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THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN MAO DUN'S EARLY FICTION 1927-1932

Hilary Chung

Ph.D. 1991

ABSTRACT

It is the prevailing critical assessment of Mao Dun's early creative writing that he displays a singular insight in his portrayal of women. This thesis seeks not only to challenge this assessment by a predominantly male body of criticism but also the assumptions on which it is based, namely that an intellectual sympathy for the women's cause necessarily implies a transcendence of the patriarchal attitudes with which society is imbued.

The major short stories and novellas written between 1927 and 1932 are analysed systematically to identify Mao Dun's underlying attitudes towards women. His portrayal of women is assessed from the following perspectives:

- his autobiographical accounts of his encounters with women in his political and personal life and his deliberate association of his female comrades with his creative inspiration;
- traditional Chinese perceptions of women and gender roles as these are manifested in the classical tradition;
- Mao Dun's numerous articles and essays on the women's question written during the nineteen twenties and his work in the women's section of the Party in Shanghai;
- Mao Dun's attempt to reconcile his conflicting sympathies for feminism and socialism.

This thesis relies for its methodology on Western feminist criticism. While the approach is maintained, in its application to the context of early twentieth century China, its eurocentrism in terms of cultural assumptions and perceptions of gender has been replaced by a definition of Chinese values. Since a fundamental prerequisite of feminist criticism is the assessment of the writer in his/her own cultural context, a historical survey of the portrayal of women in traditional literature is provided to serve as a standard against which to measure Mao Dun's portrayal.

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN
IN
MAO DUN'S EARLY FICTION
1927-1932

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1991



16 OCT 1992

DECLARATION

No material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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DEDICATION

To: Minh and Don for believing in me even when I didn't believe
in myself -- with love and thanks.

And to: Naomi and Marjorie for being as mad as I am.

“Pretty soon it feel like I can’t think. My mind run up on a thought, git confuse, run back and sort of lay down.

You sure this worth it? I ast.

She say Yeah. Bring me a bunch of books.”

Alice Walker, *The color purple*.

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ABBREVIATIONS

(English titles of Chinese journals are given where these were commonly used.)

A&AS	Asian and African Studies (Bratislava)
BJXJ	Ba Jin xuanji 巴金选集
CL	Chinese Literature
CQ	China Quarterly
DFZZ	Dongfang Zazhi 东方杂志 (The Eastern Miscellany)
FNPL	Funü Pinglun 妇女评论 (The Female Review)
FNZB	Funü Zhoubao 妇女周报
FNZZ	Funü Zazhi 妇女杂志 (The Ladies' Journal)
GWZB	Guowen Zhoubao 国文周报
HJAS	Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies
JFGZ	Jiefang yu Gaizao 解放与改造 (Emancipation and Reconstruction)
MD	Min Duo 民铎
MDQJ	Mao Dun quanji 茅盾全集
SNZG	Shaonian Zhongguo 少年中国
XC	Xin Chao 新潮 (New Tide)
XNX	Xin Nüxing 新女性
XQN	Xin Qingnian 新青年 (New Youth)
XSYP	Xiaoshuo Yuebao 小说月报
XSZZ	Xuesheng Zazhi 学生杂志
WZGDL	Wo zouguo de daolu 我走过的道路, 茅盾著
YDFWJ	Yu Dafu wenji 郁达夫文集
ZGXWXDX	Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi 中国新文学大系

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents an examination of Mao Dun's portrayal of women in the context of the Chinese literary tradition. Its starting point is the prominence of female characters in his early works and the attraction of examining the portrayal of women by an author commonly reputed to be sympathetic to women and realistic in his portrayal of them. Further scrutiny revealed the existence of formula, patterning and assumption which cast doubt on this prevailing assessment and the aim of this thesis became the re-evaluation of it. In this re-evaluation process, Western feminist criticism is the methodological tool used, redefined in order that it may be applied to the Chinese context. In the light of Mao Dun's involvement with women's issues during the nineteen twenties, it has been generally assumed that a clear commitment to the cause of women's emancipation on an intellectual level necessarily implies a deep understanding of the nature of womanhood. It is the intention of this thesis to challenge this unsupported critical approach.

Mao Dun's portrayal of women is explored from various perspectives: his reminiscences and accounts of his life; his essays on the women's question and the short stories themselves. We begin in Chapter One with Mao Dun's deliberate emphasis on the place in his creative inspiration of the various women he encountered in his political life. Accounts of a specific moment of inspiration, both contemporary and retrospective, are compared to show a clear emotional attraction to the women about whom he wrote, however much hints of this have been edited out of later versions.

Chapter Two presents a general overview of traditional Chinese definitions of gender and assumptions about gender roles in both social and literary terms and examines the extent to which Mao Dun is in debt to these conceptions of womanhood and the extent of his innovation. Chapter Three examines the physical portrayal of women in traditional fiction. The particular focus of this chapter is the formulaic nature of the traditional physical description of women in order to show how Mao Dun's physical portrayal retains clearly formulaic features which are detrimental to individual character delineation. Turning to the psychological aspects of Mao



Dun's portrayal, Chapter Four continues the preoccupation with formula and its relation to convincing character portrayal. It shows that, far from revealing special insight into the female psyche, Mao Dun's psychological exploration of his characters is fundamentally ungendered, with similar formulaic patterns of portrayal occurring equally in male and female characters alike.

A further angle on Mao Dun's portrayal of women is provided in Part I of Chapter Five with an examination of his contributions to the debate on the women's question, particularly in the light of his deep involvement with women's affairs within the Party in Shanghai. Part II explores the way feminist themes are presented in Mao Dun's fiction. In the later short stories, the prominence of feminist themes declines as Mao Dun struggled to resolve the conflict between his sympathies for the women's cause and his solid commitment to Marxism. Chapter Six charts the reorientation in Mao Dun's fiction away from an overt sympathy with the women's cause and towards an orthodox affirmation of the party line, namely the definition of emancipation in terms of class rather than gender. This is particularly exemplified by a reorientation in the portrayal of love and sensuality. In the earlier stories, love and romance are used as expressions of individuality as well as political symbols. In the later stories they function as nothing more than an unnecessary distraction for young revolutionaries to the total commitment to the Cause which is demanded of them. Ironically, this reorientation towards orthodoxy also endorses the implicit male chauvinism of Party dogma. An intellectual sympathy with feminism is superseded by one for Marxism. In the process the supposed "special insight" into and understanding of women's thought and behaviour is also "superseded."

While this study is based in its methodology on Western feminist literary theory, it only touches on the debates between the numerous and conflicting strands of this loose grouping. The central point of focus intentionally remains the contents of Mao Dun's early short stories themselves. Furthermore, as is elucidated in more detail in Chapter Four, this thesis draws on one particular aspect of feminist criticism – that which treats the portrayal of women by male writers. It is not the intention here to engage with women's writing and the complexities of the theoretical debate which

this would entail on matters such as the reconstruction of women's literary history, the nature of specifically feminine creativity and so on. Because this tends to refer to female authors, it has less relevance to this study.

The main difficulty in drawing on a body of criticism which has developed in the modern West is that many of its underlying assumptions cannot directly be transferred to a literary context which is remote in terms of both time and culture. A large number of the historical and cultural assumptions underlying such Western literary theories are alien to China. Therefore it has been necessary to provide an overview of traditional Chinese definitions of gender and of the way these have been manifested in Chinese literature. It is not the aim of this thesis to provide an exhaustive study; the survey undertaken in Chapters Two and Three is necessarily selective and seeks merely to provide a standard against which to measure Mao Dun's own attitudes, as these are revealed in his fiction. As far as I am aware, such a survey has not previously been attempted. To do justice to the several thousand years of Chinese literary history is a task far beyond the scope of this thesis; the purpose of this historical survey is to assess the extent to which Mao Dun perpetuates traditional attitudes and the extent to which he transcended them.

A fundamental prerequisite of the application of this methodology is to set the writer in the context of his own culture. It is for this reason that I have not sought to analyse in detail the question of Western influence on Mao Dun's portrayal. In the absence of specific indications from writers themselves, the question of influence is an extremely subjective affair whose significance has probably been over-emphasised by Western critics. Those who seek Western influence in the work of Chinese writers invariably find it. The example of David Der-Wei Wang is a case in point. In his study of Mao Dun's misreading of Zola and Tolstoy he is deliberately seeking out areas of coincidence and areas of divergence between the work of Mao Dun and his two Western sources of inspiration. Wang's very turn of phrase hints at the forced nature of the comparison:

*In a sense, the character of Zhang Qiuli may well be partially taken from that of Pauline Quenu of Zola's *La joie de vivre*, a novel*

praised by Mao Dun in his introductory list of foreign works. ¹

Often such “Western” elements as do exist are taken as evidence of a wholesale adoption of Western assumptions and ways of thought. In contrast, for writers of the May Fourth generation in particular, the native tradition was necessarily a major influence, particularly on writers of the May Fourth generation, however much they sought to reject it, because it was the cultural milieu of their formative years. Furthermore, in the investigation of Western influence there is a lurking tendency to impute to the writer or writers in question a Western interpretation or understanding of the figure whose influence is being investigated. As has been shown, ² Chinese writers were not passive recipients of Western influence. They often chose their “influences” with care, reflecting their own perceived needs. Their interpretations of Western works were not necessarily orthodox Western ones but were often skewed to satisfy their needs, needs which reflected and were a reaction to the native tradition. ³ Western sources were used as much in justification as in inspiration. Thus I have consciously attempted to move away from the standard model of the “reception and influence” study such as Tam Kwok Kan’s study of Ibsen in China. Michael Egan writes:

Though the twenties were a transitional period for Chinese fiction and saw the introduction of innovative literary techniques, many devices and themes that had been established in earlier literature, and may therefore be considered traditional, can be found even in the most adventurous works of the literary revolution. ⁴

A major difficulty in the study of influence is the identification of its sources. It is not acceptable to assume influence on the basis that a writer had read a certain work. A further characteristic of the May Fourth era is the way in which many works were known about and discussed without having been fully or even partially read – Ibsen’s *A doll’s house* is an obvious example – which often led to the circulation of a distorted or rein-

¹ *Verisimilitude in realist narrative ...*, p.226.

² See e.g. I. Eber, *Voices from afar ...*, H. Chung, M.A. thesis, University of Durham, 1986.

³ See the discussion of Mao Dun’s selective use of Greek and Norse mythology in Chapter Four.

⁴ *Yu Dafu and the transition to modern Chinese literature* in Goldman ed., *Modern Chinese literature in the May Fourth era*, p.309.

terpreted "impression" of the work in question. With regard to the specific question of the influence of the portrayal of women in contemporary Western fiction, it is clear that, because of its dependence on cultural context, no examination of this within the Western tradition can be applied directly to May Fourth China without considerable redefinition of assumptions and stereotypes.⁵ Furthermore this requires engagement with such elements as philosophical and aesthetic treatments of the human body within the Western tradition; all this extends considerably beyond the scope of this thesis which is necessarily anchored within the discipline of sinology. In her Ph.D thesis⁶ S. W. Chen has suggested that aspects of the physical portrayal of Mao Dun's female characters might be influenced by the writing of David Pinski, in particular their voluptuousness and the vantage point of the descriptions.⁷ Since we know that Mao Dun read and translated Pinski, it is not unexpected that certain superficial parallels in the mode of representation of women by these two writers might be uncovered, especially if such parallels were actively being sought. However such a narrowly focussed exploration of influence provides little insight into the way the representation of women in contemporary Western literature in general might have influenced Mao Dun and his generation. The question of the typicality of both Pinski and Mao Dun would have to be addressed in the context of their cultural and literary contexts, a project which, once again, extends considerably beyond the sinological scope of this thesis.

The principal source of autobiographical writings used is Mao Dun's *Wo zouguo de daolu* (*Roads I have travelled*) published in two volumes in the early eighties just before Mao Dun's death. As with any autobiographical material, nothing in it should be taken at absolute face value. Writing at the end of his life, Mao Dun was obviously putting forward his own gloss on his life. Information on some episodes of particular political import suppressed in earlier times because of their sensitivity is given in detail for the first time. The extent of his involvement in Party affairs during the early years is a case in point. Other episodes might be cut or

⁵ See Chapter Two for a contrast between the traditional stereotypes of East and West.

⁶ *Mao Dun: the background ...*

⁷ *ibid.*, p.111.

distorted to bolster prevailing political trends. His reassessment of some of his early political ideas exemplifies this.

The numerous articles written by Mao Dun during the nineteen twenties and early thirties on the 'women's question' are a fruitful source of reference to ascertain Mao Dun's views on women and their emancipation. They are fully listed in the Bibliography. Many of the articles on this subject collected in China from the original journals for this study have more recently been brought together and published as part of Mao Dun's complete works (*Mao Dun quanji*.) Articles by Mao Dun on literary theory, particularly those published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* which formed the focus of study for my M.A. thesis are not reproduced in the Bibliography here.

Unfortunately, in this reassessment of Mao Dun's portrayal of women, much of the large body of writing in Chinese on Mao Dun's work has provided little of relevance. Although elements of feminist critical thought are beginning to manifest themselves in China, these generally relate to the experiences of female authors and have not greatly influenced the dogmatic and often male-centred approach which prevails in the critical mainstream.

A typical example of Chinese writings on Mao Dun is provided by Sun Zhongtian.⁸ In his discussion of Mao Dun's early works Sun regularly quotes Mao Dun's own writings as authority for his interpretation, in particular that the characters in the early works reflect the development of Mao Dun's own views and emotions.⁹ He provides the standard interpretation that the early works portray a true reflection of the disposition of petty bourgeois intellectual youth before, during and after the failure of the 1927 Revolution. He praises the typicality of the characters who reveal the enthusiasms and weaknesses of their class.¹⁰ Character portrayal is examined from the point of view of the influence brought to bear by the era and the social background. Thus Mei's character development is viewed via all the social movements and conflicts which the novel *Rainbow* depicts and shows the positive developments in attitude of the intellectual

⁸ *Mao Dun de shenghuo yu chuanguozuo*.

⁹ *ibid.*, pp.56-57.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.58.

youth towards the revolution.¹¹ The question of gender is not addressed. Character portrayal is considered good if it reveals the correct class characteristics. Furthermore, the early works are not considered successful because they do not show the strong revolutionary spirit of the proletariat nor do they portray the revolution in a positive enough light.¹²

A similar interpretation is given by Qiu Wenzhi.¹³ Comparing Mao Dun to Balzac and Tolstoy, Qiu claims that Mao Dun not only reflects faithfully the broad canvas of the age but uses Marxism to analyse and observe the breadth of society. He foregrounds the relationship between his characters and their contemporary environment. *Eclipse* is cited as a good example of the Marxist use of turbulent and complicated times as material for analysis. It is not simply about the individual fate of a group of petty bourgeois intellectuals but expresses the complexities and errors of the Great Revolution.¹⁴ The early works as a group portray social change from May Fourth to the eve of the revolution, in particular, how the petty bourgeois “youth of the age,” especially young women (*shidai nüxing*) were propelled forward by the tide of revolution.¹⁵ *Eclipse* shows the weakness of the reactions of the petty bourgeois intellectual youth to the failure of the Revolution: hopelessness and pessimism.¹⁶ Qiu differs slightly from Sun in his specific discussion of the female characters in *Eclipse* and *Rainbow*. However, far from addressing issues of gender, he concentrates on their varying attitudes to the Cause as representatives of their class. Once again the portrayal of Mei is explored in terms of how her character development is shaped by developments in her environment.

Works of this nature are extremely numerous and a representative number are cited in the Bibliography, as are all the collectaneous works of “Mao Dun criticism” consulted. However there is a smaller number of works which address the portrayal of women in Mao Dun’s early fiction more specifically. These provide useful material with which to compare

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp.78-79.

¹² *ibid.*, pp.78-79.

¹³ *Lun Mao Dun xiaoshuo de shidairing*, *Mao Dun yanjiu*, 1985.1.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.48.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.50.

the prevailing attitudes of Chinese and Western critics to the subject and are examined at the beginning of Chapter Two.

A note on translations and editions used

The texts of Mao Dun's short stories and novellas written between 1927 and 1932 are the essential focus of this study and have been subjected to particular scrutiny. A full comparison of original and later editions of all creative works cited has been undertaken so that the significance of instances of revision may be teased out – details of all editions used are included in the Bibliography. Omissions from later editions are indicated throughout by [] and rewording in later editions by (). All translations are my own except where indicated. Since the amount of translation work required for this study has been large, in the small number of cases where translations of particular passages or articles already exist, reference has been made to them. Quotations from the translations of others have been changed to *pinyin* where necessary for the purposes of consistency.

Special note

All passages from *Mao Dun: the background to his early fiction*, Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1981 by Susan Wilf Chen are cited with permission.

CHAPTER ONE

The Place of Women in Mao Dun's Life and Creative Work

A major feature of Mao Dun's early creative works is the extent to which they are populated by women. Young women predominate. They are usually, but not exclusively, of middle class backgrounds, and the waxing and waning of their emotions and political allegiances comprise much of the substance of these works. Mao Dun explains this predominance of women characters in his autobiography, published in the early eighties:

... There is a reason for this. Around the time of the May Thirtieth Movement Dezhi (his wife) was involved with the women's movement, the main targets of her work being female students, teachers in primary and secondary schools, wives and daughters from enlightened families and other petty bourgeois intellectuals. They often came to our house and I gradually came to know them and to understand something of their nature. During the great revolution in Wuhan I also came across a good number of this type of woman. They shared characteristics common to the intellectual class but differed in nature and personality; ... and they became material for my writing.¹

The influence of women in Mao Dun's personal life is deep-rooted. After his father died in 1905 when Mao Dun was nine years old,² his mother played an important role in his life. Judging from his autobiography his relationship with her was a close and affectionate one, but she does appear to have been quite domineering and always had to be taken into account at times when life-altering decisions had to be made. She moved to Shanghai and lived with Mao Dun and his wife while he was working for the Commercial Press. Nevertheless, she was very supportive and proud of her son. She even looked after the children, despite failing health, in order that both husband and wife could carry out their political and educational activities. Thus Mao Dun lived much of his early life in households dominated by women.

Gálik writes of the way Mao Dun remembers with gratitude how his mother took over the role of her deceased husband and continued to direct both the household and the education of himself and his younger brother. The strong influence of his mother on Mao Dun is translated into some

¹ WZGDL, II, p.3.

² M. Gálik, *Mao Tun and modern Chinese literary criticism*, p.4.

of his creative works where the mother figure is portrayed as warm and comforting and often plays an inspirational role. In *Disillusion* Jing finds consolation when she has lost hope by recalling the depth of her mother's love 'whose warmth permeates society and which lights up human life.'³ By contrast Hui's mother wishes to marry her off against her will, but in times of distress Hui too longs to run into her mother's arms.⁴ In *Haze*, it is through the inspiration of the memory of her mother who died when she was a child that Miss Zhang runs away from an arranged marriage and seeks a new life; while Chen suggests that in *A Woman*, the continual presence of her loving mother by her deathbed redeems Qionghua despite her mistakes.⁵

In general father figures have a less prominent and positive role in Mao Dun's fiction. When they are mentioned they do not usually have a significant influence on the action of the plot. Furthermore, when they do appear, Mao Dun's father figures never occupy the role of representatives of the old order, as is commonly the case in the works of other novelists of the period such as Ba Jin. They are anaemic secondary figures who do not come to life with any impact.⁶

The lack of male influence in Mao Dun's early life could also account for the dearth of positive male characters in the early works. There are distinctly negative characters such as Hu Guoguang in *Vacillation* who takes advantage of the unstable situation in the small town where *Vacillation* is set to gain a position of influence and makes use of the local women's association as his own private brothel; or Miss Zhang's father in *Haze* who is a stubborn tyrant. But the majority of Mao Dun's male characters are weak or hesitant. An example is Shi Xun in *Pursuit* whose disillusionment and pessimism after the failure of the 1927 revolution bring him to attempted suicide. In *Vacillation* there is also Fang Luolang, a member of the left wing of the Nationalist Party and head of the local Bureau of Commerce who is indeed the personification of *vacillation* as both the political situation and

³ MDQJ, 1, p.40.

⁴ MDQJ, 1, p.29.

⁵ Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory in the early fiction of Mao Tun*, p.153.

⁶ See J. Berninghausen, *Mao Dun's early fiction 1927-31, the standpoint and style of his Realism*, p.66.

his marriage deteriorate before him.

Of Mao Dun's wife, Dezhi, we know very little. In *WZGDL*, which is the main source of the information which Mao Dun does supply about her, she receives very scant mention indeed. In chapter five of volume one, *My wedding* (*Wo de hunyin*) which gives details of his arranged marriage, he writes of how he was given the choice by his mother of whether or not to honour the betrothal arranged by his grandfather when he was five years old and marry an illiterate girl from his home village. He decides to do so and agrees with his mother that she will educate her. His wife soon comes to hate her own parents for having deliberately neglected to educate her and Mao Dun's mother takes her as her own daughter, naming her accordingly in adherence with the Shen family precedence.⁷ Mao Dun encouraged Dezhi to study, first in a local school and then in Shanghai when she moved to join him. Through her school in Shanghai she became involved in the women's movement.⁸ This dispassionate account is notable in its detachment. Even if Mao Dun did come to love his wife, this is not part of the image of himself he wanted to project in his autobiography. The impression given in the subsequent passing references to her in *WZGDL* is of a sisterly companion who bore his children and who, under his encouragement, did work within the Party complementary to his own. The "sisterly" impression is reinforced by her re-naming as if she were Mao Dun's sister (a female child of the same generation as Mao Dun.) In this context, Mao Dun's evident attraction to his more vivacious female colleagues is all the more significant.

At the time of the May Thirtieth Movement, Mao Dun and his family were still living in Shanghai. Not only was he an active contributor to the debate on the women's question and wrote for a number of women's magazines but he also had responsibility for women's affairs within the CCP. With both his wife and himself actively involved in this area of the Movement, it is to be expected that Mao Dun should have spent a great deal of time with female comrades and friends. In his autobiography, Mao

⁷ See *WZGDL*, pp.124-125.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.194. Mao Dun explained: '... at that time, female students were the target of the women's movement together with a small number of wives and daughters from bourgeois families.'

Dun deliberately stresses the important role that these women played in his creative inspiration. In Volume I of *WZGDL*, published in 1981, a particular incident is cited:

In the autumn of this year (1926) I was busy with meetings during the day and at night I was reading Greek and Norse mythology and classical Chinese poetry. Dezhi teased me for being one person during the day and quite another at night. At that time Dezhi was doing quite a lot of socially orientated work, during the course of which she had made many female friends. Some of these women I already knew and others I knew through Dezhi. They often came to our house. Each of these 'new women' (*xin nǚzi*) had their own characteristic ideology, voice and laughter. You could also say that they had much in common but also many differences. Having shared their company for some time, the desire to write about them grew within me. At that time, a certain Mei Dianlong, one of those working for the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, almost went mad in the pursuit of a Miss Tang. On one occasion he asked Miss Tang whether she really loved him or not. She replied 'I both love you and don't love you.' This Miss Tang was probably only joking but Mei took her seriously. He left her apartment and took a rickshaw, so preoccupied with what she could have meant that he left behind some Youth League papers when he alighted. Only after he had walked a good way did he remember the packet of papers, but it was already too late. When I heard about this incident, I felt that a complicated plot like that would make ideal material for a novel. Because of this my desire to write became stronger. On one occasion, after a (local) meeting it started to rain heavily; I had (brought) an umbrella but a close female colleague who had also been at the meeting had not. I walked her home, the two of us under my umbrella. At that moment a multitude of images flashed across my imagination, one after another, particularly images of women: now advancing, now retreating, first vague then clear, like clips from the movies. I could no longer hear the rain falling on my umbrella. I had forgotten my companion. The impulse to write was exceptionally strong and if it had been possible I would have started to write there and then, in the rain, with the umbrella in my hand. ⁹

The attraction of these women is self-evident, but in this version of the account, the allure of the girl has almost been written out of the text. The relationship between the presence of his companion and his moment of inspiration is weak. On reading the line 'I had forgotten my companion', one is tempted to question why she is mentioned at all. However, in an earlier version of this account, written in 1933, the link is less tenuous:

I remember one August evening when I had just finished a meeting and was going home. It was raining hard, the streets were empty and there were no cars. Raindrops were pelting down on my umbrella, and one of the women I had been observing was walking with me. She had spoken too much at the meeting, and her face was now

⁹ *WZGDL*, I, pp.275-76.

flushed with excitement. As we walked together, I suddenly felt filled with the urge to write. If I could have, I think I would have grabbed a pen right then and there in the rain and started to write. ¹⁰

In the detached interpretation of party ideologues the descriptions must be taken at their face value – hence the rewriting of the later version – but this creative allure certainly contains sexual overtones. This is not to suggest an equation between sexual and creative impulses. Nevertheless, to ignore prudishly the suggestive nature of this passage leads to misinterpretation of Mao Dun's portrayal of women.

He deliberately emphasises the way his inspiration comes from life. This is to be expected of a self-professed realist writer. Yet, when we consider the extent to which his female characters can be considered as 'real' or believable all these factors come into play. When observed reality is refracted through the prism of the writer's consciousness, he inevitably gives of himself. In this case, we seek to examine what of his own attitudes to and feelings for women Mao Dun brought to his portrayal and how much was supplied by the unique atmosphere of a frantic decade.

In Mao Dun's discussion of his work he repeatedly emphasises the peculiar atmosphere of the times, and the part these exciting women played in it, as being central to his inspiration. He writes further on this subject in *From Guling to Tokyo* (1928.) In 1927 Mao Dun fled the aftermath of the fall of the Wuhan government and hid in Guling on his way to Jiujiang. He fell ill and had to stay there longer than expected. ¹¹

... from time to time I sought out people I knew who were still in Guling, or new arrivals, for a chat. Among these was a certain Miss Yun who was in the 'second stage of tuberculosis.' The 'second stage of tuberculosis' had great significance for this Miss Yun; it was not that the illness had already severely damaged her health, but that the

¹⁰ *Ji ju jiu hua*, (*Remarks on the past*) in *Mao Dun lun chuangzuo*, p.4.

¹¹ See *WZGDL*, I, p.295 (1981.) In *From Guling to Tokyo* he simply states that he was convalescing in Guling over the summer of 1927. In this discussion of Mao Dun's various accounts of his experiences two types of censorship are discernible. Contemporary accounts of political events are necessarily ambiguous or veiled as a result of external political censorship. Whereas, when writing at the end of his life at a time of post Cultural Revolution reflection, Mao Dun frankly reveals details of his political activities, many of which he had not cared previously to reveal. The second type of censorship, apparent in accounts of a more personal nature, is self-censorship. In this case, when contemporary and later accounts are compared, the contemporary ones are generally more candid.

threatening black shadow of this 'illness' caused Miss Yun to vacillate between periods of negativeness and periods of great excitement. She also talked of her own life experiences, and, as I listened, it sounded just like a medieval romance* – that is not at all to say that it was not ideal, but that it was too ideal. I became interested in studying this Miss Yun whom everybody spoke of as 'sick and moody.' She said her life would make a good novel, and there was no doubt about that. However, I must state that there is absolutely nothing of Miss Yun in the trilogy – *Disillusion*, *Vacillation*, *Pursuit* – that I have since written. Perhaps there are people with the same personality, but she is not there herself. I have no choice but to make a careful statement here and now because so many people have long since been guessing which of the women in the novels is Miss Yun, but it is a very tiresome matter! But it was in Guling that I had the idea to write a novel. ¹²

This long explanation seems exceedingly devious. Mao Dun was well known at the time for his opposition to frivolous practices in literature such as the *roman à clef*, but why describe a personal encounter simply to deny that it had any bearing on the novels he wrote subsequently? His denial has more the force of an affirmation that this encounter in Guling, of whatever nature, had a profound influence on him and became part of the forces which moved him to creative writing. This conclusion is borne out during a conversation in the penultimate chapter of *Pursuit* which seems heavy with allegorical meaning. The friends meet for a picnic at Paotai Wan. In a conversation about love one remarks:

... as far as matters of love are concerned there can never be a definitive autobiography, but the imagination can approximate actual facts. When Mr. Fang, a friend of mine, wrote a novel, some people said his characters were too far removed from real life, that people like that did not exist in society. Other friends complained that he had written about their private lives. There was a young Master Yun who was adamant that there was a female character who was the embodiment of the Miss Yun they often talked about. Another friend pointed out in more detail who in the book represented whom, and said he wanted to draw up an index of the characters in the novel for Mr Fang. If he could really do so and then publish it, wouldn't it be ridiculous! ¹³

This passage bears little relation to the picnic conversation which continues. Although the sentiment expressed strongly opposes the suggestion that the portrayal of individual characters is based on Mao Dun's own acquaintances, once again its esoteric tone invites speculation. This is all

¹² *Cong Guling dao Dongjing*, XSYB, 19.10, (10.10.1928) p.1139. *English in original text.

¹³ *MDQJ*, 1, p.402.

the more the case since one of the pseudonyms Mao Dun used at the time was Fang Bi. The significance of this Miss Yun is underlined, and yet her identity and what she might represent was something Mao Dun had no intention of revealing in 1928. It is only with the publication of his memoirs and his autobiography towards the end of his life (late seventies and early eighties) that a connection is made between this mysterious Miss Yun and a friend from his days in Wuhan, Fan Zhichao. In his accounts of his encounters with Fan written just before his death, it is clear that lacunae in contemporary versions of the story stem from the political nature of their work. Yet, interestingly, a franker account of their activities contains a suggestion of Mao Dun's personal feelings. In Volume I of his autobiography (1981) Mao Dun describes how he first came to know Fan :

... I was working through the night almost every night. On the opposite side of the street from my quarters there was another room where lights burned brightly every night. Three single women comrades lived there; one was Huang Mulan, head of the Hankou City Women's Department, another was Fan Zhichao who I knew from the Department of Foreign Affairs. They had all been married before. Huang Mulan was already divorced, Fan Zhichao's husband had died. They were bold and resolute in their work, had a wide circle of friends and were full of vitality. They were also very attractive and were consequently well-known throughout Wuhan. Single young men used to come and hang around their quarters. Qu Qiubai's younger brother Qu Jingbai also passionately pursued Fan Zhichao, although Fan ignored him. Qu Jingbai had a pug nose and Qu Qiubai said to him: 'Don't go chasing after Fan until after you have had your nose seen to.' Qu Jingbai wrote this down in a letter and sent it to Fan and Fan wrote the following comment on it and sent it back: 'A nose is not what a woman wants from a man.' In high spirits Qu Jingbai showed the letter to everybody. Because of this people would jokingly ask Fan 'What is it that a woman wants from a man then?' When Fan could no longer stand men hanging round her quarters, she would escape by coming across to ours in the evenings. As a consequence she became very friendly with Dezhi. From this story it is possible to gain an insight into the Wuhan of the revolutionary period: apart from passionate and frantic revolutionary work there was a very strong romantic atmosphere. ¹⁴

In the account of the Guling encounter in *From Guling to Tokyo* (1928) ¹⁵ Miss Yun tells Mao Dun her life story. She is also ill, although each time the illness is mentioned Mao Dun adds inverted commas to suggest that this is not to be taken at its face value. The 'second stage of tuberculo-

¹⁴ WZGDL, I, p.283.

¹⁵ See above pp.13-14.

sis' could mean the second stage of a gruelling experience: a love affair, the failed revolution (although to portray the revolution in terms of illness was not a device that Mao Dun has used elsewhere.) Either explanation would fit the circumstances of Fan Zhichao when Mao Dun encounters her in Guling.¹⁶ He describes the romantic confessions of Miss Yun as being like a medieval romance, as good material for a novel; and he is evidently fascinated by her romantic entanglements. In the extended 1981 account of his encounter with Fan Zhichao, we are provided with more information about these entanglements: she rejects the attentions of the crowds of eager young men but is attracted to a man of whom she is unsure. The combination of 'passionate, frantic revolutionary work' and a 'strong romantic atmosphere' evidently fuelled his creative impulse.

... I decided to go up the mountain in search of news (of events in Nanchang.) When I reached the main road I bumped into Fan Zhichao. She asked in amazement, 'What are you doing here?' After I had explained the situation she said, 'This is not a good place to talk, let's go to your hotel.' At the hotel she said 'Don't you understand the situation out there? On August 1st there was an uprising in Nanchang. We brought Zhu Peide's troops to surrender and now the city is held by the troops of Ye Ting and Jia Long. The situation is unclear.' Then she said, 'In the next few days Wang Jingwei, Zhang Fakui, Yu Youren, Huang Qixiang and the rest of them will be coming here for a meeting ... and as many of them know you, you must not under any circumstances leave your room and wander about; when the meeting is over they will go. If there is any news I will come and let you know.' ... Fan Zhichao returned two days later. I told her I wanted to return to Shanghai and asked her to find a way to buy a boat ticket. It would be better to buy the ticket in advance and go straight to the boat after going down the mountain, to avoid hanging about in Jiujiang. She agreed and suggested that we travelled together.

By the second week of August Fan Zhichao came and told me that the meeting had ended and that those attending had left. The head of the administration had bought the tickets (for her) and we would go down the following day. Fan Zhichao and I went down by sedan and went straight to the boat. It was another Japanese steamer and the accommodation was two people per cabin. I felt a little awkward but Fan Zhichao said, 'Don't worry, it's very difficult to book an all female cabin. Sharing with you is much more preferable to sharing with a strange man.' We did not dare to wander about the steamer for fear that we might come across someone we knew. So we had no choice but to stay in the cabin and talk. I asked her what had gone on between her and Qu Jingbai and her tongue loosened.

¹⁶ Yu-shih Chen rejects the direct association of the two characters. (*Realism and allegory* ..., ch. 2.) Susan Wilf Chen is happier to accept the connection. (*Mao Dun: the background* ..., p.201 and also *The personal element in Mao Dun's early fiction*, *HJAS*, 43 (1983), p.208, n.22.)

She said she had never loved anyone. Her marriage to Zhu Jixun had not been for love but out of necessity of work. Zhu was ten years older. As a middle school student she had loved a fellow student but, sadly, he had died. She also let me see all the love letters that Huang Qixiang had written to her. I had no idea that Huang was capable of writing such moving letters. Huang was an army commander under Zhang Fakui, young, able to fight, and quite left-wing compared to others in the higher ranks of the Nationalist Party. 'Why didn't you like him?' I asked. She replied, 'Those who command troops are difficult to fathom. Today they can write you love letters like these but tomorrow perhaps they will cast you aside and leave. I was a little afraid of him.' During the afternoon of the following day our boat reached Zhejiang ... ¹⁷

In his accounts, Mao Dun reveals little overtly about how he perceived the nature of the women he took as inspiration. He focuses on events in their lives which he incorporates into the plots of his stories, and, to a certain extent, on their "unfathomable" behaviour. Nevertheless, however careful his self-censorship, his accounts remain suggestive of more than is spoken. This is particularly the case when references to his wife are taken into account. As suggested above, since Mao Dun shaped Dezhi's educational, emotional and political development, it appears that she remained respectful of his guidance and reliant on his lead. She would contrast markedly with his assertive and lively female colleagues, as he himself describes them. Furthermore, because Mao Dun's self-censorship worked towards different ends at different times, those points at which different versions of the same account diverge reveal considerably more attraction to the women involved in the original versions than the author wished to reveal later on. Typical post-1949 readings of his text at face value only bolster its suggestiveness. The chapters which follow pursue these unspoken things: Mao Dun's relationship with women as revealed through the portrayal of his characters; his manipulation of them as a male author; the relationship between his intellectual and his emotional response to issues raised by the debate on the women question; the role of "his women" as types and symbols and their place in his allegorical reworking of reality.

¹⁷ *WZGDL*, I, pp.296-297. One is tempted to ask what really went on in the cabin of the steamer that night. Speculation is tempting but futile, but one can safely assume that the atmosphere was "highly charged."

CHAPTER TWO

Traditional Conceptions of the Nature and Behaviour of Women as a Source for Mao Dun's Portrayal

Mao Dun has traditionally been held up as a writer who revealed special insight into the way women think and behave, particularly when compared to other writers of his generation. J. Berninghausen remarks how 'many critics and literary historians have noted the importance given to young women protagonists in Mao Dun's fiction, especially the early fiction, and have praised his technical skill and psychological insight in depicting them.'¹ This general assessment has been perpetuated by critics like C. T. Hsia who writes with reference to *Rainbow*, for example, of Mao Dun's 'skill in his rendition of psychological reality' with respect to his adoption of 'the feminine angle of observation.'² However, this imputation of psychological realism to Mao Dun's female characters is not supported in more than a perfunctory manner.

It would appear that this view of Mao Dun's portrayal of women has been passed down, unquestioned, from one generation of critics to the next. Berninghausen presents the case as established fact without supporting it in any way, save to quote from Marián Gálik's study of 1969:

In 1921-22 Mao Dun devoted much attention to the question of the emancipated woman. ... His theoretical studies and frequent meetings with women in the course of his revolutionary activity helped Mao Dun to be known in Chinese literature as having created true-to-life women characters of high artistic value.³

He then goes on to pursue the theme of women's emancipation in the short story *Creation*, and in particular the political activism of Xianxian without further reference to her psychology.

He follows a similar pattern in his discussion of the character of Mei in *Rainbow*. Taking his lead from C. T. Hsia, Berninghausen writes that she "is perhaps Mao Dun's most ambitious psychological study of a single

¹ *Mao Dun's early fiction ...*, p.36.

² *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, p.148.

³ *Mao Dun and modern Chinese literary criticism*, pp.49-50.

character.”⁴ But he then proceeds to relate the *events* of her life. After a brief summary of Mao Dun’s portrayal of Mei’s vacillating moods, his conclusion is that through this “Mao Dun has successfully conveyed a sensitive and disturbing awareness of just how frightening it was for a young Chinese woman of the 1920s actually to put into practice the theories of ‘liberation’ with which many modern young women identified.”⁵ Berninghausen fails to point out that the phenomenon of the fluctuating mood is one which recurs throughout Mao Dun’s early fiction in both male and female characters.⁶ He also fails to address the comparative ease with which Mei moves from one stage of her development to another in a manner which suggests an unrealistically positive pursuit of her liberation. This is in accordance with the underlying political message of the story but suggests an inner strength far beyond the capacities of the typical “modern young woman” of her generation.

Later in his study, in his discussion of modernist motifs in Mao Dun’s writing, Berninghausen notes Mao Dun’s “seeming fascination with unconventional or even bizarre behaviour or personality types.”⁷ The character of Zhang Qiuliu in *Pursuit* is the single example quoted as illustration. A good number of the female characters in Mao Dun’s early fiction display unconventional or bizarre behaviour. Mao Dun’s own comments seem to imply that he was attracted to this type of behaviour in women, not that it was necessarily typical. However, if Mao Dun displays “technical skill and psychological insight” in his depiction of women, does this mean that bizarreness and unconventionality are an insightful reflection of what women are like?

Despite all that he has already stated, Berninghausen himself appears to find aspects of Mao Dun’s portrayal of women problematical. In particular, he identifies ambivalence in Mao Dun’s portrayal of modern women. He cites Mao Dun’s use of contrasting female character types as simultaneous objects of a male protagonist’s attention, one aggressive and liberated,

⁴ *Mao Dun’s early fiction ...*, p.38.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.41.

⁶ See Chapter Four.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.103.

the other gentle and demure, displaying old-fashioned virtue.⁸ Yet it is often the latter who is given a more sympathetic treatment. Furthermore, as character types, one would not expect the kind of psychological insight in their portrayal which Berninghausen suggests elsewhere.

The unquestioning perpetuation of this monotone assessment of Mao Dun's portrayal of women seems to continue to occur within the present generation of critics. Writing two years later than Berninghausen, David Der-Wei Wang replicates Berninghausen's very words, without acknowledgement, when he states of *Rainbow* that "critics also agree that it contains Mao Dun's most ambitious psychological study of a single character."⁹ Like Berninghausen Wang cites C. T. Hsia as his authority. Wang does not seek to refute "the critics" but his perceptive analysis of *Rainbow* as "an initiation story based on [Mao Dun's] Marxist interpretation of modern Chinese history"¹⁰ undermines the assessment with which he begins.

Wang also provides a further problematical assessment, namely that Mao Dun writes

"his own experience into the leading female characters in his early novels and short stories. They dramatize their author's psychological and ideological crisis while vacillating between political commitment and personal fulfillment, yet each of them also develops her own distinctive identity ..."¹¹

In the following three chapters I seek to show that the portrayal of Mao Dun's female characters is so overlaid with descriptive and symbolic formulae that they scarcely stand as individually delineated characters. Mao Dun's own comments testify to his having written his own experience into his characters, particularly in the case of *Eclipse*.¹² But a male experience of a series of events written into female characters still remains a male experience. It may be recognised as realistic by other male critics who are reading from a similar perspective. But their consistent lack of

⁸ *ibid.*, pp.41-45.

⁹ *Verisimilitude in realist narrative ...*, p.228.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.229.

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp.179-180.

¹² See especially *From Guling to Tokyo* in *XSYB*, 19.10, quoted in Chapter Four, p.129 below.

analysis of this “realism” is problematical. The comments quoted above by Gálik and Hsia are taken as the originating authority for the standard assessment of Mao Dun’s portrayal of women but neither of them supports their assertions with any analysis. Little else is expressed by either on the subject of women during the course of the rest of their respective studies because the whole matter is taken as read or insignificant. Nevertheless, it is in these throw away remarks that these male critics reveal much about their attitudes.

A similar belief in the realism of Mao Dun’s portrayal of women is expressed by Chinese critics. Shao Bozhou writes how Jing epitomises the “special characteristics of a *young woman* of the petty bourgeoisie.”¹³ These, he defines as being a dissatisfaction with reality, a passionate individualistic pursuit of a new life, a weakness and timidity and a lack of true understanding of the ideals she pursues. In general Shao also perpetuates the parallel standard assessment by discussing male and female characters alike in terms of their class attitudes towards the revolution. In particular he emphasises their contradictory temperament (*xingge shang de neizai maodun*) which he finds very authentic in class terms – as characteristically produced by the contemporary social environment. Although he criticises *Eclipse* for not being ideologically positive enough, he praises its successful depiction of typical characters and the way it captures the spirit of the petty bourgeois intellectual.¹⁴ In his discussion of *Wild roses*, he stresses again (disapprovingly) the contradictory temperament of the female characters, implying that this is a realistic set of emotions and behaviour patterns pertaining to their class type. He especially praises the vivid and authentic portrayal of Mei. However, this is explained not in terms of femininity but in terms of its reflection of the ideological development of Chinese youth.¹⁵ It would appear that Shao recognises elements in Mao Dun’s portrayal of women which conform to his conception of the feminine nature, but he is bound to define this perceived realism in class terms. Having already defined the authenticity of Mao Dun’s female characters in

¹³ *Mao Dun de wenzue daolu*, p.29. Italics added.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.46.

terms of their class, the implication of his analysis is that those elements of their portrayal which Shao recognises as being realistically feminine become associated exclusively with the petty bourgeoisie. This may be linked to the standard association of feminist issues with the individualistic aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie when the essential distinction for Marxism is one of class and gender is irrelevant. However a further implication of Shao's analysis is that women of the proletariat may not be distinguished by gender traits at all, which suggests a considerably distorted view.

Qian Xingcun, a contemporary of Mao Dun's writing in response to the first publication of the early works, is more blatantly chauvinistic. He too praises Mao Dun's ability to capture the vacillatory state of mind of the youth of the petty bourgeoisie.¹⁶ But he focusses on the character of Jing who displays typical aspects of the temperament of a petty bourgeois woman, namely "not just vacillation but cowardliness which is fully brought out in *Disillusion*" and which is exemplified in her relations with the opposite sex.¹⁷ He explains that these are characteristics not specific to Jing but are in fact common characteristics of petty bourgeois Chinese women, which in Jing's case are portrayed in an outstanding way. Also that, in his portrayal of Jing's character, Mao Dun reveals the particular characteristics of the morbid state of mind of petty bourgeois women.¹⁸ Furthermore their mad preoccupation with affairs of the heart is typical of contemporary youth as a whole.

Qian's discussion of Sun Wuyang in *Vacillation* is particularly revealing. He writes:

Sun Wuyang is not revolutionary. Sun Wuyang does not have a revolutionary philosophy. Women who participate in the revolution and are truly able to understand the revolution are very few. All Sun Wuyang has is a philosophy of love. Her philosophy is to take her revenge on those men who play with women, so how can she be revolutionary. We are suspicious. We do not need this kind of female party member who is so intoxicated by love that she forgets the revolution. But nowadays in general this is how things are. The majority of female party members are experts in love and there is a lack of female party members who are experts in revolution and make

¹⁶ *Mao Dun yu xianshi* in *Mao Dun yanjiu ziliao*, vol. 2, p.102.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.103.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.104.

By implication, all male party members do make revolution their priority and are not deflected from this by peripheral things like love. Furthermore, the use of the first person plural ('we are suspicious') implies a male readership which shares Qian's views. This male-centred analysis continues as Qian concludes of the female characters in general that "they are all real(istic) characters, we can be one hundred and twenty per cent sure of that, we completely accept the realism of these characters."²⁰ They are real because they accord with Qian's views on the matter. They also accord with their imputed class characteristics as petty bourgeois intellectuals.

In the mid-eighties one or two studies began to appear which addressed themselves specifically to the question of Mao Dun's portrayal of women. Zhang Yuwen's analysis in *Mao Dun yanjiu* is notable in his attempt to present a different approach.²¹ However, try as he might, he perpetuates much of the stock approach of his predecessors. Like them, he continues to quote Mao Dun himself as authority for his own analysis. His own division of Mao Dun's female characters into three types is based on Mao Dun's categorisation in *WZGDL*.²² He also follows the same practice as Qian Xingcun of imposing a male-centred reading of the text. For example, Sun Wuyang in *Vacillation* is "a character who invites affection."²³ The question of whose affection is not addressed but a male reader is implied. He also internalises the view of Sun Wuyang presented through the eyes of Fang Luolan. As discussed later in this chapter, it is a matter of narratological irony that Fang's perceptions of Sun are unreliable. Zhang explains that although she tends a little towards infantile leftism, she is of an open and cheerful disposition, has a bold and vigorous working style and clarity of thought. This compares markedly with Qian's interpretation of Sun Wuyang, above.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.109.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.126.

²¹ *Lun Mao Dun xiaoshuo zhong de "shidai nüxing" xingxiang* in *Mao Dun yanjiu*, 1986.2, pp.25-32.

²² *ibid.*, p.25.

²³ *ibid.*, p.26.

Zhang also takes a strong, moralistic tone regarding the confused attitudes of these women with regard to sex. In this he typifies the difficulty of many Chinese critics in their confrontation with the feminist sympathies apparent in Mao Dun's early fiction. These female characters seek freedom in love and marriage but they tend towards immoral behaviour. He relies on his ideological training to explain that these confused attitudes are an indication of the lingering influence of the era and the environment on these female characters who do "strange things" (*guguai de shir.*) It is a special historical phenomenon, and, as history moves forward, explains Zhang, there is little trace left of this behaviour.²⁴ In his general summing up of the characteristics of the female characters in Mao Dun's early fiction, Zhang identifies several prominent traits: confused sexual behaviour, a vacillatory state of mind and a strong individualism which betrays their petty bourgeois class background. Once again, these women are considered aberrant, strange, peripheral and difficult to understand and their depiction is less satisfactory than female characters in the works of Mao Dun's more conformist contemporaries who "temper their backward elements into revolutionary behaviour."²⁵ However, Zhang considers Mao Dun's portrayal to be extremely lifelike and vivid (*xuxu ru sheng.*) This assessment is rendered questionable in terms of his earlier expression of dissatisfaction at the ideological flaws in their portrayal and is rather suggestive of Zhang's recognition of established stereotypes of female behaviour, tempered with class analysis. Indeed, with frequent recourse to the author as his authoritative source, Zhang can only explain the reasons for this lifelike portrayal in terms of Mao Dun's own experience, with which the characters are imbued, and their force as thermometers which reflect the general disillusionment of the age. Mao Dun's portrayal is realistic because it shows characters consistent with their class type in their reactions to the course of the revolution. Through this he is able to foreground the nihilism of petty bourgeois intellectuals and power of the collective will to propel the age forward. However Zhang is concerned that often this message is too clouded by the emotional and erotic content of the works.²⁶ Thus

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp.28-29.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp.30-31.

true-to-life portrayal is defined in terms of class analysis and bears no relation to gender. Unsatisfactory class traits also appear to be associated specifically with female characters.

The association of Mao Dun's portrayal of women with strangeness and contradiction is maintained by Zhao Yuan. This is notable as the perpetuation of the stereotype by a female critic who has internalised the standard set of values. She writes that every age has its "eccentrics" (*guai ren*) whose special characteristics are that they chafe against social norms, mock conventional beliefs and deviate from the normalities of life in order that a reassessment of such values might be brought about. This is the function of the "bizarre women" who appear in the fiction of Mao Dun and his contemporaries. They are the product of the fusing together of the special socio-historic conditions of the age and the particular moral and aesthetic beliefs of the individual writer.²⁷ She suggests that the best representation of the special nature of Mao Dun's female characters is in their sexual relationships which show the "complicated contradictions in their nature" – the combination of thorough anti-traditionalism and moral nihilism.²⁸ She also tends towards a moralistic tone in her discussion of the sexual behaviour of characters like Zhang Qiulu. However, she reinterprets the negative image of the "dissipated, unconventional female" as one which encapsulates the frustrations of the new woman whose demands go beyond the realities of early twentieth century Chinese society.²⁹

In general then, the standard assessment of Mao Dun's portrayal of women perpetuated by Chinese critics may be summed up by Peng Kang whose own analysis of the character types in Mao Dun's fiction is discussed in Chapter Four. He writes that Mao Dun is a pioneer in depicting "truly vivid characters of flesh and blood who encapsulate the spirit of the age."³⁰

It is clear that Mao Dun's attempt to present psychological description marks an advance in contemporary Chinese literary development. How-

²⁷ *Da geming hou xiaoshuo zhong de xin nüxing xingxiang qun* quoted in *Mao Dun yanjiu liushi nian*, p.210.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.222.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.219.

³⁰ *Lun Mao Dun bi xia de xiaozhuan jieji nüxing* in *Mao Dun zhuanji*, vol. 2, pt. 1, p.256.

ever, this largely male body of critical opinion seems to have assumed that Mao Dun is thereby presenting a more progressive and accurate view of women. What they recognised was in fact a stereotypical view of Chinese women which they themselves equally perpetuated. I suggest that what appeared to these critics to be the portrayal of 'how women really were' is actually a representation of 'how women had traditionally been perceived as being.' This chapter will investigate the nature of the traditional Chinese stereotype of women in order to provide a standard against which to assess better the characters of the women in Mao Dun's early fiction.

Traditional Chinese Definitions of Gender

This section presents a general overview of traditional Chinese definitions of gender. It is not intended to be an exhaustive study. Such a study would constitute a doctoral thesis of itself. The intention is to provide terms of reference for the discussion of Mao Dun's portrayal of women which follows.

Sex and gender should not be confused. Sex is biological while gender is cultural. Thus while people are born male or female, their social and cultural conditioning determines their masculinity or femininity: in each case certain qualities and behaviour are either encouraged or discouraged. Often what is encouraged in one is discouraged in the other. On the basis of these circumscribed norms of behaviour, certain roles are assigned to women and other roles to men, usually with little overlap. The question posed by Everett Kleinjans in her discussion of gender roles,³¹ is whether these "sex roles are a function, not of biological heredity, but of [the] social and cultural conditions [themselves]." ³² She warns of the *conceptual trap* which arises. The physiological differences between men and women and the different roles they play in the reproductive process are the basis upon which other patterns of dress, behaviour and so on are assigned. However, once these gender roles have been assigned and reinforced, "the differences are declared a manifestation and evidence of the biological sex differences. And in turn, the biological sex differences are used to argue for, and usually require, different gender roles." ³³ Furthermore, since these roles are part of the cultural unconscious, they are perceived as being 'inborn.' So when these rules of behaviour are transgressed in some way, the offence is defined as a violation of the laws of nature. I suggest that those who helped to formulate the common assessment of Mao Dun's portrayal of women have fallen into this very conceptual trap.

In Western feminist criticism much work has been done to identify specific stereotypical traits which have been historically assigned to women.

³¹ *The Tao of women and men.*

³² *ibid.* p.103.

³³ *ibid.* p.104.

Examples might include: hysteria, an inability for rational thought, sentimentality, an intuitive approach to life as opposed to the supposed logic of male thought and behaviour.³⁴ The Western cultural bias in these values illustrates well how Western critical assumptions cannot be adopted in a blanket manner and applied wholesale to the Chinese context. Nevertheless the basic approach is still valid.

The Chinese Stereotype

Whereas the Western stereotypes are very oppositional (logic versus intuition, and so on), the Chinese stereotypes are less antithetical, being based on the yin/yang principle. Even at the zenith of yin there is always the presence of yang and vice versa. This is elaborated in the ancient beliefs of the *Yi jing*. Here the two hexagrams (*gua*) *qian* and *kun* are central to the creative process. Kleinjans explains their significance as “standing for heaven and earth, yang and yin, male and female”³⁵ but Wilhelm pursues their essential meaning. *Qian* is ‘the Creative’, that which “knows the great beginnings.” *Kun* is the Receptive, that which “completes the finished things.”³⁶ Images of the interaction of the Creative and the Receptive appear throughout the *Yi jing* and it is clear that both are required to allow the creative process to take place. Thus neither the creative power of heaven nor the receptive fertility of the earth can function or exist without the other. This interaction is so close that the two principles act together as a single concept:

The *qian* and the *kun* are each an aspect of creativity. They thus form the primary unity of opposites which give [sic] rise to all things. One should not separate the *qian* from the *kun* in understanding the concept of *taiji* or the primary unity of opposites.³⁷

I suggest that this can be read as a conceptualisation on the metaphysical level of the biological interaction of the sexes before the corrupting influence of social conditioning has been brought to bear. The equality im-

³⁴ For an interesting and amusing discussion of such assumptions see e.g. Mary Ellman, *Thinking about women* passim.

³⁵ op. cit. p.110.

³⁶ H. Wilhelm, *Heaven, earth and man in the Book of Changes*, pp.36-37.

³⁷ Chung Ying-cheng quoted by Kleinjans in a work which I have been unable to identify.

plied in this unity of opposites is lost when such an interaction is made to conform to prescribed norms of social behaviour. It is conceivable that the transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal ordering of early society ³⁸ brought about an adjustment in the perception of this interaction. Receptivity as an active quality was subsumed into a hierarchical relationship where superiority, goodness, brightness, strength, activity and so on were juxtaposed with inferiority, evil, darkness, weakness and passivity. ³⁹ Eventually yin came to symbolise all that was negative and inferior in the universe, including the female sex.

This revised perception of the interaction of these opposite elements was reinforced by the moral precepts of Confucianism. In its aspirations towards order and harmony, Confucianism provided a structure of relationships which, if adhered to would be the key to the correct ordering of society. These Five Relationships (*wu lun*) are commonly cited as follows:

Ruler/minister

Father/son

Elder brother/younger brother

Husband/wife

Friend/friend. ⁴⁰

All except the last are relationships between superior and inferior. (The fifth inevitably applies to friendship among men because women were not allowed any status outside the home.) The rationale behind this structure was that full observance of the prescribed rules of conduct associated with each relationship would of itself obviate conflict within the family or within society. This was because the behaviour of each individual was strictly controlled by the duties he performed in respect of another or by those which another owed to him. All categories of interaction were covered by this schema because the family was seen as the basic unit of society

³⁸ See J. Kristeva, *About Chinese women*, part II, ch.1, passim.

³⁹ In Richard R. Guisso's interpretation, the original relationship is hierarchical. See *The Five Classics and the perception of women*, p.49.

⁴⁰ H. Baker, *Chinese family and kinship*, p.11.

– society in microcosm. Regulating perfectly the relationships within the family would, by extension, regulate the interpersonal workings of society.

Within the scheme of human relationships, women had only one role: that of a wife subordinate to her husband. The ideal to which she was to aspire was *xian qi liang mu* - “virtuous wife and good mother.” Furthermore a woman was taught to adhere to the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues. A woman owed obedience to her father when young, her husband when married, and her son(s) when widowed. She should also cultivate the following (feminine) virtues. She should not offend against the prescribed ethical codes of behaviour (*i.e.* she should understand her subordinate role in the scheme of things;) she should be restrained in social intercourse and guard against garrulousness; she should maintain high standards of personal hygiene and beautify herself in order to be pleasing to the opposite sex; she should carry out her domestic duties with diligence. ⁴¹ As expected, gender roles were extrapolated from biological function but in the process a value judgement was applied. Thus, not only were these roles seen as a manifestation of biological differences but these very roles were used as the basis for an assessment of the nature of sexual difference. E. Croll cites the judgement commonly ascribed to Confucius that “women are indeed human beings, but they are of a lower state than men and can never attain to full equality with them.” ⁴² The traditional appraisal of the nature of woman relied heavily on conceptions of their role in society. Their role was a subordinate one therefore their state of being was necessarily subordinate also. This assessment was simultaneously self-fulfilling. The education of females had as its sole aim the instillation of submission and suppliancy in order that women would fulfil their prescribed role all the more perfectly. It was an effective ‘mechanism of subordination.’ But it was based not on assumptions about women’s capacities for intelligence or emotion in comparison with those of men. Rather, to open up greater educational vistas for women would threaten the harmony of the Five Re-

⁴¹ E. Croll, *Feminism and socialism in China*, p.13. See also Richard R. Guisso’s discussion of traits associated with the female, as suggested by characters with the ‘woman’ radical in the *Shuowen jiezi*. *The Five Classics and the perception of women*, p.51.

⁴² M. E. Burton, *The education of women in China*, quoted by E. Croll, *ibid.* p.12.

lationships. The overriding emphasis in Chinese tradition was control: to cultivate in each of the sexes only those qualities which were required to maintain and enhance the harmonious ordering of society. This compares interestingly with traditional Western assumptions about women's inferior intellect or their overdeveloped capacity for emotion. There is not the same exclusivity in traditional Chinese assumptions about gender, *e.g.*, intuition or emotion were not considered the sole preserve of either sex. The emphasis on control meant that qualities desirable in a woman were negative qualities: self-effacement, a lack of garrulousness, obedience, compliance and so on. These qualities are a direct extension of the *behaviour* expected of a woman. By contrast, because Western tradition assigned different emotional responses to men and women it could celebrate positive attributes in women, *e.g.* the celebration of those qualities associated with motherhood. Despite the promotion of the *role* of 'virtuous wife and good mother,' Chinese tradition lacks any celebration of motherhood. What was important was for women to fulfil their reproductive role and bring forth sons to continue the family line. Thus the birth of sons was celebrated rather than any idealised conceptions of motherhood.⁴³

Mechanisms of subordination and control find their extreme expression in the chastity cult and in the practice of footbinding. Women should remain faithful to their husbands even after death, whilst men were free to consort with prostitutes and take concubines. This was enforced by segregating the sexes from a very young age and confining women within the home, thus narrowing a woman's horizons and increasing her isolation from the rest of society. Even her physical mobility was severely curtailed by her bound feet. It is difficult to define where the erotic connotations of this practice end and the practical implications begin. As such it is a double expression of the physical control to which women were subject: mutilating their feet both provided for the greater sexual pleasure of their menfolk and simultaneously imprisoned them within their homes. It provides a physical incarnation of all that bound women within the moral code.⁴⁴

⁴³ One should also acknowledge the importance of the Christian tradition in the Western celebration of motherhood.

⁴⁴ For further discussion of the practice of footbinding, see H. S. Levy, *Chinese foot-binding* See also J. Kristeva, *About Chinese women*, part II, ch.2 or R. H. Van Gulik,

In China the imposition of moral values was absolute. Different forms of loyalty were demanded of both men and women. All one had to do was follow the code. As has been examined in detail elsewhere, a woman could attain great virtue by her continued and absolute loyalty to a man who had already died.⁴⁵ In the West such moral absolutism was mitigated by circumstances. Mary Ellman writes of how a woman might lose twice over. Her intellect was judged as inferior and yet when it came to questions of, say, loyalty, she was still expected to make a judgement. A woman's loyalty to a man would be judged according to the character of that man. Unstinting loyalty to a fool would not merit admiration.⁴⁶

The chastity cult and the practice of footbinding indicate the lengths that were gone to keep women under control, particularly in the matter of sexual relations. Above all, this need for control was an expression of the fear men had of the power of women to subvert the harmonious relations prescribed within the moral code. Within the yin/yang duality, women were associated with the mysterious yin. Especially after Confucianism became the state orthodoxy, it took on an association with the yang principle, being the dominant ideology. This automatically brought those heterodox ways of thought over which it had triumphed into an association with the yin principle. Thus on a global level, yin implied the subversion of the Confucian ideals of harmony and moral order by the heterodox.⁴⁷ Naturally femaleness was also associated with heterodoxy, but this was through more than simple identification with the yin principle. The harmonious order of relationships extended back to past generations and forward to future ones. The living individual functioned within a Continuum of Descent⁴⁸ in which his ancestors existed only through him and

Sexual life in ancient China, ch.8.

⁴⁵ Likewise, the death of his parents did not release a son from his duty to them. See e.g. H. Baker, op. cit. p.72.

⁴⁶ M. Ellman, op. cit. pp.105-107. There was no similar denigration of woman's intellect in Chinese tradition. One notes that the *Lie nũ zhuan* (see below) contained a section of biographies of eminent women who were "able in reasoning and understanding." See A. R. O'Hara, *The position of woman in early China* ..., pp.153-187.

⁴⁷ Whilst arguing against it, Roger T. Ames provides a good description of the traditional association of yin values with Daoist thought. See e.g. *Taoism and the androgynous ideal*, p.22.

⁴⁸ H. Baker, op. cit. p.71

his future existence would only be via his descendants. Hence the central importance of ancestor worship and its attendant rituals in the workings of the family. However, because the descent continuum was patrilinear, women had no direct place within it. They married out of the lineage into which they were born and could only gain ancestral status in the clan into which they married through their husbands and sons. As they effectively lacked proper status in either lineage they were unable to take part in any of the rituals associated with worship of the ancestors. Faced with such a peripheral role in a set of beliefs which was central to an individual's eternal existence many women sought consolation in other, heterodox, ways of thought such as Buddhism or Daoism.

Although a woman's role was restricted to one domain – the home – within that domain she often fulfilled a different, more dominant role, that of housekeeper and holder of the purse strings. This 'other' role sits uneasily beside the subordinate role described above and suggests an ambivalence in the male attitude towards women's role and status. A man relied on his wife to manage the domestic affairs and yet he required her subordination outside of that restricted domain. The necessity to control this 'other' is therefore given extra force: might not women perform an external social role just as well as, if not better than, their menfolk if they were given the chance? ⁴⁹

It was on the level of sexual relations that women's power to subvert was especially feared. They had the ability to attract men away from their prescribed behavioural path, and rather than ascribing this to male weakness – the dominant culture is unlikely to ascribe weakness to itself – the nature of woman was examined for an explanation. All yin associations with heterodoxy would propel the inquirer inexorably towards the only possible interpretation. There had to be something inherently base and dangerous in the nature of woman to bring about such a state of affairs. Women were by nature cunning and manipulative and therefore to be controlled. This is a further instance of the result of the imposition of

⁴⁹ This role is not ignored in traditional fiction. The later manifestation of Li Wa as mistress-turned-mother, who looks after the hero after almost destroying him, is a powerful testament to it. Others might include the dominant character of Phoenix in *Honglou meng*.

a code of behaviour being used to justify its original imposition. Women were denied any social status or any position in the clan except via their menfolk. As an inevitable consequence it was assumed that they would resort to the manipulation of these men in order that they might bring influence to bear. Their power might also stem from the perception that they possessed a secret sexual knowledge:

... the manuals of the 'Art of the Bedchamber' ... depict the woman as the principal initiator of love-making, since it is she who knows not only its technique but also its secret (alchemical) meaning and its benefits to the body (longevity). ... But whether it is divulged by a woman or an expert 'master', the advice about love-making is principally concerned with the pleasure of the woman. Foreplay is extensively discussed, and the goal of the act itself, each time is the orgasm of the woman, who is thought to have an inexhaustible yin essence, whereas the man on the other hand, ... is supposed to withhold his own orgasm in order to achieve health and longevity, if not immortality. ⁵⁰

One of the significant premises of these manuals was the sexual superiority of woman. Her capacity for pleasure was understood to greatly exceed that of man, hence the emphasis in the manuals on techniques to enhance her pleasure. The corollary of this is the fear and resentment of her power. Her 'fundamentally unstable nature' meant that if let out from her confinement or indulged, she was bound to become 'dangerous and overwhelming.'⁵¹ Of course, such manuals were, by their very nature, part of the yin tradition. The orthodox prescription was, predictably, that all matters to do with the bedchamber were to be kept firmly in the bedchamber. The emphasis remained squarely on the desired result of such activity, namely the birth of sons.

The Literary Stereotype

With the institutionalisation of Confucianism, the Classics and other books written specifically for the purpose of educating women were used as authorities on the conduct of women. A salient example of the latter type is

⁵⁰ J. Kristeva, op. cit. p.61-62. This idea is of course not unique to China, but such a sexual economy where importance is given to female sexual pleasure and where the woman is not devalued contrast with those which are "dominated by the phallus." See also R. H. Van Gulik, op. cit., passim.

⁵¹ K. McMahon, *Causality and containment* ..., p.65.

the *Lie nü zhuan*, compiled by Liu Xiang in c. 32 BC ⁵² and used ever since for the instruction of girls in the correct moral behaviour befitting their sex. There are two sides to the stereotype which is presented. Either women are depicted as paragons of Confucian virtue whose lives are held up as models for emulation; or they are evil meddlers in men's affairs, sirens who lure men to their destruction. The *Lie nü zhuan* includes biographies of chaste widows, filial daughters, virtuous maidens and so on; it also contains a selection of biographies of 'Pernicious and Depraved Women.' ⁵³ Every biographical section of each dynastic history also contained a subsection detailing the lives of prominent *lie nü*. The following is an example taken from the *Liao shi*:

Xing Jian's wife of the family of Chen, was from Yingzhou. Her father's given name was Xing and in the time of the Five Dynasties he served as an official in successive posts up to Director of Instruction.

