Symbolic Inversion and Controversial Chinese Plays:
chiasmus as a literary device for identifying ambiguities in meaning and throwing light upon authorial intention.

by

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................... vii

Illustrations of Symbolic Inversion ........................................................................... x

Chapter One: The Importance of WM

Introduction: Prologue, some months following the autumn of 1984 ................. 1
An alternative approach to controversial plays ................................................... 4
Materials utilised ..................................................................................................... 9
Huaju and the newly written historical dramas ..................................................... 11
The production and banning of WM ................................................................. 13
The WM affair and the great debate ................................................................. 16
Why WM was a breakthrough; some comments on the debate ......................... 21
Criss-crossing suggestion and the limits of the permissible ............................... 24
Subversive tools and political messages ............................................................. 33

Chapter Two: The Four Seasons

An U rbling Winter: act one of WM ................................................................. 37
Spring, 1978: act two of WM .............................................................................. 57
Summer, 1981: act three of WM .......................................................................... 60
Autumn, 1984: act four of WM ............................................................................ 65

Chapter Three: Building the climax at the centre; ambiguity and interpretive dilemma

Chiasmus ................................................................................................................. 71
Mediation in a Kuranko folktale ............................................................................ 81
The trickster ............................................................................................................. 85
The trickster in drastic entertainment .................................................................... 86
Fooling with inversion .......................................................................................... 90
Jung on the trickster .............................................................................................. 96
Chapter Four: Burying the climax at the centre; authorial intention and interpretive dilemma

The great sage equal to heaven: Sun Wukong the Monkey King ................................. 99
The 'true' and 'false' monkeys ........................................................................ 101
'The great sage' as trickster and sage-fool ......................................................... 103
'Synthesis' or 'The world upside down'? ............................................................ 106
Burying the climax at the centre: ambiguity and interpretive dilemma ............... 109
Expectations vanished ...................................................................................... 112
A further expectational inversion ..................................................................... 114
Symbolic inversion as a 'tool': the potential for disorder ..................................... 120
Revealing the 'true nature' of things .................................................................. 124
Political polemics and subversive slogans ....................................................... 127

Chapter Five: 'Turning ghosts into people': some model operas

Welch revisited .................................................................................................. 132
Building the 'climax at the centre' .................................................................... 135
The importance of jiaoxin .................................................................................. 141
New ghosts, old dreams .................................................................................... 150

Chapter Six: 'Subverting the dramatic agenda': some controversial post-Cultural Revolution plays

Li Xiaozhang and Zhang Xiaoli ........................................................................... 153
The importance of being 'Zheng' ...................................................................... 155
Chiasmus and the 'Guangming weiba' ............................................................... 157
Status reversal reflected in a name change ...................................................... 159
Dreams .............................................................................................................. 161
The Great Wall .................................................................................................. 166
To the beat of a different drum ....................................................................... 170
An 'out of season' protagonist ....................................................................... 172
'Where is the road which will lead out of here?' ............................................. 176
Abstract

In China as elsewhere, drama has long been viewed as a powerful vehicle for affecting political consciousness in terms of building support for or challenging official ideology. Historically, the CCP leadership has recognised and reacted to the potentially large influence playwrights may enjoy by imposing upon them an elaborate system of administrative and social controls.

 Prevailing leadership factions within the CCP at different times exercise their powers of discretion to impose their own particular interpretations of Stalinist-Maoist orthodoxies. Playwrights who are viewed as "controversial" are obliged to negotiate their productions through this system, always aware of the possibility of being censored, banned, publicly vilified or imprisoned.

Yet the system of co-option and coercion that playwrights confront often has a highly ambiguous face. To a large extent this is necessarily so, as it works in conformity with a Stalinist-Maoist system that has historically shown a marked tendency to shift towards political extremes when faced with crisis. Under political conditions that include ongoing factional power struggles at the apex of the Party political definitions constantly shift. A person who is vilified as a bourgeois-liberal today may well be castigated as an ultra-leftist tomorrow.

Most playwrights who are labelled as controversial recognise their marginality to the political system and some use this marginality to their own advantage by reflecting, in their plays, the ambiguities inherent in the system. This thesis attempts to answer, in both a general and particular fashion, how this is done.
The thesis argues that it is possible to use different strategies to understand controversial Chinese drama than has often been the norm. It may sometimes be possible for those of less direct "China experience" to utilise (or "substitute", if you will) certain structural analyses of literature in order to "discover" the literary strategies which controversial playwrights may employ in presenting their socio-political critiques.

This use of structural analysis has a certain advantage in that it offers a testing ground for the political assumptions that literary critics sometimes bring to bear when dealing with highly ambiguous plays and playwrights who may find it necessary to be at times less than open about their own motives in producing their work.

The thesis employs the strategy of examining closely a well-known controversial play of the 1980s - one that caused a literary storm when it was banned after only a few performances in 1985. Wang Peigong's play *W* is examined in relationship to several other controversial plays which share with it the character of having a high degree of ambiguity.

There is a detailed cross-cultural discussion of the nature of ambiguity and how it has been variously interpreted. The purpose of this discussion is to identify ambiguity-producing literary strategies.

The literary device known as "chiasmus" is identified and examined and found to be a cross-cultural ambiguity-producing rhetorical mechanism which has been widely associated with the symbolic inversion of meaning. The thesis then takes up the question of the relationships between chiasmic inversion and well-known literary figures associated with ambiguity, such as the trickster and the fool, who are traditional to Chinese literature as to elsewhere.
It is argued that chiasmic inversion is utilised in well-known pre-modern Chinese literature. Chiasmus, it is noted, can also be utilised as a device for centralising terms, and thus underlining ideas. Some Model Operas from the Cultural Revolution are examined and each is found to resolve fundamental political dilemmas through recourse to chiasmic inversion. Chiasmic inversion is also found to operate explicitly in the controversial play, The Imposter, a play which many regard as being a direct "ancestor" of WM.

The question is then posed as to whether WM, for all its political explicitness, also utilises chiasmic inversion.

An interview with Wang Peigong which touches on questions raised in the thesis is included in Appendix A of the thesis.

My translation of WM is provided in Appendix B. It should be noted that the translation provided here is a new translation and bears very little resemblance to a translation included as part of my Honours thesis.
Illustrations

The following four illustrations (overleaf) visually capture instances of symbolic inversion, the literary aspects of which are the subject of this thesis.


Art Appreciation: The picture is of a stool, or dengm Chinese, turned over, meaning ‘overthrow’ (Kristian Whittaker, Direct Action).
Here you may see what's very rare,
The world turn'd upside down
A tree and castle in the air;
A man walk on his crown.

Poem from the English Revolution of 1642
CHAPTER ONE:

The Importance of WM

Introduction

Prologue: Beijing, some months following the autumn of 1984.

The stage lights brighten. Two musicians spring forward. They bow briefly to the audience then seat themselves at their instruments: a drum set and an electronic keyboard. 'The Gold and Silver Weaving Shuttles' is belted out. Six youths dive onto the stage and throw themselves into a wild, cavorting version of what was then the latest post 1984 Chinese modern dance craze.

The stage lights suddenly dim. Each dancer, captured individually by a spotlight, freezes into a disjointed, absurdist pierrot-like position. Now a stranger moves amongst them, touching them, peering at them, as if seeking out familiar faces and recognition. No response there, but the Drummer and Keyboardist step forward to confront him. Who is it he searches for, they inquire. The Keyboardist seems to recognise him, but the serious, abstracted stranger quickly becomes the butt of the drummer's light-hearted jibes.

The stranger, we learn, is known as "General". It's his nickname only, confides the Keyboardist ... no need to be startled. Is he, then, a disciple of Napoleon? The Drummer's question elicits from the stranger a resounding, "No!". In fact, he's a Marxist, asserts the Keyboardist. The General ignores this. He is too intent on seeking out his friends. But the Keyboardist, like a puppeteer, physically takes the General and spins him round, crying out, "Your friends are all here!" The frozen dancers come to life and, mobbing the General, gushingly reacquaint themselves. General, adopting a
serious, formal manner, introduces the youths to the audience, "These are our friends from the "collective shack": Hatoyama, Big Head, Pushcart, Princess, Sister Superior, and even ... Waifling."

The urblings pose, "like players in a Beijing Opera, for the audience's admiration, then silently slip into some heavily padded winter clothes of all the same hue". General, while donning his own winter garb, explains to the audience the coming transition from this prologue to act one ... to the winter of 1976, " 'Collective shack!' ... Now, this term will soon fade from memory until finally a day will come when people will have to look up its meaning in a dictionary. But we cannot forget! Till the end of our days we will not forget! What, for us, does collective household symbolise for us? "

"With emotional sighs and shudders" the youths form themselves into lines. The lights dim. Suddenly, from the mouths of the youths comes an eerie keening, like the sound of the roaring wind. Lights up, and we find the youths have been time-travelled back to 1976. Act one commences. The close of another day. Another day of operating (invisible) farm machinery and performing the usual heavy, monotonous labour typical of Collective Farm work towards the end of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

Even during the rehearsals, seats in the Air Force theatre were filled. Both the astounding content and the strange theatrical technique ensured that news of the production spread like wildfire. Soon, in the galleries, there was standing room only. The soldiers and their friends would intervene from the audience, shouting up criticisms and suggestions to the actors and director Wang Gui. He and the playwright, Wang Peigong, both working within a Drama Section of the Political Department of the People's Republic of China's Air Force, would often close together in an exasperated huddle, wondering just how far out on the limb they were climbing.
The ad hoc audience, it appears, was left in little doubt as to the importance of what was being created on that stage. They responded immediately to the freshness and vitality, the pathos and bitterness, that could be gleaned from the snatches of scenes under rehearsal. The play seemed about to break through the well known limits binding most of previous huaju (spoken drama). Astoundingly modernist, it appeared at the same time to be down-to-earth in its subject matter and dialogue. Neither a pastiche of borrowed Western dramatical conceits served up as abstract metaphysical exploration, nor the more common timid and jaded endorsement of some latest policy push courtesy of the Air Force Propaganda Department, this play, on the contrary, seemed to be growing into a category of its own.

WM, as the play was titled, appeared to be a very conscious attempt to recreate the experiences undergone by an entire generation of Chinese urban youth. As well, it served as a mirror to that generation's brave, Quixotic-like confusion in its tracing the search for both individual and collective atonement. Penned by playwright Wang Peigong as his personal "contribution" to the 1985 International Year of Youth, WM conjured up the shared aspirations and emotions of millions of youth drawn down to the "countryside" by the whirlpool of the Cultural Revolution, of youth systematically chewed over during the years spanning the death of Mao Zedong and the (final) re-emergence of Deng Xiaoping, of youth who were then spat out into a China inversely

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1 According to William Dolby, the first Chinese huaju, that is, a play or drama as distinct from an opera, was, "unlike the traditional dramas (in that it) had no interludes, recitation, song, asides, or soliloquies, but was pure huaju in form", (W. Dolby, p. 279)). The first real creative Chinese huaju, "was a five-act play produced by a Chinese students' drama group, "The Spring Willow Society", in Japan in 1907. The play was entitled Black slaves cry to heaven", and was the students' adaptation from Liu Shu's translation (1901) of the novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, by Harriet Beecher Stowe ... One of the actors was Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1963), who was to be a powerful force in Chinese drama in later years ... (the play) was such a success in Japan that it inspired developments in China, particularly in Shanghai. An amateur drama society performed the play there in the same year. This play was the inspiration for many others of this period that were seen to advocate revolution", (William Dolby, A History of Chinese Drama, London: Elek, Paul, 1976, pp. 202-3).
characterised by increasing pragmatic conservatism, ideological confusion and rapidly deepening social inequalities and uncertainties.

The two English letters of the play's title, **WM**, were initially seen by many to represent the Chinese word for "we" or "us" (i.e., *wōmen*). At this level, the players, to the beat of a drummer, sometimes march, sometimes stumble, fall, struggle up, fall again, then continue marching across the stage of contemporary China, from scene to scene and act to act, surviving, but at great cost, the batterings and scarrings of the years between 1976 and 1984. Like perhaps a lost brigade of the revolution, out of tune and out of joint, the players wander pathetically between the extremes of abject disillusionment and utopian idealism. They reflect both the stunning perceptiveness and, at other times, the costly, blinded ignorance of an entire generation.

