's argument that the artistic work is a form of private wish fulfillment on the part of the creator that must then be stripped of its personal content and motivation in order to become an aesthetic work that can be universally appreciated (174-5). Extending by analogy Freud's establishment of two levels inhering within the artistic work, its personal wish fulfillment and its subsequent

polishing into a universal aesthetic form, Jameson argues that the realist text is likewise comprised of two “levels,” the Imaginary, or the structuring fantasies with which the author grapples, and the Symbolic, or resulting realist narrative the author finally produces, a narrative that refuses or makes difficult the simple Utopian promises of the former “daydream”:

[the Symbolic text/realist text] is not to be satisfied by the easy solutions of an ‘unrealistic’ omnipotence or the immediacy of a gratification [...] but [...] seeks to endow itself with the utmost representable density and to posit the most elaborate systematic difficulties and obstacles, in order the more surely to overcome them, just as a philosopher imagines in advance the objections his triumphant argumentation will be summoned up to confute. (183)

For Jameson, then, the “Imaginary” fantasy that motivates the realist narrative acts as a sort of prize and challenge, a desire whose fulfillment is made all the more sweeter by the victory of the realist text in refusing “easy solutions” and painstakingly showing how Utopia can be achieved by confronting, not ignoring, History. In reading Mao Dun’s fiction, however, I want to look at how dreams and the desire they embody, while spurring on the narrative line in the first place, nevertheless refuse to be totally subsumed and sublated by a “triumphant” realism. Mao Dun’s effort to fully efface his narrative’s daydreams does not succeed; what results is a text that seems to weave around the edge of the “Imaginary” and “Symbolic” dimensions of his fiction.

In *Disillusionment*, dreaming is associated, with few exceptions, with the heroine, Jing. The schizoid nature of the narrative is evoked through its focalization of the often turbulent flux of Jing’s emotions and physical state. The sprawling nature of the

plot, including its geographic excursions through Shanghai, Hankou and Jiujiang, is suggestively analogous with Jing's own varied emotional, psychological and physical terrain. When Baosu succeeds in his seduction, Jing "swoons" (Anderson, 133) and loses consciousness. When she awakens, Baosu tells her that she had lost consciousness; still trying to comprehend what has happened to her, she buries her face into her pillow (1: 45). The next day, while assessing the loss of her virginity, she tells herself that the events of the last night were "just like a good dream." In her post-coital languor, images of her rural hometown "appeared floating in front of her tired eyes". A beautiful pastoral scene unfolds in front of her, including cows and lush green rice-paddies. The splish-splash of the waterwheel turning in the wind and the intermittent notes of a folk song being sung far away can be heard. Despite her reservations about her home, it "in the end is a lovable hometown" (1: 47). Soon after, "a fantasy unfolds," whereupon Jing feels herself physically transported both back to her hometown and back in time. She is at home, reading a "newly published magazine" outside her front door. Her mother and Baosu soon come out of the door. The mother wears a light smile of contentment, and Jing responds in kind. However, before the dream is allowed to continue, "reality immediately pulled apart the brocade curtain of fantasy, and once again snatched away its sacrificial victim" (1: 47). As the narrator instructively informs us, "fantasy and all sorts of stimulants are one and same. It gives you a momentary anaesthesia, but when it passes you must compensate for it many times over" (1: 48). Immediately after, Jing discovers Baosu's true identity as a spy and realize how much of a pipe dream her recent fantasy has been.

I want to linger a little longer over Jing's reverie before "reality" so self-consciously cuts in. On the one hand it is a nostalgic pastoral scene. Utopian desire moves backwards, rather than forward, forming a phantasmatic image of the past where woman and nature exist in harmony, untouched by the chaos of modern time. Childhood, as it were, returns to the surface. Here, for once, things seem truly quiet, at peace, to the point that it actually irritates Jing: "She furthermore was annoyed by the backwardness of her hometown and its stasis (*jingzhi* 静止)" (1: 47). It is when she enters more deeply into this reverie that we find her reading the "current" magazine of the day. There is an interesting juxtaposition between the timeless, somewhat backward countryside, beautiful yet ignorant, and her magazine, hot off the press, so to speak. It is a curious, wishful admixture; a sensuous, lush, timeless landscape surrounding a modern girl pursuing knowledge, for her own edification and the betterment of the nation. It is a scene that involves both a physical escape from the frenzy of the city and yet an exaltation of intellectual activity. The temporalities of both the pastoral and the modern seem to find, if not a synthesis, then a kind of comfortable co-habitation. There seems to be a reconciliation of contradictions between the countryside and the city, between feeling and knowledge, and between traditional mother and modern daughter sharing a smile together. The appearance of Baosu adds an element of erotic fulfillment that glosses this utopian tableau with a romantic patina. Jing's belated carnal experience is what generates this fantasy image in the first place, and Baosu's presence in her fantasy lends it a sexual charge, one that fuses together the various and sometimes contradictory elements of the "brocade curtain." However, Baosu does not merely represent sexuality. As a replacement for a

long-missing male presence (Jing's father died long ago), his integration into the family suggests a form of reunion. Although the reader knows that Baosu is a scoundrel long before Jing herself discovers it, what Jing assumes Baosu to be (interestingly, his name can be translated roughly as "upholding purity") is as important as who he "really" is. Her fantasy is a projection of her own desire. If there is something that seems to expose a subtle crack in the veneer, a curious "punctum" in the canvas, it is the presence of the dog Xiaohua who runs around Jing's mother as if "on guard." The narrator informs us that Xiaohua is the son of their old female dog A Jin. While wagging his tale and circling Jing's mother, he peers into her eyes "as if saying: 'I've already understood!'" (1: 47) On the one hand we can read the presence of Xiaohua as somehow mirroring the appearance of a new son in the family. However, the fact that he is guarding Jing's mother suggests that he is guarding her *from* something, perhaps foreshadowing Jing's discovery of Baosu's nefarious identity. Moreover, what is it that the dog "understands"? The dog's ability to understand signifies a certain elevation in his species and his true integration into a human family. However, the dog may also be suggesting that he "understands" what is really going on with Baosu, and thus also appears as a portent of uncertainty and anxiety.

But there is a sort of overkill in the way both narrator and plot collude to destroy Jing's dream. Not only does the narrator caution the reader about the intoxicating nature of dreams, but by fortuitous coincidence, Jing quickly discovers that Baosu has been snitching on fellow students to the government as well as maintaining an affair with yet another student. Jing finds her romantic rival's picture in a book by the

anarchist Kropotkin that Baosu has left by mistake in her room. Included is a letter in which the girl professes her absolute love for Baosu. Examining the picture and date, Jing finds out that the girl sent the photo at the precise moment Baosu was attempting his last and final wooing of Hui. She imagines how much like herself this third girl is: “Right at that time [when Baosu was pursuing Hui] this pitiful girl was busying herself with beautiful, satisfying, honeysweet dreams!” (1: 49). She realizes that her own dream is not unique, but shared with other girls duped by Baosu. This “revelation” seems a bit rushed, as if the realist narrative is hurrying a little too fast to disavow its own indulgence in fantasy.¹⁹ Jing is made to compensate heavily for her mistake; she falls gravely ill with scarlet fever and rushes herself to a hospital, where she stays in convalescence for a number of weeks. Jing the “dreamer” must ultimately pay the price and act as sacrificial victim and scapegoat for the narrative’s own indulgence in desire; her penance is the deferred punishment the realist narrative seems to spare itself.

In a span of less than twenty-four hours, Jing veers from sexual excitement, post-coital satisfaction and reverie, to disillusionment and complete physical breakdown. If she proves to be the antithesis of what her name suggests, then the narrative responds in kind with its own manic leaps. The speed with which the realist narrative charges against its own fantasies leads to a kind of diegetic paralysis, and the story finds itself marooned in hospital. Reality principle and utopian wish violently clash, leading to

¹⁹ Chen Yu-shih, in her monograph on Mao Dun’s early fictional work, has a far more negative evaluation of the author’s narrative skills: “I have never felt that any one of his novels is particularly well-written. Quite the contrary, I have always felt that his novels and stories, especially the early ones, do not hang together well: there are too many desultory episodes in them, too much unexplained violence, and too many eccentric characters encountering mystifying fates” (3). Given her obvious displeasure with the text, it is amazing that she was able to sustain such a long study.

physical and narrative incapacitation. As if by another strange and rather unbelievable coincidence, two of Jing's female classmates find themselves in the exact same hospital for reasons that remain unknown, suggesting that all the women characters are breaking down one way or another. Their coterie of school friends coalesce in the hospital, and it is here that the main characters among them decide to join the Second Northern Expedition. The narrative, having undergone its own kind of recuperation and now regaining a sense of direction, transports the reader forthwith to Hankou.

The second major "dream" scene is at the end of the novella, when Jing, after a number of failed attempts at finding meaningful work in Hankou, becomes a nurse in the military hospital. There she meets the swashbuckling Qiang Meng, also known by his courtesy name, Qiang Weili. Anderson takes note of the augustly martial connotations of Qiang's names: "[Qiang Meng's 强猛] name means something like 'strength and ferocity' and [his] style, Weili 唯力 means 'by force alone'" (134). Of course, his various appellations also carry a hint of a primal, phallic virtuosity as well, one that both complements Jing's intellectual gifts as well as her own hidden sexual desire. He is intoxicated by the thrill of warfare and is a devotee of the anarchic, apocalyptic doctrines of Futurism. As Jing nurses him back to health, a romance ensues. Their passion reaches its peak with yet another geographic displacement and, appropriately, another shift in Jing's state of mind, as they saunter off to Guling and Jiujiang for an "ecstatic week" (1: 93) of frolicking in a wondrous natural setting. News from Hankou is intermittent at best, and "those who like being active busied themselves with hiking in the mountains, while those who did not just slept" (1: 88).

While the two lovers are themselves hikers, a few lines down the text tell us that “Miss Jing for the first time tasted a life as sweet as a dream.” Jing seems to be undergoing movement both physically and emotionally, her legs taking her to high peaks, her mind seemingly traversing a dream world. She sighs to herself (via the narrator’s free indirect discourse), “now, the dream life, it has finally arrived.” At one point, shielding themselves from a rainstorm, the two find shelter underneath a rock. As she lays her wet body against Qiang’s equally wet chest, she repeatedly sighs, “Weili! Oh, Weili!” (1: 92). Given the literal meaning of his courtesy name (“By force alone! Oh, by force alone!”), her cries sound an awful lot like orgasmic paroxysms. That they are the last words of the chapter gives them an embarrassingly sentimental ring.

The “dream” ends when Qiang is called back to service, and Jing must fight her bitter disappointment. Although Qiang has a mercenary tendency, this particular battle is uniquely urgent as his hometown is being attacked by enemy troops. Jing goes through another cascade of emotions, but in the end is able to accept the separation and learns to cherish her romantic interlude:

She loved him too much, and deep down in her heart she thanked him for giving her an unforgettable time; although they were almost over, Jing still treasured this final scene of happiness, and was unwilling to completely tear apart her own fantasy. But she was also unwilling to cause Qiang to have lingering regrets. (1: 96)

When Qiang finally does leave, she falls into her bed and sighs to her friend Wang Shitao:

“Sister Shi! Now that we’ve separated, I’ve simply been having a dream! A great, big, happy dream! Now I’ve awoken from this dream, and just like before, it’s just you and me. It’s just that I don’t know where Hui is these days!”

“With someone like Hui, she surely won’t be disappointed.”

That was Miss Wang’s answer. (1: 98-9)

The story ends by announcing itself as a dream: “Both of the romantic encounters that constitute the narrative kernel of the novella,” writes Anderson, “have thus been reduced in Jing’s imagination to dreams” (135). However, the question of dreaming is not merely an issue of what Jing does with her imagination. Her imagination is ultimately our narrative experience, and the romantic interlude is no mere fantasy. For the text to label two whole chapters of diegetic activity as a dream risks more than invalidating Jing’s own experiences and, perhaps, naïve wishes, but also undercuts the text’s own effectiveness as fiction. The novella, by puncturing holes in Jing’s dream, hints at its own unraveling.

Perhaps it is easy to wax cynical about this romantic and sentimental idyll between Jing and Qiang, filled with caresses and coos and the rumbling of the river waters. In fact, by constantly reminding us that this interlude is a dream, perhaps the narrative is registering its own embarrassment that it felt compelled to go there in the first place. When Jing orgasmically calls out the phallic name of her lover, one cannot help but detect a strong whiff of queer affect on the part of the text itself, and by extension, a homoerotic yearning from within the author. While it is Jing who calls out in pleasure, the force of her cry threatens to collapse both woman and narrator: the woman who experiences orgasm and the narrator who indulges in voyeuristic delight seem to be

partaking in the same ecstasy. No wonder, then, that this episode must be reduced to a mere “dream” in “Jing’s imagination”; her hysteric transformation of narrative experience into dream memory functions to displace the reader’s attention from the queer contortions of both text and author. Wang’s final word, a sort of street-wise crack, aims to kick us back into “reality” – it attempts to shift the narrative terrain to something more vernacular in register, but does not succeed in writing off the realist text’s guilty pleasure. Even so, whatever the affective excesses of this “dream,” Qiang is still no Baosu, and the love the two feel for each other is genuine if foolhardy. It is not a dream because Qiang is duplicitous. It is a dream because their love has been created by war, and in the end, undone by it. Even their idyll, Jiujiang, is not wholly separated from worldly strife; it had only recently been wrested from warlords the year earlier. Their shared dream, both its joys and its heartbreak, is in effect a function of a violent disjuncture within history itself. It is not because of naiveté on Jing’s part, or a lack of trustworthiness of Qiang’s, that their affair is a fantasy; it is the problem of time itself that has rendered their love a reified experience which Jing can only, in the end, fetishize. The way in which pastoral time and modernity seemed to hang together, if tenuously, in Jing’s first nostalgic fantasy, in the end fails here, rendering the recent past as a “dream” and the present as “reality”. In this sense, the oscillation and confusion between dreamtime and historic time within the novella is, in its own way, mimetic of the epistemological pressures involved in trying to apprehend historic upheaval and change.

If the transition from “dream” to “awakening” fails to work in *Disillusionment*, then perhaps we can talk about the relationship between the narratives of dream and

“reality” as a kind of architectonics, a collision of surfaces upon which it is the fault lines between reality and dream that are most significant. Rather than conceiving of their relationship as a dialectic, where one narrative (the dream) is merely sublimated into the other (reality), and thus radically de-substantializing one in favor of the other, I suggest that we should see both competing narratives as imbued with equal symbolic weight. If we take Jameson and White’s observations of narrative as an irreducibly fictive elaboration of history, itself an absent cause, then there should be no binary between realist “substance” and oneiric “surface”: both are surfaces, and whatever depth or texture is revealed in the overlap between the two. At the same time, then, that the narrative of *Disillusionment* aims to create an objective mimesis of historic reality, it also more subtly, and perhaps even paradoxically, stages the epistemological drama of trying to “recognize” reality, a confession that reality is as much an ontological substance out there waiting to be analyzed as it is also a shifting stream of consciousness itself. The manic shifts of consciousness that heroine, text and reader undergo are perhaps the best index to the power exerted by the historic real itself on our ways of understanding reality.

Mao Dun’s intense, and at times, excessive, focalization of the narrative through Jing’s psyche and body, cannot merely be attributed to authorial scopophilia. Rey Chow argues that Mao Dun was successful in trying to capture the “contradictory” nature of a “capricious” reality by featuring what she claims are Western-influenced descriptions of his heroines’ thought processes (104-5). However, Mao Dun falls into his own self-contradictory trap when, on one hand giving emphasis on women’s inner psychic life, he also indulges in detailed and perhaps even lurid descriptions of

women's bodies, a kind of sexual objectification that threatens to delimit the power of these women's inner mental lives (107). Jin Feng argues that Mao Dun's use of women characters "accentuated male delectation of both the female body and female emotions" and that he "proved to be a connoisseur of female emotions as well as the female body" (105). Women characters, while ostensibly signifiers of modernity and progress, nevertheless become frozen within Mao Dun's leering gaze.²⁰

That Mao Dun was unable to overcome a measure of chauvinism in both his fictional work and personal life is perhaps beyond question. However, while acknowledging this severe limitation, a more productive inquiry would be to disengage from the question of whether Mao Dun was "pro-" or "anti-" woman. We should instead explore the semiotic function of "women" in Mao Dun's fiction. Mao Dun seems to privilege the female body with a heightened emotional and corporeal sensitivity; it is they who dream, lose consciousness, cry, suddenly contract scarlet fever, etc. Their hysterical bodies function analogously to the chaotic tumult of the historical moment. Mao Dun's feminine hysterics can be read as allegorical of his own narrative: seductive, passionate, and volatile. Moreover, I would suggest that the problem is not one of whether Mao Dun was authentically sincere in his fictive empathy with the female sex, a "misogynist" in feminist drag. Instead, I would proffer the more provocative interpretation that Mao Dun in fact identifies all too well with women. It is an identification that suits him well insofar as it promotes him as a

²⁰There does seem to be a revisionist trend in scholarship aimed at deconstructing Mao Dun's ostensible championship of women and unmasking it to be in fact a form of "misogyny." See both of David Wang's treatments of Mao Dun's women in both *Fictional Realism* (77-89) and *The Monster that is History* (100-6).

progressive champion of women, and insofar as women constitute the major trope for national modernity and sovereignty. However, when such narrative identification threatens to reveal the ultimately passive and hysterical identity of both text and author, the queer panic that results manifests in the heroine's breakdown, the only way to shake apart the conflation between woman and narrative and woman and author. Feminine hysteria, as we saw before in Mao Dun's dream, is ultimately a fantastic displacement designed to cover up male hysteria and preserve the integrity of author and text.²¹ For a writer like Mao Dun who is attempting to promote himself as faithful to a robustly empiric and masculine form of realism, queer affectations for such things as romance, daydreaming and male penetration must all be denied.

The second novella of the trilogy, *Vacillation*, famously ends with a volatile and intense hysterical hallucination on the part of the hero's wife, Mrs. Fang. She hides in an abandoned temple with her husband, Fang Luolan, a liberal KMT officer, and his mistress, Sun Wuyang, while an angry, reactionary peasant mob, egged on by conservative members of the Kuomintang, viciously cuts its way through the village, targeting the womenfolk who have attempted to modernize by cutting short their hair. Mrs. Fang imagines herself to be a spider she sees hanging by its thread as she envisions the entire temple collapsing spectacularly around her. The story ends with

²¹ My decision to offer a queer reading of narrative and authorial hysteria is directly inspired by Daniel Boyarin's truly fantastic essay about Freud's own homosexual desire and hysteria. Through a careful reconstructive reading of Freud's private and personal writings, Boyarin argues that Freud's decision to abandon hysteria as the root cause of psychological disturbance in favor of the Oedipal complex had much to do with the fact that focusing on hysteria would have forced Freud to tackle male hysteria, and moreover, his own hysteria and homoerotic desire for his father and his colleague Fliess (205). For Boyarin, Freud's "gay panic" that prompted this major theoretical shift stemmed in large part from the predominant cultural figuration of the Jewish man as effeminate, a stereotype that Freud wanted very much to disavow (210).