Lady Chen had barely begun to fasten her hair with a pin when she came to a thorough understanding of the true meaning of the Classics. Whenever she read a *shi* or a *fu* she was always able to recite it from memory and she especially loved to chant verse. Contemporaries knew her as a woman of scholarly accomplishments. When she was 20 years old, she married into (*gui*) the Jian family. She behaved filially towards her parents-in-law and as there was peace in the women's quarters, so her relatives held her in high esteem. She had six sons, and personally taught them from the classics. Later on two of her sons, Baopo and Baozhi, both reached the positions of leading ministers because of their virtue. In the twelfth year (994) of the Tonghe era (983-1011) she died. The Ruizhi Empress heard of this and exclaimed in grief, granting her the posthumous title of Mistress of Lu (*Luguo furen*), and (ordering) that a stone tablet be carved in order to publicise (*biao*) her conduct. When the time came to remove her for burial in the family tomb, [the Empress] sent an emissary to offer sacrifice in her honour. Those who expound on these things say that she was pure and virtuous, gentle and yielding, and followed the proper rules of female behaviour and was a paragon of motherhood without ever once uttering a discontented word. ⁵⁴

The commentator emphasises the way that, as a virtuous wife and mother, she educated her sons so that the family line continued to flourish.

Although the *lie nü* in the dynastic histories were by definition from the ruling classes: wives of prominent officials, members of the imperial clan

⁵² A. R. O'Hara, *The position of women in early China ...*, p.8.

⁵³ See O'Hara, *ibid.*, pp.186-214.

⁵⁴ *Liao shi*, Zhonghua Shuju, 1974, j.107, pp.1471-1472. Draft translation by N. Standen, work in progress.

and so on, and those who figure in the likes of the *Lie nü zhuan* range from the peasant class to the imperial clan, the standards of virtue applied are the same. A selfless devotion to her husband and his clan was demanded of a woman. When this negation of self was not effected, the flipside of the stereotype was invoked. The *Zuo zhuan* is the source of an oft-cited dictum which helped to establish women as ‘metaphors for moral danger.’⁵⁵

Where there are beautiful creatures (*you wu*), they are capable of perverting men. Unless virtue and righteousness prevail, there will surely be disaster. 56

In the recounting of ancient history, it was common practice to assign the responsibility for the fall of a dynasty to the meddling wife of the last emperor. Baosi, wife of King Yu, the last king of Zhou and Daji, wife of Emperor Xin, the last emperor of Shang both became archetypal ‘destroyers of dynasties.’

Thus, in terms of the official literature women were marginalised. Because they had no status within society, women were not portrayed as ordinary people, doing ordinary things. The function of this type of literature was to promote the state ideology and to set forth ideals of behaviour for both men and women to aspire to. In this context women were not ordinary, they were by nature suspect, to be controlled. Furthermore, virtuous behaviour from the population was essential for proper government of the empire. In order to encourage correct behaviour, examples of outstandingly virtuous behaviour were actually sought out by special officials in order that they could be rewarded with honours by the emperor. In this way Heaven could be placated as this decree by the Xianfeng Emperor in 1851 shows:

Since last year’s winter solstice there has been little moisture from the melting snows. The weather has been very dry and parched. Since the beginning of spring, cold and hot have come in unseasonable fashion. Yesterday, We passed the vernal equinox with dense sleet and freezing cold ... We are acutely aware that the people depend on Us, and have constantly examined Our conscience, being deeply fearful that our institutions may not yet be appropriate, and that We are not able to induce a harmonious response from Heaven above ... Hitherto widows who have committed suicide when their husbands

⁵⁵ G. Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa*, p.69.

⁵⁶ Quoted by G. Dudbridge, *ibid.* See also Marina H. Sung, *The Chinese Lieh-nü tradition*, pp.69-70.

have died have not been permitted to have an award, in the absence of such circumstances as a forced remarriage obliging them to safeguard their fidelity with a swift death ... If we honour them, this will ... sharpen respect for moral norms. ⁵⁷

A striking feature of Elvin's study is the absolute brain washing of women by this value system. To cite a single case, culled by Elvin from local gazetteers of the Ming and Qing dynasties, a widowed Ningbo girl proved her determination to remain faithful to her dead spouse and not to remarry by cutting out one of her eyes. ⁵⁸ Of course the historical sources and gazetteers are not reliable as insights into the actual position of women at the time they were written. The point of citing them is to show the image of women their male authors wished to project. The cases cited might function as "headlines" marking unusual events, or indeed, they might not have happened at all. ⁵⁹ But faced with only two representations of female behaviour in the official literature a woman effectively had no choice of model on which to base her behaviour.

The Stereotype in Classical Fiction

Particularly prominent within the classical literary stereotype is the danger of women's sexual power. In the *Shui hu zhuan* the heroes display a subconscious hatred of women 'as their worst enemy' and forsake female company in order to maintain their heroic code. Women are portrayed as malicious and treacherous, but in the last analysis they are punished for being women, which is equated with being 'creatures of lust.' ⁶⁰ Hsia points out that the major examples of female wickedness in the novel, be they blackmailers, slanderers, informers or husband-killers, are also 'all adulteresses discontented with their marital or captive lot.' In such cases the heroes are merciless in their misogynistic revenge.

In *Jin Ping Mei*, despite the fact that Ximen Qing is a notorious se-

⁵⁷ *Qinding Da Qing huidian shili* (1899 ed.), quoted by M. Elvin, *Female virtue and the state in China*, p.129.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p.146.

⁵⁹ It could be argued that Elvin, as a male commentator offering a verdict on the historical position of women in China, is continuing the same practice as the gazetteer writers before him.

⁶⁰ C. T. Hsia, *The classic Chinese novel*, pp.105-106.

ducer of women, the gloss provided by the author is that his 'victims are begging to be seduced.' That is, women will inevitably bring men to ruin through their 'sexual aggression and dangerous cunning.'⁶¹ Ximen Qing had abandoned himself to lust, as his sorry end brought about by an overdose of aphrodisiacs emphasises. However, he would always have been brought to this degenerate state by a woman – Jinlian, his concubine. Her obsession with carnal pleasure brings her finally to the depths of depravity when she assumes a posture of triumph over Ximen in order to enjoy the last few moments of pleasure from his ailing body.⁶²

The exception which redresses the balance is *Honglou meng*. The standpoint of the author vis à vis the female characters in his novel is expressed in part of the commentary which precedes the main text.

The author further says that, though he is now a confessed failure, when he suddenly recalled the many girls he had known in the past, he realised that their conduct and understanding were far superior to his. To be a man and yet to be inferior to these girls : this is a thought he could not get over – there is so much he should feel ashamed of, and yet what is the point of futile regret.⁶³

This comment is commonly understood to acknowledge the superiority of women to men. But it suggests rather the inadequacy of this particular man; that these girls were superior to him was a reflection of his own failure to be all that a man should be according to convention. Nevertheless, in the novel there is a recognition of the validity of women's psychology and emotion which contrasts with the stereotype. Indeed, it is through his experiences with the young women of his extended family that Baoyu reaches enlightenment. A generational distinction must be made. Baoyu and his female companions are adolescents about to enter the world of adulthood but as they do so they will be contaminated with the values of that world. These are the values adhered to by the adults of the family; the men are animal brutes driven by lust and the women are monstrous tigresses devouring others.

Baoyu is considered effeminate because he is not driven by lust and

⁶¹ C. T. Hsia, *ibid.*, p.184.

⁶² See *ibid.*, p.200

⁶³ Quoted in C. T. Hsia, *ibid.*, p.247.

does not seek a cruel dominance over the young women. Rather he sympathises with the precariousness of their condition and identifies with it. He admires their beauty and their understanding and laments their inevitable fate which is to conform to the demands of the state of marriage and to be drawn into the malice, greed and envy of the adult world. Far from appealing to the stereotype, the characters of the young women are individually delineated. The tensions of the household brought about by a company of young women living in close proximity to one another are also given full play, as is the interaction between girls of different temperaments. Their thoughts, feelings and aspirations are contrasted with the behavioural norms they are expected to follow. For example, Baoyu's cousin Xue Baochai whom he eventually marries, is docile in her compliance with Confucian morality, but this 'underscores all the more poignantly her deliberate suppression of her poetic precocity and romantic longings.' ⁶⁴

The young women are shown to be anxiously preoccupied with their marital futures, especially as in this regard they are at the mercy of the senior members of the clan. Furthermore, marriage will mean not only their propulsion into the world of experience but a rude, sexual assault on the innocence and serenity of their enclosed childhood together. The contrast between this inescapable reality, witnessed by the unhappiness of the married women around them, and their romantic longings comes to expression in their dreams.

The young women are also shown to fight against the fixed ideas imposed upon them. Qingwen, a maid in Baoyu's quarters for whom he had a particular affection, has incurred the wrath of her mistress and has been expelled from his quarters despite her failing health. Baoyu visits her in secret as she lies on her sick bed in the squalor of the servants' quarters and cannot keep his grief in check. Knowing that she has not long to live, Qingwen is desperate to clear her name as well as to give expression to her secret passion:

But there is one thing that keeps me dying content. Though I am a little better looking than the others, I have never used my good looks to *entice* you. How could they keep on saying that I am a *she-fox*? Now that I have to bear this stigma and have not long to

⁶⁴ C. T. Hsia, *The classic Chinese novel*, p.261.

live, it would not be improper for me to feel that, had I known things
would come to this pass, formerly I should have ... 65

Honglou meng explores on a human level the tensions caused when rigid codes of behaviour are imposed. There is an inevitability about the moulding of nature to form which can only be avoided by a Buddhistic disengagement from human affairs. The psychological awareness apparent in *Honglou meng* is incontestable, but whether it presents a particularly *feminine* psychology, as is commonly believed, is, I suggest, a matter for further scrutiny.

The Supernatural Tale

The supernatural tale provides a different forum for exploring what happens when the ideal codes of behaviour conflict with human nature. Here, supernatural figures such as ghosts are used as metaphors for mortal women in order more easily to dramatise their interaction with men. Thus the social realities of interaction could be more satisfactorily explored and fascinating areas of experience, on the fringes of acceptable behaviour, could be dramatised. The thesis is often put forward that the supernatural women in such tales present a unique image of womanhood which is in contradiction to the conventional image of mortal women.⁶⁶ Further examination shows the stereotype to be both maintained and exploded as the form developed.

The alluring, seductive and dangerous nature of women is encapsulated in the fox-demon motif. The belief that members of the animal kingdom could take on human form and thereby enter the world of men had already gone beyond folk belief and had been formalised by scholars in Han times.⁶⁷ The fox was particularly adept at transformation: its capacities are 'scientifically' documented by the *Xuanzhong ji* (third-fourth century).

Foxes, when fifty years old, can transform themselves into women;
when a hundred years old, into beautiful girls and spirit mediums.
Sometimes they become men and consort with women. They have
the power of knowing things at an immense distance, are skilled at

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.283. Italics added.

⁶⁶ Allan Barr, *Disarming intruders*, p.501

⁶⁷ H. C. Chang, *Tales of the supernatural*, p.4.

demonry, and beguile men into losing their reason. At the age of one thousand they win access to heaven and become divine foxes. ⁶⁸

This illicit crossing of boundaries from one level of existence to another is recognised as a recurring phenomenon but a dangerous one because it challenges the established order of things. Foxes who trespass in human society are maleficent and should be hounded out.

The classic structure of the demon story has been distilled into the following essential elements: three universal actors (a young unmarried man, a demon – animal spirit or ghost – in the guise of a young woman, and an exorcist, usually a Daoist monk); and four universal actions (meeting, lovemaking, intimation of danger and intercession of the exorcist.) Thus the young man goes out to a deserted place and meets a beautiful girl who lures him into intimacy with her. Eventually he becomes aware that this liaison is a threat to his life. A Daoist master is called in who restores the girl to her original animal form and punishes her. Other classic features are the gradual revelation of the woman's true identity and the harm which the demon works on her victim. Commonly she exhausts her lover's yang essence so that he grows weak and pale. The implicit message of this type of tale is that 'adventurous love is full of danger' for young men. ⁶⁹ It also reinforces the perception of women as seductive and maleficent beings.

Monschein cites a tale of the Six Dynasties from the *Taiping guangji* which illustrates this model. A shaman who has laid aside his Buddhist vows has taken to spending his nights in graveyards. One night he sees a fox demon put a skull on its head, dress itself in leaves and grass, which take on the appearance of real clothes, and turn into a woman. 'She' waylays a passing soldier, telling him that she is a singing girl who has fallen among thieves and has been left destitute. He eyes her lustfully and helps her to his house. At this point the shaman comes out from his hiding place and warns the soldier that she is a fox demon. He knocks the skull off her head. The fox resumes its original shape and disappears. ⁷⁰ By Tang

⁶⁸ Quoted by G. Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa*, p.64. See also I. Monschein, *Der Zauber der Fuchsfée ...*, Teil 2, passim.

⁶⁹ P. Hanan, *The Chinese vernacular story*, p.44-45

⁷⁰ I. Monschein, *Der Zauber der Fuchsfée ...*, pp.78-80.

times the portrayal of fox demons had begun to take on a greater degree of sophistication. It was possible for them to be depicted as benign, doing only good for their mortal lovers. In this regard the tale of Ren Shi (*Renshi zhuan*)⁷¹ is generally regarded as significant. Miss Ren is a fox spirit who lures her quarry in the usual way. Zheng is overwhelmed by her beauty and by making casual enquiries soon discovers her true identity. Nevertheless, he still insists on seeking her out, swearing his undying love for her. She finally accepts his entreaties and explains more about her nature, so that he has nothing to fear:

There are many like me around in human society: it is just that you do not recognise them. Do not single me out for blame ... My sort are hated and avoided by men simply because they do harm to men. But I am not like that. If you do not feel revulsion for me I wish to serve you as wife for the rest of my days.⁷²

They live together and Ren is a model wife. She advises him in business and helps his career; she also maintains her chastity when it is threatened by Zheng's friend Yin. Yet when Zheng is appointed to a post away from the capital he insists that she accompany him. She disregards her superior knowledge of what will befall her and, sure enough, the couple encounter a pack of hunting hounds. Ren resumes her original form and is killed by the hounds. Desolate, Zheng buys back her fox's body and buries it.

In the original paradigm the hapless young man falls for the fox spirit because he is unaware of her true identity. As soon as he does discover her true nature he must seek some means of ridding himself of her presence because it will be harmful to him. As a representation of intersexual interaction this shows the female being labelled a harmful influence. Being so labelled, her nature must accord with that label: the possibility that it might not is not allowed for. In the case of Ren Shi, Zheng disregards the label. He still desires Ren even though he is aware of her true identity. Because he desires Ren for herself the dangers associated with that identity cannot harm him.

Nevertheless, relations between supernatural women and their mortal

⁷¹ By Shen Jiji, in the *Yi wen ji*, preserved in the *Taiping guangji* - see Ma & Lau, *Traditional Chinese stories*, p.578.

⁷² Quoted in G. Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa*, p.65

lovers are impossible to sustain. Separation is inevitable. Either the female spirit is killed as in the case of Ren Shi or she is forced to return to the place from whence she came. This is justified by the illicit nature of her crime: she has crossed the boundaries between the world of animals and the human world and, as an interloper, will do nothing but harm. In the same way, women are denied the possibility of true assimilation into human society. Because of their nature, as this has been determined by men, they must maintain a transient, peripheral existence. The story of Ren Shi creates tensions within the original structure. Why should Ren Shi be punished as others of her kind are when by nature, she is not as they are understood to be? She is 'anomalous within the anomaly: a fox-woman who is not predatory.'⁷³ This tension is brought out in the coda added by the author.

There is humanity even in the feelings of alien beings. She preserved her chastity even under physical assault and remained true to her man until death. Even some real women nowadays fall short of this. Regrettably Zheng was not a man of discrimination. He was merely interested in her beauty and did not enquire into her nature. If he were a man of deep learning he could have come to grips with the principles of transformation, studied the relations between spirits and men. He would have written a fine essay and made known these rare and subtle circumstances, and not been content to enjoy her outer beauty.⁷⁴

Even though her virtuous behaviour would have qualified her for a permanent existence in human society, the laws of nature will out in the end. Zheng is indicted for not having come to a greater understanding of Ren's true nature: he treated her as a woman but he should not have forgotten that she was a fox. In other words, definitions of nature will prevail.

Whilst the prevailing trend of tales from the Ming dynasty was to reinforce the idea that 'alien' women were maleficent beings who must be unmasked and destroyed, some showed greater possibilities for domestication. One such is *Hu Meiniang* in *Jian deng yu hua* which tells of the concubine of an assistant prefectural magistrate whose behaviour towards her husband cannot be faulted and who helps him further his career. How-

⁷³ G. Dudbridge, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Quoted in G. Dudbridge, *ibid.*

ever, he falls ill for no reason. When a Daoist priest performs an exorcism, the concubine is revealed to be a dead fox with a human skull on her head.⁷⁵ A further development also manifests itself. Whereas the earlier tales were set in deserted places away from the city, gradually the scene of the action moves closer to centres of social life. Fox demons begin to be encountered on the edge of the city, perhaps just outside the city wall. By the time of the *Liaozhai zhiyi*, they appear in the market place and other central locations and take an active part in human affairs. This development brings the paradigm into human society. Thereby it becomes less peripheral and thus less threatening.

Liaozhai zhiyi

It is in the *Liaozhai zhiyi* of Pu Songling that heights of sophistication are reached in the depiction of tensions which arise out of perceptions of women's status. This collection also exhibits traits of portrayal which are reflected in the work of Mao Dun .

Many of the supernatural women in the *Liaozhai zhiyi* actively seek integration into human society. They are tormented by their marginal existence and desire to transform themselves into humankind.⁷⁶ Although sometimes they undergo a physical revitalisation, most often they demonstrate their suitability for acceptance into society by their model behaviour as wives or daughters-in-law. Pu Songling revolutionises the genre by allowing the transformation to take place. By so doing he legitimises the crossing of barriers between the alien or peripheral and the orthodox. As metaphors these 'alien women' provide a means of transcending the marginal position of women in Chinese society.⁷⁷ Paradoxically the means to shaking off the association with deviance is precisely to conform to the orthodox models of behaviour. In other words, the only way women could enter society was via their prescribed role. Far from contradicting the conventional image of orthodox womanhood, these creatures of fascination become manageable by their very endorsement of it. In this context, *Honglou meng* has greater

⁷⁵ H.C. Chang, *Tales of the supernatural*, p.35.

⁷⁶ See A. Barr, *Disarming intruders*, pp.508-509

⁷⁷ Allan Barr links the desire to fulfil prescribed norms of behaviour with the assimilation of a new daughter-in-law into her husband's family. See *ibid.*, p.510

revolutionary significance because it seeks to transcend the orthodox image of womanhood and to suggest that there should be alternative modes of existence for women.

Simultaneously, the *Liaozhai* provides other heroines who are quite at home in their peripheral state, thereby reinforcing the duality of the stereotype. However, they are of ambiguous nature: they often retain their facility to do harm but it is rendered less threatening. Many take human lovers on a temporary basis and often provide human replacements when the time to end the cohabitation is nigh. Concern for the injurious effect their association with a human lover might be having on his well-being might well be the cause for the provision of a human substitute and withdrawal from the liaison. As Allan Barr has suggested, this type of heroine sees her role as that of a lover rather than a mother.⁷⁸ It appears that this type of tale explores the position of the courtesan. A man seeks a liaison with a courtesan for love and sexual pleasure, a desire which is divorced from his responsibilities as filial son and provider of sons to continue the family line. This allows no orthodox position within society for the lover: she is not required to produce children or to fulfil any of the obligations of the obedient wife. This is borne out in the tales. Often these heroines are unable to produce children. If children are required a human substitute might well be provided to fulfil this function. Furthermore, because the production of children marks a major stage in the process of assimilation into the husband's family, or indeed into human society, this might well mark the end of this necromantic union. Otherwise, the transient might well be propelled towards seeking assimilation. Transients often assert their influence on their lover's affairs or control his actions. This reflects the stereotype of the demanding courtesan who brings her client to rack and ruin.⁷⁹ Despite her peripheral role, the courtesan still has a necessary role to play. Because traditional marriage did not allow for the possibility of romantic love, this place on the edge of society, this twilight zone, was generally the only place where a man might find such solace. Yet, such a union had no place within the five relationships and therefore

⁷⁸ A. Barr, *Disarming intruders*, p.511

⁷⁹ A good example is Li Wa before she undergoes her transformation. See G. Dudbridge, *op. cit.*

has to remain transient and marginal. Assimilation was possible if the courtesan became a concubine. The consequence of such a transformation was of course to take on all the behavioural obligations of a “wife.”

Liaozhai still has its fair share of predatory female beings who conform more completely to the established type. The story *Dong Sheng* provides a good example. After returning from a drinking spree with his friends, Dong finds a beautiful girl in his bed. Although at first he feels that she has a tail, he is persuaded by her that this is a figment of his intoxicated imagination. He is totally bewitched by her beauty and she remains as his wife. After some time, his health has deteriorated to a serious degree but he still remains under the spell of the fox spirit:

At nightfall, Dong took some medicine and went to sleep alone. As soon as he closed his eyes, he dreamt that he was making love with the girl. Waking up with a start, he found that he had already ejaculated (*ie* he had allowed his already depleted yang essence to become even further depleted.) Even more afraid, he moved back into the conjugal bedroom to sleep with his wife and son watching over him in the lamplight. But he dreamed as before and as he watched for the girl he became disorientated. A few days later, Dong vomited a great deal of blood and died. ⁸⁰

The fox spirit attempts to wreak the same havoc on Dong's friend Wang but Dong appears to him in a dream and she is unmasked.

In this regard, in the tale *Lianxiang*, the exchange between Lianxiang, a fox spirit, and Li Shi, a ghost, is also illuminating.

Lianxiang challenges Li Shi over the serious state of health of the scholar Sang which Li Shi's liaison with him has caused. Was it not true that a female ghost would seek to hasten a man's death in order that she might more readily cohabit with him? Li Shi denies it explaining that 'there is no pleasure when ghosts conjugate.' In turn, Li Shi challenges Lianxiang as to the deleterious effect on a man's health that a liaison with a fox could have. But Lianxiang denies that she is a creature 'who saps the vitality of men to invigorate their own constitution.' She explains that there are benign foxes who do no harm to the men with whom they come into contact but all ghosts are harmful because they belong to the nether world. ⁸¹

Nevertheless, Li Shi eventually repents when she realises that their liaison has brought Sang to the edge of death.

⁸⁰ *Liaozhai zhiyi*, 1963 ed., pp.121-122.

⁸¹ Adapted from H. C. Chang, *Tales of the supernatural*, pp.125-126.

The tale *Hengniang* provides further illumination of the actual means by which a man might be manipulated. In this tale, a fox spirit, Hengniang, teaches a human woman, Zhu Shi, how to manipulate her husband who has neglected her in favour of a concubine. The interest of this tale is the detailing of the techniques of female charm. After a period of neglecting her appearance and working with the servants, Zhu Shi carefully makes herself up and wears fine clothes again. But only after much entreating from her husband does she allow him into her bed. On returning to Hengniang for further instruction Hengniang teaches her the art of seduction, for although she is beautiful, only seduction will enable her to maintain her position as her husband's most favoured woman. She is taught to look askance and to smile in the correct way so that the teeth are only slightly revealed, and so on. Zhu Shi goes home to practise in front of the mirror and finds that her husband is 'stimulated in both body and spirit.' Also of interest is the way the behaviour of the husband is controlled by the women. He does not act on his own initiative but reacts to circumstances under their control. Only at the end of the tale does Hengniang reveal her true identity when she departs from human society.

In the supernatural tale, the female character is often portrayed from the male perspective. Traditionally, a restricted presentation of her actions, and thereby a veiling of her true identity, was a device to provide suspense.⁸² The reader is enlightened at the same time as the male protagonist as to her true nature or identity. This is the case in the story of Yingning from the *Liaozhai zhiyi*. Throughout the tale Yingning is presented as 'forever giggling, ... who cheers everyone up with her mirth, laughs so much that she is hardly able to complete her wedding ceremony.'⁸³ This is the common interpretation of the character of Yingning. However, as Allan Barr has pointed out, the reader is forced to consider Yingning's actions anew in the light of revelations at the end of the story. Only after having won the trust and affection of all in her husband's household by her endearing behaviour, is she able first to prove her fidelity to her husband and then to reveal her true identity as the daughter of a fox.

⁸² See Hanan, *The making of 'The pearl-sewn shirt' ...* for earlier precedent.

⁸³ See H. C. Chang, op. cit., p.121

She does this by repelling the lecherous advances of a neighbour's son by means of her supernatural power and acting thereafter with discretion and restraint. Because she has already gained the affection of the family, she is able to achieve her ultimate goal - 'to shed her deviant status and to establish for herself a conventional place in human society.'⁸⁴

Features which are reflected in the work of Mao Dun

Just as the *Liaozhai zhiyi* explores the tensions between the Confucian ideal and the roles women play in actual life, many of which conflict with this ideal, so Mao Dun's stories capture the tension between the aspirations of China's new women and the reality which confronted them. Often this is manifested in their aggressive behaviour.

Several of Mao Dun's early female protagonists provide an object lesson in the calculated manipulation of men. Prominent among them is Hui in *Disillusion*. She has recently returned from two years in France where she has had experiences with men which have left her filled with bitterness. Her conclusion is that "all men are bad." "When they approach us, they have no good intentions. To treat men with sincerity would be tantamount to casting jewels into the mire."⁸⁵ Thus she has resolved to treat men as they have treated her. This resolution is reinforced after her encounter with Bao Su in the French park after a visit to the cinema. The following morning Hui goes over the events of the previous evening and asks herself whether this Bao Su really was worth giving up her whole body to? The answer is a resounding "No, definitely not." At most he was nothing more than other men she had previously encountered. She was filled with defiant resolve, as she recalled her ill-treatment by men from her past. Ever since she had been deceived [and abandoned by a man called Gong],⁸⁶ she had nurtured the intention of taking her revenge on the male sex. Men were only a plaything for her, love (*ai*) did not come into it ... and as for morality, that was nothing but a trap to ensnare country maidens, a trap from which she

⁸⁴ See A. Barr, *Disarming intruders*, pp.501-506. The conventional interpretation is to disregard the apparent transformation as unfortunate and out of keeping with her original characterisation.

⁸⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, p.9.

⁸⁶ [] indicates omission from later editions.

had long since escaped. Looking back as her own woman, she felt no sorrow or remorse, only anger, the anger of unsatisfied revenge.⁸⁷ We see this strategy put into practice in Wuhan when Hui allows her male comrades to flirt with her, but she remains firmly in control.

The conversation gradually changed direction; everyone turned their attention towards their hostess. The one they called 'Brandy Bottle' insisted on asking Hui which perfume she used, the young man in army uniform pulled at her arm insisting that she dance with him, then, the short dark one announced that he would relate Hui's latest romantic encounter. Hui answered drily: 'If there is one please tell it but do not make up rumours.'

At the mention of love (*lian'ai*) this group of half-drunk men were roused as if by news of victory from the front line. They clustered round Hui, pressing her both with their words and with their hands. It was as if a bit of 'feudalistic thinking' still remained, but its effect did not reach as far as Jing.

Hui was masterful in rising above this bout of harassment. Ingeniously, she announced the end of the party.⁸⁸

This incident causes Jing no little disquiet. She asks Hui whether her friends always behaved in such a way towards her. Hui replies: 'When I am happy I fool around with them; when I am unhappy, I ignore them.' She uses the company of men to suit her own purposes without any regard to the consequences for them. She does not allow herself to plunge into an all-embracing love affair where she would have to relinquish control, as Jing does. In this way, Hui retains her aloofness and remains on the edge of intersexual exchange.

Another particularly accomplished manipulator of men is Gui in *Poetry and prose*. She is also an unconventional woman, a widow who has spurned her 'gentry education' and any moral obligations associated with her widowhood by taking a young lover. Gui enthralls the youth Bing with her obsession with the sensual experience of love-making. She is for him the 'dance of life, the dance of the soul.' However, he feels his relationship with her is insufficiently spiritual, too prosaic, and he finds more poetry in the spiritual communion he hopes will grow between himself and his demure young cousin. He accuses Gui of having changed, of becoming too vulgar, but Gui rejects the accusation:

⁸⁷ Paraphrased from *MDQJ*, 1, p.30.

⁸⁸ *MDQJ*, 1, pp.73-74.

What change? I don't see it at all. I only know that if I want something, I just say so outright. As for you, you sing a hymn to the poetic relationship between man and woman, using such terms as divine, mystery, spiritual love. But, in reality, the moment you see a woman's flesh, you are intoxicated by your imaginings and have mad cravings for her body. You pant and dribble like a dog. I remember as if it were yesterday how you have adored my breasts, my thighs, my belly. Your refinement, your purity and elegance are only masks, but you dare not show your true colours. Giving me a lecture, how shameless! 89

Bing tries unsuccessfully to defend himself, but he has no answers. Gui's response is to prove her words by pushing him to the ground and making love to him. Bing is completely overcome. In the mirror are reflected 'Gui's flushed cheeks, radiant with victorious light' and Bing, 'panting and slightly pale around the mouth.' Because Bing remains in a state of indecision as to which woman to choose, he loses them both.

The selective male perspective is used to considerable ironic effect in *Vacillation*, where a third manipulator of men, Sun Wuyang, is portrayed through the eyes of her prey, Fang Luolan. Fang is haunted by a vision of Sun, a 'both lovely and hateful image,' several chapters before she makes a physical appearance in the narrative. The reader is therefore forced to trust Fang's unreliable assessment of her character. Matters first come to a head when Sun gives Fang a handkerchief as a gift and his wife Meili suspects him of infidelity:

As far as this little misunderstanding was concerned, Fang Luolan was confident that he was not ashamed of his wife, and he wanted to be fair to her, but she really was a little too narrow-minded. To be more exact, she was somewhat unemancipated, and whoever she had heard talking, now she had begun to suspect him of infidelity, quite without cause; so a simple handkerchief had been like a touchpaper for her hurt feelings and tears. Naturally, he did not wish for there to be a rift between them and had repeatedly told his wife that 'if someone gives you a handkerchief – even if it is a woman – you appear restrained, old fashioned, if you don't accept it.' In these days of open social relations between the sexes, the giving and receiving of things like handkerchiefs was the most ordinary of matters. But his wife remained unconvinced. 90

The restrained humour of this chapter is maintained as Fang goes to great lengths in his attempts to make his wife understand, but by his very

⁸⁹ *MDQJ*, 8, pp.89-90. Translation based on Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory ...*, p.156.

⁹⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, p.145.

efforts he encourages her doubts. Finally, before Miss Zhang and Miss Liu, who are both friends of Meili and his own colleagues, he tries again.

Meili, now you must understand everything. As far as Sun Wuyang and I are concerned, we are simply colleagues. We are not even friends, so where on earth does this talk of love come from? Miss Zhang and Miss Liu can vouch for me. Naturally, she often comes to talk with me but this is simply to consult me about her work. I cannot ignore her, can I? Meili, it's a pity you were ill when the Party organised that New Year party, if you had come you would have been able to meet her. Then you would know that she is simply an innocent and lively young girl of straightforward disposition, who is affectionate to all men. She is like this by nature, it doesn't mean that she's in love with anybody. And that day when she suddenly took it into her head to give me a handkerchief – and it wasn't one that she had used before – she did so in front of everyone. She simply took it and put it in my pocket. It wasn't some furtive exchange of gifts. It was of no significance whatsoever – she just likes to lark about, that's all. ⁹¹

Poor Fang Luolan. In his agitation he takes out a handkerchief to mop his brow, only to discover that it is the self same handkerchief which has caused all the trouble. Meili had just about been convinced by her two friends about the truth of the incident when she hears her husband praise Sun Wuyang to the skies. This heavenly creature who thinks only pure thoughts contrasts markedly with the description of Sun Wuyang supplied by Zhang and Liu: 'an unconventional, coquettish woman who carries on triangular love affairs and causes men to run madly after her.' The difficulty we have with Fang Luolan's perceptions is that they are inconsistent. He is often used as a focal consciousness through which events in the novel are portrayed. Sometimes his perceptions are clearly acute but at other times, such as in his assessment of Sun Wuyang's character, conflicting messages are sent to the reader. There may well be an element of truth in the portrait painted by Fang, but he is clearly captivated by Sun, and as the novel progresses, we become increasingly aware of his naïveté in matters concerning the opposite sex. On the other hand, however much we are prepared to allow for bias in the account of Zhang and Liu, they appear to be a more reliable source. This pattern of events is evocative of the well-defined classical structure: a young man is captivated by the beauty of a ghost or fox spirit. When he learns of her true identity, he has two choices of action: either arrange for an exorcism or continue the

⁹¹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.149.

liaison and take his chances. The difference in Fang's case is that he is so captivated that he fails to see Sun as others see her.

To complicate matters further, Sun herself does show some sensitivity. Fang wishes to nominate her as the women's representative on the Party committee, but she declines, putting forward Miss Zhang's name instead. When questioned about this by Fang, she explains that the holder of the post would have to work in the same office as Fang, and that she did not want to create further difficulties for himself and his wife. 'I do not wish to be a thorn in the flesh of anybody, and I particularly do not want to be the object of a woman's hatred.'⁹² Fang Luolan is amazed firstly that she knew anything of the storm which her handkerchief had caused and secondly that she should be so considerate:

Fang Luolan hung his head without reply. Until this moment he had simply seen Sun Wuyang as lively and unaffected, but now he realised how fine and gracious she was. It seemed as if her feelings had been hurt.

When he looked up at Sun Wuyang again, he saw a look of wronged resentment flicker in her eyes; his own heart was filled with feelings of regret and gratitude. He felt that Sun Wuyang had probably heard a crushing rumour which had naturally grown out of the scene his wife had created the other day. The person responsible for all this was him: that was the reason for his regret. But Sun Wuyang expressed not the slightest dissatisfaction with him. Her 'It must have been very painful for you' expressed such a depth of sensitivity! He had to thank her. In all truth, feelings almost akin to love were beginning to stir within him. Because of the regret and the gratitude he felt towards Sun Wuyang, his wife's narrowness of mind inevitably began to seem distasteful to him.⁹³

In this passage we plumb the depths of subjectivity. None of the emotions assigned to Sun by Fang are verifiable. He projects an interpretation onto her reactions whose origin lies deep in his own naïve misunderstanding of Sun's behaviour. This is underlined almost immediately when Fang fails to recognise a box of contraceptive preparations, imagining them first to be cosmetics and then medicines. Fang leaves the women's section and her company believing that he has attained a deeper level of understanding of Sun. Her impetuous and romantic behaviour was only superficial: underneath she was deep and thoughtful. This deliberate signposting of

⁹² *MDQJ*, 1, p.172

⁹³ *MDQJ*, 1, p.173.

an unreliable consciousness⁹⁴ builds an irony obvious even to the most unsophisticated contemporary reader.

His relations with his wife continue to deteriorate, but his ruminations as to the cause bring a wry smile to the reader's face. Meili did not have even the suspicion of a lover and as for himself, he had never even come into contact with the body of any other woman apart from his wife. Inevitably his thoughts turn to Sun Wuyang. 'He thought her cute, and he liked being near her and talking with her. But never had he ever thought of Sun taking the place of Meili.' The articulation of this denial suggests the subconscious pre-existence of the thought. Simultaneously, rumours about Sun's 'loose' behaviour grow ever more consistent and create an increasingly firmly-founded challenge to Fang's infatuation. Yet he is stubborn and the gossip angers him. His unwitting reflex reaction to his wife's growing coldness towards him is increasingly to seek out the company of Sun Wuyang for solace. This shift in emphasis in their encounters brings about a change in Sun's reception of Fang. Gradually, one becomes aware of her manipulation of Fang's emotions, even via his unreliable perceptions. She stands close to him so that her breath on his neck 'makes his heart tingle.' She deliberately dresses to attract. The effect of her allure on Fang is closely tracked. We note the difficulty he has reconciling her physical allure with the purity he has assigned to her:

Now Fang Luolang was sitting with his back to the light watching Sun Wuyang who was standing in the darker side of the room. There she stood, looking straight ahead in a light-coloured dress, floating like a goddess in a dream. It was an intoxicating vision. The snowy white flesh of her uncovered neck and bosom and her gently quivering breasts could be said to have a certain allure but apart from this she was holy and pure. Such a juxtaposition banished all ugly thoughts. In exasperation Fang Luolan recalled the gossip but even more resolutely refused to believe that it contained even half a grain of truth.

In recent days he had begun to worship Sun Wuyang ever more fervently. He unconditionally denied any gossip or observation which called this into question. The more familiar he became with this woman, the more he found pleasing in her. Her unaffected liveliness was adorable but it was outshone by her frequent moments of moody silence which captivated him even more. When he talked with Sun Wuyang, he could not help becoming somewhat overcome, but he was able to keep his emotions under control. His extreme sense of conscience regarding his own husbandly responsibilities prevented him

⁹⁴ A practice used previously by Lu Xun.

from taking even one step closer to Sun Wuyang. Consequently, he retained his strong belief that his wife's coldness could not possibly be directed against Sun Wuyang. ⁹⁵

His preference for Sun's company inevitably provokes a new set of rumours. Eventually there is a major confrontation between the Fangs where Meili demands a divorce. Fang Luolan feels misunderstood. Although we only learn this through her conversation with Luolan which follows, Sun learns of the rift between the Fangs and insists that Fang Luolan rescue his ailing marriage. She explains that however much she may respect Fang and however much he had sought to respect and understand her, she could never love him. Fang is confused and dismayed, these emotions becoming intensified when she sends him on his way:

"If you don't hurry up and put all thoughts of divorce right out of your head, and then come and see me with Meili with your affections restored, I will ignore you from this moment on. But Luolan, as I know that you have a certain desire for [my body], I will give you a few moments of happiness."

She embraced Fang Luolan who had broken out into a cold sweat. Her soft, warm breasts, which were only separated from him by a single thin layer of silk, pressed tight against Fang Luolan's furiously beating heart. With her lips, hot and passionate, she kissed Fang's numbed mouth. Then, she withdrew and went lightly away, leaving Fang Luolan standing there in complete confusion. ⁹⁶

Fang spends a night trying to order his thoughts, but all he can think about is that embrace. He is unable to think of any way to dissuade his wife from the course of action she has chosen save asking Sun herself to intercede for him. In his naïveté, he returns to her early the following morning. The extent to which she has power over him is clearly intimated:

Since yesterday's conversation, his feelings for this young woman had fluctuated Lord knows how many times from love to hatred to fear, and now he did not dare risk any behaviour approaching intimacy. He was afraid that the closer he approached, the more she would distance herself from him. So now, although she was looking at him with gentleness, Fang Luolan felt himself shrivelled by her glance. He felt she was a brave and powerful superwoman, whilst he was an inconsequential weakling who flinched and hesitated and allowed himself to be captured and led along. ⁹⁷

She refuses his request, insisting that he should sort out his own affairs.

⁹⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, p.197.

⁹⁶ *MDQJ*, 1, p.214

⁹⁷ *MDQJ*, 1, p.216.

She sends him on his way reminding him that she had other matters to attend to, and then continues with her morning routine, totally ignoring Fang Luolang's continued presence:

When she had finished speaking Sun Wuyang started to hum as she put on her stockings and began to dress. It was as if she no longer saw that Fang Luolang was still sitting there in great anxiety. But when she removed her gown to reveal her dazzling breasts, Fang Luolang was suddenly at her side. He lightly touched her shoulder and said in a hesitant voice:

– I have decided to get divorced; I love you. I am willing to sacrifice everything to love you!

But after Sun Wuyang had put her arm through one sleeve, she replied with complete composure:

– Don't go and sacrifice everything, Luolang. I already said all there was to say about how you feel yesterday. Hurry and go and sort yourself out. ⁹⁸

Here she is at her most deliberately tantalising and Fang is at his most pathetic. Sun even has to take his arm and push him out of the door!

Once again we note the peripheral nature of the alluring woman's involvement with men. Indeed, while Hui retains her mortal status, Sun Wuyang has even taken on a supernatural aura (although it is her very humanity which she uses to justify herself.) She refuses engagement with her lovers, as she explains to Fang:

Do not be hurt. The reason why I cannot love you is not because I have another lover. I have so many men hanging around me, pestering me. And I am not afraid to become entangled with them: I am also made of flesh and blood; I also have instinctive impulses. Sometimes, I cannot help – but these carnal impulses cannot tie me down. So, you see, no man has ever been loved by me, I only play with (*wan*) them. ⁹⁹

Several of Mao Dun's female characters express the desire to toy with men's affections. In *Pursuit*, Zhang Qiuliu's motives in tasting the life of a prostitute go even further than simply toying with men:

Why don't I ... play around with those stupid men who think that all women are their playthings? Shitao, the most pleasurable thing for a woman to do is to entice a proud man to prostrate himself at your feet and then use all your might to kick him away. ¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.217.

⁹⁹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.213.

¹⁰⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, p.373.

In *Disillusion*, when Hui wishes to end their relationship she tells Bao Su that she has only been *playing around* (*wanwan*) and teases him for taking their relationship too seriously.

Reworking the Old Paradigm

The original fox fairy paradigm dictates that any encounter with a woman on the periphery of existence will bring harm and eventually destruction to a man. Furthermore, the mysterious female is the source of the evil. In Mao Dun's fiction, the female characters discussed also bring difficulty and confusion to their victims. They too have a peripheral existence, having rejected traditional conventions but are still in the process of realising and defining their new existence. However, these dominant women are not portrayed as evil. They are shown to have their own motivations and justifications for acting as they do, particularly in their quest for meaning and self-fulfilment.

It is via this change of emphasis that Mao Dun is able to achieve his reworking of the paradigm. Whereas the traditional tale warns men against temptation, Mao Dun's stories warn against a wimpish failure to rise to the challenge these women set. For, on a symbolic level, they are leading these men into new areas of experience. They are the personification of the new and challenging experiences of a revolutionary future which were open to the May Fourth generation in China if only it would embrace the challenge and not shy away from the uncertainties which inevitably accompany a venture into the unknown.

The case of Hui is the most clear cut. Bao Su is hurt when he is rejected by Hui, but the greatest testimony to the damage involvement with a woman like Hui can bring to a man is Shi Xun in *Pursuit*. Shi Xun is a broken man contemplating suicide. He has lost all faith in any motives for living which he once had, calling himself a living corpse – not only because his body is a physical wreck, but also because political events give him no cause for hope either. He keeps the chloroform he intends to use for his suicide attempt in an old French perfume bottle. Before he does the deed, he sits on the edge of his bed in a squalid room in a Shanghai

back street remembering the story behind the bottle. The perfume had originally been a gift for the Miss Zhou he had worshipped. But the gift had never been given. The memory is too painful for him to pursue but it had been the greatest blow of his life. Before he had known Miss Zhou, there had been 'romance' and 'the mad pursuit of carnal pleasures.' After he had lost her he had sunk to the present depths of decadence, doubt and pessimism.¹⁰¹ Hui does not appear in *Pursuit* except in Shi Xun's brief reminiscence. We are able to infer that Hui was his love firstly because in *Disillusion* her full name is once given as Zhou Dinghui. Secondly, we know that he had known this woman in Jiujiang and Wuhan.¹⁰² Thirdly, when Shi Xun comes round after failing in his suicide attempt, he finds his friend Qiuliu sitting at his hospital bedside but everything about her reminds him of Miss Zhou ("her smiling face, her eyes, her plump bottom.")¹⁰³

A comparison of the torment of Fang Luolan with that of Shi Xun might suggest that the two women were the source of equally malevolent influences in the lives of the two men. However, whereas there is little question that Shi Xun has been a victim of Hui's vengeance on the male sex, much of the havoc wrought in Fang Luolan's life is of his own making. His psyche is extensively explored in the novel. His is the focal consciousness through which we encounter Sun Wuyang. He is shown to be in a no man's land somewhere between old-fashioned ideas about the roles of and the relations between husband and wife, and the ultra-modern behaviour of a new-style woman (*xin nüzi*.) He misconstrues her behaviour because he tries to force it into conformity with his own wishy-washy ideas about the nature of women. His encounter with Sun Wuyang only serves to heighten his own weakness as the embodiment of *vacillation*.

In *Poetry and prose*, the youth Bing is shown to be in a similar position. His infatuation with Gui indirectly causes him a great deal of heartache. But the direct cause of his confusion is his inability to choose between the two women in his life. One could argue that with greater strength

¹⁰¹ From *MDQJ*, 1, pp.310-311.

¹⁰² Perhaps he had been present at one of Hui's parties. Indeed, perhaps he was the 'suitor' who questioned Hui about which perfume she used.

¹⁰³ *MDQJ*, pp.314-315.

of character, the likes of Bing or Fang Luolan could have risen above the dangerous allure of the peripheral woman. If one were to argue thus one would find oneself strangely in accord with the moralising coda appended to many a classical tale. Yet Mao Dun's stories present a subtle change of emphasis by stressing the weakness of the men rather than the evil nature of the women.

The short story *Creation* provides an interesting example. It tells the story of a young man, Junshi, who seeks in vain for a wife for several years. He eventually decides to 'take a piece of uncut jade' to 'carve' into his ideal of modern womanhood – *Pygmalion* style. This is Xianxian. He gives her a balanced, comprehensive and modern education and supervises every step of her development with great enjoyment. But the pupil goes beyond the moderate, conservative limitations of the teacher.

Junshi's nature is gently caricatured through the author's playful personification of his possessions. Xianxian is similarly portrayed, so that, as the story opens these objects represent the two protagonists. Xianxian's roses are described as having 'the smiling faces of saucy young girls' which sneer at Junshi's leather-bound books sitting up straight with the air of Confucian gentlemen and which 'simply made you think that they were novels which kept well away from the subject of relations between the sexes.'¹⁰⁴ Everything on Junshi's table is laid out in an orderly (*heshi*) fashion whilst Xianxian's table is a jumble of objects. There is a pile of crumpled magazines which have knocked over the thermometer, her fountain pen kisses the 'woman's cheek' of a postcard, the ink blot, like tears, expressing its unhappiness at having lost its top. There is a carved ivory rabbit, a gift from Junshi, which glares resentfully at a half-open fan which has knocked him over. He is inscribed with the legend 'To Xianxian on the first anniversary of March 8th, from her loving husband Junshi,'¹⁰⁵ but Junshi has made the fatal mistake of using the traditional word for husband with all its Confucian connotations and Xianxian has scratched it out. Elsewhere a table lamp has been knocked askew by a magazine en-

¹⁰⁴ *MDQJ*, 8, p.1. These novels are a particularly appropriate symbol for Junshi — although they are Confucian in bearing, they are bound in leather in the Western fashion just as Junshi has maintained his traditional ideas despite his Western education.

¹⁰⁵ March 8th was International Women's Day thus adding further irony to his inscription.

titled, significantly, *Women and Politics*. The description is detailed and continues for several pages, the overall impression being one of Xianxian's mess threatening to take over the whole room including Junshi's small corner. Everywhere her presence knocks Junshi's Confucian order awry, just as the rabbit and the table lamp have been knocked over. Even though Junshi has had a modern education, which he passes on to his wife, and his possessions are all of Western style, to have all the trappings of a modern progressive means little if one's thinking and value system have not undergone a parallel reorientation.¹⁰⁶ The significance of the name of Xianxian's magazine, as we later learn, is that Junshi objects to Xianxian's serious participation in political affairs, even though it was he who had first persuaded her not to ignore the world of politics.

Xianxian becomes progressive, fearless, and unshackled by the restrictions of conventional behaviour. She is able to captivate Junshi with her sensuality, but he is afraid because he is no longer the 'custodian of her soul.' The action all takes place in the couple's bedroom as they lie in bed one morning. The story of Xianxian's education and transformation is related in flashback through the consciousness of Junshi. Eventually Xianxian gets up to wash and dress and steals out without Junshi realising because he is still preoccupied with what has gone wrong with his 'creation.' We note that in his thoughts the words *zhangfu* and *furen* occur frequently: what troubles him most is the corruption of those traditional roles represented by these terms. Xianxian leaves a message with the maid:

"She has gone out. She asked me to tell the young master that she has first gone a step ahead, and she asks the young master to hurry and catch her up. The young mistress also said that if the young master does not catch her up, she will not wait for him."¹⁰⁷

At the end of the story the ivory rabbit, with the word *zhangfu* scratched out, swells to enormous size, challenging him to scratch out all his old-fashioned assumptions and go forward with Xianxian. She is more than a modern, independent-minded woman. On a higher dimension, she symbolises the progress of the revolution. Once set in motion, nothing can stop

¹⁰⁶ Junshi's fountain pen may have replaced the writing brush but he is still a Confucian scholar at heart.

¹⁰⁷ *MDQJ*, 8, p.31.

this progress however great the obstacles in its path. Those who do not rise to the challenge and reject the old ways in their entirety will be left behind.¹⁰⁸ But this symbolic level of interpretation still remains within the stereotype. Women are beautiful, sensual creatures which men desire, yet by their very ability to attract, they exercise power. In this reworking, their power is to inspire – to lead men forward rather than to bring them to destruction.

The most complicated exploration of this theme is in *Pursuit*. Seemingly following the traditional pattern of sensual allure, there is Zhang Qiuliu. She has returned from the failed revolution to Shanghai in total disillusionment. Her response is to plunge herself into a hedonistic pursuit of sensual pleasure in order to forget the recent past. However, such a life seems meaningless unless she can use it for some greater end. Shi Xun's attempted suicide and the degenerate physical and mental state into which he has sunk provide her with her answer. She will bring a miracle to pass and remake him. She will teach him to love life by intoxicating him with sensual pleasure. Because she already reminds him of his lost love, Shi Xun is soon under her spell and they spend long nights drinking wine and making love. In order to celebrate Shi Xun's rebirth, Qiuliu organises a picnic on the beach and invites their friends. Unfortunately, Qiuliu's triumph turns to tragedy as Shi Xun is taken ill, collapses on the beach and dies soon afterwards.

However, this destruction is not brought about by Qiuliu. Shi Xun dies because his physical health has already degenerated beyond the point of no return. Also, even though her intentions are not destructive, within the context of the novel's intentions, the thesis on which her project is based is flawed. The novel explores ways to overcome the deep despair of those who had survived the failure of the 1927 revolution: the pursuit of hedonism was not a response which he could endorse, but because so many sought oblivion this way, Mao Dun was moved to explore the state of mind which was attracted by such a pursuit. Her nondestructive intentions differentiate

¹⁰⁸ According to Mao Dun writing at the end of his life, this story was written after the fall of Wuhan to reaffirm Mao Dun's total commitment to the revolutionary cause. See *WZGDL*, II, p.9.

Qiuliu from the traditional fox spirit who inflicts harm by her very nature. There are resonances with the later peripheral women who, despite their best intentions, still bring disaster to their lover because they cannot escape their nature. Part of Qiuliu's failure has a class orientation: in order to go forward with the revolution, she should overcome her petty bourgeois class background. Without achieving this, any pursuit upon which she embarks will end in failure.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the inspirational aspect of Qiuliu which draws men forward is reworked to different conclusions within the novel through the amorous pursuits of two other male characters.

The link is made through the similarity in appearance of all three women. We have noted that in terms of physique Qiuliu reminds Shi Xun of the woman he loved. Another comrade Zhongzhao has a girlfriend called Miss Lu. She is his life's pursuit and his inspiration. When he bumps into Qiuliu she reminds him of his beloved, particularly the way she walks: 'just like a wriggling water snake coming towards him.'¹¹⁰ As they talk, her smiling face also recalls Miss Lu. Zhongzhao has a friend called Manqing, a teacher. He is in amorous pursuit of a colleague, Miss Zhu. When Zhongzhao meets Miss Zhu he is struck by her resemblance to his own Miss Lu:

They were both tall with ample bottoms and slim waists but Miss Lu appeared more graceful. They had the same goose egg face, but Miss Zhu's nose was a bit too pointed and she did not have Miss Lu's dimples. The main points of similarity between the two women were their rounded eyebrows and their large eyes, but their facial expressions were very different: Miss Zhu was gentle and lovely, Miss Lu was handsome and talented. When they frowned, the difference was greater. Miss Lu's graceful bearing revealed an uncontainable hidden bitterness (*youyuan*) which was hypnotic. Miss Zhu did not have this, only an ordinary sad look.¹¹¹

The other main point of difference is Miss Zhu's horrible gravelly, husky voice which is totally out of keeping with her appearance. When Qiuliu herself arrives Zhongzhao just cannot understand how all the women he sees look like his Miss Lu!

Manqing's marriage to Miss Zhu with the gravelly voice is not success-

¹⁰⁹ The issue of class is discussed in Chapter Six.

¹¹⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, p.330.

¹¹¹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.352.

ful. He discovers that his supposedly ideal woman is ignorant and petty. He hopes that Zhongzhao will have better luck with his pursuit. Zhongzhao has every hope in a rosy future because he has before him an image of his own Miss Lu in a green and blue silk *qipao* 'like the brave northern goddess of fate, [Verdandi].' It is only on the last page of the trilogy that Zhongzhao receives news that there has been an accident and Miss Lu's face has been disfigured. That all these pursuits end in failure points back to the disaster which the peripheral woman brings upon her victim. But in *Pursuit*, indeed, in the trilogy as a whole, it is the peripheral woman who provides the key.

We have seen how the women in *Pursuit* all resemble each other. This pattern of resemblance extends back to the first two books of the trilogy. In *Disillusion*, Hui is described as having 'two curved eyebrows, limpid eyes and two cute dimples.'¹¹² This becomes something of a descriptive tag, by which she becomes instantly recognisable. She is physically enchanting: her shapely curves are flatteringly revealed by her close-fitting clothing.¹¹³ She is sexually uninhibited and is obsessed with her personal vendetta to exact revenge on the male sex for the treatment she has received and she uses her physical beauty to attract them in order that she may humiliate them.

In *Vacillation* Sun Wuyang has the same rounded brows, this time with thick lashes and eyes full of hidden bitterness (*youyuan*.) Their physical descriptions also coincide markedly. She wears the same figure-flattering purple silk *qipao* which clings to her body in a manner similar to Hui's.¹¹⁴ Sun's behaviour also resembles Hui's in as much as she flits in and out of the lives of many of her colleagues in the local Party, deliberately using her physical beauty to attract them and toy with them, but paying little heed to the emotional havoc she leaves in her wake.

Zhang Qiuliu is linked to Hui and thus also to Sun Wuyang, by Shi Xun's reminiscences. However, a certain transformation has taken place. She lacks the rounded eyebrows of her sisters, but she has lively dark eyes

¹¹² *MDQJ*, 1, p.10.

¹¹³ See below p.93.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter Three, p.74 below

and a coquettish way with her. The purple flowers on her turquoise dress are all that are left of the purple silk. Although she is intensely aware of her physical beauty, she does not use it to ensnare others. Only in one moment of anger does she rail against the male sex as a whole and these passions are inspired by compassion at the sorry plight of her friend Wang Shitao who is forced into prostitution. By the end of *Pursuit*, Qiuliu learns that she has contracted syphilis from Shi Xun. Thereafter, all she wants is to find out how long she has to live so she can live out her life in style. Zhongzhao does not understand how Qiuliu can grasp the present without having any hope for the future – and here is the key to the structure of similarities.

All these women represent different conceptions of a life's pursuit. Outwardly they all resemble one another, thus they all *look like* the goddess Verdandi. Also, they are all pursued by men whether or not these attentions are solicited. Some pursuits are not founded on true values such as the case of Miss Zhu whose external beauty cannot hide her ugly voice. Others are well-founded, honest pursuits which nevertheless come to nothing. The failure of the Great Revolution of 1927, the progress of which, is charted through the trilogy, comes into this category. Indeed, how easy it was to be filled with an overriding sense of fate and hopelessness when the movement upon which a whole generation had placed their hopes had been crushed so violently and completely. Nevertheless, there had to be a way forward, even when the future was nothing but a 'vast expanse of blackness.' Traditional ideas of an immutable fate did not provide a satisfactory means of rationalising the failures of 1928-1929. But Mao Dun found an alternative interpretation in Norse mythology.¹¹⁵ Verdandi is the second sister of fate who stares resolutely forward into the present. This was Mao Dun's personal inspiration through which he was able to grasp or face up to the bleakness of the present and still believe in a veiled future. In *Eclipse* many women resemble Verdandi but only one has a philosophy which allows her to face up to the present. This is Zhang Qiuliu, the only woman who lacks the rounded eyebrows.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Mao Dun's study of Greek and Norse mythology is more fully discussed in Chapter Four: The Patterning of Despair.

¹¹⁶ Of course, Zhang Qiuliu's approach to life is an imperfect resolution of the sense of

This transformation from siren to inspirational goddess is effected above all by methods of physical description of the female characters involved. The following chapter examines these methods and the concepts of beauty which they assume.

despair which pervades *Pursuit*. It marks only the first stage in an emotional journey to confidence in a revolutionary future which is charted through the early novels.

CHAPTER THREE

Physical Portrayal

An important innovative aspect of Mao Dun's portrayal of women is their physical description. It is through the presentation of this that they are given much of their allure. This chapter explores the techniques Mao Dun uses to present his physical portraits, paying particular attention to the formulaic nature of his descriptions and the resonance this has with traditional representation. It also examines the concepts of female beauty which his descriptions display and compares them with Chinese tradition. Let us begin with a survey of traditional conventions of female beauty.

In a survey of poems in the *Yu tai xin yong* Burton Watson has sketched the ideal of feminine beauty which emerges. He focuses, as does the anthology, on the palace lady, but moral and intellectual character appear much less important than outward appearance:

Appearance: hair elaborately done up and held in place with heavy jeweled hairpins. In addition, she carries a considerable freight of earrings, bracelets, and girdle pendants, all of gold, jade, or some other precious substance. She wears a variety of fragrant and diaphanous garments that trail and flap about her seductively. Her waist is slim, her hands delicately white; but of her breasts and buttocks, those parts of the anatomy so prominent in Indian love poetry, we hear not a word.

Makeup: mascara on her "moth eyebrows"; lipstick; rouge and powder on her cheeks; a faint semicircle of yellow pigment on her forehead; on her face perhaps a black beauty spot painted here or there. The application of all this is an elaborate and time-consuming process which the lady is often too dispirited to complete. With makeup only half executed, she is thought to be more charming than ever. ¹

This ideal of female beauty from the Six Dynasties appears to have been handed down to the twentieth century with only slight modification. ² As Van Gulik points out certain stereotypical epithets for a beautiful woman have their origin in the *Shi jing*:

Hands soft like rush-down,

Skin smooth like lard.

¹ Burton Watson, *Chinese lyricism*, pp.92-93.

² R. H. Van Gulik's *Sexual life in ancient China* is invaluable as a source of these modifications through the dynasties.

Neck long and white like a tree-grub,
 Teeth like melon seeds,
 Cicada's head and moth's eyebrows.
 Smiling a charming smile,
 Her beautiful eyes have the black and white clearly marked. 3

'Cicada head' indicates 'the two long tresses hanging on either side of the coiffure' and, the most familiar cliché, 'moth's eyebrows' alludes to the curved antennae of the moth.⁴ The shaving of eyebrows and their repainting is believed to date back at least to the Han, and long, curved eyebrows seem to be the lasting fashion.⁵

In Han times, women powdered their faces, rouged their cheeks, painted their lips red and added mouches to the side of the mouth as this ideal representation shows:

There is a girl, a worthy companion of Xi Shi,
 Tall and handsome of appearance,
 With soft and finely chiselled face,
 Full of languorous charm.
 Her figure as faultless as a sculpted statue,
 Waist as thin as a roll of silk,
 With a neck as long as a tree grub.
 Of extreme elegance and wholly fascinating,
 Of gentle nature and modest behaviour
 Yet of luxurious and alluring beauty.
 With jet-black hair done up in a chignon
 So shining that it could serve as a mirror,
 With a mouche that stresses her winning smile,
 With clear eyes, their moist gaze limpid.
 With white teeth and red lips
 And her body a dazzling white colour ... 6

³ *Shi jing*, no. 57 or Waley, *The Book of Songs*, no. 86. Van Gulik's more literal translation is preferred to Waley's.

⁴ R. H. Van Gulik, *Sexual life ...*, p.19.

⁵ Other shapes made fleeting appearances. *E.g.* see *ibid.*, p.64.

⁶ From Zhang Heng's *Epithalamium*, quoted in Van Gulik, *ibid.*, p.76-77.

Already a pattern is emerging. The ideal woman should be of pale and clear complexion; her hair should be shiny; ⁷ her eyes should be clear; she should be tall and slim. However, the *Fang nei zhi* (Sui) warns against women who are too slim when choosing a sexual partner. It recommends women whose breasts have not yet developed but who have a good covering of flesh. It prefers her hair to be 'as fine as silk' and eyes to be small and to show the pupil and the white to be clearly separated. Among other things, it warns against women with irregular teeth, bloodshot or yellowed eyes or an elongated neck! ⁸

The Tang ideal of womanly beauty is traditionally held to be represented in the paintings of Zhou Fang. ⁹ Van Gulik describes these representations as 'sturdy women, with round, chubby faces, well-developed breasts, slender waists but heavy hips.' ¹⁰ The evidence from pottery figurines suggests that although in the Sui and Early Tang slenderness and grace epitomised the ideal, by the eighth century the corpulent female predominated. ¹¹ Despite their solid bone structure, ideal Tang women were still expected to conform to already established standards for complexion as this description of a Zhou Fang painting suggests:

Now the woman in this picture has clear, shining eyes, elegantly curved eyebrows, red lips and white teeth; well-developed ears and a long nose. She has mouches on her chin and cheeks, cleverly placed. Her skin is soft and white, her fingers as if cut from jade. ¹²

Nevertheless, it was the ephemeral, willow-waisted ideal which was handed down through to the popular romantic fiction of the nineteen twenties. ¹³

It should be noted that references to breast size occur only in sex

⁷ Shininess was much valued - hair was therefore oiled. See W. Eberhard, *Moral and social values* ..., p.291.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.149-150.

⁹ See e.g. M. Loehr, *The great painters of China*, pp.48-54.

¹⁰ Van Gulik, *op. cit.*, p.188. It should be noted that this is the impression of a male writing in the early sixties. I think he over-emphasises the heaviness of the figure.

¹¹ It is traditionally held that the favourite concubine of Tang Xuanzong, Yang Guifei, inspired the fashion for plumpness. However, by the time she became an imperial concubine, this fashion had already become established. See The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Spirit and ritual: the Morse Collection of ancient Chinese art*, p.60.

¹² From Zhang Chou, *Gu dong suo ji* quoted in Van Gulik, *op. cit.*, p.201.

¹³ W. Eberhard, *Moral and social values of the Chinese*, p.290.

manuals or other erotic texts. In mainstream literature such reference was taboo. Indeed, idealisations of female physical beauty concentrate almost exclusively on those parts of the body which are normally exposed when the female figure is already clothed. In his discussion of female beauty in the *Li Weng ou ji*, Li Yu concentrates on the face and the complexion, the hands and the feet. Li writes at considerable length about charm, echoing sentiments which go back to Zhang Heng's 'extreme elegance and wholly fascinating, luxurious and alluring beauty' and beyond:

Charm not only makes a beautiful woman more beautiful, a fascinating woman more bewitching, it also makes an old woman young and an ugly one beautiful. It magically creates sentiments in us [men] when there were none before, and without being aware of it one is captured. ¹⁴

For Li, the face 'is the most important part of the body and the eyes are the most important part of the face.' ¹⁵ This is because through the eyes one may see into another person's heart. Only then should they judge that person's body. Note that he defines the body in the following way: 'body – that is eyebrows, hair, mouth and teeth, ears and nose, hands and feet.' ¹⁶ Fine, long eyes were a certain indicator of tenderness, while big eyes were gross and a sign of crudeness. There should also be a balanced distribution between black and white in the eye. This indicates intelligence and perspicacity. The preoccupation with this feature also has ancient roots. As shown above, it is mentioned in the Daoist manuals on the art of the bedchamber and probably has associations there with a proper yin/yang and male/female balance.¹⁷

The eyes and eyebrows should always be considered together as the beauty of the eyebrows is also connected to the personality. The eyes and brows should be harmoniously proportioned, if not the brows must be retouched for length or fineness. But there has to be a natural arc to begin with.

¹⁴ Quoted in W. Eberhard, *ibid.*, p.274-275.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.281.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.282.

¹⁷ There are persistent warnings in such manuals against sexual congress with women who display characteristics associated with the male, although they are not labelled as such. This might include a protruding adam's apple, hair on the upper lip or face, strong and hard bones and a deep voice. See Van Gulik, *Sexual life ...*, p.150.

When a woman is said to have eyebrows like distant mountains, or like the crescent of the moon, this refers always exclusively to the beauty of the curve. Of course the curve of the eyebrows should not be a crudely naturalistic image of distant mountains or of the crescent of the moon, but it should merely remind one of the moon or cause one to think of the mountains.¹⁸

As for the skin, it should be both pale and soft: 'a delicate and fine complexion is as smooth and as shiny as silk.'

He also paid considerable attention to the hands and the feet. Delicate, jade fingers¹⁹ were the ideal. Pointed fingertips were an indication of perspicacity. 'Delicate and soft, pointed and fine, that is how hands should be. But one must be able to content oneself with one of the four qualities and to overlook the missing three.'²⁰ The forearm should be round and soft. Li eulogises small 'golden lotus' feet. But smallness alone was not enough, indeed he was against excessively diminutive feet which impaired the woman's ability to walk. They should be 'so slender that one almost does not see them. And the more one looks at them, the more one is overcome with deep feeling: that is their value during the daytime. They are so delicate as if they had no bones, and the more one fondles them, the more one loves to caress them: this is their value during the night.'²¹

Throughout this overview of traditional Chinese perceptions of physical beauty in a woman there is a total lack of reference to the woman's figure beneath her clothing, even to those parts which are still recognisable. There is only recognition of the general impression of a slender waist and graceful movement. In general, the bust was not a prominent feature. In my brief survey I have found few literary references to the desirability of women's breasts and these fall into the category of erotic fiction. An example is provided by *Jing Ping Mei*, in a warning against sexual pleasure:

A sweet girl of eighteen years,
Her breasts are soft and white –
But below her waist she carries a sword

¹⁸ W. Eberhard, *Moral and social values of the Chinese*, p.284.

¹⁹ A reference to colour – translucent white.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.286.

²¹ *ibid.* This could only be done in the intimacy of the bedchamber.