**An alternative approach to controversial plays**

As students of Chinese literature, how do we approach the problem of the "ambiguous" play? By ambiguous, I refer here to plays which appear to us as sometimes, or perhaps even entirely, ambiguous in their essential meaning. Those plays which we cannot with overwhelming, or even a large amount of certainty, point to and say, "The meaning of this play is such and such. This is, more or less, the playwright's central message". The field of literary criticism, of course, offers us various useful analytical tools by which we can examine dramatic works in general and in particular. However what if, on occasion, these seem a little inadequate for the task? What if, however much we take up some analytical tools and discard others in our attempts to uncover the central ideas and meaning of a certain play, it appears that curiosities and ambiguities still remain?

In recent years we have seen that even such plays as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which has historically been perceived to contain curiosities and ambiguities in structure,
dialogue and action, and which has historically therefore elicited much commentary from critics using more traditional approaches to textual studies, have been drastically re-interpreted from other stances. One critic has recently argued that *The Tempest* is a highly coherent work concerned with commenting upon contemporary problems raised by English colonialist ventures in America and expressing these concerns via Ovidian metaphor. Shakespeare's treatment of these problems, the critic argues, allowed contemporary audiences to derive meanings from the play which were lost to audiences in later periods.

What if, however, the problem which confronts us is not purely one of bridging a historico-cultural gulf? What if the playwright, Renaissance or otherwise, is writing within political conditions which determine that his own best interests lie in obscuring, at some level, the fundamental meaning, the central socio-political critique, of his work?

Within the "bureaucratised socialist" or "Stalinised" societies of the former Soviet bloc, the primary question historically asked of playwrights' literary production by officials of the state apparatuses was whether or not the central messages of those plays supported the general political lines and programmes of the current ruling elites. Plays which were viewed as crossing over, politically, the limits of the artistically permissible were often banned, while their authors sometimes paid higher personal prices.

Within the PRC the same, historically, has been true. However the advent of the Cultural Revolution and the role imposed upon Wu Han's play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, in bringing drama once again to the very forefront of political debate has meant

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2 See, for example, Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, 'Nymphs and reapers heavily vanish: the discursive contexts of "The Tempest"' in, John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares*, London and New York: Methuen, 1985, pp. 191-206.

3 John Gillies, 'Shakespeare's Virginian Masque', not published at time of writing.
that officials of the state apparatus have since given even more weight to the political importance of drama. Moreover, the legacy of Maoist factionalism that came to be superimposed upon Stalinist forms of centralism in the CCP, historically producing a combination of top down command structures combined with intense factional struggles within the Party's higher echelons, has meant that changes in political lines have often come swiftly indeed.

The Chinese playwright, therefore, has often worked under the additional burden of ensuring that his plays do not offend the leading factional persons or their political stances. The alternative has been to do a Hao Ran or Han Suyin and adapt to the situation as a politically co-opted writer, sponsored by major Party factional figures. Within this general situation, the Chinese playwright who truly desires to write politically dissenting plays and still have these performed must per force adopt entirely different strategies. In order to understand these strategies, and thus the central meaning of the controversial play, the student of Chinese literature may also be required to adopt an alternative analytical stance.

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4 The play was first performed on the Beijing operatic stage in February, 1961, but was suspended after only a few performances. On November 10, 1965, an attack on the play, written by Yao Wenyuan, describing the play as a "poisonous weed" and a trick to "use the past to satirise the present", appeared in the Shanghai Wenhuibao, touching off the Cultural Revolution. The play was concerned "with the popular theme of an incorruptible official alleviating the burdens of a people menaced by capricious officialdom". Its author, Wu Han, was a noted historian and professor who, at the time, was deputy mayor of Beijing. C.C. Huang, (transl.), Wu Han, Hai Rui Dismissed from Office, Hawaii: University Press, Asian Studies Program, 1972, p. 3.

5 Hao Ran was a leading novelist during the Cultural Revolution. A passing reference to his novel, The Bright, Golden Road, occurs in WM. Han Suyin is a novelist, resident in Europe, who played a key role in popularising both the Chinese Revolution (in all its stages) and its leadership, particularly in the West. After the 1989 Beijing Massacre, Han Suyin publicly criticised the students in Tiananmen square for "going too far", thus implicitly supporting both the party leadership's actions at the time and their practice of rationalising human rights abuses by emphasising the 'rights' of the collective (as interpreted by the party leadership) over those of the individual (or smaller group) in contemporary China. See also Simon Leys' short essay-piece, 'The Double Vision of Han Suyin: On the Character of a Trimmer', in Simon Leys, The Burning Forest: Essays on Culture and Politics in Contemporary China, London: Paladin Grafton Books, Collins Publishing Group, 1983, 1988, pp. 171-85.
In *Chinese Shadows* Simon Leys notes how, especially during the later part of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese political discourse was widely expressed through a series of "code words". For many non-Chinese, as for many Chinese not "in the know", an understanding of the real meaning of such codewords required some practical ability at code-breaking. The same is true of some recent controversial plays.

For the controversial playwright, however, there is often a choice regarding the extent of ambiguity which he may produce in a given work. If the playwright desires that the central meaning of his play be recoverable by more than a small handful of those in the know amongst his audience, then the ambiguity utilised must be directed, in some fashion, towards suggesting certain conclusions. Such is the case, it will be argued, with **WM. Lincoln Kaye**, in a recent review of Guo Shixing's play, *Bird Men*, comments that, "All interpretations are correct, he [Guo Shixing] seems to imply; all are intended and all are inseparable from each other. Chain-mail defensive writing. No wonder the censors cannot find a crevasse to slip in their scalpels". One wonders, then, how many of *Bird Men's* audience were perhaps left scratching their heads in bewilderment, perplexed by the very depth of the play's satire and ambiguity.

Drama offers wide scope for utilisation as a medium for social protest. Because of its dual nature, that is, textual production and stage production, its scope is potentially

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*6 "The pessimism that emanates from this book derives precisely from the essential unreality of its subject. But let this not mislead the reader: there is also a young, revolutionary China, repeatedly suppressed but constantly struggling. Though invisible to us most of the time, it periodically bursts into the open with stupendous courage. To mention only one recent instance, I think of Li Yizhe's manifesto 'On democracy and Legality under Socialism', which was defiantly posted on the walls of Guangzhou at the end of 1974, or at the spontaneous mass manifestation that exploded on April 5, 1976, in the heart of Beijing denouncing 'the feudal rule of the new Qinshihuang' (China's most dreaded tyrant, whose name has become a code word for Mao in the symbolic language of Chinese politics). On this 'real China' we found our hopes: the future belongs to it". Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadows*, New York: The Viking Press, 1977, Forward to the English Language Edition, pp. XV-XVI.

greater than any other literary medium. Yet for the student of Chinese literature, the problem of how to understand controversial Chinese plays is deepened by the phenomenon of the limits of the permissible and the dissenting playwright's reactions to those limits. The problem for the student may not always be resolved by simply learning more Chinese, or living and studying in China, or even studying more plays, although these strategies may certainly be extremely helpful.

Often, the problem, becomes how to bridge a politico-cultural gulf wherein the other side of the bridge may rest on shifting sands. For the non-Chinese student especially, the point of departure may be clear but the point of arrival may often seem elusive. The central meaning of the controversial play may well be dispersed, ambivalently, within the text. The playwright being interviewed may often necessarily need to be evasive or elliptical in his responses to particular questions put by the student. We may never even be able to interview the playwright, or we may not be at hand when a controversial play "breaks", and miss the opportunity of viewing it for ourselves.

Given these types of problems, and the relative complexity of Chinese political culture, the task of unravelling authorial intention has daunted many. The field of inquiry has often, therefore, been left entirely to those sinologists who have shown themselves experts at bringing to light the more subtle nuances of politically controversial literature, and who have the personal connections or academic weight to network their way through the often labyrinthine circles forming the personal relationships between the more well known playwrights, artists, publishing houses and critics. This is, certainly, the well tried and proven method. At the same time, however, there is sometimes a tendency amongst other students of Chinese literature to view such analysis as the prerogative solely of those writing from the rarefied heights (however down to earth and practical those heights may in reality be).
The notion that politically controversial Chinese literature is a "too hard" subject or even an ultimately unknowable field might even be seen by some to reflect a little of what Edward Said had to say concerning "Orientalism". On the other hand, it might be argued, the cultural nationalism promoted by bureaucratised socialist regimes tends to produce literati whose continued existence depends on their ability to sustain an emphasis on their country's own undoubtedly rich cultural traditions. When bureaucratically administered into general ideological entrenchment, this emphasis may also encourage, particularly when it comes to literati dealings with the non-Chinese student, the promotion of an atmosphere of almost mystical unknowability.

This thesis argues that it may also be necessary to deal with the text in an alternative way. If a work of drama is perceived to be somewhat ambiguous in its central meaning, then perhaps we should look within the text for ambiguity-producing literary devices, and analyse these in turn. In this sense, aside from asking of the text, "What, amidst these ambiguities of meaning, is the central critique of the playwright?", we should also ask, "Given the level of ambiguity in the text, how are the ambiguities produced by the playwright?", in order to test any conclusions derived from the received opinions of experts in the field, as well as against our own more general assumptions and predilections about the particular playwright and his work.

Materials utilised

In order to develop this alternative approach to the problem of controversial 'huaju', I have utilised a variety of sources and materials other than the texts themselves. My translation of the play WM can be found in the appendix. The translation is based on the complex character text published in the Hong Kong journal, The Nineties Monthly.  

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(the same text, in simplified character form, was published in the PRC journal, *Drama*). I have drawn on the various discussions of *WM* by Chinese and western writers published in a variety of newspapers, literary magazines and drama periodicals in the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and in the west, covering commentaries by those both within literary and artistic circles in China and western analysts.

As well, I have utilised various general works regarding controversial Chinese literature by Chinese and western writers published outside the PRC. Although I did not have the opportunity to see *WM* at first hand, several years ago I was able to watch a private video of what I believe to be a 1985 Shanghai production of the play. In late 1987, I visited Beijing where I first met and spent several days with *WM*’s author, Wang Peigong. A private but "on the record" interview I conducted at that time with the playwright can be found, translated, in the appendix. Also in the appendix is a brief background on the playwright.

I visited Beijing once again in May and June of 1989, when I again had the opportunity to meet with the playwright several days before the June 4 Beijing Massacre. Wang Peigong was working as a playwright attached to the Chinese Youth Arts Theatre in Beijing. He was also a Director of the Chinese Dramatists Association and a member of the Chinese Writers' Union. At the time, his concerns were centred less on his personal treatment by the authorities after the banning of *WM* four years before as on the possible outcomes of the student-worker democratisation movement and specifically the struggle of the students occupying Tiananmen Square, many amongst the leadership of whom he personally knew. Soon after Premier Li Peng declared martial law in central Beijing on May 19, Wang Peigong presented his local *dangwei* (Party

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\(^{10}\)Zhongguo xiju, dianshi jupao zuohanshou zhongxin, *Juben* (Chinese Theatre and Television Drama Correspondence Centre, *Drama*), Beijing: September, 1985, pp. 6-30. Also included in this issue are four critical essays supporting the play.
Committee) with his written resignation from the Party. He'd been a Party member for about twenty years. His resignation included an explanation of his action, which was later leaked by persons unknown to the foreign press.

There was little opportunity to conduct further "on the record" interviews. During the initial stages of the movement, Wang Peigong, like many Beijing intellectuals, had offered his signature on petitions in support of the movement, and had occasionally participated in rallies of support as well as in the general discussions regarding the movement that were taking place throughout Beijing society. Until May 25, Wang had also spent a large amount of his time on the streets arguing out the politics of the movement. On May 25, Wang indicated to me that he had recently decided to return to his workplace in order to resume full-time work on some pressing projects.

On June 5, having myself spent much of the previous afternoon and night on Erhuan and Chang'an Roads, approaches to Tiananmen Square, and within the Square, I heard from an acquaintance that Wang Peigong was at his home and in fear of being arrested by the Beijing Public Security Bureau. After I had left Beijing on June 7, I later learned that the playwright, after fleeing the capital, had been picked up by the authorities in mid June, in the city of Guiyang, Guizhou Province. The playwright spent many months in prison, where his incarceration was lengthened, it has been reported by other prisoners, because of his political recalcitrance. Wang Peigong was released in mid 1991.