Mrs. Fang letting out a scream and falling to the ground (*Quanji* 1: 258). Her hysterical breakdown is not only a description of psychological collapse but, both as allegory and as actual reading experience, stages the collapse of realist representation itself, as it loses its mimetic bearings and suddenly veers into figurative nonsense. Mrs. Fang observes the spider tenuously climbing up and down its thread; the spider and the fragile line it relies on for support is suggestive not only of the fragility of the body, but the sudden crisis of narrative itself. Mrs. Fang's hysterical collapse is on one hand evocative of the narrative hysteria that the author is loathe to admit; on the other hand, her sacrifice allows the narrative to continue on without her.

In this vein, the experience of history as filtered through feminine sensuality may be mimetic in its own way of a certain historical experience. This sentimental appeal to the body, however, is at odds with the equally realist convention of the dispassionate observer. The frenzied woman corresponds, if uncomfortably, with the sprawling, volatile texture of the narrative itself. At a remove is the realist authorial position that seeks to claim the mantle of objective observer. However, as Mao Dun's own statements about himself reveal, he was by no means a stable observer. His frequent illness and nervous ailments are tantalizingly symptomatic of his own hysteria, even if he refused to diagnose himself as such.²² Mao Dun thus holds two

²² Susan Stanford Friedman reminds us that Freud diagnosed hysteria in himself and revealed this in his private letters. However, he suppressed the connection between his own hysteria and the dreams he had that he recounts in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: "But in the [The Interpretation of Dreams] based on his self-analysis, he censors out the story of his hysteria [...] Freud's suppression of hysteria covers up the way in which the transition from symptom to dream and from trauma to desire involves the substitution of male for female subjectivity" (52). It is Friedman's contention that Freud's movement from studying hysteria to studying dreams marks a gradual, but complicated, privileging of the male subject over the female, and of displacing hysteria in the male onto the female subject. It is also the privileging of desire over trauma as the root cause of hysteric symptoms and dreams, a move that

different ideals of the “real” in tension: corporeal experience and critical apprehension. At points it seems that all this feminine sensuality and imagination escapes the author’s control and must be reined in; Jing must physically and mentally break down and recuperate in the hospital. However, her mental flights, her “dreams,” are themselves fantasies of physical apotheosis, a bodily redemption through romance. In her dreams Jing finds the healing and calm that seemed to plague her creator all too persistently. In the end, Mao Dun offers up a narrative corporeal poetics that is as volatile and contradictory as both the women he narrates as well as their author. What gets represented is not so much reality, but the very “effort,” the strain the author must undergo to reach that elusive goal. This strain is apparent when the narrative falls into discursive excess, when the abundance of language seems to block mimesis rather than facilitate it, when even the word “reality” is marshaled as a superfluous and self-conscious trope. Perhaps, then, the most revealing aspect of Mao Dun’s attempt to write “reality” is not so much his historical narrative, but the very moments when realist mimesis and discursive excess collide and produce a mass of figurative meaninglessness, a hysterical shriek that encapsulates the author’s impossible desire to reconcile himself with an incomprehensible world.

Wu’s Web: Narrative strategy, narrative escape, and dreams in *Midnight* (1933)

I now want to turn to Mao Dun’s most famous and oft-discussed work, *Midnight* (1933). *Midnight* portrays the heady economic frenzy in which Shanghai was

“destroys the patient’s narrative authority,” for the goal of therapy is not to help the (female) patient uncover the traumatic event (the scene of seduction), but instead for the (male) analyst to fulfill his desire of demonstrating his analytic acumen by uncovering the female’s repressed desire rather than her history (61).

engulfed during the beginning of the decade; national industry struggles against cheaper foreign imports, speculators duel it out for control of the stock market through underhanded trading, while workers resist declining wages, oppressive working conditions, and the violence meted out by their exploiters. Amidst the dozens of characters that appear on stage, the text centers on Wu Sunfu, an unscrupulous and irascible owner of a silk factory trying to keep his company solvent and strong by battling against his industrial competitors as well as playing a risky game with government bonds. Mao Dun, in memoirs he wrote late in life, detailed the many maladies that accompanied the preparation and writing of his masterwork. He suffered from an eye infection, stomach ailments and a general nervous breakdown (also alluded to in his submission to *Eastern Miscellany*). Despite these ailments, he proceeded to work on a panoramic literary trilogy about contemporary Chinese society and economy. His three linked novellas would deal, respectively, with cotton manufacture, financial speculation, and a match factory. However, in November 1930, his vision, already damaged by trachoma, began to deteriorate, and he sought treatment from a Japanese-trained doctor. In a rather horrific moment, he describes having an injection in his right cornea to help cure a cavity that had formed inside. He was largely prevented from engaging in reading or writing for three months, monitored by his wife's strict supervision. Mao Dun claims that while he was effectively blind during this convalescence, his "thinking, nevertheless, was very active" (*Wo zouguo* 1: 488), and he mentally revised his outline for his project. Still, the irony is not lost that for the foremost Chinese practitioner of realism, a mode that

privileges empirical observation over inspired creation, Mao Dun was at risk of losing the very faculty most identified with observation.²³

During these three months of intense brainstorming, Mao Dun decided to combine his three planned novellas into one long novel. Moreover, he switched the light industry emphasized in the first novella from cotton manufacture to silk production; the protagonist of the third novella, an owner of a match factory, was transformed into *Midnight's* main character, Wu Sunfu, a silk filature proprietor. Mao Dun wrote that he turned to silk because it was the main industrial Chinese export and was thus a major industry within China; however, the domestic industry was suffering because of intense competition outside, in particular the popularity of cheaper Japanese silk exports. In addition to these material considerations, the centrality of silk production in *Midnight* also functions as a handy metaphor for the novel's own structure as a tangle of various narrative threads trying to form an overall coherence and pattern. Cao Wansheng, in a highly creative reading of the novel's structure, argues that *Midnight* consists of five interlocking narrative threads: Wu Sunfu's ownership and management of his factory; the duel between Wu Sunfu and his financier rival Zhao Botao on the stock exchange; Wu Sunfu's struggles with the workers; Wu Sunfu's problems with his properties in the countryside; and Wu Sunfu's struggles to maintain control within his own family. With this metaphor of a web of interlocking threads, Cao Wansheng argues that it is Wu Sunfu who pulls the strings: "If we see this novel

²³ A more intrepid interpretation might view Mao Dun's horror at having a needle stuck into his eye as an inverted desire for penetration. If the seeing eye is the trope of an omniscient realist mode, then its penetration by a phallic needle suggests a queer fantasy not only of the author, but of the realist mode itself. Mao Dun's fear of ocular sodomy seems to find its fictive symptomatic manifestation in his heroines' hysteric episodes.

as a cross-section, then Wu Sunfu appears as the focal point of this spider web” (104). However, the centrality of silk has symbolic connotations: an invention that is often thought of as a quintessentially Chinese export, the industrialized manufacture of silk is in no small way allegorical of China’s attempt to maintain its national sovereignty while modernizing itself. The novel itself is an attempt to “weave” a uniquely Chinese, but also modern, tapestry. And not least, textile manufacture centers on women’s work and productivity, thus foregrounding the centrality of women’s progress in the discourse of modernization.

That Cao Wansheng characterizes the novel in terms of threads is not idiosyncratic; after all, one of the most prominent literary journals in the 20s and 30s was known as *Yusi* (语丝), or “Threads of Discourse” (Lu Xun first published much of his *Wild Grass* in these pages). The idea of a thread embodying the meandering vector of narrative is plausible. However, a more traditional connotation of the word thread is desire, as in *qingsi* (情丝), “threads of desire,” and implies a kind of lingering affection, a libidinal yearning that stretches across time and distance. (The term for thread is also homophonous with the word 思, which connotes longing for someone.) Indeed, in a novel as sprawling as this, and especially one that crisscrosses from the city to countryside, business to romance, poetry to politics, the question of how the author effectively threads a filament of narrative desire throughout the text, how the author keeps the reader on board, is an intriguing one.

Mao Dun’s decision to concentrate on economics was no doubt inspired by his commitment to a conception of realism as an empirical method of observation, a

demonstration of “knowing reality with great effort.” Rather than focusing on intellectuals, revolutionaries, or students, Mao Dun wanted to focus on someone he thought was most emblematic of the historical and economic zeitgeist: a capitalist. Marxist critic Qu Qiubai praised the result as being “the first successful realist novel in China. It clearly bears the influence of Zola (Zola’s *L’argent*)” (quoted in Mao Dun, *Wo zouguo* 1: 509). Although Mao Dun, while appreciating Qu Qiubai’s approval, avers that he had never read Zola’s novel about financial speculation in 19th century France, Mao Dun’s focus on money betrays an advocacy of literature more as investigation than *belle-lettres*. In his memoirs he defends himself against the charge that, as a writer, he had no background in financial speculation by reminding us that, as a child in his hometown in Zhejiang province, a flurry of speculation over the harvest of mulberry leaves happened every year among the various landlords, something that coincided with the spring hatching of silkworms (*Wo zouguo* 506-7). His 1932 story *Spring Silkworms* deals with silk manufacture in a rural town. Wu Sunfu, Mao Dun notes, was inspired by his own personal acquaintanceship with a number of industrialists:

I think there is a certain rule when it comes to describing a novelistic character: That is to synthesize and analyze the personalities of real people you are most familiar with, and then come up with the most approximate typical personality. By this principle it is natural to be able to create the typical personality of an industrialist. Wu Sunfu’s personality was created just like this [...] (*Wo zouguo* 1: 489)

Wu Sunfu not only reflects a realist and materialist novelistic approach, he is also himself a product of type, a composite specimen meant to be a “representative sample” of an important segment in Chinese society. Unfortunately he is not the most

pleasant or compelling figure; he is greedy, arrogant and conniving, given to fits of rage and poutiness. It is clear that he is a sort of anti-hero, a modern version of a traditional clown role. But he has greater aspirations, professing, whether sincerely or not, that the resuscitation of national industry is key to China's future. In his industrial ambitions he seeks to embody a national narrative, one where the key players are businessmen and entrepreneurs, not scholars and intellectuals.²⁴

Mao Dun's decision to narrate the story of a businessman is emblematic of his wish to provide a material basis for his narrative; concentrating on economics rather than *belle-lettres* or poetry conveys the author's attempt to bring a more thoroughly objective and even scientific method to his storytelling. However, as his novel also reveals, an economy that runs on credit and money is essentially a symbolic economy, predicated on tokens, promises, and faith. John Vernon, writing about the 19th century European realist novel, argues that the story of money is essentially a form of dream making:

[M]oney is at the very least a sign of reality in the novel, that is, a sign of the rupture of form by reality. But it is also fictional, chimerical, romantic. It dreams for us, as Marx pointed out: "*Money* is the external, universal *means* and *power* (not derived from man as man or from human society as society) to change *representation* into *reality* and reality into *mere representation*. It transforms *real human and natural faculties* into mere abstract representations, i.e., *imperfections* tormenting chimeras; and on the other hand, it transforms *real*

²⁴ Wen-hsin Yeh identifies a "material turn" starting in the late imperial period and coming into full force by the beginning of the 20th century whereby commerce, the pursuit of wealth and commodities began to be valorized. She labels this outlook "economism" which "as Leah Greenfeld identifies it, is a state of mind and a view of life in which issues of economy occupy a place of centrality" (9). Yeh further identifies "the state and merchants" as the two "agents of modernization" (27). If "economism" was truly the reigning ideological force of modernization among the middle classes, it is not hard to surmise that literary intellectuals felt a certain anxiety in terms of their own effectiveness, and it would explain Mao Dun's sudden need to write an "economistic" novel that did not merely deal with the intellectuals.

imperfections and fancies, faculties which are really impotent and which exist only in the individual's imagination, into *real faculties and powers*." In the nineteenth-century novel, money bolsters and fuels the romantic dreams of heroes and heroines from all classes of society at the same time as it discredits those dreams – that is, establishes the limit of their realization. The failure of money, the fact that paper money is money but at the same time the absence of money, parallels in the realistic novel the failure of mimesis, which can never be a pure, homogeneous extension of its world. If the novel represents reality, it does so in ways that acknowledge this failure, that makes reality disruptive, that confirm the Real as "that which resists desire." As with money, material reality enacts an inner limit for the novel, one that wells up within it as a kind of subtext. (18-9, italics are Vernon's)

Mao Dun's reliance on economic discourse, then, is an attempt to materially ground his narrative that, through the effects of economic crisis, unravels itself as a mere fantasy. The author in a sense wants it all, both the material backing that economy provides the novel, but the radical epiphany of collapse and awakening as well. The rhetorical move is not unlike that attempted in *Disillusionment*; the creation of a house of cards that, at the critical moment, founders.

We see the conflict between entrepreneurs and scholars played out in the scene where Wu Sunfu is dismayed to find his younger brother, Axuan, reading a book of poetry by a family acquaintance, Fan Bowen, a would-be romantic and ostentatious aesthete. Both poet and industrialist gather around Axuan, debating the merits of business and poetry. The elder brother is visibly vexed by Fan Bowen's intrusion in Axuan's life, and even more irritated by the poem that catches his eye: romantic doggerel bemoaning the loss of the natural beauty of West Lake as it chokes on the exhaust fumes from cars owned by the vulgar "bourgeoisie" (*Quanji* 3: 147). The threads of poetry thus duel against commercial silk, and the conflict between culture and commerce find their incarnation in Axuan, would-be inheritor of Wu Sunfu's

enterprise, but enraptured by Fan Bowen's verse. Fan Bowen embodies a nostalgia for the literati past, one in which power and prestige were conferred upon those harboring literary skills (his name, 范博文, can be read as "a model of broad knowledge"), an era now disenchanted by industry, commerce and colonial modernity. On one hand the text makes it clear that Fan Bowen is an irrelevant, impotent and moreover incompetent vestige of the past, and in a scene soon after we find Fan Bowen brooding around a lake and thinking about emulating the great poet Qu Yuan by throwing himself in the water (3: 157). Qu Yuan's modern incarnation, Fan Bowen, is but a parody of his former self in the realist novel: effete and inconsequential. While he intones against the vulgarity of the bourgeois lifestyle, he himself is dependent on his capitalist connections to stay alive. And yet the fact that these figures persist, albeit in clown costume, to challenge Wu Sunfu's goal of both economic and narrative monopoly, betrays a lingering hesitation on the part of the text, and perhaps of the author himself, to completely cut ties with the "lyric" past, and to ally itself wholly with the realist project as put forth by Mao Dun himself.²⁵

Axuan is not the only member of the Wu family to feel the conflict between a lyric past and a disenchanted, mechanical present. His sister-in-law and Wu Sunfu's wife, Lin Peiyao, longs for her days as a carefree student, frolicking in the literary landscapes provided by such texts as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and enraptured by grand gestures of chivalry inspired by works like Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*: "She never

²⁵ In the scene with Axuan, Fan Bowen questions Wu Sunfu's desire to stay in the silk trade as a form of national development, pointing out that garments made from Chinese silk, but woven outside and then sold on Chinese soil cannot be considered a wholly Chinese product (3: 149). Meanwhile, Wu Sunfu has been concocting a financial scheme to bankrupt his biggest competitor, Zhu Yinqiu, in an attempt to seize his large store of silk cocoons.

would have thought that one day this cup full of the fine wine of youth would one day be emptied” (3: 88). Following Shakespeare, the text refers to this period of her life as a “midsummer night’s dream,” one soon to be dispersed: “The deaths of her father and mother by illness in quick succession forced the true taste of ‘reality’ into ‘Miss Lin Peiyao’s’ virginal heart” (3: 88). Reality entails having to find a husband with the means to support her and her siblings, and unfortunately this means entering into a union with, and losing her virginity to, a “stern, purple and pimply faced husband who just happened to be the knight and ‘prince’ of the mechanical and industrial era of the 20th century” (3: 89). Poetry has been replaced by industry, nature by mechanics, and handsome knights have been switched for ugly and cruel businessmen. What Mao Dun not so subtly suggests is the sexual revulsion that Wu Sunfu evokes; it is a disgust Wu’s wife shares with the author himself, forced into a loveless marriage with a revolting protagonist arranged by a mode that wants to be faithful to economic reality. Masculine knights and romantic literature are the true objects of desire of woman and text, but these libidinal yearnings must in the end be denied.

“Miss Lin’s” train of thought is disrupted by the unexpected appearance of her former suitor, Colonel Lei, a knight of a more traditional stripe from the Nationalist Army. She is thrown into a state of bewilderment: “Mrs. Wu was startled into a panic. ‘Reality’ and ‘dream’ within an instant flowed into each other, and she almost could not believe her eyes” (3: 89). What seems to be a hoped for romantic redemption, the realization of a long-held dream, becomes yet another disappointment, as he announces that he is leaving for battle the next day. He pulls out an old copy of Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and clasped between its pages is a dried

rose. Mrs. Wu had given this volume to Colonel Lei seven years before when he was a poor student and unsuccessful suitor for her hand in marriage. After years of near-fatal battle, Colonel Lei returns the book to Mrs. Wu for safekeeping, informing her that he likely will not return alive. They share a final kiss:

“Dear brother!” suddenly chirped the parrot that was in the cage.
 (“Brother” and “sister” are common terms of affection among friends and unwed lovers.)

The embracing couple was startled. Mrs. Wu awoke as if from a dream and forcefully pushed away Colonel Lei, and holding onto her *Sorrows of Young Werther* ran out of the drawing room, up the stairs and into her own room. She fell on her bed, and a stream of hot tears shortly soaked her flower embroidered, white pillow. (3: 92)

Colonel Lei and Mrs. Wu, of course, are enacting the very romantic plot of their shared *Sturm und Drang* favorite, Lei playing the young Werther tortured by his beloved’s marriage to another. Colonel Lei sees no way out of his romantic predicament other than to die in battle, just as Goethe’s protagonist commits suicide. However, their star-crossed love also mirrors that of Jing and Qiang Weili in *Disillusionment*. Both characters express a yearning for a romantic era by enacting an 18th century epistolary novel, one made ironic by the fact that their only knowledge of such love comes in translation from a foreign West. On the other hand, they also both express a nostalgia for the act of reading. Whatever dreams of romance the former Miss Lin Peiyao holds on to, each one is closely related to an act of reading as an exercise in the emotions and imagination. It is not just romance that has been threatened by a mechanical age, but the very act of reading as well. This dreamy vignette is rudely interrupted by the parrot’s voice, as if suggesting that the love shared by the two has already lost its aura of authenticity, a portent borne out by the

fact that Colonel Lei does not die, but eventually finds his way back to Shanghai and into the arms of a shameless harlot.²⁶ Even a noble death, one that both the “poet” and “knight” seek, is rendered out of reach.