Although low neck lines were the norm in Tang times, the high collar was instituted during the Song. Henceforth the uncovering of the neck and bosom was not allowed. The breasts also came to be bound flat, which contributed to their de-emphasis. ²³

The extent to which the stereotype had become fixed can be readily ascertained by perusing any wide-ranging collection of stories. Here is part of a description of Jingniang from *Chao Taizu qian li song Jingniang* in the *Jing shi tong yan* (Ming): ²⁴

Her brows were like a range of spring mountains;
Her eyes were like pools of autumn waters.
Filled with sadness and despair, ...
Heaven had endowed her with a tantalising beauty,
Which is more than a painting can capture. ²⁵

Another Ming example is very reminiscent of the *Shi jing* poem quoted above:

Her temple locks are lightly combed into fine cicada wings, Her
painted eyebrows gently arched like the hills of spring. Crimson
lips glow like a ripened cherry;
Gleaming teeth form even rows of jade.
Flowers bloom in her blushing cheeks;
Eloquence flows from her expressive gaze.
Naturally graceful in bearing,
She has skills just as outstanding.
Stout heroes poised to kill would have to turn and look;
Meditating monks would have to pause and stare. ²⁶

²² Quoted in Van Gulik, *Sexual life ...*, p.288.

²³ See the illustration in Van Gulik, *ibid.*, p.300.

²⁴ See Ma & Lau, *Traditional Chinese stories*, p.576. The following examples are taken from this collection.

²⁵ Ma & Lau, *ibid.*, p.63.

²⁶ Ma & Lau, *Traditional Chinese stories*, p.102. This is a description of Huifeng, favourite concubine of the Scholar Wang in *Jia jiangjun huan shu jiang shang* in the *Er ke Po'an jingji*. See Ma & Lau, p.577.

From the same collection here is Du Shiniang of the famous jewel box:

Her elegance was seductive;
A bewitching fragrance flowed from her body.
Her arched brows were the colour of distant hills;
Her clear eyes were moist as flowing tides of autumn.
Her face was like lotus – indeed she was a veritable Wenjun;
Her lips were like cherries – she was comparable to Fansu.
Alas! A pity that this flawless piece of jade
Should have fallen into the streets of ill fame. 27

An interesting elaboration of the theme is provided in *Yi ku guilai daoren chu guai* from the Song dynasty where Li Yueniang and her maid, Jin Er, who are actually malevolent spirits, are described:

When he looked at Li Yueniang, he saw:
Eyes like pools of clear water,
Cheeks like red blossoms;
Hair softly combed into cicada's wings,
Moth eyebrows pencilled lightly like spring mountains;
Vermilion lips forming a fresh cherry,
White teeth like two rows of jade pieces.
Her bearing naturally graceful,
She was unsurpassed among her peers.
...
When he looked at the maid Jin Er, he saw:
Eyes clear and lovely,
Temples high and full, arresting one's eye.
Eyebrows like new moons,
Cheeks like spring peaches.
Her bearing like a delicate flower not yet fully blossomed,
Her flesh and skin soft and fine as though exuding fragrance.
Embroidered slippers adorned her tiny golden lotuses
And a short purple hairpin of gold was stuck in her hair. 28

²⁷ Ma & Lau, p.147, from *Du Shiniang nu chen baibaoxiang*.

²⁸ Ma & Lau, p.393.

It was only by the twentieth century, with the influence of Western fashion, that the physical ideals of womanhood began to change. W. Eberhard's essay is particularly pertinent to the present examination of the portrayal of women by Mao Dun because it provides a summary of a contemporary discussion of female beauty by the actor Qi Rushan. Qi surveys traditional concepts of beauty and notes changes which have come about since contact with the West. He endorses the ubiquitous white, powdered face and thin, curved eyebrows. Cheeks were not considered important apart from their colour – rouged. Dimples were regarded as attractive. Traditionally, a small mouth was preferred, a mouth 'like a cherry fruit'. Qi notes that Western lipstick emphasised lip shapes which formerly would have been considered extremely ugly. Another Western innovation was the brassière which defied the former de-emphasis of the bust.²⁹

Popular "butterfly" fiction reflects this Westernisation process whilst simultaneously upholding traditional values. Under pressure from the "new thought tide," butterfly writers felt obliged to incorporate elements of progressive thought into their writing. Zhang Henshui is a good case in point. Typical of their genre, most of Zhang's works invite identification with their male protagonists rather than female characters. Indeed, most of the female characters represent little more than a source of temptation contributing to the downfall of a weak male character. However, his novel *Return of the swallow* (*Yan guilai*) presents a deliberate, if exaggerated, attempt to keep up with changing times in its portrayal of Yang Yanqiu, the main character, which contains both traditional and modern elements.

Nineteen years old, she is a pupil at a secondary school affiliated to one of the universities in Nanjing. Not only do her fair, rosy complexion and dark eyes call forth exclamations of her beauty wherever she goes, but with her sturdy physique, there is no hint about her of the sickly aspect of the old-style beauty. Apart from being captain of her school's girls' basketball team, she is also the South China two hundred metres sprint champion. Not only is she thus the object of admiration of all her schoolmates, but which of those society youths so enamoured of modern, shapely women would not consider it an honour just to catch a glimpse of her.³⁰

²⁹ W. Eberhard, *Moral and social values ...*, pp.291-295.

³⁰ *Yan guilai* (Hefei, 1986) pp.1-2. Translation adapted from Tommy McClellan, *Zhang Henshui's fiction: attempts to reform the tradition*, Ph.D thesis, Edinburgh, 1992, p.63.

However, modern behaviour in female characters is generally portrayed by Zhang in a negative light as in terms of cunning, ruthlessness or waywardness, the most extreme example being the beer-drinking Helena in *Fate in tears and laughter* (*Tixiao yinyuan*.)³¹

Mao Dun's Descriptive Formulae

The dominating presence of the female protagonists in many of Mao Dun's early works owes much to his vivid descriptive technique which manipulates colour, form, shape and smell. Seeming to follow traditional preoccupations, he pays particular attention to facial detail. Furthermore, much of the facial beauty of these women follows the traditional pattern. In the descriptions which follow we note limpid eyes, dimples, long and rounded brows, elongated eyes and cherry lips.

The descriptive formula which immediately identifies Hui in *Disillusion* has already been mentioned in Chapter Two. It includes curved eyebrows, limpid eyes and dimples.³² Here is a description of Gui in *Poetry and prose* as the youth Bing sees her reflected in the mirror:

An abundance of black hair, long eyebrows and elongated eyes,
the features off-set by her blushes, and a half-open, smiling mouth
...³³

One also recalls Junshi's thoughts of his enchanting wife Xianxian:

... that lovable face, those brows, quick to frown, those enchanting eyes, those captivating cherry lips ...³⁴

We also find shiny black hair, soft white skin and a slender waist as in this description of Miss Zhang in *Vacillation*:

Miss Zhang was of medium height, a little shorter than Mrs Fang. She was about twenty-four or twenty-five years old. With her pale skin and her full figure, even Mrs Fang could not compare. Her hair was long, black and shiny and twisted into large curls on each side of her face. Of course, this was not the latest style but Miss Zhang had so much hair she had to follow such a strategy to deal with it. Indeed, it had its own charm and style. With their ample breasts, slim waists

³¹ I am grateful to Tommy McClellan for discussing Zhang Henshui's portrayal of women with me.

³² See p.62.

³³ *MDQJ*, 8, p.87.

³⁴ *MDQJ*, 8, p.8.

and small red mouths, she and Mrs Fang shared a resemblance. They had been at school together and were the greatest of friends. ³⁵

In other descriptions cited below we will also encounter reference to 'snowy white' and 'plump' forearms which recall Li Yu's discussion of arms:

Round forearms and fat joints indicate that the woman lives in the glitter of pearl bangles and halcyon ribbons. ... The forearm of a hand which holds a flute should be soft, like an arm holding a knife for cutting bamboo. ... ³⁶

To this rather traditional approach to female beauty various modern elements are added. Although traditionally the shape of the eye had been crudely linked to personality, Mao Dun often gives detailed descriptions of the movement in his women's faces and of the expression in their eyes, which is clearly an extension of his penchant for psychological portrayal. ³⁷ The following passage from *Vacillation* describing Sun Wuyang addressing a meeting of the local Party committee is typical:

Sun Wuyang's gentle voice lingered all the longer in the tense atmosphere. With a pencil dancing in her fingers as she put forward her argument in tones which were almost musical, this tantalising young woman was a picture of complete composure. Her large, dark eyes danced gaily under their long, thick lashes, filled as before with the three disparate but equally spell-binding qualities of charm, enmity and cunning. From time to time her rounded brows would furrow slightly revealing an infinite but hidden bitterness which moved one to pity. But in an instant the tips of her eyebrows would shoot up, giving her an air of bright, heroic beauty. Because of the urgency with which she spoke, the round, soft shape of her breasts could be seen rising and falling under her purple silk *qipao*. ³⁸

This passage also exemplifies a further modern descriptive trait, namely the frequent description of the shape and movement of breasts and buttocks. This has already been noted in Chapter Two with reference to the patterns of similarity among the women in *Eclipse*. As already described, Qi Rushan's observations quoted above testify to the influence of western fashion on Chinese perceptions of the female body. It is natural that this should be reflected in Mao Dun's representation, particularly bearing in mind his insistence that a writer should write from observed reality. Thus

³⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, p.148.

³⁶ W. Eberhard, *Moral and social values ...*, p.285.

³⁷ See Chapter Four.

³⁸ *MDQJ*, 1, p.159.

Mao Dun's representation of what was desirable in the female form included these extra elements. It also shows a conscious intention, typical of the May Fourth generation of writers, to be 'modern,' which included deliberately flying in the face of the outmoded conventions of the classical tradition.³⁹ However, I do not believe that these elements of a woman's physiology were not part of what was traditionally considered physically desirable in a woman just because it was not an acceptable convention to include them in literary evocations of female beauty. The reference to breasts in *Jing Ping Mei* quoted above affirms this.⁴⁰

This representation is best judged in contemporary terms. It appears that all Mao Dun has done is to bring traditional conceptions of female beauty up to date by adding a few modern curves. This would suggest that despite his prolific contribution to the debates on the women's movement, he was still considerably bound by traditional ideas about women. However, even these ideas might well have been typical of the progressive May Fourth Chinese male, so absolute judgement of them would be unfair. If this was the case, it would show a considerable discrepancy between their rhetoric and their underlying –perhaps subconscious – attitudes.

It is also clear that Mao Dun's physical portrayal of women is also consciously sensual. We note his fondness for following the gestures of his female characters and the way their bodies move beneath their clothes. A further notable feature is the play he gives to the senses. In the description of Sun Wuyang above, visual and tactile imagery is used in combination. Mao Dun frequently includes olfactory images, such as in this description of Zhang Qiulu in *Pursuit*:

Today she was especially beautiful and lively; she spoke with grace and elegance, yet her words suggested hidden meaning. Both her dark eyes, full of emotion, actively looking about, and the tips of her eyebrows, the inspiration of much affection, seemed to beat time to the musical strains of her voice; at the slightest movement of her arm, her raised sleeve revealed a plump, white elbow and released her

³⁹ They followed the injunctions of Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi *et al.* towards complete iconoclasm, originally enunciated in *XQN*.

⁴⁰ See also a case mentioned in K. McMahon, *Causality and Containment ...*, p.115. The fierce female ruler of a community dominated by women is stripped naked before the men whom she oppresses. Her breasts are large and 'bounce this way and that'. When the male onlookers see her, 'each one of them "raises the flagpole."'

All in all Mao Dun's portrayal of his female characters contains a strong element of sensuality which is the basis of their allure. There are recurring images of these women being caught in the rain, or, one of their number might be discovered naked by chance or in the process of dressing. On other occasions they deliberately act to provoke. Qiuliu is twice discovered in a state of undress. The first time is by Zhang Manqing on her return home to change her clothes after being caught in the rain.

'Oh, Manqing, so you're in here!'

Manqing turned round, and seeing Zhang Qiuliu in such a state, could not help bursting into laughter.

'I was looking for you. Shi Xun has tried to commit suicide!'

Miss Zhang said no more and leaving Zhang Manqing in a state of perplexity, she ran up to the third floor like a shot. Half incredulous, Manqing hesitated for a while, then slowly went upstairs. He pushed open Zhang Qiuliu's bedroom door. He was half into the room when suddenly a naked form flashed before his eyes. It was Zhang Qiuliu's snow white skin. Manqing instinctively withdrew and heard laughter from within:

'Sorry! Hang on a minute.'

Manqing felt his heart miss a beat as [two nipples like ripe cherries still quivered before his eyes; he remembered how he had caressed them before, and recalled that sensation of smoothness, warmth and softness. But he promptly told himself that these emotional memories were quite shameful,] he tried to calm himself and forced his thoughts in the direction of Shi Xun's suicide. ⁴²

The second time it is Cao Zhifang who bursts into Qiuliu's room and discovers her lying naked on her bed. He wants to persuade her to run away and join the 'bandits' ⁴³ with him, but seeing her startled by his sudden entrance he pulls off the blanket which Qiuliu has hastily grabbed and accuses her of being afraid:

As if in reply Zhang Qiuliu calmly jumped up. Totally unperturbed, she straightened up and looked Cao Zhifang straight in the eye for a few seconds: her eyes were burning with an angry red glow. She gave an emphatic snort, turned away, casually picked up an unlined *qipao* lying on the edge of the bed and draped it round her body. In the half light Cao Zhifang could vaguely make out two

⁴¹ MDQJ, 1, p.356. This reference to the smell of a woman (*rouxiang*) is an image which recurs throughout the early works.

⁴² MDQJ, 1, p.317. [] indicates omission from later edition.

⁴³ Code for the peasant movement in the countryside.

nipples like cherries and plump, white buttocks gently quivering in response to the movements of her body. ⁴⁴

Both men are momentarily captivated by the sensual beauty of Qiuliu's body. In both cases they are distracted from their original intentions by the force of their desires. Female characters like Qiuliu are a focus for exploring this allure. Qiuliu is an unwitting agent in the process but when other female characters challengingly cast off their clothes they force their male beholders to master the conflicting forces within them. This is the case with Sun Wuyang in *Vacillation*. ⁴⁵ *Creation* provides a different example. Xianxian and Junshi are lying in bed going over past experiences when Xianxian acts suddenly:

With a quick placement of her wrists, Xianxian was once again on top of him. As she rubbed her lithe, strong body against his and the ripples of her throaty laughter filled the room, it seemed as if even the pile of books sitting upright and correct on the corner of the desk by the south window could not prevent their heartbeats quickening.

...

She started giggling again. Her cheeks were slightly flushed; the delicate laughter-lines, appealing yet reproachful beside her half-closed eyes, had the effect of a captivating spell: and her sensual warmth was simply about to melt him. Ah, strange, bewitching thing! Symbol of Modernism! Even Junshi could not help feeling his self-assurance begin to waver! But his reason prompted him to turn away from this fascinating temptation ... ⁴⁶

Xianxian has great sensuality and charm but Junshi will lose her if he does not keep up with her pace.

This sensuality is innovative in contemporary fiction. Mao Dun's contemporaries do not display the same penchant for sensual realism in their portrayal of women. Once again, it was consciously daring and modern in its straightforwardness and openness. It was not the ideas which were innovative but the straightforwardness of their representation. Traditional literature, by its very nature did not allow for such openness. Nevertheless, nothing in this mild eroticism (by late twentieth century standards) is sufficiently daring to compare with pre-modern Chinese erotic fiction.

⁴⁴ *MDQJ*, 1, p.378.

⁴⁵ See above p.55.

⁴⁶ *MDQJ*, 8, pp.23-24. Translation adapted from S. W. Chen, *Mao Dun: the background ...*, p.112.

S. W. Chen suggests the influence of the Jewish symbolist writer David Pinski in this sensual portrayal.⁴⁷ In approach Pinski and Mao Dun show similarities, especially in the presentation of visual imagery. Perhaps this is because Mao Dun found it necessary to look to modern western representation for a model because of the rigidity of the traditional literary canon. In this Pinski could have constituted an attractive choice because he also wrote from the context of a traditional culture and moral code forced to face the challenge of the modern West. However, influence can often be a contentious question. It is not easy to measure the extent to which Mao Dun might have been influenced by Pinski's mode of portrayal as such and how much Mao Dun was attracted simply to a bolder, modern approach from the West. Despite its modern feeling, its setting in the context of allure and manipulation links this portrayal strongly with the past.

As we have seen, the impulse inspired in men by the sensuality of Mao Dun's women can be both a force for change or a destructive force. It is this ambivalence in their portrayal which adds to their enigma. The overall impression of sexual awareness in Mao Dun's works is given by short passages of description or minor incidents such as those already quoted. The most sexually aggressive female character is Gui in *Poetry and prose*.⁴⁸ Once again, we note the dominance of Gui's sexuality. Yet Gui is not luring Bing down the path of debauchery. This short story is amoral in its tone. She is forcing Bing to make his choice. This is a choice not simply between his refined, traditionally brought up young cousin and the sensual, earthy, independent-minded Gui but between what is traditional and familiar and what is new and seductive, yet frightening.⁴⁹

Even the reworked stereotype depends on the idea of allure. The difference is in the reorientation away from preoccupations with woman's evil nature. In Mao Dun's early work, woman's allure can lead man to good or ill, and this is determined largely by his own strength of character. In later

⁴⁷ *Mao Dun : the background ...*, p.110.

⁴⁸ See Chapter Two, p.50.

⁴⁹ Incidentally, the fact that Bing goes off to join the Nationalist Party (indicated by the cross-wise leather belt of his friend with whom he goes, which is the same as that of Bao Su in *Disillusion*) marks Mao Dun's dissatisfaction with the Nationalist Party's position: neither progressive nor reactionary, and therefore totally ineffective.

works, where romance and love are portrayed more as a distracting influence on young minds whose primary concern should be the revolutionary cause, there is no question of this malign influence being associated with either sex in particular. Nevertheless, there is a serious contradiction in Mao Dun's portrayal of women between their modern, liberated behaviour and the way in which they are perceived. The physical description of Mao Dun's female characters is almost always from a male point of view. In most cases this is because the beholders of these women are male and Mao Dun's narrative tends to be character-centred. However there is not generally a corresponding description of male characters as perceived by their female companions. When women only are present, physical description is also lacking. By contrast, in his psychological portrayal of female characters, Mao Dun is much less concerned to present profiles which conform to fixed perceptions of gender.⁵⁰

This representational contradiction extends to the level of approach. Despite the incorporation of modern elements, particularly an openness in his presentation of sensuality, Mao Dun's debt to tradition outweighs his innovation. Not only does Mao Dun retain much of the traditional conceptions of female beauty, he also makes use of formulaic description. Once again, as with the fox-fairy paradigm, the formulae are applied in a modern way, but the over-structured physical portrayal leaves little room for the physical differentiation of characters – all the women appear very much the same. As discussed above, this is particularly apparent in the trilogy *Eclipse*. The same epithets are used repeatedly so that similar images are evoked: rounded eyebrows, limpid eyes, cherry lips, plump bottoms, and so on. This structure is consciously built up for the symbolic reasons discussed above, but makes for monotony in characterisation.

⁵⁰ See Chapter Four.

Symbolism and Allegory

Y. S. Chen describes the allegorical representation of external political events in *Eclipse* through symbol and allegory by means of various devices.⁵¹ The ages of characters and other numbers point to dates and other significant events associated with numbers such as Party conferences. In Y. S. Chen's penetrating interpretation, in *Disillusion* Jing and Hui represent different conceptions of the CCP in its relations with the Nationalist Party which is represented by Bao Su. At the beginning of the novel Jing is twenty-one and Hui is twenty-four. 1921 is the year of the founding of the Communist Party. 1924 is the year that the Nationalist Party officially accepted the CCP in the Nationalist Government at Canton and the year when members of the CCP were ordered to join the Nationalist Party under the guidance of the Comintern. We learn that the two girls had become friendly three years previously when they had shared a dormitory bed at school. Thus their shared experiences up to this point are the same. However, since their time at school together, Hui has been abroad to study and has just returned. With her foreign links, Hui is associated with that faction of the CCP which was sympathetic to the Comintern line that collaboration with the Nationalists should be strictly as an expedient to manipulate the Nationalist Party to the Communists' advantage. So, at the age of twenty-four, Hui has an affair with Bao Su. The unethical nature of this disastrous political partnership is revealed via the dream Hui has on her return home from an evening spent with Bao Su.⁵² This dream shows the affair to have resulted in a child who is now three years old [sic]⁵³ — the years 1924-1927 — but the affair only angers a threatening figure from Hui's past who beats her over the head until her skull splits open.

Jing has not been abroad and represents that indigenous faction of the CCP which approached collaboration with the Nationalists in the genuine hope that it would be beneficial for the future of China, rather than to further the machinations of an international communist grouping. In her

⁵¹ *Realism and allegory* ..., chs. 3-5.

⁵² See Chapter Four, p.127.

⁵³ Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory* ..., p.63. In both the original version of the trilogy published in *XSYB*, and later revised editions, the child is four years old.

liaison with Bao Su Jing suffers much more severely than Hui. Jing loses her virginity to him and almost her ideals of love. Hui simply abandons him.

Further play of the number three is made in *Disillusion*:

The collaboration policy [with the Nationalists] was first decided upon by the *Third* International and, after heated debate, was adopted officially by the CCP at the *Third* Party Congress in the summer of 1923. These three “three’s” lend significance to the otherwise pointless detail of classroom 3, the setting of the student assembly. The students’ public debate about how Wang Shitao is to treat her two suitors (whether she should accept the one as a suitor when she is already in love with the other) becomes integral to the novel when it is viewed as representation of the question raised at the Third Congress, whether a CCP member should at the same time take Nationalist Party membership. The two-suitor policy is voted down at the student assembly, and there is even a proposal to punish Miss Wang. The debate and the vote accurately represent the feeling of the majority of the CCP members at the Third Party Congress, and it can even be said that Mao Dun is not merely indulging in wishful thinking but carefully setting the historical record straight. ⁵⁴

This interpretation is very convincing, particularly with reference to *Disillusion*. But sometimes I feel that Y. S. Chen becomes over exuberant in her desire to force her interpretation onto the contents of the trilogy where it does not always tally completely with the details on the page. The discrepancy between the age of the child in Hui’s dream and Y. S. Chen’s text has already been mentioned. In order for the allegory to work the child must be three years old because the failure of the Wuhan government and the beginning of the White Terror both happened in 1927. Furthermore, there are other details in the trilogy of a similar nature which invite a similar allegorical interpretation, but none is forthcoming from Y. S. Chen. In *Pursuit*, after his marriage to Zhu Jinru, Zhang Manqing comes increasingly into conflict with the conservative-minded teachers who govern the school where he and his wife are teachers. A class of Manqing’s students hand in blank examination scripts in order to protest at the traditionalist approach of one of the other history teachers. Even though this action is taken as a personal slight by his colleague, Manqing takes the side of the students. As a result, “on the third day of the third week” (after Manqing’s

⁵⁴ Y. S. Chen, *ibid.*, p.62.

wedding) states the text,⁵⁵ very deliberately, a staff meeting is called and the decision is taken to expel the students involved. The parallels with this incident and the expulsion of CCP members from the Nationalist Party seems clear enough already, but the message is reinforced by the following justification for his decision which is appended by the headmaster to the notice of expulsion:

“Just as the Party must be purged, so must the school; just as counterrevolutionary elements must be purged from the Party so nonconformist students must, of course, be purged from the school. If we allow such students to remain at the school, then the future of the school itself will be put in jeopardy.”⁵⁶

The date when the decision to expel members of the CCP from the Nationalist Party was taken was April 1927 which does not relate directly to the use of threes. Neither is it three years and three months since the original decision that CCP members should join the Nationalist Party. The only significance for this that I can suggest relates to the allegory of *Disillusion*. Since Zhu Jinru supports the action of the headmaster and chides her new husband for supporting the students, she may be associated with the Nationalists. Manqing's marriage to her could be construed as a further reference to the CCP's alliance with the Nationalist Party the decision for which strategy is clearly associated with threes. Symbolic significance to numerical references may be sought *ad infinitum* and may or may not have been the original intention of the author.

Y. S. Chen also posits a complex structure of name symbolism in the trilogy, suggesting, for example that the name of Zhang Qiuliu alludes to a pair of love poems by the Tang poet Han Yi.⁵⁷ It is not necessary to dig so deeply to find name symbolism which might attain greater resonance in both the contemporary and the present day reader of Mao Dun's fiction, although less supportive of the particular political interpretation that Y. S. Chen wishes to place on the trilogy. Jing's name (tranquility) reflects her passive nature. There is frequent play on her name. Her sheltered upbringing is described as “peaceful and beautiful” (*jingmei*); all

⁵⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, p.408.

⁵⁶ *MDQJ*, 1, p.409.

⁵⁷ Y. S. Chen, *op. cit.*, p.132-134.

she seeks to do is “a bit of quiet study” (*jingjingr du yi dian shu*); after the trauma of her liaison with Bao Su, she goes into hospital to “cultivate tranquillity” (*xi jing*) and so on. There is similar play on the name of Shi Xun (history in circles) in *Pursuit*, reflecting his scepticism. He says: “It is all circular (*xunhuan*.) Human life has its cycle, (*rensheng you xunhuan*) first active then passive.”⁵⁸ The name of the futurist soldier who gets his excitement from the battlefield and who becomes Jing’s lover at the end of *Disillusion* is Qiang Weili (strength + only force.) Sun Wuyang’s dominant yet alluring nature is also reflected in her name: dancing (*wu*) + masculine/bright (*yang*.) Nevertheless, Mao Dun himself refers to his intentional use of name symbolism with classical referents in his autobiography. A character whose name is given particular mention in this regard is Huo Xinchuan (Xin) in *Road*.

The intention in writing *Road* was to indicate to young people a way out of this type of political and military situation. The name of the main character Huo Xinchuan hints at this intention. There is a phrase in the *Yang sheng zhu* chapter of *Zhuangzi* which reads: ‘when the flame has consumed a faggot, it passes to another and is not extinguished.’⁵⁹ The commentators understand this sentence to mean: ‘fire is transmitted by firewood; new faggots kindle from old faggots and the fire itself burns without end.’⁶⁰ I used this quotation to give my main character the name Huo Xinchuan to suggest that the kindling of revolution is spreading and must become the force to set the prairie ablaze. Huo Xinchuan also eventually takes the revolutionary road. The name of the other main character in *Road* Duruo is also a literary allusion. The final two lines of *The lady of the Xiang* from Qu Yuan’s *Nine songs* reads: ‘Sweet polia I’ve plucked in the little islet/To send to my far-away beloved.’⁶¹ According to the Tang commentator Li Shan, polia (*duruo*) is a fragrant herb and the ‘one far away’ is a high and worthy official. That is to say Duruo had been the wife of a painter who had been a CCP member. The painter had been arrested and sacrificed; Duruo had also been arrested and had suffered inhuman treatment in prison. Later she had been released and had reentered university. Outwardly she maintained a cynical attitude to life, in fact she is pure of soul and lofty of spirit. She is a fragrant herb. It is actually her who leads and encourages Huo Xinchuan towards revolution.⁶²

⁵⁸ *MDQJ*, 1, p.280.

⁵⁹ Léon Wieger, *Wisdom of the Daoist masters*, p.128.

⁶⁰ The four character phrase *xin jin huo chuan*, meaning learning passed from master to pupil in endless succession, is also evidently derived from this passage from *Zhuangzi*. It has a bearing on this instance of name symbolism since it is often abbreviated to *xin chuan* – the personal name of Huo Xinchuan.

⁶¹ David Hawkes, *The songs of the south*, p.109.

⁶² *WZGDL*, II, pp.58-59.

Y. S. Chen also shows the use of colour symbolism in *Eclipse* with particular reference to the colour red. The following description takes Y. S. Chen's general political interpretation of colour symbolism as its basis but expands and adapts it, and adds detailed references to the significance of colour.

In *Disillusion* there is not a simple association between the colour red and the Communist Party. Rather, it is associated with the extreme left wing policies of the Comintern, or that faction of the Communist Party sympathetic to the Comintern line, represented by Hui. When we first encounter her in chapter one she inadvertently pulls back the hem of her dress to reveal an India red⁶³ petticoat. At the end of the chapter, reflecting on Hui's hatred of men and her discussion of the darker side of sexual relations, Jing wonders how Hui's beautiful exterior could hide something so ugly and frightening. The colour code extends this thought into the realm of political allegory: Comintern strategies appeared attractive but were fatally flawed. Jing represents the indigenous interests of the Communist Party, her lack of colour indicating that as yet she has not been tainted with the ultra-left policies of the Comintern. Bao Su also has an association with the colour red: he has a red tie which contrasts with the paleness of his face. This is a realistic detail: Y. S. Chen has identified his tie as that of an officer in the Nationalist Party.⁶⁴ His white face is a truer indication of his political allegiance. After her affair with Bao Su, Jing falls ill with scarlet fever, a fever caused by damaging red policies. In Y. S. Chen's interpretation Mao Dun uses this allegory to express his dissatisfaction with the insidious influence of the Comintern during the early years of the Chinese revolution. He blamed the inappropriate policies forced on the Chinese Communists by foreign advisors who did not understand China and could never have the same total commitment to China's future for causing the failures of 1927.⁶⁵

The next occasion when Jing 'goes red' is when she falls in love with Qiang Weili. This time there is no interference from Hui. Jing's style of

⁶³ *yindu hong*: bright red.

⁶⁴ *Realism and allegory ...*, p.62.

⁶⁵ *Realism and allegory ...*, pp.58-67.

dress is reminiscent of Hui's but its colour is softer, less bright.⁶⁶ This is because Jing has learned independent action from Hui. Jing's union with Qiang Weili, the futurist, represents the Nanchang Uprising. Without the involvement of the Comintern, Communist forces regroup to form the Red Army and rise in their first independent action at Nanchang. The realities of their military defeat are glossed over in this representation. The main point of emphasis is the spontaneous rising of indigenous Communist forces as a basis for future action.

In *Vacillation* Sun Wuyang's purple clothing and red lips indicate her affinity with Hui and therefore her association with the Comintern. This second section of the trilogy continues the theme of the apparent attractiveness of Comintern policies compared with the disastrous results they brought about. Sun Wuyang attracts interest from males of all persuasions in the town, from the reactionary Hu Guoguang to the Nationalist Party stalwart Zhu Minsheng to the Nationalist Party left-winger Fang Luolang. She forms liaisons with whomsoever she pleases and often has more than one man in tow at a time. This symbolises the tendency of the Comintern to enter into political alliances of whatever nature if there was the opportunity for political gain, however it might be won. Fang Luolang's judgement is subjected to particular scrutiny. He is completely under the spell of the beautiful Sun Wuyang to the extent that he will not accept the criticisms levelled at her by others. He convinces himself that the others only have a superficial understanding of Sun while he alone understands her true nature. This is underlined by the colour of Sun's clothing during their personal encounters: pale green, light grey. In Mao Dun's colour scheme green is the colour of hope and aspiration. We note that elsewhere Fang Luolang had already described Sun as 'the light of my hope.' But it is a pale, flimsy hope. These colours are as far removed as possible from the purple which indeed indicates her true nature. Their paleness shows a lack of true conviction, emphasising the faulty judgement of Fang and his ilk by the very fact that he should seek a future based on these colours. Mao Dun's main point of emphasis in *Vacillation* is that a greater part of the responsibility for the failure of the Great Revolution should be

⁶⁶ See below p.95.

borne by the likes of Fang. It was they who failed to recognise the nature and danger of ultra-left policies until it was too late and the horror of the White backlash was upon them. Fang has his own moment of revelation when Sun Wuyang brings news of impending disaster. Marauding bandits have already entered the town: she has managed to escape from their clutches but not before red weals had been left on her snow-white arm. It is this striking contrast of red on white (Communist Party versus Nationalist Party) which brings revelation. *Vacillation* warns against future failures of judgement.

At first glance, one might seek to associate Zhang Qiuliu in *Pursuit* with Hui and Sun Wuyang. This would be erroneous not least in colour terms. Qiuliu lacks the bright reds and purples of her sister protagonists. Her lotus-root coloured (*ou se*)⁶⁷ dress has barely any hint of red. Thus we ignore the impulse to associate her with the Comintern. Indeed, there is a deliberate association with Jing in *Disillusion* in the original edition, although subsequent omissions have made this link tenuous. Throughout the original edition of *Disillusion*, Jing is referred to as Miss Zhang (*Zhang Nüshi*) rather than as Miss Jing (*Jing Nüshi*) as in later editions. When, at the beginning of *Pursuit*, Manqing meets Qiuliu after a year's absence, he recalls their previous romance and muses on the changes that each of them has undergone. The original reads '... even if Miss Zhang is still the same Miss Zhang ... I, Manqing, am no longer the old Manqing.' Subsequent editions read '... even if Miss Zhang is the same Zhang Qiuliu ...' thereby breaking the link between Manqing and the 'old Miss Zhang', *ie* Jing from *Disillusion*. Through the character of Qiuliu, a further conception of the Communist Party after the failure of the Nanchang Uprising and during the White Terror is presented. The policy of collaboration with the Nationalist Party as advocated by the Comintern has been shown to be totally erroneous, hence the lack of 'redness' in Qiuliu's clothing. However, as the novella progresses she gains a modicum of red colouring. Her turquoise dress has small purple flowers on it. Later an angry red light shines in her eyes. This anger is inspired by the plight of Wang Shitao, who with her bloodless lips represents another strand of thought within the

⁶⁷ A pale pinkish or purplish grey.

Communist Party. Recent experiences have left Wang with only a vague hope for the future in a hopeless present. Zhang seeks to revitalise this hopeless present into a triumphant inspiration to the likes of Wang by re-making the sceptic Shi Xun. This represents the Comintern insistence that after the Nanchang Uprising there should be a series of putschist risings which would be answered throughout the country by armed uprisings. In the sensual description of their union, there are echoes of Jing's passionate affair with Qiang Weili. However, the hope which had infused the action at Nanchang was misplaced by the time of the débacle of the Canton Commune in December 1927. Qiulu is blind to Shi Xun's physical weakness, wishing only to show off her handiwork at the picnic at Paotai Wan. But Shi Xun collapses on the beach and dies soon after. The severe defeat inflicted on the combined forces of the recently formed Red Army and the Communist-organised workers of Canton by the warlords of Guangdong showed Comintern misjudgement of the situation in China for what it really was. A thoroughgoing reexamination of its China policy ensued. Once again, the emphasis in *Pursuit* is the failure of judgement by those loyal to the Party. They were beguiled by the Comintern, or they clutched at the straw of the promised success of the series of 'rising waves.' The need for a parallel reassessment of Chinese Communist attitudes to future action is the implied conclusion of *Pursuit*.

Bearing in mind the continued association of Mao Dun with a realistic literary approach, it might appear a little far-fetched to read so much symbolic import into what might appear to be straightforward realistic details such as the colour of a protagonist's clothing. However, during the latter half of the decade, Mao Dun had already begun to disassociate himself from strict realism, as he explained in *From Guling to Tokyo* in 1928.

I love Zola, I also love Tolstoy; I had enthusiastically, although ineffectually and with much misunderstanding and opposition, beat the drum for Zola's naturalism, yet when I came to attempt writing fiction for myself, my approach was closer to Tolstoy's. Of course, I am not so arrogant as to put myself in the same class with Tolstoy; moreover, there is not the slightest resemblance between my life and thought and those of this great Russian writer; all I am trying to say is this: although people regard me as a disciple of naturalism (this is despite the fact that I have not talked about naturalism for a long

time), I did not begin my life of creative writing by following the rules of naturalism. ... It was not for the sake of writing fiction that I went out to experience life. ⁶⁸

During the early stages of his career as a critic, Mao Dun believed strongly in the theory of literary evolution. Identifying China's position at a stage between classicism and romanticism, he was a strong advocate of realistic literary theory in order to propel Chinese literature forward towards the post-realistic trends which were current in the West. Paradoxically, despite his fervent promotion of realism, it was to these post-realistic trends that he was attracted. Eventually this position became untenable. He also ceased to have faith in the evolutionary process as modern art became increasingly esoteric and his own belief in the importance of the relationship between literature and life in society strengthened. Nevertheless, the social and political responsibilities of the artist did not preclude his adoption of modern techniques where appropriate. Symbolism was a particularly attractive vehicle for a writer of conviction working at a time of severe repression.

Mao Dun did not attempt to camouflage his use of colour symbolism but neither did he advertise it. The short story *Colour-blindness* is the only example where there is attention drawn to the significance of colour; this gives justification to the pursuit of a symbolic colour structure. This short story explores through colour symbolism the political disillusionment which resulted from the failure of the 1927 revolution. The youth Lin Baishuang had been in Wuhan. Now he feels totally disillusioned: life has no meaning, he has fallen along the wayside of history. 'I am one who does not mesh with the great mechanism of mankind. In this great mechanism which is human life, I do not even have the status of a single screw. I am only a piece of scrap iron which has somehow fallen into the machine and is swept along and crushed by countless wheels and axles.' ⁶⁹ He describes his view of life as grey and gloomy (*huise andan de renshengguan*) and all he can see before him is an expanse of grey-blackness. 'Of course,' he explains,

⁶⁸ *Cong Guling Dao Dongjing*, XSYB, 19.10 (28.20.1928). Translation from Y. S. Chen, *From Guling to Tokyo* in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 8.1 (January-March 1976), p.38.

⁶⁹ *MDQJ*, 8, p.103.

'I know that within the grey-blackness there are colours, red, yellow and white, standing out in sharp contrast, but when they appear in front of me there is only grey-blackness. ... what pains me most is that this spiritual colour-blindness is something which I myself do not desire!' ⁷⁰ In this colour scheme red represents the Communist Party, white represents the Nationalist Party and yellow the centre party. None of the alternatives inspire in him any hope (or light) for the future. Lin pities those 'brave warriors' who speak in stern voices about the nature of his distorted vision. They

... cursed others with the words others had previously used to curse them, and he pitied even more those who in the not too distant future would use those very same words to compliment themselves. He was also only too well aware where these brave warriors had bought their lottery tickets for a future society, confidently believing that in three year's time they would be able to cash them in; so they went out for all they were worth to be heroes, early birds who would be certain of their reward. ⁷¹

We note Mao Dun's deliberate use of the word lottery ticket (*caipiao*), of which *cai* means 'colour' as well as 'luck' or 'prize.' Likewise, to 'cash them in' or 'exploit the benefits' (*kaicai*) carries a similar pun. No party could offer a cast iron guarantee for the future. Those who believed otherwise were deluding themselves. Lin explains to a friend that he is indeed able unmistakably to distinguish 'who is red, who is yellow and who is white,' but when he surveyed the world as an entity, 'I can only see an expanse of grey-blackness.' It was as if the colours of the globe merged into blackness as the globe spun. Lin tries to explain his defective vision as the result of an over-preoccupation with the bleakness of the present.

I feel perhaps my colour-blindness is due to the way I examine human life long and hard, just as if I have stared into the sun too long and see only darkness. ⁷²

The torment of his distorted vision proves unbearing. Lin seeks solace and escape in love which he likens to a green island. Green is the colour of hope and aspiration. He is faced with a choice between two women, Zhao Yunqiu who is slim, dignified and restrained and compares markedly with

⁷⁰ *MDQJ*, 8, pp.106, 107.

⁷¹ *MDQJ*, 8, p.116.

⁷² *MDQJ*, 8, p.119.

her friend Li Huifang who is plump, unrestrained and sensual. The two women could not be more different. Lin's inability to choose between them reflects his distorted vision.⁷³ However, in *Colour-blindness* a resolution of this failure to choose is sought. Lin's friend is convinced that love is a distraction which will bring Lin no closer to 'the light' (*guangming*.) Lin disagrees. He needs the comfort of his green island because he cannot find 'the light.' Nevertheless, when he is with Li Huifang his perception shifts and the three-colour nightmare impinges. Her red mouth contrasts with the white of her arms. Her dress is silvery red, her stockings yellow and her hat white; furthermore, he sees Li spin round like a globe.⁷⁴

Later, it dawns on Lin that no green ideals of love will clarify his unreliable perceptions and that he will not 'see the light' until his vision is unclouded.⁷⁵ He sees a group of women emerge from a dark corner waving banners. They approach nearer and nearer until they are nothing but a mass of multi-coloured banners. These in turn become a jumble in which Lin cannot distinguish one colour from another as they roll forward and threaten to swallow him whole! Lin runs home in fright. On another occasion he roams the streets aimlessly. The people all appear flushed, exuding an inner strength. Inspired, he senses the historical necessity for change: evil and filth would be eradicated and the wave of blackness which ensnared people would be swept away. It was futile to swim against the tide. The inspiration is transitory. Lin finds himself outside a foreign bank from which appears to emanate the cold, white gleam of silver. The faces of the people in the street are no longer flushed red but frosty white, hurrying past like ghosts in the underworld. The smaller back streets are friendlier than the modern Western buildings, they have a comforting yellow light about them. But he soon falls into a 'yellow depression' and boards a tram. Inside, the faces of the passengers appear red, yellow and white, the colours becoming a jumbled mass. Lin wonders where he should go and what colour his face is. Everyone has their own direction except him. The pointlessness of his life becomes suddenly very clear. He gets off the

⁷³ This has parallels with the short story *Poetry and prose*.

⁷⁴ *MDQJ*, 8, p.123.

⁷⁵ Love is an obstacle to clear political perception. See Chapter Six.

tram and takes a rickshaw. He has no *pursuit* at all for either personal or collective benefit. Perhaps suicide is the answer? As the rickshaw reaches a main road he resolves to find his own direction and his face reddens. At home a letter from Li has arrived but he consigns it to the waste paper basket. The rays of the setting sun redden the white clouds. Outside, everything has taken on this 'red colour of hope' (*xiwang de chi se*.) Even the map of China on the wall gives off a 'blood red light' which is reflected by all the other objects in the room. Lin's final thought is that although this is still a form of colourblindness, this one-colour blindness is better by far than his previous three-colour blindness ⁷⁶

It is clear that a writer who deliberately wrote a story like *Colour-blindness* was unlikely to have used colour randomly. The three-colour metaphor is hammered home relentlessly throughout *Colour-blindness*. Yet, alongside this is a further use of colour which, although at first sight, it appears to invite a political interpretation, belongs, I believe, to a parallel colour structure running through the early works relating to personality.

Lin Baishuang seeks escape from his political confusion in love. As we have seen, following a familiar pattern in Mao Dun's early fiction, he is faced with a choice between two women. There is Zhao Yunqiu whom we meet at the beginning of the story wearing a moon-white silk dress and her very different friend Li Huifang. Zhao is restrained, cerebral and does not readily display her feelings. Her parents are traditional gentry folk who plan to marry her off against her will. Zhao's protest against this state of affairs follows traditional lines: she declares she will remain single all her life; she would rather die than be married off. Lin finds her resentment against all men hard to understand. Li Huifang is plump, unrestrained and sensual. When we first meet her she is sitting in a poplar tree. Her friend Zhao Yunqiu looks up and sees 'a bundle of light purple rustling as it moved.'

The sound of bright laughter came down from the poplar tree, followed immediately by a delicate female form which pushed its way through the green waves. In a trice she was on the ground, but as she bent over for a reason unclear [to her companions], the strengthening

⁷⁶ This is an interestingly bold slight against the dogmatism of the Communist Party in a story whose symbolism is so deliberate.

evening wind blew her purple *qipao* open revealing pale red suspenders
attached to honey-coloured stockings. ⁷⁷

The youth Lin Baishuang is particularly susceptible to Li's captivating powers. The three friends share a taxi home. Zhao Yunqiu gets off first, leaving Lin to see Li Huifang home. When the taxi jolts suddenly, he is thrown against Li's warm, soft body and almost overpowered by a strong perfume which emanates from her. Lin is most decidedly ill at ease; he had never been alone with a young woman in a car before! But Li is 'triumphant and self-possessed.' She persistently questions him about his past experiences as a teacher in Wuhan and as she looks at him intently with her sparkling eyes Li feels as though she has some kind of hold over him. For an instant her laughter fills him with fright. He sees her two rows of sparkling white teeth 'and it was almost as if they could eat people.' But this hallucination is quickly dispelled by her womanly fragrance and warmth. He sees her breasts gently quivering under the purple silk of her *qipao*. Indeed, it is her sensuality which draws Lin to Li Huifang. They start to correspond with one another, and we register the light purple colour of Li's stationery – *qian zi se*, the same descriptor as that used to describe her appearance in the poplar tree.

When they next meet, they go to a restaurant to eat. Her face takes on a red glow from the champagne. She leans back in her chair:

... this had the effect of flattening out the curve of her breasts
somewhat, but two button-like objects pressed against the thin
silvery-red silk. ⁷⁸

Lin Baishuang is absolutely captivated, or, as the narrative explains, rather he was 'captured' (*bei zhuazhule*.)

In the expected scheme of things, Zhao's white clothing would be associated with the Nationalist Party whilst Li's bright purple clothing would suggest the extreme 'redness' of the radical left-wing faction within the Communist Party. However, this contradicts the clear political colour scheme within the story. Far from being a left-wing radical, Li is described as 'a daughter of the nouveau riche.' Thus she lacks association with the

⁷⁷ MDQJ, 8, p.101.

⁷⁸ MDQJ, 8, p.124.

traditional gentry, but her ideas are inappropriately optimistic at a time of pessimism and blurred vision. Even though Zhao's family background might suggest an association with the Nationalist Party, she rebels against the values of her parents. Her actions reflect the first phase of the women's movement in China, characterised by individualism and defiance. Rather, I suggest that Zhao's white dress is an outward expression of her demure, restrained refinement. We recall how, as the story opens, she modestly holds her dress down for fear that the wind will blow all her buttons undone, whilst Li casually reveals her suspenders after she climbs down from the tree. Thus Li's purple is an expression of her captivating sensuality. Discussed in isolation this might seem unlikely, but it follows a pattern already established in *Eclipse*.

In *Disillusion* Jing's paleness contrasts with Hui's red and purple clothing. The first impression the reader receives of Jing is that she is pale and lacking in colour.

Sitting beside her [Hui] on the edge of the bed was her old school friend Miss Jing: she was about twenty-one or twenty-two years old with a beautiful figure and dressed with quiet taste. But her complexion was a little too drawn and pallid.⁷⁹

She is particularly colourless in comparison to Hui who wears a bright red petticoat under her dress. This comparison is continued in chapter three in an extended description of the two friends.

The late May weather was already very warm. Hui was wearing a purple silk *qipao* whose soft silk wrapped her body quite perfectly, revealing all her protruding curves dripping with sweat. Two limpid, lively eyes nestled under a pair of rounded eyebrows, complemented by the darker contours of her face, against which they sparkled even more keenly. Her small mouth enclosed an even line of fine white teeth, like a fully opened blossom: [red, delicate and welcoming.] Miss Hui was quite enchanting! But you could not say that Miss Jing was not beautiful. It was possible to describe Hui's beauty, but not Jing's. You could not identify how a particular element of her face or her body might conform to classical concepts of beauty. Neither could you identify any notable characteristics of her body, or any alluring characteristics. All you could say was that Miss Jing's eyes, nose and mouth were very ordinary eyes, nose and mouth. But when this complete ordinariness came together to form Miss Jing, it was a phenomenon which could not be perceived or rationalised but which joined her body and her spirit in a complete beauty which defied analysis. Hui excited you, she had a devilish quality which captured

⁷⁹ MDQJ, 1, p.7.

you, drawing you willynilly to her side. Yet this excitement would be closely followed by a numbing weariness when you would long to escape Hui's feminine stimulation. Even if there were a thousand beauties there for you to choose from, you would make a bee-line for a woman like Miss Jing. Her tranquil beauty would then soothe your agitated nerves, she would intoxicate you as if a delicate fragrance were released from her body, or an electric wave, increasing in length and strength, which would engulf you, rendering you defenceless.

But at present, as she sat beside Hui, Jing appeared only pale and ordinary (*pingfan er qiaocui*) at least in the eyes of Bao Su. ⁸⁰

Jing's paleness is a representation in terms of colour of her naïveté and inexperience in matters of relations between the sexes. This contrasts with the bright purples and reds of the more experienced Hui. *Disillusion* charts Jing's voyage into experience. At the beginning of the novella, Jing has only an idealised conception of the nature of love and sexual relations: '... she had always hidden behind an embroidered curtain of solemnity, purity, warmth and softness and had certainly not pulled aside the corner of that curtain to see what kind of thing lay behind it.' ⁸¹ However Hui's diatribe against the male sex does precisely this and becomes the first step on Jing's journey into experience. This is underscored by the reference to colour: a red blush spreads across her pale face (*cangbai de lian.*) But the colour red is not simply a symbol for sexual experience, it incorporates attitudes of active participation and self-respect. This is made clear as Jing surveys the washing on the line the following morning. The blouse of the second landlord's daughter-in-law is of a faded red and had 'seen with its own eyes' her experience of her first year of marriage. Submission to the demands of men had caused the bright red of the self-confident Hui's clothing to become the faded red of the timid young wife's blouse. Both women have sexual experience, which Jing lacks, thus both have red clothing, but only Hui maintains a position of dominance. The experiences of the young wife are confined within the traditional framework.

The colour code prepares us for Hui and Bao Su's romantic encounter in the French park in chapter four. The setting sun is described as being blood red (*xue hong de xiyang.*) This epithet has already been used of Bao Su's tie in the previous chapter, but as the events in the park are related

⁸⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, p.20. [] indicates omission from later editions.

⁸¹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.10.

in flashback they are actually a continuation of the action in chapter three. Thus the link is reinforced and reflected back in Hui's blood red lips (*xue hong de zuichun*) upon which Bao Su plants a kiss. When Bao Su comes to visit Jing in search of a sympathetic ear when Hui leaves, the first thing that Jing sees as she opens the door is the blood-red tie. 'And I don't know whether it was the reflection of the red tie or for some other reason but a red blush spread over Jing's face,' remarks the author. Jing is gaining some of Hui's 'redness': of late she has become greatly preoccupied with the question of relations between the sexes. As the conversation becomes more intimate, there is red in Jing's eyes; her face also reddens. She wants Bao Su to make advances and acts positively to encourage him. Thus Jing gains sexual experience, but the chapter ends ominously with a description of the red light of the setting sun fading to black.⁸²

In this way we are forewarned of Jing's discovery in the following chapter. Bao Su leaves his note book behind and from it not only does Jing learn that he already has a fiancée, but that he is working for the Nationalist authorities. Jing becomes utterly disillusioned with all aspects of relations with the male sex, and even feels sympathy with Hui's expressed hatred of all men, sentiments which previously Jing did not understand. Her personal redness diminishes almost to nothing – her lips are now bloodless (*shi xue de zuichun*) and as she bites her lip with her white teeth they only leave small red marks. But at the same she becomes ill with *scarlet fever* (*xinghong bing*.) She has been contaminated by Bao Su. Her beautiful ideal of love has been dashed to pieces and she has lost her virginity into the bargain, but she is left without ideals or direction.

Seeking a new direction in political action, Jing nevertheless takes active steps against any kind of involvement with the male sex. Eventually she becomes a nurse in a military hospital and falls in love with one of the patients, a young officer, Qiang Weili. Only at this point do we notice that her face reddens once again. Jing's growing sense of fulfilment in this passionate relationship is reflected in her dress. When they go on holiday into the mountains of Guling, Jing is wearing a cerise-coloured,

⁸² *MDQJ*, 1, pp.37-45. This description is omitted in later editions.

(*shuihong se*) Western style low-cut blouse, which together with the rest of her outfit emphasised how 'gentle, lively [and sexy] she looked.'⁸³ Never before has Jing's appearance resembled Hui's to this extent. Of course she cannot match Hui's bright reds and purples. When Weili is unexpectedly recalled to the front, initially Jing is as devastated as on her discovery of Bao Su's betrayal. But she has gained sufficient redness to reconcile herself to the impossibility of her unrealistic ideals and the imperfections of the real world.

In *Vacillation*, Sun Wuyang reaches an extreme of captivating sensuality. On her first full appearance in the novella at the local (Nationalist) Party committee meeting she is wearing a purple silk *qipao*.⁸⁴ The similarity to Hui is unmistakable, not only in terms of dress but also in terms of behaviour. This is indicated by the discussion of Sun Wuyang's character which precedes her eventual appearance in the flesh.

Indeed, she commands considerable presence even before she appears in person. We meet her first through the hallucinatory preoccupations of Fang Luolang.

It was no longer the nandina bush standing tall before him but the dark green of a woman's overcoat. The whole of her body, exactly the same height as the nandina bush, was sprinkled with tiny red stars. And they were twinkling. Against the dark green background, all the red stars were twinkling, faster and faster! Like sparks from fireworks they shot upwards, accumulating on the collar of the dark green gown forming a single large red disc. Then the scarlet disc broke open to reveal two lovely lines of fine white rice grains. Oh! That smile, feminine and enchanting. Above it under slender, rounded eyebrows and shielded by black lashes, two eyes flashed yellow and green light.

Fang Luolang did not dare to maintain his gaze. He quickly shut his eyes, but that smiling mouth, those eyes under their thick lashes, full of hidden bitterness, were, as before, enclosed within his closed lids. He ran into the living room as if to escape. The light from the oil lamp flared up and the hallucination faded away. The small flame of the oil lamp flickered sharply. Fang Luolang thought it was the beating of his own heart and subconsciously stretched out his hand from his pocket to cover his heart. His palm felt burning hot, just as if it had been held by those burning hot, plump white little hands.

- Wuyang, you are the light of my hope. I am irresistibly drawn

⁸³ [] indicates omission from later editions.

⁸⁴ See description above p.74.

Fang struggles to calm himself and to banish the 'both lovely and hateful image.'

Sun Wuyang's true colours are indicated on her first appearance in the novella when she addresses the meeting. However, she appears thereafter dressed in various colours. This serves to show how she appears to the various men through whose perceptions she is portrayed, in order to bring the reliability of their judgement under scrutiny. At one point she appears wearing light green – the colour of hope.

As soon as Hu Guoguang reached Shi Jun's quarters he saw Shi Jun talking with a man and a woman. The man he already knew, it was Lin Zichong, but the woman dazzled Hu Guoguang like an enormous pile of silver. He had not yet encountered the famous Sun Wuyang.

The day was very warm and Sun Wuyang was wearing a pale green blouse and skirt. It was probably because the blouse was tight that it easily revealed the soft protruding shapes of her upper body. Her short black hair was bound with a pale yellow ribbon, this flash of light colour in the glossy blackness was matched by blood red lips set in a pale pink face. The blouse extended to her waist and her skirt hung down to about two inches below the knee. Perfectly rounded calves as soft as if they contained no bones, fine, delicate ankles, feet, not too big and not too small in one-and-a-half-inch high flat-backed yellow shoes, not to mention her ample bottom and fine, soft limbs, were enough to impress upon you the excellent proportions of her whole body. In short Hu Guoguang had never seen such an image of femininity in his life before. ⁸⁶

That this hope is illusory and that these perceptions are unreliable is indicated by the paleness of the green colour.

Indeed, as described above, her portrayal in the novella is exclusively from the perspective of other characters, mostly male, and particularly Fang Luolang. The reader, however, notes that her true nature is clear if only Fang would but see it: her outfit may be pale green but she has Hui's blood red lips. The unreliability of Fang's judgement is emphasised by the way his visions of her are often hallucinatory.

By contrast Fang Luolang's wife Meili has no red colouring.

⁸⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, pp.137-138.

⁸⁶ *MDQJ*, 1, p.168. The description of the bonelessness of her legs is clearly based on traditional convention.

Hu Guoguang looked at Mrs. Fang. She was wearing a deep blue blouse of traditional style and a long dark skirt; she had a small goose-egg face and fine white skin. She was about twenty-five or twenty-six years old but with her bobbed hair which fell forward below her temples, she still looked like a young girl. Contrary to his expectations, she was warm, gentle and amiable, without the aggressive air of modern-style women (*xinpai nǚzi*.)⁸⁷

Once again it is a question of the perceptions of male onlookers. With her bobbed hair, Meili looks like an aggressive modern woman who might seek to erode the inequalities which reactionaries like Hu Guoguang hold very dear. But she is not. She cannot understand or keep up with the pace of change: 'the world is changing too fast, it's too complicated, too contradictory; I really feel at a loss.' She is not in control of her environment or of her relationships with others. Even at her most independent-spirited, when she demands a divorce from her husband because of his friendship with Sun Wuyang, there is no red light in her eyes or red blush across her face. This is because her action is based on non-comprehension and confusion, it is precipitated by events rather than *vice versa*. Hers is a traditional beauty. It is warm and soft and comforting, but it does not allure or challenge. Fang seeks escape in her from the trials of his political life or from the torments of the heightened emotional tension caused by his infatuation with Sun. In some ways Fang Meili offers a similar kind of solace to that ascribed to Jing in *Disillusion*.⁸⁸ However, whereas a colourless Jing grows to gain colour, Meili lacks scope for growth because her colour, a conservative dark blue, is already fixed.

In *Pursuit* all the characters have emerged from the trauma of the failure of the Wuhan government and its continuing aftermath. It is therefore a novella of subdued emotional colours. When mention is made of the colour of Qiuliu's clothing, her blouse is described as being the colour of lotus root, marking all that remains of the deep red and purple passions of Hui or Sun Wuyang. Their passions grow out of positive motivations: a hatred of men and a desire to exact revenge, or the pursuit of personal gratification. But Qiuliu's pursuits are motivated solely by her desire to escape from the memories of recent events. In vain she seeks excitement in

⁸⁷ *MDQJ*, 1, p.129.

⁸⁸ See above pp.93-94.

the nightclubs of Shanghai, then she tries to bring new life to the physically weak Shi Xun after his failed suicide attempt. Their affair is passionate,⁸⁹ but it is blurred by alcohol and the overriding desire to pursue physical pleasure for its own sake. Their loveless relationship results in Shi Xun's death and Qiuliu's discovery that she has caught syphilis from him.

Qiuliu has lost all faith in political causes and her colour might be seen to reflect this. By contrast, despite her appalling situation, Wang Shitao retains her hope in the future. Nevertheless, she is also subdued in colour:

The usually lively Shitao, blooming with colour, seemed to Zhang Qiuliu's eyes simply to have become a different person. Her soft cheeks had lost their former pink hue (*taohong se*) and a number of fine wrinkles had multiplied round the corners of her eyes.⁹⁰

Yet her visit to her friend Shitao restores some colour to Qiuliu. She is consumed with anger at the way Shitao has had to resort to prostitution in order to survive, now that her lover has perished and she is left expecting his baby. What repels Qiuliu is that Shitao has chosen to subordinate herself to the carnal desires of men. This anger is most reminiscent of Hui's pursuit of revenge on the male sex. She returns home in an angry mood, a red light shining in her eyes. This light is intensified when Cao Zhifang bursts into her room and makes her submit to his superior physical strength.⁹¹ The realisation that women are always at the mercy of the superior physical strength of men leads her to reject her earlier aspirations and to seek to remake Shi Xun instead. At least this way she would be in control.

Wang Shitao's sad choice of self-subjugation is also reflected in her lack of colour: Qiuliu looks into a 'bloodless' (*shi xue*) face. Wang's colouring is reminiscent of that of the young wife whose faded red blouse on the washing line is the focus of Jing's thoughts in chapter two of *Disillusion*. Both subordinate themselves to men's desires. Although Qiuliu's passions have been dulled by disillusionment, she is still fired by a strong sense of self-respect: she has a heightened awareness of her own beauty and personal integrity – she will submit to no man. These passions are indicated by the

⁸⁹ See Chapter Six, pp.256-257.

⁹⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, p.370.

⁹¹ See above p.76.

purple flowers on the pale blue blouse into which she changes after being surprised by Manqing.

The dominance of structure and formula in their physical portrayal make Mao Dun's women less believable to the reader as individual characters. This is particularly the case in their symbolic interpretation where their behaviour must conform to the fixed pattern set by the events which they allude to. Sometimes they also seem to take on an extra, transcendent significance as symbols of the revolution itself. A positive image of ever forward progress is evoked by Xianxian in *Creation* whilst a character like Qiuliu in *Pursuit* encapsulates the emotions of the failed revolution, whether particularised in the emotions of Mao Dun himself or generalised in the dashed hopes of a generation.⁹² Much of their allure and the fascination they evoke in the male protagonists of Mao Dun's early fiction draws on traditional stereotypes. Paradoxically, their hold over their menfolk is also due in part to their behaviour as 'modern women' who challenge traditional conventions. The reflections of various characters on the nature of the new woman reveals this.⁹³ In *Vacillation*, when Hu Guoguang meets Mrs Fang for the first time he sees a young woman in her mid twenties with bobbed hair. Judging by her appearance, he imagines that she must be one of those modern women (*xin pai nüzi*) but is pleasantly surprised to discover that she lacks the aggressive air he associates with such women. She also gives no impression of political interest as he had expected.⁹⁴

At the beginning of the story *A woman* Qionghua is beginning to learn about boys. Some of her girl friends often say that boys are hateful, that they are like greedy flies, nailing⁹⁵ a girl only to satisfy their own despicable

⁹² Mao Dun's comments in *From Guling to Tokyo* that he wrote his own depression into the characters of *Eclipse* are well known. (See Chapter Four, p.129 below.) That he should choose to make female characters the vehicle for his emotional expression can be interpreted as a strategy to fool the censors – an emotional response is expected of women – but it also says much about his position as a male writer manipulating his female subject.

⁹³ Definitions of modernity had been changing since the middle of the nineteenth century when ideas of modernity were first mooted. By May Fourth times, the modern woman (*xin nüzi*) had become typified by the following features: bobbed hair, Western fashions – emphasizing a curvaceous figure, a liberated attitude towards sex, political awareness, (some) modern education and so on.

⁹⁴ *MDQJ*, 1, pp.129-130.

⁹⁵ A literal translation of the Chinese.

intentions and using her as a plaything. Qionghua does not agree because she quite enjoys the attentions of the boys who surround her but she is further confused by her friend Miss Zhang's criticism of those girls who hate boys. "They only say that because they don't have boys to love" (*yin wei mei you nanzi ai*.) Qionghua wonders what 'love' means. Was having a boyfriend something to be proud of? Was it a state into which every girl was doomed to enter? If the company of the boys was not so agreeable, Qionghua imagines that she would probably agree with the girls who hate boys, or perhaps she would support Miss Zhang's point of view.⁹⁶ At any rate, she would be more like a modern woman (*xiandai de nüxing*): she would be depressed and bitter like a modern woman.⁹⁶

A further impression of the 'new woman' is given by Li Wuji in *Rainbow*:

I often think of it like this: here is a woman. With her beauty and intelligence she could mesmerise any man, with her strength of will she could play with any man, her thoroughness of thought is enough to break all fetters, her awareness of her right to life makes her seek all pleasures! She is a new woman (*xin nüzi*); she could cut out the most comfortable and satisfactory way forward for herself, but to the last she brings not the slightest benefit to man and does harm to herself.⁹⁷

Modern women necessarily chafe against the *status quo*. Their bobbed haircuts are an instant indicator to the ignorant and reactionary Hu of heightened political awareness and aggressiveness – presumably towards males like himself. Yet he is captivated by Mrs Fang's beauty. Modern women are mysterious: they are depressed and bitter, almost 'by nature,' that is, they make others feel uncomfortable. This is a prerequisite to attaining the state of 'modern womanhood' in the mind of the young Qionghua. Finally, a modern woman is manipulative and selfish, qualities acceptable in male behaviour but challenging when exhibited by women.

It is generally held that one of Mao Dun's greatest achievements was to enter into the psychology of this behaviour. Chapter Four examines Mao Dun's representation of the psychology of his female characters and seeks to show both that it is as laden with formula as his physical portrayal and that it cannot be shown convincingly to be an evocation of specifically female experience.

⁹⁶ MDQJ. 8, pp.52-53.

⁹⁷ MDQJ. 2, p.175.



CHAPTER FOUR

Psychological Portrayal

Awareness of the psychological dimension of character portrayal was not a major feature of traditional fiction. It was not totally absent and *Honglou meng* is not the only testament to this.¹ Nevertheless psychology was a relatively new preoccupation even in the West at the time Mao Dun was writing. He had read Dostoyevsky and written on him with enthusiasm.² He was also attracted to the symbolic representations of the workings of the mind produced by such writers as Barbusse and Latzko, and translated works by both.³ Mao Dun's early works display a high level of psychological awareness — many of his stories are portrayed through an individual focal consciousness which might be male or female. However, because in these works female characters predominate, the impression is given of a particular understanding of the feminine psyche. This chapter seeks to challenge this standard interpretation by showing the undifferentiated nature of his psychological portrayal.

Femininity of Consciousness

In *Sexual/textual politics* Toril Moi discusses what she terms the 'Images of Women' approach to literature. This focuses on the portrayal of female stereotypes in literature written predominantly, but not exclusively, by male writers. Even in its less extreme manifestations, the result of this approach is severe criticism of authors, whether male or female, for their creation of 'unreal' female characters. Moi writes: "... one quickly becomes aware of the fact that to study 'images of women' in fiction is equivalent to studying *false* images of women in fiction written by both sexes. The 'image' of women in literature is invariably defined in opposition to the 'real person' whom literature somehow never quite manages to convey to the reader."⁴ The question raised is therefore one of the criteria used to make such a judgement. This type of criticism displays two difficult assumptions.

¹ See e.g. K. McMahon, *Causality and containment ...*, p.51.

² See *XSYB*, 1922.1

³ See S. W. Chen, *Mao Dun : the background ...*, pp.98-103.

⁴ *Sexual/textual politics*, pp.44-45.

Firstly, it assumes the ability and necessity of art to reflect life accurately and fully — a kind of extreme naturalism. Secondly, it demands that the (generally female) critic set standards of 'authenticity'. And where is that female critic to turn for a yardstick against which to measure this literary portrayal of woman but to her own experience as a woman?

In terms of the first assumption, this approach is not entirely redundant when applied to Mao Dun's portrayal of women. Although by the late twenties he had distanced himself somewhat from an ultra-naturalist position, for much of the decade he himself was preoccupied with questions of literature's very ability to reflect life accurately. He even wrote of literature in terms of a mirror which was held up to life.⁵ Also, as has been shown, he consciously and deliberately identified his female colleagues as a major source of inspiration in his creative writing. In addition, his portrayal of feminine consciousness and behaviour has been praised as revealing a depth of understanding of the 'way women work.' To seek to challenge this view is not to deny the 'literariness' of his text — the creative process is necessarily one of selection. However, through that very selection process Mao Dun was inevitably working according to certain assumptions, whether conscious or unconscious, about women and their nature.