*Huaju and the Newly Written Historical Dramas*

As a vessel for his personal message, his socio-political critique, Wang Peigong rejected the potentially safer format of the historical drama (*lishiju*). Other playwrights at this time were experimenting in this field, transposing their critiques of contemporary
China onto a stage set more safely in an earlier, imperial epoch. By the mid 1980s the statistical growth of newly written historical dramas (xinbian lishi ju), such as Tang Taizong, Daming Hun, Pan Jinlian, attested to the relevance of this vessel for what some believe to be perhaps more subtle, veiled critiques by cautious PRC playwrights. In his survey of some of these dramas, Colin Mackerras concludes that:

The locus of society which dominates the stage has changed; peasant rebels have retired to the background, while the emperors and courtiers have replaced them front stage. The politics which underwrites the newly written historical dramas is one of nationalism. However, there is still a serious concern with certain social problems, such as the inferior status of women...11

From Mackerras' review of some examples of post Mao historical drama, it is evident that during the early 1980s several well known playwrights, such as Chen Baichen, Bai Hua and Zhou Changfu were very much concerned with the question of leadership succession.12 In informal discussions I held with Chinese drama students in Beijing during 1987, it was apparent that many of the students believed that various of the emperors and courtiers portrayed in these dramas and operas were intended to be seen as embodying character traits of certain contemporary Chinese political leaders. The relatively fewer huaju staged during the early 1980s period spoke volumes about the

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12 Ibid. cf. for example, Chen Baichen's, Da feng ge (Ode to the Great Wind), 1979; by Bai Hua, Wu Wang jinge Yue Wang jian (The Weapons of State), 1983, and Zhou Changfu's opera, Qu feng ci (Song of the Autumn Wind), 1985.
political uncertainties and dangers inherent for the playwright in working within this form.13

Once deciding for the more immediate and powerful 'huaju' form, however, Wang Peigong broke with a tradition still clung tightly onto by the bureaucratic overseers of the dramatic arts in China. The playwright spurned a basic element of the increasingly discredited, but still hegemonic, drama-writing policy prevailing in one form or another since Mao's, "Talk at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art", in May, 1942.14

The Production and Banning of WM

"The four-act play WM was banned in November 1985 at the beginning of one of the cultural purges that have become an annual ritual in Deng Xiaoping's China".15 WM began its short performance life within the Drama Society of the Political Department of the Chinese Air Force.16 The playwright, Wang Peigong, was in his early forties and a member of the Political Department. The play's Director, Wang Gui, was the Commanding Officer of the Drama Society. Rehearsals began on June 8, 1985, but news of the play's content and style spread to the Air Force's General Political Department, whence came an order for the production to cease. Wang Gui was accused

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13 Ibid. Mackerras presented fairly detailed statistics showing the comparatively lower production level of huaju for the period. His own conclusion was that the huaju form was "less popular".
16 The details of the banning of WM are taken from Li Yi, 'Lishi de shanghen, juda de honggou: shitan WM de jinyan fengbo' ("Scars of History- The Gigantic Gulf: examining the storm over WM's banning") in Jiushi niandai (The Nineties Monthly, Hong Kong: Going Fine Ltd, December, 1985, pp. 78-80.
of insubordination, and dismissed from his post. Later, the People's Daily, published an article criticising the incident.

Not long afterwards, the controversial playwright Sha Yexin invited Wang Gui to direct a production of the play in Shanghai, with the result that a public performance of WM was presented by the Shanghai People's Theatre of Dramatic Arts on October 4, 1985. The editor of the Hong Kong periodical The Nineties Monthly, Li Yi, mentions that the performance aroused unprecedented emotional responses from members of the audience. While WM was in rehearsal at Shanghai, another production of the play, nominally under the sponsorship of the China Society for Theatre Literature, was announced on September 6, 1985, in Beijing, with the cast drawn from the Beijing People's Arts Theatre and the Youth Arts Theatre.

An opening performance was staged on October 20, 1985, at the Beijing National Palace Theatre. Tickets for five performances were sold out in half a day. Entry to the performances was restricted to members of the Chinese Stage and Drama Organisations. Reportedly, the performances aroused a deeply sympathetic response from younger members of the audience. Recalls Wang Peigong:

One person in the audience who was formerly an 'educated youth' told me he had to leave the theatre three times during the performance. He couldn't bear it. It made him too depressed. Finally he bought a bouquet of flowers and threw it onto the stage. I received many letters after the play was banned. One young worker wanted to offer me his savings. 'I have 1,000 yuan in savings', he wrote, 'and I'd like to present this to you'. I refused. Affairs cannot be conducted that

17 FE/0904; B2/2, October 25, 1990.
18 FE/0904; B2/2, October 25, 1990.
19 How strictly this was enforced is questionable, as I have met an Australian Chinese-language student who recalls seeing a Beijing production at the time.
way. They liked the play. The play touched them not because of the performance technique but through the play's message; their strivings, the distortions, etc. They could easily understand the play.

The play was closed down on November 8, before its two final scheduled performances had been staged. The following day, Beijing newspapers published an announcement from the Drama and Literary Society. Performances of the play were to cease forthwith and all persons who had purchased tickets were requested to return these to the theatre for refunds. On November 13, a Chinese newsagency reported that Wang Gui had stated in a telephone interview that the Beijing authorities had passed down an order for performances to cease. "This isn't a temporary ban", he added. Wang Gui also mentioned the possibility that the Cultural Section of the Beijing Municipal Party's Propaganda Department had raised objections to the content of the play.

Meanwhile, the editorial department of the monthly PRC magazine, Drama, decided to publish in its August issue an interview with playwright Wang Peigong, together with a selection of thirteen photographs from a performance of WM. In its following issue, Theatre published a script of the play together with four critical essays giving the play strong approval. At the end of the year, The Nineties Monthly, republished the entire script of WM in its December issue with an article summarising the history of the play's content, production, and banning. This was followed, in its February 1986 issue, by a short critical commentary on the WM affair.

20 Pj0904; B2/2, October 25, 1990.
21 Meilianshe.
22 'Fangwen WM de zuozhe' ('An Interview with the Author of WM'), Drama, August, 1985, pp. 50-53. For the photographs see pp. 96-97.
23 Drama, September, 1985, pp. 6-30.
24 The Nineties, December, 1985, pp. 78-96.
February, 1986 also saw Taiwan's Central Daily News carry an article on WM that noted the play had also been staged in Paris by a group of dissident Chinese intellectuals and their friends. In October, 1986, the same newspaper published a more lengthy article, based largely, it appears, on the Theatre and The Nineties commentaries.

Inside China, of course, the debate continued to rage. But it wasn't till the end of the decade that the final verdict was issued by the authorities in the form of a scathing criticism, over one and one-third broadsheet sized pages long, in the literary criticism section of an issue of Wenyibao, in which the author, Xuan Ming, particularly condemned the playwright (though everyone else involved in the production was flagellated too) outright for, amongst a quite impressive list of crimes, promoting the trend towards bourgeois individualism. The publication of the article appears to have been timed to coincide with Wang Peigong's release from prison.

**The WM affair and the great debate.**

If many amongst Beijing's theatre going audience's found WM to be a breath of fresh air, within literary circles especially the banning of the play caused a storm of debate. Barme and Minford report that "Official displeasure with WM centred on the play's puzzling romanized title and the belief that the characters were not representative of Chinese realities."  

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27 Zhongyang Ribao, October 5, 1986, p. 3.
28 Xuan Ming, 'WM' de fengbo shiwei' ('The complete story of the storm caused by WM'), in Wenyibao, 13 October 1990, p. 5 and p. 7.
29 Barme and Minford (eds), Seeds of Fire p. 117. This work also includes a translation of a part of act one of WM, pp. 105-116.
Aside from these general reasons, no specific ones were publicly offered either by the Air Force Political Department or the Beijing authorities as to why they had banned the play. In an interview within the theatre journal, Drama, however, Wang Peigong is quoted as stating it was because the play had no 'positive characters' (zhengmian renwu) or 'negative characters' (fanmian renwu). Instead, the playwright had "transgressed an old taboo by portraying 'middle characters' (zhongjian renwu)". That is, characters with faults as well as positive aspects.\(^\text{30}\)

As implied by Barme and Minford above, yet another aspect of the play which was criticised was its 'foreign-ness'. Unhappy references were made to the playwright's use of English letters for the play's title, and some critics saw this as evidence that the play was permeated by western influence in the form of European 'modernism', as well as contemporary western values associated with this post-World War I movement.

For example, realism in stage scenery is eschewed in the play and the use of props is minimised. The 'collective shack' in act one exists only in so far as the actors conjure it up upon an otherwise empty stage. The window frame through which the youths peer out at the devastated village at the close of act one is simply an unattached wooden frame held up by the youths. Pang Yun's attempted suicide by throwing herself into the river is conveyed through her being hoisted high by a swinging rope. General grabs her hands to save her from being swept away by the imagined current. In general, the production of the play was far removed from traditional Ibsen-based approaches in terms of stage settings.\(^\text{31}\) Responding to criticisms of the lack of positive and negative characters in WM, Wang Peigong has conceded the point, but is, however, unrepentant.

\(^{30}\) Drama, 'An Interview with WM's Author', pp. 50-51.

\(^{31}\) Within China the Ibsen-based approach was early exemplified in the work of the playwright Cao Yu. For a brief discussion of this point see, Joseph M. Lau, Ts'ao Yu, Hong Kong: University Press, 1970, especially the Introduction and the section on "'Thunderstorm": Its Source and Form'.

There are no positive and negative characters in the play. They don't exist. Such characters are artificial constructs and don't exist in real life... Each individual has several aspects, positive and negative, dominant characteristics and ones of less importance. That's reality. Life can change endlessly and so do people. An individual can be in various states ... all sorts of labels... this one's a hero, that one's good or bad... are attached by people. The best way is to show naked individuals and let members of the audience themselves decide upon appropriate labels. That's my approach.32

Criticisms of the absence of positive and negative characters were, however, merely part of much deeper concerns expressed more privately by certain authorities. According to the playwright, certain highly placed persons, in particular Hu Qiaomu, reportedly felt the play to be "too pessimistic" in its general tone, and essentially contradicting, therefore, the general political line of the Third Plenum of the CPC's Central Committee regarding Chinese youth. On this point, responding to a question regarding what has commonly been perceived as the greater artistic merit of act one of WM compared with acts two to four, the playwright had the following to say:

I think that the four acts... form an integrated body. You can hardly say that one part of this integrated body is better than the other parts. [However that criticism] was not based entirely on artistic criteria, but more upon political considerations. 'Winter' [act one, set in 1976] described the situation during the Cultural Revolution. Now it's come about that the Cultural Revolution has been officially criticised and negated. I'd be permitted to write any scathing story about the Cultural Revolution, even if it was a horrific one. After the Third Plenum of the CPC's Central Committee (Sanzhong quanhui), however, they [the Party

32 cf. Appendix A of this thesis, 'An Interview with Playwright Wang Peigong, Beijing, August, 1987'.
leadership] decided that all the youth had become "high spirited and vigorous", as the expression goes, and were prepared for the Four Modernisations. They thought that by 'Autumn' [1981] the characters should have been acting maturely and not as they actually did in the play when they still retained feelings of directionlessness, purposelessness and loss.

In 'Winter' I posed the question, what is humanity? Therein I wrote that humans are "tiny motes of dust" or "small pieces of bricks" [tape inaudible here]. I raised this question again in 'Autumn'. The answer we received was that humans are "small potatoes". Certain persons thought this intolerable and shouldn't be permitted because in the end I didn't offer any optimism. It was seen as contrary to the policy of the Third Plenum. Hu Qiaomu said, "This is a play which offers no optimism. Not only is there no hope in 'Winter', but also in 'Spring', 'Summer' and 'Autumn'. If the situation described in the play is true it means our Third Plenum has been a failure and that we can't do anything (wusuozuoweile)".

I don't think his attitudes should be reflected in literary production. But I also realised that the play involved the issue of how to understand the youth of today.

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33 At the Fourth National People's Congress in January 1975, Zhou Enlai left his sickbed to preside. "Zhou's keynote address ... was essentially a call to forge ahead with the long-range plan of achieving the comprehensive modernisation of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology before the end of the century, so that our national economy will be advancing in the front ranks of the world'. This broad objective came to be referred to as the 'Four Modernisations". Craig Dietrich, People's China: A Brief History, Oxford: University Press, 1986, p. 226. Dietrich notes that the Congress marked the re-emergence of Deng Xiaoping as a political force. A further explanation of the origins of this term is offered by Hsu; "Zhou Enlai was generally credited with initiating the idea of the Four Modernizations in a report to the Fourth National Congress in January 1975. Actually, industrialization as the foundation of socialism was a Leninist principle which the Chinese Communists implemented as soon as they achieved power: more than one-half of China's total investment in the 1950s was allocated to industrial development. In 1963 Mao called for the 'building of a modernized socialist power'; and it was in response to this call that Zhou proposed, at the Third National People's Congress, December 1964, the socialist construction of a 'modernized agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology' to be accomplished 'within a not too long period of history'. However, no concrete action followed due to the onset of the Cultural Revolution". Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, China Without Mao: The Search for a New Order, Oxford: University Press, 1990 (2nd edition), pp. 92-93.
The play reflected my own understanding derived from the experiences of my friends and from my own life. During the Cultural Revolution I felt at a loss. I felt that there was no way to control one's own fate or find out the rules determining one's fate... Today I think that, when it comes to youths, I should portray the reality, so I don't think it's the right approach to add in a lot of idealistic and romantic scenes.