The novel thus makes a meta-narrative case for its own status as a “realist” text by thoroughly debunking the “dreams” of romantic literature, and it does so in a self-conscious manner that invites the charge of defensiveness. And yet, even as this scene is meant to be a parody of the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” leisure literature that was far more widely read in the 1930’s, it is often more compelling and even more pleasurable than most of the scenes concerning Wu Sunfu’s struggles with his economic rivals. “Narrative desire” is not just a way of conceptualizing the reader’s libidinal investment in a text; it also invites us to think about how the text itself struggles with its own self-identification. In what sense is the text trying to mask its own guilty desire to break into full-fledged sentimentality by framing such emotions in terms of dreams? Despite all of the “realist” disclaimers, the text nevertheless betrays a fascination with the values of romanticism, perhaps a desire that need not be so rigidly muffled by an overcompensating realism. Mao Dun’s realism is a literature of strain, exhibiting both doctrinal fastidiousness and sentimental excess, both a defense of its purposefulness but also a lingering regret of what must be forsaken. Mrs. Wu’s trade off between a romantic knight and an ugly, rich industrialist mirrors the literary trade off the text makes. Realism, in Mao Dun’s hands, dreams of

²⁶ This figure is Xu Manli, famous for dancing on tables to the delight of her industrialist admirers and patrons. David Wang argues that Mao Dun’s salacious treatment of this modern courtesan betrayed the author’s hidden misogyny: “[Mao Dun’s] feminine style, at its best, is but a costume drama. Take away his profeminist mask, and he shows a misogynist face” (*Fictional Realism* 89).

literature as pure pleasure, now seemingly lost under the imperative to represent and analyze. The epistemological binary of dream and reality becomes writ large in an unexpected fashion as the opposition between literature and realism.

Intertextual nostalgia marks its appearance in yet another dream scene in the novel involving another female character, Wu Sunfu's sister Huifang. Wu Sunfu's family is rooted in the landowning class in the countryside; however, because of threats of revolt from "Communist bandits," Wu Sunfu decides to move the rest of his family, his brother Axuan, sister and father to the relative safety of Shanghai. Wu Sunfu's father dies immediately upon arrival to Shanghai, pushed over his cardiac limit by the sensory overload of the city. Huifang, who was especially close to her more feudal father, finds her new urban life deeply alienating. As a result of her closeness with her father, she has inherited his moral values, including his devotion to a Daoist text, the *Treatise of the Most High on Action and Retribution* (太上感应篇).²⁷ Fabulously popular among the religious masses, the text is formed of laundry lists of good and bad deeds and their corresponding retribution (the list of bad deeds vastly dwarfs the good ones, giving a lopsided impression of the tract as a rather drab and stern affair). Wu Sunfu's father rejects the dynamics of capitalist exchange in favor of the moral exchange outlined by the text: do enough good deeds, accumulate enough merit, and one can attain immortality and join the gods. It is in a sense the ultimate exchange, the attainment of complete freedom from all human compromises. Huifang clings to this text as she longs to return to the countryside. Her loneliness in the city is only

²⁷ I am indebted to the translation of this title used by Catherine Bell. For a discussion of the popularity of this text in China, see her "'A Precious Raft to Save the World' The Interaction of Scriptural Traditions and Printing in a Chinese Morality Book" in *Late Imperial China*, 1996, 17:1 (158-200).

compounded by her brother's iron-clad control over her life, and she quickly descends to fits of desperation and paranoia. Haunted by a number of unsettling dreams, one in particular holds special power over her:

Suddenly last night's dream came back to her. It was an old dream that she had had repeatedly, although now Huifang was simply convinced that it was not merely a dream, but reality (真实); she seemed to think that the dream referred to an event that had occurred three weeks ago during the evening -- it was a thunderous and rainy night, and it was after she and Fan Bowen had finished chatting near the fish pond by the flower garden facing the hexagonal pavilion that was on the artificial hill when she lost her precious maidenhead under cover of night; she was truly convinced that among her strange dreams this particular dream that tormented her repeatedly and with little variation was surely not a dream, but was real (真实); and this real dream precisely took place at that hexagonal pavilion, in that thunderous and rainy evening, that moment when the heavy rain first roared, as she lazily lay back on the reclining chair in that pavilion with Fan Bowen was sitting opposite her, and with her eyes closed she could feel him walking to her side, and she felt her whole body suddenly become weak and paralyzed, as if intoxicated. (3: 515-6)

In this passage, a long meandering sentence that seems to evoke Huifang's torrid psyche, we see a much more sensual and racy recapitulation of Mrs. Wu's "dream" sequence. The frequency with which the words "dream," "real" and their related cognates appear reveal a dizzying dialectic that far outstrips what occurred in the earlier sequence. In earlier instances, the narrator does not hesitate to delineate what is reality and what is merely fantasy; here the narrator finds itself ventriloquizing Huifang's voice, telling us that her dream is indeed reality. Moreover, the text leaves unresolved whether Huifang is completely imagining her rendezvous with Fan Bowen, or whether there was indeed an actual assignation at some earlier part of the narrative that the text never hinted at. However, the passage's focus on the precise location,

time and setting when Huifang was suddenly ravished cements a sense of the concrete palpability of the event, its unmistakable “realness,” even if it is a fabricated memory. The text, usually so eager to separate reality from fantasy and romance, seems to have suddenly collapsed upon itself.

Slavoj Žižek, elaborating on Lacan's theory of dreams, argues that "it is only in the dream that we come close to the real awakening – that is, the Real of our desire" (*Sublime Object* 47). Dreams and fantasy are not merely a façade, a play of surfaces that conceals the actual reality, a kind of ideological “false consciousness.” Instead, they reveal the very mechanism by which we live within reality: “It [is] only in the dream that we [approach] the fantasy-framework which determines our activity, our mode of acting in reality itself” (47). We might ask how Huifang’s dream reveals a naked desire that motivates Mao Dun’s search for “reality,” a desire so strong that at certain points it threatens to warp the very ontological integrity of that narrative reality into something beyond recognition, carrying the text to the edge of hallucination or utter breakdown. Huifang’s supposed affair with Fan Bowen may be utter fantasy, a willful and violent creation of reality from an unfulfilled desire; on the other hand, Mao Dun’s Shanghai may also be fantasy, an act of desire, one that is all the more perverse in its ability to attach itself to a historic referent. This scene is fascinating because we witness how the text wavers between two possible scenarios and seems unsure of its own reality: Huifang’s coupling with Fan Bowen as hallucination or “actual” event.

Just as Mrs. Wu's dream sequence was inspired by Goethe's *Werther*, so does this scene also have an intertextual connection to the past, this one more traditional: the pivotal dream-scene in Tang Xianzu's 16th century *Peony Pavilion*. The heroine, Du Liniang, not only discovers her future lover and husband in a dream, but consummates her love with him. After the dream, she pines over her spectral beau, Liu Mengmei, and dies. Du eventually reunites in the phenomenal world with Liu after first being his ghost lover, and then dug out of her grave and resuscitated. Their love and devotion for each other is recognized by Du's doubtful family and sanctioned by imperial fiat, thus making what was a love that existed only in a dream into a socially recognized reality. In the author's famous preface to the work, we find rhetoric that is uncannily similar to the passage from *Midnight* quoted above:

Love is of source unknown, yet it grows ever deeper. The living may die of it, by its power the dead live again. Love is not love at its fullest if one who lives is unwilling to die for it, or if it cannot restore to life one who has so died. And must the love that comes in a dream necessarily be unreal? (*Peony Pavilion* ix)

情不知所起，一往而深。生者可以死，死可以生。生而不可与死，死而不可复生者，皆非情之至也。梦中之情，何必非真？

Love, or *qing* (情, a term that also denotes desire and affection, encompassing both civil *agape* and passionate *eros*), is so powerful and so compelling as to transcend life and death, and to establish itself as the ultimate reality. Mindful that the literati of 16th century China were not as engaged with questions of empiricism in the May 4th sense, we should note that the word used to denote real is simply *zhen* (真), a more flexible term that emphasizes more truthfulness and authenticity, and which not need necessarily include the sense of ontological reality.

Peony Pavilion demonstrates the power of *qing* to create multiple narrative worlds, some more fantastic than others, to accommodate its trajectory. In the end, *qing* constitutes an alternate reality that proves more lasting than the existence bounded by life and death, man and ghost, and the paternalistic strictures of Neo-Confucian morality. Whatever the doubts of the other characters as to the reality of Du Liniang's love, the spectator remains functionally convinced of its reality through the very act of watching the performance; the actors inside and outside the dream are the same – there is no "set change" to demarcate that we have entered "dream space." Moreover, the plot would be impossible to follow unless we tacitly believed the consummation did indeed take place in Du's dream. Whatever our private doubts about the dream's reality, the dream is real "functionally," for the play *itself* believes for us. This "automatic belief" that the play creates structurally heightens the sense of love's reality.

For a split second this also seems to happen when we read Huifang's dream. The relentless onslaught of the meandering prose collapses dream and reality, and it is not hard to be tempted to believe that something utterly magical is taking place. However, as a realist novel, only one sort of reality exercises hegemonic control over the text. Du Liniang exists in a textual realm where multiple worlds are possible; moreover, her ability to traverse these worlds makes her a heroine. Huifang, however, does not exist in such a pliable world; her insistence on her "reality" threatens to condemn her as psychotic, not heroic. What are merely parallel universes in Tang Xianzu's play are the teetering footsteps lurching towards insanity in Mao Dun's novel, a collapsing of levels that threatens to produce a textual monstrosity. And yet even this psychosis

has a silver lining; her insistence on the reality of her dream and desire inspires her to a stunning rebellion against her bullying brother: “[...] her entire body was a flame of revolt” (3: 516). With the help of her friend, the student Zhang Susu, she makes a bold declaration of independence by moving out of her brother’s house, leaving Wu Sunfu livid.

The text leaves ambiguous what will happen to Huifang. On one hand she wishes to follow Zhang Susu’s footsteps and pursue an education. On the other she is enthralled by Zhang’s decadent friends, and at one points muses that frolicking in the Rio Rita Gardens is far more pleasurable than reciting her Daoist treatise (3: 527). Anderson argues that Huifang is “emblematic” of those new, young arrivals to Shanghai that “soon take on the addiction to stimulation that characterizes the city’s older, more hardened denizens” (148). They frolic in gardens, near lakes, in pavilions and on artificial mountains, poor imitations of a wished for Eden. However, not all of the people in Zhang’s cohort are unaware of their precarious existence. Even Fan Bowen, romantic blowhard he is, has a sense that things will quickly change as he remarks on the White Russian émigré waiter serving drinks:

Did you hear clearly! Professor Li is always so serious, and always prepares for everything just in case. He’s quite right! You see that White Russian over there? He probably was a count or marquis at some point, probably lived half his life having other people pour wine for him. But now it’s his turn to wait on other people; he’s a quick study, though. He can pick up six soda bottles in one hand! (3: 523)

Even the aesthetes are not unaware that their continued life of pleasure will most likely come to an end; it remains to be seen whether Huifang will indeed veer off into a life of dissolution, or actually pursue an education and make something of her life.

Whatever her fate, what remains undeniable is that Huifang succeeds as being one of the few characters who successfully escape Wu Sunfu's "web," and as such, drops out of the novel, free to pursue her own narrative. Mrs. Wu, herself unable to escape the unhappiness of her loveless marriage to the capitalist, finds herself secretly "sympathizing" (3: 540) with Huifang's plight and her escape, even as she is unsuccessful in retrieving her from the YWCA where her sister-in-law is staying. Whereas *Peony Pavilion* allows us to follow Du Liniang wherever she may go, *Midnight* can only abandon Huifang, leaving her fate to our imagination.

Huifang's dream, along with Mrs. Wu's dream-like fantasy, both involve the lingering intertextual traces of older, more romantic literature. Following the logic of negation, the text is proclaiming what it is not: it is not a tragic romance in the style of *Werther*, nor is it a romantic drama with a happy end as in *Peony Pavilion*. However, the invocation of both of these works in the dream form also installs them as a powerful form of intertextual nostalgia, whereby the realist text, although not openly, laments what it cannot allow itself to be. Mao Dun's critical realist novel, then, evinces two forms of desire, one for the kind of social transformation that the work implies is yet to happen (and perhaps is imminent), and the other for a nostalgic fantasy of literature as a form of beautiful romance, something that is also, by necessity, lacking in the novel. In both cases the barrier to desire is History itself, as that which seeks to be transformed, and whose necessary transformation prevents the author from writing in a more aesthetically inclined mode. On the other hand, these two forms of desire, for utopia and for literature, are also the end goals that the reader will feel emboldened to pursue through the means of social struggle. In as much as

these desires are deferred because of History, they are also the inspirations that spur its transformations as well. Thus to characterize the text's relationship to its intertextual predecessors as merely lament would be one-sided, for while the text bemoans the loss of literature, it also evinces a hope of its reclamation.

In addition to Mrs. Wu and Huifang, our protagonist also starts dreaming towards the end of the novel as his financial schemes go awry while, in his own home, he starts to lose control over his family. In the first one, he lies in bed with his wife, who is busy "groaning and whimpering in [her] dream" (3: 506). Given her unsatisfying romantic life, it is not difficult to guess of whom Mrs. Wu is dreaming. Her husband, on the other hand, is torn by nervous fits, feeling as if "his body was completely surrounded by landmines," feeling a "kind of terror that repeatedly battered his swollen and feverish brain." In Wu Sunfu's dream he finds Huifang with her hair shorn going off to a nunnery (quite a reversal of the dream Huifang herself has), while her other siblings raise a ruckus over dividing the elder brother's property. Axuan and a bunch of actors perform a martial arts spectacle on stage. Suddenly the dream takes a happier turn and finds Wu Sunfu in a hotel, cradling Liu Yuying, the mistress of his archrival Zhao Botao whom he secretly covets (3: 507). Wu Sunfu's dream is both a nightmare and a reverie. He witnesses the complete dissolution of his power over his family; his property is parceled away among family members, his sister rejects all familial duty and runs to a nunnery, while his brother finds a new home in the theater, as if his family has decided to reject the 20th century and return to a pre-modern existence where monasteries and village dramas play an important role. Wu Sunfu's accumulation of capital is also project of familial modernization, an

effort to bring his rural family into the urban fold – the dream undoes that trajectory.²⁸ The only bright spot in his dream is in the end, when he can finally be at ease with the object of desire; the only place where his body can find a measure of respite is in the arms of an unattainable woman. Like many of the other dreams in Mao Dun, the theme is one of self-redemption through romantic union, a consummation that never fully occurs in waking life. The novel seeks to finally undo Wu Sunfu’s power over both his surroundings and the text by undermining him from within and dispatching a Trojan horse into his subconscious. The last chapter begins with Wu Sunfu flailing in the “black waters” of a dream (3: 541). As his bedroom clock strikes nine in the morning, the ring transforms into the sound of the bell at the stock exchange, the site of his final, desperate rally, as well as the solemn knell of his financial doom.²⁹ In the end Wu Sunfu causes his own undoing along with his financial rivals and the global economic system that strangles China’s industrial development.

²⁸ His marriage to an educated woman would seem to belie his interest in creating a modern nuclear family, or *xiao jiating* which, as Wen-hsin Yeh notes, was valorized by the middle class. As she notes, these new marriages were “predicated on mutual commitments, and invariably led to the establishment of separate residences from the parents” (112). However, radical disturbances in the countryside forces him to bring in his extended family (although his father dies not soon after his arrival); moreover, his own autocratic ways not only prevents him from realizing the ideal new family, but also puts a question mark on his actual commitment to rework the social relationships necessary to allow the new formation to succeed.

²⁹ Yeh notes the rise of the clock in Shanghai as a function of a dramatic change in the sense and use of time in an industrial and commercial society: “To belong to the modern crowd of mechanized and powered mobility, it was necessary to accept punctuality as a virtue. To take part in the modern sector of the economy, time had to be experienced as standardized measurements that synchronized and structured the rhythm of life” (79). The novel’s title, *Midnight*, indicates a point in time that can only be accurately pinpointed by a mechanism like a modern clock; on the other hand it also marks the point of transition between one day and the next, but in an allegorical fashion, between capitalist time (night) and revolution (day). Moreover, the nostalgic dreams the text indulges in occasionally are not merely passages backward into time, but yearnings for different forms of time, whether it be romantic Europe, late Ming China, or, as in *Disillusionment*, the pastoral, where time is felt by the rhythmic turning of the water-wheel instead of the ticking of a clock.

Towards the end, however, it is the tale of economic development, the story of national industry that forms the backbone of the novel, that itself becomes a “dream.” Zhou Zhongwei, the owner of a match company, finds himself unable to secure a loan to keep his factory afloat. Faced with such a dire end, he reminisces about headier days with his fellow businessmen:

“Hey, do you remember? The day of old Mr. Wu’s funeral! Miss Xu Manli was there too! Remember? She was dancing on the tables! Miss Xu then lost one of her brocade high heels! Haha! It was real fun, a dream!”

[...]

Colonel Lei and Xu Manli both laughed, but Wang Hefu furrowed his brow while his face changed color. That time from Old Mr. Wu’s funeral up till now really was all a dream! Their dream of developing industry! Was it soon time to wake up from the dream? (3: 478-9)

In the end, Zhou Zhongwei has no choice but to accept a predatory loan from Japanese lenders, thus selling out a national enterprise to a colonial rival. As he announces the reopening of the factory to his workers, he disingenuously tells them that his work is motivated by a deep sense of nationalism:

“Even though our factory was in the red, I still decided to keep going; why? First, if we closed the factory, you’d all be starving. You’re all Chinese, and your boss here is also Chinese, and Chinese bosses need to help Chinese workers! Second, our markets are saturated with foreign matches, and the cash of the Chinese are going to the pockets of foreigners, who knows how many millions per year! [...] Chinese workers also need to help Chinese bosses! If the operating costs are too heavy, then we can’t sell our goods; if you guys help me out, that is, accept a wage cut of a few dollars, then once the factory starts earning money, we can all live happily! [...] Alright then, long live national industry!” (3: 480)

In his short speech Zhou Zhongwei mentions the word “China/Chinese” 12 times, varnishing his words with a gloss of vulgar nationalism that only heightens the irony of how the factory is now de facto a Japanese venture, leaving Zhou the proprietor in

name only. The workers are more dumbfounded than inspired, and glumly return to work. As the machines begin to hum, Zhou Zhongwei reflects on his life: “First he was a compradore, then he was his own boss, and then he was yet again a compradore, -- but a different sort of compradore, from now on a proprietor in name only! It had been a dream, it had come full circle!”³⁰ In the end, Zhou Zhongwei has lost his business and his pride, and is only left with his ability to laugh (3: 481).

Wu Sunfu, as a “typical” specimen of the industrialist, stands in for the greater tragic hero of Chinese capitalism itself. With hopes of creating wealth and power for the nation and in composing the narrative of a new, modern China, national industry falls victim to its own economic hubris, domestic chaos, and colonial threats, becoming merely a “dream” and rendering the nation little more than a crude slogan. Marston Anderson has argued that the novel’s obsessive attention to details prevents the text from suggesting, in Lukacsian fashion, the imminence of historical movement (150); the novel prizes synchrony over diachrony and thus fails in its realist mission. Because Mao Dun does not involve the great historic forces of the peasantry and colonialism, Anderson argues that the resulting Shanghai is a “contained, dead place where all activity is stillborn and unproductive” (147). It seems to me that an equally compelling inspiration for *Midnight*, in addition to Zola, is a more traditional novel like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, a text that delights in material sumptuousness, description and detail, only to reveal the vacuity of it all. The logic of movement in

³⁰ As Wen-hsin Yeh remarks, the “compradore” was an institution that facilitated between foreign firms and the Chinese market dating well into the latter part of the 19th century: “[...] these ‘bicultural middlemen’ worked on commissions or fixed salaries, and served as house stewards, business assistants, upcountry purchasers, ‘ship compradors’ (independent purchasers), or independent merchants” (13).