In terms of the second assumption, however, it is clear that an autobiographical approach is problematical in criticism, not least in the evaluation of the literary portrayal of women separated socio-historically and culturally from one's own experience. So-called Anglo-American feminist criticism, of which this approach is a feature, places considerable emphasis on 'experience' as a criterion of authenticity. Even though the immediacy of the connection between the critic's personal vision and the text may well be one of the main sources of the energy and creative power of feminist criticism,⁶ its application to Chinese literature of the May Fourth era is problematical. Furthermore, to seek absolute standards of authenticity with regard to femininity is vainly to adhere to the classical belief in a 'transcendental signifier' in the Derridan sense: "some ultimate 'word',

⁵ *Wenzue yu rensheng (Literature and life)* ZGXWDX, 2, p.164.

⁶ See S. J. Kaplan, *Varieties of feminist criticism*, in G. Green & C. Kahn eds., *Making a difference ...*, p.40.

presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation of all our thought, language and experience;" ⁷ or, as Moi puts it, "a 'metaphysics of presence' which discerns meaning as fully present in the Word (or Logos.)" ⁸ In feminist criticism, much energy is devoted to the definition of 'woman' and women's writing. ⁹ Such an exclusivity of approach bolsters traditional antagonisms and maintains the binary logic by which the patriarchal order is maintained. It is, after all, patriarchy which labels women as, say, emotional, intuitive and so on while claiming reason and rationality as the preserve of men. It is for this reason that Julia Kristeva, representing a further strand of French feminist thought, adamantly refuses to define 'woman,' at all, ¹⁰ insisting that femininity itself is a patriarchal construct. From this position she refutes the argument that biological difference should be the basis upon which women should be marginalised. In her own critical approach, she defines modes of writing in the feminine which may be achieved by either male or female writers. Mary Jacobus puts the relativity of all signification in the context of reading woman:

"When we write of a woman everything is out of place;" displacement, not hierarchy, becomes the order of the day. These multiple displacements — from one self to another, from masculine to feminine, from biography to autobiography, from reader to writer — constitute the "insouciant shiftings" of writerly non-identity or otherness which simultaneously preclude both closure (culminations and perorations) and certainty (truth). "If you want to know more about femininity," Freud inconclusively concludes his lecture, "enquire from your own experience of life, or turn to the poets" (*SE* 22:135). When literature turns from experience to psychoanalysis for an answer to the riddle of femininity, psychoanalysis turns the question back to literature, since it is in language — in reading and in writing woman — that femininity at once discloses and discomposes itself, endlessly displacing the fixity of gender identity by the play of difference and division which simultaneously creates and uncreates gender, identity and meaning. "The difference (of view)" which we look for in reading woman (reading) is surely nothing other than this disclosure, this discomposition, which puts the institution of difference in question without erasing the question of difference itself. ¹¹

⁷ T. Eagleton, *Literary theory*, p.131.

⁸ *Sexual/textual politics*, p.107.

⁹ This is typical of the approach of one strand of French feminist theory which posits a specifically feminine language — *parler femme* in the work of Luce Irigaray or an *écriture féminine* in the work of Hélène Cixous — through which women are able to express what is uniquely feminine in their nature and in their psyche.

¹⁰ "... woman as such does not exist." See *About Chinese women*, p.16.

¹¹ *Reading woman (reading)*, in *Reading woman*, p.24.

However, marginalisation on the basis of biology is fact rather than simply argument and Kristeva's disregard of this deeply antagonises members of the so-called Anglo-American school of feminist thought, one of whose concerns is to show the existence of a women's literary tradition (literary *herstory*) denied by the patriarchal literary authorities. One of the fundamental criteria in defining the literary "herstory" is precisely the sex of the writer, and hence we return to a reliance on binary logic: literary criticism in the context of feminism cannot avoid a transcendence of the literary into political implication. Gender (of the author) remains foregrounded as central in these debates because marginalisation continues to take place. For some, it will always be central in the evaluation of literature; others, like Kristeva, believe that considerations of gender will be defined in terms of a spectrum of behaviour rather than in absolute terms.

Since structuralism evokes the kind of binary logic to which much of feminist thought is opposed, deconstruction has been inspirational in the development of feminist criticism. This is precisely because it is able to demonstrate how 'one term of an antithesis secretly inheres within the other.' Because Eagleton takes the male/female opposition as his example, his summary of how deconstruction operates may usefully be cited here:

... for male-dominated society, man is the founding principle and woman is the excluded opposite of this; and as long as such a distinction is tightly held in place the whole system can function effectively. ... Woman is the opposite, the 'other' of man: she is non-man, defective man, assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the male first principle. But equally man is what he is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite, defining himself in antithesis to it, and his whole identity is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique and autonomous existence. Woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond his ken, but an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is. Man therefore needs this other even as he spurns it, is constrained to give a positive identity to what he regards as no-thing. Not only is his own being parasitically dependent on the woman, and upon the act of excluding and subordinating her, but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because she may not be so other after all. Perhaps she stands as a sign of something in man himself which he needs to repress, expel beyond his own being, relegate to a securely alien region beyond his own definitive limits. Perhaps what is outside is also somehow inside, what is alien is also intimate — so that man needs to police the absolute frontier between the two realms as vigilantly as he does just because it may always be transgressed, has always been transgressed already and is much less

The way man defines woman (or, equally, the way woman defines man) may therefore be deconstructed to reveal as much about how he (or she) defines him/herself. In the case of Mao Dun, it is through his portrayal of women that we seek to establish how he defines himself as a man/male writer and how he relates to and understands the women he seeks to portray.

Typology

In Mao Dun's conscious identification of women he knew as central to his creative inspiration, he divided them into two types. A full rendering of the passage from *WZGDL* (1984) quoted in Chapter One reads as follows:

.. There is a reason for this (the predominance of female protagonists in *Eclipse*.) Around the time of the May Thirtieth Movement Dezhi (his wife) was involved with the women's movement, the main targets of her work being female students, teachers in primary and secondary schools, wives and daughters from enlightened families and other petty bourgeois intellectuals. They often came to our house and I gradually came to know them and to understand something of their nature. During the great revolution in Wuhan I also came across a good number of this type of woman. They shared characteristics common to the intellectual class but differed in nature and personality; *there were Jing types and there were Hui types* and these became material for my writing. ¹³

This binary division harks back to the oft-quoted section of *From Guling to Tokyo* (1928) where Mao Dun discusses the female characters in *Eclipse*:

I paid particular attention to the personalities of the characters; among them are several exceptional women who naturally attract attention. Some people believe them to be modeled on certain people from life; others believe that this kind of woman does not exist in our age and that they are products of the author's imagination. I do not wish to make any comment on this. The reader must decide for himself. Moreover, although there are many women in the three works *Disillusion*, *Vacillation* and *Pursuit*, those whose description I worked hardest on can be divided into two types: Miss Jing and Mrs Fang belong to one type, and Miss Hui, Sun Wuyang and Zhang Qiuli belong to the other type. It is quite natural that Miss Jing and Mrs Fang should win the sympathy of most people — perhaps some would be dissatisfied with their lack of penetration. Miss Hui,

¹² T. Eagleton, *Literary theory*, pp.132-133.

¹³ *WZGDL*, II, p.3. My italics. See also Chapter One, p.9 above.

Sun Wuyang and Zhang Qiuli are not revolutionary women either, but neither are they shallow, licentious women. If the reader does not find them likeable or worthy of sympathy, it is the failure of the author's characterisation technique. ¹⁴

Susan Wilf Chen has accepted this division, interpreting it as one between modes of portrayal; the first type being 'sympathetic characters' who are described 'psychologically,' the second being the 'femme fatale' who is described 'mostly in external, physical terms.' Therefore the key to sympathetic reader response is the very intimacy of the psychological approach, the implication being if Mao Dun had wanted a more sympathetic response to his 'femme fatale' type he should have presented more than external details of their appearance and behaviour. ¹⁵ On this basis we should expect the same sympathetic response to male characters portrayed in a similar way, but this is not necessarily the case. The Chinese critic Peng Kang also divides the female characters of this early period into two types but his criteria are different. Even though his discussion is couched in the language of class struggle, the criteria he follows in his classification shed some light on the assumptions made by the 'sympathetic reader.'

Peng's first type are 'women who have been influenced by the new thought tide and are courageous in their resistance and in their pursuits.' ¹⁶ He lists Hui (*Disillusion*), Sun Wuyang (*Vacillation*), Zhang Qiuli (*Pursuit*), Xianxian (*Creation*), Li Huifang (*Colour-blindness*) and Qiong Hua (*A woman*) as members of this group. According to Peng, they are active in their pursuit of personal liberation and female emancipation but without possessing a real grasp of the true meaning of these aspirations. Their resistance to traditional morality is therefore negative in its orientation; their spirit is great but it is misdirected. ¹⁷ His second type are dissatisfied with reality but lack the strength for any kind of pursuit. They are stragglers in an age of disillusionment. Jing (*Disillusionment*), Miss Zhang (*Haze*) and Zhao Yunqiu (*Colour-blindness*), exemplify this type. Thus, Peng effects

¹⁴ *Cong Guling dao Dongjing*, XSYB, 19.10, pp.1139-1140.

¹⁵ See *Mao Dun : the background ...*, pp.114, 234.

¹⁶ *Lun Mao Dun bi xia de xiaozichunji nuxing*, in *Mao Dun zhuanji*, vol. 2, pt. 1, p.256.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.257.

his own binary division of active versus passive. In general terms it is the passive women who are portrayed in 'psychological' terms and the active ones who are portrayed externally. This simple gloss could also be extended to the portrayal of male characters: those whose thought processes are opened up to the reader tend to be characters who display weakness, confusion and vacillation in their interaction with changing times — examples might include Fang Luolang (*Vacillation*) or Bing (*Poetry and prose*.) The overriding impression of this type of male character is one of wimpishness and inadequacy. Why then should it be that a passive, confused female character evokes a sympathetic response but a similarly portrayed male one does not? It is because Mao Dun is presenting a portrayal of women which conforms to the prevailing male-centred view of femininity. Women are supposed to be weak and passive, men are not. By contrast, the first type of women, being strong and aggressive, challenge this view. They are remote, unfathomable, 'other' — that is outside of 'one's' own experience, so there can be less or no sympathy or identification.¹⁸ Thus, the 'sympathetic reader' must be one who has internalised this view and who is encouraged in his assumptions by the author's representation.

A further example of the internalisation of this male-centred view within Mao Dun's narrative is the way female characters tend to gain meaning in their life only through men.¹⁹ Miss Huan (*Suicide*) can only respond to the absence of her lover by her own extinction: without him her life has no meaning. Jing (*Disillusion*) is only able to bring her 'pink ideals' down to the level of reality through Weili's love for her. Following a similar pattern, it is Hui's very hatred of men which lends meaning to her life. This is further reinforced by the failure of the author to refute within the context of the stories certain assumptions about the nature of men and women which are expressed either by the characters themselves or through the narrative voice. Hui lies awake in bed after her bad dream

¹⁸ It has already been noted that Mao Dun's early creative work displays a dearth of strong male characters. (See Chapter One, p.10.) This prevents a comparison with the response evoked by strong female characters. The defeatism and pessimism displayed by many of Mao Dun's male characters has been shown to be influenced by the Russian anti-hero, particularly the resigned type represented in the work of Andrejev. See Ng Mao-sang, *The Russian hero in modern Chinese fiction*, ch. 5, especially pp.155-167.

¹⁹ This idea is briefly discussed in S. C. Chan, *The problematics of modern Chinese realism*, pp.121-124.

about the possible consequences of a liaison with Bao Su. Her decision is that he is not worth “giving her whole body to,”²⁰ implying that women “lose something” when they allow men to have sex with them. Bao Su works on the assumption that if women are pestered long enough they will succumb to the attentions of the man who perseveres even if they do not admit to it: “Women are shy, they are unwilling to express how they feel. That is part of their nature.”²¹ Far from being refuted, similar assumptions are associated with Mei in *Rainbow*. Mei bemoans the weakness of all mankind, *but especially women*, in matters of love.²² By contrast female characters like Gui (*Poetry and prose*) or Sun Wuyang (*Vacillation*) only subvert or confuse men’s thoughts.

The simple binary division of character types is obviously problematic. On this basis, a study of psychological portrayal would exclude half the female characters which populate the early works. Although not too great a store should be set by what authors say about their intentions, we have noted that in 1928 Mao Dun did emphasise the care he took in delineating the personalities of both types of women he identifies. This suggests a spectrum of portrayal. At one end of the spectrum are women portrayed exclusively from an internal perspective and at the other, women whose external appearance takes precedence and whose thought processes are not revealed. Writing in 1933, and looking back over his creative output to date, Mao Dun returned to the discussion of the various types of women he had portrayed. In this article, he explicitly divided them according to their attitude to the revolution and spoke of three different types:

At that time, (1926, in Shanghai) I also hoped to find time to try to write fiction. This was because the ideas held by a few women had attracted my attention. It was the eve of the great revolution. Some petty-bourgeois women students and intellectuals did not want to join the revolutionary party, but did a little pointless studying instead. Moreover, they harboured extraordinarily intense illusions regarding the revolution. These illusions led them to join the revolution, although they were merely watching from the sidelines. There were also those who had found themselves blocked in some other aspect of life and were burning with desire for revolution; their illusions were seasoned with doubt. Together with them there was another, completely different type of woman. They provided me with an in-

²⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, p.30. See Chapter Two, p.48.

²¹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.31.

²² *MDQJ*, 2, p.219. Italics added.

tense comparison, so my plan for my experimental novel grew each day. At night I still studied my antiquarian mythology, but I was eager to finish it quickly; during the day, whether I was walking outside, on a tram or waiting for somebody, my thoughts were full of the structure of the novel I had in mind. ²³

From this description it is not difficult to identify Jing and Hui. Jing had been disillusioned with the activists in her provincial girls' school; they had lost sight of the original aims of the campaigns, becoming more interested in the young 'society men' who were also involved in the movement. All she wants to do now that she is in Shanghai is "a bit of quiet study." ²⁴ Hui has been blocked in her quest for love, finding only cruelty and revenge. Both join the revolution in Wuhan, but Jing finds commitment difficult to sustain. Interestingly Mao Dun gives no clue as to the nature of his third type. In the context of this article, she might be a woman of positive commitment to the Cause, such as Mei (*Rainbow*) becomes or Xianxian (*Creation*) suggests. But if we revert to type definition based on internal/external portrayal, if Jing is an example of "internal" portrayal and Hui one of "external" portrayal then what could the third type be but a combination of the other two. We could suggest Zhang Qiuli (*Pursuit*) as an example of this type: her physical appearance is clearly delineated whilst at the same time her emotional confrontations with a difficult reality are also clearly tracked.

Zhang Yuwen follows Mao Dun's lead in his division of the female characters into three types. Indeed he cites Mao Dun's *WZGDL*:

Women with the strength of character of Xianxian are in a minority, but women of weak character, the opposite type, are comparatively more numerous. ... [re: *A woman*] in this short story the main character Qionghua differs in nature both from Xianxian in *Creation* and from Miss Huan in *Suicide* and constitutes a third type. ²⁵

Zhang's first type are strong, positive women: Xianxian (*Creation*), Gui (*Poetry and prose*), Miss Xu (*Top*), Mei (*Rainbow*) and Sun Wuyang (*Vacillation*.) In a different environment, suggests Zhang, these women

²³ *Ji ju jiu hua* in *Mao Dun lun chuanguo*, pp.3-4. Translation adapted from S. W. Chen, *Mao Dun : the background ...*, p.181. Peng's schema obviously draws on this article.

²⁴ "jingjingr du yi dian shu." *MDQJ*, 1, p.7.

²⁵ *Lun Mao Dun xiaoshuo zhong de "shidai nüxing" xingxiang* in *Mao Dun yanjiu*, 1986.2, p.25.

could become revolutionaries. His second are of weak character: Miss Huan (*Suicide*), Zhao Yunqiu (*Colour-blindness*), Miss Zhang (*Haze*) and Miss Wu (*Top*.) They are inspired by the New Thought Tide but when they encounter obstacles they sink into pessimism and refuse to confront reality. Zhang's third type, although proud and of strong character, lack a positive attitude to life and maintain an indifferent egoism to survive. They include Qionghua (*A woman*), Hui (*Disillusionment*) and Zhang Qiuliu (*Poetry and prose*.)

However, Zhang reveals the arbitrariness of his divisions by placing a second set of categories over the first in order to explore the way he believes the portrayal of the women of the early works encapsulate the spirit of their age whilst those of the later works do not. Now he divides them according to the 'era.' The women of the May fourth era oppose feudalism and Confucianism and seek individual emancipation, but their philosophy incorporates too great a reliance on individualism. Mei, Xianxian, Gui and Qionghua belong to this group.²⁶ The women of the revolutionary era throw themselves into the revolution but give up when they face setbacks and become pessimistic and negative. These include Jing, Hui, Sun Wuyang, Zhang Qiuliu, Miss Huan, Miss Zhang and Zhao Yunqiu.²⁷ They lack a true revolutionary spirit. Zhang's third type belong to the era of the war of resistance against Japan. Examples of this type belong to the later fiction and are characterised by the way they channel their strength into the struggle for liberation and are patriotic and progressive.²⁸

Zhang then proceeds to negate both sets of categories by discussing the charactersitics which all the women have in common, which appear to duplicate those he has just defined. They hate the bleakness of the present and seek resistance and revolution but they are not consistent and they do "strange things." They have their own character and independence of thought but tend towards individualism. They are united in their opposition to traditional morality, particularly the chastity cult. They seek

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.26.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.27.

freedom in love and marriage but tend towards immorality.²⁹

The further this typological differentiation is pursued, the more arbitrary the categories become. Indeed, an examination of the stories reveals the use of various devices in the portrayal of the workings of the mind of both male and female characters. Even though the portrayal of an individual character might be weighted towards one of the poles suggested by Chen, it is precisely through the interaction of the two that the portrayal gains its effect. The higher incidence of female characters means that their psychological portrayal has a higher profile but this does not necessarily imply a greater insight into the feminine psyche.

Mao Dun's emphasis on typicality in his character portrayal indicates his continued espousal of realistic literary theory. In *From Guling to Tokyo* he insists that his characters are portrayed "in profile." Furthermore, he emphasises "the impact of fiction [which] has always been its ability to use a part to hint at the whole. It is neither like a newspaper which must report everything heard, nor like history which must not leave out any great villain."³⁰ This recalls Engels' conception of realism as "the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances."³¹ Thus typicality enables reflection of the essence of the human consciousness of the age — in this case the experience by the May Fourth generation of social change and revolution. According to Lukács, this essence is evoked through the dialectical interaction between the type and the totality in the context of narrative. Prusek finds in Mao Dun's writing "a constant intermingling of inner monologue with narration, which implies a constant confrontation of 'outer' epic reality with the 'inner' spiritual world of the character, and it is in this confrontation that the tension is constantly discharged between the character and the milieu in which it moves. Inner monologue interwoven with narration makes it possible for the character

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.27-28.

³⁰ *Cong Guling dao Dongjing*, XSYB, 19.10, pp.1140-1142. Translation from Y. S. Chen, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Special Issue: The development of revolutionary literature in China*, pt.1, Jan-March 1976, pp.40-41. See also *Ziranzhuyi yu Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo* (*Naturalism and modern Chinese fiction*), XSYB, 13.7 (July 1922.)

³¹ See S. C. Chan, *The problematics of modern Chinese realism ...*, p.63.

to react instantly to epic reality.”³² Lukács defines the type as “a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular in both characters and situations.”³³ This definition has particular relevance for Mao Dun’s characterisation technique. In Mao Dun’s fiction the *general* signifies the Chinese milieu of the period: social change, revolution, intellectual ferment and so on. The *particular* signifies the experiences of an individual living in this milieu, whether male or female. However, in the binding together of these two elements, gender differentiation is subsumed into the greater unity.

A specific instance of this can be seen in the adoption of anti- heroic models from Russian fiction. Ng Mao-sang suggests that the character Qiuliu in *Pursuit* is modelled on Artzybashev’s Sanin and Ropshin’s George in *The pale horse*.³⁴ The identification by the Chinese intelligentsia of the May Fourth era with the experiences of the Russian intelligentsia at the turn of the century makes the attraction of Russian literary models obvious. However, the patterns of egotism and sensuality which Ng identifies as traits the Chinese and Russian types have in common have been transferred from a masculine to a feminine context, without seemingly undergoing any transformation in the process. This suggestion of the interchangeability of experience is reinforced by Mao Dun’s comments in *From Guling to Tokyo* on the role his characters play in *Eclipse*. As he says, he “did not wish to ridicule the petty bourgeoisie, nor to use Miss Jing as representative of the petty bourgeoisie; I just wrote about a general feeling of disillusionment toward the revolution between the summer and autumn of 1927. ... Therefore in *Disillusion* I was only writing about ‘disillusionment’; during the revolution Miss Jing felt the same disillusionment that was generally experienced by all ...”³⁵ In other words, it is not her experience of disillusionment as a woman that is important but her experience as an individual as representative of wider experience. Similarly, “it is vacillation that is

³² *Three sketches* ..., p.16.

³³ Quoted in Toril Moi, *Sexual/textual politics*, p.5.

³⁴ *The Russian hero* ..., pp.167-169.

³⁵ *Cong Guling dao Dongjing*, XSYB, 19.10, p.1141. Translation adapted from Y. S. Chen, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Special Issue: The development of revolutionary literature in China*, pt.1, Jan-March 1976, pp.40-41.

described in *Vacillation*, it is the vacillation experienced by participants in revolutionary activities when the revolutionary struggle is fierce. ... Fang Luolan is not the main character in the piece, but my original intention was to make him a representative figure in *Vacillation*.”³⁶

The Mechanics of Psychological Portrayal

Mao Dun uses various devices in his portrayal of the workings of the minds of his characters. These include interior monologues, hallucinations and dreams. This section will demonstrate that the employment of such devices simply reveals a heightened psychological awareness in character portrayal, but gives no intimation of gendering.

1. Interior Monologue

The short story *Suicide* presents one pole of the spectrum of portrayal discussed above. There is no physical description of Miss Huan; the narrative comprises a sustained interior monologue through which is explored her unstable state of mind. She contemplates suicide as the only way of coping with her unwanted pregnancy now that her lover has left to join the revolution.³⁷ The following excerpt indicates Mao Dun's use of the *style indirect libre* and his conscious manipulation of the narrative stance. A distanced, impersonal narrative voice might merge imperceptibly with the thoughts of the character until these thoughts become the narrative. Then it might pull back to an ambivalent objectivity again.

Miss Huan sighed softly. She replaced the torn photographs in the wallet, walked to the window and looked dully at the sky. Among a few sparse white clouds floated a full wheel of a moon, seemingly racing across the sky but at the same time always remaining in the same place. There were so many stars, their eyes twinkling mysteriously, like a clamorous crowd of chattering children. A cool breeze blew across the expanse of pale sky as if it were its random thoughts. As Miss Huan looked in frustration, her thoughts became more confused and more frantic: had her behaviour been too rash after all? Was it not completely due to her own bad nature that she had rushed headlong into the mire? Was the man she loved really a no good cheat? Was he such a wretch that after stealing away her virgin purity he still wanted to spread lies so that others were obsessed with remembering it? Had his behaviour all been part of a preconceived plot?

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ See Chapter Five, pp.207-210 for a more extended analysis of this story.

The letter he had left behind was also a red herring and who could say how many other people he had deceived already? Were those sincere and touching words really nothing more than empty lies? Could such a handsome, strong and loveable person really be nothing more than a cheat? Wasn't it really the fault of her own uselessness: she could not even recognise a cheat when she saw one. Wasn't it because she herself had really got bogged down in what they called sexual neurosis and had ruined her whole life, as if in a dream?

"No!" cried a voice within her resolutely. "No not at all! Not even my own female companion who is much more indiscreet than I has ever had such things befall her. He isn't a bad man. He left simply because he had to leave. He sacrificed his own happiness for the sake of mankind in general. He is open and upright, a real man. But a man with such heavy responsibilities as his ought not carelessly to fall in love with people. But hadn't he said before that he too was a man of flesh and blood, of passion, who could not resist the temptations of the flesh?" Miss Huan recalled how it was she who had encouraged him to embrace her and, with seeming bashfulness, covered her face with her hands. Once again she deeply regretted that at the time she had not immediately gone to look for him and followed him through hell and high water, to the ends of the earth. At this a new hope suddenly seized her: what if he were able to return? To be the lover of a man who had struggled for the happiness and well-being of the majority would be something to be proud of. ³⁸

We note the progression of perception which is a recurrent feature of Mao Dun's 'psychological' narrative. The passage begins with visual imagery – the sky. It proceeds to tactile imagery – the wind on her face (implied) – and culminates in interior reflection. The switch to direct speech for forcefulness marks the restoration of some kind of narrative distance. A similar pattern of interior monologue in a vacillatory state of mind fluctuating from one idea to its opposite, can be seen in a male character such as Bing in *Poetry and prose* although in this case the narrative distance is more consistently sustained. The following passage finds him in reflective mood after Gui has made passionate love to him:

When the lights went on the youth Bing was lying dejectedly on the bed, staring at the top of the mosquito net. The slender young woman had already gone but on the corner of the desk next to the roses she had left a pale blue floral print handkerchief. Conceited yet stupid, it was lying there as if it was its mistress's representative. It also seemed to be keeping a watch on him like an enemy agent.

A multi-coloured haze and floating golden stars still lingered before his eyes like oriental fireworks. He felt as if the bed beneath his body was gently floating upwards, and that his weak and flaccid limbs were sinking into a state of dizzy ecstasy. At the same time a semi-conscious thought crossed his sweetly sated brain: how did it

³⁸ MDQJ, 8, pp.40-41.

compare with before? These days, every time he was contaminated by Gui, this reflection inevitably raised its head — or, more properly, this enquiry. In this state of dizzy ecstasy he often half-consciously asked himself this question. But what alarmed him every time was his inability ever to find a definite negative answer to this. He really could not find a reason to say that today was not as good as before. He had to agree that every time the experience was as sweet as the first time, made him just as limp and just as intoxicated. The difference was, the first time there was a fresh, pleasant sense of a venture into the unknown which somehow increased the sense of mystery in the beauty of the experience. The second time this had already receded almost to nothing, and now, naturally, it had completely disappeared. Every time he pursued the matter to this point, he could not avoid becoming somewhat melancholic. This first experience he called “the trembling of the soul,” ever after it became “a feast of carnal pleasures.”

“Make my soul tremor once again, if it were possible to recapture that sensation, how much better, even than now, it could be!”

Bing had already spoken to Gui in this vein. Now he had already attempted to find “the soul’s tremor” in his cousin, but when, from time to time, he thought apologetically of Gui, he reverted to the thought that if Gui could give him his “soul’s tremor” just like the first time, there would be no need to go to the trouble of seeking far and wide for what was close at hand. Bing’s gaze returned to the roses on the corner of the desk. A wave of fear suddenly engulfed him. The rose buds seemed like the smiling face of his cousin, but the thorns on the stem appeared as mockery within her smile. He turned his head away sharply and sighed to himself. “Is my behaviour immoral?” He could not help asking himself this question. At such a point, his first thoughts always turned to Gui. He felt that since he already loved his cousin with all his heart and soul, he ought not to have anything further to do with Gui. To accept Gui as before was to deceive her. “I can disregard the things that happened in the past, but now, as I am still contaminated by her, am I not treating her high handedly at the very least?” Bing was genuinely repentant. At this moment, not only were there no feelings of hatred for her in his heart, but, on the contrary, he felt sorry for her. He cursed himself for sinking to the very depths of cowardice, accepting his own attitude as two-faced deceit.

He rolled over to face the wall in seeming resignation at his own helplessness. His heart felt as if it was being crushed by a lead weight, his eyes reddened. Painfully, he accepted that since a man like him clearly did not deserve to love his cousin, he was equally undeserving of Gui’s love. He recognised himself as completely weak and ineffectual, lacking both the decisiveness to seek what was good and the courage to do harm. He had an intuitive sense of the inevitable failure which awaited him in the future. Sinking into a trance-like state, he could see his cousin coldly turning tail and leaving him, and then he saw Gui with anger in her eyes, pointing a scornful finger at him. Bing started, wide-eyed, but the hallucination had disappeared. Slowly, he wipe the beads of sweat from his brow with the back of his hand, returning to a state of comparative tranquillity in self-reflection. After that brief moment of panic, his head was empty of all thought, but slowly he picked up the thread of his melancholy. Gui’s angry eyes and scornful gesture reminded him of her recent affection and his own

attitude towards her. In self-defence, he said to himself: "I loved her before, I do not love her now, does this pose any problems in moral terms? Is that to say that since I do not love her now, I should not continue to be contaminated by her? Yes! But, she will relentlessly entrap me, so what else can I do? Isn't it simply deceitful behaviour to say that when I embrace her I am actually thinking of somebody else? But her pleasure depends on this very deceit! If you can make somebody happy, even if it means deceiving them, should that count as an evil deed? And anyway, it isn't as if I am deliberately deceiving her. She has forced me into it!" At this Bing's world brightened and his mental tension reduced markedly. He rolled over again, and suddenly the alluring beauty of the roses made him uneasy again. A series of questions pierced his mind one after the other like arrows: "But wouldn't this be tantamount to deceiving my cousin? It would not exactly please her, would it? If deceiving Gui does not count as an evil deed then, my cousin's case, at the very least, could not count as a good deed, could it?" At this, he felt as though he had already denied his cousin something which was rightfully hers, as if he had stolen something from his cousin and given it to Gui. ³⁹

The beginning of this passage displays the same progression from visual to tactile imagery, and then further inwards into interior reflection. There is also similar use of direct speech for emphasis, marking the narrative tensions which have been set up between the omniscient narrator, who is able to enter into the very being of the character, and the character himself. The variations in narrative stance are marked by acknowledgements of the external, in this case the flowers and the handkerchief, which also symbolise the two women. The use of hallucination is a further trait of Mao Dun's psychological portrayal exemplified here, of which more below.

A particular example often cited to show Mao Dun's success in psychological portrayal is that of the character enclosed in a room. A scene might be propelled by an impressionistic ordering of details according to the reactions of the protagonist to them. People's voices in another room, a fly buzzing against a window pane, a noise in the street – and then perhaps back to memories of recent happenings or musings on future ones. Then the narrative voice might resume its objectivity to describe the reaction of the character to the external stimuli which disturb his/her train of thought. It is suggested that the success of this pattern lies in Mao Dun's drawing from his own experiences of confinement, particularly when he was in hiding in Shanghai after the failure of the 1927 revolution. ⁴⁰ The fol-

³⁹ *MDQJ*, 8, pp.91-93.

⁴⁰ See S. W. Chen, *Mao Dun : the background ...*, p.224.

lowing two examples show remarkably similar patterns of depiction. The first is from *Disillusion* and shows a female character, Jing, enclosed in her room because she is irritated by the company of her school friends and their preoccupation with matters of love and sex, matters by which she is perplexed and repulsed because of her own lack of experience. Jing's portrayal is further along the spectrum from that of Miss Huan. Although she constitutes the focal consciousness of *Disillusion* considerable attention is also paid to her external appearance, not least for the purposes of allegory and symbolism discussed earlier.

From early that morning Jing had not left her room. She was still angry, probably because Hui had left suddenly the previous day, saying that she was returning home. Last evening she had thought for over an hour but she still did not understand why Hui had left so suddenly. The only conclusion she had reached was that "Hui was annoyed with her." But why should she be annoyed? Hui had lived with Jing for more than two weeks and had shared everything with her. As far as Hui's relationship with Bao Su was concerned, Jing had expressed her reservations all along: perhaps the answer lay there. Jing's final conjecture was that Hui's sudden departure had to be something to do with Bao Su. But naturally outsiders could not be privy to the details.

Although she had managed to find an explanation to the question of Hui's return home, her "inexplicable anger" remained as before, since brooding alone with her angry thoughts had become her daily assignment. She leaned back on the cane chair, her thoughts in confusion.

The old sub-landlady from the block opposite was in full flow, recounting the latest on her eldest granddaughter. At the foot of the wall below the window another couple had been chatting for ages, and somehow their chatter had turned to argument. Blast after blast of shrill women's voices was relayed extraordinarily clearly as if they were just outside the window. A fly was crashing itself against the pane of the west window. Stubbornly, it insisted on this impenetrable route in its instinctive drive to fly towards the light, periodically letting out bursts of anxious buzzing. Among the pile of papers on the desk lay an envelope with its mouth ripped open. It gaped open as if in resentment at its owner's rough treatment.

All these sights and sounds irritated Jing. In inexplicable anger, her tangled thoughts radiated in all directions. She recalled the story that Miss Fang had told her about a fellow student who had written love letters in the name of another. She also remembered how, when she was walking past classroom number five, three days ago, she had seen a girl and a boy embracing in the corner. And then there was the horrid murder story she had read in the newspaper not more than a few hours ago — as she recalled, it seemed the reasons were women and money. She pondered on the ugliness in countless people's relations with one another. This ugliness merged to form a great, dark shaft which spun before her eyes. She would rather see the earth destroyed or commit suicide than continue to confront this unending

ugliness and darkness.

She covered her face with her hands and lay back dejectedly in the cane chair mechanically turning the idea of 'destruction' over and over in her mind. Tears began to fall through her fingers.

Tears are an effective assuager of grief — those prone to tears will understand this well. Now Jing's nerves were somewhat calmed, mysteriously soothed for a while, as she sank into the non-thinking state of mind which tears occasion. ⁴¹

As Jing sits lost in aimless thoughts, the focus of the narrative shifts outwards to elements of her environment. In this way, it reflects the way her attention is drawn away from her own preoccupations. Again, the narrative follows Jing's perceptions of the world outside her room: first the noise of chattering neighbours (aural perceptions), then, as if Jing is leaning forward a little to see out of the window, her curiosity nominally aroused, the sight of the figures below the window (visual perceptions), then back to aural perception with the sound of their shrill voices arguing. This scene fails to hold her attention which focusses instead (visually again) on the window pane itself and the fly which keeps crashing itself against it (aurally). Gradually, her thoughts close in again. From the window pane, her attention moves to her desk and back inside her head. We note the resumption of greater narrative objectivity at the end of the passage.

This passage may be interestingly compared with an example from *Pursuit*, where the same devices are applied to the consciousness of the (male) journalist, Zhongzhao. He is intensely frustrated that his editor will not support the reforms he has proposed for his page of the newspaper he works for. This passage finds him sitting in his room trying to write.

He did not start work on his "Impressions" column until three o'clock in the afternoon. Rainwater was gurgling in the roof guttering. The atmosphere was humid and close. Zhongzhao hated this type of weather above all. The pen he held between two fingers hovered above the page as he recalled the sights and sounds of the dance halls from the previous evening. For some reason, his train of thought veered first one way and then another without coming into focus. Last night he had gone to a good many dance halls; he had seen and heard a lot but now his recollections of it all were hazy and rambling, without strength or intensity. Now the only idea he could not chase out of his mind was Zhang Qiuli! Her bewitching posture and her penetrating conversation. Last night he had found her in the Palace of Leisure. ... She had talked to him at length, of passion,

⁴¹ MDQJ, 1, pp.37-39.

of indignation, of dejection, of politics, of love — of everything. Her words alone filled Zhongzhao's head. So should he write out these words? That wouldn't do either. That wouldn't be "Impressions." In any case, nobody knew this Zhang Qiuli; she wasn't a dancer, neither was she a person of standing. To begin his "Impressions" column with Qiuli's words would not suit his stylistic rules. Originally, Zhongzhao had wanted to seek a special atmosphere in the dance halls, the tears behind the mad laughter, the frustration behind the decadence, the defiance that seeks to sample the meaning of existence in sensual stimuli, the cries of despair that pierce through the grey veneer of life. He had looked upon the sudden rise of the dance halls in Shanghai as the equivalent of the *Sturm und Drang* expressionism of the defeated post-war Berliners and expected to find in it a natural explosion of the disillusioned and vacillating human spirit hemmed in by gloom and numbness. Every time he went to the dance halls this was the feeling he used to have about them, but when last night he had deliberately gone to seek it out, he found it wasn't there. Instead there was only vile sexual licence and the ugly exchange of gold for carnal gratification. This, of course, was not the kind of material for his "Impressions." Only Zhang Qiuli symbolised the target of his quest but wouldn't it be simply inappropriate to write her up as the embodiment of all he wanted to bring out?

It was as if he was suspended in space struggling helplessly. Zhongzhao brought the nib of his pen to the paper several times but could not write a single word. Several times he threw his pen aside and thought angrily: surely, even in this small matter lurks the fundamental incompatibility between one's ideals and the facts? ⁴²

From the sound of the rain on the roof, the narrative proceeds briefly to the visual image of the pen in his hand and the blank sheet of paper before immersing itself in Zhongzhao's reflections. His inability to write is reinforced by a return to the nagging presence of the ineffectual pen and its unsatisfactory interaction with the paper. A similar pattern is also used to reflect the difficulty in marshalling their thoughts which besets both characters. Jing's thoughts shoot out in all directions whilst Zhongzhao's veer first one way and then the other (literally: first east and then west.)

2. Dreams and Hallucinations

The use of hallucination and dream has already been noted as a trait of Mao Dun's psychological portrayal. Several hallucinatory formulae are used in the early fiction and are revealed in both male and female characters. A frequently recurring device is the perception of a concrete image by the character as the embodiment of their mood or state of mind. The dark

⁴² MDQJ, 1, pp.301-302. Translation based partially on Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory ...*, p.118.

shaft which Jing sees is an example of this. Susan W. Chen has shown how the particular image of the spinning record, used in the context of hallucination, is inspired by the writing of Latzko.⁴³ A similar image occurs both in the thoughts of Zhongzhao (male) in *Pursuit* and of Hui (female) in *Disillusion*. This passage is taken from earlier in the same chapter of *Pursuit* as the one quoted above:

Sitting at his desk, Zhongzhao brooded silently, his chin in his hands. But he could not think, for the blood vessels in his ears were pounding, making all kinds of strange sounds. Among them were Shi Xun's cutting sarcasm, the restless wild cries of Cao Zhifang and the others, and Zhang Manqing's exhausted groans. All of these flashed relentlessly through his brain, each greedily trying to take possession of him. It was as if there was a record spinning rapidly inside his skull, reproducing a scratchy version of each person's voice. It spun faster and faster until he could not make out what they were saying.⁴⁴

After her encounter with Bao Su in the French park Hui returns home and cannot sleep. She thinks over how she has wasted the prime of her youth:

"Already twenty-four years old!" her excited brain repeated stubbornly. Really, "twenty-four" seemed like a sharp needle pricking her skull, until her head hurt so much it felt as if it would explode. "Twenty-four" then turned into a flying wheel whirling inside her head until she was dizzy.⁴⁵

A second type of hallucination is one which embodies symbolism relating to the character's belief system. In both of the following examples the hallucination alludes to the necessity for change. In *Creation* Jun Shi (male) has consistently revealed his inability to transcend completely the traditional belief system. Despite his Western education, his 'progressive' stance is ultimately too compromising with the past to have a viable place in the New Order. Jun Shi's attitudes are particularly well exemplified in his continued use of the terms *zhangfu* and *furen* for husband and wife. These terms, with their Confucian connotations, are anathema to his wife Xianxian who refuses to be bound by Jun Shi's assumptions about the place and role of women in society. This confrontation is embodied in the figure of the ivory rabbit which Jun Shi has given as a gift to Xianxian,

⁴³ *Mao Dun the translator*, pp.82-83.

⁴⁴ *MDQJ*, 1, p.291-292. Translation adapted from S. W. Chen, *Mao Dun the translator*, p.83.

⁴⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, p.29. Translation adapted from S. W. Chen, *ibid*.

ironically to mark International Women's Day, as its inscription reads: "To Xianxian on the first anniversary of March 8th from her loving husband (*zhangfu*) Jun Shi." Xianxian has scratched out the offending word. The rabbit is first mentioned at the opening of the story. Symbolically, it has been knocked over "quite improperly" by Xianxian's fan. At the end of the story Xianxian has already left their home and has challenged Jun Shi to join her. He remains in bed in a state of perplexity. The rabbit's challenge is to all Jun Shi's assumptions as these are embodied in his conception of himself as a *zhangfu*.

The small ivory rabbit burst upon his consciousness, growing steadily larger until it had assumed human proportions and insolently looking askance at him with its red eyes. In his confusion, he mistook it for Xianxian. Finally even the red eyes disappeared leaving only the word *zhangfu* scratched out with a knife and swaying all the more vividly before his eyes. ⁴⁶

In *Vacillation*, Fang Meili (female) also has difficulty keeping up with the times. She misunderstands the behaviour of the ultra modern Sun Wuyang and declines to take any part in the politics of the town. At the end of the novella the town is overrun by bandits and Meili flees with her husband to the sanctuary of an abandoned convent outside the town. Somehow, Sun Wuyang, disguised as a youth, has ended up there too. All Meili's confusions come back to haunt her. She sees a spider on a thread, its struggle to climb back up a vain one as it hangs there, swaying in the emptiness. After hearing Sun's account of the atrocities which have been committed by the bandits, particularly against the women of the town, Fang Meili begins to lose her grip.

As Mrs Fang looked up, the first thing she saw was the little spider hanging there. Now it had descended even further and was almost touching her head. As she looked, this little creature began to swell in size until it was as big as a man. Mrs Fang could clearly see its obese body suspended on a gossamer thread, trembling with fear as it struggled, without effect. She could see the spider's ugly, wrinkled face, numb and dejected, gasping for breath. Then this face was transformed into countless faces, flying helter skelter in the emptiness. On the ground suddenly there surged forth a bloodied, naked, headless body with protuberant breasts. The distorted face flew onto the bleeding neck and let out a low and heart-rending cry.

A cool gust of wind caused Mrs Fang's shoulder to flinch; the

⁴⁶ *MDQJ*, 8, p.32. Translation adapted from S. W. Chen, *Mao Dun the translator*, p.84. See also Chapter Two, pp.58-60.

hallucination had gone and the dilapidated convent remained as before.

...

Painfully, Mrs Fang thought how deeply she regretted how vacillatory her ideas were even now. Her head felt dizzy, as if from vertigo, her body floated in the void, swaying from side to side. She had consciously already become that small spider, suspended alone in a vast and endless void, swaying out of control. ⁴⁷

Mrs Fang's hallucination continues as, through the spider's eyes, she sees the convent disintegrate before her. Then the broken beams and mud walls rise up and engulf everything in darkness. The spider symbolises Mrs Fang's vacillatory state of inability to engage fully with the turbulent forces of change which she witnesses uncomprehendingly. The destruction of the convent represents the disintegration of the old order: the forces of destruction will engulf everything unless one is able to engage with a violent and uncertain present.

This example from *Vacillation* also contains elements of a third formulaic pattern, a less contrived type of hallucination where recent experiences play on the minds of the characters, and through these distorted images their inner preoccupations are revealed. In Meili's case, Sun's account of how women in the town, some of whom were her [Meili's] friends, have been abused by the bandits is transformed into the headless corpse in her hallucination. Meili's anguish is all the more poignant because it is those women who were engaged in political activity who were a particular target for attack whilst she had remained on the sidelines.

In *Rainbow* Mei (female) has a dream which follows this latter pattern. It is hauntingly surreal, the more so for catching the reader unawares. While working as a teacher, Mei has recently met a Miss Yang who works for the local Division Commander, a war lord who seems to be hijacking the revolution for his own purposes. Unfortunately, the population of the local town seem unaware of his true intentions, only singing his praises as he promotes such things as education for women and encourages them to cut their hair as a symbol of their emancipation. Mei sees through the sham immediately: if he is such a keen supporter of women's emancipation,

⁴⁷ MDQJ, 1, p.256-257.

why does he still have so many concubines? At first he helps them, then later, they feel obliged to do whatever he wants. For some of his female 'helpers,' this could mean effectively swelling the numbers of his harem. Mei is alone in her insights and the whole matter plays on her mind.

Mei returns to her room and tries to read for a while, but her eyes are heavy with sleep. Yet after turning out the light she is unable to sleep.

A circle of yellow light fell across her face for a while and then went out again but it was followed by a succession of sounds. The wind blew fallen leaves against the window pane, it sounded like a storm. Her neighbour Chao Peishan was still rustling about next door. There was also a droning noise within her own ears which imperceptibly changed into the babble of human voices. How irritating all these things were that kept you awake! Mei rolled over angrily and buried her head in the pillow. The stifling heat stifled the droning sounds away. When she unburied her face to breathe more easily, she heard the clear, regular sound of her watch ticking beside her pillow. She listened peacefully to it for a while. Suddenly she was reminded of her beloved black man alarm clock with the clock face in his large stomach which she had had at home in Chengdu. Who knew whether it was still there now? Perhaps it had had the same fate as its owner! At this her thoughts turned to many other things connected with Chengdu, including her father. But because these elements of her recent past had already become very hazy, they seemed to belong to the past of decades ago. Life before her was so active, so changeable, a day seemed to last a year.

Suddenly, the sound of a trumpet interrupted her thoughts. It was getting nearer and becoming louder and clearer. Wasn't it signalling 'Quick March?' She could see columns of troops. And wasn't that Miss Yang pulling at her hand? She found herself in the inner guest room of the Division Commander's house, smiling modestly and refusing to cut the hair of concubine number two and concubine number three. Short and capable, the Division Commander was standing to one side doing his best to persuade her. He seemed to be saying:

"Don't worry. If you don't cut it well it doesn't matter. In future, when we have bought the necessary tools, I want them to open a hairdresser's shop just for women, and I want you to manage it. Ha ha! No, I'm not joking. It will be killing two birds with one stone. Not only will it encourage women to cut their hair, but it will also provide work for concubines."

Then a large lock of black hair fell out of her hands. She saw her own hands very nimbly wielding the scissors, snip, snipping away. Hair was piling up round her feet like grass. She was bogged down in a shower of hair. Black, yellow, grey; short black hair like arrows shooting at her own body and almost burying her. She struggled desperately, floundering about in the heap of hair. Suddenly her vision cleared and the snow-white bald heads of the two concubines appeared before her. And the Division Commander and Miss Yang were stroking these bald heads, laughing wildly.

Mei awoke with a start, the wild laughter still ringing in her ears.

The first part of the passage follows the pattern described above and progresses from light to sound, to interior reflection to reminiscence. Then, having lulled the reader into a false sense of security with a familiar pattern, it proceeds into the dream. If the dream has any allegorical significance it is to suggest the illusory nature of the trappings of women's emancipation and the dishonest way these were promoted. Its main interest is its exploration of the way the subconscious influences the dreaming mind. Ordinary experiences such as women cutting their hair as an outward sign of their emancipation are distorted and recombined with Mei's personal fears — especially, after having escaped from an arranged marriage, her fear of being trapped once again by the sexual desires of men. The sexual overtones of the surreal imagery are thus significant. Mei's fiercely independent spirit makes the possibility of such entrapment particularly abhorrent to her.

The hallucination of Fang Luolan (male) towards the end of *Vacillation* works in a similar way, although the imagery appears more contrived than in the last example. When the bandits attack the town, Lin Zichong, a colleague of Fang's, runs to tell Fang what has happened, particularly to their female colleagues. Fang's shock is expressed through his hallucination. Interestingly, in this hallucinatory state he has a clarity of vision normally lacking from his every day perceptions.

Fang Luolan grimaced in horror and simply shook his head. His mind was in complete turmoil. Three naked female corpses, dripping with blood, floated up before his eyes and lay before him. There was resentment in their protruding eyes as they stared fixedly at him, seemingly awaiting his reply. He shivered and closed his eyes; but that instant the deadly cries of the hooligans filled his ears. At the same time, a soft but insistent voice reverberated within his head:

"The first month's account must be settled in full! You have deprived others of their lives, you have allowed animosity to grow between people and now you must reap what you have sown! ..."

Fang Luolan sighed dejectedly, he repressed the soft voice in his head and opened his eyes. He saw Lin Zichong's two little eyes staring unflinchingly at him. Suddenly, they began to move, the black part floated upwards and the white part sank downwards turning into two round counters, black on the top and white at the bottom. Aagh! These became two heads, the heads on the female corpses dripping with blood with their bobbed hair! [They grew larger and

⁴⁸ MDQJ, 2, pp.176-177.

began to move. Below the black, he could see two pairs of eyes. One emitted yellow and green light, the other looked more stagnantly. Fang Luolan's whole body trembled. Didn't one pair belong to Sun Wuyang and the other to Mrs Fang?] "All women with bobbed hair must be fucked to death." That cry reverberated through his head again. He gritted his teeth, his lips involuntarily forming into a bitter smile.

With a sudden flash, the two heads withdrew; the two counters, half black and half white appeared as before, like draughts (*weiqi*) pieces. Countless arrow-like objects flew out from each of the counters, forming separate piles before Fang Luolan, like two hills. Then two hills seemed to be formed by countless eyes heaped up, all of them staring at the three bloodied female corpses which were laid out between them. One pile of eyes projected anger and grief, but the other seemed detached, indifferent, even pleased. A brick wall suddenly encircled the two hills of eyes like a girdle and the heaps of piled up eyes collapsed, becoming just one, each half a different colour. Aagh! The two halves of different colours were like two halves of a town! The soft voice at the back of his mind suddenly forced itself onto Fang Luolan's attention again:

"You say it is reactionary, murder, but half the town is happy!"

Fang Luolan trembled from head to toe, from his mouth came forth a piercing cry. The hallucination left him. He steadied his gaze and looked again. There he was all alone in his confusion: Lin Zichong had long since left. ⁴⁹

The hallucination contains both allegory and self-revelation. It is only in his hallucinatory state that Fang is aware of the consequences of his failure to take a firm stance against those working against the interests of the revolution, in particular, how the town has become polarised into two camps. But the political rivalries within the town and the conflicts within his own personal life are merged together. The two women in his life are as different as black and white yet he cares for them both. The bandits also threaten both of them equally. The horror of what has been done to his female colleagues reaches even greater proportions in Fang's mind when he associates it with the women he cares for, especially when he blames his own indecisiveness for everything that has happened. The public and the private are inextricably entwined and turn on the central pivot of the hallucination — eyes, that is, perception. Erroneous perception only leads to destruction in both political and personal terms. Fang, the epitome of vacillation, sees that he has to make a choice, and that he will only have one chance to make the right one.

⁴⁹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.246-247. [] indicates passages omitted in later editions.

This combination of allegory and self-revelation is used to good effect in Hui's (female) dream in *Disillusion*. After her romantic encounter with Bao Su, Hui lies in bed, unable to sleep as she reviews all that has happened to her during the past few years. Slowly she sinks into sleep and begins to dream.

Eventually the activity within her brain decreased; her body became limp and useless as it floated into boundlessness. Indeed, she was no longer lying on the camp bed, nor at the cinema but in the French park. She was sitting on grass as soft as a cotton mattress. Bao Su's head was pillowed in her lap. A mass of pink cloud scudded overhead and a white goose waddled past. A child ran over from under a tree — he was about four years old with rounded eyebrows and dimples. As he ran to her side she acknowledged that he was her own child. She stretched out her hand to pat him on the head when all of a sudden a man jumped out from the child and began to shout at the top of his voice:

"I have been looking for you since you left the cinema. So this is where you are.

He raised the cane in his hand above his head and slammed it down.

"I'll beat you to death, you shameless creature. When we were abroad did I ever treat you unfairly? I never imagined you would deceive me and run away. And who is *this* man then? I'll kill him. I'll beat him to death!

Frantically she tried to protect Bao Su's head with her arms. With a smack the cane hit her own head instead. She could clearly feel her skull split open and red blood and grey-white brains spewed out all over Bao Su's face. Anger combined with her fear. When she heard the man's wild laughter, her anger got the better of her. She saw that there was a large stone at her feet. She grasped it with both hands and jumped up. But the man had another cane ... Her whole body shook; she opened her eyes wide. Luckily she was lying on the camp bed as before, the room full of sunlight. ⁵⁰

This dream forms part of the allegorical structure of *Eclipse* described in Chapter Three. On the psychological level, it provides greater insight into the reasons why Hui harbours such an intense hatred of men. It also shows how she is haunted by this man from her past, and vividly captures her inner fear. Hui is defined as a character portrayed externally, yet something of her inner nature is revealed through the nightmare. Hui would never reveal these inner emotions anyway, not even to her close friend Jing, for to do so would work against the image of herself that she puts forwards to the world of a cold, hard man-hater. The most external female

⁵⁰ MDQJ, 1, p.29-30.

character in the early works is Sun Wuyang in *Vacillation*. Seldom are any indications of her inner nature revealed to the reader. She is revealed through the perceptions of others such as Fang Luolan or Meili's friends or her own challenging behaviour. She represents the opposite pole in the spectrum of portrayal to that of Miss Huan in *Suicide*.

In his use of dreams, Mao Dun is much closer to the Chinese tradition than to prevailing influences from the West. S. W. Chen has shown how Mao Dun incorporated aspects of Latzko's technique in the symbolic representation of dreams.⁵¹ However, the use of dreams for symbolic or allegorical purposes has a long history in the Chinese tradition, not least in the supernatural tale. Bearing in mind Mao Dun's interest in Greek mythology, one might have expected him to display influence from the Greek interpretation of dreams. Although the premonitory function of dreams is common to both traditions, in the Greek tradition, exemplified by Plato, dreams are understood as a channel of communication between the individual soul and the divine. In the Chinese tradition, this idea of communication with the divine is lacking and Mao Dun displays no trace of it in his fiction. Neither is there any apparent influence from Aristotle's more empiricist interpretation where dreams are explained as the imagination, a faculty of the intelligence, acting on memories and after-images.⁵² A dream like Hui's, or indeed Mei's, has a distinct premonitory function but there is no indication of their being divinely inspired. In addition these dreams reveal some psychological awareness. In terms of influence, it would appear that Mao Dun had gained this awareness indirectly through his reading of writers such as Dostoevsky or Latzko. There is no evidence that he himself had read Freud.⁵³ It was Mao Dun's preoccupation with questions of fate which drew him to study various mythological traditions,⁵⁴ but he appears not to have read more widely in Greek mythology or philosophy.

⁵¹ *Mao Dun the translator*, pp.71-94.

⁵² See Malcolm, *Dreaming*, *passim*. I am also grateful to Mr. C. Long of the Department of Philosophy, Durham University for useful discussion on this subject.

⁵³ Although Freud's interpretation of dreams was published in 1900 there is no evidence in my reading that Mao Dun had read the English version. Discussion with Bonnie S. McDougall and reference to Gálik's extensive research on the subject of Western influence on Mao Dun and others confirms this impression. The work was not available in Chinese until at least the late thirties.

⁵⁴ See following section.

This single-minded approach to a specific topic of interest and the eclectic selection of material from a wide range of sources to suit the specific need is typical of Chinese writers of the period. In general, Mao Dun's portrayal of dreams is most successful as allegory. At times useful psychological insight is provided but generally the dreams and hallucinations appear forced, with abrupt progression within the narrative from the characters' conscious and dreaming or hallucinatory states. Moreover, similar patterns appear in the portrayal of both male and female characters rendering the portrayal ungendered, and not revealing any particular insight into the dreaming experience of female characters.

The Patterning of Despair

Finally, the ungendered nature of Mao Dun's 'psychological' portrayal reveals itself in the overall formulaic representation of patterns of despair. The formula is defined by Mao Dun's own experience in coming to terms with having lived through the failure of the 1927 revolution. Mao Dun stated in *From Guling to Tokyo* that he wrote his own experiences into his early works and this is generally accepted among critics. It is these experiences which provide the material from which Mao Dun moulded a formula for the portrayal of despair. He did this via his reading of Greek and Norse mythology and of the work of Maeterlinck. He explains in *From Guling to Tokyo* (1928):

... *Pursuit* contains my most recent thoughts and feelings — that is of the period of time during which I wrote this novel. The underlying tone is one of extreme pessimism, and, whether great or small, the aspirations which the characters in the work pursue cannot be realised as they all wish ... I accept that the extremely pessimistic tone is my own, although the dissatisfaction of the young people in the novel with the existing state of affairs, their pessimism and their search for a way out are all objectively authentic. ⁵⁵

A couple of pages later he gives both a more detailed indication of his fluctuating moods, a pattern whose permutations and combinations can be seen reproduced in many of the passages quoted above, and a veiled indication of how he sought to overcome this pessimism — via the brave Nordic goddess:

⁵⁵ *Cong Guling dao Dongjing*, XSYB, 19.10, p.1140.

... at that time I became very low in spirit; in an instant there would be many fluctuating conflicts in my thoughts. One moment my emotions would soar to burning heights, the next, they would sink into icy coldness. This is because at that time I had contact with a few friends and learned from them of some painful events — you who can stand unyielding in the face of strong forces, even you might be brought to madness and despair by the unreasonable acts of those close to you. Perhaps one day these events will be known. They brought a heavy, pessimistic colouring into my work and at the same time gave it a lingering tone of bitterness and rage ...

It has already happened as I describe, but I hope that from now on I can brace myself so as not to sink into dejection again. I definitely believe that I can. Before me I see the dignified figure of the central Nordic goddess of fate, urging me on and guiding me forward! Her spirit of ceaseless struggle will inspire me forward! ⁵⁶

In various quotations from Mao Dun's discussion of his work during this period, one notes passing reference to his study of mythology. It was precisely this study which was to enable him to construct a paradigm for overcoming despair. Interestingly, although this work was central to his creative activities at this time, Mao Dun makes no more than passing reference to his study of mythology in *WZGDL*. From the perspective of the end of his life and with a career in close association with the arbiters of artistic standards in post 1949 China, to indicate inspiration from Norse mythology and from neo-romantic writing, was evidently inappropriate, not least because of its emphasis on the potential of the individual to control his own fate. This self-censorship is also apparent in the way the name of the Nordic goddess of fate has been suppressed from later editions.

During the latter half of the decade, Mao Dun made several studies of mythology, particularly Chinese, Greek and Nordic. The August 1928 issue of *XSYB* carried an article entitled *Greek mythology and Nordic mythology* in which he makes a systematic comparison of various aspects of the two mythologies, such as their creation myths, their representations of the universe, and including their conceptions of fate. His comparison of this latter aspect is almost exactly reproduced in his *Foreword to 'Wild Roses'*:

If we may consider the concept of fate in the mythology of a race to be their philosophy of life, it should be very interesting to compare the concept of fate in Greek and Nordic myth.

⁵⁶ *Cong Guling dao Dongjing*, *XSYB*, 19.10, pp.1142-1143. Translation partially drawn from Y. S. Chen, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Special Issue: The development of revolutionary literature in China*, pt.1, Jan– March 1976, pp.41-42.

The goddesses of fate in Greek myth are three sisters. Clotho is the youngest, in charge of spinning the thread of life, deftly crossing the strands of light with the strands of darkness, just as there is light and darkness in human life. Lachesis is the second sister. Her task is to twist together the [strands made by Clotho into] threads of life. Her wrist power is at times strong and at times weak; that explains why man's life force varies in degrees of strength. The oldest sister, Atropos, is the cruellest one. She holds a pair of huge scissors and pitilessly snips those threads of life.

In Nordic myth also, the goddesses of fate are sisters. But unlike their counterparts in Greek myth, they do not have three different tasks; rather they symbolise three periods in infinite time. The eldest is Urd, who is very old and feeble and constantly reminisces; she is the personification of the "past." Skuld, the youngest, wears a veil over her face, and the direction in which she looks is exactly opposite to that of her eldest sister; she is the unfathomable "future." Verdandi is the one in the middle, in the prime of life, spirited, courageous, staring straight down the path ahead; she is the one who symbolises the "present."

These are the different primitive philosophies of life expressed in the myths of the Greek people of the south and the Nordic people of the north. The realist Nordic people keep a tight hold on the "present;" they neither dwell on nor lament the "past," nor do they vainly fantasize about the "future." 57

Clearly, anyone who had been tempted to believe that the failure of the revolution, the brutality with which it was repressed and the continuing persecution of revolutionaries were all dictated by an unkind fate, for which the individual was nothing but a plaything, would find no solace in the Greek myth. It would only reinforce their despondency and offer them little hope for the future. However, the positive attitude demanded of her followers by Verdandi, did provide a basis for reassessment. The difficulty was that the standards set by Verdandi were very high when one's instincts were precisely either to dwell on or lament the past, or to fantasize about the future. The second passage quoted above shows Mao Dun to have recognised the potential of Verdandi's message but without the control over his own emotions to respond to her challenge. The writings of Maeterlinck provided the mediation he required to become a full disciple of the goddess.

In *From Guling to Tokyo*, Mao Dun mentions that he read Maeterlinck's 'The Buried Temple' during his convalescence in Guling. This reference has hitherto seemingly been passed over, but further investigation

⁵⁷ Xie zai 'Ye qiangwei' de qianmian, in *Mao Dun zhuanji*, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp.812-813. Translation based on Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory ...*, p.142.

is rewarding. There is an English translation of this work published by Allen in 1902 which could well have been consulted by Mao Dun. This does indeed seem likely since this translation lacks the final chapter of the original, entitled *L'Avenir*, the contents of which do not tally with Mao Dun's paradigm whilst much of the contents of the preceding chapters support it.⁵⁸ In this work, Maeterlinck discusses a fluid concept of time, where divisions into past, present and future are considered arbitrary and where any one of these can flow into any other within the consciousness of the individual, with diverse effects dependent on the attitude of that individual. The first chapter discusses justice. We should not search for the 'invisible and incorruptible justice,' without which we are lost, within the natural world or the universe, but within the 'depths of the moral life of every man.' It will not save man from catastrophe, but will promote a frame of mind, a moral condition with which he will be better able to cope. The essay then turns to mystery, of which the greatest is death in the way it blindly claims the young and the happy. We use fate to explain the inexplicable, we even worship the 'unbending, malignant goddess' who is often more acceptable than 'the divinity who only asks for an effort that shall avert disaster.' However, the unknown is neither sympathetic nor hostile, its neutrality does not warrant our attributing to it a force or hostility which it cannot be proved to possess. Therefore, only when mystery reveals itself as 'perceptible, intelligent and moral' will we be entitled to submit to it.

The chapter on the past has the most relevance for Mao Dun's purposes. There always seems to have been a misconception of the past:

The force of the past is indeed one of the heaviest that weigh upon men and incline them to sadness. And yet there is none more docile, more eager to follow the direction we could so readily give, did we but know how best to avail ourselves of this docility. In reality, if we think of it, the past belongs to us quite as much as the present, and is far more malleable than the future. Like the present and to a much greater extent than the future, its existence is all in our thoughts, and our hand controls it: nor is this only true of our material past, wherein there are ruins that we perhaps can restore; it is true also of the regions that are closed to our tardy desire for atonement; it is true above all of our moral past, and of what we consider to be most irreparable there.

⁵⁸ The opening sentence of this final chapter reads: 'Il est, à certains égards, tout à fait incompréhensible que nous ne connaissons pas l'avenir.' *Le temple enseveli*, p.285.

'The past is past,' we say, and it is false; the past is always present. 'We have to bear the burden of our past,' we sigh, and it is false; the past bears our burden. 'Nothing can wipe out the past,' and it is false; the least effort of will sends present and future travelling over the past to efface whatever we bid them to efface. ⁵⁹

Thus the past depends completely on our attitude to it at any given moment. We must approach it with strength, take from it what we require and discard the rest. We should not allow it to 'enter ... like a parasite settling upon us.' It should not influence our present activity as its sole purpose is to bring us to where we are now. It is necessary to detach oneself from an unhappy past, for no past can be wretched — the wretchedness lies in our manner of welcoming it. The final chapter in the English translation discusses luck, 'the small change of fatality.' If we look to the gods for an explanation of why some are lucky in life and some are not, we will find no answers, for 'the gods' have yet to explain themselves. Let us rather look within ourselves, since we are the parties concerned. It is within our own unconscious life that we must seek the explanation of fortunate or contrary chances. As we progress we discover that many forces which mastered us and which we called 'god' are only part of our own power which we did not fully understand. Even though by bringing this particular force within ourselves we will not conquer it, we will be bringing it nearer to ourselves and will be able more easily to question it. Eventually we may learn to subdue it, but the answer lies within ourselves. Despite calamity, man can still go on.

Combining the idea, encapsulated by the figure of Verdandi, of confronting the present, however unpalatable, and Maeterlinck's conviction both that the past could be manipulated to one's own benefit and that one's own inner strength provides as good a means as any other of mitigating the effects of an unkind fate, Mao Dun constructed his paradigm for the portrayal of despair. Despite being based on his own experience, this pattern is projected onto his characters, whether male or female, to give an ungendered and formulaic portrayal of the experience of despair, as the following discussion shows.

⁵⁹ *The buried temple*, pp.200-201.

The early stories explore the capacity of individuals both to 'approach the past with strength' and to keep 'a tight hold on the present.' In both *Disillusion* and *Vacillation* the question is one of confronting reality. Jing refuses to do this either in the realm of love or the field of politics. Love is her major preoccupation and she has her own idealised conception of what it should be like. Furthermore, she refuses to acknowledge, or fails to register, the signals challenging her conceptions which emanate from all around her. The first of these is Hui herself and experiences of rough treatment at the hands of 'vile men' which tweak the corner of the 'embroidered curtain' within Jing's mind which hangs before the realities of sex and love. The second is the experience of the young wife's first year of marriage as suggested by a faded red blouse of hers on the washing line. Jing is brought to tears at the thought of the young woman's fate, but fundamentally, her tears mark the unacceptably ugly face of reality. Then she sees (or thinks she sees) a figure on the balcony. This frightens her into hanging a curtain over the top part of the window. There is already a curtain over the bottom part of the window, preventing people on the balcony from looking in, but she could still see out. Blocking off the window will mean that she will no longer be able to see out — as if she wants to replace the 'embroidered curtain' and pretend that it had never been lifted. Thereby she will shut out this glimpse of reality and seek refuge in her beautiful ideal.

This pattern of seeking refuge in illusory ideals of beauty and perfection is repeated throughout the novella. When confronted by hideous images at school and in the newspapers which distort her ideal, she seeks solace in thoughts of her mother — source of morality and goodness — and her childhood. Because this refuge is fundamentally illusory, it leaves her in a state of reverie in which she sees everything as 'pink and lovely.'⁶⁰ Her distorted perceptions lead her to believe that she can seek her ideal of love with Bao Su. However, after the event the following morning, she is overcome with a crushing sense of emptiness and disappointment verging on pointlessness (*wuliao*): the experience did not live up to expectations. Once again, she refuses to face the reality of the situation, and tries to

⁶⁰ The use of the colour pink to describe beautiful but illusory dreams is also to be seen in *Suicide*, e.g.. *MDQJ*, 8, p.41.

rekindle her fantasy by bringing Bao Su into her idealised memory of her mother and her home village. This time her memories are coloured with realism but she deliberately stifles the knowledge that the countryside is truly not at all as she imagines it. She forces Bao Su into a stylised vision of the past, which she turns into a roses-round-the-door, happy-ever-after vision of future marital bliss. This escape into the past as a refuge from the present is perfectly acceptable behaviour according to Maeterlinck's essay but inappropriate for a follower of Verdandi. Her efforts are in vain as 'reality had pulled back the brocade curtain of fantasy and illusion.'⁶¹ As the full extent of the ugliness of her reality is revealed to her — Bao Su's true identity as a Nationalist agent — she is totally unable to cope. She falls ill, loses all confidence and slips into a state of fatalistic hopelessness.