In my old works, especially those about soldiers or military affairs, you could tell from their first appearance which characters were good and which were bad. I used every conceivable means to make the positive characters sympathetic figures... but gradually I became dissatisfied with that approach. This change in me may have been triggered by personal experiences. My self-understanding may have gradually changed.

Initially, I took a simplistic approach to myself and my work, that I'm a Party member and a Party writer (dangyuan zuojia). I followed the Party's instructions, doing what the Party required of me. Everything was simplistic ... I tried to write with the aim of improving life by revealing people's good points so others could learn to be better while criticising people's bad points so they could rid themselves of them. However gradually I found that although my work was appreciated and I did receive some rewards, I wasn't really satisfied. My own understanding of life had become deeper and more complex. I don't mean that my old approach had become redundant and useless. At certain times it may still be needed. But I think

34 Several earlier plays by Wang Peigong written in this style include, Ta Cong Taiwan Feilai, Dianshiju wenxue juben, (From Taiwan He Came Flying, A Drama Script for Television), Beijing, February 1982, and, Huore de Xin (A Fervent Heart, a traditional operatic drama utilising contemporary themes in five acts co-written with Li Dongcai and Liu Dianchen, Theatrical Company of the Chinese PLA Air Force's Political Department), Beijing, July 1984. I have not been able to read or obtain details concerning Wang Peigong's historical drama, Zhou Lang Bai Shuai (An Official of the Zhou Dynasty Does Obeisance to his Prince).
today's audiences can no longer be convinced by such an approach. They might be momentarily touched, but would soon forget. They might feel that those ideas aren't really their own but rather have been inserted into their minds by someone else.

I used to work as a journalist and I sometimes wrote speeches for the leaders. While I was writing these it seemed to me that I was in control, but really the opposite was the case... They controlled both my pen and my mind, and that used to be the case with my plays. There are still many people today who write like I used to. If you strip away the husks of their plays you find that the kernels contain none of their own ideas.

**Why WM was a breakthrough; some comments on the debate**

Even a cursory reading of the text of **WM** will reveal that none of the characters can be simplistically categorised as "positive" or "negative examples". Wang Peigong's characters simply defy any such categorisation. The often vague and wholly manipulable political categories regarding the perceived moral conduct, revolutionary zeal, class affiliation (often deemed to run, literally, in the blood), loyalty to the Party or counter-revolutionary potential, have historically long been basic to the construction of dramatic characters in the PRC. Indeed, at one level the characters of **WM**, through their essential humanity, their vices and blindesses, serve to ridicule and finally abolish such categories. At another level, the playwright's admixture of both "good" and "bad" elements within each character serves to turn such previously imposed categories themselves upside down.

Even **The Imposter**, the scandalously wicked play of 1979 by Sha Yexin, Li Shoucheng and Yao Mingde, stopped short of attempting such a thorough job of rejecting, and in
doing so dismantling and deconstructing, such imposed model categories. The crux of Sha Yexin's and others' offence was not that his characters escaped from positive or negative categories. The crux was that in *The Imposter* the characters with whom the audience sympathised were a swindler and a cynic at the bottom of the social order, together with the very model of a morally irreprehensible general and central committee member at its apex. The characters shown in a bad light appeared, meanwhile, to comprise the vast majority of the bureaucratised middle-level Party cadres.

In the end, *The Imposter* remains an ingenious, politically-devastating farce. Its characters attain significant depth, and thus audience sympathy, only through Sha Yexin's creation of a contrived and tightly woven plot wherein massive and implausible (even though based, according to Sha Yexin, upon an event reported in a PRC newspaper) doses of coincidence propel his protagonist into dizzying but also dangerously higher social status.

*WM*, for all its comparative simplicity of plot, goes far beyond such farce. What Wang Peigong succeeds in recreating to an unusual degree, often by oblique reference, is the impression that it is precise political and historical conditions which act to form and mould his characters in ways that go against conventional stereotypes. His characters never stumble by chance, as does Sha Yexin's character Li Xiaozhang at a theatre door, upon any golden opportunities that can be used as ladders to scale the rarefied social heights.

On the contrary, Wang Peigong's characters are consistently obliged to react to political changes which continually set them up with new hopes and aspirations, only to smash them down once more in the end. Changes in political conditions act to reaffirm continually the status of the youths as victims of a political system within which they have little input, let alone control.
The force of such an approach by the playwright lies in the fact that even if it were possible, via some tortuous assumptions, to define the General as mostly a positive character (or Pushcart as mostly a negative character), then such categorisation is still fundamentally undercut by the playwright's casting of all his characters in a sympathetic light. None of the youths is in a position to really take control of their lives. They can merely, at best, assert and affirm their humanity within the small openings they can temporarily force between their objective, imperative need to survive within their uncertain environment, and their deep, subjective desire to sell off neither their principles nor their *gemeur* comrades.35

*W*M is a deceptively ingenuous play. The finale, apparently open to many possible interpretations, again simply reconstructs the conditions wherein each character must again ask the question, "Where is the road that will lead out of here?" No obvious answer is apparent ... at least at the level of what the drama-going audience might conventionally tend to expect.

Instead, Wang Peigong's answer (his very critique) lies hidden beneath the surface. For the audience, the tip of this message, as of an iceberg, is expressed through the playwright's act of exposure of the very limits of the play, and especially the consciously ambiguous finale. An essential preliminary step in discovering the critique, the text implies, lies in our defining the limitations of the political system. Deng Xiaoping, it is also implied, occupies a point at the apex of this system. At the same time we find an unexplained, inverted trestle stool suspended above the stage. The action of the play operates to subvert the apparent choices for the youths offered by the socio-political system, and ultimately exposes these as non-choices.

35 *Gemeur*: a term which might loosely be translated as "brothers". The term implies a personal relationship much closer than "comrades", almost in the sense of "mates".
This thesis will argue that the playwright who wishes to present a political critique within what might be termed the "limits of the permissible" in the PRC will often be obliged to conceal the central terms of the critique by utilising literary strategies which permit, indeed encourage, ambiguities in interpretation.

**Criss-crossing Suggestion and the Limits of the Permissible**

The official boundaries of what is permissible and what is not are often vague and ambiguous in the extreme. For example, Orville Schell, referring to the factional struggle within the Party leadership "between hardliners like Wang Zhen and liberal reformers like Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang [and] Premier Zhao Ziyang" in 1986, during the lead up to the Thirteenth Party Congress convened in October, 1987, describes this struggle as a continuation of "an ongoing 'two line struggle' that had pitted leadership factions against each other for decades". According to Schell, this historical competition between the leadership factions "had been responsible for the way in which Chinese politics had swung continuously from 'left' to 'right', and could be expressed as an oscillation "between what the Chinese refer to as the tendency toward either 'expanding' (fang) or 'contracting' (shou) the boundaries of what was politically permissible". Some key historical reasons for the production of fang and shou within the Chinese political system overall will be explored further in chapter seven. For the moment, however, it is useful to look at some of the direct effects of that system upon controversial Chinese writers, and, of course, one playwright in particular.

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By far the most important force in the contraction of the scope for literary expression, and in inducing writers to stay within it, is a vague but omnipresent fear of criticism and punishment. This fear is the great anchor which exerts a constant, directed pull on all the little sailboats crisscrossing suggestion.  

These lines form part of Perry Link's description of 'The Mechanics of Contraction of the Scope for Writers', and, in the following chapters, when an analysis is also drawn of the structural role of "chiasmus" in western and Chinese literature, as well as in several contemporary and controversial Chinese plays, Link's poetic imagery of such small sailboats "crisscrossing suggestion" will be shown as able to be conceived as more than a simple, if rather appropriate, poetic conceit.

Meanwhile, Link continues his comments on the mechanics of contraction. "Contradictory warnings are a favourite tool in literary control. The impossibility of compliance tends to bring everything to a halt, and this, for advocates of restrictiveness, as well as for time-serving bureaucrats, is ideal ... If one wishes to be safe, one can only stay well within the vague boundaries". It can hardly be surprising, then, that theatre companies themselves play a role in acting as their own censors. Those who are involved in deciding what plays are to be staged continue to do so as long as they remain sensitive to the views of the party overseers. Especially in borderline cases, it is sometimes admitted that self-censorship is better than laying oneself open to the possibility of being censored.

Wang Peigong offers some candid examples of the self-censoring aspects of this system, how it works and the scale upon which it operates. Along with his agenda to

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38 Ibid. p. 15.
more closely reflect actual life and conditions and to de-dogmatise notions of contemporary Chinese realities, the playwright also strove to de-formalise relationships between his characters.

Originally I didn't give the characters any [formal] names, but then the director said that I should. "You only use nicknames such as Bighead and Princess", he said. "The leaders who will examine the play won't like that". So I had to give them [formal] names. However in the play the characters don't address each other by their formal names.

While most of the characters' nicknames appear innocent enough, several could be viewed as implying an anti-dogmatic commentary regarding the prevalence and persistence of social hierarchisation in the PRC, as well as pervasive attitudes within the hierarchy.

Banche (Pushcart) received his nickname on account of his family background. His father was a labourer who spent his life moving goods for others on his flatbacked tricycle. Such people were called banrye [literally, a flatbacked tricycle rider]. Today we call them daoye. They are strong, bare chested types who ... ride their tricycles all day every day. After work, they head off to small wineries to order dried beancurd or pigshead offcuts to go with the strong liquor... so he's [also] called Pushcart by his school friends.

The nickname itself has some connotations of humiliation. His school friends would have looked down on him. Though Pushcart accepted the nickname he always felt uncomfortable with it. During the Cultural Revolution he went through a glorious period because his father really was a member of the traditionally poorest layers. and for that reason he became head of the zhiqing
family. Out of instinct he adopted a flattering manner towards children of senior ranking officials, but at the same time he hated them. Have you noticed how he always tried to get up Bighead's nose?

Jiangshan [Hatoyama] is originally a character in the Hongdengji [The Story of the Red Lantern]. Jiangshan is a Japanese in that opera. Perhaps his [Hatoyama's] face resembled Jiangshan's. Anyway, in the original opera Jiangshan is a negative figure. Jiangshan wasn't able to get a better nickname, and if you think about his father you can understand why. A nickname like that is simply for poking fun, for teasing.

A second example of self-censorship at the theatre company level might be seen in what was probably director Wang Gui's enforcement of literary taboos surrounding the question of 'unofficial' sexual relations. According to Wang Peigong, his own original script depicted Sister Superior as falling in love with a university classmate, to whom she became pregnant.

She had vowed to her mother that she wouldn't get married until after she'd graduated. When she entered the university, however, she found life there very dull. While the examinations were challenging, daily study and life in general was very tedious. We call it laosandiar [the three dull places; classroom, dormitory and library]. So all the students fooled around and had love affairs, and she wanted to as well. After General's departure she went to see her classmate. It was only on visiting his home that she discovered he was married. He's cheated her. Sister Superior was pregnant to him, but he was married. She had to decide whether to have an abortion.
However for an unmarried woman that would have been extremely embarrassing. On the other hand, she had no 'right' to have the baby... Some lines were deleted by the director, and because I was in too much of a hurry I didn't replace them before it was sent to the publisher... In fact I don't understand why the director deleted them. The original lines revealed very clearly Sister Superior's reason for attempting suicide. Now the revised edition gives the wrong impression, as if Sister Superior simply felt deeply insulted when she was cursed by her classmate's wife. That's wrong.

There were larger disagreements between Wang Peigong and Wang Gui, who was also head of the theatre company. According to the former, Wang Gui didn't like the plot. However after the prologue and act one had been written, Wang Gui decided to stage the play after all and began rehearsals.