Midnight is not one of progression, as we would expect in a realist novel, but one of sudden enlightenment, an instant transcendence of the phenomenal world. However, such a transcendence, such a sudden transvaluation, can only occur alongside a great historic trauma. Moreover, if the nationalistic development of China's industry is compromised by the forces of imperialism, how much more can we expect a realist mode, a "novel about China," to exist comfortably on Chinese soil, a society with only a nascent bourgeoisie and proletariat among a sea of peasantry? Colonialism and globalization thus compromise the very reality which Mao Dun seeks to reflect, for underneath any seemingly solid image of "Chinese society" lurks the far more powerful web of global connections and power relations that not only overdetermine national identity, but undermine it as well. Mao Dun's attempt to paint a picture of contemporary Chinese society can therefore only be, at best, a simulacrum. Perhaps, then, the relative fragility of Mao Dun's realism, its "hysterical" shifts into a dream world, was a symptom not only of the relative novelty of the mode, but also the inability of Chinese society, because of conflicts from within and without, to build a strong and robust capitalist economy and bourgeoisie. In such "premature" conditions, the naked desire of Utopia can gleam all the more brightly, as a fledgling epistemology of "realism" can only try in vain to obscure it.

A case can be made for an analogy between dreaming and the economy as described in *Midnight*: just as a dream seems ethereal and impermanent, so does the capitalist economy essentially run on an engine of emptiness, of fictive speculations and hypothetical prices, values flitting and transforming in a speck of time. On the other hand, a dream can nevertheless feel very "real," and in the way that the

phenomenon is somatically involved, so does capitalism have very real, and often traumatic, effects on bodies; labor is exploited, the reserve army of labor endures hunger; workers' protests are met with violence. That the text renders the national economy as "merely" a dream not only exposes the "emptiness" of the whole enterprise, but also implies the hysteric political violence that renders an entire economy oneiric pageantry. The dream is not simply a nostalgic figure for the hopes of the past, but a trembling index to the horrors both presently occurring and yet to come. In the end Mao Dun was perhaps wiser in his fear of dreams than he himself knew; their danger lies not so much in their indulgence in utopian allegory, but in suggesting a more horrifying mirror to reality than mimesis itself.

Chapter Three

Sleeping Under the Communist Sun: The Rhetoric of Dreams in the Socialist Era

A Reality Greater Than Any Dream

The Communist regime that came to power in 1949 took great pains to demonstrate to its new subjects that their October revolution served as a great redemption for the very sorry history of colonialism, civil war and invasion that the Chinese had endured for many years. The Communists saw themselves as the solution to generations of suffering, an answer to a prayer for a better future produced not by any divine hand, but rather by the handmaiden of history itself, and guided by the dialectical wisdom of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. In the previous two chapters I referred to and discussed the 1933 special New Year's edition of *Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang zazhi*), a collection of readers' submissions about their "dreams" for a future China. The publication of this special issue acted as a historical benchmark and index to the depth of crisis to which the nation had plunged on economic, political, geopolitical and spiritual fronts. At once a plea and cry for much needed change, it was also, conversely, an expression of hope that such change was indeed possible.

The regime's ideologists were not ignorant of the evocative historic power that this publication carried, and the *People's Daily*, the national news organ of the party, weighed in with its own assessment. In 1953 Wang Ruoshui, then a young editor in the theoretical department of the *People's Daily*, made the 1933 *Eastern Miscellany*

issue the subject of his own commentary. He began with an epitaph by radical Russian writer Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), the author of *What is to be Done?* (1863) (*Chto delat'?*), the utopian novel that inspired the Russian radicals of the 1860s: "Reality is grander than dreams."¹ According to Wang, the dreams written down in 1933 were expressions of a much darker time; the crevasse between the readers' dreams and the grim reality that surrounded them constituted a "sharp contradiction" that they struggled, yet failed, to resolve. Their dreams were a direct index pointing to the nation's misery, a pathological symptom pointing to substantial social ills.

However, the passage of time and the unfolding of history have produced a radically different present:

Twenty years have passed that have spun around our heavens and upturned our earth.

The beautiful dreams of those from twenty years ago, if we brushing aside the merely absurd ones, have for the most part already become reality, and there are still some that are gradually becoming reality; moreover, the reality has in some places even surpassed those dreams. The reality of today is far more abundant than that volume of

¹ In the 1980's Wang Ruoshui would become one of the leading Marxist humanist dissidents that criticized the regime, and was forced from his post as deputy editor of the paper in 1983, although later reinstated in a position of little consequence (Kelly "Emergence" 159; Introduction 3). His unabashed idealism in the promise of the socialist state, as expressed in the article discussed above, perhaps precipitated his later criticism of the regime's abuses. He died in 2002 in the United States where his wife was pursuing a fellowship in Harvard (Gittings).

In regards to Chernyshevsky, the young Vladimir Il'ich Ulianov claimed to have read his novel after the execution of his brother, Aleksandr, a revolutionary executed for organizing a failed assassination of Alexander III, and who held the novel in great esteem. The future Lenin was so enamored of Chernyshevsky's work that he did not hesitate to defend it against charges of being bad literature and, moreover, named his 1904 seminal pamphlet on vanguard party organization, the manifesto for the formation of the Bolshevik party, after it (Katz and Wagner 32-3). The author's choice of Chernyshevsky is notable because the heroine of his novel, Vera Pavlovna, a young woman who along with her companions realizes her aspiration of creating a utopian community, has a number of key dream sequences in the text. In her last dream she envisions a palace made of glass and metal, the triumphant meeting place where the liberated masses congregate, dine and revel after a hard day's work, the famous "Crystal Palace" that became emblematic of socialist utopia. This dream of collective revelry acts as an allegory for the last scene in the novel, which shows the protagonists gathered together, unified in joyful song.

vivid dreams written twenty years ago. Not only do we see a number of things of which we once dreamed, we also see things of which we never even dreamed. (3)

The “beautiful dreams” of the past have been validated by their historic realization. It is not enough, however, to merely celebrate the realization of these “dreams”; the point is, following Chernyshevskii's epigraph, to demonstrate how the reality of socialism is so resplendent as to outstrip and outshine even the prettiest of dreams. Dreams and reality have dramatically switched places after 1949, the dark and grim existence of colonialism, war and poverty have been turned into fleeting nightmares, while those dreams of a transfigured nation have suddenly materialized in front of our very eyes. Just as the “heavens” and “earth” have dramatically changed their positions, so have dreams and reality suddenly reversed. As the author writes: “In the past we used dreams to beautify our reality, now we use reality to beautify [reality's] dreams” (3).

This paradoxical and convoluted statement is typical of socialist discourse's tendency to announce the transfiguration of reality and everyday life. No longer is “reality” merely that which a realist like Mao Dun strived “with great effort to know.” It does not sit passively, waiting to be probed, analyzed and transformed by someone else. Rather, reality emerges as a powerful force in its own right, acting on its own behalf, uncovering and producing its own truth:

Reality corrects those dreams of desperation: in the past it was possible to use dreams to criticize reality, but now we should use reality to critique dreams. Reality has smashed those dreams that sought escape from the world: most of those dreamers have since woken up; otherwise, if they continue to abandon reality, they will find themselves forsaken in turn by reality. (3)

“Reality” emerges as a somewhat terrifying angel of vengeance; Wang writes that whereas prior to liberation dreaming was a way of escaping or sugar-coating reality, after liberation, reality has returned to actively dispense with those dreams. However, according to Wang, this does not mean that dreaming is completely abandoned in socialism. Instead, the way one dreams has been radically altered by the new reality:

Reality has taught us how we should dream. From now on we will never again have those blurry dreams, those empty dreams, those fearful dreams; we now will have rational dreams, Five Year Plan dreams, Socialist and Communist dreams. Beautiful reality will not bring an end to rational dreams, instead, it will give those dreams’ potential for realization a wide pathway. [...] Now there already does not exist anymore an unbridgeable chasm between dream and reality. Our eyes have seen the great Soviet Union, their reality is precisely our dream. This all fills our hearts with conviction: dreams can be transformed into reality. (3)

Reality has not killed dreaming *per se*, but has tethered it to “rationality” and meticulously laid out schemes of economic development. Moreover, these post-liberation dreams are “rational” and “realizable” because they have concrete backing: the “reality” of the Soviet Union. Dreams and reality are “bridgeable” because there is fundamentally no chasm between them except for that of time and, in this case, a mere geographic border. The “dream” world was, after all, just next door. If, in the time of *Eastern Miscellany’s* special 1933 New Year’s issue, dreams were a plea of desperation and hope in response to a reality that seemed on the verge of collapsing, then in 1953 dreaming takes on a decidedly different tenor, one of a challenge or dare, probing reality’s ability to respond. As the author concludes:

As we are in the very beginning of building our economy on a grand scale, these [aspirations] are still dreams, or half are dreams and half are reality. Our readers perhaps will have even more beautiful dreams than these.

Those dreams will be surpassed by reality.
We have great dreams, but we have an even greater reality. (3)

In fulfilling the dreams of the past, not only have the Communists created a majestic, new reality, they have also, conversely, sucked out the enchantment dreams once held over their subjects. Their space over the cultural imaginary becomes diminished as reality is imbued with revolutionary vitality, itself the playground of desire. Writing about the Stalinist experience, Evgeny Dobrenko notes that the new “reality” as created by Socialist Realism soon overtook the place of dreaming:

[Makarenko] proclaimed, “Our reality is good for precisely the fact that it takes the lead over dreams.” By painting “dreaming” into the picture of “realism,” the Socialist Realist aesthetic removed the “romantic” gap between them (“the disharmony between the ideal and reality”) up to the point that it seemed that reality was more beautiful than a dream.

The “dream zone” underwent logical erosion: “Just as socialism is no longer the future but the present, life itself in all its manifestations, so is happiness no longer only a moral category or Maeterlinck's blue bird that mankind saw in a dream but was unable to catch. The happiness of our times is concrete. It is in the breathing of our country [...]” (63)

In a similar vein, the *People's Daily* article is as much a paean to the triumph of socialism as it is a farewell to dreaming. The rhetoric of the post liberation period is one of profound ambivalence. The dream had become reality, but there was no way that those in power could deny that the reality was not quite there yet. Socialism was paradoxically both present and deferred. Utopian desire was exploited in order to fuel the revolutionary momentum, but at the same time this desire had to be carefully micromanaged so that it did not escape the control of the Party. There seems to be an anxiety attached to the persistence of dreams in a socialist era; if people continue to imagine worlds other than the one they are presently in, then are they not implying

that the current state of affairs, and by consequence, the regime itself, is somehow wrong? Are dreams not a pathological symptom of a social order that is unwell? While the contents of such dreams may be benign and merely beautiful, their form constituted an implied critique of repression and injustice, a kind of dark knowledge that was an unwelcome competitor to the slogans and affirmations of liberation.

The 1933 *Eastern Miscellany* issue is summoned yet again in the *People's Daily* four years later in 1957, when the regime prepared for the campaign of rapid industrialization and agricultural collectivization of the Great Leap Forward. The author, Wu Zhongping, celebrates the hard won transformations of the socialist revolution, again arguing that the dreams from 1933 have been realized: "The dreams of yesteryear have already become reality: there is no hunger, and no class oppression" (8).² In contrast to Wang Ruoshui's piece, Wu is far more prescient to how "reality" has not yet really arrived, and, in a form of exhortation, promotes the necessity of more dreams in order to pick up the pace of modernization. However, like Wang, he argues that it is necessary to ground these dreams in concrete, practical plans for modernization, and not to indulge in sheer fantasy. Wu makes use of Lu Xun's famous critique of the *Eastern Miscellany* issue, reminding readers that Lu Xun criticized the 140 or so "dreamers" for entertaining merely utopian visions and personal reveries, but never dreaming of the necessary and often cruel hardships needed to realize true social change. As he quotes from Lu Xun, "Very few people

² In hindsight rather ironic given that the Great Leap Forward would resort in what most have argued was the greatest famine in human history, although there is no agreement to the number, ranging from a conservative 15 million to 40 million (D. Yang 37-8). Whatever the exact figure, even the most conservative number dwarfs other man-made catastrophes like the Holocaust. As Dali Yang writes, the Great Leap Forward "in retrospect, was fantasy incarnate" (34).

[who contributed to *Eastern Miscellany*] dreamed about what would have to occur before creating such [an ideal] society, the class struggle, the White terror, the bombings, the vicious murders, the pouring of pepper water into nostrils, electric shock, etc..." Wu's citation of Lu Xun's rhetoric is meant to prepare the populace for, if not torture and terror, then the non-stop hardships of accelerated industrialization.³ At the end of the article, the author even attempts to speak in Lu Xun's voice, relying on his previous citation as a template:

I think that if Lu Xun had lived today, he certainly would have told us this: At the same time we dream of an industrialized, socialist nation, we must also dream of the struggle against nature, hardship, bitter cold and the cruel heat that must occur before we build this nation. If we do not dream of these things, industrialization will not happen. (8)

Both Lu Xun and Wu Zhongping agree on the necessity of thinking about the concrete steps needed to effect social change and of not simply relying on fantastic visions of a hoped-for future.⁴ Wu Zhongping's rather shameless ventriloquism of Lu Xun's voice uncomfortably seems to render Lu Xun an enthusiastic cheerleader for Party rhetoric on rapid and ruthless industrialization. But the rhetorical context is fundamentally different in the two cases. Lu Xun argued for socially grounded dreams as a critical response to what he felt was Nationalist censorship; he believed this was demonstrated by the way he claimed the editors of *Eastern Miscellany* attempted to de-politicize the content. Dreams, in his view, were ineffective if subjected to political censorship and neutered into sheer fantasy; moreover, they do

³ Of course, a form of terror was occurring, as the regime was turning against "reactionary" and "rightist" elements, sparking a wave denunciations and imprisonment that culminated in the 1957 anti-Rightist movement.

⁴ As Lu Xun wrote, "There are indeed those who want to realize this 'dream,' but they do not merely speak, they act; they dream of the future and yet also devote their energy to reaching a future present (*jianglai de xianzai 将来的现在*)" (4: 482).

more to bolster existing power rather than challenge it. Lu Xun, in arguing for an overtly politicized form of dreamwork, was speaking from a position of resistance rather than authority. Wu Zhongping, however, as a spokesman for the Party's authority, reinterprets Lu Xun's words into a state sponsored directive of how and about what one should dream, in effect, reversing the intent of the 1933 essay.⁵

Another *People's Daily* article from 1957 bore the title "Peasants Before the Revolution Could Not Even Have Dreamed of This Kind of Life." A collectivization official from Shenyang county in Liaoning province reports on the extraordinary successes of land reform, insisting that life before and after collectivization were "as far apart as heaven and hell" ("*Youxian*" 3). In addition to agricultural abundance, the collectives have also instituted reading rooms, recreational clubs, extracurricular drama troupes and radio broadcasts. As the official asks rhetorically, "Is it really possible to say that peasants before liberation could have even dreamed of this life?" The wonders of the rural socialist Eden, the food, culture and camaraderie, transcend the very far limits of dreaming itself; the marvels of socialist reality outstrip any possible desire. We see, in the journalistic discourse of the post-Liberation 1950s, a rhetoric of the "dream realized," and by consequence, a complementary rhetoric that tries to quiet radical imagination.

This chapter explores the rhetoric of dreaming during the early years of the People's Republic. I argue that in a time when official discourse was trying to celebrate the majesty and grandeur of a new reality, the rhetoric of dreaming, once prominent in pre-1949 intellectual discourse, starts to not only fade away, but become

⁵ Such authoritarian re-readings of Lu Xun, the patron saint of Chinese literature in the socialist period, was of course, not uncommon. Note Mao Zedong's quotation of Lu Xun in his Yan'an speeches on art.

the target of ideological suspicion. At the heart of this anxiety was the socialist imperative for a transparency and visibility of all social meaning that dreaming, in its symbolic density and in the privacy of its operations, obscured. Also a source of concern was the existence of alternative utopian impulses that threatened to compete with the sanctioned, official utopia. The result of this centralized management over knowledge and desire was an ideological and cultural landscape in which not only did dreams barely figure, but even sleep itself was hard to come by, especially as the sunlight of Communism shined so brightly. In the second half of my discussion I will look at one of the most well known socialist realist novels, *The Song of Youth* (*Qingchun zhi ge* 青春之歌), by Yang Mo. Published in 1958, the novel delved into the dark dreams of the 1930s; I will suggest how this novel juggled a drive towards historical and stylistic nostalgia as well as the imperative to overcome such nostalgia and manifest the immanent socialist reality to come.

Pavlov over Freud

The figurative dreams of 1933 and those of 1953 and 1957 illustrate the familiar story of revolution, its transition from struggle to victory and consolidation of power. In the triumph of reality over dreams, the space allowed for oneiric imagination became far more constricted and scripted. However, if we move away from dream as a utopian discourse and turn our attention to the fate of dream as a psychological object of study, we will also note a similar constriction. It is instructive, and perhaps not all that surprising, to note that in the 1950s psychoanalysis, while having thrived in intellectual and aesthetic discourse during the Republican period, virtually

disappears in the socialist period. Psychoanalysis, along with virtually every other Western school, including Gestalt, behaviorism and pragmatism, were lumped into the category of “idealist” psychology, regarded as patently inferior in light of the materialist orientation of Marxism-Leninism and Maoist philosophy.⁶ The new Communist regime undertook to develop psychology along the lines of Soviet psychology, deriving much inspiration from the great theorist of conditional reflexes, Ivan Pavlov (M. Li 281, Higgins and Zheng 230).⁷ Psychological research was to be experimental and materialist in nature, not speculative and analytic, and it had to “serve the Chinese socialist construction” (M. Li 280). Physiology and social psychology took precedence over speculative investigations of the unconscious. As far as figures such as Freud were concerned, the Chinese followed their Soviet mentors in denouncing them as “idealist,” “subjective” and “bourgeois.”⁸ Moreover, following the Soviets’ cue, Freudian psychoanalysis was viewed as the tool of American imperialists, for whom the concept of the unconscious was a way to keep the masses mired in mysticism and superstition (“*Sulian baokan*” 3). In a 1959 review article in the *People’s Daily*, “Soviet Scholars Critique the Absurd Theories of

⁶ As L. B. Brown notes, “After the liberation the Chinese had no sympathy for Western psychology” (37).

⁷ Although, following the political estrangement between the Soviet Union and China in the late 1950’s, Pavlov’s influence began to wane in this 1960, he was dominant on the Chinese psychological scene from Liberation through the 1950s. A Chinese edition of his complete works was published in 1958 (L. Brown, 34).