A temporary victory over fate is achieved by the construction of a new set of ideals and aspirations, this time in revolutionary work. However, her pursuit of a 'bright new life' is not rooted firmly enough in reality. When the revolutionary experience becomes just as *wuliao* as the sexual experience because the reality comes nowhere near her expectations, she finds herself back in her sick bed. As she lies there, all the ugly realities which she had hitherto refused to face pass through her mind and she becomes aware of the enormous contradiction between people's ideals and their capacity for achievement. The only way she is able to recover is to avoid all instances of this ugliness. Thus she lives a life of virtual non-engagement with human affairs. Because all along her disillusionment stems from her inability to relate her dreams to the real world, she can only experience the 'sweet life of her dreams', her 'ideal love' which she eventually discovers with Qiang Weili, by ensuring that they deliberately cut themselves off from reality by going up into the mountains of Guling. Just as she had previously attempted to do with Bao Su, she tries to include Weili within her rosy vision of mother and home in the countryside, the lost happiness of childhood, marital bliss for ever more. Of course, this is continued self-deception: the green of the fields of home in her fantasies is the same green of the Guling hills — far removed from reality. 'Pretty dreams of the future can never be satisfactorily realised' warns the narrative voice

⁶¹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.47.

in anticipation of the bursting of the bubble.⁶² Finally reality intrudes, as Weili is recalled to the front. At first she feels betrayed that he should choose to return to the front instead of remaining with her. But only when she understands that out of love for her he is prepared to stay, despite the exhilaration of life on the front line, does she finally bring her ideal down to the level of real life and agree to his return to the battlefield. In this decision she is determined that their love should survive on this level: she has awoken from a 'dream that was too full of happiness.' However, the novella is left open-ended. There is a hint that Weili will not return, and it is uncertain whether or not Jing will be able to cope with this.

In *Vacillation* Fang Meili also refuses to engage with a difficult present of modern women, political activism and social change. We first encounter her through the eyes of Hu Guoguang who imagines her to be one of those 'bright-eyed,' aggressive 'women of the new school' (*xin pai nüzi*.)⁶³ But he soon discovers otherwise. Far from having any interest in the current political situation she can only admit to feeling that 'the world is changing too quickly, and I am ashamed to say that I feel unable to keep up.' In the same way that Meili's 'dull eyes' (*zhise de yanjing*) mar her physical beauty, her dull perception blurs her understanding of the world. Moreover she makes no effort to improve her understanding of what is happening or to participate. Unlike Jing, whose attempts at 'grasping the present' fail because of the incompatibility of the realities of that present with her ideals, Meili fails even to attempt to do so until the end of the novella when she is forced to make her choice. For her the future holds nothing more than 'a repetition of the bad times from the past.' As she is left dangling on a thread like a spider, the old order (represented by the dilapidated convent building), in which she attempts to seek refuge, collapses and a black form engulfs all the familiar faces from her life. She will have to leave all of them behind her if she is not to be engulfed as well. If she does survive the destruction of her world, she will be propelled towards a new future where there is no possibility of the bad times from the past repeating themselves. The condition for all this to happen is for her to grasp hold of the reality

⁶² *MDQJ*, 1, p.93.

⁶³ *MDQJ*, 1, p.129.

of the present, to accept the collapse of the old order instead of seeking refuge in it, and to look forward with commitment.

Fang Luolan is convinced that he has a good grasp on the present. He also has a 'goddess' to follow. However, although she may resemble the Verdandi figure identified by name in *Pursuit*, she is a false goddess who brings him close to destruction, precisely by clouding his vision of the political realities with which he has to deal. Only in his hallucinatory state at the end of the novella is he able to perceive the truth of the deteriorating situation around him.

The three 'strong' female characters in the trilogy, all of whom are linked to the Verdandi figure through their appearance,⁶⁴ appear to have total control over their present, but this is not so. Hui's strategy of avenging herself on the male sex for the way she has been treated bears too great an influence from the past, which lives in her present. Her nightmare reveals the extent to which she is haunted by past experiences which define her actions in the present. Her longing to seek refuge in her mother's arms also testifies to her inner insecurity and unhappiness. Sun Wuyang's control over her present appears absolute — she is not dogged by a painful past as Hui is. But her reading of the present is also shown to be erroneous, particularly her assessment of Hu Guoguang and his supporters as true revolutionaries when, in fact, they represent the forces of reaction. Her control disintegrates when she is forced to flee the town by disguising herself as a youth, thereby denying the very feminine attributes on which her control was based.

Zhang Qiuli and her fellow students in *Pursuit* have all lived through the failed revolution. This past haunts them all, but it is the extent to which they succeed both in overcoming it and in identifying the true Verdandi which differentiates them. For Shi Xun the past impinges severely on the present. His unrequited love for a false Verdandi (Hui) has left him without a proper 'grasp' on the present. Indeed, his attempted suicide testifies to his inability to face the hopelessness of his present. His name,

⁶⁴ See Chapter Three, for a preliminary discussion of this patterning with relation to colour.

'history in circles' also suggests an attitude to the future as pessimistic as that of Fang Meili who can only look to a 'repetition of the bad times from the past.' Because his suicide attempt fails he has to face the present all over again. This time his Verdandi figure (Qiuliu) lives solely for the present, and encourages him to seek immediate gratification in physical pleasures in order to obliterate all memory of the unhappy past. Already in poor health, he dies in the attempt.

Manqing throws himself into education in order to escape the past. That this pursuit is flawed is indicated by the true nature of his Verdandi figure. Miss Zhu may physically resemble the goddess but her ugly, gravelly voice is a bad omen. Only after their marriage does Manqing become aware of how small-minded and petty she really is. Furthermore, his hopes of educating the future generation to learn from the mistakes of his own are dashed when any reforms he tries to institute are sabotaged by the conservative establishment at the school.

The pragmatist Zhongzhao makes reforming his page of the newspaper his pursuit. Whereas Manqing loses hope when his plans are thwarted, Zhongzhao carries on doggedly, even if his progress amounts to 'a half of half a step' at a time. And all the time, standing before him is the vision of his 'brave Northern European goddess of fate [Verdandi],'⁶⁵ (Miss Lu) inspiring him onwards. He must bring about reform of the Fourth Page in order to prove to Miss Lu's father that he is a worthy future son-in-law. Ironically, the 'pulse of the city' which he seeks to tap in his 'Impressions' column does not exist. There is only 'vile sexual licence.' Nevertheless, the minor changes he is able to make are enough for him to be able to announce his engagement. His belief in the future is the foundation upon which he bases all his present actions. 'He believed that it was only their hope for the future which enabled people bravely to grasp hold of the present.'⁶⁶ Whereas he witnesses the failure of all his colleagues in their pursuits, he is convinced that his own good fortune can be relied upon (*kekao de xingfu*.) But, on returning home after visiting Qiuliu in hospital he receives

⁶⁵ The name Verdandi (in English) is omitted from later editions. See note 70 for the significance of this.

⁶⁶ *MDQJ*, 1, p.419.

news that his beloved and perfect Miss Lu has had an accident which has disfigured her face. The novella ends with Zhongzhao's reflection: 'Even though the object of your aspirations may be in your grasp, just at the moment when you grasp it, it changes face.' ⁶⁷ Y. S. Chen suggests that Zhongzhao's pursuit is a struggle for the pure face of the CCP (Jiaxing where Miss Lu lives is the place where the CCP was originally founded) ⁶⁸ against the directives from 'afar' — officialdom, big business interests and so on — conveyed through his editor, which force him to present a distorted picture of contemporary life. According to this interpretation, the symbolism at the end of the novella would therefore indicate that the aims and ideals of the Party itself had been disfigured. The question which remains unanswered is whether, if she is the true Verdandi, this goddess should still be followed.

Wang Shitao's present is strongly coloured by the past. She is mourning the death of her lover, Dong Fangming and carrying their child. Furthermore she is sick and penniless. Her present is only bearable because she retains a dogged hope in the future: '... in the last analysis we need children because they are the hope of the future. Our lives are limited but our struggle is a protracted one, so our children will carry our torch into the future.' ⁶⁹ However, she is prepared to mortgage the present for the sake of these vague future ideals. In order to survive and bring up the child in whom all hope for the future is embodied, she has had to resort to prostitution.

And so to Zhang Qiuliu. For her Wang Shitao's chosen course is absolutely unacceptable. Qiuliu no longer has any concept of the ideal whether in society, life or love. Human life is but the pursuit of happiness and all she wants is a life of unrestrained, hedonistic stimulation. It is by plunging herself into such an existence that she seeks to forget the past. Her reply to Wang Shitao illustrates her 'philosophy of the present.'

[I never think of the future,] I only concern myself with the present. [Empty hope in the future is nothing more than seeking consolation in the tiresome present. I am against the saying 'look

⁶⁷ *MDQJ*, 1, p.422.

⁶⁸ Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory ...*, p.218.

⁶⁹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.372.

thrice before you leap.' Those who look thrice probably will not leap at all.] I do not hesitate. I act immediately according to my thoughts and only look at the implications after the event. [All those big-hatted concepts like morality, society, fatherland — cannot impede my decision of the moment. There is no way I would hesitate before those things.] 70

At the end of *Pursuit* this philosophy is called into doubt. When Zhongzhao goes to visit Qiuliu in hospital, although she shows no outward signs of illness her eyes are 'dull' (*zhise* — recalling the dulled vision of Fang Meili in *Vacillation*) and her smile is 'different.' She fears she has contracted syphilis from Shi Xun and asks Zhongzhao's help in finding a reliable doctor from whom she urgently requires to know how much longer she has left to live. Zhongzhao does not understand how this 'strange, romantic girl' can maintain her hold on the present without having any hope in the future. Qiuliu says that Wang Shitao does not understand either because she is only a slave to a vague future. Only Shi Xun had responded sympathetically — but he was dead.

In this way, the trilogy *Eclipse* (1927-1928) explores the first stages in becoming a follower of Verdandi.⁷¹ There are those who refuse to 'grasp the present' at all and who inevitably come to grief. Then there are those who attempt to engage with the present but fail. This might be because they believe the present to be other than it really is, or because they are

⁷⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, p.372. Interestingly, the revision of this passage in later editions, indicated by [], omits almost all reference to this 'philosophy.' It is precisely a solid belief in a positive future that a revolutionary hero is expected to have, particularly in the face of an adverse present. Ideas of self-sacrifice have no place in the aftermath of the failures of 1927.

⁷¹ This is the significance of the quotation from Wordsworth appended to the beginning of *Pursuit*.

Hope rules a land forever green:
All powers that serve the bright-eyed Queen
Are confident and gay;
Clouds at her bidding disappear;
Points she to aught? — the bliss draws near,
And Fancy smooths the way.
(*MDQJ*, 1, p.261.)

Note the linking of the colour green to the idea of hope, following the pattern of colour symbolism described in Chapter Three.

too haunted by the past. The vision of Verdandi looking straight into the present, is an inspiring one but her demands are too great if one's existence is dominated by the past. There is an awareness of the way of the goddess but it is accompanied by the fluctuating moods of those who are battling against their instincts. This is why Maeterlinck's concept of fluid time is an important aid in grasping the present. He provides a means to subdue the angry presence of the past and to bring within human existence this and other external forces which appear to master human destiny. Here they might more easily be understood and even mastered.

One of these forces is a blind and ruthless fate after the Greek model. There is a very strong sense of unmastered fate throughout *Eclipse*. In *Disillusion* Jing is portrayed as battling to overcome her fate. At times of despondency she believes that 'people are the victims of fate' and that 'nobody can escape from its clutches.' When her confidence is restored fate is seemingly overcome, but often the narrator indicates otherwise. Such an example is when Jing decides to join the revolution.

... she returned to Shanghai. The following day she and Miss Zhao boarded the Yangtze steamer, and, following the dictates of fate, went to seek out a new life. Although at that time 'fate' was the last thing on Jing's mind. ⁷²

In *Vacillation* the presence of fate seems to be linked to the sun — 'this hateful, burning sun' — which presides over the destruction of the town. It pours down onto the streets on the day of the expected show-down between the opposing factions. It is also present at the meeting of the combined Party organisation which tries to settle the dispute. At first it dances on the conference table, but as the meeting drags on inconclusively, it leaves the room impatiently and leans lazily outside the window. ⁷³ As events move inexorably towards disaster, the narrative voice intrudes, like the voice of fate, reaffirming that there is no escape: 'Soon there would be yet further examples of unclear understanding of events.' ⁷⁴ In *Pursuit* Shi Xun himself is the very embodiment of fate and his words remain hauntingly in

⁷² *MDQJ*, 1, p.60.

⁷³ *MDQJ*, 1, p.232. Note, in this instance the sun is even referred to as 'she.' If this was a typographical error, it has been corrected in *MDQJ*.

⁷⁴ *MDQJ*, 1, p.236.

the minds of others:

Life is tragedy, all ideals are hopeless, all hopes are false, and the
way forward shows only darkness ... ⁷⁵

When, at the end of *Pursuit*, Zhongzhao considers how all his comrades have failed in their ideals, he questions whether this was simply a manifestation of the inevitability of the power of fate. His conclusion is in the negative because “this was an age when man’s wisdom had overcome fate and nature.” ⁷⁶ However, this is before he learns of the ‘fate’ of his own fiancée.

It is clear that facing the present was only the first stage in becoming a fully-fledged follower of Verdandi. Existence in the present had to be linked to some conception of the future otherwise Qiuilu’s strategy would be enough. In this respect Mao Dun reworks the Norse myth. In his *Preface to ‘Wild Roses’*, quoted above, Mao Dun writes of Verdandi looking “straight down the path ahead.” This is to merge present and future whilst the Nordic conception of Verdandi was of a goddess who embodied the present. In the illustrated *Myths of the Norsemen* by H. A. Guerber (1919) consulted by Mao Dun, ⁷⁷ there is a representation of the three sisters with Skuld and Urd sitting facing opposite directions and Verdandi sitting between them staring straight out of the page. Her line of vision is therefore in the opposite plane to that of both her sisters. By drawing from Maeterlinck, Mao Dun reworks the myth so that the way of Verdandi leads to a revolutionary future. This second stage of development is glimpsed in the collection of stories entitled *Wild Roses* (1929) where the psychology of commitment and despair continues to be the main focus of exploration.

In *Creation*, the story of Xianxian and Jun Shi’s marriage is related in flashback as Jun Shi lies in bed and looks back over their relationship. He is unsettled by what his creation has become in the present: she is sensual, lively, independent and scornful of the standards of wifely behaviour which he has set for her. His past impinges on his present. He remembers it longingly and wishes to return there. This unsatisfactory vision of the

⁷⁵ MDQJ, 1, p.292.

⁷⁶ MDQJ, 1, p.421.

⁷⁷ This is confirmed by M. Gálik. See Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory ...*, p.223.

present, heavily coloured with past memories, is underlined by his 'dull' (*zhise*) moan at the end of the story as Xianxian challenges him to become a true follower of Verdandi. Whereas within the consciousness of Jun Shi the past lives in the present, Xianxian is more than a vivid *presence* because she also indicates a future path for Jun Shi to follow. She is the future in the present, a vision of the way forward. All that remains is for Jun Shi to rise to the challenge.

In *Poetry and prose* Bing reveals a similarly vacillating consciousness. His present is the choice he has to make between the two women in his life. His demure cousin, the epitome of traditional virtue, represents the past, whilst Gui, sensual and unrestrained, a New Woman who has rejected traditional conventions of behaviour, represents the future. His failure to choose represents his inability to 'grasp the present.' Instead of choosing either 'poetry' or 'prose,' he decides on an 'epic' life (*shishi de shenghuo*) in the army — a combination of the two. As a consequence he loses both women: his cousin moves to Peking and Gui leaves him.

Miss Huan in *Suicide* is another character who fails to come to terms with her present. The past, her tenderly remembered affair with her boyfriend who leaves to join the revolution, figures highly in her emotionally strained present. This existence of past-in-present is more graphically represented when she discovers that she is also pregnant by him.⁷⁸ Her situation recalls that of Wang Shitao in *Pursuit* but her response to it is nearer to that of Zhang Qiuliu. When Qiuliu learns of Shitao's choice of 'selling her sex' as a means of survival, she responds by describing her own choice of action if faced with the same set of circumstances. She would choose to lash out and kill a few people⁷⁹ and then kill herself. When asked by Shitao whether she would still commit suicide if there were things she would regret to leave behind, Qiuliu states that there is nothing she would regret to leave. It is all a matter of having the courage of one's own convictions and the strength of will to remain in control of the situation.⁸⁰ Whereas Qiuliu has no thought for the future and lives solely for

⁷⁸ See also Chapter Five, pp.207-210.

⁷⁹ Changed to 'enemies' in later edition.

⁸⁰ See *MDQJ*, 1, p.375. Much of the latter part of this exchange is omitted in later

the moment, within her unstable present, Miss Huan does have a vision of the future but either it is one of failure and social rejection or it is a rosy projection of the past which bears no relation to reality. Her choice of suicide requires only a moment's courage and strength of will, whereas to live out her life requires courage beyond her capacities. Miss Huan's acknowledgement of a future extends beyond Qiuliu's continual present but because a belief in the future requires grasping hold of the present, her fate is sealed.

In *A woman*, Qionghua comes to a clear vision of her present. She is born into a wealthy family and has many suitors. She learns skilfully to manoeuvre her way through the complexities of social relationships, presenting a false self (*jia wo*) rather than revealing her true feelings (*zhen wo*.) As a result, she becomes the queen of her social circle. But although she can see through the workings of society, she suffers emotionally from going along with its falsity. She disdains those who surrounded her, but has grown used to their praise. She also sees that love is the missing element which is lacking in her life, but she does not know in whom she will find it. Then, disaster strikes. A fire in her home destroys her family's wealth, the basis of their social standing, and also scars Qionghua's face. As a consequence, she is rejected by the same social circle which she used to dominate. Her detestation for her former 'friends' is intensified. She plans to regain her position of preeminence in order to avenge herself. The attempt fails and she lacks any further strength to pitch herself against the ugly forces of society. She falls ill and loses her clear-sighted perspective on life. She retreats into the past, seeking solace there in the person of Zhang Yanying. She associates her own predicament with his. Zhang had been ostracised by her 'society friends' for being a posthumous child. Whilst they both see through the false values of society, only Zhang is able to act on this understanding. He leaves the town, vowing not to return until he has made something of himself. Qionghua's eyes become 'dulled' (*kuse*), indicating her failing perception. She concentrates her desire for love in the person of Zhang, hoping for his return one day and relying on a benevolent

editions. This another example of Mao Dun's self-censorship as he suppresses references to Qiuliu's philosophy of life which are inspired by Verdandi.

fate for relief. When he finally returns and visits her he precipitates her death.

In *Suicide*, Miss Huan's sad end is brought about by her own failure of vision. Her projections of the future are of her own construction and bear no relation to the present because her present is rooted firmly in the past. By contrast, Qionghua's tragedy is precipitated by events beyond her control. Hers is not a failure of vision but a failure to act upon it. Her scarred face recalls the tragedy which befalls Miss Lu at the end of *Pursuit* and her fate is the projection of a route which Zhongzhao could possibly follow. Both see clearly the complexities of the present but this alone is not necessarily enough in the face of calamity outside of their control.

Miss Zhang in *Haze* is indeed faced with her own calamitous present. After her participation in revolutionary activity, her father has removed her from her modern school and has sent her to a school for young ladies in Shanghai. He also intends to marry her off to be the second wife to an army officer in Nanjing. To make matters worse she also discovers that her friend Lan has been seeing her boyfriend He Ruohua. After this discovery her eyes become 'dulled' (*kuse*), a now familiar indication of unclear perception. Her first reaction is a desire for revenge, to make He Ruohua lie prostrate and kick him away, recalling Hui in *Disillusion*. But as her anger cools, she feels intensively the hopelessness of her life and considers drowning herself. Finally thoughts of her long dead mother and her happy childhood inspire to take her destiny into her own hands. (Her mother had always encouraged her to do well for herself.) She runs away to Canton. This time the past is not a stifling weight upon the present but an inspiration for the future. Such an escape does not have to be cowardly, indeed it is in the best Nora tradition. Within the context of the *Wild Roses* collection, Miss Zhang first considers revenge like Qionghua but reconsiders. Then she is tempted by suicide like Miss Huan, but thinks better of it. And whilst for Jing in *Disillusion*, images of mother and childhood from the past are an escape from the ugliness of the present, for Miss Zhang they remind her of all the possibilities of fulfillment which are still open to her in the future if only she will grasp the present and take the initiative, which she does.

The novel *Rainbow* (1929) marks a further stage of development. In the opening chapter the ideal represented by Verdandi is realised. Mei is on a steamer on her way down the Yangtze to Shanghai. She has escaped from an arranged marriage and from the trials and tribulations of a Nora who has left home and who tries to seek a living in a provincial society where traditional attitudes run deep. An account of her past experiences will follow, recounted in flashback, but the opening chapter revels in a glorious, confident present. Unlike the characters in the earlier novels, she knows neither empty fantasy (*kongxiang*), pessimism (*beiguan*) or contradiction (*maodun*.) There were neither old events to unsettle her or 'vague aspirations' to stimulate her. She simply waits for whatever life will throw at her. As she reflects on her experiences, the twists and turns of which are symbolised by the progress of the steamer through the twists and turns of the Yangtze Gorges, she concludes that the lesson she has learned was not to become attached to the past or to have illusions about the future. One should just grasp the present with all one's might. Her life was like the steamer's progress through the gorges: it was not possible to see either where one had come from or where one was going — there was only the present.⁸¹ At the same time she has an unconditional belief in the future — to continue the analogy with the steamer's progress, there is no doubt that Shanghai is the steamer's destination. Mei 'rushes forward with the spirit of a warrior' to conquer both environment and fate.⁸² Mei's appearance also links her with the Verdandi figures of *Eclipse*, particularly in *Pursuit*. Like the other women she has "rounded brows" (*yuanyuan de meimao*) and bright red lips.⁸³

The all-embracing presence of the formulaic and ungendered representation of despair is further underlined by descriptive formulae. The use of the epithets *zhise* or *kuse* meaning 'dulled' or 'stagnant' to indicate unreliable perception — in characters of either sex — has already been noted. Characters who seek escape from the present in flights of fancy are described as being in a 'pink reverie' or believing in 'pink hopes.' Jing and

⁸¹ See *MDQJ*, 2, p.12.

⁸² *ibid.*, p.6.

⁸³ *MDQJ*, 2, p.251. See discussion in Chapter Two, p.61.

Miss Huan are both good examples. There is also, as J. Berninghausen has shown,⁸⁴ recurring use of similar words and phrases to describe perplexity or distractedness in characters. A common descriptor is *wangran*, 'in a daze.' It is used of Jing as she sits in her room dreaming pink dreams; Fang Luolan is similarly unfocussed as he fantasizes about Sun Wuyang; Miss Huan's distracted state of mind is captured by the same descriptor after she tears up a photograph of her lover in a fit of pique; Bing is similarly described as he dreams of his cousin who has brought him white roses; it is Qin's constant state of mind in *Road*, as he fails to find any meaning in his life; Xu in *Three Friends* is described as being in this state when he is confronted with the inevitability of the enforced end to his relationship with Xin; and so on. A further, frequently recurring formula is reference to the interaction of light and darkness, *guangming* and *heian*. In *Rainbow* Mei's reflection on how her life's thread was twisted from strands of darkness and light recalls Mao Dun's representation of the Greek fates, quoted above: Clotho spins the thread of life, 'deftly crossing the strands of light with the strands of darkness, just as there is light and darkness in human life.' Mao Dun's protagonists continually seek a bright future (*guangming de qiantu*) or sink into despondency when their lives appear to be nothing but an expanse of darkness. This is the case with Hui in *Disillusion* just before her nightmare. After Qiuliu has visited Shi Xun in hospital she ponders on the type of life she leads. She could take the path to *guangming* which will be blocked by many obstacles and overlaid with thorns or she could take the path to degeneration which will be comfortable and lead to material happiness and carnal gratification. She wonders whether her inability to choose between the two simply reflects the struggle between the forces of darkness and those of light in this chaotic society.⁸⁵ Zhongzhao reflects similarly:

In our lives there were originally threads of light and threads of darkness. The path of man's life was originally overlaid with thorns. But those who succeeded knew how to use the light of hope to illuminate their journey and how to use the flame of patience to burn away the thorns.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ See *Mao Dun's early fiction ...*, p.322-325.

⁸⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, p.319-320.

⁸⁶ *MDQJ*, 1, p.292. Adapted from Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory ...*, p.117-118.

The overall focus of this psychological portrayal is the ability of the ungendered individual to bring the forces of time and destiny within his or her own consciousness in order to demystify them. In this act of demystification, familiarity is the first step towards subduing them. This is to suggest the unitary nature of human psychology where there is a spectrum of behaviour not differentiated between the masculine and the feminine but between one individual and another.⁸⁷ It also reflects the May Fourth determination to lay traditional perceptions of the inferiority of women at the door of several thousand years of cultural conditioning. But at the same time it fails to engage fully with the particular experience of May Fourth women which is differentiated from that of May Fourth youth as a whole. For example, Mao Dun writes in *Ji ju jiu hua* of how he had witnessed young women going ‘wild and decadent’ as the revolutionary fervour of Wuhan increased, but he witnessed it as an outsider and does not pursue the real reasons why this should be so — namely that the new woman was attempting to establish her own identity in an order dominated by patriarchy and that this process was necessarily disruptive. Experiences which pertain specifically to women (biologically determined) simply become a peg upon which to hang the paradigm. This is not to deny Mao Dun’s genuine concern with questions of women’s emancipation, but this concern is politically and intellectually defined.

However, at times, Mao Dun’s empathy with women’s experience transcends the patterning of ungendered despair. An example is the description in *Rainbow* of Mei’s wedding night.⁸⁸ The level of understanding revealed in this description lends a greater credibility to his portrayal of Mei as a woman, but it does so on a collective level rather than enhancing individual character development. This is less the expression of the experience of an individual woman than an expression of the historical experience of countless women through the centuries. As a stereotype of female exploitation it is credible and marks Mao Dun’s particular sympathy with female experience. However, to do this contradicts the paradigm: either experience is interchangeable or it is not. It shows Mao Dun to be caught in the ‘para-

⁸⁷ See following chapter for discussion of the merging of gender identity.

⁸⁸ See Chapter Five, p.195.

dox of representation' which Chan posits as a feature of male writing of the May Fourth era. Male writers wished to portray the symbolic liberation of women and were often passionately committed to the cause of female emancipation. Nevertheless, they could not transcend the dominant mode of (male) discourse that had initiated the very act of subversion in the first place.⁸⁹

The contradiction is between the intellect and the subconscious. The following chapter discusses the intellectual side of the contradiction, the commitment to the women's question, which in Mao Dun's case was very deep. Although as a result of this he was unable for some time to reconcile his socialist and feminist sympathies, nevertheless But no amount of sympathetic rhetoric would turn symbolic representations of equality in terms of the ungendered portrayal of consciousness into enlightened evocations of the female psyche. The very symbolic and formulaic processes of representation themselves render this an even remoter possibility.

⁸⁹ S. C. Chan, *The problematics of modern Chinese realism*, p.103.

CHAPTER FIVE

Part I: The Debate on the Women's Question

This debate forms a backdrop to the life of the nineteen twenties. Mao Dun actively contributed to the discussions which raged in the progressive journals of the day as well as alluding richly to many of the issues in his fiction. A background is provided to place in context the discussion of Mao Dun's own contribution which follows. The remainder of this chapter examines the treatment of feminist themes in Mao Dun's fiction.

Background

Elizabeth Croll defines the 'women's question' as the term used to refer collectively to the issues surrounding the role and status of women.¹ This became the subject of great debate from the time of the explosion of the New Culture Movement, as part of the general reappraisal which grew out of the widespread disillusionment with the failure of the 1911 Revolution to bring about significant change. The inspiration for much of the new awareness came from Western ideas of individualism, freedom and self-fulfilment² which were gaining ever greater currency at this time. Female emancipation was one facet of a general concern with the emancipation of the individual from the constraints imposed by the family and by society. Above all it was the Confucian ideology, pervading all aspects of life, which was most rigorously attacked as the single greatest factor hindering the modernisation of social customs.

When Mao Dun was writing his first novellas and short stories, the total iconoclastic rejection of Confucianism was of some years' standing. In the vanguard of the open assault on Confucianism which began in 1916, was Chen Duxiu whose attacks were launched through *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*, *XQN*), which he edited. A typical indictment is contained in the article *The way of Confucius and modern life*:³

¹ *Feminism and socialism in China*, p.80.

² *ibid.*, p.6.

³ *Kongzi zhi dao yu xiandai shenghuo*, *XQN*, 2, 4, pp.3-5, partly translated in W. T. de Bary, ed., *Sources of Chinese tradition*, II, pp.153-156.

In China, the Confucianists have based their teachings on their ethical norms. Sons and wives possess neither personal individuality nor personal property. ... Those who engage in political parties all express their spirit of independent conviction. They go their own way and need not agree with their fathers or husbands. When people are bound by the Confucian teachings of filial piety and obedience to the point of the son not deviating from the father's way even three years after his death and the woman obeying not only her father and husband but also her son, how can they form their own political party and make their own choice? The movement of women's participation in politics is also an aspect of women's life in modern civilisation. ... In today's civilised society, social intercourse between men and women is a common practice. Some even say that because women have a tender nature and can temper the rudeness of men, they are necessary in public or private gatherings. It is not considered improper even for strangers to sit or dance together once they have been introduced by the host. In the way of Confucian teaching, however, 'men and women do not sit on the same mat' ... ⁴

One of the most unacceptable aspects of the inequality of Confucian morality was the failure to recognise women's humanity and personal integrity (*ren'ge*). A large number of articles sought to prove this attitude both morally wrong and biologically incorrect. Prominent among them was *Female emancipation* by Luo Jialun. He argued that as biologically and psychologically women were the equals of men, there was no reason why they should not be recognised as viable human beings. Furthermore, in order to create a healthy society and a productive economy there was no alternative to the emancipation of women from their traditional shackles. ⁵ Luo Jialun recognised that the attitudes of both men and women would have to be changed before this could be realised but he placed the final responsibility on the shoulders of women themselves. Women would need men's help, but ultimately they had to liberate themselves. Western historical precedent was also quoted. There were many potted histories of European and North American suffrage movements and accounts of recent arguments and achievements of the feminist movement since the First World War.

Having established the irrefutable principle of women's personal integrity, the traditional family became the object of sustained attack as the greatest inhibitor of *ren'ge*. Gu Chengwu's article *Thoughts on the tradi-*

⁴ *ibid.*, pp.153-155.

⁵ Luo Jialun, *XC*, 2.1, (30.10.1919) *Funü jiefang*.

tional family ⁶ is typical. Gu called the moral code forced upon women a slave morality, the values of which women themselves internalised and were therefore convinced of their inherently evil nature. By being tied to the household and having their feet crippled they had absolutely no sense of their own worth and were prevented from understanding any of the larger issues of life or society. Calls were also made for the Western model of the monogamous nuclear family to be followed. This would free the individual from the web of duties and obligations forced upon him or her by the complex structure of traditional family relationships. It would also put an end to the insidious practice of concubinage and facilitate the free expression of love.

In the context of traditional marriage as nothing more than a 'son-bearing device' ⁷ love was an alien concept: there was only the chastity code. It was an article by the contemporary Japanese poet Yosano Akiko, *On chastity*, in *XQN* ⁸ which brought the twin issues of love and chastity to the forefront of the debate on the women's question. ⁹ Questions raised by this article are summarised by Witke:

Should chastity be exacted of women only, or of both youth and women? Must chastity be observed by all people at all times? Does chastity always lead to greater freedom, goodness and happiness in human life? Does chastity belong to the spirit, to flesh, to love or to sexual intercourse, or to several of these matters at once? Can one be unchaste in mind only or is chastity violated by deed alone? Do the rules of chastity apply only to married couples? Since people all over the world continue sexual relations long after love has cooled, and they may indeed hate each other, if we hold that love is the only moral justification, must we conclude that such disaffected couples are unchaste? ¹⁰

In *Thoughts on the traditional family* ¹¹ Gu Chengwu described the traditional state of affairs whereby women not only internalised the judgement of the moral code that they were by nature evil but believed that their evil nature had its basis in sexual identity. Thus they lived in fear of the loss of chastity which would bring about eternal condemnation in

⁶ *XC*, 2.4 (1.5.1920) *Duiyu jiu jiuting de ganxiang*.

⁷ R. Witke, *Transformation of attitudes ...*, p.116.

⁸ *XQN*, 4.5 (May 1918) *Zhencao lun*, translated by Zhou Zuoren.

⁹ In *Rainbow*, this article is a major source of inspiration to Mei. See *MDQJ*, 2, p.57.

¹⁰ R. Witke, *op. cit.* pp.112-113.

¹¹ *XC*, 2.4, *op. cit.*

this world and divine punishment in the next life. In times of social instability, even the threat of rape would drive women to suicide. Gu further criticised the vanity of such action as the underlying motive of the chastity code. By committing suicide to preserve her chastity a girl would win eternal acclaim.

Hu Shi deplored the fact that articles were still being written extolling the virtuous behaviour of young girls who had committed suicide in the name of chastity and spoke out against the double standard by which the chastity code was applied only to women.¹² In response to Yosano Akiko's article, he put forward his own revolutionary reinterpretation of chastity. It should apply to both partners and should be the governing principle of sexual love. Without love, the question of chastity was irrelevant. Furthermore he emphasised the dual nature of love, that it contained both physical and spiritual aspects. On the spiritual plane, Hu Shi insisted that love should be expressed in terms of mutual respect for each other's personal integrity (*ren'ge*.)¹³ The large number of stories and articles on the subject of chastity testify to its being one of the major concerns of the era. The issue was confused. Traditionally, chastity only referred to the physical aspect of relations between the sexes as the spiritual aspect (*ie* love) had no place within the code. And yet it had been coupled with clearly defined moral principles which necessarily belonged to the spiritual sphere. The matter was further complicated by the rediscovery of love in all its aspects during the May Fourth era and the subsequent attempts to reconcile the need for freedom of expression in these matters with the need for a new moral framework of some sort.

The relationship between love and morality was especially pertinent to the related issue of 'free love' (*ziyou lian'ai*.) In the West, the term had taken on the sense of the struggle against the middle class requirement that sexual love begin and end in marriage.¹⁴ The Chinese term carried more of a sense of the 'freedom to love', the freedom to choose and fall in love with one's marriage partner. Writing in 1921, Qin Lu endorsed

¹² *XQN*, 5.1 (July 1918) *Zhencao wenti* (*The problem of chastity*.)

¹³ See R. Witke, op. cit. p.116.

¹⁴ R. Witke, op. cit. p.140.

the point made by the Swedish feminist Ellen Key that love had to be the basis of modern marriage. Thus any marriage which did not have love as its basis was immoral, and hence the necessity for free divorce as the means to dissolving an immoral union.¹⁵ Free divorce was doubly necessary to the cultural iconoclasts as the means to put an end to those marriages arranged under traditional standards, whereby 'when parents bestow a bride on their son, they are actually not giving him a wife, but are acquiring a daughter-in-law for themselves.'¹⁶

Ibsen's Nora

Of great inspirational significance in this debate was Ibsen's play *A doll's house*, known throughout China as *Nora* (*Nuola*) after its main female protagonist. Although something of Ibsen and his work had previously been known through Japanese studies and translations, the play and its author were introduced to the Chinese public in a serious and systematic manner for the first time via the journal *New Youth*, in 1918. In June of that year *XQN* published a special issue devoted to Ibsen consisting of a translation of *A doll's house*, partial translations of *An enemy of the people* and *Little Eyolf* and a biographical essay and a critical evaluation of Ibsen and his work entitled *Yibushengzhuyi* (*Ibsenism*) by Hu Shi.¹⁷ Eide summarises the plot of *A doll's house* as follows:

A doll's house (1879) describes a seemingly ideal marriage that is based on an illusion. The husband in the marriage, Helmer, treats his wife as a doll, and she, being accustomed to listening first to her father and then to her husband, is content to remain a plaything. At one point in her marriage Nora forged her father's name on a cheque in order to save her husband's life. When Helmer later attains a high position in a bank, the recipient of the false cheque, the lawyer Krogstad, attempts to blackmail Nora into persuading her husband to give him a job; if not, he will expose both her and her husband. Nora, having no conception of having committed a crime, does not fear exposure for her own sake. She believes that when exposure comes, Helmer will take the blame for her actions, demonstrating that he is a man and that he loves her. This conception of mutual sacrifice for love has hitherto made her marriage a source of joy. Nora has no intention of allowing him to shoulder the responsibility, however, and she is even prepared to take her own life rather than let him suffer. But Helmer

¹⁵ FNZZ, 7.2 (February 1921) *Ailun Kai nüshi yu qi sixiang* (*Miss Ellen Key and her thought.*)

¹⁶ Meng Zhen, XC, 1.1 (1.1.1919) *Wan wu zhi yuan* (*The root of all evil.*)

¹⁷ E. Eide, *China's Ibsen*, p.15.

falls short of her expectations. He is seen to have feet of clay and only fears for his reputation and honour. Instead of thanking her for helping to save his life, he accuses her of ruining him, and declares that she is not fit to be a mother. When the blackmailer withdraws his threat and Helmer magnanimously forgives her, the scales fall from Nora's eyes: she leaves Helmer and her children. Before she can be a wife and mother again she must find out whether she can live in a society where moral norms contradict her own conscience. ¹⁸

Hu Shi's interpretation of 'Ibsenism' in a Chinese context contained two main areas of emphasis: an attack on the way the traditional Chinese family system oppressed the individual and an affirmation of the potential of the individual to bring about social transformation. Traditional forces, which particularly shackled women, denied the possibility of cultivating an independent will and thus of developing one's own character (*ren'ge*); only after this had been achieved would the individual be able to participate usefully in society. Thus Nora's motive in leaving was not to gain advancement but to find out how she could cultivate herself in order to be of use to society. Hu emphasised Nora's own statement that she had duties to herself which surpassed those to her husband and family. Thus education, as the foundation for independence in Hu's estimation, would be the first thing to happen to Nora after she left home. Hu Shi's interpretation of Ibsen in terms of individuality set the pattern of interpretation in China for years. Furthermore, under the obvious influence of George Bernard Shaw whose *The quintessence of Ibsenism* misleadingly interpreted *A doll's house* as a work of feminism, ¹⁹ Hu's article encouraged attention to be focused on the character of Nora and the question of female emancipation. Interest came to be focused more on Nora's fate than on her potential as a human being. Indeed, as the 'Nora debate' proceeded, it became progressively further removed from the context of the play while the character of Nora was completely abstracted from her dramatic context and reduced to a one-dimensional symbol of female emancipation. E. Eide also notes that many of the participants in the debate had not even read the play. ²⁰

A doll's house ends with Nora slamming the door shut behind her, but there were so many Chinese Noras who, inspired by the play, left home

¹⁸ op. cit., pp.15-16.

¹⁹ Tam Kwok Kan, *Ibsen in China* ..., p.46.

²⁰ op. cit., p.90.

without the means to support themselves, that a long-running debate grew up about what would really happen to a Chinese Nora after she left home. One of the opening shots in the debate was fired by Lu Xun in a talk given at the Beijing Women's Normal College on December 26th 1923, entitled *What happens after Nora leaves home?*²¹ The importance of this talk is its influence: it set the tone for all future discussion on the subject and includes Lu Xun's often-cited conclusion on Nora's future:

... by logical deduction, Nora actually has two alternatives only: to go bad or return to her husband. It is like the case of a caged bird: of course there is no freedom in the cage, but if it leaves the cage there are hawks, cats and other hazards outside; while if imprisonment has atrophied its wings, or if it has forgotten how to fly, there is certainly nowhere it can go.²²

He insists that the reason why she must remain a puppet under the control of others is because of her lack of economic resources, and thereby of independence:

Thus the crucial thing for Nora is money, or — to give it a more high-sounding name — economic resources. Of course money cannot buy freedom, but freedom can be sold for money. Human beings have one great drawback, which is that they often get hungry. To remedy this drawback and to avoid being puppets, the most important thing in society today seems to be economic rights. First there must be a fair sharing out between men and women in the family; secondly men and women must have equal rights in society.

Unfortunately I have no idea how we are to get hold of these rights; all I know is that we have to fight for them. We may even have to fight harder for these than for political rights.²³

Ten years later, in an article entitled *On women's liberation* Lu Xun indicated the limited amount of progress which had been made but insisted that the question of women's economic independence remained unsolved. He wrote of women factory workers 'whom the bosses like to employ because their pay is low and they do as they are told' and also of the 'bitter lamentations of professional women and the gibes of critics at the New Women.'²⁴ Lu Xun spoke of the reforms which had taken place as just so much window-dressing, comparing the position of women who had entered

²¹ Translated in *CL*, 1973, 9, pp.23-29.

²² *ibid.*, p.24, adapted.

²³ *ibid.*, p.26.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.31.

society to that of a caged bird which has been released but is only made to perch on a pole: its status might appear to have changed but it was still the plaything of men. His call for 'persistent tenacious struggle' ten years earlier had become a more urgent demand to 'fight unceasingly for liberation.'

Lu Xun's pessimism about the fate of a Chinese Nora was born of a realistic awareness of the obstacles she would face immediately after slamming the door shut behind her, which contrasted with the 'romantic gesture of rebellion' which Nora came to symbolise. However, others were convinced that Nora should not leave home at all. Opening the debate which continued for some weeks through the pages of *Guowen Zhoubao* (*National News Weekly, GWZB*) in early 1934, Juan Bing questioned the relationship between economic independence and happiness. The first was not necessarily the means to the second. He also pointed out that this was not a matter which related solely to the question of women's emancipation, but expressed concern that women's pursuit of personal happiness had serious implications for the propriety of relations between the sexes, which was the true basis for happiness. He claimed to endorse women's right to social and economic independence but proceeded to argue that their rigorous pursuit of these had upset the harmony of family life.²⁵ This was because traditional morals had been rejected in favour of the new Western morality. According to this, marriage should be based on mutual love between the partners but the high incidence of divorce indicated how difficult this was to achieve because of the inappropriateness of this new morality for Chinese social behaviour. Juan Bing claimed not to hold that the traditional framework for relations between the sexes was preferable but went on to criticise the Western marriage ideal as having no basis in morality while traditional marriage, which, 'although it had the air of a business deal,' had a solid moral foundation because it incorporated obligations of constancy. Western values also encouraged the mistaken idea that happiness could be achieved by the pursuit of material and sensual pleasures. His advice to the Chinese Nora who had left home was to remember that true happiness

²⁵ Tam Kwok Kan appears to have been duped by the strength of Juan Bing's own rhetoric when he states that Juan Bing did not oppose women's emancipation or her right to leave home. See *Ibsen in China...*, p.249.

was achieved through the recognition of one's moral responsibilities and the exercise of restraint. Thus she should return home or remain there, not, he claimed, to be a 'virtuous wife and good mother' but 'to cooperate with her husband and love him.'²⁶ Thus Juan Bing revealed himself to be a true defender of the traditional order whose greatest concern was that the delicate balance between the individual and his obligations to society, upset by the new values from the West, would be restored.

A series of articles appeared in subsequent issues of *GWZB* in reaction to Juan Bing's provocative assertions. Jiang Jiping strongly opposed Juan Bing's views on traditional morality, pointing out that traditional marriages caused the suffering of both parties which had adverse effects on society as a whole. The problem could not be solved by restraint as this would only store up greater pain and suffering for the future. However difficult it was to leave, Jiang felt a Chinese Nora should do so, and if she had already left, the greatest suffering would be caused by forcing her to return.²⁷

Wen Wan continued the indictment of Juan Bing's preference for a traditional moral view. He whole-heartedly endorsed the link between economic rights and happiness: economic independence and freedom were at the heart of the women's question. The reason why so few women had achieved these rights and had undergone great hardship in the process was because society was still dominated by the old thinking. It was still dominated by men, and newly departed Chinese Noras would probably find life more difficult than it had been at home. But Wen urged them to be resilient. Concepts of morality evolved according to time and place: the old moral norms were no longer appropriate today. Wen emphasised the necessity of ensuring that the new morality would take root rather than trying to restore the rotten morals of a past age. Thus, with regard to relations between the sexes, marriage should be on the basis of love not on obligations of 'right behaviour.' If love cooled or was found not to be

²⁶ *GWZB*, 11.11 (19.3.1934) *Nuola zou hou jiu jing zenyang?* (What really happened when Nora left?)

²⁷ *GWZB*, 11.13 (2.4.1934) *'Nuola zou hou jiu jing zenyang' du hou* (After having read 'What really happened when Nora left?')

present in a relationship, forced constancy was itself immoral. ²⁸

Gao Lei applauded Nora's independent spirit and resolution but expressed concern over the appropriateness of impulsive action in a personal quest for self-fulfilment without due regard for one's collective responsibility to promote social reform. China needed some brave Noras to take a revolutionary lead and if there was no alternative then it was right for China's Noras to leave. However, women had to share the responsibility for reforming society and they should reflect very carefully before taking this drastic step because of the danger that they might simply come to grief and add to society's problems. Thus it was more profitable to consider the reasons for Nora's departure so that the problem could be tackled at the root. Nora left because she was undervalued by her husband Helmer. Chinese society was full of Noras and Helmers and the Helmers were as much products of traditional society as the Noras were. Helmer was just as much a victim as Nora was and the blame should not all be put on his shoulders. Rather than running away from the problem Nora should stay and work with Helmer for a new society. For his part, Helmer should awaken and reform his thinking so that the traditional structures which defined relations between them could be banished forever. Gao looked to education as the means to effect long-term changes of attitude towards women's worth and their place in society. ²⁹

Jiang Jiping also examined the causes of Nora's departure. He pinpointed her 'spiritual dissatisfaction' (*xinli bu man*) and suggested that Ibsen himself had provided a solution to the problem in the play *The lady from the sea*. When a former fiancé returns and begs her to come away with him her husband gives her complete freedom to make her own decision. Having been given this responsibility for her own destiny she decides to stay. ³⁰

Whereas these male contributors discussed the abstract principles behind the Nora question, the female contributors were more concerned with

²⁸ GWZB, 11.14 (9.4.1934) Du 'Nuola zou hou jiujiang zenyang' hou (After reading 'What really happened when Nora left?')

²⁹ GWZB, 11.18 (7.5.1934) Guanyu Nuola chuzou (On Nora's departure.)

³⁰ GWZB, 11.13, op. cit.

its practical consequences.³¹ Xia Yingzhe emphasised Nora's heroic qualities: she was characterised by awakened thought and resistent action. Her cause was human rights and her own individuality and *ren'ge*. She should believe in herself and not be broken by social pressures or allow herself to be taken advantage of. As such she would be an example to others. Xia shows an over-optimistic attitude to the possibilities of finding employment: men would be forced to buy in the services once performed by their unawakened dolls. Once Nora had achieved financial security she would have complete control over her life and be able to participate in society as a real human being.³²

Yu Lishen's approach was much more realistic. She pointed out that most Chinese Noras were ordinary women not heroines and the obstacles they faced in a male-dominated society were great. Jobs and positions were created on the basis of male interests and it was still considered immoral in some quarters that men and women should work alongside one another. The backward nature of the Chinese economy did not allow women true economic independence and yet this was the necessary means to freedom. Yu insisted that Nora would achieve nothing before far-reaching social reforms had been carried out and it was this to which she should devote all her energies. She should work for financial independence and equality for all women and concern herself less with the material benefits of emancipation. Yu was well aware that many Chinese Noras lacked the means and the strength for a protracted struggle. She exhorted them to find a place of safety because to return home would be the ultimate acknowledgement of defeat and would hinder the wider cause.³³

Both Xia and Yu were at pains to defend Nora's action against the charge of immorality and selfishness. They argued that women could only benefit society if they were recognised as independent human beings. Traditional moral standards allowed no place either for the recognition of female *ren'ge* or the concept of mutual love. These were the key to women's

³¹ E. Eide, *China's Ibsen*, p.91.

³² GWZB, 11.15 (16.4.1934) *Lixiang zhong de Nuola* (*The ideal Nora*.)

³³ GWZB, 11.16 (23.4.1934) *Nuola tuoli jiating de yuanyin yu zou hou zenyang de wenti* (*The reason why Nora left home and the question of what happened to her afterwards*.)

fulfilment as they were the expression of the equal worth of the sexes. This was the moral standard by which Nora's action should be judged.

This exchange serves to evaluate the progress on the women's question which had been made during the previous decade or more. It is clear that even those with more conservative views had been influenced by the debate over the past ten years and felt obliged to couch their traditional inclinations in the language of the new age. But it is also clear that such a strategy did not fool those who continued to work for women's rights and to build on the progress which had already been won. By the mid thirties it was also the case that much of the idealism which accompanied Nora's 'romantic gesture' had fallen away, to be replaced by a much more practical and pragmatic approach. Society had to be confronted as it was, not as many Noras might (justifiably) wish it to be. In the light of this exchange, let us turn to Mao Dun's own contribution to the debate.

Mao Dun's Contribution to the Debate

Mao Dun made a significant contribution to this debate on the women's question in the early 1920s. The main two journals expressly aimed at a female readership to which Mao Dun contributed during the early nineteen twenties were *Funü Zazhi* (FNZZ, *The Ladies Journal*), a Commercial Press publication, and *Funü Pinglun* (FNPL, *The Female Review*), a weekly supplement to the *Minguo Ribao* (*The Republican Daily News*). Later in 1924 when FNPL was no more, he also wrote for *Funü Zhoubao*, (FNZB, *The Women's Weekly*) which was also a supplement to the *Republican Daily News* and was under the editorship of the prominent female CCP activist and founder of the CCP Women's Department, Xiang Jingyu.³⁴ Around the middle of the decade Mao Dun ceased writing articles which dealt specifically with the women's question. By this time, not only was he heavily involved in political activities on the ground, but attitudes towards women's issues within the Party had taken on a different emphasis. Although women's groups continued to be established under the auspices of

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.214. For a short biography of Xiang Jingyu see R. Witke, *The transformation of attitudes towards women during the May Fourth era of modern China*, pp.283-288. Other treatments include E. Croll, *op. cit.*, pp.119-120 and Helen F. Snow, *Women in modern China*, pp.245-49.

the Party, it was generally believed that class struggle was the paramount concern, regardless of sex. The low position of Chinese women was due to a backward social system and their emancipation could only be brought about by changing the social structure to free men and women alike. Mao Dun's autobiography (*WZGDL*), provides much information about his involvement both in activities for women organised by the fledgling CCP in Shanghai and in the women's press. He describes in some detail his close involvement at an executive level with the Shanghai Party organisation from its inception. Of interest to this discussion is his position on the Committee for the National Movement (*Minguo Yundong Weiyuanhui*). This was an organ which coordinated the activities of all sections of society: workers, peasants, traders, students and women in the months leading up to the May Thirtieth Movement. At the end of September 1923 the Committee gave Xiang Jingyu and Mao Dun special responsibility for women's affairs. Mao Dun explained that at that time, as head of the women's section of the Party and organiser of political work among women factory workers, Xiang Jingyu was effectively in charge of women's affairs within the Party. Modestly, he attributed his being chosen by Xiang to work in this area to his articles on women's liberation in *FNPL* ³⁵ but in fact his interest in women's affairs, particularly in the field of education, had already been established on a very personal level with his encouragement of his own wife, who was originally uneducated, to study. ³⁶

His interest in women's education was translated into action at the end of 1921 when he became a teacher of English at the Plain People's Girl's School (*Pingmin Nuxuexiao*) run by the Party, with Li Da as principal. ³⁷ It is worth noting that *pingmin xuexiao* were established by the Party to provide ordinary working people with a basic education and political awareness, reflecting a greater concern with class than had been the case previously. This shift of emphasis is also apparent in Mao Dun's articles, as we shall see. Plain people's schools were run on a work-study basis and Mao Dun described the curriculum of this particular school in the following

³⁵ *WZGDL*, I, p.210.

³⁶ See Chapter One.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.195. For more information on *pingmin xuexiao* see R. Witke, *Transformation of attitudes ...*, pp.237-46.

terms:

... as well as English, a general knowledge of science, literature and so on were also taught; but the main subject was the women's movement. 38

He also explained how, since there were no more than twenty or thirty regular students attending classes at the school (one of whom was Ding Ling), attempts were made to attract female workers to come to night school, where, apart from literacy classes, there were discussions about 'how the capitalists exploit the workers, how the workers should unite and so on.' 39

The fruits of these efforts to politicise the female as well as the male work force were seen during the strikes by female textile workers just before the May Thirtieth Incident. Mao Dun became more concerned with working class women and emphasised the need for educated women to take on a leadership role among working women after he began to work with Xiang Jingyu. His personal activities reflected this need for education on two fronts. Apart from his work in the *pingmin xuexiao* he also taught in the departments of English and Chinese literature at Shanghai University. 40 In his autobiography he mentions how by 1925 his wife Dezhi had also become involved with the work among the women workers (*nügong gongzuo*) after encouragement from her friend Zhang Zhilua (wife of Qu Qiubai) who had also persuaded her to join the Party. For her own part Dezhi encouraged Ye Shengtao's wife Hu Molin also to become involved. 41 In the heady days of the May Fourth Movement the women's question was first recognised and made a subject of debate by men. It continued to evoke a depth of commitment in both sexes which has been likened to current campaigns for racial equality rather than to the women's movement in the West. 42 Nevertheless, it would seem that the activities of their wives might have been a contributory factor in the continued interest of so many

38 *ibid.*

39 *ibid.*

40 *ibid.*, p.198. Shanghai University was also run by the Party and had risen from humble beginnings to rival the intellectual activities of Beijing University.

41 *ibid.*, p.223.

42 R. Witke, *Mao Tse-tung, women and suicide* in M. B. Young ed., *Women in China*, p.8.

CCP activists in this issue.

Mao Dun was first invited to contribute articles 'on women's liberation and related issues' by Wang Chunrong the editor of *FNZZ* in 1920. This was in an attempt to bring this rather conservative journal, which had upheld the doctrine of 'virtuous wife and good mother' (*xianqi liangmu zhuyi*) for the previous five years, more into line with the new thought tide.⁴³ *FNPL* was established the following year.

The main intention of his writing on this subject was to bring Chinese women to a greater awareness both of their predicament and of the means to progress, an important aspect of this work being to inform readers of the latest developments in the women's movement in the West and to introduce the writings of prominent Western writers on women's issues. Although Mao Dun was aware that much of the material which came from the West could bring Chinese youth to disillusionment if it was read without taking the social background of China into account, in the case of feminism and the women's movement he encouraged his readers to keep abreast of the latest trends. He expressed concern at the widespread lack of proper understanding of the issues and took great pains to correct misconceptions and educate his readership.

From the outset Mao Dun expressed a wariness of feminism as it had manifested itself in turn-of-the-century Europe, yet he insisted that those who wished to investigate the women's question should first acquaint themselves with its historical background in order to understand better the context within which the Chinese debate was taking place. In particular, he stressed the significance of the political and social background and the relationship between the 'new thought tide of democracy' and the concept of women's rights. He also complained strongly that there was little systematic or accurate material in Chinese on this subject.⁴⁴

Mao Dun's own efforts towards rectifying this state of affairs included many translations and introductory articles. A significant article in *Dong-*

⁴³ *WZGDL*, I, pp.135-6.

⁴⁴ *FNPL*, 2 (10.8.1921) *Shu bao jieshao (1): Funü yao de shenme (Book review (1): What women want.)*

fang Zazhi (*The Eastern Miscellany*, *DFZZ*)⁴⁵ describes the nature of the Chinese women's movement and puts it in the context of the world movement. In particular he traced the orientation away from a preoccupation with suffrage towards a greater concern with women's welfare which had occurred both in the West and in China. He noted the strength of the Chinese women's suffrage movement at the time of the establishment of the Republic but found it to be a single issue movement which paid no attention to the position of women in society or the unequal demands which traditional morality made on men and women. Its prominence at the time marked a sincere belief in the concept of representative government after the imperial régime had been deposed and also in suffrage itself as a means to equality and freedom for both men and women. This showed the influence of contemporaneous developments in England and the United States, Mao Dun explained. Furthermore, the female leaders of this movement were from families of the higher classes who knew nothing of personal or economic hardship and who could conceive of no alternative to the political dominance of their own class.

There was general disillusionment following the failure of the Xinhai revolution to effect the kind of changes which had been hoped for. There was also a general realisation of the futility of seeking political reform at a time when any semblance of representative government had long since crumbled away. The contemporary Chinese women's movement had become much more concerned with 'reform from the roots' (*genben gaige*.) Its aim was to improve the lives of all women, and thereby to promote social advance. Such a reorientation had been brought about by the advent of the new thought tide which, fuelled by widespread disillusionment, had encouraged a greater awareness of the needs of all classes in society, and focused on effecting fundamental change, particularly with regard to the rights of the individual. In addition, there were increasing economic pressures which did not only affect the lowest classes.⁴⁶ Such developments challenged existing social structures to such an extent that political reform

⁴⁵ *DFZZ*, 17.3 (10.2.1920) *Shijie liang da xi de furen yundong he Zhongguo de furen yundong* (*The two main divisions of the world women's movement and the Chinese women's movement*.)

⁴⁶ See *MD*, 2.4 (15.1.1921) *Jiating guizhi de yanjiu* (*A study of family reform*.)

had to take second place to the more pressing needs of educational and economic equality, the reform of traditional marriage conventions and of the traditional family system, and, above all, the creation of a new morality which upheld the equality of the sexes. Mao Dun particularly emphasised this last point:

I believe that the subjugation of Chinese women is completely due to a failure of morality. Of old, women have been bound tightly by distorted moral dogma. Now that we are examining the women's question in terms of education and economics it is even more imperative that we should pay earnest attention to the question of morality. If we do not first establish the concept of a new morality, daily discussion of the problems of social relations between men and women or of marriage will be nothing more than empty talk and could be dangerous. ⁴⁷

Thus it was with some concern that he confronted a resurgence of interest in the question of suffrage. The principle of suffrage was right, he counselled, but in the Chinese political context he had no confidence at all that radical liberation could come via political reform. Would Confucian moral inequality, restricted educational opportunities and all the other causes of women's low status be solved by obtaining the vote? ⁴⁸ In February 1920 Mao Dun felt that the future of the cause was uncertain and could only be saved by a continued reorientation away from concerns with suffrage and a greater interest in the many obstacles to women's emancipation within Chinese society. China should not follow blindly precedents set in the West but should be attuned to the needs of her own society.

In order to encourage this Mao Dun examined the nature of the philosophies of various writers on women's issues more closely. Firstly, he differentiated between a socialist and a feminist approach. Socialists interpreted the women's question in terms of the emancipation of woman as a social being (*shehui de ren*) and as part of general social reform for the good of all. Feminists emphasised her right to be a free and fulfilled individual. ⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *JFGZ*, 2.4 (10.2.1920) *Ping nüzi can zheng yundong* (A review of the movement for women's suffrage.) One is reminded of Mei's travelling companion in the opening chapter of *Rainbow*, Wen Taitai, who believes in suffrage. Much humorous mileage is made of this character, thereby caricaturing her views, by an extended description of Mei's attempts always to stand up wind of Wen Taitai, whose chignon, pinned up in the traditional manner, emitted a foul smell.

⁴⁹ See *JFGZ*, 2.15 (1.8.1920) *Ping ertong gongyu wenti* (A review of the question of

Mao Dun expressed his personal preference for the socialists' long-term aim of complete social reform. However, quoting Bebel's evaluation in *Women under socialism* that there was little prospect of replacing existing oppressive structures in the short term, he recognised that the acute situation of China's women demanded immediate attention.⁵⁰ Thus he turned to examine the various feminist alternatives. He identified two contrasting trends. The characteristic feature of the first he defined as being the intention to extinguish the parameters of sex difference and to consider the needs of mankind as a whole, whilst that of the other was to emphasise the differences between the sexes and to promote fulfilled motherhood.⁵¹

The first group included such writers as C. P. Gilman and P. Schreiner and held that the family was of secondary significance to the individual. The requirements of the individual were paramount to this group, to the extent that the family might cease to exist, and love was seen purely in terms of the expression of individuality. He took the ideas of Gilman as an example, describing how she was strongly in favour of women's right to work and also her encouragement of mutual help and understanding between the sexes. He then turned to her views on marriage: she did not oppose spinsterhood but insisted on monogamy (*yi fu yi qi*) with no remarriage and on equality of moral standards. Gilman also discussed social conditioning and how gender roles are defined by the way children are brought up but Mao Dun was less inspired by these ideas. Most important was her advocacy of economic independence for women which included the state education of children, maternity allowances and so on.⁵² Many of Mao Dun's ideas about the socialisation of much of the drudgery assigned to women appear to have been borrowed from Gilman's *Women and economics*.⁵³

The second group Mao Dun associated with the writings of Ellen Key who emphasised the different natures of men and women and whose perspective was more spiritual than economic. She held that women should

the state rearing of children) and *MD*, 2.4, op. cit.

⁵⁰ *MD*, *ibid.*

⁵¹ *FNPL*, 13 (26.10.1921) *Suowei nǚxìngzhuyì de liàng jíduān pài* (Two extremes in so-called feminist thought.)

⁵² *FNPL*, 13, *ibid.*

⁵³ See A. Rossi ed., *The feminist papers ...*, pp.592-593.

enjoy rights and freedoms equal to those enjoyed by men in order that they could control the direction of their own lives – active participation in society being an option rather than an obligation. She upheld the sanctity of fulfilled motherhood, emphasising the special skills for this vocation which she insisted only women possessed. Moreover, she insisted on the paramountcy of the right to motherhood even outside marriage and was, at the same time, a strong advocate of freedom of divorce and equality of moral standards.⁵⁴ Since motherhood is not glorified in the Chinese tradition, there is a sense that this redefinition of motherhood was attractive to campaigners against traditional marriage conventions. However, Mao Dun was aware of the possibility of conservative elements twisting these views for their own ends. He warned that because Ellen Key and her followers believed that nothing should impede the fulfilment of a woman's first vocation (the proper upbringing of her children) and did not promote economic independence for women or their participation in politics, their views were welcomed by conservative groups who opposed women's entry into society. So he took pains to point out her more radical promotion of free divorce and equal moral standards. Furthermore, her belief in spiritual love as a pivot of morality was a concept alien to the Chinese traditionalists.

Mao Dun took care to give a clear introduction to these various thinkers on women's issues, giving a balanced treatment to the different alternatives. He made translations from works by Gilman, Key, suffragist writers, Bebel and others. His own views are somewhat eclectic with borrowings from rival philosophies – details of these are given below in relation to specific topics. Yet rarely does Mao Dun give an insight into what he believed true liberation in a general sense might mean for Chinese women, being far too preoccupied with the practicalities of its material aspects. Nevertheless, there are glimpses.

The Meaning of Liberation

In an article in *FNZZ* entitled *Liberated women and women's libera-*

⁵⁴ *JFGZ*, 2.15 (1.8.1920) *Ping ertong gongyu wenti* (A review of the question of the state rearing of children.)

tion⁵⁵ Mao Dun discussed the emancipation of women in terms of the equality of all mankind: all slaves must be freed, including all women enslaved by Chinese tradition. They must be given human rights and become dignified human beings, as men are, and stand shoulder to shoulder with them. Yet this article shows that even as early as 1919 Mao Dun was not preoccupied exclusively with the issue of individual rights. 'Duty' was the obligation of 'right.' Enjoying the latter, one must fulfil the former and this included the upholding of modern culture. Bearing the responsibility for social advance was the responsibility of everyone and taking up this responsibility was part of being liberated. Traditional society did not allow women such responsibilities but Mao Dun urged men to do so in order that Chinese women might be liberated. For their part, Chinese women should learn how to bear such responsibilities. Only then could there be true liberation (*zhen jiefang*.)

Mao Dun insisted that there should not be an exclusive preoccupation with the issue of women's rights, emphasising that the women's question was part of the wider problem of social reform.⁵⁶ 'Why do we advocate women's liberation?', he asked the readership of *FNZZ*. 'For humanistic reasons? No! For social progress.'⁵⁷ Women must be liberated precisely because of the need for social advance, not because of the way they had suffered in the past. Furthermore, true liberation would allow women to be recognised as and to recognise themselves as human beings (*ren*) rather than a sub-species. But this did not necessarily mean that women should simply learn all that men do; other aspects of liberation included freedom from physical and mental shackles and from self-generated spiritual strictures. It was as much the responsibility of women to participate in their own liberation as it was for men to encourage it.⁵⁸

Distinguishing between the material and the spiritual aspects of lib-

⁵⁵ *FNZZ*, 5.11 (15.11.1919) *Jiefang de funü yu funü de jiefang*.

⁵⁶ *FNZZ*, 6.3 (5.3.1920) *Women zenyang yubeile qu tan funü jiefang wenti?* (*How should we prepare to discuss the question of women's liberation?*)

⁵⁷ *FNZZ*, 6.1 (5.1.1920) *Funü jiefang wenti de jianshe fangmian* (*A constructive approach to the question of women's liberation.*)

⁵⁸ *FNZZ*, 6.1 (5.1.1920) *Du Shaonian Zhongguo funü hao* (*After reading the special women's issue of SNZG.*)

eration, he wrote of the latter that unequal moral standards in favour of men were the first thing to be reformed.⁵⁹ But he explained that what he envisioned was not free sexual licence for either side, or the reverse of the current situation, *ie* unequal moral standards in favour of women. The means to progress were two-fold; it was necessary to learn from the experiences of the West and keep up to date with current writings, but it was equally necessary to investigate thoroughly the true nature of the Chinese situation. Only then would it be possible to determine the relevance of Western experience to Chinese needs and a suitable direction for future progress. Even though Mao Dun was generally quick to supply constructive solutions to the issues of the day and wrote with evident conviction, he always sought to impress upon his readership the enormity and difficulty of the task. In this typical case he insisted upon a high standard of scholarship and observation; anything less would be tantamount to a betrayal of the whole cultural movement.

In the following sections various themes from Mao Dun's contributions to the debate on the women's question are explored. Examples of his literary treatment of these themes are also given. Because *Rainbow* is Mao Dun's most self-conscious attempt to encapsulate these ideas in literary form, it yields the largest number of examples.