He said, "We need an approach for this script"... He approved both the 'Spring' and 'Summer' acts, but then I had great difficulties with 'Autumn'. He told me, "You should write the last part with great care. The previous parts are good and the play has a nice flavour to it, but in the last part you need to sound a brighter note. At the very least you need to play your tune two scales higher, otherwise the play won't be able to obtain approval.

He was very experienced. He'd joined the Red Army more than forty years ago. We'd worked together before. So I asked him, "What can I do?" He replied, "At the end of the play, let the characters sing an idealistic song". I knew he was right, if we didn't want to get into trouble with the authorities. I tried it. At the end I tried to let General emphasise their ideals. But that made the story become unreal.

39 Wang Gui had previously directed Wang Peigong's play, A Fervent Heart.
General became something akin to a saviour figure. So I rewrote it again and again, more than ten times. The three previous acts together had taken me one month to complete. The last act itself took me an entire month. I wanted to add in all sorts of romantic atmosphere while maintaining the central idea, that is, the characters' feelings of having lost some things while gaining others. It didn't work.

The rehearsal audiences appreciated the play, says Wang Peigong, because many of them had shared similar experiences to those of the characters. Some had been sent to the countryside while others had joined the army.

Even the director understood the reality of the situation. Everyone felt the added idealistic atmosphere to be unreal. So we had to rewrite the last part again to expunge it. Hu Xuehua, the play's assistant director, discussed the problem with me and suggested we delete it. He'd concluded that the play would become meaningless if we didn't. He thought we'd do better writing about life as life is. I told this to the director and finally he agreed with me. He decided we'd prefer a play which reflected the reality, even in the case where it might fail to get [official] approval. He termed this 'modern realism'.

So I wrote the present draft in one evening. Three days later the rehearsals were completed. The play had developed quite a nice rhythm. If the 'Spring' and 'Summer' acts were imbued with a disco-like rhythm, then 'Autumn' more resembled a slow and elegant tango. It's interesting that the music selected for this part was in fact tango music. So we'd thought about the possibility of being criticised because of the play, but by then we had no choice. We'd decided to stage the play like this so we could maintain consistency in terms of the characters and seriousness in terms of art.
Although both Wang Peigong and Wang Gui were long term Party members, the latter, as head of the theatre company, had closer links to the bureaucratic overseers of theatre production, and thus had more direct experience with the problem of the actual limits of the permissible as implemented during the mid 1980s. Personally, in terms of his job, he might well have seen himself as having more at stake. In any case, as time went on, Wang Gui appears to have increasingly politically distanced himself from the ideas of his assistant director and playwright.

Later, while the play was in performance, the director added in some references to Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang. I myself still find it difficult to agree with those additions. The published manuscript is basically the complete and correct one. This was the one which was banned. The version used in later performances had many revisions. I found that audiences didn't like the later one. Some asked me why I'd sounded a brighter note and added in the propaganda. However there were also some who appreciated the revisions. Chen Haosu, for instance, who at the time was deputy mayor of Beijing, after watching a performance commented, "It's good that the last part of the performance sounded a more optimistic note". I myself didn't like it.

Wang Gui's somewhat belated intervention to revise, indeed change the political line of Wang Peigong's script, appears to have been motivated by the reaction of a very high ranking cadre who had come to see a Beijing performance. The cadre concerned was Hu Qiaomu, a former politburo member and personal secretary to Mao Zedong. At the time of WM's banning, Hu Qiaomu was seen as the CCP's chief theoretician. Wang Peigong narrates the background to these events.
The ending of the Beijing performance was altered by Wang Gui. I disagreed with him on this. He wanted to change the ending in order to obtain the approval of the authorities. At the last performance in Beijing, Hu Qiaomu was very angry. He left without seeing the actors. Someone overheard him saying, "This play is pessimistic. It's not right to be cynical about 'the four beauties and the five stresses'." On hearing this, I laughed and said, "I didn't expect him to be complimentary". But Wang Gui became silent and depressed. I felt sorry for him. He'd joined the army and the party earlier than I. He had a forty year history with them. He's loyal to the party. He wept, and I felt sad. The actors also wept.

For all the apparent sincerity expressed by Wang Peigong, as quoted above, one might still question the motives of the playwright regarding his narration, in an interview, of his own version of events. Perhaps to not do so might even be naive. Is, then, the playwright being a little less than completely upfront regarding the political context of his play? There would appear to be reasons for assuming that this is in fact the case. In this regard, it should be remembered that the playwright is a former self-confessed 'hack' writer for the CCP, and that he continued in this role well after the conclusion of the larger political campaigns characterising the Cultural Revolution.

40 Unfortunately, in 1987 I was unable to interview Wang Gui, WM's director. I was told he was working outside of Beijing. Neither, during the short time I was in Beijing in 1989, did the opportunity arise for me to hear his interpretation of the events surrounding the play's banning.

41 Former Politburo member and personal secretary to Mao Zedong, Hu Qiaomu was seen as the CCP's chief theoretician at the time of WM's banning.

42 Craig Dietrich remarks that during the early 1980s, when intellectual and cultural life "grew freer", sections or factions of the party at the same time utilised campaigns as a means of putting the breaks on what they perceived as the threat of too much liberalisation. This was itself "something of a paradox because the new leaders publicly renounced mass campaigns as an instrument of policy. There was a campaign to emulate Lei Feng. There was a 'Four Beauties and Five Stresses' campaign to restore good manners, presumably lost since the Cultural Revolution". Dietrich, People's China, pp. 281-82.

43 cf. Appendix B of this thesis.
The play reflected my own understanding derived from the experiences of my friends and my own life. I felt at a loss during the Cultural Revolution. I felt there was no way to control one's fate or find out the rules determining one's fate. The Cultural Revolution saw everyone involved, from the Chairman of the PRC to a small potato like myself. Nobody could escape from its effect. But I could still try to comfort myself with the thought that it was a 'revolution'. Great. Later, as the campaigns developed, all my ideals were destroyed. My belief was shaken.

While much of the play revolves around the notion of the youths' shaken beliefs, is the political context of this play limited to this point only? One suspects not. The implications of the youths' shaken beliefs are dealt with by the playwright in an entirely ambiguous manner, and no formal political conclusions are drawn. On the surface, that is. And it is in regard to this feature of the play that the audience might have reason to suspect Wang Peigong of being politically disingenuous.

The tone of the excerpts quoted above, from the 1987 interview with Wang Peigong, is one which goes toward presenting a self portrayal as very much a victim of the system of literary production and censorship, and much less that of a long term active participant within that same system, one obliged to constantly act and react within it. The tone of the above interview excerpts is one wherein the playwright portrays himself as simply 'sticking to his guns' in depicting a more realistic situation regarding Chinese youth, as opposed to the rosier situation according to the CCP's political dogma. The tone of the interview excerpts emphasises that, if anything, the playwright himself approached the WM project hampered by a certain political naivety, exampled in his later expressed moral outrage at the higher authorities' rejection of the play's depiction of 'middle characters'. The tone of the interview excerpts emphasises that Wang Peigong's moral outrage is indeed limited to questions such as that of his middle characters, and expresses a sense of personal courage at his having defended, as best he
could, his 'right' to portray middle characters under the auspice of a larger artistic integrity.

Yet does this tonal emphasis sit well with the fact that Wang Peigong, as a Party hack writer, must necessarily have been well versed in the art of following, presenting and promoting the wildly fluctuating political lines emanating from the Party's Cultural Revolutionary and post-Cultural Revolutionary leaderships? Probably not, and here it is timely to foreshadow the inclusion in this thesis of other interview excerpts which point to the playwright as operating in the play upon a different and deeper political plane.

Subversive tools and political messages

"Do not adjust your head, the fault lies in reality".44

"Art", wrote Bertholt Brecht, "is not a reflection of life, but a hammer with which to shape it".45 For those playwrights working after the Cultural Revolution who might see their texts as promoting politically "subversive" messages, the hammer with which they construct their dramas needs necessarily to be wielded gently and with fine precision. Their texts need to be shaped such that their political critiques lie largely hidden within the prevailing orthodoxies, but can also be brought to the surface by those with the analytical tools to do so.

A corpus of post-Cultural Revolutionary plays exists in China that is marginal to the official political discourse. These texts are seen as controversial because they pose a problem for official criticism in that at one level they appear to fit within the limits of

44 Graffiti found in the ANU Union Bar toilets, September, 1993. The line is a pun on station messages flashed onto television screens during interruptions of transmission.
45 The quote is attributed to the German dramatist and poet, Bertholt Brecht (1898-1956).
the official political discourse yet may often appear to lead the audience to non-officially sponsored political conclusions.

Within such an atmosphere the playwright who wishes to present a political critique must often also present the text in a form whereby the political conclusions are obscured or oblique. For the more discerning of the audience, therefore, the presentation of the text in dramatised form can come to resemble a puzzle or mystery requiring a greater or lesser degree of unravelling.

For the controversial playwright, a gamut of literary and of course theatrical devices (irony, lampoon, double-entendre and punning, jokes, over-acting etc) is readily available. Taken by themselves, or in conjunction with a partial understanding of (or simple guessing at) authorial intention, the utilisation by the playwright of such devices can produce the possibility of various interpretive outcomes.

Playwrights intent on producing political critiques find these devices useful because in most cases the onus for showing why a play should be banned rests upon the ability of the official critic to prove how the play is "subversive". The playwright may, with relative ease, dispute the official critic's interpretation of the authorial intention behind, for example, an ambiguous joke or reference to an important political leader.

This approach by itself, however, leaves open the possibility that the Party overseers of literary production may simply choose to censor particular sections of the text or parts of the performance that are deemed to be controversial. The more shrewd playwright, however, may choose to construct a work wherein the political critique is produced primarily from the very structure of the text itself. In this fashion the problem of the "cut and paste" method of official censorship may be overcome and the structure of the
text itself, or key elements of the structure, may continue to produce a subversive interpretive outcome.

For interpreters of authorial intention who are somewhat removed from the socio-political environment wherein the controversial play is written and staged, the question of how to interpret even the most overt controversial references in the text is often problematic, and may apparently elude definite answers.

How can we arrive at a closer idea of authorial intention when it comes to interpreting plays that may be written with the fundamental aim of producing interpretive ambiguity? Do we simply read and re-read the play in question until we think we've arrived at the key message? Do we optimistically seek out the playwrights with the expectation that they will feel somehow free or willing to confide in us that which they have gone to so much trouble to conceal from the official critics?

The hypothesis developed here is that a structural analysis of the text is crucial to resolving such interpretive dilemmas. As John Welch writes, "Indeed what is said is often no more important than how it is said ... the task of understanding the meaning of a writing is never complete until its formular aspects as well as its thought contents have been grasped". 46 In order to show that such a structural analysis may be useful, the thesis will focus primarily upon Wang Peigong's play, WM. Several other plays marginal to the official political discourse in post-Cultural Revolutionary China will also be referred to throughout.

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The following chapter will offer a brief descriptive picture of the play **WM**, outlining some of its key features and unusual characteristics that make it an appropriate subject for such a study.
CHAPTER TWO:

The Four Seasons

An Urbling Winter: act one of WM

“Never feed the hand that bites you.” ¹

Purgatory. Endless working drudgery. Bitterly cold nights, hatred or indifference from most of the village peasants. Sporadic violence, no fuel for fires, a windy hut with its broken-down door, huddling together for warmth, shortages of everything except Maoist literary polemics, deep depressions, love and back-biting, overwhelming frustrations, small heroics and petty jealousies, anger and repentance, comradeliness, sharing of scant food, lampooning and hatred of denounced government leaders, daily ideological confusion, cynicism and desperate humour ... It is the Winter of 1976. For three years the youths have lived and worked on this collective farm. Tonight is a night that promises to be much like any other.

Act One of WM is long ... almost a play in itself.² But, with perhaps the exception of the final scene of act four, it is probably the part which most remains in the audience's

¹ A chiastic line by the King of Id, in Parker and Hart’s cartoon strip, The Wizard of Id. The King is responding to a question put by his chamberlain as to why he has stopped foreign aid to third world countries (cf. Parker and Hart, The Wizard of Id Summer Special, Sydney: Beaumont Book Company, 1981, p. 119). As noted elsewhere in this thesis, the zhishi qingnian, were high school educated youths who were sent down to the countryside by the party leadership during the later stage of the Cultural Revolution, with the official exhortation to “learn from the peasants”. At the same time, however, this policy solved for the party leadership the problem of how to deal with large numbers of Red Guards and militant youth who had been politically active in the cities during the earlier stage of the Cultural Revolution. Throughout this thesis and appendices I have used Barmé and Minford’s translation of the term ‘zhishi qingnian’, which is ‘urblings’.