⁸ Despite the opprobrium Freud earns in the socialist period, his name and various Freudian terms nevertheless appear in the “Vocabulary of Psychology” (Xinxue mingci) produced by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 1954. This work was part of a whole series of “Vocabularies” across the sciences meant to produce a common Chinese nomenclature for English technical terms, with Guo Moruo serving as general editor. Terms such as “Freudianism,” “dream,” “hysteria,” “repression” and “unconscious” appear, but more specialized terms, like “primary process” and “secondary process” do not.

In the Soviet context, Igal Halfin recounts the history of attacks on Freudianism in the early 1930s, culminating in its “demise” in 1936 (236, 241).

Freud,” the anonymous author, reporting on a recent Soviet conference of psychologists and physiologists denouncing Freud, took stock of his wide influence in fields as far ranging as “philosophy, psychology, sociology, ethics and pedagogy” (“*Sulian xuezhe*” 7).⁹ This influence has been a pernicious one, merely a “method used by bourgeois intellectuals to dupe the masses and an intellectual weapon against Marxism.” Freudian psychoanalysis and Pavlovian physiology were “fundamentally opposed,” and Freud’s theory that dreams were the expression of repressed desire demonstrated his “abandonment of the principle that viewed mental disorders as the result of a deviation in the normal psychic processes.” Freud’s symbolic theory of dreams “walked the road of idealism.” A paper published the same year in the *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, the official publication of the Chinese Institute of Psychology, similarly laid out a devastating critique of Freudianism. The author, Sun Ye, followed his Soviet counterparts in placing Freudian psychonanalysis within the discursive sphere American imperialism, naming the United States the “second homeland” of psychoanalysis (264). Moreover, Sun Ye identifies Freud as the heir to a line of German anti-Enlightenment thinkers, in particular Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and lambastes Freud for having a genealogical (if not direct) connection to the philosophy of fascism (269). Psychoanalysis was thus yet another weapon in the bourgeois

⁹One Russian, however, who defended Freud, was Trotsky. Isaac Deutscher, in his biography (some have argued it is more hagiography) of Trotsky, recounts the revolutionary’s defense of Freudian psychoanalysis as, along with Pavlovian physiology, being fundamentally materialist in nature. Freudian theory, Trotsky argued, accepted physiological urges as the basis behind psychic formation, and could thus be seen as also employing a logic homologous to the theory of conditional reflexes (179). He even wrote to Pavlov in 1922 to encourage him to be more tolerant of Freudian theories and research (178). Igal Halfin also recounts Trotsky’s defense of Freud (161-2).

ideological arsenal of false consciousness, an amalgamation of American imperialism and German fascist dogma.¹⁰

Besides plainly ideological condemnations of Freud, Sun Ye also pointed out a number of methodological objections to his method. They include Freud's reliance of a "primitivist" view of history and psychology as opposed to a materialist view of history (264), a lack of solid statistical proof for the effectiveness of psychoanalytic treatment (265), the dismissal of educational and environmental factors over human development (265), and the lack of experimental and statistical basis for Freudian hermeneutics (268), among others. The author proudly notes that at a conference in 1957 in the West German city of Freiburg where the philosophies of Freud and Pavlov were compared, participants criticized the Freudian method as being "absurd" (265).¹¹

Aside from the "scientific" criticism of psychoanalytic theories, the popular press also echoed physiological explanations for dream phenomena. A *People's Daily* article printed shortly before liberation, replying to a reader's query, explained the origin of dreams as a psychological response to a physiological stimulus response. The article was signed, notably, by the "North Chinese People's Government Hygiene Bureau" ("*Ren weishenme*" 4). The article argues that both mental and bodily illness can induce dreams, and that these dreams, in turn, are harmful to the physical constitution. The article ends with advice on how to avoid dreams altogether,

¹⁰ Sun Ye relates the story of a strike in a British factory, where the owner hires a psychoanalyst to diagnose the situation. He ascribes the workers' discontent not to the exploitative practices of the capitalist, but to their collective Oedipal hatred against their boss, the father figure (264).

¹¹ Although Sun Ye also notes separately that some participants argued for a dialogue between the two thinkers (266).

instructing the readers to create an optimal sleeping environment and to avoid distracting external stimuli, “such as being too full, using blankets that are too thick, placing one’s hands on one chest, or having an object pressing against one’s neck.”¹² It also instructs the readers to avoid substantial mental stressors, such as “flying if one is scared to fly, missing one’s family, and indulging in absurd fancies (*wangxiang* 妄想).”

Another *People’s Daily* article printed ten years later in 1959 declares that dreams, while common to all sleepers, are “essentially void and absurd, and have no real meaning” (Fu 8). Before embarking on the familiar attack on Freud, the piece first takes aim at traditional beliefs regarding dreams, in particular the practice of dream divination, or *yuanmeng* (圆梦). The author argues that the criteria for such interpretation was arbitrary, and dependent upon the power relations between lord and seer, as dream divination often took place within the context of political governance. The author relates a story about the Tang rebel and usurper An Lushan who, after sacking the capital Chang’an, compelled one of the court entertainers to interpret a dream of his in which the rebel saw the sleeves of his robe extend well over his hands. The entertainer notes that the proper interpretation was that the new lord “let his sleeves hang and thus governed” (*chui yi er zhi* 垂衣而治), implying An Lushan’s grace and ease in governing through moral suasion (Fu 8). Pleased with this reading, An Lushan generously rewards his analyst. However, after An Lushan dies and Chang’an is recaptured, the same entertainer is held for treason because of his

¹² Incidentally, the placing of hands on the chest is the ostensible somatic reason why Lu Xun’s narrator dreams of a suffering woman discussed in Chapter One.

divination, to which he pleads that he was only giving a false interpretation to save his skin. The correct interpretation was that as An Lushan “dreamed his sleeves were too long, it meant that he was unable to stick his hands out (*chu shou bu de* 出手不得),” thus implying An Lushan's complete impotence in governing. The article notes the arbitrariness of dream interpretation, its illumination being not one of the dreamer's psyche, but of the power differential between dreamer and interpreter.

The author goes on to promote a “materialist” theory of dreams, and again draws on the authority of Pavlov. According to Pavlov, the author writes, dreams are a result of shallow sleep. In proper, deep sleep, most of the brain undergoes a form of “inhibition” (*yizhi* 抑制) that prevents the nervous system from reacting to any external stimulus. However, if sleep is shallow, the nervous repression is not complete, and therefore parts of the brain remain active and start to function, thus creating dream phenomena. As such nervous activity is only partial, the things perceived in a dream “lack logical relationship to each other, and this accounts for the absurdity of the dream” (Fu 8). After detailing the way various external stimuli can affect the content of dreams, the author then admits that “dreams perhaps reveal a person's true feelings. An individualist will dream about the realization of his own extravagant wishes (*shewang* 奢望), whereas a person who enthusiastically loves to work will dream of a sudden increase in production.” While the author does endorse an explanation of dreaming as wish fulfillment, he marks a contrast between the “individualist” whose dreams are merely fanciful, and the lover of labor whose dreams are purely within the realm of rational production. One dreamer is selfish, the

other dreams of the greater socialist good. The author ends by reminding us that dreams are simply a function of shallow sleep, and that this is normal and not of significant harm to the body. Excessive dreaming, however, affects proper rest, thus hindering the sufferer in his daily work, and should thus be guarded against.

It is not my intention to produce an exhaustive history of the science of dreams in the early socialist period; I merely want to demonstrate representative examples of the kind of discourse surrounding dream that were circulating and which informed popular conceptions of dreaming. However, it is not merely coincidental that the figurative discourse of the “dream fulfilled” as heralded by the socialist revolution, and the rise of a materialist, Soviet-inspired explanation of dream phenomena, occur roughly simultaneously. Both discourses, while looking at dreams in different senses, nevertheless are similar in the way they try to ultimately lay dream discourse to rest. Socialist psychology was foremost concerned about how to foster a new kind of subjectivity appropriate to the socialist state, how to mold the nation’s citizens into responsible and enthusiastic communists. Psychologists were primarily focused on educational psychology, and emphasized the importance of researching the psychic and social development of children.¹³ The role of materialist psychology was to make its subjects conscious of their existence not as individuals, but as actors within history, contributing to the collective construction of the new socialist society.

¹³ The Institute of Psychology published a translation in 1953 of a collection of Soviet articles and conference proceedings around the topic of the transformation of psychology through the insights of Pavlov. The last article, a series of general conclusions, declared the importance of studying children’s psychology and the molding of their consciousness and behavior to fit communist norms through the lens of Pavlov’s “two nervous signaling systems” (*Bafuluofu* 334).

The relegation of dream discourse to “superstition,” or more damningly, “absurdity” (*huangmiu* 荒謬), reveals not only the empirical thrust of socialist scientism, but also the dominance of official discourses over forms of signification at odds with central semiotic authority. Of course, this did not come out of the blue; May 4th scholars of psychology were also engaged in filtering out superstitious beliefs from new insights into the psyche. But state-sponsored socialist ideology inaugurated a regime of semiotic normativity, whereby speculative hermeneutics of alterity, such as dream interpretation, whether traditional or modernist, were deemed as being utterly devoid of meaning, “absurd.” The Freudian method was to be rejected not only because of its clear connections to American imperialist false consciousness, but also because its hermeneutics are symbolic and qualitative rather than empirical and quantitative. The unconscious, to which dreams act as an index, and repressed desire, which dreams purport to reveal, cannot be validated because they are not subject to any measurable sense perception. They linger in the dark, illusive figures of fancy, unable to stand on their own against the bright light of socialist science. The individualist who harbors secret “extravagant wishes” was both a parasite upon and a threat to the socialist state, for not only did he keep his ideas to himself, hidden away from the scrutiny of the state, he was also open to co-optation by imperialist enemies. Official ideologists thus attempted to abolish *de facto* the existence of a private hermeneutic, the production of meaning that can be somehow secreted away from central authority. The symbolism of dreams is indebted to the shadows cast by language itself, the textures and spaces between overlapping and ever changing signifiers; it is not a surprise that a strong, centralized state might have found this

kind of meaning production anxiety inducing. Thus what is common to the treatment of utopian dreaming and psychoanalysis described above is the deep anxiety official psychologists and ideologists felt towards alternative forms of knowledge that threatened the state's semiotic authority. Indulging in an idle daydream was disapproved of not merely because it diverted attention from building socialism, but also because such fantasizing carried with it an implicit critique and challenge to the Party's monopoly over knowledge. In what follows, I hope to show how this anxiety over dreaming results not only in its conspicuous absence in post-Liberation culture, but moreover, in a collective insomnia as well.

The Cult of Light

In relation to the ideology of the patently visible against the murky phantasms of shadows, it is worthwhile to note the dominance of the motif of light, lamps and electricity in the 1950s and early 1960s, one that surely helped precipitate the full-blown cult of Mao as the “bright red sun” during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴ Fan Yanqiao devotes an essay to the topic of artificial light, telling the story of rural electrification by way of discussing an old village woman ecstatic by the new arrival of light bulbs. “Our village now has electric lights,” he reports the old woman as saying. “I’ve lived over seventy years now, but even in my dreams I could not have dreamed of such a happy occasion” (76). In a remarkably meticulous manner Fan

¹⁴ Yomi Braester, in *Witness Against History*, writes elegantly about the semiotics the “lantern and Mao” in his chapter on the revolutionary play *Hongdeng ji* (Red Lantern). He argues convincingly that the “lantern implies, not a system that facilitates the free exchange of messages and opinions, but rather a structure that upholds the Party’s arbitrary interpretation of all signs” (127).

Yanqiao goes on to trace the evolution of artificial light throughout Chinese history, remarking how Mao was able to craft powerful essays even in substandard lamplight:

Just like the never-ending evolution of human tools from pottery to bronze, and then to magnets and tin, the form of artificial light has also gone through many changes. The use of vegetable oil, soybean oil, peanut oil, cottonseed oil and hempseed oil (for lamps) over thousands of years have seemed like a single day. Kerosene lamps, gaslight and electric lights followed monopoly capitalism's entry into China. With the new always outstripping the old, not even the lamp can avoid this law, and those things that fall behind will be weeded out. However in that sacred land of revolution – Yan'an -- our great revolutionary leader, under the light of a hempseed lamp, wrote majestic essays, and even though the light was dim, his words shone brightly for thousands of yards, illuminating the great land. [...] Today, under the even brighter electric lights, what kind of things can we now write? This is worth deep reflection. (77)

Fan Yanqiao applies the materialist laws of history to the evolution of lamps and light bulbs throughout the ages, each new form of lighting replacing the previous one, and identifies electric light with the arrival of capitalist modernity.¹⁵ However, he creates a figural catachresis when talking about how Mao's revolutionary writings shine even brighter than his hempseed oil lamp. On one hand, he is endorsing the common evolutionary discourse of modernity, the obsolete making way for the new. However, Mao's use of a hempseed oil lamp signals a revolutionary leap over the usual laws of development; although the chairman is in a country backwater far, far away from the city, with not even a proper lamp at his disposal, it is precisely here that he produces his transcendent knowledge, one that pushes the peasantry into the forefront of revolution and brings him to the capital. In this sense the ideological and figural importance of enlightenment always outstrips light as physical phenomenon. Rural

¹⁵ For an account of the modernization of light in Europe, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *Disenchanted Night*, 1-78.

electrification has double implications; on a literal level it allows people to produce and work uninhibited by nightfall (something that would be of paramount importance under the Great Leap Forward), but on an ideological level it drives away the darkness of ignorance, superstition and false consciousness. The progress in the technology of artificial light promises, as the author suggests, an even greater advance in ideological insight. Moreover, electric light has won a significant battle against the wavering unreliability of nature. “In helping us read and write, the lamp and the sun serve the same function, but the sun’s power is occasionally weak while the lamp is affected by neither darkness, wind or rain, and even in darkness can shine brightly [...] the lamp will always be our greatest companion (*zhiji* 知己)” (77). Light has contributed to collective happiness, and Fan Yanqiao ends his essay by describing a joyous New Year’s banquet in the capital:

There was a banquet inside the Great Hall of the People, and the festive lanterns, numerous as a canopy of stars, bright as moons, illuminated the old and young as they toasted each other. As I told this old lady from the village, this is truly what cannot be dreamed of. Light, in the new China, is happiness; people under the light of today are far happier. (77)

Again, what is striking is how inevitably the author so easily equates the evolution of artificial light with the themes of spiritual and social illumination, how material modernity is always already its own figure. The most important advance is neither light nor electricity, but Maoist knowledge. The essay itself, by beginning in the countryside and then ending in Beijing’s Great Hall of the People, formally demonstrates the dynamism of the Maoist ideological ether, galvanizing the country and triumphantly zooming into the center of power. Under the guise of celebrating the

forward march of lighting, Fan is in fact writing a joyous panegyric to the liberating power of socialist ideology over forms of epistemological darkness.

What gets left unmentioned is the opportunity cost of ever increasing light: night. Night recedes as the diurnal rhythms under socialism become irrevocably transformed. The author writes about how peasants could not have possibly dreamed of the wonders of electric light; ironically, what persistent light does, by pushing away night, is to prevent dreaming from happening in the first place. When everything is illuminated, nothing is hidden. A poem from 1957 extols the image of children reveling in the street while holding festive lamps. The author equates the light with their happiness:

But as for the children,
In their hands there are lamps,
On the crown of their heads there are lamps,
In their hearts there are lamps,
Even in the land of sleep,
The sunlight of Communism nurtures their dreams.
(“Deng” 96)

It is hard to imagine how these children can even fall asleep when they have been figuratively transformed into human torches; however, whatever dreams they have are warmed and nurtured by Communism’s luminescence.¹⁶

In contrast to this celebration of light, political discourse in the Chinese 1950s and 1960s often used dream discourse to pejoratively denigrate foreign and internal rivals, including the Dalai Lama, John F. Kennedy, Liu Shaoqi and others. An instructive example is that of John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State to U.S. President

¹⁶ Schivelbusch relates how night light, once a symbol of utopian modernity and illumination in 19th century Europe, degenerates into an ominous symbol of totalitarian control in the 20th century. “The Utopian dream of nights lit up as bright as day,” he writes, “was transformed into the nightmare of a light from which there was no escape” (134).

Eisenhower. In response to Dulles' anti-communist policy of diplomatic isolation in regards to mainland China, the *People's Daily* called Dulles' fantasy of politically containing China a "dream" and "daydream" ("*Dulesi de meng*" 7). Incidentally, this was fitting for a country that Chinese psychologists considered to be the "second homeland" of Freud and his ilk.¹⁷ Two years later, a poem appeared in the March 1959 issue of *People's Literature* entitled "Dulles' Dream Ravings" (*Dulesi de mengyi* 杜勒斯的梦呓). During this time Dulles was gravely ill with cancer and died only two months after the poem's publication. The poem opens uncharitably with an image of Dulles in his sick bed:

The dim light
 Emanating from the dark green edge of the lampshade,
 Shines upon Dulles' sickbed.
 [...]
 Only Dulles' groans can be heard,
 In this exquisite desolation and loneliness.
 The night is deep,
 And the capitalist world is stuck in deep winter.
 Dulles has fallen sick.
 [...]
 His troubles, like a viper,
 Grab hold of his heart,
 Often had he thought of swallowing the world in one gulp.
 But it was of course only a dream!
 [...]
 (Sha 56)

While Dulles bitterly approaches his demise, China is luxuriating in a verdant spring, the "sun as usual rising in the East." The difference between socialism and capitalism was as clear as the difference between day and night, between glorious sunlight and

¹⁷A day after the *People's Daily* published their denunciation of Dulles, the Los Angeles Times reiterated China's position by quoting the *People's Daily* article. See "Red China Hits Dulles' Dream." Los Angeles Times, 4 Jun 1957.

dark, sickly hallucination. Furthermore, this sort of discourse heralds the triumph of socialist knowledge against bourgeois fantasy and speculation, the victory of one hermeneutic, one way of reading the world, over another. Socialists relied on the incontrovertible truth of dialectical materialism; imperialists, however, used dreams not only to dupe the working class, but themselves as well.

The Sunshine Policy

In his meticulous survey of the Chinese “socialist literary system,” Perry Link describes the often tense and fraught political situation in which writers found themselves. While on one hand enjoying the “prestige and official sanction” provided by the state in the creation of the All China’s Writers’ Association (109), they also found themselves, depending on the political winds prevailing, nakedly vulnerable to the punishing wrath of the very system that sustained them. However, as Link also notes, most writers of the early socialist period were by and large “revolutionaries who were emerging from the turmoil and suffering of the 1930s and 1940s, and who had high hopes for the new regime” (110). Literature in the socialist period had a primarily utilitarian purpose; it was supposed to aid the political transformation, to educate and enlighten the populace, a “cog and screw,” to borrow Lenin’s oft-abused phrase, in the socialist machinery.¹⁸ Literature was a uniquely social public works project, following Mao’s famous Yan’an dictum that “revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel

¹⁸ Terry Eagleton reminds us that when Lenin wrote of cogs and screws fourteen years before the Bolshevik revolution he was referring to party literature, not literature at large (*Marxism* 40-41). However, after the revolution, it is arguable that all literature indeed became “party literature” of one form or another.

history forward” (470). The Chinese were inspired by the model of Soviet socialist realism in literature and the arts, producing their own works celebrating the heroic travails of model workers, peasants and revolutionary warriors. The open partisanship of literature was nothing to be ashamed of – privately or individualistically oriented literature was but a façade for bourgeois decadence anyhow.