The Confucian Legacy

In an article entitled *Views on the discussion of women's status*,⁶⁰ Mao Dun pursued this problem by examining the difficulty many experienced in coming to terms with the actual situation of Chinese women. Drawing on his reading of realistic literary theory, he encouraged his reader to look at reality (*xianshi*) where he would find that the majority of women were in a position no better than that of prostitutes. Rehearsing the familiar arguments, Mao Dun warned against the traditional Chinese concern with face which obscured the rottenness of what was beneath the surface. A woman was expected to maintain high standards of purity, but consoling

⁵⁹ FNZZ, 6.3 (5.3.1920) *Women zenyang yubeile qu tan funü jiefang wenti?* (How should we prepare to discuss the question of women's liberation?)

⁶⁰ FNPL, 28 (15.2.1922) *Duiyu 'nüzi diwei' bianlun de zagan.*

oneself with illusory beauty because the pain of ugly reality was too great was a denial of the possibility of change. Realisation of the truth, however painful, and the reasons for it, was the first step towards liberation. A good number of Mao Dun's articles sought to promote such an awareness — that the moral standards which had prevailed for hundreds of years were no longer acceptable. One way he did this was to try to bring women out of what he termed their 'anaesthetised state.'⁶¹ Drawing on the 'Nora' debate, he described how historically men had used both 'hard' and 'soft' measures to maintain their dominance. Woman would be kept prisoner like a criminal, but at the same time she would be praised as a delicate flower or a little bird which needed careful tending. Thus man defiled the truth. Everything in a woman's life was controlled by men: men insisted that women were only fit for gentle work, not for study, yet they put on a kindly exterior, praising women's gentle, weak nature. At a time before the awakening of female consciousness women were satisfied with this state of affairs, but in a changing world there could only be contempt for such behaviour. He warned against the view, still expressed, that women were by nature weak and refuted it saying: 'No! It is the anaesthetic effect which man has had on woman's spirit.'⁶² These remarks would undoubtedly have recalled the play *A doll's house* to the minds of many readers. Mao Dun's description of women's treatment by men as *bei wannong* (being played with) under the name of respect is reminiscent of Hu Shi's description of Nora's treatment by her husband in his article *Ibsenism*.⁶³ More obviously parallel is Nora's husband's use of nicknames for his wife such as 'my little bird,' 'my little squirrel' and so on.

Mao Dun was as concerned to bring women to an awareness of the nature of their Confucian legacy as he was to enlighten men to theirs. The 'anaesthetic effect' which such attitudes had on women's own perceptions is graphically illustrated in the short story *Suicide*. Miss Huan's lover has been called away to fight for the revolutionary cause, leaving her pregnant and unable to face the wrath which *she believes* will be the reaction to the

⁶¹ *FNPL*, 8 (21.8.1921) *Nanzi gei nüzi de mayao* (*The anaesthetic effect which men have had on women.*)

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *XQN*, 4.6 (June 1918).

truth of her predicament of her family in particular and society in general. Several of Mao Dun's male characters incorporate obvious confucian values. One such is Junshi who is gently caricatured in *Creation*. What Junshi finds most difficult to accept is the fact that he no longer owns Xianxian; her exterior belongs to him but her mind no longer does:

But at that moment a painful thought distracted him: that soft, warm breast, that loveable face, those brows quick to frown, those enchanting eyes, those captivating lips like cherries, in fact, all of her enchanting whole belonged to him, truly belonged to him. But, deep down beneath all of this there was a heart which even now he could feel beating — but this heart could not be considered as belonging to him. ⁶⁴

She used to soak up everything he said like a sponge but now she is as resistant as iron. This assumption of possession was one of the most hated aspects of the Confucian regulation of relations between the sexes. It is considered in more detail below in relation to Mao Dun's portrayal of the inhumane treatment of women in society such that it offers "paradigms of inhumanity."

Education

If women were to be instrumental in their own emancipation, they had to be brought to a fuller understanding of the nature of their oppression and of the means to bring about change. Mao Dun's own activities in the field testify to his belief in women's education as a force for change.

In *A constructive approach to the question of women's liberation*,⁶⁵ Mao Dun deplored the backward state of women's education in China. Historically, education was the bastion of Confucian orthodoxy, thus the purpose of women's education was to produce good wives and daughters to fulfil traditional roles rather than to produce rounded 'people' for society. Any system which perpetuated those values would make talk of women's liberation self-defeating. Moreover, schools available to women still did not reflect modern aims and requirements because in general they were for the upper classes and simply turned out 'stuck up little hussies.' Expressing views which were extreme, even in an era of radical thinking, Mao Dun

⁶⁴ *MDQJ*, 8, p.8.

⁶⁵ *FNZZ*, 6.1 (5.1.1920) *Funü jiefang wenti de jianshe fangmian*.

called for coeducation from the universities down to the primary schools, with greater access for all classes. He also pointed out that although education was no longer a major issue for the women's movement in the West, without its modernisation and greater accessibility the movement would not have progressed.⁶⁶ He described how the movement for women's education had been spearheaded by middle class women but insisted that the position of all classes of women had benefitted as attitudes began to change. In order to provide encouragement for those who were labouring to improve educational opportunities for women in China, Mao Dun also gave potted histories of successful campaigns for greater educational equality in European countries and the United States.

The greatest obstacle to progress on this and other fronts were prevailing male attitudes. Whereas the majority of commentators tended to blame the bankruptcy of Chinese society in general for the disadvantaged position of women within it, Mao Dun was more scathing in his criticism of the attitudes of his own sex. For centuries men had denied women access to education. Women's lack of knowledge left them benighted and weak. Knowledge was a powerful weapon used by the strong to subordinate the weak, and naturally the strong would not surrender such an advantage lightly. Men limited the scope of women's activities to the home, so even with awareness of their plight, women were powerless to bring about change. Only more recently, under heavy economic pressure, were men forced to allow their women out into society to work. Ever since, the demands for equality of educational opportunity had continued to grow louder.⁶⁷

In the early years of the decade Mao Dun was cautious as to the rate at which progress on the women's question could be made. There could be no sudden entry into society for Chinese women or the forces of reaction would be too greatly antagonised. This was a time of preparation. Lack of elementary knowledge was women's historical legacy which should now be redressed. In this, Mao Dun recognised that the greatest responsibility

⁶⁶ FNZZ, 9.1 (1.1.1923) *Funü jiaoyu yundong gailuo* (An overview of the movement for women's education.)

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

would fall to educated women whom he encouraged to work with their more disadvantaged sisters and to spread the ideas of the new thought tide. Only then would women be able to participate in the processes of their emancipation.⁶⁸ Mao Dun warned against impatience: independence without a sound educational support would not lead to true emancipation.⁶⁹

As examined in more detail below, the novel *Rainbow* gives much insight into the importance of education in the development from ‘young lady’ (*xiaojie*) to passionate revolutionary. Among Mao Dun’s early works, the short story *Creation* also offers a positive endorsement of the value of education, especially to the cause of women’s liberation. Junshi supervises every step of Xianxian’s development, enjoying immeasurably being the source of all wisdom and, almost, the custodian of her soul. However, the pupil goes beyond the moderate, conservative limitations of the teacher, finally challenging him to catch up and go forward with her.

Economic Independence

Economic forces had propelled working class women out of the home in an unprecedented way. At the same time education had brought new horizons to women of the more privileged classes, opening their minds to new opportunities. However, as Lu Xun had described, many areas of society remained barred to them. Mao Dun worked both with women students and with female factory workers yet he tended to write about the needs of women as a unified group. In 1923 in *FNZZ* he described the benefits to ‘all women [who] constitute a single class’ (*funü quanti shi yi ge jieji*) when even some of their number gained access to education.⁷⁰

First it was necessary to prove women’s capability for economic independence. In an examination of traditional rural life Mao Dun noted the way women in the countryside had often made an equal contribution

⁶⁸ *FNZZ*, 5.11 (15.11.1919) *Jiefang de funü yu funü de jiefang* (*Liberated women and women’s liberation*.)

⁶⁹ *FNZZ*, 6.5 (5.5.1920) *Jiating fuwu yu jingji duli* (*Service to the family and economic independence*.)

⁷⁰ *FNZZ*, 9.1 (1.1.1923) *Funü jiaoyu yundong gailüe* (*An overview of the movement for women’s education*.) In the early years of the decade Mao Dun appears not to have reconciled the demands of individual liberation from which the women’s movement was born with his own preference for socialism.

to the domestic economy either by doing the same work as men in the fields or through cottage industry at home, thereby proving their ability to seek a livelihood as not inferior to their menfolk. Some women without children even became servants and supported themselves independently. Nevertheless, in general, women were denied access to the fruits of their labours because of the slave status ⁷¹ accorded to them by the 'male-orientated system of cannibalistic Confucianism.' Thus the question of women's economic independence depended upon changing the attitudes enshrined within the Confucian tradition. ⁷²

Yet it was in his evaluation of the situation in the cities that the needs of different classes of women were brought into sharper relief. In an examination of the lot of women factory workers, Mao Dun revealed his already-forming socialist inclinations when he identified the economic organisation of society along capitalist lines as the greatest obstacle to their economic independence. Whereas in the countryside the right of women to work was not called into question, in the cities it was often denied even if their skills were equal to those of male workers. Furthermore, women workers were mercilessly exploited in those industries in which they were employed in large numbers. ⁷³ Mao Dun particularly mentioned the exploitation of uneducated female workers in the Shanghai silk filatures of whose working conditions he had first hand knowledge. ⁷⁴ Mao Dun's conclusion in 1921 was that in order to improve the situation of working women, there should be greater emphasis on the reform of the economic organisation of society because this might also go some way towards changing attitudes. Economic pressures and demographic changes had already forced women into the growing number of factories in order to supplement, or indeed to provide, the family income. Mao Dun hoped that acceptance of their right to take on this responsibility would challenge traditional attitudes towards women's capabilities.

⁷¹ Reflects the commonly borrowed interpretation of Nietzsche's division of morality into two types, noble and slave.

⁷² FNPL, 3 (17.8.1921) *Funü jingji duli taolun* (A discussion of the independence of women.)

⁷³ FNPL, 3, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ FNZZ, 6.1 (5.1.1920) *Funü jiefang wenti de jianshe fangmian* (A constructive approach to the question of women's liberation.)

However, his explorations into socialist theory caused confusion when he still singled out the needs of women workers as a special case. In *FNZZ* he gives a simplistic vision of an ideal socialist society where wealth would no longer constitute the means to economic power and so no longer represent the distinction between oppressor and oppressed. A set of new relationships would have to be defined. Instead of including the female portion of the work force within this framework, he extends the analogy to male exploitation of women. Women were denied access to wealth because they were denied access to the fruits of their labours. Yet, that their domestic labours were unpaid was not in itself a sign of slavery. Rather, it was a question of attitude. This relationship also needed redefinition.⁷⁵ Here Mao Dun touches on the central contradiction between socialism and feminism: the first relationship being defined by class, the second by gender alone. Failure to address fully the class consideration at this stage inevitably brought Mao Dun back to the question of attitude and its colouring by the traditional morality code as this was the one common denominator running through all aspects of the women's question.

Thus Mao Dun was critical of those theorists like Gilman who placed what he felt was too great an emphasis on economic independence for women. In *FNZZ*, he challenged Gilman's contention that all relations between the sexes could be expressed in economic terms. This did not pay enough heed to the question of morality which, in China at least, held greater sway. The ideal aim of the women's movement was to raise perceptions of women's character (*ren'ge*) and capabilities (*nengli*) to those of men and this was not simply a matter of economics. The achievement of economic independence for women without sweeping away the old moral code would not bring about liberation (*jiefang*).⁷⁶ This is where class differences become more significant. Lacking education and often forced unwillingly into society, working class women still internalised traditional attitudes and had to be awakened as to their own potential for responsibility. Women of the more privileged classes, with access to some level of

⁷⁵ *FNZZ*, 6.5 (5.5.1920) *Jiating fuwu yu jingji duli* (Service to the family and economic independence.)

⁷⁶ *FNZZ*, 6.5 *ibid*.

education, were more likely to be awakened but were held back by prevailing attitudes.

The Nora debate centered on the concerns of this latter group and economic independence was one of the major issues which it raised. Mao Dun emphasised its importance in *FNPL* where he holds it up as the firmest guarantee of female emancipation. The 'proof' of this was to be seen in the numbers of young women who had been forced to sacrifice their bodies and their freedom of will simply because of their economic dependence on others.⁷⁷ This is a reference to middle class Chinese Noras whose idealism was not equal to the practical demands of independent life in society. He was at pains to convince the readership of *FNZZ* that it was not a demand of the women's movement that all women should go out into society and be turned into 'social animals'.⁷⁸ Many women lacked the ability to do so in any case and what use was liberation into society if there was nothing for them to do there or if they were unequal to the task?⁷⁹

This dual approach is partly the result of Mao Dun's realistic appraisal of the intellectually deprived and backward position of the vast majority of Chinese women, yet it may also derive in part from his eclectic borrowing from different feminist writers. In *JFGZ* he describes Gilman's advocacy of liberation and social independence via economic independence. This should take precedence over women's domestic responsibilities and they should therefore rely on state structures where there was conflict.⁸⁰ In *MD* he discussed her demand for all jobs to be made open to women and for equal work for equal pay.⁸¹ Gilman's writings probably provided some of the inspiration for Mao Dun's interest in the women's labour movement abroad as indicated by his translation of a report on the post-war situation of

⁷⁷ *FNPL*, 13 (26.10.1921) *Suowei nǚxìngzhuyì de liàng jíduān pài* (Two extremes in so-called feminist thought.)

⁷⁸ *FNZZ*, 6.8 (5.8.1920) *Fùnǚ yúndòng de yìyì hé yāoqiú* (The significance and demands of the women's movement.)

⁷⁹ *FNZZ*, 5.11 (15.11.1919) *Jiefang de fùnǚ yu fùnǚ de jiefang* (Liberated women and women's liberation.)

⁸⁰ *JFGZ*, 2.15 (1.8.1920) *Píng ertóng gōngyù wèntí* (A review of the question of the state rearing of children.)

⁸¹ *MD*, 2.4 (15.1.1921) *Jiātíng gāizhì de yánjiū* (A study of family reform.)

women workers in England carried in *FNZZ*.⁸² This interest complemented his work with female factory workers in Shanghai.

In an article entitled *Ping ertong gongyu wenti*, Mao Dun compared Gilman's approach to that of Ellen Key. He examined Key's arguments and the basis for them with great care. He described her conviction that women should not be forced into entering society and that those who gave economic independence their highest priority were denying themselves the ultimate satisfaction of fulfilled motherhood. Mao Dun approved of Key's emphasis on improving the quality of women's lives and insisted that, in this regard, Key and Gilman were at one. However, his ultimate sympathy was with Gilman because he felt that Key gave insufficient significance to the economic pressures which forced women out to work. It was infinitely preferable to target the immediate need for improved working conditions than to call for the long term aim of fulfilled domestic lives for Chinese women as this inevitably brought him back to the legacy of Confucian attitudes and the tendency of conservative elements to use Key's arguments as a guise to seek to retain the old order.⁸³

We see an example of Mao Dun's dramatisation of the problem of financial dependency in *Disillusion*. Hui finds it impossible to find work after returning from France. Her financial insecurity forces her to live with her brother and his wife, much to the displeasure and disapproval of the latter, and her situation is made worse by being unable to return home to her mother without running the risk of being married off. In *Pursuit* also the problem of financial insecurity proves traumatic for Wang Shitao and Zhao Chizhu (although it should be noted that for the majority of the characters in the trilogy, being of middle class stock and still in contact with their families, money is not a major problem.) Both girls have lost their menfolk in the repression which followed the failed revolution of 1927 and are forced by financial insecurity into prostitution, in spite of the fact that Wang is already pregnant.

Works like *Haze* and *Rainbow* echo aspects of the 'Nora debate.' In

⁸² *FNZZ*, 6.1 *Shijie funü xiaoxi* (*Women's news from around the world*.)

⁸³ *FNPL*, 13 op. cit.

Haze, Miss Zhang refuses to accompany her autocratic father to Nanjing to meet the man he wishes her to marry. (Nanjing is associated with Nationalist rule.) Instead she is inspired to run away to Guangzhou (birthplace of the revolution) to escape and start afresh. Here the story ends, leaving the reader to imagine her fate — in this case the implication is that Miss Zhang's future will be bright. Yet it was left to *Rainbow* to explore what might really happen after a Chinese Nora left home.⁸⁴ Time and again, Mei is criticized by Qijun for not having a constructive plan of action. She leaves her husband in Chongqing and goes into hiding, first in Qijun's home and later in a school on the edge of town which is closed for the summer vacation, but she refuses to face the question of how she is to support herself from now on. She is simply inspired by naïve ideas of courage (*guogan*) and self-confidence (*zixin*).⁸⁵ Qijun echoes Mao Dun's own comments when she bemoans the fact that those who bring people to awareness have not prepared a bright, happy society for them to run into.⁸⁶ It is indeed extremely difficult to find work for Mei, and it is only by dint of Qijun's enormous effort that she finds Mei a position in a school in Luzhou. This reflects the general problem of jobs for educated women being extremely hard to find. As Hui's brother remarks:

All people like you can do, even if you have eaten a couple of years of foreign rice and can understand something of a foreign tongue, is become a message runner for a foreign firm; but of course foreign firms don't employ female message runners!⁸⁷

Apart from teaching and nursing or medicine there was little that was considered suitable for women to do. Even if they did find a job, they were still likely to suffer the abuse described by Lu Xun. Traditional attitudes remained the greatest obstacle to economic independence for Chinese women.

Motherhood and the Family

Mao Dun's strong support for the principle of economic independence

⁸⁴ Written after Mao Dun had been severely criticised by his Creationist critics for not imbuing his works with a clear revolutionary message.

⁸⁵ *MDQJ*, 2, p.112.

⁸⁶ *MDQJ*, 2, p.114. See *FNPL*, 50 (19.7.1922) – p.189 below.

⁸⁷ *MDQJ*, 1, p.13.

for women necessarily meant that his attitude to conventional conceptions of the family would be radical. It was Mao Dun's sincere belief that through education and the recognition of the potential of ordinary Chinese womenfolk they would be brought to a level of awareness whereby they would challenge traditional family structures. Thus changes in the role and treatment of women within the family would be brought about.⁸⁸ Mao Dun's suggestions for family reform were exceedingly revolutionary and quite advanced for his day.⁸⁹ Mao Dun contended that since domestic chores and the rearing of children were the main responsibility of women in the home, and since it was these responsibilities which prevented women from playing an active role in society, there should be communal child-rearing facilities and communal kitchens. He noted the threat that such suggestions constituted to a society like China's where the family was the basic social unit, but insisted on radical reconstruction in order to achieve meaningful social change. In the future, society would be one big family of individuals, an expression of what he called, in English, 'cosmopolitanism' (*sihai tongbao zhuyi* – '[all within] the four seas of the same womb-ism'.⁹⁰) He described the family as nothing more than a recent, transient development in the course of social evolution.⁹¹ This reveals a desire not merely to ape the monogamous nuclear family of the West but to leapfrog over this model to an even more 'advanced' form. As such, Mao Dun went beyond the demands of most other commentators on this issue. He was aware that the type of radical social reconstruction for which he called was impossible to achieve under prevailing conditions. He linked such achievement with his socialist dream when in 1920 he wrote:

Until we have a society where property is held in common (*gongchan*) it will be impossible for family organisation to move far from its present state.⁹²

⁸⁸ *FNPL*, 79 (7.2.1923) *Mugin xuexiao de jianshe* (*The establishment of schools for mothers.*)

⁸⁹ Similar measures were actually implemented after 1949. See also R. Witke, *Transformation of attitudes ...*, p.276.

⁹⁰ R. Witke, *Transformation of attitudes ...*, p.100.

⁹¹ *JFGZ*, 2.15 (1.8.1920) *Ping ertong gongyu wenti* (*A review of the question of the state rearing of children.*)

⁹² *FNZZ*, 6.5 (5.5.1920) *Jiating fuwu yu jingji duli* (*Service to the family and economic independence.*)

In *MD* Mao Dun showed more pragmatism. He demanded urgent changes because of the gravity of the present situation regarding the family in China. Progress could be made via the small family model of the West although the ultimate goal remained the socialist family (*shehuizhuyi de jiating.*)⁹³ Perhaps as inspiration, Mao Dun introduced the works of Margaret Llewelyn Davis into the debate. The relevant part of his translation of her *What women want*⁹⁴ makes many radical suggestions: the status of mothers should be made equal to that of fathers, women should receive payment for the work they do in the home, special provision should be made for women during pregnancy, home helps should be provided for women who work and sexual equality should be incorporated into the law. However, at the end of his translation Mao Dun commented wistfully that such measures could not be implemented in China in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless he hoped that the ideas might make a contribution to the debate.

Mao Dun's approach to family reform mirrors his description of the ideas of Gilman and her school in *FNPL*: the interests of the individual were paramount; the individual should not serve family needs if these conflict with his or her own, to the extent that the family may cease to exist.⁹⁵ Above all else, this approach was founded upon the conviction that there was no other way for women to achieve fulfilled lives in Chinese society. This is made explicit in an article written in 1927 where Mao Dun explored with understanding the difficult choice, which many women faced, between the competing alternatives of domestic or social responsibility. His conclusion was that the ideal concept of wife and mother would be a viable aim if the social environment would allow its realisation. However when a woman sought fulfilment of this ideal, the whole weight of tradition fell on her head. Thus the only way to achieve fulfilment was to enter society and work for change.⁹⁶

⁹³ *MD*, 2.4 (15.1.1921) *Jiating guizhi de yanjiu* (*A study of family reform.*)

⁹⁴ *FNZZ* 6.1 (5.1.1920) *Xianzai funü suo yaoqiu de shi shenme?* (*What is it that women want nowadays?*)

⁹⁵ *FNPL*, 13 (26.10.1921) *Suowei nüxingzhuyi de liang jiduan pai* (*Two extremes in so-called feminist thought.*)

⁹⁶ *XNX*, 1927, 2.1 (1.1.1927) *Xianzai nüzi de kumen wenti* (*The current problem of depression among women.*)

Nevertheless, there remained some conflict in Mao Dun's mind over the question of motherhood because of its importance in the upbringing of China's future generation upon whom the regeneration of Chinese society would depend. He took some care to compare the different approaches of Gilman and Key. Gilman advocated the state rearing of children which would nurture social awareness. Mao Dun also noted the point that poverty and lack of education made for a poor standard of childcare in many cases.⁹⁷ Yet he seemed drawn to the vision of motherhood articulated by Ellen Key of which he made a special study for *DFZZ*.⁹⁸ Key opposed the idea of the communal rearing of children in the belief that motherhood was a god-given vocation for women. Although Mao Dun disagreed that women's talents were limited solely to motherhood and also with the idea that a child could only be brought up by its own mother,⁹⁹ he expressed some sympathy with Key's claim that a child's spiritual development depended on its being brought up in an environment of motherly love. But he felt bound to urge that in a benighted country like China it was far better to promote the communal rearing of children and combine it with a programme to educate mothers in modern ways of child rearing and domestic science when the alternative was 'darkness' (*heian*) and 'inhumanity' (*wu rendao*).¹⁰⁰ In a reply to correspondence¹⁰¹ Mao Dun expanded on this by pointing out that it was all very well to proclaim motherly love as an answer to a child's spiritual needs and to urge that women should learn modern mothercraft, but such arguments took no account of social and economic pressures especially among working class women which made fulfilled motherhood impossible.

Familial scenes do not figure prominently in Mao Dun's early fiction because the majority of his characters are young, educated and, to a greater

⁹⁷ *JFGZ*, 2.15 (1.8.1920) *Ping ertong gongyu wenti* (A review of the question of the state rearing of children.)

⁹⁸ *DFZZ*, 17.17 (25.6.1920) *Ailun Kai de muxinglun* (Ellen Key's theory of motherhood.)

⁹⁹ *FNPL*, 13 (26.10.1921) *Suowei nüxingzhuyi de liang jiduan pai*.

¹⁰⁰ *FNPL*, 79 (7.2.1923) *Muqin xueixiao de jianshe* (The establishment of schools for mothers.)

¹⁰¹ *FNPL*, 15 (9.11.1921) *Ailun Kai xueshuo de taolun* (A discussion of the theories of Ellen Key.)

or lesser extent, liberated from traditional constraints. Yet the traditional concept of the family casts its shadow across the lives of many of them. In *Haze* Miss Zhang is promised by her father as a concubine to an army officer, but runs away to escape the marriage; in *Disillusion* Hui hesitates to return to her home village for fear that her mother will marry her off; in *Rainbow* Mei and her boyfriend are forced to part because both of them have arranged marriages. The significance of the ideal mother figure has already been noted as a source of inspiration but more widespread is the pressure brought to bear on young women (and often on young men too) by their families with regard to marriage. Not surprisingly motherhood has a very low profile in Mao Dun's early works. The image of Fang Meili and her child in *Vacillation* appears attractive, but it is soon made apparent that Meili's life lacks fulfilment. The implication is that this is due to her refusal to take an interest in extra-domestic affairs. The only other treatment of motherhood in the early works is the distorted image of Wang Shitao's pregnancy in *Pursuit* or Miss Huan's in *Suicide*.

Marriage

In China, one of the major achievements of the play *A doll's house* was to bring about an awareness of the denial of personal individuality within traditional marriage. Of course the oppression was two-fold: parents forced their children to marry and, within marriage, wives were treated as nothing more than chattels. This assumption of possession was one of the most hated aspects of the Confucian regulation of relations between the sexes. It is treated humorously in *Creation* but much more starkly in a work like *Vacillation* where this assumption of woman as nothing more than a possession underlies almost every political transaction and business deal.

Mao Dun continually attacked the traditional system. In *FNPL* ¹⁰² he described so-called 'morality' as a crystallisation of the cannibalistic spirit, so-called 'rites' as empty deceit and the Chinese concept of chastity as simply a manifestation of the poisoning of social ethics by cannibalistic Confucianism. It was a product of man's desire for possession: man

¹⁰² *FNPL*, 5 (31.8.1921) *Lian'ai yu zhencuo de guanxi* (*The relationship between love and chastity*.)

insisted that woman preserve her chastity because of his view of her as a possession exclusive to himself, even after his own death. Following the popular debate, Mao Dun further emphasised that not only China but the whole world had passed down an unequal concept of chastity based on man's possessive instinct and chauvinism. He asserted that even those societies which claimed to be civilised retained a discriminatory attitude in that sexual licence on the part of a man was largely condoned, whilst, even if she was coerced, a woman would be much more severely judged. Nevertheless, efforts were being made in those societies to change attitudes, but in China the traditional prejudices were more extreme and still prevailed.

Although he rejected absolutely the traditional concept of chastity, Mao Dun was adamant that relationships between men and women, whatever their nature, should contain 'a spirit of noble-mindedness, mutual trust and respect.'¹⁰³ Thus, although Mao Dun was not among the so-called moral relativists who sought to upgrade the traditional chastity code to serve as the spiritual side of the new sexual morality, he does tend to hold to the fundamental Chinese belief that, even in modern times, sexual love and marriage, as well as social encounters, should be disciplined by moral rules of some sort. At the centre of Mao Dun's arguments was the strong conviction that traditional morality should be replaced by a new set of morals appropriate to this century. In general Mao Dun would appear to be against the excesses of promiscuity with which the term 'free love' came to be associated. In his stories, successful love affairs are generally associated with marriage, the case of Jing and Weili in *Disillusion* being a typical example. *Creation* provides an overall positive endorsement of marriage in a modern context, Junshi's attitudes notwithstanding. Even the picnic which celebrates Qiuliu's remaking of Shi Xun is described (ironically) as being like a wedding to match the parallel pursuits of their friends which also end in marriage. In this case, the aspiration of the protagonists to marry and live happily ever after is deliberately contrasted with the failures which result. Nevertheless, all these cases are placed firmly within the framework of a new morality. Contrasting with this are negative images of repressive marriages. In *Disillusion* Hui's insistence on determining her

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

own relationships while she is a student in France have left her thoroughly disillusioned. Marriage for her has only been the experience of a man's desire 'to exercise his husbandly authority to restrain her.'¹⁰⁴ Something of her experiences are hinted at in her dream after returning from an evening spent with Bao Su.¹⁰⁵ The only way that she can come to terms with this ill-treatment is actively to hate all men. Other women succumb to the stagnation and degradation which traditional marriage exerted on them. The young wife, whose faded red blouse causes Jing to weep, is crushed by her marriage.¹⁰⁶

Mao Dun's rejection of marriage conventions within Chinese tradition was absolute. This conviction was the basis of his support for freedom of divorce for either party as a means of escape from the misery of an arranged marriage. This view is clearly inspired by the writings of Ellen Key, to which he refers in this context in *FNZZ*. Key noted how in most countries divorce laws simply institutionalised the differing moral standards expected of men and women. Recognising the need for every society to regularise the framework within which marriage and divorce could operate, she demanded that this be balanced against the needs of the individual. This meant that there should be absolute standards of moral behaviour to which men and women should be equally accountable.¹⁰⁷ This view is echoed by Mao Dun's own call for a new moral framework to replace the old and his opposition to anarchism in moral behaviour. Nevertheless, this should not prevent young women (and men) from exploring their own identity including their sexuality, the better to fulfil themselves and thus to make a greater contribution to society.

To sum up, Mao Dun's views on marriage and family life have two thrusts. The first was towards the socialisation of women's traditional role to alleviate drudgery and allow them to seek fulfilment and independence in work and political activity. This would be achieved by the establishment of communal structures which would free women from their traditional

¹⁰⁴ *MDQJ*, 1, p.28.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter Four, p.127.

¹⁰⁶ See p.94.

¹⁰⁷ *FNZZ*, 8.4 (5.4.1922) *Lihun yu daode wenti* (*Divorce and the question of morality*.)

burdens. The second was towards the freeing of human relationships from traditional constraints and the fostering of the liberation of the individual. Taken to its logical conclusion, the first would undermine the importance of the family as the basic social unit; but this is balanced by the new morality incorporated into the second which referred to constructive relationships between individuals based on 'mutual trust and respect.'

Love and Friendship

Once women had made the decision to enter society, they had defied the forces of tradition which denied them a place there. Thus any attempt at establishing new standards of social behaviour automatically invited the antagonism of the old guard.

In several articles Mao Dun described how social relations between men and women were still greatly influenced by traditional attitudes. In *FNZZ*¹⁰⁸ he described the attitude of the reactionaries who believed that open social relations were a threat to national morality. He was especially critical of those who claimed that women were naturally inferior to men, lacking intelligence and easily led astray, and therefore without the capacity to enter society. He refuted their view that openness in social relations was the cause of the increase in what they saw as immoral behaviour by arguing that such behaviour had always existed. What was so despicable about Confucianism was its hypocrisy in claiming morality as its own preserve whilst not recognising what was going on 'behind the screen.'¹⁰⁹ Mao Dun insisted that such attitudes had not upheld morality but institutionalised immorality.¹¹⁰ Equally despicable was the way Confucianism had repressed the concept of love and had brought human sexual relations down to animal level.¹¹¹ Mao Dun particularly mentioned the dehumanising effect on sexual relations of the Confucian denial of love.¹¹² An

¹⁰⁸ *FNZZ*, 6.2 (5.2.1920) *Nannü shejiao gongkai wenti guanjian* (*Views on the question of open social relations between men and women.*)

¹⁰⁹ *FNPL*, 8 (21.9.1921) '*Nannü shejiao*' *de zancheng yu fandui* (*Support of and opposition to 'social relations between men and women.'*)

¹¹⁰ *FNZZ*, 6.2, op. cit.

¹¹¹ *FNPL*, 8, op. cit.

¹¹² The path which Mao Dun's thought followed in this regard was inevitably circular. As will be shown in Chapter Six, love was "discovered" and endorsed in the nineteen

especially stark evocation of this in Mao Dun's early fiction is the incident in *Vacillation* involving the drawing of lots by the peasants of Nanxiang for the 'spare' women whom they have rounded up.¹¹³

He was forthright in expressing his own views on how relations between men and women should be conducted. It was his firm belief that these had been corrupted by Confucianism whereas in primitive society open social relations between men and women had been the normal state of affairs (*pingchang de shi*.)¹¹⁴ Thus he argued that the whole matter had little to do with 'morality' in the conventional sense. The need for openness was in order to bring things back to the way they should be so that the human worth of both sexes could be recognised. In common with his contemporaries, one way in which Mao Dun challenged traditional beliefs was deliberately and explicitly to portray free relations between his protagonists. Because the milieu he created for them was generally that of modern-educated students of middle class background, it was completely appropriate that their behaviour should contravene Confucian ethics. In *Vacillation* the contrast between these two views of social behaviour is brought to the fore, particularly in Fang Meili's misunderstanding of Sun Wuyang's behaviour. However, what appears on the surface to be a working of the well-aired issue of the conflict between traditional and modern ethics also contains an implied judgement against the extremes of Sun's behaviour. Freedom of social relations was right and proper but her relentless pursuit of men who took her fancy in order to use them for her own ends was not.

In an article for *FNPL* whose general theme was the adverse effect on social relations of a degenerate social system, Mao Dun blamed the contemporary chaotic state of social relations on the suddenness with which Confucian constraints had been removed. He believed that there were many young people who truly wanted freedom in relations but who had taken the wrong road. Yet he refuted the criticism that young people had brought such a state of affairs upon themselves because they were

twenties, only to be denied again by the dogmatism of the following decade.

¹¹³ See below pp.203-205.

¹¹⁴ *FNZZ*, 6.2, op. cit.

inherently bad, pointing instead to social ills. Society did not allow women economic independence or independence of spirit, thereby oppressing them. Women should not be denied the right to escape, but having done so, they were often extremely vulnerable to exploitation. He also recognised that the young often acted rashly, even if their feelings were genuine. But he called on those who were apt to sit in judgement not to chide the young for intentionally taking the wrong path, as this was not so, noting that it was much easier to judge than to be judged.¹¹⁵

In a further article entitled *Crossroads*,¹¹⁶ discussing the problems faced by awakened young women who entered society for the first time, Mao Dun reasserted his belief that that the young could not be blamed if social currents swept them off in the wrong direction. He expressed his pleasure that the call for women's liberation had spread far and wide and that so many young women had 'stepped onto the road of life,' having rejected the old rules, and were demanding their rights and seeking to give meaning to their lives. They were young, they demanded the right of the young to enjoy life and to find comfort in sexual relations. Their's was a strong, passionate, naïve demand to enjoy the fruits of civilisation and beauty; and if they were a little extreme, how could others self-righteously chastise or ridicule them? However, sometimes their will was weak and, having drunk the wine of pleasure, they forgot what they were about, perhaps becoming totally absorbed by love, or being forced by their environment into a new type of degradation no better than that of old. Yet Mao Dun was always sympathetic to the plight of young women when they were unwitting victims of their society or environment:

They cannot help it so why should we hate them? We should forgive them and pity them.¹¹⁷

In *FNPL* in 1922, Mao Dun reflected further on this. He described how he had seen many awakened women decide that they no longer wished to submit to parental authority because they had become aware that they had

¹¹⁵ *FNPL*, 9 (28.9.1921) *Zai lun nannü shejiao wenti* (A further discussion of the question of social relations between men and women.)

¹¹⁶ *FNPL*, 47 (28.6.1922) *Qi lu*.

¹¹⁷ *ibid*.

the right to fall in love and make their own way in the world. They dared to leave home because of problems with arranged marriages, a lack of freedom in social relations and so on. In all, they could not bear the oppression of their spirit and were driven on by 'a respect for self and individuality, for rights and freedom.' He described how they had believed that society was 'broad, rich and beautiful,' and, just like a bird escaping from a cage,¹¹⁸ they sought only their own happiness and paid no attention to how they would live or study, or how much of a difficult struggle life would be. On the contrary, leaving home was a very fashionable thing to do and these new entrants to society only felt that they had accomplished a great achievement and that they would be greeted with open arms. However, when they discovered society to be different from their expectations, they began to feel disillusioned and to seek a life of pleasure as solace.¹¹⁹

In particular Mao Dun described young women's pursuit of 'free love' (*jiefang lian'ai*.)¹²⁰ He found young women to be passionate in their pursuit of a 'white hot love,'¹²¹ and they would forget everything, their studies, their parents, society, even themselves in the process. He described how in the early days of the Chinese women's movement he had believed that this was a genuine expression of self-liberation, and had seen the meaning of that movement in China to be the 'discovery of love.' However, by the time this article was written, these beliefs had been shattered as he had come to discover that in many cases:

Their mad pursuit of love was for fame, limelight-seeking, financial gain, and they have sacrificed their studies, their work for society, even themselves for these peripheral things (*waiwu*), not for love itself.¹²²

He insisted that such women could not be called liberated because the condition of being a 'liberated woman' was to understand what real love

¹¹⁸ Further reference to Ibsen's *A doll's house* via Lu Xun's lecture.

¹¹⁹ *FNPL*, 50 (19.7.1922) '*Wo suo jian' yu 'wo suo you'*' ('*What I see*' and '*what concerns me.*')

¹²⁰ See *FNPL*, 34 (29.3.1922) *Za ping (1): Jiefang lian'ai* (*Miscellaneous comments (1): Free love.*)

¹²¹ Mao Dun uses this phrase several times in his short stories *eg Disillusion* where this very phenomenon is featured.

¹²² *FNPL*, 34, *ibid.*

was.

... we cannot condone those for whom love is a game, a piece of merchandise, a means to another end. We should forgive those who have freed themselves from the shackles of the old ways, but who cannot bear the gloominess of reality and seek to intoxicate themselves with pleasure. We should not forgive those who feign 'awareness' or 'liberation' in order to indulge their desires and to deceive others. These are the enemies of true women's liberation. ¹²³

His greatest concern was that other young women would take such behaviour as a model, believing it to be an expression of 'liberation' and 'awareness.' Thus many misconceptions arose, as he described in the eighth issue of *FNPL*. ¹²⁴ Some supported free social relations for the wrong reasons, claiming, for example, that China needed to be freed from a dull, dry tradition, and went out looking for women to liberate. Mao Dun saw no difference between this type of behaviour and the traditional treatment of women as playthings. He described how young people complained that life in the countryside was boring because there were no 'new men and women' (*xin nannü*) to have a good time with. ¹²⁵ Others believed that having open social relations was a prerequisite to their joining the ranks of the 'new youth.' Yet others even believed that open relations actually meant free love and felt obligated to fall in love and find a lover. Mao Dun warned that such thinking was a great obstacle to the establishment of what he called 'proper social relations,' but explained that these misunderstandings were inevitably common as a result of the sudden liberation from Confucianism which had taken place. ¹²⁶ But they also caused much friction between the older and younger generations. ¹²⁷

The extent of the confusion among the young gave Mao Dun considerable cause for concern and he took great pains to deal frankly and openly with the previously taboo subject of the nature of love. He had no qualms

¹²³ *FNPL*, 47 op. cit. Mao Dun's attitude to the likes of Hui was less sympathetic. For her 'love' was nothing more than a game, a means to another end — revenge. By contrast, Zhang Qiuli in *Pursuit* has a more sympathetic hearing: she immerses herself in the pleasures of life in order to forget the sadness of the failed revolution.

¹²⁴ *FNPL*, 8 (21.9.1921) '*Nannü shejiao*' de zancheng yu fandui (*Support for and opposition to 'social relations between men and women.'*)

¹²⁵ This complaint can be heard in *Eclipse*.

¹²⁶ *FNPL*, 8, *ibid*.

¹²⁷ See *FNPL*, 4 (24.8.1921) *Qingnian de wuhui yu laonian de wuhui* (*Misunderstandings of the young and the old.*)

about approaching the whole question head on, and indeed was responding to the topic which most preoccupied the minds of young people. In XSZZ¹²⁸ he provided a sensitive exploration of the subject for his student readership. Historically 'love' was forbidden even between husband and wife as traditional morality maintained strict separation of the sexes. This denial of love in Chinese culture had crushed the souls of China's youth and caused a distorted conception of love to develop. Nevertheless, Chinese people still retained a capacity for love and a need to express it. However, because there was no place for such expression within the orthodox code of behaviour, it was viewed as immoral or simply as a pastime for men. This had all been challenged by the new culture movement. In an age of change Chinese youth wanted to free itself of all the constraints of the old culture, yet among these love was the biggest issue of this generation – to an obsessive extent. Mao Dun remained indulgent towards this obsession: there was a need for thorough discussion simply because the opportunity for it had been denied for so long. Highlighting the lingering influence of the traditional perception of love as a pastime of conquest and also the implied obligation to pursue it as such, Mao Dun called for the young to be taught the solemn nature of love. There followed a deliberately simplistic description of what love should entail.

Love was an exchange of feelings on both sides, not the expression of male sexual impulses. It proceeded from a mutual understanding of personalities to a meeting of souls. Mao Dun counselled the young not to believe the romantics. Love was no mysterious feeling or an instant attraction; time should be taken to choose the right person. Carelessness and physical desire were a challenge to the sanctity of love. One should not mistake physical desire for love nor take the matter lightly: 'it should consume your whole heart and soul.'¹²⁹ Jing's progress through *Disillusion* may also be considered as part of Mao Dun's attempt to bring the young to a better understanding of relations between the sexes. Whereas in *Rainbow* Mei's journey brings her to political awareness and commitment, Jing's is

¹²⁸ XSZZ, 11.1 (5.1.1924) *Qingnian yu lian'ai* (Young people and love.)

¹²⁹ *ibid.* In his concluding remarks Mao Dun stressed that what he had written was very ordinary (*pingchang*) but many young people still needed advice and they should not be denied their right to seek understanding.

one of discovery into affairs of the heart.

Like Hu Shi, in his explorations into the nature of love, Mao Dun emphasised its dual nature. Love contained both physical and spiritual aspects in combination, requiring both to exist. But he proceeded a step further by expressing his belief that love proceeded from the physical to the spiritual. He explained that those who held the reverse to be true were in danger of misunderstanding the affection of friends, of misinterpreting it as love. If one accepted the dual nature of love, chastity was no longer an issue. He differed from Hu in his insistence that true love needed no bounds of chastity, to believe differently was self-deception. Without love there was no need to speak of chastity, thus 'love' and 'chastity' were one and the same. Indeed, he was critical of those who still thought of chastity as a restraining influence which would bring all relations within an *acceptable* code of behaviour.¹³⁰ Whereas Hu Shi put greater emphasis on the need for externally applied moral restraints, Mao Dun hoped that restraints such as were necessary would be internally generated as a product of the free expression of the love of the two individuals involved. Nevertheless, both affirmed that a new morality should be generated for a new age.

Through these articles Mao Dun reveals himself firmly on the liberal side of the arguments. Most notable are his extreme views on the socialisation of motherhood. He also appears to be remarkably unaffected by the euphoria of the age, showing himself to be extremely practical in the way he addresses the issues. The frequent reference to aspects of the debate in his fiction reflects the general tenor of these views. For example, motherhood has an extremely low profile in the early works. In *Vacillation* Fang Meili has chosen motherhood as her role in life, but this decision is linked with her dulled understanding of social change. The other main representation of motherhood is the corrupted image suggested by Wang Shitao's pregnancy in *Pursuit* or Miss Huan's in *Suicide*. However, his fascination with the writings of Ellen Key has resonances in the idealised and comforting image of motherhood invoked by several characters in the depths of their despair. Similarly, the portrayal in his fiction of educated young

¹³⁰ FNPL, 5 (31.8.1921) *Lian'ai yu zhencao de guanxi* (*The relationship between love and chastity*.)

people, liberated from traditional constraints, underlines his rejection of traditional moral standards. In particular, women's themes constitute a recurring motif. What had previously only been possible in the supernatural tale was now happening in twentieth century life. Women were finding alternative modes of existence beyond traditionally prescribed norms.

Part II: Feminist Themes

As has already been discussed, Mao Dun's female colleagues figured prominently in his creative inspiration. When viewed in the context of his engagement with the debates on women's issues during the nineteen twenties and his active involvement in women's affairs within the Party in Shanghai, it comes as little surprise to learn that women's themes form a common thread running through the early stories. This thread manifests itself in two different ways. In some stories, issues relating to female emancipation and the necessity for changes in attitudes constitute a central preoccupation, but in the majority, women's themes are used as a means by which to explore political issues not directly related to the women's question. This lends to many stories a multi-faceted depth, making the reading experience a greater intellectual challenge.

Preoccupations with the education of women are as important in his fiction as they are in his political work. As Croll writes:

These new opportunities for education in schools not only took women teachers and students out of the confines of their homes, but also introduced them to current revolutionary ideals, Western literature and institutions and the new concept of 'feminism' -- current among English and American suffragettes ... It was the new schools which produced and published the first women's magazines and were the centres of the patriotic, anti-dynastic and feminist activities which characterized the first decades of the twentieth century. ¹³¹

It was the schoolgirls of this generation who became the radical participants in the new culture movement in the twenties and thirties, and, in the process, the protagonists of Mao Dun's early fiction.

¹³¹ E. Croll, *Feminism and socialism in China*, pp.56-57. For a fuller discussion see ch. 3, *New expectations: patriotism and the vote*, *ibid.*, pp.45-79 and also C. L. Beahan, *The women's movement ...*, chs. 2-4.

Women's Issues

One such schoolgirl is Mei in *Rainbow*. Her story is told in partial flashback, but chronologically it begins in a provincial town in Sichuan. It is the time of the boycott of Japanese goods, shortly before the May Fourth Incident, although for the young Mei such major issues have little relevance. Typical of many young women of her class and era, she lacks almost completely any awareness of outside events, that is until they begin to have a direct influence upon her own life: she becomes betrothed to her cousin Liu Yuchun who is the owner of a shop which sells Japanese goods. At the same time a deeper awareness begins to swell within her, an awareness of the injustices committed by society against women — but she has no idea that anything can be done about it. This comes about because her boyfriend Wei Yu insists that circumstances must force them to part. Mei questions why she did not have the right to love whom she wished, why she should only be a slave, a piece of meat to be played with by others. She asks why her school did not teach her about such matters, and, for want of any alternative, puts it all down to the traditional *bo ming* (bad fate) of womankind.¹³² Her school is of the type which retained traditional attitudes towards women's role and status.¹³³

However, by the beginning of the following school year the ripple effects of the May Fourth Movement have reached this Sichuan backwater and the school undergoes a change of philosophy. The school head's speech talks of men and women working together; women should not wait to be liberated but should cut their own way forward. The pressing issue of the day becomes the opening up of social relations between men and women (*nannü shejiao gongkai*.) Through her school friend Xu Qijun, Mei is introduced to new style magazines which talk of marriage in terms of a business deal, with women as nothing more than chattels.¹³⁴ She is also persuaded to cut her hair short which causes such ructions that she has to become a boarder in order to avoid making unnecessary appearances

¹³² MDQJ, 2, p.20.

¹³³ One is also reminded of Gui's complaint in *Poetry and prose*: 'I am one of those people who has been messed up by what you call a gentry education (*shenshi jiaoyu*).'
MDQJ, 8, p.87.

¹³⁴ MDQJ, 2, p.34.

on the street. Thus Mei's awareness of modern issues, even if her grasp of them is shallow and naïve, is fostered by her attendance at this modern style school, which encourages its pupils to question and to seek answers. This compares markedly with the situation before its change of direction.

Mei's shallow grasp of modern ideas is deliberately portrayed to typify the impossible desire of young women like Mei for knowledge, and their wholesale espousal of the first set of theories they come across as a panacea for all ills. Nevertheless, the grounding which she gains inspires her to run away from her husband, whom she detests, and to seek a new life on her own. The journey upon which she embarks comprises the main part of the novel. Indeed, part of its intention is to explore what might really happen to a Chinese Nora after she had left home. But it is also a response to severe criticism of Mao Dun by the Creationists for not imbuing his works with a clear revolutionary message. Therefore Mao Dun's Nora figure eventually enjoys a much brighter (and more ideologically correct) future than Lu Xun, for example, could hope for her.

Remaining with the Nora theme, the portrayal of Mei's relationship with her husband Liu Yuchun provides a Chinese alternative to Ibsen's model. It explores the tensions and conflicts of an arranged marriage with a depth of sensitivity and understanding, expressing the horror of it without being polemical and allowing this all too commonly occurring tragedy a human face. The horror is strikingly vivid in the description of Mei's wedding night in *Rainbow* as she remembers it a couple of days later.

She did not want to remember but memories of it constantly kept flooding into her consciousness. When the traditional 'spectators' had finally dispersed, her feelings were ones of cold determination that she should not be violated. She wrapped herself in the quilt and lay on her side facing inwards; her predetermined tactics were completely disregarded, and when a hot, strong body had embraced her from behind, she had jumped out of her skin. This was followed by a numbing irritation which she was made to feel on her neck as he kissed her. At the same time a hand stroked her breast. She felt him grab hold of her breasts and started to think of struggling but like a whirlwind the adversary had rendered her incapable of resistance with one agile movement; in a hot, suffocated daze she had been crushed and kneaded until she had passed out. She had probably also cried out shrilly. But what had been the use? It had only given people something to gossip about the following day. ¹³⁵

¹³⁵ MDQJ, 2, p.59.

This scene shows remarkable empathy with women's experience, providing an insight into the commitment with which Mao Dun persistently called for mutual trust and respect in relations between men and women and attacked the iniquities of the Confucian legacy. Yet Liu is also a victim of this legacy. He sees Mei as the prize he merits after suffering a deprived earlier life as an orphan. This prize is being denied him by Mei's decision to move back into her father's house, prompted by Liu's continued association with prostitutes, and her refusal to have any contact with him. To C. T. Hsia, his plea has a touching humanity about it. To my mind, although it serves to illustrate the degradation of human emotions achieved by the old order, it also upholds the traditional view of women's role:

I have no parents, brothers or sisters; when I had some money, I wanted only a good woman, because my heart was lonely. I wanted only a good woman to share happiness with me. When I saw you I was very pleased, and I thought it wasn't for nothing that I had struggled for half of my life. But now all this looks like a dream. My heart is also flesh, and do you honestly think I can't suffer? Other people have what they want; ... 136

Liu tries to buy back his prize with gifts and is genuinely concerned to please Mei. For her part Mei may be touched by his solicitude¹³⁷ but his behaviour and his ignorance are nothing more than laughable:

He ... frequently bought books for Mei; he would buy every book and magazine whose title included the word 'new.' Thus *A new talk on hygiene*, *A new way to play baseball* or even *A new discourse on sexual intercourse* would be thrown in the heap with copies of *New Youth* and *New Tide* magazines, which often made Mei laugh endlessly. 138

Ironically, the 'new' ideas contained within the magazines and books which Liu brings Mei have opened her mind in such a way that she can never be his chattel (*ta de dongxi*), however highly prized, and eventually she makes good her escape.

After Mei finds a job as a teacher, to her surprise, she discovers that the teaching staff in her new school are just as ineffectual as those in her old school. Moreover, Miss Zhang, a colleague, is having an affair with the

¹³⁶ *MDQJ*, 2, p.71. Translation from C. T. Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, p.151.

¹³⁷ See C. T. Hsia, *ibid.*, p.152.

¹³⁸ *MDQJ*, 2, pp.76-77. Translation from C. T. Hsia, *op. cit.*, p.152, adapted.

principal. Another colleague Li Wuji aptly criticizes the way the school is run as 'old material in new garb.' ¹³⁹ Despite the sacking of the whole of the former staff, nothing has fundamentally changed. The new staff are all supposedly 'modern people who have rejected Confucianism' (*dapole lijiao de xin renwu*) but their behaviour is still reactionary. Mei is totally disillusioned by her colleagues:

Was this type of upstart who had come floating to the surface on the new thought tide fit to carry out educational and social reform? They supported the slogan 'Down with the old Confucian rites' to eat the rice it brought them, just as the previous generation had eaten the rice gained by upholding the words of the Classics and the Sages, and no different from the local division commander, so-called champion of new ideas, who still ate warlord rice. ¹⁴⁰

Indeed, exaggerated rumours which spread about the locality after a staff outing which ended in little short of a drunken orgy threaten the reputation of the school. As a result of the scandal which follows, Mei decides to resign, thereby concluding a further stage in her journey. ¹⁴¹

Mei's experiences in *Rainbow* represent an encapsulation of the experience of young women of her class during the years from the May Fourth to the May Thirtieth Movements (1919-1925.) The challenges she faces and the choices she has to make reflect the common experience of her generation of young women. She gradually becomes aware of the new thought tide and its implications for her aspirations in life, she explores questions of chastity and celibacy, she builds a strategy to deal with her arranged marriage, and having escaped from her marriage, she learns how to make a place for herself in society. In particular, she learns how to come to terms with the shortcomings of society and to see through those who perpetuate the old ways in the name of the new. Mei is a composite May Fourth woman: she is every-woman and no-woman. Because the narrative focuses on the course of her development from naïveté to commitment, there are times when her portrayal appears insightful and convincing. Instances such as her wedding night and her relationship with her husband have already

¹³⁹ *MDQJ*, 2, p.137.

¹⁴⁰ *MDQJ*, 2, pp.159-160.

¹⁴¹ Her move to Shanghai and her espousal of the revolutionary cause are discussed in the following chapter.

been discussed. Yet even in such instances, she functions more as a type than as an individually delineated character. Her experience carries weight in its encapsulation of the general experience of her generation of women rather than in its particularity. The pre-determined course of her development also works against Mei's believability. She overcomes all setbacks however unprepared she is for whatever may happen to her next. In a sense her character as such develops very little. She is a sponge who soaks up each successive wave of ideas in turn from Wei Yu's non-resistance through Li Wuji's benevolent nationalism to the Marxism of her friends in Shanghai. Although her instinct for survival saves her from the clutches of the local warlord in Luzhou, she reacts to circumstances rather than acting independently.

In her survival instinct Mei endorses much of Mao Dun's advice to her generation of women earlier in the decade. Her transformation through education is a testament to Mao Dun's insistence on education before all else as the cornerstone of women's emancipation. The misery of her marriage reflects Mao Dun's unwavering rejection of traditional marriage conventions and their underlying assumptions. Her search for a place in society reflects Mao Dun's sympathy for the Chinese Nora whose right to that place he endorsed without question, although he was realistic about the difficulties of achieving it. Finally, as is discussed in the following chapter, her feminism is transcended by the greater Cause, illustrating Mao Dun's own evolving sense of commitment.

Because of the more overt political message of *Rainbow* Mei overcomes her challenges one by one, eventually becoming a committed revolutionary, but many of her sisters in other works exhibit more human reactions to the obstacles they face in their pursuit of meaning in their lives at a time of great social and political upheaval.

Miss Zhang in *Haze* is under great pressure from her autocratic father to become the second wife of an army commander. (He has already curtailed her involvement in student politics by removing her from her new style school and sending her to one for 'young ladies' instead.) She is in love with a fellow student He Ruohua but discovers that he is seeing a

friend of hers called Lan. Anger, the desire for revenge, frustration at the powerlessness of her position vis à vis her father all fuse together and her disjointed thoughts tumble onto the page. First she thinks of drowning – the traditional ‘way out’ for women who had no other means to protest against their ‘bad fate.’ Then possible ‘modern’ ways out present themselves one after another, evoking at one fell swoop most of the issues of the women’s question and the Nora debate:

leave home? how to live? find love? get even with Lan? with
He Ruohua? ... to go bad? free love? tragedy? how to earn an
independent living? female office worker? teacher? woman writer?
woman revolutionary? 142

Finally, she refuses to go to Nanjing with her father to meet the man he wishes her to marry (Nanjing is associated with Nationalist rule.) Instead, memories of her childhood and of her long dead mother, who always wanted her to do well for herself despite the fact that she was a girl, inspire her to run away to Guangzhou (birthplace of the revolution) to escape and start afresh.

One of the saddest figures in the early works is that of Wang Shitao in *Pursuit*. Wang and her lover Dong Fangming participated in the 1927 revolution together. At the end of *Disillusion*, he marches south with Jing’s lover, Qiang Weili while Wang Shitao returns to Shanghai where they plan to be reunited. However, Dong Fangming does not come back. His appearance in *Pursuit* is only via Zhang Qiuliu’s grisly hallucination, his face horrifyingly distorted and a bloody ring around his neck.¹⁴³ In the meantime, Wang, pregnant, sick and penniless, has had to resort to prostitution. Qiuliu learns more of her sorry tale when she goes to visit her friend. At Wang’s telling of her tale, earlier and later editions diverge. Wang has previously been pestered by another student, Long Fei, and has had an intermittent affair with him for some time. This triangular relationship brought her much criticism from her fellow students in *Disillusion*.¹⁴⁴ In the original, Wang manages to break her relations with Long Fei, until,

¹⁴² *MDQJ*, 8, p.164. Translation from J. Berninghausen, *Mao Dun’s early fiction ...*, p.96, adapted.

¹⁴³ This image is omitted from later editions.

¹⁴⁴ Another metaphor for the uneasy relationship between various factions of the CCP.

just before Dong Fangming's final departure, she has succumbed to Long Fei's continued pestering one last time. When Fangming departs he tells her that it is her flirtation with Long Fei which has helped him make up his mind to leave for the south. Previously he had hesitated because of his worry for her, but what she had done had freed him from worry and he was now ready to die. There is no mention of the child. In the later edition, she does not give in to Long Fei and Dong Fangming's last words on his departure are that she should look after their unborn child. This later version considerably simplifies Wang's predicament, since the decision as to whether or not to have the child is largely made for her. In the later version, Qiuliu urges her to think carefully about the consequences of bringing up a child on her own in such circumstances, but Wang is determined to make immediate sacrifices because of her dogged hope in some undefined future ideals: 'in this age of intensive struggle it is we women who suffer most, especially women with children. But in the last analysis we need children because they are the hope of the future. Our lives are limited, but our struggle is a protracted one, so our children will carry our torch into the future.' Nevertheless, there are times when other ways out seem tempting. Evoking recurrent women's question/May Fourth preoccupations with freedom to love and freedom to marry versus the difficulty of living an economically independent life, she tells Qiuliu how she has considered marriage to a rich husband as a solution to her financial problems:

[Of course, this could be easily accomplished but it was the same as being 'married off' (*jia ren*), just as her parents had once wanted to marry her off. At that time, because of her determination to be independent and free, to pursue her own goals, she had rebelled against her parents and left her family to avoid being 'married off' (*bei jia*). Was she now to turn around of her own accord and be married (*jia ren*) in the name of the very same sacred ideals she had then entertained? This time it would be marriage through her own will (*zi jia*) but would that be any better than being married off according to someone else's wishes (*bei jia*) ?] A man who would be able to provide for her financially, by definition, would not number among her poor friends. There would necessarily be conflicts between their different points of view and her way of thinking would necessarily be scorned. ... Once again she thought of abortion — that would enable her to roam the world freely and carry on her struggle. ¹⁴⁵

Most horrifying to Zhang Qiuliu is the way Wang (and Zhao Chizhu,

¹⁴⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, p.372. [] indicates omissions from later editions

another participant in the failed revolution who has also been forced into prostitution) is prepared to sacrifice her pride in herself as a woman to the sexual pleasures of men. 'Was not selling her sex the ultimate means for a woman of making a living?' asks Wang Shitao.¹⁴⁶ Wang recalls what Zhao had said to her in an attempt to assert control over a situation in which they are actually powerless: 'Sex is only one part of your body coming into contact with someone else, not even like shaking hands.' This poignant portrayal of the corruption of human relationships by latent social forces brings out the attraction to writers and commentators of this period of the treatment of woman as a paradigm of inhumanity.¹⁴⁷ This particular exchange reveals a depth of sensitivity to the meaning to the women themselves of the degradation to which they were forced by the harshness of prevailing conditions.¹⁴⁸

Paradigms of Inhumanity

Mao Dun is a prominent exponent of this technique. He uses woman's predicament (in this case Wang Shitao's) to explore questions of belief in the revolutionary movement in general. The low point reached after the failure of the Wuhan government and the severity of the White Terror made belief in future ideals merely laughable. It raised questions about the extent of the sacrifice it was possible and necessary to make for the sake of one's beliefs. Thus Qiuliu is unable to accept Wang's insistence on severe self-sacrifice now for the sake of vague future ideals.

In *Vacillation* the effect of extremist leftwing actions in the rural areas is also portrayed in terms of women. Abuses in the countryside were not limited to women but intimations of the whole are given through the effect of left extremism on women. There is particular emphasis on the question of communisation and the assumption of woman as nothing more than a possession. This whole question is given emphasis throughout the work as a reflection of the situation in the rural areas around Wuhan before the backlash of the White Terror against the spread of 'Red' influence in these

¹⁴⁶ *XSYB*, 19.8 (October 1928) p.974. Omitted in later editions.

¹⁴⁷ To be replaced by the peasant or worker in the following decade.

¹⁴⁸ See discussion of Zhang Qiuliu's attitude below, pp.211-212.

areas. From the first chapter the fear is expressed of the communisation of property (*gong chan*) by the Reds. Among the uneducated this leads to the fear, encouraged by reactionary and 'bandit' elements, of the communisation of wives (*gong qi*). Opportunists like Hu Guoguang and Lu Muyou are determined to take advantage of this situation for their own sordid purposes.

Behind their actions and agreements there is almost always a woman involved, and it is through their attitudes towards women that their true nature is revealed before the force of events confirms it. Hu Guoguang's attitude to women is typified by his reaction to the woman he sees on the arm of Zhu Minsheng (who could be Sun Wuyang but the narrative is not specific.) She appears to him 'more dazzling than a pile of silver' and it is to his extreme regret that his immediate concerns deny him the opportunity to introduce himself. For him, a woman is like a pile of silver, a possession, of a certain beauty but one which can also be used to gain power and influence and to 'buy' the goods and services of others. He also works throughout the course of the novel to satisfy his ravenous sexual appetite. Lu agrees to support Hu's candidacy for a place on the standing committee of the local traders' union in return for Hu's help in gaining access to a young widow whom he has his eye on. Later he uses his position within the Party to seduce her, only afterwards discovering her name and the nature of her circumstances. She has no rights: if she remarries she will lose all her property to her late husband's family. Trouble with the shop workers causes Hu's background to be investigated only perfunctorily, sparing him the label 'evil gentry' (*lieshen*). This is his greatest fear since anyone so identified would have his property 'communised' and most valuable to him among his property was his concubine. Thus Hu's comprehension of the issues is shown to be as inadequate as that of the peasants, but this does not prevent him from rising to gain a place of influence within the local Party organisation.

The question of the communisation of property takes centre stage in chapter eight of *Vacillation*. In the town shop-keepers are suspicious of registering their businesses for fear that their property will be confiscated, whilst in the countryside Peasant Associations are being formed. This fuels

the rumours:

Since the end of the last lunar year, Peasant Associations had been formed in the nearby countryside, Nanxiang. Peasants actually became organised and rumours accordingly followed. The first rumours were about the 'communisation' of property because at that time the Peasant Associations were investigating the distribution of land ownership among the peasants. But the rumours quickly turned into 'men for draft and women for sharing.' Hence peasants at Nanxiang had been in a state of fright as they spent their pathetic New Year Days. There were incidents of assaults on the Peasant Associations, which caused the County Association to dispatch a special commissioner by the name of Wang Zhuofan to Nanxiang for an investigation.

What had happened was not difficult to bring to light. The ones who had been spreading the rumours were the local ruffians and evil gentry, and the ones misled were the peasants. However, if you tried to argue that there had been no 'sharing' of wives, the peasants were not going to believe you. It was clear as daylight to all that there was a Communist Party ['share property party.']. Thus it went without saying that all property was to be shared, and that since wives were a form of property, it would make absolutely no sense to the peasants to say that wives were to be exempt from sharing. That would be downright double-dealing. 149

Violence breaks out in Nanxiang as the demand of a mass meeting of peasants to redistribute concubines, wives and nuns is challenged by a group calling itself the Husbands' Rights Association who are afraid that their own wives will be 'communised.' However the idea of women as property is reinforced by Wang, the representative of the County Party Association, who encourages the peasants without wives to draw lots for the women they have brutally rounded up. This description is taken from the original version as published in *XSYB* in 1928 because there are significant omissions from later versions: 150

Before Wang Zhuofang, who was acting as temporary chairman, stood three women, absolutely petrified. One of their number whose clothes were noticeably cleaner was the concubine of the local tyrant 'Old Tiger' Huang. At about five o'clock that morning the peasants had stormed into the Huang residence and she had cowered, trembling, in the corner of the bed. [Since, when she had been pulled from the bed, she had been completely naked it was suggested by some that she should be paraded around the locality; but on consideration that she was soon to belong to another man the proposal to parade her round the streets was not carried out. So, after allowing her to dress they had brought her here.] Now this eighteen-year-old country girl was staring, wide-eyed yet blankly, at the men encir-

¹⁴⁹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.182. Translation from Chen, op.cit, p.85, adapted.

¹⁵⁰ Later omissions are marked [].

cling her. She knew that they were about to 'communist' people but her simple brain could not comprehend why she had been brought to be communist. She had seen what had happened when her own husband had raped a young peasant girl. [At first her struggling and her cries were frightening but after Old Tiger Huang had completely subjugated this helpless piece of flesh and had given vent to his animal lust, she had regained no little of the composure which women are supposed to have in this type of situation and did not seem at all in pain. So it seemed rape was not so terrible.] Now it was 'communistation;' she truly did not understand the difference between communistation and rape and could not contain her anxious imaginings which frightened her considerably.

There were two others. One was a widow about thirty years old whose demeanour was one of calmness as if she knew very well what was about to happen. The other was a bondsmaid from the family of the former local superintendant. She was also about seventeen or eighteen years of age and was as petrified as the local tyrant's concubine, but had more of an air of curiosity about her.

The peasants [eyed the women and continued a rowdy discussion; some went right up to them and bickered among themselves. A middle-aged man with a deformed eye went and felt the bondsmaid's chest, remarking how small she was and expressing his concern that she was not well developed.

Yet the peasants still did not proceed with communistation. They] simply watched, argued and laughed as if they were waiting for something.

Finally, in a burst of wild laughter and general commotion two nuns were brought in, quaking with fright, continually invoking the Buddha. [On all sides the men laughed even more wildly; even the other three women laughed uncontrollably.] The commotion gradually subsided and Wang Zhuofang shouted out:

– There are only five women, not enough to share out. What shall we do?