² The following description of act one of the play is much longer than those for acts two to four as it is this act, with its far more lively action, that really sets the atmosphere.
memory. Playwright Wang Peigong candidly admits that he spent three weeks writing and polishing Act One, while Acts Two to Four were raced off in just a few evenings of frantic writing. It is likely that this is one of the main reasons why dissident émigré sculptor Wang Keping decided, after production of WM was banned in the PRC, to produce in Paris only the first Act of the play.

The youths have changed into white smocks cut from sheets. These symbolise the heavy, padded winter clothes referred to in the Prologue. Exhausted, they groan loudly as they labour. Now Pushcart, their hut-leader, has "solemnly announced" the day's work to be finished. Leaning heavily into the chilling wind, they begin to return home. Slowly the youths move across the stage, in this way pantomiming earlier Model Opera actors who, in scenes from Cultural Revolutionary Model Operas like Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy or Shajiaobang, were obliged to pose as steadfastly battling nature's elements to confront and finally win out over their counter-revolutionary enemies.

The theatre-going audience has no trouble identifying these vestiges of stereotypically socialist-realist poses. But marvellously for the audience, this entire convention is rudely undercut by the youths' earthy, anti-heroic dialogue. The youths complain and rail at their situation, denigrating themselves ironically within the languages of their own generation and of Cultural Revolutionary polemics.

Hatoyama: "Obstinate Stinkers", shouldn't that term apply to us?

Pushcart: Hatoyama!

Hatoyama: It's true. Our brigade-leader said as much. Didn't you hear him?
**Princess:** Since intellectuals are labelled "ninth level old stinkers", what should us urblings be tagged?

**Hatoyama:** "Tenth-level old stinkers"!

**Big Head:** "Shitty old stinkers"!

**Waifling:** [Calling out sharply] "Stinking shitheads"!

{The whole group laughs}

They arrive near centre stage. Heaving open an invisible door, they collapse, exhausted, into their single-roomed shelter. But hardly have they caught their breath when, with a thunderous drumroll, their door is blown down by the wind. The men, too tired to get up, are indifferent. It really is the last straw.

**Hatoyama:** [To Pushcart] Can our existence really be all that different from your old man's in "the evil old society"?

Ignoring Pushcart's command to fix the door, the men adopt the rhetorical language of the Model Opera revolutionary heroes.

**General:** Wind ! Snow ! Hardships ! We dare you ... come and try us!

**Hatoyama:** [Sings] "Learn from the pine tree growing ..."

**General & Big Head:** [Singing at the tops of their voices] "at the summit of Mt Tai ..."
The women are angry. Led by Princess, they threaten to go on strike ... to not cook dinner till the door is fixed. But the men, revelling in their rhetorical play, are not moved. They haven't yet finished with their allusions.

**Big Head:** And if you don't cook dinner then we'll have to drink the northwest wind. That slogan, "Reflect on past hardships but count your blessings" will really be appropriate. [Sings] "Heaven above brims with stars, ..."

**Young Men:** [Lying where they are all sing] "... the new moon shines brightly. The production team departs a rally ..."

In the end it's left to Princess to curse them as "bloody fools". Pointedly she tells them how, after another group of urblings failed to secure their hut door, the women were raped. Silent and shamefaced, led by General, the men set about rehanging the door.

For dinner, then, there is only boiled water and steamed cornbread (two pieces each). Hatoyama becomes the butt of their jibes when he insists on washing his hands before dining. Pushcart is quick to remind everyone of Hatoyama's privileged background and what he sees as some elitist pretensions.

**Pushcart:** He really is a "little lordling" ... still so fastidious!

Hatoyama meanwhile adds fuel to the flames when he quietly pleads with Waifling to desist from washing his laundry ... his dirty drawers are there. "So what, 'Mr Particular'!", is Waifling's response. As revealed later in the play, her response is much more than a passing quip. Her family background is that of the landlord-capitalist class. Her grandparents and parents have been victims respectively of the 1949 revolution and the Cultural Revolution.
Hatoyama's family background, on the other hand, is entirely different. Although he derives from the intelligentsia, and while his parents have become victims of the anti-intellectuals campaigns, his family status is still a far cry from being within the "class enemy" category as defined by the simplistic Maoist system that divides society into revolutionary and counter-revolutionary elements. Even as she performs favours for Hatoyama, Waifling is acutely aware of this uncrossable social gulf.

Big Head hovers jealously on the edge of their developing relationship. There are four men and three women in the hut. It soon becomes apparent that Princess and General, the two strongest characters, have already paired. Everyone despises Pushcart, while Sister Superior is cast as so stereotypically plain and studious that she is no object for Big Head's attentions. That leaves Waifling ... and Big Head can't abide Hatoyama's elitist ways. Later, when Big Head spies her pouring a bowl of water for Hatoyama, he lets loose some jealous barbs.

Big Head: What sort of catch have you made, Hatoyama? You look like you've just dined on honeybee shit. And don't be so partial, Waifling, or next time you're working in the fields, I might not lend you a hand.

After their small and pitiful dinner, the topic of conversation turns to the work points earned by the youths. Pushcart hands out the Labour Records. Big Head (who by the close of the play has become a wealthy private entrepreneur) is quick to complain that, according to the new system in use, his entire day's labour has earned him a grand total of seven cents. General backs the complaint, and Pushcart belatedly reveals their farm's Brigade-leader has recently decreed that only half of the work done by the urblings is to be recorded in the Labour Records.
Another new regulation, and, as General realises, there is nothing that can be done
about it. Annoyed but mindful of his companions' morale, he quietly exerts his natural
authority over them (therein undermining Pushcart's official status) and cuts off further
complaints by ordering them to sleep. They obey ... for the moment.

Big Head is the first to break the silence. "How come as soon as I lie down I feel
hungry again?", he asks aloud. His comment is followed by a chorus of complaints
from Hatoyama and Pushcart about the lack of food. "You'd better not make us think of
our empty stomachs", says Big Head hypocritically, "or else how will we be able to put
into practice that slogan, 'Never forget the class struggle'?"

General, knowing the way the conversation is likely to turn, attempts to quieten them
again, but the three are already off and running with a series of polemic-peppered
allusions. Hatoyama (in act four he's become a frustrated film director) reminds them of
a propaganda film he's seen wherein thirsty heroes are saved by simply thinking of sour
plum juice.

Hatoyama: ... Just think to yourself: I've dined so well! I've stuffed myself to
death with ... steamed pies, stuffed dumplings ...

Pushcart: It's not working. The more I imagine it the hungrier I get.

Big Head chomps cheerfully away at his imaginary meal, succeeding in aggravating
Pushcart further. But Hatoyama has a sharper weapon up his sleeve. Pushcart has
already revealed to all that Big Head's father was elected as a standing member of the
Township Revolutionary Committee, inquiring whether this might have anything to do
with Big Head's name.
Referring to the sour plum substitution, Hatoyama now innocently asks, "Big Head, does your father use this same trick when he's making out reports?" "Go fuck your mother!", is Big Head's ferocious response. General, seeing the situation getting really out of control, steps in with, "Who's gabbing on again? I'll rip their bloody arms off!". Silence.

The focus shifts now to the women. Waifling, it seems, is sobbing quietly. Her period has arrived, but there's no toilet paper. Sister Superior takes time out from reading her book to prod Princess into comforting her. Princess suggests Waifling use the day's newspaper to soak up the flow. But Waifling cries out in disgust and hurls the newspaper to one side, astounded perhaps at both the grossness and the almost politically sacrilegious implications of such an act.

**Waifling:** Do I seem that far gone? The front page has ... an editorial and photographs and everything!

**Princess:** No kidding, this editorial's arrived in the nick of time! [Softly] Listen to me, when I can't buy any toilet paper, I do exactly the same. Quickly now!

{Waifling quickly fixes herself.}

On this, their relative scale of misery, Sister Superior attempts to one-up them both,

**Sister Superior:** [Sadly] I really envy you two ... mine hasn't arrived for three months now ... anaemia, dropsy ... I'm starting to wonder whether I'm still a woman ...?
This leads Waifling to relate a recent dream to them. In it, her grandmother had died, but her eyes still went on looking at Waifling. This becomes even more poignant when it's revealed Waifling was in fact reared solely by her grandmother, who is the last survivor of political purges that wiped out her family. Waifling believes the dream may be a sign that her grandmother really has died. But Princess comforts her, "Hey, haven't you heard? What comes true is the opposite of what you dream" - a notion that has underlying importance throughout the play.

Sister Superior, meanwhile, is incorrigible. She continues to study deep into the night. Princess ridicules her studiousness. According to Princess, any hopes that Sister Superior retains of being recommended by the local authorities to sit the university entrance tests are illusory ones. The only way to get such a recommendation, according to Princess, is to sleep with someone with the proper clout. But, as for herself, even this is not worth attempting.

Princess: ... A pass in the Entrance Test would still be about as useful as a dog's fart! Don't talk to me about these idiotic "uni students". My father, he graduated from a famous university, went overseas to study, could even read and write fluently in four languages, and has now graduated to his present position of herding ducks at a "Cadre School"! ... Oh! Go to sleep! "Long slumbers are blissful"!

At the other side of the hut, the men are still awake. Big Head, tossing about sleeplessly, lets fly a fart.

Princess: [Pricking up her ears] Hey, you lot over there, how about showing some consideration?
**Big Head:** [Feigning shock and innocence] Who was it? Who's disturbing our Princess' sweet dreams? You deserve the death of ten thousand cuts for such a crime. [Chuckles to himself] There's really no need to act so shocked, there's nothing in or stomachs except some corn flour noodles our dried sweet potato ... fart for your life, you'll never stink the place out.

A growling sound then emanates from someone's stomach, and Hatoyama jumps in with, "Shoosh! Listen - what portends? "Monsters and Demons", it's the cry of our class enemies". General, recognising that something must be done or there'll be no peace for anyone, gets up and volunteers to steal a chicken from the collective chickenyard.

Big Head immediately tries to embarrass the faint-hearted Pushcart by suggesting he accompany General on this excursion. But Pushcart successfully foils him.

**Pushcart:** None of us should go. Brigade-leader Bai is keeping an eye on us. He told me that in one place where an urbling stole some chickens the villagers gouged out his eyes with an iron spade!

The youths are at first horrified, then righteously indignant at Bai's implicit threat. However the more practical Pushcart knows better, "It's always been the same: Bai could beat you to death and get away with it!" General's strong sense of morality is appalled. What he initially saw as a bit of a prank has now turned into a mission ... an heroic gesture of defiance directed at Bai. His role is that of the hero Shi Qian from the novel, _The Water Margin_. The others urge him not to take a chicken belonging to any of the villagers who have been kind to them. General takes up a knife exclaiming, "I'll specialise in stealing from "profiteers", and dashes outside. Princess follows him out, where she alternately curses and pleads with him to give up the whole idea.
Princess: What sort of trumped up hero do you think you're playing at? Don't you think you might have some use for your eyes?

General: If both my eyes were to be gouged out I would count that as a real misfortune. But with one eye left I'd still be the same old General. [Closes one eye] So ... like Duke Potchensky. [He wants to go.]

Now greatly worried, Princess harries him to stay. General, however, tells her he has made up his mind, and having done so, "won't change it for anyone". Princess will learn later, to her cost, just how deep his determination to go his own way does run. Meanwhile, pantomime is used to portray General's stealing of a chicken. He returns to the hut in triumph.

Urblings: [Shouting] Hail triumphant General!

General: [Imitating the imposing manner of Lin Biao] Red Guards and Young Generals! The living reality of socialism has once again been attested to: the urblings who go down to the countryside will have the opportunity to provide a great service! [Hurling down the chicken.] Take it away!

They quickly kill, pluck and clean the chicken. But then comes the problem of lack of fuel for their cooking fire. Who can "contribute" some? Big head makes the first donation, his collection of Criticising Lin Biao and Confucius, which was sent to him by his father. Waifling then offers up her copy of The Criticisms of Song Jiang. Pushcart, snatching away a book Sister Superior is reading, is about to add this to the flames as well. But General notices this one is Ai Siqi's, Popular Philosophy, and vetoes its burning.
Instead, General suggests they burn their stack of newspapers, and now it's Pushcart's turn to veto; "No don't! There's some articles in that lot by "Liang Xiao" about the revolution in education. We've still got to study and discuss them".