Lan Yang has taken great pains in pointing out an actual bifurcation in the development of Chinese socialist literary practice from the late 1950s through the 1960s; he points to debates among Communist intellectuals about the extent to which it was possible and/or necessary to address the darker aspects of life and society through Socialist Realism, and whether such exposés compromised the ideological purpose of literature (96). Yang argues that this uneasiness over the status of non-idealized reality within the representation of reality in its “revolutionary development” was resolved by the promotion of related, yet distinct, school, or “Revolutionary Realism plus Revolutionary Romanticism.” Under this intensified rubric, only the most ideological and idealist reality was legitimately recognized as “reality,” and thus the problem of what to do with inconvenient details and actualities was conveniently sidestepped. Around 1960 is where Yang marks a transition point between Socialist Realism and its more “tendentious” cousin (99). While Yang provides an important contribution to our understanding of how socialist-period literature was far more complex than has been usually assumed, the persistent and explicit utopianism of socialist realism, the realization of a desired reality in textual form, is something that pervades the literature of the 1950s as well. For Dobrenko, writing about the Stalinist experience, Socialist Realism was not merely a literary

mode that sought to “beautify” reality, but went much further, in essence creating the very “reality” of socialism itself:

Ideology *materializes* in Stalinist art, but is not “described” or “portrayed” in it. Socialist Realist “descriptiveness” is radical and self-referential: *Socialist Realism describes a world to the existence of which only it bears witness.* [...] This allows one to see Socialist Realism not as “propaganda” [...] but as a system that engenders a sort of reality, which obliges one to reexamine certain traditional approaches to the subject. (13)

Dobrenko thus describes a fundamental change in the relationship between literature and reality whereby literature constitutes, rather than merely describes, reality. Katerina Clark, in her classic study on the Soviet novel, argues that Socialist Realism exhibits what she calls “modal schizophrenia,” the dizzying oscillation between the worlds of “what is” and “what ought to be” (37). Fiction in the time of Stalin, according to Clark, was given the task of mediating between current reality and utopian inevitability, thereby transporting the reader into a kind of historic epic consciousness: “Thus the Stalinist novel was supported by a world view that tended to annul time, to write off that unbridgeable distance between its own kind of absolute epic past and the present” (40). For Boris Groys, Soviet Socialist Realism found its roots not in earlier schools of realism but in the avant-garde projects of the early revolutionary period; for Groys, Socialist Realism was nothing but the very realization of avant-garde fantasies, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that heralded the complete triumph of aesthetics over politics (9). While the exaggerations of socialist realism do mimic modernist fantasy, it is also worth thinking about how Socialist Realism, in

both the Soviet and Chinese contexts, performed an explicit realization of a utopian desire inherent within realism itself.¹⁹

In realism, utopian desires within the text can be detected in their allegorical transformation into dreams, narrative fantasies that are legitimized by their proper relegation to an individual character's reverie. In previous chapters I have argued that the dream form preserves History's independence from Utopia, at the same time demonstrating how History strives towards it. One way of thinking about Socialist Realism, then, is a kind of realism where the bar between dream and reality has been removed, where life has become dream and vice versa. One consequence of this transformation, however, is that the presence of dreams as an autonomous entity with its own borders separated from the narrative disappears.

This implicit utopianism revealed itself as a sort of literal “sunshine policy” in Chinese texts of the socialist period. Characters are so engaged in building socialism that they often fail to sleep, and when they do, only rarely, perchance, to dream. Sleeplessness, insomnia, “all-nighters” at the cooperative, as it were, seem to be a common motif in this literature. For example, in Wang Wenshi’s 1956 story “Night of the Snowstorm” (*Fengxue zhi ye* 风雪之夜), a group of village party leaders and those from the district spend all night hammering out production quotas for the New Year. The district secretary, his eyes “heavy and bloodshot, with black rings around

¹⁹ Clark suggests that Tolstoy predated the formulators of Socialist Realism in their search for a transcendent, utopian literary form: “Yet the official formulators of Socialist Realism, Gorky especially, also wanted to create a great, universal, and simple form. This, of course, had been Tolstoy’s dream before them; in many of his aesthetic tracts and in his later writings he tried to call an end to the self-indulgent verbosity of modern literature, to rise above all that into a literature of essential essences, accessible to all” (36).

them” is encouraged to take a nap, but instead he picks up his things and trudges through a snowy morning to make his way to another meeting in another town.

In Li Zhun’s 1959 “The Story of Li Shuangshuang” (*Li Shuangshuang xiao zhuan* 李双双小传), narrating the positive effect of the Great Leap Forward on a modestly educated but underappreciated peasant wife, Sun village is mobilizing its citizens for a great collective project, the creation of a water channel leading from an uphill reservoir to the village. Shuangshuang, itching to lend her efforts to the task, is dissuaded by her boorish and mocking husband. After a long evening of arguing with her husband, Shuangshuang finds herself awake and alone in her house, when outside the window she discovers the bright flicker of lamps wielded by jovial workers on their way to the night shift. “Outside the Great Leap has turned the night-sky red,” she thinks to herself. “How can I let these household duties entrap me forever?” (341) She converses with a neighboring woman, both of them professing their inability to sleep amid all the excitement, as the work is progressing nearer towards their neck of the woods. Concerned that there is not yet a communal mess hall to feed the workers, Shuangshuang and her friend forthwith head to the village secretary to propose an idea to build such a hall. Encouraged by the village secretary’s wife to put up large announcements proposing the idea, Shuangshuang returns home to find her husband fast asleep, and then spends the rest of the evening, until “the East was bright,” writing her announcements. In the end of the story, just as night becomes day, her domestic household is turned inside out and traditional roles are reversed, as she manages construction and operation of the new mess hall, and her husband is employed as the noodle maker.

Another story detailing the transformation of night during the Great Leap Forward is Wang Wenshi's "Summer Night" (*Xiaye* 夏夜, 1960). Again, the diurnal cycle, along with gender roles, are reversed. The main character is a skilled female tractor driver, Yunyun, hired to the neighboring village to work the late night shift (*yeban* 夜班), sleeping during the morning so she can plow under moonlight and lamps. Harassed by a playful laborer, Shuhong, who joy rides her tractor, she complains to the widow of a house where she takes her morning sleep. She does not realize that the owner of the house is Shuhong's mother, and she also fails to realize that both her father and the late father of her pest worked together in the Communist underground before liberation, and that she and Shuhong were once childhood playmates. The first time she takes her sleep at the house, she enters a dream that is not quite a dream:

It seemed like a dream, yet was not really a dream either. Yunyun hazily heard someone's footsteps treading lightly in her room, quietly closing the window slats and shutting off the sun's rays shining westwards, softly placing something besides her pillow, and quietly stepping out and bringing the doors to a close, after which from the courtyard could be heard some halting words: "...Mother... you should..." In reply she heard Auntie say "Don't worry and go ahead now." Several hours later, Yunyun awoke, and the few rays that seeped through into her room had dimmed. She opened a window and saw the setting sun immediately flood the room. Looking about the room, she discovered that by her pillow had been placed a large cattail leaf fan, and on the little stool was a washbasin to clean her face. (16-17)

In addition to the fan and washbasin, she discovers slices of cucumber to refresh her thirst, as well as a note informing her that the gifts were from the village youth Communist league and meant as a token of appreciation for their "comrade engaged in mechanizing agricultural labor." Just as night has been artificially transformed into

day through the magic of electric lamps, so must day be artificially be turned into night by blocking out the sun's rays so that Yunyun can get some sleep. However, it is significant that Yunyun does not really dream at all, but merely perceives her surroundings through a consciousness flagging into sleep. When she does sleep, nothing happens; her mind shuts off, and both brain and body get the necessary rest needed so that she can be refreshed to work the next shift. As her fellow tractor sister-in-arms tells her, "You must sleep your fill, otherwise you'll have no energy for the night shift" (16). This skilled laborer, bringing the wonders of mechanization to the village, is herself an automaton, needing sufficient periods of downtime.

The ambiguous use of oneiric rhetoric here, the dream which is not a dream, seems to evoke a sort of sexual, yet subtle, desire in the form of Shuhong, who spirits himself into the bedroom like a specter, quietly and softly placing his gifts in the room, even suggestively stepping right near her pillow, and then leaving. The language of dreams thus acts as a romantic foreshadow, hinting at the eventual union of the two lovers, a fate predestined by their fathers' close comradeship a generation earlier. However, all libidinal energies are eventually diverted towards the collective labor, not romance. When Yunyun and Shuhong in the end coalesce and initiate a proper courtship during an evening party, the two leave the party to work the night shift together, Yunyun acting as tractor instructor to Shuhong.

One can argue that dreams mirror an inner, personal utopia that allegorically models what a redeemed outside world might look like. This personal world, by being driven "underground" into the realm of sleep, bears the imprint of external reality that has necessitated its coming to being, but at the same time, by being kept within, this

world remains somewhat free from the compromises of that very same external reality. A socialist epistemology that seeks to create a unified, centralized hermeneutic would necessarily find indulgence in private dreams as a sort of aberration, if not direct challenge, to the univocal authority of the state. This implicit barrier to dreaming and private meaning production finds its symptomatic literary effect in the curious fact that when characters of the socialist period sleep, they rarely dream. Moreover, they are often prevented from ever sleeping in the first place, too vexed by their concern for the well-being of socialism. The workers are far too invested in working in the fields and factories to ever bother with sleep and dreams; desire is not something to be indulged in apart from wakened reality, but is something that permeates the very fabric and texture of that reality.

Touched by a Bolshevik: Yang Mo's *Song of Youth* and the Therapeutic Discourse of Feeling

Yang Mo's 1958 novel *Song of Youth*, about a young woman's transformation from naïve, earnest schoolteacher, to emboldened and heroic Communist activist in the early 1930s, provides both a counterpoint and foreshadow to more contemporary tales of socialist construction. Because the novel deals with a period prior to the revolution, it can and does display a certain stylistic nostalgia, and features more introspection and personal reflection than a contemporary panegyric to the countryside.²⁰ Unlike contemporary stories about the glories of collective agriculture,

²⁰ As Cyril Birch, just five years after *Song of Youth*'s publication, notes, "The tendency [...] to go back to the 1930s for material may well represent a means of escape into a 'margin of creativity.'" He goes on to describe the more nuanced, layered descriptions of protagonists in the novel: "The

this tale instead indulges in the dark world of wicked KMT agents, feudal landlords and the decadent bourgeoisie. Meng Yue has noted how the novel is a form of feminine *bildungsroman* that “begins like some women’s writing from the 1920s and 1930s” (127), one that stresses the political evolution and development of its heroine, Lin Daojing. Moreover, Daojing’s tale is also a narrative of working through trauma and finding psychic recuperation through the agency of the underground Communist party.

There is only one major dream scene in this novel of over 600 pages, but it is a significant one. Trapped in an unhappy union with Yu Yongze, a Peking University literature student and petty-bourgeois dandy, Daojing is charmed and inspired by Lu Jiachuan, a masculine and robust Communist who begins to teach her the tenets of the Communist creed and encourages her to tackle a vast list of books on dialectical materialism. Laying besides an aesthete for whom she has long stopped feeling affection, she dreams of the true object of her desire:

That night she had a strange dream.

Under a dark, murky sky she paddled a small boat, floating about on a sea buffeted by foamy waves reaching up to the sky. The wind, rain and black clouds were all pressing against this small boat, pushing it down. She was afraid, very afraid. She was all alone in this frightful sea, all alone! (162)

As she battles against the torrential elements, a man suddenly appears in the boat bearing an uncannily resemblance to someone she has met before. He softly smiles at her, eliciting her annoyance and frustration. In anger and desperation she flings herself at his throat, only to discover up close the identity of the familiar stranger:

Communists [...] are depicted in heroic terms, but in shadow, as figures mysterious and brooding, almost one would say as Byronic heroes” (8).

She let him go. The sky seemed to clear, and the waters turned azure. He sat silently opposite her, and the two fixed stares upon each other. Was he not Lu Jiachuan? Taken by surprise, she dropped her oar into the water, and Lu Jiachuan immediately plopped right into the water to fetch it. But then the black waters swallowed him whole, and the skies in an instant turned black. Crying, she let out a yell and cast herself into the water. (162)

The description of the water and Daojing's tumultuous emotions are thickly saturated with desire, one that finally culminates in the materialization of her beloved Communist mentor. Their naked attraction for each other is evidenced by their fixed, mutual stare, and when Lu Jiachuan disappears into the ocean, Daojing immediately follows her beloved.

While the dream certainly expresses a conventional trope in both premodern and Chinese literature, the erotic encounter with a beloved, a significant ambiguity abides in their union. They both fall into the sea, a motif that looms large throughout the novel. The novel opens with Daojing looking upon the sea after leaving the train in northeastern Beidaihe, where she has arrived after escaping the clutches of an abusive stepmother and an arranged marriage back in Beijing.²¹ Not long before her escape, she learns the fate of her birth mother and grandfather, poor farmers in Jehol. Her mother was raped and kidnapped by their landlord; her grief-stricken grandfather shortly drowned himself in a nearby river. Shortly after her birth, Lin was seized by the landlord's wife and her mother driven out. Her mother also flung herself into the river. While both her mother and grandfather drowned themselves, the sea is abundantly associated with the mother figure. While in Manchuria, Daojing finds

²¹ Peter Button, in his analysis of the novel, argues that the sea trope encapsulates the heroine's dialectical journey from an appreciation of the sublimely beautiful that transcends reality to an adoption of a revolutionary praxis that requires a re-entry into reality.

employment as a schoolteacher. She goes to the sea every morning, and discovers a visceral maternal attraction to it:

[...] she would always spend the whole day sitting on a giant rock that reached deep into the water. She was drawn to the sea as she was drawn to her beloved mother (*aizhe hai, xiang aizhe qin'ai de muqin* 挨着海，像挨着亲爱的母亲). Her melancholy eyes stared firmly into the waters, and from time to time she would hang her head and cry “Mama!” (30)

This is not the only time that the sea is directly associated with a mother figure. At one point she meets a beggar woman near the water who is so starved that she is unable to breastfeed her infant. Only a few days later she discovers that this woman, in hunger and desperation, has flung herself into the water, child in tow. Not long after Daojing is herself on the verge of the very same fate, having learned that her erstwhile trusted schoolmaster is trying to pawn her off to rich man.²² Pleading to her long dead mother for help, she dashes into an angry sea, saved in the nick of time by the man who would be her first love, the Peking University student Yu Yongze (37). The heroine likens the entire tumultuous episode as a kind of “bad dream” (*e meng* 噩梦).

Sigmund Freud, in the opening of *Civilization and its Discontents*, remarks on the “oceanic feeling,” a concept he acquired through correspondence with the French author Romain Rolland. Rolland used the concept of “oceanic feeling” while trying to

²² The problem of suicide as the only outlet available to educated women trapped in an oppressive patriarchal system was one that interested Mao himself. Julia Kristeva, in her work *About Chinese Women*, discussed a series of nine articles that Mao wrote on the topic of female suicide between 1919 and 1920 in Hunan. For both Mao and Kristeva, suicide was a woman’s final act of revolt against patriarchy and tradition, an overdetermined effect of a social conflict (120). “The goal of the struggle is not to be killed by others, but to strive towards an affirmation of an authentic individuality,” says Mao. “If one does not succeed in this struggle, in spite of all her efforts, if one struggles up to death and sacrifices herself, then she will become the most courageous person in the world, and this tragedy will make a great impression on the spirit of men” (120-1).

describe the sensation of “something limitless, unbounded – as it were, ‘oceanic’” that constitutes the “true source of religious sentiments” (64). In his letters to Freud Rolland made references to yoga and other forms of Eastern mysticism, but was addressing religious feeling as a whole. Freud, however, insisted that he felt nowhere inside of him any inkling of this “oceanic feeling,” although he accepted that others felt this sensation (65). He averred that such a need sprang from a childhood psychological source, the child’s desire for “a father’s protection:” “The derivation of religious needs from the infant’s helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it seems to me incontrovertible, especially since the feeling is not simply prolonged from childhood days, but is permanently sustained by fear of the superior power of Fate” (72). While towards the end of his introduction Freud locates the desire that underlies the “oceanic feeling,” and religion in general, as essentially a desire for fatherly protection, earlier in the essay he mentions the undivided consciousness of the infant prior to ego-formation, and describes the union of mother and child: “An infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in upon him” (67). Freud seeks to explain religious drives as fundamentally psychological in nature, deriving from childhood experiences. In analogous fashion, the sea in *Song of Youth* also has a very powerful association with childhood and, quite particularly, the maternal, characterized as a natural force that draws the heroine ever closer, even to her own oblivion.

The trauma of an absent mother is something that haunts Daojing, most significantly in her dream.²³ Motivating her deep desire to become an activist on behalf of the party is her overriding feeling of being an orphan. Daojing's nocturnal vision of the sea is not the only instance where mothers and dreams are drawn together. In the last half of the novel, Daojing returns to Beijing after another stint teaching school in the countryside in order to evade the authorities. Having spent all night shortly after arrival unsuccessfully trying to find lodging, she sleeps outside a Peking University dormitory where she had hoped to find a friend and a bed:

[...] suddenly a weak sound, like falling rain, softly resounded in her ear:

"Mom! Mommy..."

She woke with a start, thinking she was dreaming. Rubbing her eyes, that weak sound continued to reverberate:

"Mommy! Mommy! I want mommy!..." She then heard someone sniffing.

Fully awake she realized what was happening: it was not a dream, but the faint sound came from nearby. She stood and went looking for its source. She finally discovered it: across the girls' dormitory, under the eaves of a store there lay two children leaning against each other, sleeping on the icy stone steps. Under the faint light of dawn, Daojing leaned forward and could make out who they were: two boys, the older about nine years old, the young about six, their faces filthy, bodies frail, not a single rag on their naked bodies. The two seemed to be sleeping soundly, but the younger one's mouth was left hanging, catching his tears, and he continued to cry out for his mommy. (362-3)

What is so remarkable about this scene is how the author describes the heroine's inability to ascertain where the cry is coming from, either from her unconscious, or from some external source. The cry of "mommy" is at first a disembodied voice, belonging to no one and everyone at the same time; it is only after Daojing is fully

²³ I have just recently become aware of Lingzhen Wang's discussion of mother-daughter relationships in *Song of Youth* in her book, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China*. In future versions of this chapter I will take up her arguments more specifically; for now, please refer to her discussion (125-40).

awake that she recognizes its “true” source. What she discovers is that it is not, specifically speaking, her dream, but that of the poor child, hungry and cold. And yet, for a moment the text indulges in the fantastic, and in some ways this is the most truthful and poignant point; the dream of “mommy” reveals a collective cry.