At this a dispute broke out, a primitive, barbaric dispute with cursing and shouting. It lasted for some time. Finally, when it seemed that everyone had shouted themselves hoarse, it was decided to draw lots so that every peasant without a wife had the chance to gain one. The prettiest of the five women went to a favus-headed peasant aged about thirty. [Once Favus Head knew she was his, he jumped up, wrapped his arms around her and, revealing a mouth of yellowed teeth, he kissed her fat red face.

There was a rumbling from all sides; wooden staves, spades and hoes were raised high in the air and shaken wildly.] Suddenly the local tyrant's concubine burst into tears, angrily stamping her foot and shouting: – I don't want him! I don't want this dirty, smelly man! – That's too bad. The lots have been drawn. She can't have her own way, shouted a number of men supporting the justice of Favus Head's right of possession.

– No! No! Favus Head is a bad match. It's not fair, yelled voices of opposition from the outer edge of the circle of men. In an instant the scene disintegrated into a mad shouting match; the wooden staves, spades and hoes went into action and a brawl broke

out. The blood-curdling cries of combat shook the temple of the earth god until it almost collapsed. Wang Zhuofang did not know what was happening and simply blew his spear corps commander's whistle indiscriminately. [Favus Head fixed his eyes on the writhing heap of brawling men before him and with one hand grabbed hold of the concubine's hair as tightly as he could, as if he was afraid that she would run away.]

Eventually the spear corps successfully quelled the brawl and arrested three or four men [all covered in blood] whom they had brought before Wang Zhuofang.

- There's no need to interrogate them, we know these bastards. They're from Songzhuang at the front of the village. We wounded seven or eight of them.

- You're dead right, you dirty swine. Our Husbands' Rights Association will kill the lot of you, one of the prisoners gruffly swore back, his eyes bulging.

Everyone knew that there was a Husbands' Rights Association in Songzhuang. It had deliberately set itself up in opposition to their own Peasants Association. So it was they who had started the trouble! The anger of the group of men erupted in a horrendous thunderstorm of shouting and cursing. Staves, clods of earth and stones were hurled at the prisoners and a good few hit their own people too. Wang Zhuofang saw that things were getting out of hand. He ordered the spear corps to take the prisoners and turned the attention of the men towards Songzhuang to 'beat the hell out of the Husbands' Rights Association.' This tactic was immediately effective. The crowd of men outside the temple rolled off in the direction of the front of the village like a change in the wind direction, [leaving the four women to follow their new husbands home. The local tyrant's concubine had long since been carried into the temple of the earth god by Favus Head and now her giggles could be heard through the broken door of the temple, fading away across the spring countryside.] ¹⁵¹

The horror of this scene is lessened by the satirical tone of the narrative voice. Nevertheless, Mao Dun's vivid and detailed description is deliberately intended to show the legacy of thousands of years of Confucian bigotry among both men and women. Most notable is the unquestioning acceptance by the women of their fate. They are victims of 'anaesthetisation.' Their attitude is one of complete submission to man's bestial nature.

The final omission from the original text raises interesting questions. In its original form the text shows a remarkable change of mood experienced by the woman allotted to Favus Head which verges on fickleness. This can be seen to cast aspersions on the integrity of this woman which cannot easily be explained away as the result of anaesthetisation. In artistic terms

¹⁵¹ XSYB, 19.2, pp.247-248.

its original inclusion might well have been to add humour but it brings about a rather too abrupt change of mood.

News of what has happened filters slowly through to the town. No action is taken immediately but in a speech on Women's Day Sun Wuyang totally misconstrues what has been happening. In her speech she talks of 'the spring thunder of women's liberation' and 'the harbinger of liberation for bondswomen and concubines.'¹⁵² Miss Zhang, also of the local Women's Association, makes a more balanced speech, attacking the system under which bondswomen and concubines are immorally treated and nunneries are turned into brothels. Hu Guoguang proposes that all bondswomen, concubines, widows and nuns should be publicly owned and reallocated.¹⁵³ This meets with opposition from all sides. The Women's Association stands for emancipation but wants women to be taught skills to enable them to live independent lives. However, such opposition brings about the accusation by the extremists, led by the likes of Hu Guoguang, that the vacillatory stance of the local Party was preventing proper revolutionary policies from being fully carried out. With the lack of any alternative proposal a resolution is decided upon whereby:

All bondswomen are to be emancipated without exception; concubines over forty are allowed to remain in their former masters' homes; nuns are to be emancipated without exception but old nuns may choose to remain nuns; widows under thirty who have no children will be emancipated without exception, whereas others may continue their widowhood.¹⁵⁴

In addition a women's care centre is to be set up as a staging post for newly emancipated women before their full entry into society. Despite all the well-meaning proposals put forward to safeguard the position of these women, it is eventually revealed that Hu Guoguang has ensured that the conditions of the emancipation of local women accord with his and Lu's completely unrevolutionary intentions. It suits their plan to call for the destruction of feudalistic thinking but such thinking is not dissimilar to Hu's and Lu's own if only the rest of the committee would see it. The two of them manage to engineer Lu's 'little widow' on to the staff of the care

¹⁵² *MDQJ*, 1, p.188.

¹⁵³ Of course, this proposal upholds the traditional assumption of ownership.

¹⁵⁴ *MDQJ*, 1, p.190. Translation from Chen, op. cit., p.86.

centre, which enables them to use it as their own private brothel.

The horror of the White backlash itself is also portrayed in terms of its effect on women.¹⁵⁵ Of course the intention of the White Terror was to snuff out the whole of the revolutionary movement once and for all, not simply to seek out the women who were involved in it. But in *Vacillation*, the vivid portrayal of the assault on the Women's Association is enough to suggest the viciousness of the reactionary forces throughout the rural areas.

The predicament of the central character in the short story *Suicide*, a woman driven to suicide, is used to evoke general questions of how to believe in a better future when the present is so unbearably bleak. As discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, the collection *Wild Roses* presents as its main point of focus the difficulties in continuing to believe in their ideals of those whose aspirations were dashed by the failure of the 1927 revolution. *Suicide* particularly explores the way one's perceptions of the hopelessness of the present are coloured by images from the past. It does so through an exploration of the consciousness of a young girl (Miss Huan) whose lover has left to join the revolution, through the interplay in her mind of tenderly remembered episodes from their affair and her anxiety at what she imagines to be the consequences of these in the present – each equally real to her. Most of the 'action' of the piece actually takes place inside her head.

The narrative voice of the story is deliberately and deceptively subjective, reflecting Miss Huan's own assumptions as to the consequences of her past actions. Thus the reader has to take the validity of these assumptions on trust because no scale of values is provided to measure it against. She is an orphan who has been brought up by a kindly aunt who has even gone so far as to promise her free choice of marriage partner. However, as she re-lives every precious moment of the night of love-making, Miss Huan is overcome with melancholy: she has thrown away the freedom of choice which many other girls of her age would yearn for by having this affair.

¹⁵⁵ For descriptive details see pp.225-226 below.

She could no longer enjoy her precious youth – all had turned sour.¹⁵⁶ She persecutes herself by believing that everyone knows about the affair – but this is never substantiated. She hides from the world in her room ‘like a rabbit hiding in a burrow’ and sinks ever further into depression at the beauty of the world which she sees from her window whilst her fate is so cruel – because she imagines it to be so. From this low her thoughts turn back to her lover who is prepared to sacrifice his own happiness for the greater cause. Escape from haunting fears of discovery takes the form of a pink reverie where her lover returns as a revolutionary hero with a row of medals on his chest and is acclaimed by all those whose disdain she presently fears. The cold light of day brings fresh doubts. Her persecution complex extends to reading her own predicament into the news stories in the newspaper. Even here she finds only implied criticism of herself. She sees herself as a plaything of fate. Eventually she is persuaded by her cousin to go out but she continuously scrutinises her companions for signs that they have seen into her thoughts and discovered her guilty secret. There is joyous relief when she realises that her friends are unaware of it but this in turn is dashed by the terrible discovery that she is pregnant.

Now the cycle of anguish, romantic reverie as escape and haunting fear of discovery repeats itself with ever greater intensity. She sees a road of red light to the south and her lover’s face. He would want her to bring up his child and in her dreams this is what she will do with pride as a testimony to his bravery. But in the cold moonlight she sees only reproach. She lacks the lifetime’s worth of courage necessary to carry this out. There is no way out except suicide – for this courage is required only for an instant. She intends her death to be a testament to the illusory nature of all ideas of liberation, freedom and light by which she had once been so inspired. Only at this point does an alternative set of values fleetingly and indistinctly presents itself; as the noose tightens around her neck, it occurs to her that there could be another way out if she could only follow the new tide ... But she has made her choice.

¹⁵⁶ The loss of youth is a recurrent theme in *Eclipse*, notably articulated by Hui in *Disillusion* and Zhang Qiuli in *Pursuit*. Presumably she feels she has spoiled her chances of happy marriage because she has given up her virginity.

The use of suicide as a motif has a particular significance for the contemporary readership, particularly the suicide of a young woman. Firstly, suicide was the only traditional means of protest open to a woman against an unbearable situation. As a weapon it had a double edge, for although of finite effect on her own life, a woman might bring about infinite shame on the family which was the cause of her misery. However, since suicide was also one of the bolsters of the traditional moral code, and required of women if their honour or chastity – as defined by the code – had been compromised, then, far from disrupting the code, a woman's suicide might also endorse it and perpetuate it. With the advent of the new thought tide, many young women continued to use the traditional means of protest in the name of the New Thought to protest against the continued imposition of traditional values upon them. This was especially the case with arranged marriages.¹⁵⁷ *Suicide* is evocative of this intertwining of the old and the new with respect particularly to socially acceptable norms of behaviour for women. Traditional concepts of chastity were indicted relentlessly by Chen Duxiu in pace-setting magazines like *XQN* but the extent of their internalisation by the younger generation meant that a young girl like Miss Huan, despite being a follower of the new ways and having chosen to engage in 'free love', could still allow herself to be persecuted for having broken the chastity code. In Miss Huan's case, suicide on these grounds follows the traditional pattern: she cannot remain in society with her honour compromised as she believes it to have been. Furthermore, she wishes to use her suicide as an indictment against the new thought for having failed her. Her actions contrast with those of the young women who used the traditional method of protest in the name of the new thought, against traditional values.

Ostensibly the story centres on Miss Huan's lack of courage to face the social and personal consequences of her illegitimate pregnancy. Mao Dun uses the unreliable narrative voice to show the extent to which traditional forces are able to work on her consciousness. It is her *belief* that her aunt will ostracise her once her affair is discovered. But there are no grounds

¹⁵⁷ See eg Roxane Witke, *Mao Tse-tung, women and suicide* in Marilyn B. Young ed., *Women in China*, pp.7-33.

within the context of the narrative to suggest that this will be the case. Indeed, the aunt has shown only understanding and kindness to her. By the same token, life with an illegitimate pregnancy may not assume the nightmare proportions it takes on in Miss Huan's mind. We are further invited to explore the reasons for the way she misconstrues these realities. To her the past – her affair as she remembers it – is more real than the present. All her efforts are concentrated on keeping that past alive in a hostile present and because this past remains the focus of her attention, her vision of it becomes distorted, embellished. At the same time her perspective on the present becomes distorted. Now the allegorical function of the presentation of this unstable consciousness becomes clear: an over-romantic and backward-looking view of the failed revolution fits uneasily into a present dominated by the White Terror. Furthermore it could cloud one's perception of the present and of what might be an appropriate means of facing it.

Miss Huan is the only female character who commits suicide in Mao Dun's early fiction. Others, such as Miss Zhang in *Haze*, contemplate it but reject it as a viable course of action. In general it does not have a high profile in the early fiction. The other major instance is Shi Xun's attempted suicide in *Pursuit*. Suicide is too greatly intertwined with the maintenance of an outmoded code of morals to receive much attention from Mao Dun. It is associated with weakness of will and an inability to face life in a changing society.

Part III: Gender Polarisation and Merging

Ironically, the effect of the introduction of feminist ideas was often the polarisation of relations between the sexes. Mao Dun was particularly wary of the destructive behaviour associated with feminism and expressed great concern at the trend among some women, whose 'awakening' had brought them to a position of extreme intolerance of men, and for whom all men were 'the enemy.' In an article entitled *What kind of awareness is this?*¹⁵⁸ he described how many women's 'awareness' had brought them to the realisation that they could no longer accept maltreatment by men, but they

¹⁵⁸ FNPL, 13 (26.10.1921) *Zhe shi na yi zhong de juewu?*

developed a hatred of all men and a sympathy towards all women. Thus in their perception there were only two alternatives in relations between the sexes, submission or antagonism, since they believed all men to be as wolves while they were sheep. He accepted that thousands of years of oppression by men could not easily be forgiven but insisted that it was totally misguided to see all men as the enemy when many were their friends.¹⁵⁹

In his works there are two women who exemplify this antagonistic attitude: Hui in *Disillusion* and Zhang Qiuliu in *Pursuit*. In revenge for her treatment by men, Hui resolves to treat all men as she has been treated. She appears cool and calculating in her attitude, yet in the eyes of the reader there is a certain justification in Hui's actions in that her past experiences have pushed her to this extreme. In Jing's perception Hui is like a wild beast lashing out on all sides in order to take revenge, in which process the innocent have also been sacrificed.¹⁶⁰ In other words, Hui is non-discriminatory in her attitudes.

The case of Zhang Qiuliu contrasts with that of Hui. Qiuliu's awareness of women's down-trodden position and their vulnerability in the face both of men's physical strength and the pressures of a male-dominated society is acute. This is given specific expression when Qiuliu goes to visit Wang Shitao. Wang's situation does not so much sadden Qiuliu as anger her. She is preoccupied with the beauty of her own body and the pursuit of physical pleasures and stimulations. Thus Wang's physical condition and her decision to have Dong Fangming's baby provoke Qiuliu's anger:

This is not something which will be over in a week or two, it will burden you for five or six years. [By that time your hot youthful blood will have cooled, your body will have deteriorated, times will probably have changed and your strength of will will have become an empty hope.]¹⁶¹

Qiuliu is appalled at the consequences of Wang's and her friend Zhao's position: that they should maintain themselves by 'selling their sex.' When, in the following chapter, Wang Zhongzhao enquires after Wang Shitao, Qiuliu expresses in the following terms her intense anger and disgust at what

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter Six for further examination of this theme.

¹⁶⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, p.43.

¹⁶¹ *XSYP*, 19.8, pp.972-3.

the two of them are prepared to do for the sake of vague future ideals:

I myself feel choked. A better way of putting it would be that
I feel suffocated, suffocated with that infernal suffocation one feels
when one smells the stench of a rotting corpse. 162

Prostitution is the ultimate act of self-subjugation to the domination and demands of men, and, as such, it is quite repugnant to Qiuliu. So she embraces Shitao tightly and exhorts her to join forces to put down all men. At this point in the novelette it is as if Qiuliu is launching a crusade against all men for the sake of the down-trodden position of women. At one point, as part of her pursuit of all life's experiences, she had toyed with the idea of trying the life of a prostitute so that she could

"... play around with those stupid men who think that all women are their playthings. Shitao, the most pleasurable thing for a woman to do is to entice a proud man to prostrate himself at your feet and then use all your might to kick him away." 163

But, having returned to her room after seeing Shitao, the sudden appearance of Cao Zhifang provides her with an inkling of what she had contemplated. He appears just when she is half naked, in the process of changing her clothes, and is inspired by her body to demand that she be his partner and join him in a life of banditry. He is very keen to impress upon her that he is not afraid of the dangers of such a life and accuses her of being afraid when she refuses. Twice he uses his superior physical strength against her. The first time as he barges into her room unexpectedly, he really does frighten her. He pulls off the blanket which Qiuliu had grabbed hastily and takes several menacing steps towards her, making her turn away from him before laughing scornfully at her and accusing her of cowardice. By this time any fear which Qiuliu may have felt has very definitely turned to anger at being humiliated in this way. The second time is after she has refused to go with him: he grabs her hand and twists it until she writhes with pain, before stalking out of the room without saying another word. Originally it had been her intention to use her beautiful body to make all men submit to her will but the realisation that men could always defeat her by virtue of their superior physical strength is like a stabbing pain.

¹⁶² MDQJ, 1, p.387.

¹⁶³ MDQJ, 1, p.373.

Qiuliu is so very angry that her body, the very means by which she had planned to bend men to her will was too weak to withstand their physical demands. She realises that prostitution is utterly repugnant to her because her sense of self respect is too highly developed. She could never surrender her body to men's desires: no high ideal would be worth this extreme sacrifice. Instead she contents herself with her project to remake the sceptic Shi Xun.

In *Rainbow*, Mei is similarly frustrated. She is repulsed by thoughts of her impending arranged marriage, not so much because her love for her boyfriend Weiyu will be denied but for fear of being dominated, enslaved.¹⁶⁴ Her school is preparing to put on *A doll's house* and Mei takes her inspiration from the character Mrs Linde. She has lost her respect for Nora because she feels Nora is a victim of her femininity. By contrast, Mrs Linde is able to use sex as a bargaining counter and thereby 'forgets that she is a *nüxing de ren*.' Mei decides that she will marry in order to teach Liu (her fiancé) a lesson: she will become caged and then escape; she will make him her slave. However, despite all her plans, on her wedding night she too becomes a victim of man's superior strength.¹⁶⁵ This experience colours her attitude towards the opposite sex when she does finally escape from her marriage:

Since she had escaped from Liu's cage she had truly overcome every obstacle: she had conquered her environment; she had also overcome the weaknesses of her own sex; she had tempted so many men to attack her but had laughingly kicked them away without losing her composure. ¹⁶⁶

In *Haze*, in an initial rush of anger at her boyfriend's unfaithfulness, Miss Zhang thinks similar thoughts:

Why don't I use some means to win him over, make him lie at my feet and then kick him away. ¹⁶⁷

But, in contrast to the likes of Hui, Miss Zhang thinks better of this impulse and decides to solve the problem of her imminent enforced marriage

¹⁶⁴ *MDQJ*, 2, p.43.

¹⁶⁵ See p.195 above.

¹⁶⁶ *MDQJ*, 8, p.180.

¹⁶⁷ *MDQJ*, 8, p.160.

by running away.¹⁶⁸

This insistent reversal of roles simply inverted traditional relations and contributed nothing to reform.¹⁶⁹ But Mao Dun was sympathetic to its motivations. In *FNPL*,¹⁷⁰ instead of mirroring the common response and blaming society, his strongest criticism was reserved for those men who continued to have no respect for women. He explained that woman's antipathy towards man had hitherto been concealed, without opportunity for expression, because she had been weakened by the civil and religious laws by which man had bound her, making her into an oppressed toy. Once again he reasoned that the advocacy of women's liberation necessarily meant that these pent up feelings would come out into the open, but, he warned, if shameless men continued to commit obscenities under false pretences, women's hatred would only gain in impetus.

As Jing's perceptions of the young wife in *Disillusion* and the attitudes of the peasant women in *Vacillation* show, sex was the ultimate means by which man expressed his dominance over, even his ownership of, woman. Thus the most extreme act of defiance for women was to refuse to participate, thereby denying men this means of expression.¹⁷¹ Traditionally this would be done by entering a Buddhist nunnery. Another approach developed in southern China in the nineteenth century with the spread of industrialisation. In order to escape oppression from husbands or parents women joined sisterhoods known as 'old maid homes' (*bu luo jia*) or golden orchid societies (*jin lan hui*), maintaining economic independence by working in the factories. Like the secret societies they acted as pseudo-kinship groups for their members, fulfilling a need within the tradition. These

¹⁶⁸ Compare also Jing's frustration and anger when Weili decides to return to the front. She feels an intense hatred not only of Weili but of all men (*hen yiqie nanzi*) and gains an insight into Hui's behaviour. However, reconciliation follows the next day.

¹⁶⁹ *FNZZ*, 6.3 (5.3.1920) *Women zenyang yubeile qu tan funü jiefang wenti?* (*How should we prepare to discuss the question of women's liberation?*)

¹⁷⁰ *FNPL*, 14 (2.11.1921) *Liang xing hu zhu* (*Mutual aid between the sexes*.) This is written under a pseudonym in reply to *Zhe shi na yi zhong juewu?*

¹⁷¹ Early feminists could conceive of no alternative within marriage to the role of domestic subservience. Thus they used any means they could (such as education and employment, the sale of jewelry and so on) to keep themselves and avoid 'the dreaded institution' altogether. See E. Croll, *op. cit.*, p.75.

sisterhoods were also associated with lesbianism.¹⁷² Little was written on this as it remained taboo, but the subject is hinted at once or twice in Mao Dun's fiction. In *Disillusion* Zhao Chizhu teases Jing and Wang Shitao by calling them lesbians because of the closeness of their friendship. In *Rainbow* Mei and Qijun share a dormitory bed in their school which, the narrative tells, us was common practice and is therefore unremarkable in itself, but their discussion of how Jing is going to prepare herself for her wedding night provides the allusion when Qijun asks: 'If at this moment the person sleeping by your side were not me but Liu what would you do? ...'¹⁷³ Lesbianism is the ultimate rejection of relations with the male sex, but celibacy, the equally defiant and more socially acceptable choice of many women at this time, became the subject of much debate.¹⁷⁴

This course of action is supposedly chosen by Miss Chen, a teacher in the school in Chongqing where Mei takes refuge after escaping from Liu. Miss Chen is described thus:

This Miss Chen was probably over thirty years old. She said that she herself had chosen to retain her single status but she greatly enjoyed discussing the loves and marriages of other people; it seemed she had much experience of all types of relations between men and women.¹⁷⁵

She is described as an old maid and Mei avoids her because she likes to poke her nose into other people's business, but Miss Chen eagerly seeks out opportunities for a chat. On one such occasion she discusses the reasons why women choose celibacy ('single-person-ism' *dushenzhuyi*):

— Many people seek refuge in the single life (*dushenzhuyi*) because the idea of marriage is not to their taste; others have high aspirations but their personal qualities are not up to the mark, however hard they try they are not rewarded with success, so they use the choice of the single life as an excuse; yet others cannot bear the pestering of men so they turn to the single life; still others simply use this as a pretence as if they are waiting to sell to the highest bidder! Nowadays there are many women who have chosen the single

¹⁷² For a fuller discussion see R. Witke, *Transformation of attitudes ...*, pp.201-210.

¹⁷³ *MDQJ*, 2, p.49. Levy confirms this common practice. He also suggests that the segregation of the sexes in the Chinese education system and the general taboo on open social relations between the sexes 'encouraged a wide range of platonic and carnal homosexual practices' in the dormitory after 'lights out.' See Chang Ching-sheng, *Sex histories ...*, p.3.

¹⁷⁴ See R. Witke, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁵ *MDQJ*, 2, p.104.

life, probably for one of these reasons, but all will then have misunderstood the true meaning of the single life!

— Then I imagine that you, Miss Chen, must have the most lofty of reasons for choosing the single life?

Mei made a special effort to be polite and tactful, but she could not help sending a penetrating glance in Miss Chen's direction.

— Ah, well ... Yes, because it is the most noble of ideas. 176

It is obvious that Miss Chen has simply been left on the shelf. Mao Dun appears to be discrediting the idea of *dushenzhuyi* by associating it with such a character. His de-emphasis of women's role within the family did not extend to this extreme. But it is not for this reason alone that Mei is dissatisfied with the arguments. Mei has no desire to be dominated by any man ever again, but the essence of *dushenzhuyi* was a negative response to a perceived evil.

Despite the varying degrees of justification for the angry polarisation of gender differences portrayed in these cases, the overall gloss is one of negativity and destructiveness. The polarisation of the differences remained too close to the rigid separation of the sexes enforced by traditional morals. However, on several occasions Mao Dun had also expressed his dissatisfaction with the feminist argument because of its tendency towards the neutralising of sex differences in the family, the workplace and the political arena, and also because of the division of loyalties which it caused between the right of women to a career and their right to a fulfilled life within the family.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, he saw no hope in the obstinate division of the sexes advocated by Key, and insisted that women's talents were not at all limited to motherhood. Mao Dun worked to narrow the artificial divide which Confucianism had maintained between the sexes: women should have the same opportunities as men in employment and education, they should be subject to the same moral standards and so on. In one article he went as far as to suggest that women's dress should be similar to men's — as an outward expression of equality.¹⁷⁸ The extent to which

¹⁷⁶ MDQJ, 2, pp.105-106.

¹⁷⁷ See FNPL, 13 (26.10.1921) *Suowei nüxingzhuyi de liang jiduan pai* (Two extremes in so-called feminist thought) or eg FNPL, 2 (10.8.1921) *Shu bao jieshao (1): Funü yao de shenme* (Book review (1): What women want.)

¹⁷⁸ FNZZ, 6.2 (5.2.1920) *Nannü shejiao gongkui wenti guanjian* (Views on the question

gender differences could actually be merged seems to have been a question which fascinated Mao Dun and this fascination found expression in many of his creative works. The merging of identities necessarily implies stepping outside women's traditionally circumscribed role.

Traditional Images of the Merging of Gender

Historically, the only way women could transcend their prescribed role was through romantic literature which portrayed 'patriotic and romantic heroines' serving their country or secretly meeting their loved ones. A perennial favourite was the story of Mulan, set in the sixth century AD.

She was the daughter of an old and ailing general who was suddenly called up to lead the Imperial troops into battle. To save her father she donned the dress of a boy, left home and for twelve years fought in the army. She was a leader of men, performed great feats of courage and was rewarded for her heroic services to the Emperor. None suspected her sex, her chastity was preserved and it was not until she returned home and exchanged her linked-iron tunic for a skirt that her true identity was discovered. 179

But Mulan differs from Mao Dun's women because she belongs within the tradition. Even though she takes on a male leadership role, it is stressed that her chastity remained intact throughout her adventures. When she returns home she continues her former circumscribed existence as if the past twelve years had been an aberration. Indeed, Mulan makes no challenge to the traditional order. Her actions are motivated by filial piety and she brings about no revision in the treatment of women. It may be said that she transcends her sex to take on a suprasexual role while taking her father's place, shedding all distinguishing qualities, and only reverting to womanhood when the task is completed. Of course, anything more would have been beyond the bounds of that same tradition. The possibility of the interchangeability of roles within the orthodox tradition is endorsed by M. Elvin who writes of cases where, in the absence of sons, an unmarried daughter could take on the role of a son-substitute, even to the extent of

of open social relations between men and women.)

¹⁷⁹ E. Croll, op. cit., p.34. The figure of the female knight-errant with superhuman powers is retained in Butterfly fiction, Guan Xiugu in Zhang Henshui's *Fate in tears and laughter* being a case in point.

Cross dressing and the interchangeability of gender has a long history in Chinese literature and folklore of which the following is not intended to be an exhaustive summary. In the *Yu tai xin yong* (Six Dynasties) in poems where homosexual love is portrayed and the sex objects are male rather than female, young men or page boys are described in the same flowery language used to describe women, suggesting that similar ideals of beauty were applied to both sexes.¹⁸¹ The theme is particularly prominent in the *zhi guai* ('recording the abnormal') tradition. Here it is but one manifestation of the movement between natural categories which are properly alien to one another: human and non-human, dead and living and so on.¹⁸² In its perversion of the natural order, this illicit crossing of boundaries was a source of endless fascination, not least with the question of what new reality could result from it. Dudbridge quotes a poem by Bo Juyi to illustrate this fascination:

The Shu maid changed into a stream.
Niu Ai in his sickness became a tiger.
Someone had a willow grow from his elbow.
Sometimes a man turns into a woman.
Birds and beasts, rivers and trees,
Basically do not mix with mankind.
But, for no good reason, our lives suffer change,
When we least expect it we die and return to dust. 183

Within this heterodox tradition the roles of gender also interchange. Thus, although the fox spirit is generally portrayed as being female, bringing a malicious influence to bear on an unsuspecting male, the reverse scenario is also encountered. *Gu er* (*The merchant's son*) in *Liaozhai zhiyi* provides an example:

A tradesman of Chu was away on business; and his wife, who lived alone, dreamt one night that someone was having sex with her.

¹⁸⁰ M. Elvin, *Female virtue and the state in China*, pp.143-144

¹⁸¹ Burton Watson, *Chinese lyricism*, p.92.

¹⁸² See G. Dudbridge, *The tale of Li Wa*, pp.61-63. As discussed earlier, the case of the fox fairy also comes into this category.

¹⁸³ G. Dudbridge, *The tale of Li Wa*, p.63.

Waking up, she reached out her hand and fumbled in the dark. The stranger beside her turned out to be a young man of small stature. As there was something out of the ordinary about him, she knew him to be a fox. Shortly afterwards, the thing got out of bed and disappeared, although the door had not been opened.

The next evening she asked the cook-maid to share her bed. She also had her son, who was ten years old and accustomed to sleeping in another bed, come to keep her company. As the night deepened when both cook-maid and the boy had fallen asleep, the fox appeared once again. Presently the mistress started muttering something as if talking in her sleep. This woke the cook-maid, who immediately called out and the fox vanished. From then on, the tradesman's wife was often found in a trance. When night fell, she dared not blow out the candle and she warned her son not to sleep too soundly. ¹⁸⁴

Her liaison with the fox eventually causes the woman to go mad. The fox is finally outwitted by her son but the woman's constitution has been fatally contaminated and she dies.

Late Ming fiction has been shown to contain elements which continue the fascination with the subversion of gender roles. Whereas in Chapter Two we have noted the misogyny of the major heroes of the *Water margin*, McMahon notes the gradual emergence of the *fengliu* type, 'the man who is sexually and emotionally more open to women and who has a sharp eye for subtleties.' ¹⁸⁵ In opposition to the macho hero, this gentler type often figures as the comely youth (*mei shaonian*.) He is distinguished by his 'beardless face, handsome features, lithe physique and clever mind.' Indeed, in the context of homosexual romance, he might even be compared explicitly with a beautiful woman (*meiren*.) ¹⁸⁶ This type of romance takes gender merging to its extreme. A justification of homosexual love in a story from the collection *Hairpins beneath his cap* (*Bian er chai*) emphasises the fulfilment to be gained in the crossing of natural boundaries:

If we go by the logic of Reason, then what we have done today is wrong; but if we use the logic of Love, then we are right. For a man can become a woman and a woman can become a man. It is possible to go from life into death as well as from death into life. Those who are bound by the difference between man and woman or life and death have not lived love to the fullest. ¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Translation from *Strange tales from Liaozhai*, p.63.

¹⁸⁵ K. McMahon, *Causality and containment ...*, p.51.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.55.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.74.

The transformation of gender is taken further still in two other stories where boys are female impersonators. In one case the boy's feet are softened in order that he may bind them. He is taken in as a concubine until calamity breaks up the household. Thereafter he lives out his life as a nun.¹⁸⁸ Such preoccupations redress the balance substantially tipped in the direction of woman's superior sexual capacity by the sex manuals. The implication is of an all-containing self which can be both male and female.¹⁸⁹

The opposite extreme also occurs. There is the 'Amazon-like' or 'masculine woman' who neutralises the brutish hero Wang Qing in *Water margin*, by equalling him in sexual capacity.¹⁹⁰ There is also the recurring image of the community ruled by women, such as the Kingdom of women in the *Jing hua yuan*.. The late Ming novel *Lost tales of the true way* (*Chan zhen yishi*) also provides an example called Henville (*Ciji shi*) which is governed by a fierce woman with 'large breasts, big feet, a fierce look and dark skin.' In her the masculine and the feminine are also combined: in her behaviour she challenges male dominance but when she is stripped naked before the men whom she oppresses, she is still sexually desirable to them.¹⁹¹

Gender Merging in Mao Dun's Fiction

Mao Dun's article summarising Key's *Love and marriage* included a passage in which Key criticised the trend towards the creation of a 'third sex.'¹⁹² Key argued that in their demands for emancipation, women were becoming more like men, thereby creating a third sex of women who had become man-like. Mao Dun rejected Key's advocacy of the strict differentiation of gender roles and in both his theory and his fiction he endorses the narrowing gender differences. Unlike Key, but probably inspired by her, he welcomed trends towards the creation of a third sex, especially in terms of women's role and opportunities. The idea became a starting point for his

¹⁸⁸ K. McMahon, *ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁸⁹ See K. McMahon, *ibid.*, p.78.

¹⁹⁰ K. McMahon, *ibid.*, p.54.

¹⁹¹ K. McMahon, *ibid.*, p.115.

¹⁹² *FNZZ*, 6.3 (5.3.1920) *Aiqing yu jiehun*.

own speculations on this theme. This is a concrete instance of how Mao Dun incorporated aspects of his reading of sociological texts into his fiction. If women were truly emancipated, would it not be possible for gender differences to be merged so that differentiation would be immaterial?

Mao Dun plays with the idea of the third sex in his fiction by manipulating traditional gender identities. Women are often aggressive, dominant: male or yang characteristics. Men are often weak-willed and vacillatory: female or yin characteristics. This merging is underlined by the way female characters are described in male terms and vice versa. Of Hui, Jing says 'Hui is a most unyielding and resolute person; she is a male [type of] woman (*yi ge nanxing de nüzi*).'¹⁹³ In *Pursuit*, in one of her moments of introspection, Qiuliu recalls what her friends say of her:

All her friends said that she had the body of a woman and the disposition of a man. On many occasions she had indeed proved herself to be a person without scruples who had the courage for action.¹⁹⁴

In *Rainbow* Mei's friend Qijun is described as having 'a masculine air about her with an imposing manner which commanded respect.'¹⁹⁵ In *Road*, Xu and Rong's female friend Heng also has male characteristics:

Born tall and strong, her usual nick-name was 'health and beauty.' She was also the 'ideal husband' for all the girls — the weaker of the boys used this to tease Heng for being seventy percent manlike.¹⁹⁶

These women challenge male assumptions of superiority. An example is Qiuliu's reply to Cao Zhifang's demand that she follow him into the hills to become a bandit: 'Follow? I have no liking at all for following people.' In the same way, Qiuliu tells Long Fei that she has only been *playing* with him for her own satisfaction, 'like holding out my hand for a dog to lick.' She challenges his belief that he can pester (*jiuchan*) her and tie her down (*shuchan*) as and when he wishes.¹⁹⁷ They even reverse these assumptions. After the extended investigation of the male assumption of ownership of women in *Vacillation*, in *Pursuit* Qiuliu gives the following

¹⁹³ MDQJ, 1, p.41.

¹⁹⁴ MDQJ, 1, p.320.

¹⁹⁵ MDQJ, 2, p.37.

¹⁹⁶ MDJQ, 2, pp.289-290.

¹⁹⁷ MDQJ, 1, p.347. These terms are also used by Hui to describe men's treatment of women.

warning to Zhang Manqing about his girlfriend Miss Zhu: 'She already sees you as her possession.' This theme is further underlined by the frequent portrayal of male characters in female terms. When Bao Su is rejected by Hui, he describes himself thus:

I am like a virgin, full of pure feelings of love, who meets a most perfidious man and gives her whole soul to him; but afterwards he turns round and abandons her. 198

Similarly, when Fang Meili tells her husband that she wants a divorce, his confusion is compared to that of 'a wife suspected of unfaithfulness.' Sun Wuyang's assumption of dominance over the prominent men in the town is lent further *masculinity* by her remarks such as that about Zhu Minsheng: 'I know he is a muddle-headed idiot but I like him from time to time because he is like a woman.' 199 A further illustration is provided by Jing in *Disillusion*. As shown in Chapter Four, she is generally recognised as being a weak character, but suddenly she takes on a dominant role in her relationship with Weili:

This union on the part of Miss Jing was [a white hot love arising out of a mingled compassion and respect;] it was voluntary (*zhugongde*) and self-conscious [not sentimental]. One might say of the futurist (*ie* Weili) that he was attracted (*bei sheyin*) and moved (*bei ganhua*), but it might be said that this was just another aspect of his futurism. Heaven only knows what was going on! But in that first week their two hearts united; it was undeniably a Naturalistic love not a Futuristic love. 200

A notable aspect of Mao Dun's strong women is that, although they are given so-called 'masculine' attributes of determination, forthrightness, dominance and so on, this in no way diminishes their 'feminine' attributes. They are still beautiful, charming, sexy and so on; such that most of the men who surround them find them irresistible.

By comparison, his male characters often lose their physical attributes of masculinity. In *Rainbow* Mei's boyfriend Wei Yu is effeminate in appearance. 201 As in this case, effeminacy in men may be associated with

198 MDQJ, 1, p.43.

199 MDQJ, 1, p.171.

200 MDQJ, 1, p.87. Translation adapted from Chen, *Realism and allegory ...*, p.71; the Chinese passive construction emphasises the active nature of Jing's participation in the relationship. [] indicate omissions from the later version.

201 MDQJ, 2, p.19.

ineffectualness or weakness: Wei Yu's advocacy of Tolstoyan non-resistance brings about an enforced end to their relationship. Another male character in *Rainbow* who is given effeminate characteristics is Li Wuji, a male teaching colleague whom Mei later encounters again in Shanghai, by which time he has joined the Nationalist Party. Li has 'soft, fluffy hair like a woman's' ²⁰² which he has the habit of sweeping back off his face. Quite the antithesis of Jing's description of Hui, Li is described as 'a female [type of] man (*yi ge nüxing de nanzi*).'²⁰³

When female characters do lose their physical feminine characteristics, either by accident or design, it is generally treated humorously. Such is the case of Qionghua in *A woman* whose father tabooed the fact that she was a girl because he wanted a son. ²⁰⁴ The episode of Mei's haircut in *Rainbow* is also treated in this way. Not only did her bobbed haircut cause so much commotion in the town that her father wanted to withdraw her from school altogether (until Mei persuaded him to allow her to become a boarder, thereby eliminating the possibility of embarrassment as she walked to school every day) but her father's initial reaction to the haircut is also interesting:

That a daughter should become a son is in the end no bad thing.
It is just a pity that I could never have a son. ²⁰⁵

However, his attitude soon changed. He began to complain that one could not tell the difference between male and female these days and that people were gossiping. There is obviously a long way to go before the sex of a child will lose its significance. A third example also occurs in *Rainbow* when Mei and Huang Yinming share lodgings. Their ageing female servant who comes in daily to cook and clean for them thinks Yinming is Mei's husband because of Yinming's bobbed hair and western dress, which the older woman takes for traditional male attire.

This very much suggests that Mao Dun was maintaining traditional stereotyping by his assumption that attributes of 'masculinity' necessarily

²⁰² *MDQJ*, 2, p.178.

²⁰³ *MDQJ*, 2, p.229.

²⁰⁴ *MDQJ*, 8, p.53.

²⁰⁵ *MDQJ*, 2, p.41.

imply dominance, *etc.* and that attributes of ‘femininity’ are associated with softness, gentleness and so on, whether they appear in male or female characters. However, Mao Dun does attempt to undermine some of these assumptions.

Let us compare Mao Dun’s physical description of Qiang Weili in *Disillusion* and Fang Luolang in *Vacillation*. Qiang Meng (‘violent force’) – also called Weili (‘only force’) – is deliberately portrayed as a heroic and valiant soldier. There is authorial comment to emphasise the correlation between his physical appearance and his nature:

With a pair of long, narrow eyes, a straight nose, a mouth neither too big nor too small, fine, black hair and a round face, he appeared refined and gentle. Only his eyebrows expressed his valiant spirit, but although they were thick and black they were not particularly bushy. ²⁰⁶

His thick eyebrows reveal his valiant spirit but their lack of bushiness might be explained by the way he is conquered by his love for Jing which, finally, he holds to be of greater importance to him than his lust for the danger of the battlefield. Nevertheless, Qiang Weili scores strongly in ‘masculinity.’

We are first introduced to Fang Luolang through his photograph:

On the lintel above a pair of small doors was a twenty-four inch enlargement of a man’s portrait photograph. With a square face, thick eyebrows, a straight nose and eyes neither too big nor too small, it could be said that this man’s appearance was out of keeping with convention. Hu Guoguang gathered that this was a photograph of Fang Luolang. ²⁰⁷

Judging by the description of Qiang Weili, Fang appears to be another of the heroic type with his unconventional air and his thick eyebrows. However, even on his first appearance in the novel, he is described as having a ‘vacillatory spirit’ (*dongyao de xin*). In time he will be shown to be the embodiment of vacillation, both in the context of local politics and in his relations with women. A ‘vacillatory spirit,’ being a sign of weakness, is

²⁰⁶ *MDQJ*, 1, p.79. In traditional fiction bushy eyebrows were a common descriptive tag used to denote bravery and heroism. See K. McMahon, *Causality and containment* ..., p.55.

²⁰⁷ *MDQJ*, 1, p.131. These two passages of description also illustrate Mao Dun’s tendency towards formulaic description.

much more of a feminine quality, notwithstanding Fang's 'masculine' description. Thus one should be wary of making simplistic inferences from Mao Dun's character portrayal. In the latter case Fang's physical description is very much tongue-in-cheek, perhaps suggesting the other self to which Fang aspires, or even believes himself to be. As has already been pointed out, the lack of a dominant male figure in Mao Dun's early life may be reflected in the dearth of strong heroic male characters in his fiction.

Nevertheless, gender differentiation remains because male and female characters receive different treatment. There is an attempt to undermine traditional assumptions of masculinity, particularly in physical terms, but the corresponding attempt in respect of femininity founders because the behavioural 'masculinity' of a female character tends to sit uneasily beside her seductive physical attributes. This suggests an expression of Mao Dun's own prejudices.

This quest for gender merging is juxtaposed against the monolithic force of Chinese tradition. The strength of feeling against the merging of gender difference is most graphically shown in *Vacillation*, the events portrayed having been the substance of news reports of events in the 'Red' area around Wuhan which Mao Dun received but was not allowed to publish.²⁰⁸ The bandits portrayed in the novelette represent the Nationalist forces of 'White Terror.' When the 'bandits' enter the town they deliberately attack the offices of the local Women's Association because this group is seen as the main force behind a perceived movement to narrow physical sex differences. As such it combines the two foci of the mob's hatred: the Party and liberated women; as Hu Bing warns: 'They'll fuck them to death and shoot all those in the Party.'²⁰⁹ Thus women with long hair feel at less risk than those with bobbed hair, who are singled out for attack. Most horrifying is the way these women are attacked. This is Lin Zichong's account of events to Fang:

There is no end to the brutality of the local tyrants and evil

²⁰⁸ See e.g. *WZGDL*, I, pp.288-293. See also *From Guling to Tokyo* (Y. S. Chen's translation in *The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, p.41) and the short story *Mud* (1929.) S. W. Chen comments on the emotional effect these experiences had on Mao Dun in *Mao Dun the translator*, p.204.

²⁰⁹ *MDQJ*, 1, p.245.

gentry! There were three women with bobbed hair in the offices of the Women's Association who were captured by them. Not only did they take it in turns to rape each of them, but stripped them naked and cut their breasts through with iron wire. Then they dragged them down to the county Party offices where they finished them off by ramming wooden staves in between their legs. 210

The women are attacked in such a way as to emphasise physical sexual differences and male dominance — those two elements most threatened by the revolution. Sun Wuyang escapes by disguising those very features of her womanly charm with which she had previously attracted male attention. She bandages up her body and disguises herself as a youth, denying her femininity for survival. 211 Independent corroboration of this type of occurrence, which one might have hoped was exaggeration as a product of artistic licence, is provided by Anna Louise Strong in *China's millions*. Strong toured the former Red areas after the White backlash and was given many accounts of atrocities committed. Two are particularly relevant. The first is the story of Wang Su Chun [sic]:

Such is the complex web of women's fate in China, against which the story of Wang Su Chun flames, brief and tragic, from the high, defiant choice of her own lover, through the mounting fire of her seven month's freedom as she worked in the women's union, to the agony of that last hour when jeering soldiery, spurred on by her own neighbours, cut the flesh slowly from her bones and fired at last, into the broken pieces of her body, seventeen shots to show the extremity of their hate. 212

210 *ibid.*

211 This is a reworking of a traditional theme. E. Croll describes how, as part of the campaign against footbinding, reformers would quote a popular ballad which told of the fate of bound-footed women unable to flee from marauding bandits, in comparison to their sisters with healthy feet. The ballad also tells of women disguising themselves to escape:

My neighbour a healthy wife,
With feet bare and unbound,
Escapes to the valley, babe in arms,
Another wraps her turban like a man,
Rice in bag, pot on shoulder,
Lucky she can hide her femininity from bandit eyes.
(See E. Croll, *op. cit.*, p.49.)

212 *China's millions*, p.137.

Strong interviewed a student who knew Wang:

'... Miss Wang fall in love and declare love before she get married. She choose fiancé before her parents permit. This is free love, free engagement, free marriage. It is very shocking to old-fashioned people living in China. ... When the reactionary soldiers came into the town,' concluded the student lad who had been her friend, 'the neighbours in her own street turned her over to the soldiers. She could never escape; she was most prominent of all the KMT people in the town. Her own neighbours for the hate they bore her, brought the soldiers, and shouted to urge them on.

'The soldiers were all about her, many soldiers and one girl agitator. That was what everyone called Wang Su Chun now. The soldiers shouted many bad words at her until they stirred their rage up. Then they cut her to pieces with knives and bayonets.' He pointed grimly to his breast to show where they began cutting. 'Then they cut off her arms; they cut off many pieces. By and by they fire seventeen shots into what was left.' 213

A second account tells of the *Revolution in Yungfong* and shows how the narrowing of differences was perceived as such a threat:

... But during the time when the unions occupied the mission building, ten girls of the women's union lived in it together with men unionists and labour soldiers. To the minds of the orthodox Chinese, all of these are 'ruined women,' who must certainly have been living in utter promiscuity. These girls I learned, wore uniforms like men; they went tirelessly from house to house urging the unbinding of feet, and the cutting of hair, and the right of young people to marry without their parents' consent. From all of these facts, it appeared that it was the more potent emotion of Revolution rather than of sex which stirred them. But to the older inhabitants of Yungfong, the wearing of men's clothes was only an additional horror.

One girl especially was picked out later for punishment, because she 'bound her breasts with a girdle to compress herself and look unlike a woman.' Terrible was her fate when the soldiers overthrew the unions. The reorganised merchants' union removed the girl's clothes to the waist and exposed her for two days and nights in the temple at the centre of the main street under the guard of soldiers, 'so that every man in town may see that she is a woman.' Then she was sent home to her husband's house, for girls of nineteen in China nearly always have husbands, and she lies there today in Yungfong disgraced and hidden. 214

To seek to blur the boundaries of gender difference was to incur the wrath of this monolithic force. Such an aspiration was equal in menace to the 'levelling' policies of the Communists — a threat to the very foundations of the structures of wealth and power. In *Vacillation*, the women's

213 *ibid.*, p.140, 148.

214 *ibid.*, p.189-190.

section of the Party is perceived as the embodiment of both these menaces, hence the ferocity of the attack on the 'new women.'

A similar quest for the merging of gender identity in terms of psychological portrayal – or an assumption that it was possible – is discussed in Chapter Four. This also encounters obstacles of Mao Dun's own making. Suggestions of the interchangeability of experience seem at odds with his obvious sympathy with specifically female experience, such as in his description of Mei's wedding night in *Rainbow*. It also runs counter to an implied sympathy for the demands of characters like Hui in *Disillusion* for a reversal of the old order. This is achieved by showing repeatedly that the reason why these strong women are so angry, aggressive and manipulative is because of the way they have suffered at the hands of men who are a product of the traditional system of values. However, sympathy for this type of militancy inevitably suggests a new polarisation with all men perceived as the enemy. It also conflicted with Mao Dun's evolving Marxist ideas. Feminism was ultimately unsatisfactory because it elevated the needs of the individual above the needs of the collective. At the same time, the antagonism between the sexes to which it also gave rise was the cause of even greater concern.

It is in this context that Mao Dun's fascination with the idea of the third sex evolved. In its original conception, it suggests the assumption by women of social roles and attitudes hitherto reserved for men, and thereby their becoming somehow 'man-like.' This merging of roles was of course given added poignancy as women chose to cut their hair short and wear clothes which deemphasised their physical differences with men as a symbol of the liberation they sought. If the liberation of women as individuals could be expressed in terms of the merging of gender identities, this could be harnessed nicely into the service of the revolution where men and women would work side by side as equals for the greater cause, their gender differences becoming immaterial. In this way Mao Dun sought to mediate the growing conflict between his feminist sympathies and his commitment to Marxism. Thus characters invite judgement on the basis of their commitment to China's future and their loyalty to the revolutionary cause. This should mean that those whose concern for personal liberation,

revenge, free love and so on overrides their commitment to the greater cause should be indicted. However, Mao Dun's remaining sympathy for the cause of female emancipation did not allow the censure of 'strong women' who bring about destruction in other people's lives. This brings ambivalence into the new revolutionary morality of his fiction and underscores his failure to mediate the contradiction between his conflicting sympathies.

CHAPTER SIX

The Triumph of Socialism over Feminism

The polarisation of relations between the sexes was especially dangerous because it precluded considerations of class. The linking of class concerns with the women's question occurs very early in Mao Dun's writing. In October 1921 he wrote:

I have recently discovered something very important: all women who call themselves 'aware' must retain a sense of class. ¹

To emphasise gender differences at the expense of class — such as by setting men up as the enemy and challenging their assumed position, which is at the heart of *dushenzhuyi* — would cause conflict within classes rather than between them.

What Mao Dun most feared was what he called a 'class war between the sexes,' ² meaning a sex struggle where those of the same class would be ranged against one another, rather than a class struggle to facilitate the rise of the proletariat. It was this latter direction which Mao Dun saw as the only future for the women's movement in China, as he explained in *FNZZ* as early as 1920, when he wrote that oppression did not distinguish between male and female but between classes. His view was that the strength of the women's movement depended on the class of women who made up its hard core, and his hopes rested with the middle classes. Only they had access to education without having been contaminated by the ingrained attitudes of the higher classes. His advice to them was not to fear that their strength was insufficient to put down the old society, because under their leadership their working class sisters would rise up behind them. Mao Dun believed that it was only through class struggle that women would achieve the goals of the women's movement in the new society which would be brought about by men and women working together. ³ In *FNPL*, he repeated his call for

¹ *FNPL*, 13 (26.10.1921) *Sui gun lu: Zhe shi na yi zhong juewu?* (*Random thoughts: What kind of awareness is this?*)

² *FNPL*, 24 (11.1.1922) *Correspondence: Nüzi xianjin de diwei zenyang?* (*What is the present position regarding women's status?*)

³ *FNZZ*, 6.8 (5.8.1920) *Funü yundong de yiyi he yaoqiu* (*The significance and the demands of the women's movement.*) This is an interesting reinterpretation of the

men and women to work together and overcome thousands of years of deep-rooted prejudice.⁴

Part of the function of the earlier stories was precisely to explore the petty bourgeois mentality in order to understand better the obstacles which prevented members of this class from assuming their proper revolutionary role. Explicit references to the class background of characters occur as early as *Eclipse*. When asked by Bao Su whether she knows what her classmates are saying about her, Jing lists a number of put downs which she is tired of hearing. These include 'young mistress' (*xiaojie*), vain, backward-thinking and petty bourgeois. She states quite frankly her acceptance of the title *xiaojie* and agrees that she is a "petty bourgeois worthy of the name" but gives no credence to the rest.⁵ This deliberate establishment of Jing's class background and her straightforward acceptance of it enables the author to bring out the 'naïveté and sentimentalism,' which he considered consistent with her class mentality, but which are inadequate to sustain her will to address the ugliness of reality.⁶

In *Pursuit*, Qiuliu is presented with a choice of paths for future action: the path leading to enlightenment, overlaid with thorns and obstacles and that leading to degeneration by way of material happiness and carnal gratification. Unwilling to sacrifice the second, she blames her lack of courage to choose a direction in which to proceed on environment, inheritance, education and a petty bourgeois intellectual class background.⁷ This foregrounds the stereotype of the petty bourgeois mentality in a similar way. However, in the early works, all the characters are deliberately portrayed as members of the same class. This deliberate strategy is defended in the

Leninist line that enlightened members of the intelligentsia should take on a leadership role in order to propel the revolution forward. This particular article seems to suggest that somehow women should be differentiated by sex within the mass movement whilst at the same time working with their male comrades. It is of even greater interest to note that in his autobiography, in a discussion of the article *From Guling to Tokyo*, Mao Dun denied that he had assigned a leadership role to the petty bourgeoisie. See *WZGDL*, II, p.23. Writing, as he was, in the late seventies as China was emerging from the Cultural Revolution, such a denial is only to be expected.

⁴ *FNPL*, 14 (2.11.1921) *Liang xing hu zhu* (*Mutual aid between the sexes*.)

⁵ *MDQJ*, 1, p.15.

⁶ See discussion in David Der-wei Wang, *Verisimilitude in realist narrative ...*, ch. 5.

⁷ *MDQJ*, 1, p.320.

article *From Guling to Tokyo*. Here Mao Dun clearly states his intention to draw from the lifestyle and experiences of members of the petty bourgeoisie with which he was familiar and among whose number he belonged himself.

Who are the target recipients of our revolutionary literature and art? Perhaps some may say they are the oppressed and toiling masses. I sincerely hope and I am extremely keen that the toiling masses *could* be the target recipients of revolutionary literature and art. But what are the facts? Forgive me for wishing to speak unpalatable truths once again. In fact, the toiling masses will not be able to read a work which purports to appeal to the toiling masses by saying 'this was written for you.' Not only would they not be able to read it, but even were you to read it aloud to them, they still would not understand. ... they still cannot understand your overly Europeanised or overly *wenyanised* style *baihua* ... So your new literature 'written for the toiling masses' can only be read by the 'non-toiling' petty bourgeois intellectual class. Your target recipients are of one group and those who have access to your work are inevitably of another; this really is a most distressing and contradictory phenomenon. Perhaps some will say 'This is not too bad – better than having nobody to read it.' But we should not indulge ourselves in this sort of rationalisation. It is a particular group who you expressly wish to awaken and whose revolutionary sentiment you wish to raise and yet at the same time the work you have written for this purpose clearly cannot reach it. This is at best a wasteful misapplication of effort and energy. I am not saying that the writing of this type of literature should be stopped but I have always felt that we should also have some works which are actually written for the readers which we actually have today. It is the height of dogmatism to claim that petty bourgeois people are all non-revolutionary, and hence that it is just a waste of effort to address them. Whether or not China's revolution can ultimately do without the petty bourgeoisie is a problem that requires very careful study. I for one feel that the future of China's revolution cannot leave out the petty bourgeoisie completely. If this is regarded as a backward way of thinking, I do not wish to argue too much; future history will supply a fair verdict. It is on this account that I consider the 'new literary work' to have neglected the petty bourgeoisie far too much in its choice of subject matter. ⁸

This focus underlies the significance of references to contemporary political events throughout the early stories. These must be clearly identifiable in order that the reactions of Mao Dun's protagonists to them may be properly scrutinised. Often there is displayed an inadequate awareness of the importance of events, characters being too obsessed with their own personal concerns. Fang Luolan in *Vacillation* provides a good example of

⁸ *Cong Guling dao Dongjing*, XSYB, 19.10 (1928) p.1144. Translation made with reference to Y. S. Chen tr., *From Guling to Tokyo* in *Bulletin of concerned Asian Scholars*, Special Issue: *The development of revolutionary literature in China*, Part I, Jan-March 1976, pp.42-43.

this type of behaviour. He is too distracted by his infatuation with Sun Wuyang to act decisively to counter the excesses being committed among the peasants in the name of revolution. A more specific example may be cited from *Pursuit*. While on her way to visit Wang Shitao, Zhang Qiuliu comes across a demonstration protesting about the Jinan Incident. This was a matter of national importance, an example of the violation of Chinese sovereignty frequently carried out by the Japanese. But Qiuliu is so preoccupied by the plight of her friend that she pays little attention. This juxtaposition of the petty bourgeois individual against the epic of history⁹ serves to bring out the difficulties experienced by this group in overcoming their heredity and environment. These are summed up by Wang Shitao:

‘We are not people who are resigned to a state of degeneration; we will always keep in mind the happiness which comes from complete self-sacrifice and the quest of happiness for the majority. But our environment constantly entices us to decadence, and because our courage is not adequate we have become what we are today. Environmental forces are too great, there is no way an individual in his weakness can resist. So we must join together in our struggle and advance by using the strength of the group to restrain ourselves and propel ourselves forward.’¹⁰

Central to this encapsulation of the bourgeois mentality is the preoccupation with personal or selfish concerns. This is particularly represented by the quest for love, sex, a love affair, all rendered by the general referent *lian'ai*. Thus in *Disillusion* the pursuit of a perfect love takes precedence over revolutionary commitment in Jing's life, even though the background to her sentimental education is the Great Revolution of 1927 itself. In *Vacillation* it is precisely affairs of the heart which prove to be Fang's greatest distraction from his political duties. In *Pursuit* Qiuliu chooses the pursuit of carnal pleasure instead of trying to work against the demands of her licentious environment in Shanghai. This preoccupation with personal aspirations is linked to the first stage of the new thought tide, the stage of the emancipation of the individual. In *Rainbow* Yinming explains the liaison between Liang Gangfu and Qiumei in these terms:

‘Two years ago who wasn't acting on impulse? The May Fourth

⁹ See discussion in J. Prusek, *Three sketches of Chinese literature*, pp.10-43. Prusek does not discuss the importance of class but emphasises the interaction of inner and outer reality.

¹⁰ *MDQJ*, 1, pp.320-321.

tides only gave us two directions in which to go: a complete rejection of the old beliefs and the confidence that everything could be created anew on the basis of one's own convictions (*ziji de xinnian*.) But what could our empty minds create? All we did was to follow the impulses of the moment. Liang Gangfu, the local CCP leader, and Qiumei's relationship came about through such an impulse.' ¹¹

Yinming goes on to explain to Mei that what she should grasp now was the importance of larger scale affairs, in particular, the question of the masses which was 'larger than you, me or her (Qiumei).' She continues: 'The first thing you must do is to rid yourself of those feelings and opinions you have about individuals.' ¹² The movement for the emancipation of women which flourished during the May Fourth era was part of this 'individualistic phase.' Through the character of Mei in *Rainbow* the development of a young girl's awareness of the issues of emancipation are deliberately delineated. She would never have fled her marriage and sought to lead an independent life without the inspiration of this Thought Tide. However, having freed herself, in Shanghai she learns to work to free others, the masses. It was essential to go through the first stage in order to proceed to the second, but this first stage was a staging post and not an end in itself. What concerned Mao Dun was the failure of the petty bourgeoisie to proceed to the second stage of development. The careful delineation of Mei's metamorphosis is an attempt to show how this progression could and should be achieved.

Gradually, in stories written after *Rainbow* the gender debate recedes into the background. Mao Dun's female characters lose their force as 'paradigms of inhumanity' on the greater canvas, although individual instances of the unhappy lot of womankind remain.

In *Three friends* Xu's girl friend Xin is forced to marry a rich husband to support her family. ¹³ A second case in *Three friends* is that of Qiuju, the bondsmaid in Hui's family home. The family is in debt to a local loan shark Lu Mapi but it will be possible to clear the debt if they sell Qiuju to Lu. Hui sums up Qiuju's sorry plight: 'If you sell her to a farmer

¹¹ *MDQJ*, 2, p.219.

¹² *ibid.*, p.220.

¹³ See *MDQJ*, 2, p.392.

she will be like an ox and a child production machine; if you sell her to Lu Mapi she will be like a pig, a machine for the gratification of desire. There is little to choose between them. All in all, Qiuju has no freedom at all!’¹⁴ Hui blames the social system in which her fate will always be to be nothing more than a ‘piece of merchandise.’ This nicely absolves him from any blame. Xu is moved by her plight and insists on buying her himself in order to give her freedom. However he takes no responsibility for what might happen to her afterwards. This quixotic act of compassion is more an expression of his own desire for independent action, free from the forces which hitherto have controlled the course of his life. When he explains his intentions to Qiuju, she stares back uncomprehendingly like a frightened animal and can only imagine that Xu wants her for sex. When he makes it clear that she will be free, she becomes hysterical, runs outside and commits suicide. For her ‘freedom’ would have been a nightmare: she would have had nowhere to go, no one to whom to belong.

At the same time as the gender debate recedes into the background, romantic and erotic elements also disappear, or become more clearly associated with the decadence of the capitalist classes. If gender differences are transcended by the revolutionary cause, ‘love’ becomes an impediment to its realisation. Mao Dun wrote of ideal relations between men and women being like those between brother and sister, which might be close but where ‘no unsuitable sexual love develops.’

As we advocate open social relations between the sexes, we should see women as people just like ourselves. ... We simply feel that, just like the two wheels of a cart, these sisters whose clothes are different make up society with us. We should not see them as the means to fulfilling our sexual desires. Once we do so we revert to our animal nature. 15

The implication is both that relations between men and women should be platonic and that women should be recognised as equally viable members of society rather than sex objects. Mao Dun explained how men and women could come to a high level of understanding without extending to

¹⁴ *MDQJ*, 2, p.424.

¹⁵ *FNZZ*, 6.2 (5.2.1920) *Nannü shejiao gongkai wenti guanjian* (*Views on the question of open social relations between men and women.*)

the extreme of love.¹⁶ Elsewhere, while discussing the problem of open social relations he had also written: 'you cannot forget that one is male and one is female but it is wrong to mistake friendly feelings for love.'¹⁷

Thus Mao Dun is scathing in his portrayal of the amorous activities of the revolutionaries in *Disillusion*:

As a woman, to remain without a lover was a crime almost of the order of being anti-revolutionary, or was at least a vestige of feudalistic thinking. ... The desire for *lian'ai* had become an epidemic. People madly sought pleasure of the flesh and novel sexual stimuli ... All this was a reflection of depression. In a subdued atmosphere reflections of depression take the form of despondency and negativism; in a tense atmosphere they become the pursuit of sensory stimulation. As a result the so-called 'love affair' had become a sacrosanct excuse.¹⁸

Rainbow marks a turning point in the portrayal of love, romance and sex in Mao Dun's early fiction. Eventually, Mei chooses to reject the attractions of the opposite sex in order better to commit herself to the revolutionary cause as she reaches the end of her voyage of self-discovery. Although it is not emphasised explicitly, Mei's petty bourgeois class background is clear from descriptions of her family circumstances. She undergoes various stages of development before she gives up her quest for love. Her first love for Wei Yu is unsustainable in the face of their respective arranged marriages. Yet, long after she has left her husband and established an independent life, she writes to her friend Qijun of how no man since has attracted her as Wei Yu did.¹⁹ Sexual relations with her husband Liu are repugnant to Mei. Once she has run away, she has a very warped sense of love and friendship: the way that love differed from friendship was the addition of sex, and sex was associated in her mind with her experiences with Liu.²⁰ And yet, when challenged by Qijun as to her plans for the future now that she is free, Mei replies that she is going to find a lover.²¹

¹⁶ FNPL, 9 (28.9.1921) *Zai lun nannü shejiao wenti* (A further discussion of the question of social relations between men and women.)

¹⁷ FNPL, 5 (31.8.1921) *Lian'ai yu zhencao de guanxi* (The relationship between love and chastity.)

¹⁸ MDQJ, 1, p.71. Translation adapted from Y. S. Chen, *Realism and allegory ...*, p.69.

¹⁹ See MDQJ, 2, p.180.

²⁰ MDQJ, 2, p.112.

²¹ MDQJ, 2, p.113.

During her time as a teacher in Luzhou Mei rejects the advances of several men including a fellow teacher Li Wuji and the local Division Commander from whose clutches she escapes to Shanghai.

After her arrival in Shanghai, this previous period in her life since her renunciation of her marriage is described as a time when she had attracted the attentions of numerous men and then laughingly, self-assuredly, had kicked them away.²² Thus, Mei is used to being the centre of attention, so when Liang Gangfu fails to respond to her advances, she feels slighted and hurt. Men were no longer attracted; what had she done to offend? Mei notes a coldness about Liang and Huang Yinming, both political activists. This is the first time that she has been confronted by this type of activity. The narrative explains that until this time, the sum of Mei's life experience had only taught her how to manipulate sex-mad officials and others who operated within the traditional moral code. She could see through those whose who harboured manipulative intentions but she had no class awareness. She had no understanding of the needs of society.²³ Gradually Mei becomes aware that all her actions up to this point have been motivated by individualism: leaving home, living an independent life, getting divorced. All that she had learned from the May Fourth thought tide related to individualism, the rights of the individual and the promotion of freedom. This inspiration had precipitated her departure from Chengdu and eventually from Sichuan province. She had rushed forward impulsively, compulsively, but her failure to find fulfilment in her past life may be explained in terms of her lack of awareness of nation and society.²⁴ She has vague notions about 'going into society' but still seeks guidance from Liang and Huang. At the same time Mei becomes infatuated with Liang, even to the point of dreaming that she embraces him. In her dream, he refuses to love her. She clings to him but he punches her and knocks her to the ground.²⁵ The violence of political life on the streets of Shanghai finally brings Mei to the realisation that there are more important matters than love. She renounces love and commits herself to the revolution, thereby completing

²² *MDQJ*, 2, p.189.

²³ *MDQJ*, 2, p.200.

²⁴ *MDQJ*, 2, pp.209, 224.

²⁵ *MDQJ*, 2, p.242.

the course of her development from the individual to the collective sphere of activity. By so doing, Mei does what Huang Yinming had been unable to do earlier in the novel, that is 'overcome sentiment.'²⁶ Mei chooses to give up all personal concerns including love, to better devote herself to the revolution:

'I have now decided to cast aside this vague aspiration. I am ready to lose in love, and I am ready to devote myself to a third lover, that is political belief (*zhuyi*.)'²⁷

It is in this context that references throughout *Rainbow* to Mei's conquering of her environment and her nature may be understood. A typically colourful passage appears in the first chapter of the novel, which, in chronological terms, marks her departure from Sichuan:

'Her special characteristic was 'rushing forward!' Her single aspiration was to conquer her environment and her fate. For the past few years her only aim was to overcome her own deeply embedded femininity and her even more deeply embedded maternal instinct.'²⁸

Only by transcending her inheritance in terms of both class and gender could she become a true revolutionary. Two similar incidents give confirmation of this change. Twice she becomes soaked to the skin, once by being caught in the rain and the second time by water cannon while in a demonstration. Both times her wet clothing clings to her body in such a way as to attract the attentions of interested males. Both times their advances are repelled decisively, indeed she is so intensely preoccupied by her political work that she scarcely notices that her clothing is wet, let alone the effect this has had on her male colleagues.

²⁶ See *MDQJ*, 2, p.86 where Yinming falls for her adopted brother and almost wrecks his marriage.

²⁷ *MDQJ*, 2, p.252. Such sentiments are echoed time and time again in contemporary accounts of the fervour of young female revolutionaries. E. Croll quotes the revolutionary song of a military college for girls in Wuchang:

Train quickly to become the vanguard of the people,
To wipe away the old ways, and *down with love*,
Accomplish the Socialist Revolution, you great women.
(E. Croll, op. cit., p.132.) My italics.