"Farting is forbidden!", quips Hatoyama. His quip refers, in fact, to a line in a poem by Chairman Mao. The poem happens to be one of two by Mao published on the front page of the People's Daily on New Year's Day of the year in which the first act of WM is set. Forced to backpeddle by Pushcart, Hatoyama attempts to justify his quip; "I ... so I memorised Chairman Mao's poems. What's wrong with that?"

This of course leads on to a discussion between the youths as to how the publication of the two Mao poems should be interpreted. In what ways, the youths elliptically inquire, might the publication of the poems reflect the current political line promoted by those at the Party's apex? And, perhaps more to the point, at which leading Party figure is the current campaign, which by implication the Mao poems are to be seen to support, directed against?

Big Head allows he has heard that the current campaign is against a certain leading figure whom he doesn't dare to name aloud. Instead, he simply indicates the identity of the person with a hand gesture which the others [and presumably the audience] all recognise. General is surprised. "So what did he mean when he said, 'talented men are hard to obtain'?", he asks, referring to Mao's description of Deng Xiaoping upon the occasion of the latter's political rehabilitation. Princess agrees with General.

However Waifling throws another spanner in the works. "But Chairman Mao's poems published on new year's day said, 'Everywhere, orioles carol and swallows dip!'". "But", asks Hatoyama, "there's also that line which forbids farting about, isn't there? Now everyone is confused. There is silence."
Within these few exchanges the playwright succeeds in describing what he sees as a fundamental dilemma for those attempting to comprehend the subtle signs of significant shifts and turns of political campaigns during the Cultural Revolution period. The youths' inability to unravel the labyrinthine connections between poetic reference and current political campaign place them, as with the majority of people, outside the knowledgable inner circles of politics.

'Jinggang Mountain Re-ascended' and 'Two Birds: A Dialogue' were the two of Mao's poems republished on new year's day of 1976. Both were written in 1965 and were political diatribes directed against what Mao believed to be Soviet revisionism promoted by Nikita Khrushchev.

The line, "Everywhere, orioles carol and swallows dip" is to be found in the first poem. The title, "Jinggang Mountain Re-ascended" refers to Mao's revisit to the first rural base of communist power. According to translator Nancy Lin, the poem "is a song of the Chinese people's victory in those stirring years of revolution and reconstruction, but still more, a clarion call to fight on", and includes an epithet which "alludes ironically no doubt to the forces of reaction the world over, particularly to Soviet revisionism".3

The second poem, "Two Birds: A Dialogue", includes the line "Not worth a fart!". The poem in part takes the form of a dialogue between the mythical Chinese creature the whale-roc (referred to in the Zhuang Zi) and a sparrow. Again, according to Lin, Mao makes use here of the parable concerning the whale-roc, a whale in the North Sea that transformed itself into a giant roc, soaring 90,000 li into the sky in preparation for its migration to the South Sea. The whale-roc's feat is mocked by a tiny sparrow, perched smugly in a tree far below. "The whale-roc may well represent in Mao's mind true

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Marxists in general. The sparrow alludes to Khrushchev and his successors. The formal publication of the poem in 1976 symbolises presumably China's unflinching resolve to carry on the ideological combat with Soviet Russia and the concomitant fight against super-power hegemony".  

All well and good. But, as Waifling concludes, the real confusion enters the picture when the youths pose the question, against whom within the Chinese leadership is the publication of the poems directed?  

And in this regard, the poems could be seen to contain ambiguous and contradictory messages. The first poem describes orioles and sparrows soaring and dipping together in a paean to the Chinese revolution and the revolutionary masses internationally, while in the second poem the Khrushchevite sparrow retreats from the field of revolutionary struggle to the utopian "Isle of Immortals", leaving the onus of continuing the struggle to the whale-roc. Just who, the youths' questions imply, is this contradictory Chinese sparrow?  

Whether it is Deng Xiaoping, as General implies, or another party leader, the youths can in the end only speculate. Such indirect, often tortured political allusion, the playwright succeeds in suggesting, nicely reflects the state of play between rival factions within the Party leadership, which comprises a sort of shadow play that continually substitutes for more direct and open political discussion. In this type of

5 Dietrich describes Mao's growing alienation from the U.S.S.R. as twinned to "his holy war against revisionism". "Mao failed to see anything but revisionism in Moscow. As he said in his July 1964 diatribe On Khrushchev's Phony Communism and Its historical lessons for the World, 'The questions of whether revolution ... and ... the dictatorship of the proletariat should be upheld or opposed ... are now the focus of struggle between Marxist-Leninists the world over and the revisionist Khrushchev clique.' Soviet leaders had betrayed Marxism-Leninism and their disease was communicable. Thus, Mao's battle with the Russian monsters abroad and with capitalist ogres at home fed on one another - were in fact one and the same struggle". Craig Dietrich, *People's China* pp. 168-69.
game the youths can only be losers, and at the close of their short discussion their continuing perplexity is neatly summed up;

**Big Head:** [Heaving a long sigh] Oh! Roll on Cultural Revolutions ... we're supposed to re-make one in seven or eight years ...

**Hatoyama:** [Lying down on the spot] In another seven or eight years ...

At this point General attempts to prevent their depression deepening and prompts Princess to play a tune on her guitar. But she can't even do this. A rat has gnawed through a guitar string. In a throwaway line, he promises to steal a cat for them ... an invitation for further political punning.

"A black cat or a white one?", asks Hatoyama, echoing the imagery of an accusation made by Mao against Deng Xiaoping in the sixties. "Look! If it can catch rats it'll be good enough!", responds Big Head, indirectly quoting Deng's famous slogan concerning the need for more pragmatic, rather than more "political", policies for the state. The punning game continues, with its allusions to what is not dared to be spoken of aloud taking centre stage, and, hamming it up outrageously, the youths drive this point home to the audience;

**Pushcart:** [Very worried] Can't you be a little more discreet? Are you looking for trouble?

**Big Head:** Stay cool, we still haven't mentioned anyone by name. Have you the nerve to?
Hatoyama cuts the exchange short with a demand that echoes a more broad sentiment; "All right! Allow us revolutionary masses to have some peace for a bit!" A moment passes, then General begins to quietly hum a tune, one from their childhoods, the "Song of the Young Pioneers'. Soon, everyone is singing:

**Urblings:** [Singing] Hey little brothers,/ Ho little sisters,/ Our road goes ever on and on!/ The masters of the future,/ We surely will be! ...

but the song ends in their tears as, led by Sister Superior, they all give way to grief.

Their shattered hopes and ideals, the reality of their youth wasted on the grinding harshness of the commune, combine to explode as, the spotlight hitting each in turn, they begin to rise and find voice for their personal pathos;

**Princess:** [With tears welling in her eyes] Cry then! But what are you crying about? Even though a dream is beautiful it's still only a dream! If reality is cruel, it's still reality!

**General:** [Laughing coldly] Become a General? How many of our old marshals have been toppled?

**Sister Superior:** Any hopes I had have vanished ...

**Waifling:** The piano ... it was smashed to pieces! Towards the end it sounded so beautiful ...

Now Hatoyama rises and poses what he considers to be the decisive question;
Hatoyama: People! What are we, really?

Pushcart: My old man often says that for man the point of life is to have three meals a day and lounge in a bed ... with two ounces of rice wine. Mmmnnn, if you think it through its pretty reasonable.

Big Head: Your reasoning's is full of shit! If that's the case then why should we be alive at all?

Hatoyama: People ... people are simply particles of dust.

Waifling: We're pathetic little pebbles.

General: And I say we're are a supply of bricks - you can raise up the Great Wall with us, or build a chicken-coop, it just depends on how they want to use us!

Each brief outpouring marvellously reflects the personal philosophic stance that each character having adopted will develop through to the play's conclusion.

Princess is completely devoid of any hope that even very fundamental changes in objective conditions will present any real hope for her. Her argument is the antithesis of General's. She draws an uncrossable line between what she terms the "dream" and the "reality". Ironically, when General later spurns her attentions, she takes refuge from reality in an artist's career, becoming very successful while at the same time "stuck" in her obsession with her unfinished portrait of General. For Princess her love for him is the only true "reality".
Sister Superior's response of, "Any hopes I had have vanished ... ", describes a personal stance that will later cause her to attempt suicide.

The pragmatic Pushcart's answer to the question, "What are people?", reflects what he knows to be the timeless, perceptive response of the Chinese masses; to wit, the acquisition of at least a minimum of material comforts and the leisure to enjoy them. All else is superfluous, and thus essentially meaningless. Via nepotism he later pursues a career in the Party.

Big Head, however, nurses far greater ambitions. He would scale the social heights, if given only half a chance. By the close of the play we find him as a wealthy private entrepreneur.

Hatoyama's conclusion that people are merely "motes of dust" comes to be reflected directly in his creed of personal ineffectiveness. He refuses to go against his parents' wishes that he marry someone of social standing equivalent to his own family. Waifling is left out in the cold, then turns to Big Head on the rebound. Hatoyama aspires to quit the dust of his too mundane existence by finding a position "in the corridors of art". He becomes a film director. Ironically, however, the reality of the film world is that the mud sticks even thicker. The motes of dust and the light captured through the camera lens belie an environment of continual back-stabbing and power-mongering.

For Waifling, the smashing of her family's piano symbolises the destruction of her previously financially well-heeled family. From her own experience all people are "pathetic little pebbles", dropped, perhaps, from heaven like the character Precious Jade...
(Bao Yu) in Cao Xueqin's novel, *Dream of Red Mansions*, and obliged to survive in the troublesome world of non-illusion.

Initially, General wonders aloud how he can hope to realise his ambition of "becoming a general" (that is, pursuing a career as an officer in the People's Liberation Army, and not necessarily being promoted to "general" as such) at a time when, towards the close of the Cultural Revolution, so many old marshals have been purged. His response to the question, "What are people?", involves his introduction of the Great Wall-chickencoop dichotomy, which will be discussed in a later chapter. The close of the play finds General seeking only to retreat to his mountaintop where he can spend the rest of his days as a "common footslogger". The times as well as events have combined to work against his earlier dreams.

Big Head's icy response to Hatoyama's question then continues to develop the theme. "They ... they throw you away to one side! Listen! (He raps rhythmically on a bowl.) We're all just lumps of brick!" By the close of act four he is being forced by the authorities to purchase special government bonds - which will purportedly pay for repairs to the Great Wall.

Returning to act one, however, the outpourings of the youths have suffered an ironic diminuendo. Advancing to the front of the stage, they confront the audience. General assumes the role of chorus leader. Where, by conventional standards, they should now be striking heroic poses, instead the following lines are spoken;

6 David Hawkes (transl.), *The Story of the Stone: a Chinese novel by Cao Xueqin in Five Volumes*; Penguin Books, Great Britain, 1973, 1976. Cao Xueqin's title for this work was *Hongloumeng*. The title has been more literally translated by Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi as 'A Dream of Red Mansions', and has been popularised outside China as a Chinese television drama series under that English name. All quotes from the *Hongloumeng* in this thesis, however, will refer to David Hawkes' translation.
Urblings: [Chanting loudly together] They cart us north, south, east and west!

General: And if you want to ask if life is cruel?

Urblings: [Listlessly] Remember the Long March of twenty-five thousand leagues!

Hatoyama: And you wish to inquire whether labour is exhausting?

Urblings: [Approaching complete exhaustion] Remember the old society with its ten thousand evils ...

Thereupon, they fall into fitful sleep. Princess, rising again, is spotlit. For the audience she sings, "The Song of the Urblings";

Princess: The light from the oil lamp shines on the wall./ How desolate the night appears./ Looking back on events now so in the past./ Where is the road that will lead out of here?

Then she, too, nods off to sleep.

Silently, the Drummer and Keyboardist steal back onto stage. They comment on the frozen smiles worn like death masks by the sleeping youths. Like ghosts themselves, they wander amongst the youths calling out for them to awaken; "Disaster is nigh!"

The stage lights flicker ominously. "Look!", cries the Keyboardist, "It's those peculiar flashes of lightning which announce an earthquake!" "Listen!", shouts the Drummer, beating loudly on her drum the while, "The whole earth is roaring like a bull!"
The youths waken, crying out, "An earthquake! It's an earthquake!", and then throw themselves tumbling about the stage as their invisible hut collapses around them.7

Inert bodies. The, after a while, they begin to rise. One of the youths holds up a broken window-frame. Crouching and kneeling, the others gather behind it to face the audience. The devastation caused by the earthquake is haltingly described.