A similar instance occurs later when Daojing is arrested by the KMT and subjected to vicious torture. Thrown in a dungeon with two other women, an older, more seasoned revolutionary, and a young girl of sixteen rounded up as a suspected sympathizer, they lean on each other for moral support and spiritual survival. The torture is so brutal that Daojing is left in a “dreamlike” state, an effect of the violence against her body, but also a psychic defense against the trauma inflicted on her. The younger girl, also subjected to torture, is traumatized to the point of speechlessness: “She was held by terror, and didn't speak a single word, all day she would lie on her wooden board and cry. During night, Daojing could hear her cry out fearfully in her dreams: ‘Mommy! Mommy! I'm afraid, so afraid!...’” (383). In order to survive, the three women act as a surrogate family, Daojing acting as a mother to the younger girl, and the older revolutionary as mother to both.

The encounters with mother-surrogates are so frequent in this novel as to be obvious.²⁴ Where mothers are absent, the revolutionaries step in to fill the gap.²⁵ Daojing, in a letter she writes to her revolutionary love, Lu Jiachuan (one that is never delivered because, unbeknownst to her, he has already died after a fantastically gory trial of torture), refers to the Party as “our great Mother” (229). However, what is also

²⁴ Moreover, the novel references Gorky's novel *Mother* a number of times, including in Chapter 12 and Chapter 23 of the first half.

²⁵ As Lingzhen Wang points out, “The political appropriation [...] of the mother and mother-daughter relationship operate[s] [...] to expedite Lin's journey toward the revolutionary goal” (132).

significant is how the theme of the lost mother informs the psychological trauma that afflicts not only Daojing, but collectively, nearly all of the revolutionaries, and allegorically, the nation as a whole. It is a trauma that spurs Daojing to action, but in the sense that this trauma causes her psychological pain and difficulty, it is also something that must be eventually overcome. What Daojing needs is therapy, socialist-style. Daojing's transformation from vulnerable, naive intellectual to brave, heroic activist is as much a process of Bolshevization as it is a kind of therapy, one that helps her heal her broken psyche. This therapeutic aspect of socialism is common to Socialist Realist literature; Katerina Clark has described how such novels stage the hero's ritual transition from "spontaneity" (*стихийность*), the visceral and unthinking reactive behavior of the oppressed protagonist, to "consciousness" (*сознательность*), the hero's deliberate and disciplined exercise of knowledge gained only through a proper understanding of political theory (15). In Daojing's case it is not merely a matter to acquiring new knowledge and replacing the old; it is a drawn out, retroactive process of illuminating and displacing the psychic non-knowledge that lurks deep in her unconscious. Ultimately, she needs to rewrite her own psychic history into a new, conscious political script in order to succeed as a cured socialist subject.

At one point Daojing comes to an understanding of her mother's wretched life through studying socialist theory and reading exemplary literature like Gorky's *Mother* (115). Daojing's suicidal yearning for her lost mother is de-pathologized through the lens of class struggle; her family melodrama is not merely a private tragedy, but emblematic of larger social forces. Through the aid of the Party and its

representatives Daojing is able to translate her personal angst into social insight, a transformation that allows her to not only free herself from her mental shackles, but to take an active part in collective liberation as well. The Party thus acts both as a surrogate for her lost mother, but also, in an analogous way to psychotherapy, the object of a psychological transference.

The novel ends with Daojing organizing a student strike against Japanese imperialism. Even in face of artillery fire, Daojing loses herself in solidarity with her fellow protesters:

The sweeping crowd (*paishan daohai de renqun*, lit., "the crowd, like an upturned mountain and a roiling sea"), the far-off sound of rifle shots, the free-flow of fresh blood, the surging tenor of a majestic song..... it all appeared before her eyes, rushing like a great sea wave. Because her body was weak and, moreover, exhausted from excitement and fatigue, she suddenly felt faint, and almost collapsed. However a girl student standing beside her held on to her, and although they did not know each other, they held tightly to one another.

The closed city gates could not hold against the fearless, heroic young demonstrators, and they were bold warriors, marching in lines and in groups, one after another, (*yi hanghang, yi duidui*), in the howling wind, as if drummed up in a frenzy and beginning to boldly attack their enemies. The city wall was finally broken by the wave of people – the enemy had no choice but to open the gates in front of the fierce and angry crowd. The ranks, vast and surging (*haohao dangdang*), continued to advance ever forward.

"Defeat Japanese imperialism!"

"Masses! Organize yourselves! Arm yourselves! Rise up, fellow Chinese, and save China!"

The endless waves of people, the bright and arresting banners, the cries of solemn slogans, continued to swell up (*futeng*) in the streets and atmosphere of this ancient capital, and the heroic march continued to move without cease ever forward – without cease ever forward.....
(612)

The novel ends in a lyric rhapsody organized, both in symbol and in syntax, by the sea trope. The protestors are likened to "waves," they "swell up" and are "vast and

surging". The staccato syntactic repetition, as well as the use of ellipses, suggests a surging, roiling quality to the poetic prose.

This scene also recapitulates Daojing's dream, where both she and Lu Jiachuan flung themselves into the ocean. The novel thus restages the dream in daylight and narrative real-time through a process of transcoding whereby the sea, which had previously been closely associated with Daojing's lost mother, transforms into the protesting masses, led by the Party. Like the city walls that eventually give way to the sea of protestors, so do the confines of her own mind also crumble and Daojing loses herself and her subjectivity to the crowd; in the last few paragraphs the heroine of our revolutionary *bildungsroman* completely disappears, a nameless, faceless wave in a multitude of waves that surge together as one. Individual subjectivity gives way to utopian consciousness, and a revolutionary "oceanic feeling" pervades the novel's conclusion. Daojing's personal dream becomes decoded through a socialist hermeneutic, transforming it into a collective experience. Through the interpretive agency of Party ideology, dream and reality have become fused as one. In contrast to Freud's treatment of the oceanic feeling, in which religious sentiments are translated into an individual pathology stemming from childhood, in *Song of Youth*, the reverse trajectory takes place. Daojing overcomes the traumatic symptoms arising from childhood in order to attain a quasi-religious ecstasy of solidarity. Daojing's trajectory also mirrors the novel's formal shift from its nostalgic imitation of a 1930s intellectual novel, a literature in which dreams and reality are separate, into a full fledged socialist realism, whereby the two are joined as a unity.

One of the reasons for the novel's popularity and renown may be found in its reliance on "feeling," whether oceanic, maternal, or both. Peter Button has convincingly argued for the role of visuality in creating an aesthetic sublime and points to a number of painterly tableaux throughout the novel that engage the ocular faculty. For Button, it is the experience of the visual sublime, embodied by the vast sea, that sets off the revolutionary transformation in *Daojing* (198-9). However, as a supplement to the role of visuality, I want to argue for an equally significant place for the haptic as allegorized by the maternal embrace and the oceanic feeling, and to suggest how the poetics of touch create a compelling and unique case for framing the Party in affective terms in contradistinction and as complement to the paternal and totemic discourse of Party and Maoist heroism. The sea is not merely a picturesque manifestation of the sublime. It is also a figure for an all-encompassing, total embrace, the dissolution of the self as it reunites with the multitude. Scholars such as Ban Wang and Meng Yue have rightly argued that fantasies of embodied collective unity threaten to shut off any space for dissenting voices, for aberrant waves that go against the current. There is a troubling analogy between *Daojing* losing her consciousness during torture, and her doing the same in the protest that closes the novel, inviting a comparison between the two that was perhaps unintended.²⁶

But it is perhaps too easy, especially in hindsight and with the nightmares of the Cultural Revolution still so fresh in the mind, to see only something authoritarian and sinister in any expression of oneness. It is clear that Yang Mo, in *The Song of Youth*,

²⁶ However, imprisonment and its vicissitudes, including torture, are seen positively by the characters as a form of revolutionary training. As *Daojing* tells her younger cellmate, "We're not in a prison, we're in the University of Marxism-Leninism" (391).

is not merely ventriloquizing an authoritarian discourse; what is so prominent, perhaps even overly sentimental, is the emotional sense of loss and trauma, figured by the absent mother and crying orphan. If we read sympathetically, then the sea stands not so much for the power of authority to smother all individuality and dissent, but as a curing embrace meant to heal a sense of loss, both personal and national. The way the mother figure seems to haunt the dreams of a number of characters in the novel suggests how a sense of parental loss burrows deeply in the unconscious of these characters, and causes them grief and misery. The psyche itself bears the imprint of an embrace that has long been lost, something it tries to recreate in oneiric form. To cry for one's mother, essentially, is to lament physical separation from her and demand reunion.²⁷ As Lingzhen Wang suggests, the novel "reveals a deeply buried personal need for, desire for, and fantasy about the mother," although she is critical of the trope's outright politicization (138). The text employs the potency of this affect to make a case for the Party as not merely a mother surrogate, but as the mother figure *par excellence*, holding the peasantry and proletariat in its universal embrace. One of the ways the Party's status as supreme mother makes itself felt is through the process of solidarity, in embracing someone going through a similar trauma. The Party thus acts as a supreme deity, but one that also makes its presence known through various avatars, manifesting herself in the various revolutionary mother-surrogates that populate the novel. During Daojing's imprisonment, the older revolutionary, the "mother" figure, is executed. Daojing and the younger prisoner are bereft, and rely on

²⁷ As Freud himself notes: "[The infant] must be very strongly impressed some sources of excitation [...] can provide him with sensations at any moment, whereas other sources evade him from time to time – among them what he desires most of all, his mother's breast – and only reappear as a result of his screaming for help (*Civilization* 67)."

each other for comfort: "In the cold and dank cell only Daojing and Shuxiu were left. They groped for each, joining their emaciated fingers as one, just like two orphans who had just lost their mother lean on each other" (397). Similarly, in the last scene, when Daojing is about to collapse from exhaustion, she is propped up by a girl she does not know, and they hold on to each other as they march forward.

The figural realization of Daojing's dream at the end of the novel actualizes the liberation of her psyche from its individual confines and into a utopian, collective consciousness, of bringing her desires out from the night and into the daylight. Daojing's therapy from her childhood haunting is to essentially give herself up to the revolutionary wave and dissolve her subjectivity. However, in exchange for her forsaken individuality, one stained by petty bourgeois habits of thought, she achieves the ecstasy of reunion, of becoming one with a sea of humanity. It is essentially a form of suicide, the destruction of her ego, but also the reclamation of a greater, more ecstatic collective identity, one characterized by an everlasting embrace, at once anonymous and intimate. Here two strands of history join as one; Daojing's own story of being an orphan and finding her lost mother, and the nation marching ever forward towards liberation, guided and aided by the maternal Party. In manifesting Daojing's dream, the revolution also helps to bring it to an end. The "realization" of Daojing's dream, its restaging at the end of the novel, is simultaneously the "correct" interpretation of the dream content. It is only through the hermeneutic transformation of Daojing's dream into an allegory for socialist utopia that her dream can have any legitimate meaning.

As breathtaking as the conclusion is, however, its prose threatens to collapse under the weight of its own tropes and figures. The text effects the collapse of dream and reality by heavily relying on the figural, to form people as “waves,” lyricize the flowing of their blood, and employ rhythmic syntax and creative punctuation in order to heighten an artificial discursive flow. The prose becomes virtually tactile, studded with odd catachreses, and it is hard not to feel as if the words are themselves a wave crashing over the reader, drawing us into its depths. The use of figuration is inevitable, but its hyperbolic overuse suggests that what Yang Mo is writing is not so much a manifest reality as it is simply another dreamscape, this one far beyond the boundaries of a single heroine’s mind. The conclusion at once promises apotheosis, but at the same time also courts its own unraveling, its own disillusionment as a mere fantasy, a play on words. The collective and universal embrace promised by the end of the novel risks revealing itself as merely the self-embrace of a daydreamer.

Yang Mo spent the better part of ten years at work on her novel, and her diary gives us insight as to how she felt about her creation. Much like her heroine, Yang Mo presented herself in an array of different emotions in her diary, giving voice to her own self-doubt, sometimes giving herself pep talks to persevere with her novel, and goading herself to become a more ideal socialist. She was often ill, suffering from terrible insomnia, and underwent hormone therapies and injections to allay her symptoms. A good night’s sleep, apparently, was hard for her to come by, and when she did, she was haunted by a number of dreams.

Yang’s relationship to her novel was intensely personal, and its status as a reminder of her own revolutionary past was powerful and even affected her dreams,

as shown by this entry written in August 1955: “These past few days I’ve been dreaming of my comrades-in-arms [*zhanyou* 战友] who passed away, all of whom were people I wanted to see but could not see [*dou shi xiang jian er bude jian de* 都是想见而不得见的]. Could it be that my novel is causing [these comrades] to linger in my heart?” (*Zibai* 243). Writing the novel became an actualization of Yang Mo’s nostalgia for a more heroic past, a melancholic desire to see the comrades that were irretrievably lost to history. The powerful nostalgic desire that fueled her creation is evidenced by the almost hallucinatory relationship she had to her own characters. Her creation of characters seems like an attempt to resurrect and touch the dead. In January 1956, while suffering from a liver ailment, Yang Mo wrote down this vision:

I can almost see Lu Jiachuan standing tall in front of me, extending his hand to me and smiling softly; I can almost see Lin Daojing who is just like me, a body racked with illness, frail, with furrowed brow and a grimace on her face. I want to hold their hands, to speak to them intimately – I will tell Lin Daojing: “You still have a number of faults (*maobing* 毛病), you must fix them!” She will nod her head and say yes, and I will happily smile in response. but who will help her fix them? Perhaps I will have to perform surgery on her. (256-7)

Her intimate relationship to her own creation has a hint of the occult about it, and is all the more bizarre when she seeks to hold hands with her characters, and even “perform surgery” to remove the lingering traces Lin Daojing’s petty-bourgeois consciousness. In addition to the hallucinatory visual quality of Yang Mo’s private fantasies, there is also the yearning to reach out and physically touch the past, to hold it and even cut it open with a scalpel. The need to touch something long gone and yet more substantial, more desirable, and more real than what presently surrounded her lends the story behind *The Song of Youth* a particular poignancy.

In this sense, then, *The Song of Youth* is itself like a dream in two powerful ways. It is a fantastic visualization of a lost heroic past, the resurrection of a powerful revolutionary nostalgia. Yang Mo, through her hands and literary scalpel, wishes to both touch the past but also reshape it according to her desire. The novel is also a token of a palpable loss of revolutionary spirit that Yang Mo, writing in the 1950s, a time plagued with anxieties, suspicion and paranoia among intellectuals, perhaps felt. The revolutionary history before 1949 was a vast, great and majestic flowing sea, and in her novel Yang Mo perhaps expressed a desire to return to its waters. The utopian moment at the end of the novel betrays an ironically literal referent: it can be read not as a premonition of an epic, timeless moment of socialist triumph, but as a quite plain reference to that historic event of December 9, 1935.

The narrative return to pre-revolutionary times ostensibly attempts to paint a picture of heroic continuity, demonstrating how we in the post-revolutionary “present” inherit and carry forward the work of the comrades who came before us. It is part of a larger project in creating a coherent, lasting revolutionary tradition, an act of fictive historiography that reminds the readers of their place in the socialist chain, as well as of their forebears and future scions. This narrative of history moving towards utopia is, of course, a state-sponsored ideological fantasy, and Yang Mo’s novel is a contribution to this teleology. However, in addition to this ostensibly noble project of narrating an equally noble revolutionary moment, there also lurks the presence of past history not as a mere token to the past and portent of a redeemed future, but as a fantasy of transport into the past. The nostalgic fantasy for a more heroic past is one that seems to promise far more sensual experience than post-

revolutionary reality. This is a somewhat different sense of history from the figure of utopian History that propels us in our struggle for freedom from necessity; it is history as actual, literal and literalized past events, stripped of their conventional allegorical overtones, a fantastic chronicle through which one can somehow quite literally gain access and entry into the past and thus escape the present. The novel provides powerful moments of such sensationalized history, including the mind-numbing extremes of torture and the sensations of being wholly enveloped in a crowd of marching bodies while bullets volley above. This ecstasy, this *jouissance*, is part and parcel of the genre of historical fiction, the assumption of a profound limit of experience whose actuality can be vouched for through historic markers. Yang Mo's own hallucinatory relationship to her novel suggests how the story is not merely a piece in the revolutionary chain, but itself a pathological symptom of a profound desire to *feel* history itself, to be enveloped, and perhaps disappear, in its embrace. In this sense, then, Yang Mo's effort to rewrite and resurrect history is not so much an act of continuity as a radical disjunction, the collision of two different senses of history that results in an anachronistic folding of history upon itself.

What I am suggesting is the presence of a double-voiced utopian mode at work in *Song of Youth*. The return to the past can easily be read as a voice of assent to the statist utopian narrative of revolution. However, the author's obsessive attachment to the past is one that seems to resist any real movement towards the future, and suggests an individual pathological fixation that runs against the current of the collective waves moving triumphantly beyond 1949. Reading against the novel's grain, one can detect within this celebratory text of revolution a dissonant cord of

disavowal. In this vein, one can sense a certain anxiety about the revolution as realized. Through this anxiety's symptomatic manifestation as a fantasy of historic fixation on a heroic past, one detects the allegoric space for the possibility of another utopia, one that transcends the statist utopia the novel ostensibly validates.

I opened my discussion by looking at how the press in the liberated 1950s used the colonial 1930s as a way of showing how the dreams expressed in that era had now been achieved thanks to the revolution. Those dreams were the symptoms of the "sharp contradictions" of a darker time; with the advent of socialism such dreams were overtaken by a reality that was advertised as more wonderful and spectacular than any fantasy. Ostensibly Yang Mo's *Song of Youth* was doing the same thing, providing a narrative picture of the political struggle in the early 1930s that laid the groundwork for the liberation nearly two decades later. As she herself wrote in her preface to the English edition, she wanted to show "how the dream of so many who had laid down their lives came true." And there is no reason to question Yang Mo's intention and sincerity in contributing to such a teleological narrative. However, what I suggest is that while History is moving ever forward, the trajectory of utopian desire in the novel is one that seems to instead reach backwards. Whereas those in the 1930s dreamed of the future, Yang Mo was dreaming of a past that she wanted so very much to touch again.

Epilogue

Dueling Dreams: Jiang Qing, the End of the Cultural Revolution, and Zong Pu's *A Dream For Strings*

"No, I like a bit of excitement in my sleep, too." [...] Dong Qian, the commanding officer, had decided to take part in the younger soldiers' conversation. "I love having exciting dreams, Socialist and Communist dreams. How about you, little Zhang? Do you like to dream, too?"

"I do," answered Little Zhang. "But all my dreams are about things to eat, like fish, or chicken, or meat buns, or some leftover corn -- that's what slips into my dreams."

"Dreams are ideals." The commanding officer continued to lay out his point of view. "If a man doesn't have ideals, he won't dream..."

-- From Zhou

Libo's story about the anti-Japanese Resistance, "Night at Xiang River," published in 1978.