²⁸ *MDQJ*, 2, p.6.

However, despite Mei's renunciation of *lian'ai*, her entry into a meeting with her clothes all wet is described in familiarly sensual terms:

When Mei arrived at 'No. 240,' since her unlined *qipao* was wet through, it clung to her body emphasising the pointed undulations of her breasts. When the six or seven young men gathered in the room saw Mei enter looking like a naked model, they exclaimed their surprise to a man. But when they saw Mei's rigid countenance without the slightest trace of a smile, all the mouths ready with a clever quip had no alternative but to shut tight and bide their time. ²⁹

The second time, after Mei has been drenched by the water cannon, she bumps into an old admirer from Chongqing, Qijun's brother Xu Ziqiang. Seeing her plight, he invites her back to his room where he offers her a change of clothes. While she is changing behind the screen, he sits and smokes a cigarette. Eventually, he cannot resist approaching the screen. But Mei is too quick for him, she laughs mockingly and, stepping out deliberately from behind the screen wearing only her vest, she warns him not to try any tricks.

As she spoke, she put on the new *qipao* in her hand with complete composure. Then she walked to the side of the sofa, sat on a chair and proceeded to put on her stockings. Her *qipao* gaped open at the front. The thin white silk of her underwear was wrapped round her plump breasts, holding them up in such a way that their two pink tips could be seen nestling there. ³⁰

Ziqiang protests his honourable intentions but says in defence that Mei does not realise how captivating she is. Anyone who did not want to look at her would not be human. Mei is angered by him and after a further brief exchange, she storms out and rejoins the demonstration.

This behaviour is reminiscent of Sun Wuyang's treatment of Fang Lulan in *Vacillation* but it is more defiant than deliberately tantalising. The tenor of these descriptive passages represents an undeniably male point of view. As such, their appearance in the context of Mei's renunciation of matters of love and desire is unsettling. If the whole thrust of Mei's metamorphosis is to endorse the thesis that, in the context of revolution, women should not be differentiated in terms of gender or treated as sex objects, the effect of these passages is to undermine it. A charitable inter-

²⁹ MDQJ, 2, pp. 253-254.

³⁰ MDQJ, 2, p.267.

pretation might be that this treatment shows the difficulties faced by an individual who had made Mei's level of commitment to the Cause when the majority of his or her colleagues had not. However, it is the tenor of the descriptive passages themselves which is problematical rather than the course of events which they propel. Although Mei successfully and steadfastly repels the advances of interested male colleagues, she remains portrayed as seductive and desirable. Indeed, physical description of Mei is selective, only highlighting the alluring details of her body. A pattern which occurs in earlier stories is the infatuation of male characters with tantalising women and their inability to overcome their passions. The likes of Hui and Sun Wuyang reject the advances of men such as Bao Su and Fang Luolan but these women have deliberately manipulated the emotions of their admirers. These episodes in *Rainbow* mark a reversal of this pattern: revolutionary women deflect the unsought affections of men. This reversal develops in other later stories, of which *Road* in its original version provides a confused example.

The ambiguity of Mei's conversion to revolutionary puritanism is retained in *Road*. Mao Dun was evidently dissatisfied with his portrayal of the romantic element of the plot of *Road* because he revised it for the second edition, with Qu Qiubai's encouragement.³¹

The plot centres on the inability of the two protagonists to banish love from their lives. The particular interest of this story for our discussion is the ambiguous nature of the character Duruo who becomes for Qin dangerous temptress, teacher and guide. His infatuation becomes an obsession, as this passage shows. We also note the familiar use of various sensory images in

³¹ See *WZGDL*, II, p.58: 'In 1932 this book was published by the Guanghai Book Company. When Qu Qiubai read the whole book, he felt that some of the romantic description could be removed, so when the second edition came out, I had removed a further three or four pages.' The postscript to the second edition itself reads as follows: 'In the first printing of this book there was a large number of errata. Now, in the revised edition, naturally, all possible effort has been made to correct these errata. At the same time I also cut a few sentences – about four pages in all, which for the most part consist of unnecessary romantic description. This was also in response to the comments of a friend, who, having read the first edition of the book, suggested that in certain parts of the novel the romantic description was unnecessary. Now, I do not know where this friend has gone. As I complete the editing of the revised edition, I cannot help thinking of him with great affection and wish him peace and good health.' In *WZGDL* Mao Dun explains how he could not make explicit reference to Qu Qiubai because of his deep involvement in Party affairs.

the description of Duruo:

But at that moment another apparition drowned out his (other) thoughts. It was Duruo's strange smile which threw him into confusion and at the same time made him shiver; it was the unforgettable smell of Duruo's lipstick when she whispered in his ear; it was Duruo's big dark eyes, her expressive brows, her tender, well-formed breasts ... Along with all this, there was not anguish at a sudden loss, nor a feeling of hatred from which he wanted to free himself but could not. No, it was a natural desire which flared up within him, as hot as fire. This was something he had never felt before. ³²

Even when he is with his girlfriend Rong, she becomes a substitute Duruo. ³³ Qin's fascination with Duruo is further increased when he comes across an old school friend, Lei, a communist, who has an oil painting in his room of a woman who resembles Duruo. When Qin shows the painting to Duruo she insists that he tell no one about it, but she will not tell Qin of her secret past. So far Duruo has kept the infatuated Qin at arm's length but when violence erupts at the University a solemn encounter becomes a passionate embrace. Duruo both first precipitates the embrace and then pulls away from it, insisting that such passion will be no good for either of them. After this Qin is resolved to give up all thoughts of love and devote himself wholly to his political responsibilities, to the point of death. Until this point it has been Qin who has been infatuated and Duruo who has kept Qin at arms length. However, curious coincidences are heaped one on top of another to suggest that it is Duruo who pursues Qin, watches over him and encourages him. It is also from this point that the first and later editions begin to diverge. Both versions attempt to deal with the question of platonic friendship in the context of revolution but both do so inconclusively.

Despite her advice, Duruo seeks Qin out again, this time to warn him that the school has already contacted the police about the student revolt and that he is in danger of arrest. Her smile makes him feel uneasy. She asks him why he can't treat her as he might treat one of his (male) friends. He says he can but does not understand why she has come back. This is indeed a central preoccupation of the novel and it is no coincidence that the first and later editions diverge at this point. In the first edition Qin grabs

³² *MDQJ*, 2. p.299.

³³ *MDQJ*, 2, p.330.

Duruo and mauls her, unable to cope with the conflict between his emotions and his sense of duty. (This attack is omitted from later editions.) This strange behaviour is doubtless intended to show the tensions generated by the decision to put loyalty to the Cause before love. However, Duruo's behaviour is becoming increasingly inconsistent. Firstly, she seems to be adhering to the assumptions of female behaviour expressed several times by male characters in the early works, namely that a woman will eventually fall for a man if he pesters her long enough.³⁴ Duruo's behaviour is exaggerated and unconvincing – it is highly unlikely that anyone mauled as she has just been would respond by looking gently into the mauler's face! And, without a murmur. Mao Dun does not refute this assumption: he allows Duruo to be won over in just such a way. In the first place, she deliberately remains aloof in order to discourage Qin's affections. This is not least because she has clearly lost a previous lover to the Struggle and does not want to be hurt again. Then, there is a sea change in her behaviour. She actively expresses her affection for him, then she seeks him out to advise and guide him. First she allows the possibility that she could fulfil the role of lover, then she takes on the role of teacher and guide, warning him of danger.

The tensions experienced by both Duruo and Qin as they fight a losing battle to banish thoughts of love retain a high profile to the end of the novel. Hearing that violent confrontation has erupted once again, they run together to the scene of the fighting, but in the melee they become separated.

The final chapter opens with Duruo at Qin's bedside relating the outcome of the previous day's events. Qin holds her hand. He thinks all is over now that his friends have been arrested but here Duruo fulfils her role as guide and teacher. Qin had resolutely opposed both liaison with other schools to expand the strike and other forms of nonviolent agitation – but this is now precisely what is happening. The use of force only played into the hands of the enemy. Through Duruo, Qin is made to see this and admit his earlier error of judgement. Duruo looks into his troubled face and finds

³⁴ A view articulated by Bao Su in *Disillusion* among others.

it 'loveable.'

'Love! This mad youth was madly in love with her! Should she remain aloof? No, there was no need. Was this the end of her romantic life? There were so many problems. Her tempering by life was of no consequence if she could not be happy. He was so anxious [literally: 'mad'] – she had to sit by him. And he was holding her hand so tightly that a great heat flowed through to her ...' ³⁵

The heightened tension is continued when, in order to prevent him leaving his hospital bed with her, Duruo resorts to pushing Qin back onto the bed and lying on top of him. After convincing him that he should stay and that she will be able to find the money for his hospital fees, Duruo makes as if to go. At this point there is a large omission from later editions.

Qin had no alternative but to nod his head; [releasing Duruo's hand, he looked at her as if he wanted to tear her soul apart. Dejectedly, he turned his head away in the deepest wretchedness. Duruo understood the import of this. Two conflicting impulses re-formed in Duruo's mind.

She stood there in confusion for a moment and finally her character, so honed by life, gained the upper hand. But just as she was on the point of saying goodbye to Qin, he turned to her again with a sigh and asked tentatively: 'Is money all you are going to give me?'

Duruo's expression changed. She turned round sharply, ran back to Qin's bed and squatted down beside it, resting her head on the edge of the bed. She looked intensely into Qin's face and spoke quickly as if unable to catch her breath: 'I will give you my heart as well but I cannot remain in the same place with you. I already said to you yesterday that to remain together would have no benefit for either of us. You would be frustrated with me and then you would hate me.'

'Don't you love me?'

'Love! This is my way of loving. I can let you love me a while.'

Qin blushed. He stared into the middle distance, his nostrils quivering slightly.

'Come on Qin. You're not angry at these few words are you? Qin, do you still remember a month ago when we bumped into one another at the ferry terminal, went to a restaurant and returned to school together? That time I wanted to love you a while!' 'But what about later on?'

'Later on I saw you were too serious. I felt I shouldn't let you get hurt.'

Seemingly unable to understand, Qin shook his head.

'In future you will understand. But today, so that you don't go completely mad, I will stay with you – so that you can love me to the full.'

³⁵ *MDQJ*, 2, p.377.

So saying, Duruo leaned over and planted a kiss on his bloodless lips. Then she stood up, smiling broadly, tenderly taking in the whole of his face.

After some moments, Qin spoke quietly with a sigh:

‘You are a bad person (*huai ren*.) No, you are a good person too. There will always be some things that I cannot understand. I hate myself! Oh Duruo, I don’t want to see you again. No, I will see you, once a day. Will you come again this afternoon?’

Seeing that she had nodded her head,]* he watched her swinging her hips as she walked away and held his head in his hands. ³⁶

In this episode both Qin and Duruo are ambivalent in their attitude towards the question of whether or not they should allow love a place in their lives. The bleakness of both their lives makes the proposition most attractive but such a course of action is neither practical nor politically acceptable. And yet they compromise with what is acceptable behaviour, admitting love but pretending somehow that they have not. The unacceptable nature of this compromise is emphasised by Mao Dun’s very re-writing of this section of the text for the second edition so that the temptation to admit love is resisted, although the temptation itself is recognised. For this reason, it is precisely that section of the text omitted in later editions which renders Mao Dun’s exploration of the petty bourgeois mentality more viable. We note the anguish which finds expression in Qin’s anger that he may not satisfy his physical desire for the girl who holds so much sway over his emotions, however melodramatic or exaggerated a form this takes in the narrative.

As has already been suggested, the behaviour of Duruo appears less viable. As a contrast to Qin, Duruo has apparently transcended her class background and devotes herself to the Cause. On occasion she voices the party line. Yet, although seeming complete, this transcendence is not so. Her resolve is easily deflected. We expect Duruo to be either a fox fairy or a Verdandi figure but she is simultaneously both and neither. As a temptress she manipulates Qin’s emotions but at the same time she is herself a victim of temptation. While she acts as teacher and guide to Qin, particularly towards the end of the novel, she also warns him not to follow her example.

³⁶ *Lu*, (1932 ed.) pp.203-205. []* -- Note that the whole of this section has been cut from later editions.

This characterisation fails because in the work of a writer who relies on typicality, the failure properly to assume either role renders the character of Duruo unmanageable.³⁷

Therefore *Road* presents an unsuccessful reversal of the original pattern in the earlier stories where weak men are unable to overcome their infatuation with captivating women who manipulate them. Whereas Mei successfully repels the unsought interest of her male colleagues, Duruo's rejection of Qin's unsought affections is at first inconclusive and later she succumbs to them. A perfected example of the reversal of the original pattern is to be found in *Midnight*. It is already apparent in *Road* that the sensual description of female characters has been reduced. There is infrequent mention of Duruo's quivering breasts and her limpid eyes, and colour references are largely lacking. In *Midnight* there is no sensual description of the female revolutionaries.

The incident in question takes place during the strike by female silk workers in Wu Sunfu's filature. The party activists who are coordinating strikes at various filatures meet the workers' representative in the slum where the workers live. After the meeting only two party workers are left, Ma Jin and Su Lun. After they have gone through the resolutions of the general strike committee, Su Lun teases Ma Jin for taking matters so seriously.

'Oh, shut up you clown!' she muttered, coming to a halt. 'You needn't be funny about it!' She smiled, but Su Lun suddenly became serious. He heaved a sharp sigh and said grimly:

'Frankly I feel the same as you do about all this rushing blindly ahead and ignoring the risk. Doesn't seem right. But what can you do about it? The moment you come out with a different opinion, you're called a right opportunist, a liquidationist! And then some little tin god swats you with his 'orders.' Commandism, that's what it is!'

Ma Jin glanced at Su Lun with her lively but gentle eyes, as if she sympathised with him. Su Lun was something of a 'theorist,' and had the 'gift of the gab.' She had always looked up to him in a way, but at this moment she suddenly felt that he was somehow even more imposing than ever – clear-minded, able to speak without relying on 'formulas,' always smiling that intelligent smile of his, and always calm and sensible. Apart from the respect she had always had

³⁷ A possible point in her favour is that her failure to deny outright the attraction of emotional involvement makes her a little more human.

Ma Jin walks over to the bed and lies down; Su Lun follows her over. They discuss other female comrades who are losing weight because they are 'too busy with the dual task.' Su Lun teases Ma Jin for not understanding that the dual task implied 'the demands of sex and the demands of revolution both taking their toll at the same time.' This brings Su Lun to remark on his own loneliness now that his girlfriend has left Shanghai. Ma Jin teases him:

'You're not a revolutionary, Su Lun. You've turned into a little girl!'

'You know, Ma Jin, sometimes I really do feel like a little girl! Ma Jin, I need someone to comfort me, someone to encourage me. Would you Ma Jin? I need -'

Su Lun looked up as he spoke and pressed his face close to hers. Ma Jin did not move, but gave a suppressed giggle. Su Lun now pressed his cheek against hers. She just giggled, without resisting.

'What nice, firm little breasts you have, Ma Jin!'

Ma Jin giggled even more excitedly, then suddenly rolled over, pushed Su Lun away and sprang off the bed.

'It's getting late! I must be off to see Sister Yue!'

Su Lun had stealthily put his arms round her again, and again she pushed him away. She ran across the room and picked up her 'working girl's clothes,' but before she could put them on, Su Lun suddenly threw himself on her and grasped her so violently that they both fell on the bed. Ma Jin laughed and shouted: 'No, no, you barbarian! I've got work to do!'

'Work? Yes, the devil's work! Commandism! Putschism! I can see through it all!'

'What can you see through?'

'I can see well enough that our work is a waste of time! That the party line is a suicidal policy, that our Soviet is a tourist Soviet, that our Red Army is a robber-band brought up to date! - Now come on Ma Jin, you needn't be so feudalistic ...' Ma Jin suddenly snarled and thrust him savagely away, then she sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing with anger, and snapped: 'How dare you say such a thing! You're giving yourself away - you're tarred with the same brush as the liquidationists!'

With that, she flew downstairs and out of the house to the alleyway.

Above her head shimmered a star-studded sky. As she walked

³⁸ *MDQJ*, 3, pp.453-454. Translation from *Midnight*, Foreign Languages Press, 1957 ed., p.434, adapted.

along, Ma Jin remembered her dispute with Ke Zuofu and Su Lun's beastly behaviour. She felt angry and resentful, but she tried to forget these unpleasant things and concentrate on her mind on one thing: her mission. 39

This incident does not contain any sensual description because by this stage in Mao Dun's creative writing, such sensuality was to be firmly associated with the capitalist classes. That is, what was originally a device with multiple connotations has been reduced to one with a single association with class. The lack of sensual, or indeed physical description in the passage above compares markedly with the portrayal of the female members of the Wu entourage as seen through the eyes of the ailing Mr. Wu senior.

All this talk about fashion acted like a needle on the atrophied nerves of the old man. His heart fluttered, and his eyes fell instinctively upon Fufang and he saw now for the first time how she was decked out. Though it was still only May, the weather was unusually warm and she was already in the lightest of summer clothing. Her vital young body was sheathed in close-fitting light-blue chifon; her full, firm breasts jutting out prominently, her snowy forearms bared. Old Mr. Wu felt his heart constricting with disgust and quickly averted his eyes ... 40

The familiar descriptive patterning from earlier stories is recognisable here ⁴¹ together with traditional referents to the female body frequently used by Mao Dun, such as 'snowy forearms.' The traditional conceptions of all that is evil in womanhood are encapsulated with great gusto by Mao Dun in the kaleidoscopic vision which causes old Mr. Wu's demise:

All the red and green lights, all the geometrical shapes of the furniture and all the men and women were dancing and spinning together, bathed in the golden light. Mrs. Wu Sunfu in pink, a girl in apple green, and another in light yellow were frantically leaping and whirling around him. Their light silk dresses barely concealed their curves, their full, pink-tipped breasts and the shadow under their arms. The room was filled with countless swelling bosoms, bo-

³⁹ *MDQJ*, 3, pp.455-456. Translation adapted from *ibid.*, pp.435-436. * Note the allusion to an earlier preoccupation with gender merging.

⁴⁰ *MDQJ*, 3, p.12. Translation adapted from *ibid.*, p.9.

⁴¹ Many other descriptive passages from the novel could be cited to show how Mao Dun continued to use the same epithets to describe this class of women, yet without their earlier symbolic connotations. A description of Mrs. Wu Sunfu amply illustrates the point: 'Beneath her fine, arched brows (*yuanyuan de, bu nong ye bu dan de meimao*), her eyes, though just a little red from crying, were still as bright as they had always been, dancing and shining with infinite wisdom and boundless charm.' *MDQJ*, 3, p.33. Translation from *ibid.*, p.17.

soms that bobbed and quivered and danced around him. Wu Sunfu's pimply face grinned and Ali Xuan's lustful eyes shone among the dancing breasts. Suddenly, all these quivering, dancing breasts swept at Mr. Wu like a hail of arrows, piling up on his chest and smothering him, piling up on *The supreme scriptures of rewards and punishments* on his lap. He heard wild, seductive laughter and the room rocked and swayed as if it would collapse.

'Devils,' cried Old Mr. Wu, as golden sparks showered before his eyes. He felt his chest crushed under an enormous weight, and something seemed to explode inside his head. Suddenly, there sprung out of the ground before him two women, Mrs. Wu Sunfu and the girl in apple green, both laughing with wide-open, blood-red mouths as though they wanted to swallow him up. Something seemed to snap in his head. He turned up his eyes and knew no more. ⁴²

While silly, self-obsessed, sentimental episodes have no place in the life of a female party activist with a strong sense of mission, they are a central part of the lives of the Wu entourage. With its cliché of the faded rose the would-be romance of Mrs. Wu Sunfu and Colonel Lei represents the epitome of petty bourgeois romanticism. He is about to go back to the front and is unlikely to return alive. Having waited until her husband has left the house, Lei seeks out the woman he had worshipped as a poor student and whose affections had been returned by her in the form of a rose. Now, five years later, he returns the very same rose, preserved between the pages of a tattered copy of *The sorrows of the young Werther*. After one passionate embrace, the dashing Colonel Lei strides towards the battlefield, never to return. ⁴³

Despite the common interpretation of the position of Wu Sunfu in the novel, the main issue is clearly one of class and the exploitation of one class by another. ⁴⁴ The issue of gender has been superseded by the issue of class. This is confirmed by articles on the gender question which Mao Dun wrote during the thirties. In *A perspective on 'A doll's house'* ⁴⁵ Mao Dun reflects on how the movement which the play inspired had been nothing but a series of tragedies. The women so enticed out of their cages

⁴² MDQJ, 3, p.17-18. Translation adapted from *ibid.*, pp.13-14.

⁴³ MDQJ, 3, p.92.

⁴⁴ It is commonly agreed that the picture is complicated by the positive connotations of Wu Sunfu's position as a *Chinese* entrepreneur battling against the forces of Western and Japanese economic imperialism and by an overly sympathetic portrayal of the bourgeois characters in general.

⁴⁵ *Cong 'Nuola' shuo qi*, in *Zhujiang Ribao: Funü Zhoukan*, 29.4.1938. See MDQJ, 16, pp.140-142.

took on Nora's 'spirit of resistance' but lacked political and social understanding. There were female warriors on the front line now but these were an even newer generation of women (*geng xin de nüzi*) who understood reality and did not simply have Nora's 'spirit of resistance.' This was the true 'women's movement.' Yet, Mao Dun recognised the significance of the Nora movement and where it remained as the inspiration to women in the provinces, it was better than no movement at all. The article ends with the reflection that in the complicated place that was China, it was possible to fly from place to place by aeroplane but the majority of the people still used the one-wheeled cart as their only means of transport. So, although many women failed to go beyond the 'Nora movement' there was no need to despair because a new generation of 'aeroplane girls' was coming forth.⁴⁶

By the time *Midnight* was written, the issue of class, placed squarely in the context of class struggle, had taken precedence over the question of the failure of the petty bourgeoisie to transcend their class inheritance. This gradual reorientation is manifested in the two transitional works written at the turn of the decade, *Road* and *Three friends*. At the beginning of *Road* Qin's class background is clearly and deliberately revealed from the outset: he is a member of the bankrupt scholar gentry. Of course, at one time he would himself have possessed a leather suitcase of the quality of the one he is carrying, but that was a very long time ago. This case belongs to his girlfriend Rong.⁴⁷ Rong's class background is also clearly identified. She is a 'wealthy, conceited *xiaojie*.'⁴⁸ The incompatibility

⁴⁶ This reorientation away from issues of gender is interestingly illustrated in another article written in 1935 entitled *Yao jia nü bian nan de gushi* (*The tale of the girl from the Yao household who turned into a man*) in *Man Hua Shenghuo*, no.8, 20.4.1935. This recalls the case of a girl who made a false penis out of cotton in order to be allowed (as a son) to go to Xinjiang to look for her father, a soldier, who had gone missing. Unfortunately, the family did not anticipate the rigors of modern scientific investigation to which their daughter was subjected. The Red Cross pronounced a definitive refutation of the family's claim that their daughter had changed sex in her desire to be filial. Mao Dun's reflection on the story is that because society has treated this case as a joke, it has missed the main point which is namely that the family were forced into desperate measures out of destitution since the bread winner had been lost. He makes no comment on idea of sex change in the context of female emancipation despite his treatment of this very theme in his earlier fiction.

⁴⁷ *MDQJ*, 2, p.278.

⁴⁸ *MDQJ*, 2, p.298.

of their class backgrounds is brought to a head when Rong seeks to solve Qin's financial problems by offering him a job in her father's business. For Qin, this would be like selling his soul. This disparity of means makes Qin mistrustful of Rong's intentions and from this point their relationship begins to deteriorate, in direct proportion to the growth of Qin's infatuation with Duruo. Qin's reaction is typical of his class. His self-esteem and his freedom are so precious to him because he is too self-obsessed. If Duruo has failed to completely transcend her class background, Lei is a true revolutionary who would sacrifice all for the cause and who has no identifiable class traits. Lei remembers Qin from their middle school days:

‘shy, conceited, head-strong, would not accept the jibes of others, pensive and slow to act. He was a fine son, honest and sincere according to the Doctrine of the Mean, of whom an eminent petty bourgeois family would loudly boast. But now in these times of change, he had a patent on the art of depression.’ ⁴⁹

Lei emphasises that these traits, particularly his depression in the face of current events, are all part of his nature and therefore his own responsibility. Qin fails to transcend this until the very end of the novel when he writes to his parents renouncing all his obligations as a son of theirs. This is only after Duruo has taught him how to put the interests of the collective (in this case the striking students) above his own pride and selfish aims. ⁵⁰

The same clear identification of the class backgrounds of the protagonists occurs in *Three friends*. For example, of Xu Yun remarks that he cannot take setbacks because he is a ‘young man brought up in the warm and kindly atmosphere of a bankrupt bookworm family.’ ⁵¹ In a discussion about Hui's philosophy of life and his hatred of chaos, Yun reminds him: ‘Hui, you are a young master (*shaoye*), you are educated, you have become too used to a pure and orderly life ...’ ⁵² By contrast, Yun himself is of a peasant background and his father has made great sacrifices to provide his son with an education. On his first appearance in the novel Yun is described as having a square face and broad shoulders, somewhat boorish

⁴⁹ *MDQJ*, 2, p.344.

⁵⁰ Qin's original opposition to cooperation with students at other establishments was because his desire to defeat teacher Jing had become too personal.

⁵¹ *MDQJ*, 2, p.408.

⁵² *MDQJ*, 2, p.462.

but steadfast.⁵³ Elsewhere there are references to his strong handshake and the warmth of his grip, all perpetuating the stereotype of the child of the soil. Mao Dun includes the following comments on the backgrounds of the protagonists of *Three friends* in *WZGDL*:

The title *Three friends* is taken from the *Shu er* section of the *Analects*: 'When three walk together, one must be my teacher; I will choose this person of good qualities and follow him, those of bad qualities I will seek to alter.' So there are three main characters in the novel. It was my intention to establish the family background of each character as follows: Xu, the son of an impoverished scholar; Hui, the son of a small businessman on the verge of bankruptcy; and Yun, the son of a farmer with fifty *mu* of prime land who becomes a poor peasant overnight. I deliberately sought to use two negative characters (Xu and Hui) to serve as foils for the positive character Yun, but my writing plan did not come to fruition. There are many reasons for this: you cannot include middle school student life if you have not experienced it. I also wrote about student life in *Road* and indeed I described the life of contemporary university students which I myself had not experienced, as I look back today, I still think that *Road* was reasonably successful. The fundamental reason why *Three friends* did not succeed is, I believe, because the positive character Yun is not well portrayed.

Originally Yun's family were comfortably off farmers but with natural and man-made disasters and the virtual bankruptcy of the rural economy, they could not even afford to pay for Yun's education. Confronted with the choice between going to the city in search of a way out or remaining at home and working on the land in order to decide the future direction of his life, 'he believed the first would be a leap to break through reality while the second would be a compromise with reality.' However, he found the peasants' acceptance of their lot and their conservatism helpful and delayed his decision, finally he respects his father's wishes and goes to borrow money from the major landlord-cum-loan shark in order that he should 'continue his studies and make something of himself.' As a result he himself is falsely accused and forced into prison and his father has to sell all of his fifty acres of prime land to buy him out. Only then does Yun make up his mind to leave his home village and go to Shanghai. But after Yun has carried out this 'great leap' his *character* is not finely drawn; it is not made clear who he meets when in Shanghai or what he does. He criticises Hui for his Chinese style nihilism but his own views are not made clear. I could say that restrictions on writing were very tight so I could not make clear what Yun's activities in Shanghai were but *Road* appeared very soon after *Three friends* and yet in *Road*, if the immediacy of Lei's activities among the people, distributing leaflets and shouting slogans, suggests that he is an underground worker for the Party, why cannot the same technique be used in *Three friends*? Thus this positive character is not well portrayed, and this is the main reason why *Three friends* is not successful. After Qu Qiubai had read *Three friends*, he said to me: 'Confucius said when three walk together one must be my teacher but there is no teacher among

⁵³ MDQJ, 2, p.390.

It is clear that the central preoccupation of this novel is ideological. The primary object is a comparison of the attitudes towards commitment and reality of the three protagonists and the establishment of one as a model. What is noticeable about *Three friends* is the use of male protagonists in its exploration of attitudes where in the earlier fiction female characters were generally the focal point through which this type of exploration was conducted. As 'paradigms of inhumanity' female characters were used to represent the experiences of their class. In *Three friends* male characters fulfil this function. If characters of either sex could act as representatives of the experiences of their class, this implies that for Mao Dun at this stage in his development, the experiences of men and women were comparable, *ie* in his view the gender issue was no longer relevant for members of the petty bourgeoisie. Women play a minor role in *Three friends*. Xu's girlfriend Xin appears briefly at the beginning of the novel as part of Xu's love tragedy. But this is examined solely from Xu's perspective to show how only the son of a 'bankrupt bookworm family' could become so distracted by matters of romance as to seek to disengage from life. Yun's advice is typically practical: Xu should either make a clean break or fight their enforced separation, but he should stop wallowing in self-pity.⁵⁵ Xin's own state of mind is not explored.

Xin makes a second appearance at the end of the novel where her attempts to come to terms with her betrothal to a man she despises seem to be given slightly more attention. This impression is deceptive. The function of Xin's return is to represent Hui's former self. It was Hui's advice on which she acted when she accepted the betrothal and now it is Hui's former arguments which she has internalised and throws back at him even though his own views have changed. There is no serious exploration of the devastating consequences for Xin's state of mind on her discovery that the views upon which she had acted to mortgage her future are no longer advocated by the friend who had previously articulated them. Her function is to provide a second voice for the debate prolonged in Hui's

⁵⁴ WZGDL, II, p.62.

⁵⁵ MDQJ, 2, p.393.

consciousness between his two selves as he goes slowly mad. Thus her existence in the novel is only validated through the experiences of the two male characters. The bondsmaid Qiuju suffers a similar fate. The whole point of her existence in the novel is to show how Xu's attempts to control his life through individual acts of quixotic heroism are totally misguided.

In this way the use of male protagonists can be seen as regressive. By comparison, despite the assumptions revealed in description and portrayal, Mao Dun's use of female protagonists in the early fiction acknowledges the significance of the disadvantaged state of womankind. By the time of the writing of *Three friends*, this acknowledgement has lapsed, even though the content of the novel implies otherwise. Xin is forced into an arranged marriage; Qiuju's position as a bondsmaid is as tragic as a bondsmaid's life always was. Now these experiences are framed differently, being only a means to explore the ideological confusions of the male protagonists. There is also a further shift of emphasis. If the question of the forcible break up of a romance is deemed to be equally traumatic for both parties – even if it is not conclusively portrayed as such in this case – then all references to the particular experience of women in the novel are to the working class (Qiuju and Xu's student from the *pingmin xuexiao* where he subsequently takes a job as a teacher.) The thrust of this is further to imply that gender issues are no longer significant for the educated youth of the petty bourgeoisie and that their solution in the context of the working class is not through individual, uncoordinated acts of well-meaning but misguided heroism but through the Party. (These processes are portrayed in action in *Midnight*.) Thus the sex of the protagonists could be deemed to be of less significance.

However, the portrayal of gender within the novel itself belies this. In addition to the question of the justification of the existence of female characters through their male counterparts, the portrayal of Yun as a heroic role model also shows regression. Not only is he strong and sturdy but he also has thick eyebrows, deliberately identified by Mao Dun in earlier works as symbolic of heroism, but used ironically in the case of characters such as Fang Luolan and Qiang Weili. Now these attributes are to be taken at face value giving a very masculine model of heroism. This is bolstered in a most heavy-handed way by the weak, emotional, almost effeminate,

character of Xu and by Hui's madness.

The ideological conformity of *Three friends* is not only apparent in its deemphasis of the gender debate, but also in its lack of romance or sensuality. The only romantic episode in the novel is that between Xu and Xin. Not only does it fail, but it has clear associations with the class background of the participants: only members of the petty bourgeoisie are bothered about love affairs. Apart from a brief description of Xin's svelte figure in a pale blue *qipao* at the beginning of the novel when Xu watches her from afar, the only other physical description of women which occurs in the novel is one which forms part of a Shanghai street scene.

The pavement was crowded with people emerging from the cinema. Tired, pale-looking youths, modern girls with faces painted snowy white, lips daubed scarlet, brows plucked fine and long, hair a mass of permed curls filling the nape of their necks, and wearing long *qipaos* so close-fitting that the curves of their breasts and buttocks were clearly revealed in a quite nauseating way. ⁵⁶

This description contains a new element, the tone of disapproval. But this does not prevent the enumeration of details just the same. With little distraction, then, the novel is able to hammer home its ideological message, particularly in terms of the incorrect attitudes to revolution of Xu and Hui.

The ideological exploration in *Three friends* is an extension of the questions of attitude and fate discussed in Chapter Four. Xu feels that the events in his life are controlled by an invisible force against which resistance is useless. At the same time he dwells on matters past, particularly the enforced end to his romance with Xin. Furthermore, on hearing that his mother is ill he decides to go home because he cannot overcome his feelings of filial obligation to her. This attachment to the past is such that he fails to take responsibility for the present or the future. His return home means that he fails to take his examinations which will have serious consequences in his search for a livelihood. Yun's advice is to make a complete break with the past and all its regrets and obligations and to look forward to a better future. But Xun is doggedly fatalistic and refuses to take any responsibility to change his life, insisting that all he can do is accept what life throws at him.

⁵⁶ *MDQJ*, 2, p.468.

After his mother's death, Xu undergoes a sea change. He decides to cut himself off from all things past by selling the family home and starting anew. His new freedom finds expression in his discovery that he can act to control life rather than stoically accepting life as it is. He makes two attempts to right wrongs in a quixotic fashion both of which end in tragedy. The first is to offer to buy Qiuju her freedom, the very idea of which is so mind-blowing to the simple bondsmaid that she commits suicide by throwing herself into the well. The second is to attempt to save a girl from the *pingmin xuexiao* from the clutches of the local loan shark Lu Mazi. This results in his own death at the hands of Lu's men.

Xu's ideological development is from the Greek to the Norse conception of fate where the former allows no influence by the individual over events while the latter, in the form of Verdandi, encourages the individual to shape his own fate by grasping hold of the present. This Xu attempts to do but because he acts in isolation, trying to right thousands of years of wrong in a single act of compassion, failure is inevitable.

Hui's failure of belief is also in terms of responsibility. His philosophy of life is called *dengdaizhuyi* (philosophy of waiting) by his friends. He is a nihilist who waits for the day when the present world in all its chaos and imperfection will be razed to the ground and a brave, new world created in its place. He cannot accept the world as it is but feels that he is not equipped to be one of those who will initiate this 'great change.' So he waits, unable to understand that it is precisely upon the chaos and imperfection of the present that the future will be built. It is only through a speech he records in his diary by teacher Ge (voice of the Party) that Hui begins to see that a new society will not fall from heaven and that the suffering of those who seek to bring it about is of a different nature from the historical suffering of the people.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, by this time madness has already begun to set in and he remains unable to act on his new ability to look reality in the face. By contrast Yun makes a the break from his family past and goes to Shanghai where he works within the Party for a better future.

⁵⁷ *MDQJ*, 2, p.478.

Verdandi was an adequate source of inspiration for those who dwelt obsessively on the horrors of past failures. However, there was a danger that she might lead the unsuspecting to take on the world single-handed. Or her clear-sighted example might make an individual balk at the immense ugliness of the present he or she had grasped. The correct way to grasp the present was to see that the only way forward was via the Party.

This is the last work in which the unreliable perceptions of the educated and impoverished youth and their failure to live up to their revolutionary responsibilities are explored. By *Midnight*, there are no more second chances for the petty bourgeoisie. Either they are portrayed as loyal stalwarts of the Party, having already transcended their class inheritance, or they are associated with capitalist decadence. Since issues of gender and matters of romance are associated with that class inheritance, having transcended it, they have also left questions of gender behind them and have no time for romance.

All thoughts of love and lust are distractions which deflect both men and women from the right path of revolution. Not only did the erotic content, such as it was, almost completely disappear from Mao Dun's work after the mid 1930s, but with the puritanical and dogmatic standards for artistic work set by Mao Zedong as the CCP rose to prominence and Mao Dun's close association with the leadership, editions of earlier works published after 1949 have been considerably bowdlerised.

Chapter seven of *Pursuit* provides a good example of the subsequent bowdlerisation of Mao Dun's early 'erotic' description. Shi Xun and Qiuliū have arranged to meet friends for a picnic at Paotai Wan but go there two days early at Shi Xun's suggestion. There is a great sense of expectation as they sit late into the evening watching the ships in the bay:

A silent tension spread between them. [Their hearts were dwelling on the thing which was about to take place. They had expected it to take place for a long time but its imminent arrival brought them as participants into a state of palpitating anxiety.]⁵⁸

They return to their room but when Qiuliū proudly reveals her beau-

⁵⁸ XSYB, 19.9, p.1068. [] indicates omission from later version. Translation from Chen, op. cit., p.127.

tiful body, Shi Xun is suddenly overcome with total disillusionment and inadequacy as his own sickly body pales in comparison. At this point the earlier and later versions diverge markedly. In the earlier version Shi Xun suddenly embraces Qiuli and kisses her wildly. She is terrified at what she fears to be a 'wild pornographic mind,' struggles to free herself and is about to run out of the room when she catches sight of her state of undress in the mirror. Shi Xun sits down with her on the sofa and tells her not to be afraid. He explains how her fierce desire for life alone had pulled him away from death after his suicide attempt failed, but reason and sentiment continue to fail to recognise his authority over them and act freely within him. The contrast between her body and his caused his feelings to take over so that he felt totally inadequate and disillusioned, just as he had done in the past. Qiuli urges him to regain his courage in drink and:

... under the cover of wine they forgot the past and no longer worried about the future. Their hearts and minds were wholly immersed in the unrestrained pleasures of the flesh for a fleeting moment. 59

The following day Shi Xun's old complaint is giving him trouble and they have to return to Shanghai for his medication. Qiuli's recollections of the previous evening are blurred by drink but Shi Xun's are of a vague happiness which has greatly increased his zest for life. He is soon much better and is keen to return to Paotai Wan ready for the picnic the following day.

This night passed quietly, lightfootedly, while they were under the violent stimulus of wine and the eddies of passion. As they had the night before, they lost consciousness in extreme exhaustion. Not long afterwards sunlight came to the earth again. It pierced through the window screen, peeping onto those two intoxicated beings and invoking blessings upon them. 60

They wake and go to the station to meet their friends.

In the later version Shi Xun does not overcome his feelings of disillusionment and inadequacy at the sight of Qiuli's beautiful body in comparison to his own. He sleeps in a separate room that night, feels ill the following morning and returns with Qiuli to Shanghai for his medication. They do

⁵⁹ *XSYB*, 19.9, p.1071. Translation from Chen, op. cit., p.128.

⁶⁰ *XSYB*, 19.9, *ibid.* Translation from Chen, *ibid.*

not return to Paotai Wan until the morning of the picnic. This alteration of the plot appears to have been carried out either hurriedly or unwittingly because it makes for illogicality in the fate of Zhang Qiuliu in later editions. At the end of *Pursuit*, Qiuliu discovers that she has caught syphilis from Shi Xun, impossible if their relationship was not consummated.

As stated in the Introduction, instances where Mao Dun has cut or altered the earliest versions of works have been indicated by [] throughout this thesis. Many of the changes he made were to effect a toning down of the perceived eroticism or sensuality of his work, which was no longer acceptable. Ze Eishun discusses how Mao Dun cut to 'remain within the bounds of propriety' (*shike er zhi*.) Phrases which were consistently cut include 'soft, warm breasts' (*ruan er re de xiongpu*), 'blood red lips' (*xuehong de zuichen*), 'voluptuous, sexy' (*rougan*), 'carnal' (*routi*) and so on.⁶¹ It has already been pointed out that such cutting could entail the alteration of the plot, not always achieved in a consistently expert manner.

Disillusion provides a further instance where cutting the text requires the alteration of the plot in the scene where Jing loses her virginity to Bao Su. In the later edition Jing simply swoons into the arms of Bao Su and comes to a few moments later. References at the beginning of the following chapter to Bao Su's having stayed the night are also cut. The original reads as follows:

An electric current flowed from Jing's palm and in an instant filled Bao Su's whole body; [he was numbed, his mind was devoid of thought, he instinctively] (suddenly) put his arm round Jing's waist and held her to his breast. Jing closed her eyes, her body went limp; she did not resist or even move. [In a daze she felt the heat of a male caress linger a moment at her breast and then move downwards. A tingling numbness she had never felt before engulfed her body, she dimly felt] (seemed to feel) her limbs and all the joints in her body loosen and uncouple; [her consciousness was wrested little by little until she lost all sense of her own being] (until finally she lost consciousness.)

When she came round, she found herself lying on the bed, with Bao Su's face close to hers.

'You fainted,' he said softly.

There was no reply. Jing rolled over and buried her head in the pillow. [Bao Su planted countless kisses on the back of her neck.

⁶¹ *'Shoku' no kaisatsu*, p.10.

The red light of the evening sun shone in through the window a while, then slowly crept away. The room gradually darkened.] ⁶²

The revision of the text leaves Jing with her virginity intact. In terms both of the political allegory and of the tracking of Jing's emotional development, it is necessary for her to lose her virginity at this point. Otherwise, all references in the following chapter to the failure of life to live up to expectations lose their meaning. Her shock at her discovery of Bao Su's wallet containing both a photograph of his fiancée and a letter from his political superior revealing his true allegiance loses its two-edged significance. Her sudden empathy with Hui's hatred of men also goes unexplained, and so on. This unsophisticated revision appears simply to eliminate explicit references to sexual desire or love-making. It does not extend to less explicit allusion to the same such as occurs in *Suicide*. Miss Huan's recollection of her affair is prompted by 'her soft skin' being 'penetrated by the proboscis of a mosquito' which then flies off, just as her lover has deserted her. ⁶³

Equally reflective of the conformism of Mao Dun's later work, we note that in these transitional stories, issues of class are gradually associated with the workers and peasants. In Mao Dun's portrayal of Yun's father we see an early attempt to delineate the character of a peasant – a forerunner to the portrayals in many stories written later in the nineteen thirties. *Midnight* attempts the same with the factory workers of Shanghai. The resolution of the problems of working class women lay firmly within the parameters of class struggle.

In this reorientation towards ideological conformity, little remains even of the impression of a special understanding of women's nature or their experience. ⁶⁴ All is consumed by the chauvinism of Party dogma.

⁶² *XSYB*, 18.9 (10.9.1927) p.20.

⁶³ *MDQJ*, 8, p.37.

⁶⁴ Though occasional vignettes do appear in later stories, such as the portrayal of Lotus in the *Spring silkworms* trilogy.

CONCLUSION

The central preoccupation of this thesis has been to explore and re-evaluate Mao Dun's portrayal of women. To put this in the context of his contemporaries I offer a brief comparison with two other male writers of the period. Like Mao Dun, Yu Dafu and Ba Jin are regarded as leading literary figures of the May Fourth era and are comparable to Mao Dun in their literary output. Even a brief examination reveals major differences in their portrayal of women. As I have explained in the Introduction, I have not included any female writers: this thesis is essentially about Mao Dun and male perceptions of women.

Okada Hideki writes of four common features in the portrayal of women in this period: the extreme suffering of women at the lowest level of society; the evocation through issues of love and marriage (often experiences personal to the author) of contradictions in a changing society and their devastating results on the individual; women writers writing their own experience of grief, melancholy, depression and so on; the vitality and strength of women who refuse to be cowed by the social forces which operate against them.¹ Such a summary lacks the depth required to go beyond the general assumption that most writers of the New Culture were sympathetic to the women's question. A comparison with the work of Yu Dafu and Ba Jin bears more fruit. Both write of the experiences of May Fourth youth in a turbulent age and both contain images of women. In their portrayal of women I suggest that they take different aspects of Mao Dun's portrayal to contrasting extremes.

In Yu Dafu's writing, the way his physical portrayal of women resonates with traditional images of the female body recalls Mao Dun's approach: white skin, delicate white hands, small red mouth, dark limpid eyes and so on. Here is an example from *Sinking* when the protagonist watches a waitress in a bar:

He wanted to look closely at her and confide in her all his troubles. But in reality he did not even dare look her in the eye, much less talk to her. And so, like a mute, all he did was look furtively at her delicate white hands resting on her knees and that portion of a

¹ *Chūgoku kindai bungaku ni kakareta joseizō*, p.24.

pink petticoat not covered by her kimono.²

He outdoes Mao Dun in his obsession with the fragrance of women:

Looking westward, he saw that the sun was now only about ten feet from the horizon. But however beautiful the scene, his thoughts were still with the waitress - the fragrance (*xiangwei*) emanating from her mouth, hair, face and body. After repeated attempts to engage his mind elsewhere, he resigned himself to the fact that he was obsessed with flesh (*routi*) rather than poetry.³

There is a marked similarity to Mao Dun's approach in the way Yu Dafu combines images of jutting breasts and shapely curves with a plethora of facial details more in the traditional mould:

Her body was so well developed that although she wore a country-made, poorly-fitting dress made of cheap silk, nevertheless as she walked ahead of me, it was not just the curves of her plump buttocks, narrow waist and round calves that aroused a fantasy in me, but her round soft shoulders also excited wild desires in me if my eyes dwelt on them for very long. And when I stood in front of her to talk, her large, moist eyes, retroussé nose, oval, tender face, rosy and fair, and her jutting breasts heaving particularly quickly after our energetic walk, were enough to send me out of my mind.⁴

In addition, not only does he incorporate to a greater extent than Mao Dun the impact of Western dress and behaviour on perceptions of the female body, but the women described are explicitly portrayed as objects of desire. Here is a description of a Western woman from *Mirage*:

Jennie Bergman was twenty-one years old this year. Every part of her perfectly proportioned body, plump and gorgeous, intimated a physical strength gained from outdoor activity and a free education. In her oval face, the pink [literally, red] and white of her complexion were combined in perfect harmony, giving full play to her virginal beauty, along with her large stunning eyes, as blue as the sea and her finely curved, red cherry lips. Her European style dress revealed all the curves of her body, but the effect was increased by the open clothes she wore because of the hot weather so that her pink flesh was clearly apparent. And a different type of coquettishness which could only drive you mad, were the curls of golden hair which only the Germanic people have which stole out from beneath her summer hat of silver threads. When she raised her hand to straighten her hair you could see her pale pink armpit and the sides of her full breasts,

² Chenlun in *YDFWJ*, 1, p.48. Translation from Joseph S. M. Lau et al., ed. *Modern Chinese stories and novellas, 1919-1949*, pp.138-139.

³ Chenlun in *YDFWJ*, 1, p.47. Translation from Joseph S. M. Lau et al., ed. *Modern Chinese stories and novellas, 1919-1949*, p.138.

⁴ *Chi guihua* in *YDFWJ*, 2, pp.339-340. Translation from *Nights of spring fever and other writings*, p.151, adapted.

Less ambiguously than in Mao Dun's case, Yu Dafu's women can be divided into two types: the unapproachable *femme fatale* and the weak victim. An example of the latter type can be seen in *Nights of spring fever* where the protagonist-narrator observes his neighbour, an orphaned girl, with 'dark limpid eyes,' who worked long hours in a cigarette factory. By contrast to Mao Dun's portrayal, there is not the slightest attempt to explore the psychology of either type. They are only portrayed externally and, indeed, are less portrayals in their own right than projections of the consciousness of the protagonist narrator. This is particularly clear in *Nights of spring fever* where the author-narrator continually relates the girl's expressions of emotion to himself. When she tells him her sad tale:

'... a tear trickled down her cheek. I thought she was crying from exhaustion and felt not only a deep sympathy but a certain thrill to discover she was such a child. ... Again a few tears rolled down her cheeks. I knew really that her tears were at the thought of her hated factory, but my heart would not let me think that way: I preferred to think that they were for me. ... Her simplicity touched me but at the same time an unthinkable notion swept over me. I longed to stretch out my arms and embrace her but reason checked me severely, saying, 'That would be a sin. Don't you know your situation? Do you want to poison this pure simple girl? Devil, devil, you have no right at present to love.' ... She's a poor little girl, but what about me? I'm in an even worse situation.' 6

There is an overriding sense of the weak male figure confronted with women who taunt and manipulate him. But the women are not monsters, it is only the comparative timidity and weakness of the protagonist which makes them appear that way to him. This is framed within the irony of Yu Dafu's objective narratological stance which undercuts the protagonist's self-pity, and shows the absurdity of his self-image. 7 We note his reaction to the calls of the waitresses in *Sinking*:

Without finding out the identity of the place, he simply walked in and was immediately greeted by a very sweet feminine voice: 'Please come in.'

Taken by surprise, he stood there in a daze and thought, 'This is

⁵ Shenlou in *YDFWJ*, 2, pp.205-206.

⁶ *Chun feng chenzui de wanshang* in *YDFWJ*, 1, pp.248-250. Translation from *Nights of spring fever and other stories*, pp.31-33.

⁷ See Michael Egan, *Yu Dafu and the transition to modern Chinese literature* in Goldman ed., *Modern Chinese literature in the May Fourth era*, pp.309-324.

probably some kind of restaurant, but I have heard a place like this cannot be without prostitutes.'

At the thought of this he again became invigorated, as if drenched by a bucket of cold water. But he soon changed colour because he didn't know what to do with himself, whether to advance or retreat. It was a pity that he had the lust of an ape and the timidity of a rabbit, which accounted for his present quandary.

'Come in. Please do come in.' That seductive voice called from the hall again, accompanied by giggles.

'You devils! You think I am too timid to come in?' he said to himself in anger, his face burning hot. Stamping his feet lightly, he advanced, gnashing his teeth and clenching his fists, as if preparing to declare war on these young waitresses. But hard as he tried, he couldn't possibly erase the the flushes of red and blue on his face nor compose its twitching muscles. So when he came near these girls, he almost cried like a child. ⁸

It is clear that much of the imagery and the stance of Yu Dafu's portrayal of women has parallels with Mao Dun's portrayal. The combination of images is often similar, as is the emphasis on the weak male's perception of, and reaction to, the women around him. However, because of Mao Dun's deliberately detached narrative stance, the sense of women as objects of desire is much more implicit and deflected through the consciousnesses of other characters, whereas, in Yu Dafu's case, it appears to be unashamedly explicit. A woman is to be possessed, to be valued not for herself but for the way she can enhance the self-esteem of a man:

'What I want is love.

'If there were one beautiful woman who understood my suffering, I would be willing to die for her.

'If there were one woman who could love me sincerely, I would also be willing to die for her, be she beautiful or ugly. 'For what I want is love from the opposite sex.

'Oh ye Heavens above, I want neither knowledge nor fame nor useless lucre. I shall be wholly content if you can grant me an Eve from the Garden of Eden, allowing me to possess her body and soul.' ⁹

It is unclear to what extent the sentiments expressed by the protagonist are undermined by Yu Dafu's irony and to what extent they uphold the

⁸ *Chenlun* in *YDFWJ*, 1, pp.45-46. Translation from Joseph S. M. Lau et al., ed. *Modern Chinese stories and novellas, 1919-1949*, p.138.

⁹ *Chenlun* in *YDFWJ*, 1, pp.24-25. Translation from Joseph S. M. Lau et al., ed. *Modern Chinese stories and novellas, 1919-1949*, p.128.

male-centred order of things.

Whilst Yu Dafu makes little attempt to understand the predicament of women, who constitute little more than a means of self-expression for his protagonists, Ba Jin, like Mao Dun, is concerned to provide insight into women's experience. In *Jia* he follows with particular sympathy Qin's attempts to gain the same educational rights as her cousins and to become 'a strong and self-reliant woman, a 'human being' like Nora in Ibsen's *A doll's house*'¹⁰ and her frustration at the strength of the forces ranged against her. The threat of warlord soldiers overrunning the town leaves her high ideals in tatters:

Although she could think of no other alternative [to suicide], she felt there must be one. All her new ideas, her new books and periodicals, Ibsen's social dramas, the writings of the Japanese author Akiko Yosano, had vanished from her mind. She could see only outrage and humiliation, leering at her, mocking her. The shame would be something she could not live with.

...

She sat down and lay her head on the tea table and wept softly.

'Qin, what is it?' cried Mrs. Zhang. 'Do you want your mother to feel any worse than she does already?' Tears sprang to Mrs Zhang's eyes.

The girl did not answer, but continued to sob with her head on the table. She wept for herself, for the shattered dream she had fought so hard and long to attain. Now, just as she was beginning to see a glimmer of hope that she might become a strong and self-reliant woman, a 'human being' like Nora in Ibsen's *A doll's house*, she had collapsed, weak and frightened at the first real danger she had to face. What was the use of all her fine ringing phrases? She used to think she was brave, and others had praised her for her courage, yet here she was, waiting like a lamb to be slaughtered, without even the strength to resist.

Her mother couldn't understand what was going on in her mind, nor could the others, even Juemin – who believed he knew her best. They assumed she was weeping because she was afraid. They too were tormented by fear, and they could find no words of comfort for her, though her sobbing cut them to the quick. Juemin wanted to take her in his arms but he didn't have the courage.¹¹

Even here, despite the obvious sympathy implied, the text still inevitably remains within the world of male assumption, firstly that the fear of the girl should be the same as the fear of the boy and secondly that

¹⁰ *BJXJ*, 1, p.206. Translation from *Family* (Doubleday Anchor), p.177.

¹¹ *BJXJ*, 1, p.206. Translation from *Family* (Doubleday Anchor), p.177-178.

she would have been 'all right' if the boy, source of authority, comfort and strength by virtue of his sex, had been able to take her in his arms.

Ba Jin's detached portrayal extends to his rarely occurring physical descriptions of his female characters. These are markedly matter-of-fact and refreshingly lacking in overtones of desire. The following is a description of Mingfeng the bondsmaid going to bed:

I'd better go to sleep, she thought dully, opening the buttons of her padded jacket. She slipped it off. Two mounds of firm young flesh pressed out against her undershirt.

I'm growing up, Mingfeng sighed. But who knows what kind of a home I'll have. ... Then the face of a smiling young man appeared before her. She recognised him and her heart burst into flower. Warmed by a thread of hope, she prayed that he would stretch forth his hand. Perhaps he could rescue her from her present life. But then the face gradually floated away into the sky, higher and higher until it vanished. And her dream-filled eyes found themselves looking only at a dirty ceiling.

A cold gust of wind swept across her exposed breast, wrenching her back to reality. ¹²

In his facial description we note classical overtones, such as in this description of Qin, who, as an aspiring new style woman is given a considerable presence. Derived from a traditional emphasis, in his use of the expression in a woman's eyes, to convey her mood or character, Ba Jin's technique is similar to Mao Dun's :

Qin was dressed in a pale blue silk padded jacket and a dark blue skirt. A strand of hair curving down beside each ear flattered her oval face to full advantage. Beneath her neat fringe long brows arched over large eyes set on either side of a well-formed nose. Those eyes were exceptionally bright and penetrating; they shone with a warmth that not only added a glow to her enthusiastic, vivacious face, but seemed to light up a room the moment she came into it. She magnetised the attention of everyone in Juexin's office as she and her mother smilingly greeted them all. ¹³

Despite itself, this description contains a patronising edge: Qin is an enchanting girl because that is what girls are like – they brighten up the lives of the men in front of whom they appear.

The most striking point of difference between Ba Jin's and Mao Dun's portrayal is the almost complete lack of sensual description in the work

¹² *BJXJ*, 1, p.26. Translation from *Family* (Doubleday Anchor), p.29.

¹³ *BJXJ*, 1, pp.46-47. Translation from *Family* (Doubleday Anchor), p.48, adapted.

of Ba Jin. When Juehui day dreams about the bondsmaid Mingfeng with whom he believes himself to be in love, he eulogises her purity and goodness but there is no hint of sexual desire.¹⁴ The romance between Qin and her cousin Juemin is greatly down-played and takes second place to their political activities. There is never a hint of 'impropriety' between them. Although this might appear to lend to Ba Jin's fiction a more objective intellectual sympathy with the aspirations of his female characters because their treatment is not made ambiguous by sensual description such as that found in Mao Dun's writing, it rather suggests a resemblance with Mao Dun's later Marxist self. Sexuality was a part of the self which May Fourth youth discovered. Prudishly to ignore it is to convey an uncomfortably restrained impression of the times. We note that Mao Dun deliberately emphasised the 'passionate and frantic' atmosphere of the decade.¹⁵

His sensual description is consciously open and thereby deliberately 'modern,' a challenge to the hypocrisy of Confucian morals. He also reflects one of the major preoccupations of the youth of the May Fourth generation. As Chang Jingsheng's treatise on the subject reveals, a major factor in this preoccupation was inadequate sex education and a refusal by society to address the question openly.¹⁶ Perhaps in his earliest works Mao Dun's open description has an added educational intention. This element of his portrayal of women in particular remains problematical because it contains overtones of desire. This is all the more contradictory in the light of an article he wrote in 1927 entitled *The description of sexual desire in Chinese literature*.¹⁷ In this article he expressed unambiguously the view that most description of sexual desire in Chinese literature was either the expression of abnormal, perverted desires or described technique, particularly in the context of 'nourishing the body' (*yang sheng*) both of which lacked any literary value whatsoever. Linking the flourishing of erotic fiction with the lewdness of the times, and singling out the Ming as a particularly lewd era, Mao Dun credited *Jin Ping Mei* with literary value because it constituted

¹⁴ *BJXJ*, 1, pp.83, 86.

¹⁵ See Chapter One, p.15.

¹⁶ See Chang Ching-sheng, *Sex histories*, passim.

¹⁷ *Zhongguo wenxue nei de zingyu miaoxie*, in *Mao Dun Wenyi zaluji*, vol. 1, pp.246-258.

a realistic reflection of the times. Nevertheless, he blamed erotic fiction for fostering unhealthy attitudes. It was all very well to describe extremes of behaviour in order to put forward a moral message – if a certain pattern of behaviour were followed disaster would inevitably follow – but this could only work if those who read the work already subscribed to the moral view expressed, otherwise such writing would only encourage lewdness.

It is only in his later work that a coherent moral line is apparent with regard to promiscuous behaviour. In the earlier stories not only does his sensual description cloud his ‘message’ but there is a distinct lack of moral judgement: fate appears to be random. Although Hui sleeps and toys with men as she pleases, she suffers no terrible fate. On the contrary, she goes on from strength to strength. Sun Wuyang’s behaviour differs little from Hui’s and yet the internal verdict of the novelette is not to vindicate her actions: at the end of the story she is forced to disguise herself as a youth in order to escape from the bandits who overrun the town, thereby losing the very aspects of her physical allure as a woman which were her means to power and manipulation. Qiuliu is less vindictive in her sexual behaviour than Hui or Sun Wuyang but she contracts syphilis. By contrast, Wang Shitao is loyal to her lover’s memory but is forced into prostitution. This randomness of fate recalls Maeterlinck’s *Buried temple*: it is useless to look to the Gods for an answer as to why some are lucky in life and some are not – it is far better to seek some kind of truth within ourselves.¹⁸

As has been shown, one reason for this problematical aspect of Mao Dun’s physical portrayal is the conflict between his feminist sympathies and his Marxist loyalties, freedom of sexual behaviour being an outward expression of a woman’s liberation from the shackles of the traditional moral code. At the same time we recall the insistent view which Mao Dun, as a self-professed realist writer, maintained, that literature should reflect the nature of the times, and his assessment of the particular atmosphere of this fast-changing decade in China. In the light of this, there is no little honesty in his portrayal. There is nothing wrong with showing that the new, self-confident, emancipated woman was extremely attractive to her

¹⁸ See Chapter Four, p.133.

male colleagues, those who sympathised with and often actively supported her cause. In the process, he inevitably reveals something of his own attitudes as a male revolutionary deeply involved in the cause of women's emancipation. This is supported by later accounts in his autobiography of the inspirational role played by his female colleagues in his decision to write fiction. At the same time, his sympathy with and commitment to the cause of female emancipation is unquestionable. The extent to which he attempts to represent female experience is laudable. There is no question that he identified with the experiences of the women, both educated and working class, with whom he worked. But sympathy and identification do not imply a special insight, neither can they be divorced from all the other assumptions which inevitably accompany them.

The most innovatory aspect of Mao Dun's portrayal, which is self-evident even in this most simple of comparisons with the work of his contemporaries, is his psychological exploration. Nevertheless, these remain the most problematical element of his portrayal of women because of the generally accepted belief that Mao Dun wrote his own experience into his portrayal. In addition, the high degree of formulaic description coupled with complicated allegorical structures causes character delineation to suffer. The portrayal must inevitably become contrived in order to accord with such structures.

Mao Dun's attempt to capture and give literary treatment to the female experience has a parallel with the West. It was ground-breaking when Henry James attempted to write from a woman's point of view in *The portrait of a lady*. Such things had not been consciously attempted before. Lawrence and Joyce were also believed to have revealed a special insight into the 'way women work.' Only with the rise of feminist criticism has the work of these writers been put to more rigorous scrutiny and reassessed. The case of Lawrence is the most notable and has clear parallels with the writing of Yu Dafu, not least through the close links between his text and episodes in Lawrence's personal life. He has been shown to use female characters to examine the male psyche, thereby to define some aspect of himself; to blame women for the weaknesses of the hero; to portray as

acted upon rather than as initiators of action and so on.¹⁹

The many difficulties in assessing whether Mao Dun brings any special insight into his portrayal of women may be summarised in the following way. Firstly, the tools available to make the assessment are Eurocentric in their assumptions and orientation and have to be recalibrated. When Chinese classic conceptions of womanhood as conveyed in traditional literature are used as a yardstick against which to measure Mao Dun's portrayal of women, it is clear that he draws extensively from them. At the same time, he reworks aspects of his tradition for new purposes. Secondly, it is entirely inappropriate that the basis of this reappraisal should rely solely on a late twentieth century (Western) understanding of the role of men in feminism, enhanced and enlightened as it has been by several decades of critical debate. Mao Dun must be judged by the standards of the era in which he was writing. However, since there has been very little research into the literary portrayal of women in the May Fourth era, an assessment of Mao Dun's or any other writer's typicality or innovation in portrayal is rendered extremely difficult. This study has attempted some preliminary steps towards the reappraisal of the portrayal of women in Chinese literature.

¹⁹ See e.g. Faith Pullin, *Lawrence's treatment of women in 'Sons and lovers'* in Anne Smith ed., *Lawrence and women*, pp.49-74.

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GLOSSARY

ai	爱
bei jia	被嫁
bei wannong	被玩弄
bei zhuazhule	被抓住了
beiguan	悲观
biao	表
bo ming	薄命
bu luo jia	不落家
caipiao	彩票
cangbai de lian	苍白的脸
daode sixiang	道德思想
dapole lijiao de xin renwu	打破了礼教的新人物
dengdaizhuyi	等待主义
dongyao de xin	动摇的心
duruo	杜若
dushenzhuyi	独身主义
fengliu	风流
fu	赋
funu quanti shi yi ge jieji	妇女全体是一个阶级
furen	夫人
genben gaige	根本改革
geng xin de nuzi	更新的女子
gongchan	共产
gong qi	共妻
gua	卦
guai ren	怪人
guangming	光明
guangming de qiantu	光明的前途
guguai de shir	古怪的事儿
gui	归
guogan	果敢
heian	黑暗
heshi	合适
huai ren	坏人
huise andan de renshengguan	灰色暗淡的人生观
jia ren	嫁人

jia wo	假我
jiefang	解放
jiefang lian'ai	解放恋爱
jin lan hui	金兰会
jingjingr du yi dian shu	静静儿读一点书
jingmei	静美
jiuchan	纠缠
kaicai	开彩
kekao de xingfu	可考的幸福
kongxiang	空想
kun	坤
kuse	枯涩
lian'ai	恋爱
lieshen	劣绅
maodun	矛盾
meiren	美人
mei shaonian	美少年
nannu shejiao gongkai	男女社交公开
nengli	能力
Nuola	娜拉
nugong gongzuo	女工工作
nuxing de ren	女性的人
ou se	藕色
pingchang	平常
pingchang de shi	平常的事
pingfan er qiaocui	平凡而憔悴
pingmin nuxuexiao	平民女学校
pingmin xuexiao	平民学校
qipao	旗袍
qian	乾
qian zi se	浅紫色
ren	人
ren'ge	人格
rensheng you xunhuan	人生有循环
rougan	肉感
routi	肉体
rouxiang	肉香
ruan er re de xiongfu	软而热的胸脯

shaoye
shehui de ren
shehuizhuyi de jiating
shi
shike er zhi
shishi de shenghuo
shi xue
shi xue de zuichun
shuchan
shuihong se
sikai tongbao zhuyi
ta de dongxi
taiji
taohong se
waiwu
wan
wangran
wanwan
weiqi
wo de hunyin
wu
wu rendao
wuliao
wulun
xi jing
xian qi liang mu
xian qi liang mu zhuyi
xiandai de nuxing
xiangwei
xianshi
xiaojie
xin jin huo chuan
xin nannu
xin nuzi
xin pai nuzi
xingge shang de neizai maodun
xinghong bing
xinli bu man

少爷
社会的人
社会主义的家庭
诗
适可而止
史诗的生活
失血
失血的嘴唇
束缠
水红色
四海同胞主义
他的东西
太极
桃红色
外物
玩
惘然
玩玩
围棋
我的婚姻
舞
无人道
无聊
五论
习静
贤妻良母
贤妻良母主义
现代的女性
香味
现实
小姐
薪尽火传
新男女
新女子
新派女子
性格上的内在矛盾
猩红病
心里不满

xiwang de chi se
xuehong de xiyang
xuehong de zuichun
xunhuan
xuxu ru sheng
yang
yang sheng
yi fu yi qi
yi ge nanxing de nuzi
yi ge nuxing de nanzi
yindu hong
yinwei mei you nanzi ai
you wu
youyuan
yuanyuan de, bu nong ye bu dan de meimao
yuanyuan de meimao
zhangfu
zhen jiefang
zhen wo
zhi guai
zhise de yanjing
zhise
zhuyi
zi jia
ziji de xinnian
zixin
ziyou lian'ai

希望的赤色
血红的夕阳
血红的嘴唇
循环
栩栩如生
阳
养生
一夫一妻
一个男性的女子
一个女性的男子
印度红
因为没有男子爱
优物
幽怨
园园的，不浓也不淡的眉毛
园园的眉毛
丈夫
真解放
真我
志怪
滞涩的眼睛
滞涩
主义
自嫁
自己的信念
自信
自由恋爱