When the Gang of Four unraveled after Mao Zedong's death in 1976, the press and public opinion quickly turned viciously against its ringleader, Jiang Qing, accused of instigating the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Cartoons depicted Jiang Qing as a witch, a rat, and a fanatical devotee of Wu Zetian, the infamous Tang Dynasty ruler who usurped political power and declared herself emperor (Terrill 372-3). Jiang Qing became the focus, fairly and unfairly, of intense anger and resentment by those who suffered the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, a tumult that threatened, if not succeeded, to destroy the very legitimacy of socialist rule from within. With few to defend her, and without her all-powerful husband to act as a buffer, Jiang Qing became a safe and easy target for the resentment of those needing to give vent to their bitterness.

Liu Mengxi, then a young scholar of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*), published a tirade against Jiang Qing in the September 1976 issue of *People's Literature*. The timing of publication seems precarious, for Mao died that very month, and Jiang Qing was not arrested until October. However, the fact that Liu and the editors decided to go ahead with publishing the article attests to the impatience of many to express their displeasure and disgust with Jiang Qing and her ilk. The article's title was "Ripping Apart Jiang Qing's Facade of Being 'Half a Red-ologist'," "Red-ologist" (*hongxuejia*) being an abbreviated term for professional scholars of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Jiang Qing made references to the novel in her speeches, and considered herself an amateur expert on the subject. Her public association with *Dream* went as far back as 1954, when she championed an article written by two Shandong University students attacking the eminent scholar Yu Pingbo's studies of the novel for being "bourgeois" and "idealist" and following in the footsteps of the long discredited and reviled scholar Hu Shi (He 298; Terrill, 219-20). The article argued for a vigorous political reading of the novel as a "manual of class struggle" (Terrill 219). Jiang Qing tried to have the *People's Daily* republish the article, but they refused, and it was later picked up by the lesser *Literary Gazette* (Terrill 220). Yu Pingbo, subjected to a harsh campaign of denunciation, would only find his career resuscitated after Jiang Qing had finally left the stage thirty years later.

Liu Mengxi, drawing on Jiang Qing's own comments about the novel, attacked her opportunistic, Machiavellian and often crass interpretations of the power struggles among factions of the Jia household. For Liu, Jiang Qing's single-minded focus on the machinations of power in the novel was a reflection of her own obsession with

advancing her political ambitions. Referring to the historical context of *Dream*, Jiang Qing spoke approvingly of the Yongzheng Emperor's successful usurpation of power from Kangxi, and remarked that Yongzheng was “really something” (86). Moreover, she criticized Yongzheng for not hiding his treachery well enough. Liu claimed that, according to Jiang Qing, Yongzheng did not understand that one “must throw on an overcoat in order to deceive people,” and not “wildly and nakedly conspire.” “Any perspicacious person,” Liu wrote, “will know in an instant that she was ‘borrowing the past to speak of the present,’ ‘pointing to a mulberry tree and calling it a locust tree,’¹ while in actuality she was using the story of Yongzheng's usurpation as a way of explaining her own general lessons in seizing the power of the Party” (86).

Jiang Qing argued that the ultimate power struggle in the novel was between the “patriarchal faction” (*dang*, the same word also denotes a political party and “the Party”) and the “matriarchal faction,” a battle between those who had public duties, and those who ran the household: “In the power struggle between the matriarchal and patriarchal factions in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, it is the matriarchal faction that is victorious” (Liu 87). Following a long tradition in Chinese history of being wary and suspicious of court women, Liu argues that Jiang Qing was in effect admitting her own feminine treachery in seizing power. He also ridicules some of her more precious allegorical readings, such as suggesting that Jia Baoyu's two maids, Qingwen and Xiren, were spies for both “left” and “right”-wing forces in the house.

¹ Here Liu is using a variation of the popular saying “to point to the mulberry tree and scold the locust tree instead” (*zhi sang ma huai* 指桑骂槐), which has a somewhat different connotation from what he writes, “*zhi sang shuo huai*” (指桑说槐). The original phrase comes from a line in the Ming-novel *Plum in the Golden Vase*, and is used in Chapter 16 of *Dream of the Red Chamber* when Wang Xifeng refers to the prickly and critical nature of the senior maids of the household.

Liu points out, however, that one character remains notably absent from Jiang Qing's various remarks, and that is Wang Xifeng, the scheming, manipulating and relentlessly cruel mistress of the household who, in no small part, helps bring about the family's catastrophic downfall:

Wang Xifeng's [...] role is so important, [...] so why does Jiang Qing not discuss her? The reason is because there are surprising similarities between Jiang Qing, whose ambitions went against the Party, and Wang Xifeng. They both represent a corrupt, sinking class, they are both scheming plotters, devils that kill without blinking an eye. Jiang Qing is today's Wang Xifeng, in fact she is even more like Wang Xifeng than Wang Xifeng herself. (87)

Jiang Qing's obsession with *Dream*, according to Liu, was evidence of her grander dream of eventually becoming an emperor (“*huangdi meng*” 皇帝梦), a delusion that Jiang Qing did succeed, if temporarily, in realizing. However, like a dream, her tyrannical rule has suddenly collapsed, bringing Jiang Qing back down to reality. Liu closes his article by quoting from Chapter 5 of *Dream*. In this chapter the protagonist, Baoyu, dreams of entering a magical realm where he reads heavenly registers in which the fates of the women in the household are revealed. Each file is centered on one of the women, illustrated by enigmatic rebus-drawings that allude to her tragic fate. He also hears songs with perplexing, riddle-like lyrics, each also foreshadowing the fate of the women. Liu picks up a few lines from a song dedicated to that schemer, Wang Xifeng: “And half a life-time's anxious schemes/ Proved no more than the stuff of dreams” (*Story* 143). “This is written for Wang Xifeng,” concludes Liu. “But if we use this as a portrait of Jiang Qing, whose ambitions went against the Party, is it not very fitting?” (87). Jiang Qing’s indulgence in her own dreamy ambitions leads her to become overtaken by a hallucinatory non-knowledge. As a

result, she not only horrendously misreads the novel, but her own political situation as well.

Two months later an article in the *People's Daily*, "Smashing Jiang Qing's Dream of Being Emperor," recapitulated many of the same themes, often verbatim, from Liu Mengxi's article, but with even more vitriol. The author went by the pseudonym "Stone Words" (*shiyán* 石言), suggesting both through metaphor and through its pun (实言 *shiyán* mean "truthful words") that s/he spoke words of truth in contrast to Jiang Qing's fanciful ravings. The name also hints at the novel's original title, *Story of the Stone*. The article's striking similarity with Liu's article makes one wonder if the author was in fact Liu. By November 1976 Jiang Qing had already been arrested, and the author, while still using a pseudonym, was freer to be unrestrained in his denunciation, and even writes that Mao himself made note of Jiang Qing's ambition to become Party chairman. The Gang of Four "made their dreams truly sweet, but in the end they were nothing but pretty soap bubbles" (5). The article, like the one preceding it, openly mocked Jiang Qing's "hysterical" interpretations of *Dream*. However, a point that this article emphasizes far more is the topsy-turvy switch between left and right under Jiang Qing's regime. In the same way that Jiang Qing arbitrarily assigned political positions to Baoyu's maids, she denigrated the Party-faithful by assigning them the label of "Rightist" while promoting herself as a true Leftist. The truth, avers the author, is the opposite: "Jiang Qing is precisely a true, authentic Rightist, she is the typical intra-Party capitalist, an unrepentant follower of the bourgeoisie. As far as the professional 'special agent' that 'stole her way into the other group,' that is no other than [Jiang Qing] herself." The author is remarking on

Jiang Qing's explication of *xiren* (袭人), the name of the supposed right-wing maid. *Xiren* means “to infiltrate a person/body,” and in the novel *Xiren* was given this name because her pleasant fragrance supposedly lingered on the person who had just seen her. However, Jiang Qing transforms the name into “*tou xi bie ren*” (偷袭别人) to imply that what her name really denotes is her role in infiltrating the more “progressive” ranks of the household.

The dizzying confusion over who is truly “left” or “right” is both analogous to and dependent upon the shifting polarities of dream and reality. This article, like the previous one, insisted that what Jiang Qing and her clique represented was an aberration from the correct socialist course, a “dream” that has, like a soap bubble, been effectively dispersed.² Moreover, what the Gang of Four also embodied was a perverted form of socialist epistemology, a corrupted political knowledge that reversed all proper socialist values and which transformed reality into a brutal phantasmagoria. But what is also suggested, perhaps unwittingly, is how much political reality is wholly a function of who happens to hold power. Critics pointed to Jiang Qing's treatment of *Dream* not merely to show her laughable infelicities as a literary critic, but to demonstrate that her misrule was, in essence, a grand fiction. The work referred to, however, was not just any piece fiction, but a novel that self-referentially reflects on its own fictionality, as well as reveals the sumptuous but impermanent world of the Jia household as but a dream. Jiang Qing's ability to manipulate the signifiers of socialist rule to her own ends, to “point to a mulberry tree

² This was not the last time that the press spoke about Jiang Qing's dalliance with *Dream*. Through 1977 there were a whole slate of articles, in smaller organs, referring to Jiang Qing's “Red” obsession.

and call it a locust tree,” is akin to the semiotic manipulation that occurs both in dreamwork and in literature.

However, to dismiss the bloody, phantasmagoric, yet quite real experience of the Cultural Revolution as a mere “dream” that has been suddenly replaced by true socialist reality is as foolhardy as Jiang Qing’s assignments of Leftists and Rightists among Jia Baoyu’s maids. The violent dream that Jiang Qing (but, more to the point, Mao himself) conjured was one that would linger in the minds and bodies of millions for decades to come, and would haunt her political successors. It was more a political tsunami than a floating soap bubble. Both articles also failed to note that, in *Dream*, Wang Xifeng is not the sole recipient of ontological come-uppance – every character, and most importantly, the hero, Jia Baoyu, are made to confront a reality disintegrating into nothingness. Thus to argue that true “socialist reality” has been restored, and its false double has been dispelled, is to ignore the very totality of awakening that *Dream* ostensibly insists upon, and to overlook the very contingency and frailty of any reality that can be established after Mao. The critics’ misogynistic focus on Jiang Qing’s hysterical and reckless rule was as much a form of misreading and misdirection as Jiang Qing’s own opportunistic interpretation of *Dream*. By focusing on Jiang Qing’s hysterics, the critics elided the more fundamental issue of the hysteria within the authoritarian state itself, one given to manic reversals and vicious cycles of political disenchantment and re-enchantment.

A Dream For Strings (*Xianshang de meng* 弦上的梦), a story that Zong Pu wrote in mid-1978 and published at the end of the year in *People's Literature*, suggests a redemption for the utopian potential of the dream motif. Her literary debut in *People's*

Literature, the 1956 love story *Red Bean* (*Hong dou* 红豆), led to critiques against her during the subsequent anti-Rightist campaign of 1957. She hardly published anything at all during the Cultural Revolution, and *A Dream For Strings* marked the resumption of what would be a very successful literary career. A number of her post-1976 writings have been classified as “scar literature,” a belated expression of the traumas inflicted by the upheaval of the 1960s.³

What makes this story so remarkable is the deft way it explores three separate senses of the dream: dream as trauma, as political illusion, and finally, as utopian yearning. During the waning days of the Cultural Revolution, Murong Lejun, a cello teacher living in Beijing, receives a visit from the daughter of a close friend and colleague from the Yan'an period. However, the Red Guards have hounded the man to death, imprisoned his wife, and tortured their daughter, Xia, then only a girl of about nine. After her imprisonment, the mother takes her daughter to the south; after she dies of illness Xia moves back to Beijing to live with her mother's stepsister. There Xia searches for the old family friend Lejun, and asks to have cello lessons, which Lejun, in memory of her friend, readily agrees to provide.

The horrors of the Cultural Revolution has left its deep scars on Xia, a girl who has learned to cope with the losses of her life with sarcasm and icy-cold detachment. Moreover, because of her father's status as a counterrevolutionary, she has been barred from continuing her education and occupational training, and as a result she

³ Jeffrey Kinkley characterizes scar literature as “stereotyped fiction about good and bad people that simply turned Maoist values upside down, throwing all the blame for social ills on ‘Lin Biao and the Gang of Four’” (243). Such a description, while heavy handed, also applies for much of the criticism of the Cultural Revolution shortly after 1976. However, Kinkley does accept that such literature, while stuck in the same Manichaeian structure as that of the system it criticized, was “daring” for its time.

becomes a kind of wild child, rootless, orphaned, tactless, and directionless. The trauma of witnessing her parents' persecution and undergoing her own trials has resulted in childhood nights filled with haunting dreams:

Alas, those days, those heavy, somber (*chenzhong* 沉重) days! Liang Xia, moreover, was just a child! During that time she had frequent dreams, and in those dreams she always saw a large rock pressing against her body, and no matter what she did she could not remove it. She would cry out, cry herself awake, and even then she still felt this heavy weight (*chenzhong* 沉重) upon her. (68)

With time, however, the terrible dreams cease, and like the stone that presses against her in her dreams, Xia becomes stone-like herself, numb towards the world. She grows unable to indulge in any kind of deep emotion, something that worries Lejun. In its place is a tough, cynical edge, a hardened skepticism against the political lies that surround her. Her anger is mostly focused on Jiang Qing, who she does not mention by name, but by her moniker, "White-Boned Demon": "That woman! That white-boned demon! All those wretched things she did, who does she think she's fooling? She's just having those damned pretty dreams of hers! (*hai zuo ta ma de meimeng ne* 还做她妈的美梦呢!)" (71). Xia makes note of the second usage of dream in this story, and that is of illusory fantasy. Here Xia notes that Jiang Qing has lost touch with reality, plunging the entire society into a horrific phantasmagoria.

Xia's plight worsens as her uncle, recently promoted in the Party, finds the presence of her niece in the household politically compromising. Eager to leave a home in which she is no longer welcome, Xia persuades Lejun to take her in. Lejun agrees, and while their co-habitation is for the most part agreeable, Lejun is perturbed by the lack of direction in Xia's life, a discomfort compounded by the frequent male

visitors that come by and call upon her. However, as 1976 rolls by, Xia starts to become more somber and serious, and Lejun starts to suspect that Xia is plotting something. The story's climax is the death of Premier Zhou Enlai in January 1976 and the subsequent April 5 Tian'anmen Incident, when public displays of grief for the popular leader turned into a large protest of grievance at Tian'anmen Square against the Cultural Revolution. During this period of mass mourning, Xia has been distributing leaflets protesting the current regime in buses and parks, including one that explicitly names the object of her ire: "Down with the white-boned demon that has brought catastrophe to the nation and disaster to the people: Jiang Qing!" (88). The day after Lejun finds out about Xia's acts of rebellion, Xia disappears, never to come home again.

Lejun waits to hear news of Xia, hoping for her eventual return. The story ends with Lejun falling asleep and having a dream:

That night, Lejun had a dream. She dreamed of a concert in which she herself was performing, her cello emitting the sounds of glory and victory, and in the middle of the audience there were one pair of dark black eyes, following the movements of the cello's bow. It was Xia! Suddenly, the person playing the cello on the stage was not her, but Xia. With deft, skillful movements Xia produced an august tune that went straight into people's spirits. She let flow tears of joy and victory. The bright lights that filled the stage shone brightly on the silver sequins on her white gauze dress, as well as on her pearly tears that that flowed drop by drop in that silver light. The notes of the cello resounded, filling the hall, piercing the air. It was august, heroic, victorious music! This was music that all men and women produced on their heartstrings, it was the music produced by the people's heartstrings! "Father! My father!" Xia cried suddenly. Her clear, crisp voice pierced through the glorious music, and floated up to the very clouds. On that great, high Monument to the Heroes of the People in Tian'anmen square appeared the name of Liang Feng (Xia's father) as well as many, many other names, its luminosity reaching for miles, its light competing with that of the sun and moon. Some of these names

were familiar, others not, and yet there were many more as yet unwritten on the Monument. They were all just ordinary people, but at once they were also great heroes without equal. They sacrificed themselves along the winding and complicated (*quzhe* 曲折) road of our dear socialist fatherland. Although their ways of sacrificing themselves were not the same as previous heroes, they have every right to live on in the hearts of our people, and to remain everlasting from now on!

The dreams of people will certainly be realized; the dreams of demons will certainly be destroyed. That is the inevitable course of history. (90-1)

The story could have concluded with a reunion between Lejun and her protégé; after all, the story was published in 1978, by which time Jiang Qing was already in prison, and a measure of stability had come to China. Even though the last line tells us that the dreams of people, as opposed to those of demons (such as Jiang Qing), will inevitably come true, it is significant that for the present the dream remains unfulfilled. Unlike Lin Daojing's dream that becomes realized at the end of the novel, Zong Pu's text demurs from forcing utopian desire to manifest itself. It prefers to remain in the waiting room, allowing history to take its course, patiently waiting for the truly right moment (if ever) to announce itself as reality. While the text subscribes to the familiar teleologic rhetoric of socialist inevitability, the use of the qualifier *quzhe*, or "winding and complicated," suggests a keen understanding of the catastrophic failures of socialism along with its achievements and its promises. Although the text in the end declares that dreams will come true, the narrative itself formally hedges. One of the most notable absences throughout the story is any real mention of Chairman Mao, something that would have been *de rigueur* just a few years earlier. Instead, the text extols Zhou Enlai as a paragon of political virtue. The

refusal to address Mao in any substantial way suggests that the target of the text's ire may not simply be Jiang Qing, the politically sanctioned scapegoat for all that went wrong. Like the critics who denounced Jiang Qing, and before them Jiang Qing herself, Zong Pu also engages in a sort of rhetorical misdirection. However, there also seems to be a sense that she is well aware that the problem cannot merely be confined to simply one villain. Jiang Qing may not have been the only demon.

A Dream for Strings is a clear departure from earlier socialist-era texts that tried to either demonstrate the socialist dream as having been achieved and/or curtail the presence of those dreams that linger. Few could, after the horrors of the past decade, write about China as being in any way redeemed, and this story itself bears the scars from that violent era. In Zong Pu's text, people sleep, have nightmares about the past, and have visions of a redeemed, but deferred, future. Zong Pu is sensitive to the varying meanings of dreams. In the case of Jiang Qing, it can be an irrational world of unbridled power, one that brings destructive harm to untold millions, but in the end unravels. For little Xia, it is the redoubled experience of history's violence weighing against her body like a crushing stone. However, the sense of dream that is given most approval is Lejun's, a veteran of the revolutionary struggle who, even after great disappointments and betrayals, nevertheless envisions a future communion between the young and old, and the dead. It is also a bodily redemption; Xia becomes a sort of goddess figure. Moreover, the emotional shell that has grown around her cracks, and the flowing of her tears, the patent display of her feelings, demonstrates a body that has healed from the wounds of history. The motif of music reinforces this sense of a bodily communion, an outlet through which people can be free to share their

emotions with each other and engage in a kind of collectivity that is perhaps not as ethically and politically compromised as those forms of collectivity that reigned during the tumult. Whereas just a few years earlier people gathered to shout and hurl slogans at each other, in this dream sloganeering and jeering are replaced by the centrifugal waves of music, refusing to be confined to any ideological rubric. Music in the dream figures as the free language of redeemed bodies; its function is to heal and celebrate, not injure and denounce. Dream once again embodies great hope, one that does not overlook reality, but one that can only arise out of a painful experience of history's failures.

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