**General**: Look! Not a light to be seen! Where's the village? The people?

**Big Head**: Gone! Completely wiped out!

**Hatoyama**: And the sun? How can the sun have vanished?

**Waifling**: There's such a heavy snowfall! Where can we find sanctuary?

**General**: Come on, let's hug together.

**Sister Superior**: [Fearfully] The earth's crust has cracked open. We might be swallowed up!

**Pushcart**: [Despairingly] We're finished! [Screaming wildly] Finished!

**Big Head**: There's no need to scream! We're still alive! Let's think a moment!

**The Youths**: Let's think a moment!

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7 The Tangshan earthquake. For notes to this and other references in WM, please see the footnotes to my translation in Appendix B.
General: Pack together! Keep hold of each other! If one comes again we don't want to be caught unawares! Or become separated!

{The urblings huddle close together - and are seemingly transformed to resemble a stone statue.}

The Drummer, still on stage, turns from watching the youths to address the audience. "As long as there shall be stones, the seeds of fire will not die". The Drummer then follows this quote from Lu Xun with one from Shelley; "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

She describes how the west wind has scattered the old order, how the snows have melted and the land returned to spring. Unspoken, but obvious to many in the Chinese audience, is the implication that with the earthquake has come the Great Helmsman's death, and his "east wind" has finally been beaten. The Drummer exhorts the urblings to wake up and "Go forth and breathe! Go running! Go singing!"

Upon waking, they shed their heavy winter garments and walk off, "each going their own way", advancing into ... act two, the spring of 1978.

Spring, 1978: act two of WM

The opening scene reveals the collective-shack companions nervously cramming their study notes. They memorise theorems and formulae, desperate to pass the recently reinstated university entrance examination. As General quips, passing is about the only "Bright, Golden Road" that will allow them to return to the city. They are unanimous in wanting to put behind them the "wasted years" spent at school during the Cultural Revolution and then in the countryside.
Princess: And what did we learn in those years? In total we learned how to indulge in mass criticisms, hand in blank examination papers, smash glass, criticise and parade our teachers ..."

Now the pressures to pass are enormous and, at the final hour, Sister Superior succumbs to a feinting fit. Her companions try to convince her to forget about sitting the exam and rest, but to no avail. Swooning, she enters the exam hall.

Drummer: [Incomprehendingly] How has this happened?

General: Right, how has this happened? ... It's because, for the time being, the examination route is about the only "Bright, Golden Road" we have left. It's because we were delayed for too long, till we'd lost almost all hope, so that now we're desperately clutching at this last opportunity to realise our ideals! ...

Time is shortened. Soon the youths file out of the exam hall, despondency in their eyes. In another moment the results are out and, apparently, Sister Superior is the only one amongst them to have passed. Almost immediately, however, she realises the cost of her success. Her ecstatic reaction is reversed when she realises she has broken solidarity with her gemenr.

A postmortem is held on a riverbank where it's revealed, ironically, that Big Head has also passed. To the others' bewilderment, he proceeds to tear up the transcript of his results. His father, we now learn, has recently been purged and sent to a political study class. In reality, therefore, Big Head has no chance of being accepted for admission by a university.
Hatoyama: [Quietly] It's not possible, is it? That, even now, the "nine degrees of kindred" can be implicated by one member's crime?

Pushcart rails at the seemingly immutable, corrupt conventions of Chinese society. Hatoyama, he asserts, will be the first to have his registered address transferred back to the city, where a decent job will await him. It's all to do with social connections, he implies. Meanwhile, his own upward social mobility appears to hinge upon the retirement of his father. Gibing at the regime's policy of rehabilitating elderly victims of the Gang of Four, Pushcart exclaims, "Don't only concern yourselves with the elderly's rehabilitation. You should also be giving a little thought to us urblings!"

The following scenes depict a series of exchanges or updates between General and his friends. Pushcart believes the only way for him to get back to the city is to suck up to a doctor and so obtain a medical certificate. Big Head, General finds, has meanwhile become enamoured of emerging radical thinking associated with journals such as Exploration. His real social immobility is now compensated for by his somewhat elitist political pretentiousness:

Big Head: ... In my opinion China's hopes appear to be within our very own hands! ... "When heaven produced a genius like me it must have had some purpose in mind"! ...

As Pushcart predicted, Hatoyama's residential registration is indeed transferred to the city, courtesy of the intervention of his father's private secretary. Deeply embarrassed and temporarily ostracised by his male friends, Hatoyama seeks out Waifling with a marriage proposal. She loves him, but tells him sadly to leave her, arguing that the social gulf between them is too large to bridge.
General and Princess meet in a willow grove. She wants to paint his portrait for her portfolio. She has an opportunity to enter the Central Fine Arts College (her father knows the dean). General announces his intention of enlisting in the lower ranks of the army. After one year's service, he argues, he'll be able to sit for entrance to military college, hopefully, the beginnings of a career as a commissioned officer. Princess offers to spurn arts college if he'll put aside his plans and remain together with her, but General is adamant. They argue, and Princess resorts to emotional blackmail. If General enlists, she swears, she'll "find someone else quick enough!". Act two closes with General proudly striding across the stage in military uniform, blind to the nearby beginnings of Pushcart's romantic pursuit of Princess.

Summer, 1981: Act three of WM

General has just returned from active service, initially in China's southwest, and later in the northwest. He bumps into Sister Superior and we learn that for the past two years Princess has been in a relationship with Pushcart. Sister Superior is told that General has re-enlisted as a "common footslogger". He was denied entrance to military college because the doctor decided his memory "wasn't up to scratch". We soon learn the real reason is that General has been wounded in combat. Parting from Sister Superior, General hears a siren. "The noise is abruptly transformed into the sound of artillery shells whistling overhead and then exploding. General stops dead, at a loss, and peers about him", reads the playwright's directions.

Later General meets up with Hatoyama, and together they bump into Big Head. There is obviously a cool tension between General's two friends. Big Head has been stuck in a job stoking steamboilers in a collective factory while self-studying various university courses. Hatoyama, in contrast, has climbed rapidly from one position to another, and
has most recently landed the job of director at a television station. Big Head is bitter at Hatoyama's flagrant abuse of social connections and privilege.

Big Head: How come it's so difficult whenever we want to get something done, while it's always so easy for you? It's as if China allows you bunch of "little lordlings" to usurp things like "freedom" and "democracy" from us. You don't leave even a little for the common people.

Hatoyama's growing anger, however, makes him seem unrepentant. He boasts of his upward mobility and lets fly his own barbs. Since he and Waifling separated, Big Head has been courting her. In front of General, Hatoyama accuses Big Head of trying to buy Waifling's affections with money received from a generous government handout. This accusation is too much for Big Head, who punches him to the ground and storms off. General is aghast at the changes in his companions. "Could it be that wealth and status", he ponders, "are stronger than even love and friendship?"

General, Hatoyama and Big Head soliloquise separately on the passes to which they have come, however Big Head goes a step further. He gets drunk, ends up in a brawl and wakes up in a police lockup, astonished at his own misbehaviour and frantically worried about missing work.

Soon General and Hatoyama are conspiring to help him. Hatoyama suggests they seek out Pushcart. The implementation of the slogan, "Use workers to substitute for cadres", has opened the door for Pushcart to find a job in his department's political section. Big Head's factory manager, it turns out, is Pushcart's boss. Pushcart might be able to intervene on Big Head's behalf. Loath at first to accompany Hatoyama as a supplicant to Pushcart, General swiftly changes his mind upon hearing that Pushcart has recently been allocated an apartment ... "because he's going to be married".
They arrive to find Pushcart almost comically terrified of meeting General again. He soon obsequiously agrees to their request. The tension builds when General politely inquires after Princess. It soon transpires, however, that Pushcart broke off with her two months beforehand. A photo of a different woman, his fiancee, sits framed upon his desk. But General is still bitter, believing Pushcart to have emotionally deceived Princess.

Hatoyama explodes with laughter when he recognises the new fiancee to be the daughter of Pushcart's boss. Caught out, Pushcart at first joins in with his laughter, then turns on them to vent his spleen as the two stand aghast.

Pushcart: Laugh then! Why aren't you laughing! Laugh at me! At my climbing social ladders! At my grasping onto apron-strings. At my seeking out an influential patron so I can rise to a "second class citizen"! Am I so different to you lot, then? On what basis does destiny decree that you scions of the official class should in turn become officials, while I'm bloody well doomed to live out my days in this disaster area? ...

General is completely stupefied by Pushcart's self vindications. How then, he asks, did Pushcart treat Princess?

Pushcart: ... Sure, she's a beauty - but you can reach a stage where you really regret playing around with a pretty thing like her. After finishing nightshift I'd be obliged to wander about the bazaars with her! I'd have to shelve my college classes and escort her to hear some farty symphony! ... she's a "witch disguised with stage paint"!
General restrains himself from physically lashing out at Pushcart, avowing it's only, "Because I'm a soldier!", and he and Hatoyama leave. Alone, Pushcart begins a little dance, only to stop suddenly, distraught, and wipe the tears from his eyes. Once again at the riverside, General asks Hatoyama why he "so cold bloodedly" dropped Waifling.

Hatoyama: I didn't ... no! ... I made her a vow: that I'd become independent. But circumstances compelled me. My parents forced me. They want to pressure me into changing into a different person. They won't let me love the person I want. Instead they're lining up strangers for me to choose from. That old bag who, when I was in less fortunate circumstances, "slammed the door in my face", used some honeyed words, forced drink upon me and then prettied up her daughter as a gift for my bed ... I blame myself, too. When people get drunk most change into monsters ... It's as if I've made my way into some sewer. Everywhere there's filth! ... I've lingered in a lot of places, but in every situation I've seen people hanging on men of influence, trying to outwit each other, hypocrites and swindlers ... People, they're so pitiful! It's the world of Art where I hope to end up. I wonder if, in the end, I'll be able to discover my real self there?

The scene switches suddenly to reveal Waifling pounding upon Big Head's door. He has been convicted of assault and fired from his job. The immense loss of face he has suffered spurs him to tell Waifling that for her own good he wants to break up with her. He claims he is a loser, a wastrel who will fritter away the twenty thousand "yuan". However Waifling succeeds in convincing him otherwise. In a moment he has opened the door, proceeded to take back the money he'd previously given her, and then vowed to start life afresh as a private entrepreneur. In time, he says, he will repay her the money. She consents to marry him.
General finally pays a visit to Princess. He catches her unawares, in a sad, reminiscent mood, singing a snatch from the "Song of the Urblings". It is plain to him that she has simply been floating through life. Even her canvas "Spring" is still unfinished. "My life flows by and that's quite enough for me!", she declares. As for Pushcart ditching her, "I can find a dozen like him!". Their reunion is short. "Go on wasting your life and artistic talents until you turn into a garrulous old bag!", responds General before turning around and walking off.

It is evening. General is walking by the river when he hears someone quietly sobbing. He spies a young woman standing and weeping. She starts to walk listlessly towards the river. Just as she appears about to throw herself in, General jumps out and pulls her back. Only then does he recognise her as Sister Superior.

Sister Superior has been deceived by a lover. Worse, in having an affair with a fellow student she'd broken a filial vow to her poor slaving mother that she wouldn't allow either romance or paid work to get in the way of her studies. In the end she'd discovered her lover was already married. His wife had shown up at her house, smashed up everything and publicly denounced her as a "stinking prostitute". Why shouldn't she drown herself, she asks? Moreover, why can't he help her suicide? After all, isn't he a soldier and therefore inured to killing?

General: [Angrily] That's killing the enemy in battle!

Sister Superior: [She trembles and begins to shiver] I'm cold! So cold!

{General hurriedly takes off his shirt and drapes it about her. Revealed upon his naked chest are the tracks of a terrible scar ... Sister Superior is dumbfounded. She turns her head away and looks over her shoulder, at a loss what to do.}
General: [With a bitter laugh] Ugly, is it? But this is nothing! Our Company Commander had his eyes blown out; his 2 I.C., who'd only graduated from military college the year before, died in my arms. As he lay dying, he said something rather strange to me. He said, "My wife's nickname as a child was 'Roly-poly', and when she bore a daughter she nicknamed her 'Hoopy-loopy'... 'Roly-poly, Hoopy-loopy'... It was only after six months had gone by that I understand what he meant: that as soldiers we form a protective ring around the lives of our people! ... But you, you still profess that your life is your own! Don't trample all over our feelings! If you did, what could I say to my comrades-in-arms when I return to my mountain-top? Eh?"

Sister Superior gazes solemnly at General's scars. She returns his shirt and, having accepted his invitation to see her home, she begins to walk off. Turning suddenly around, she hurries back to him. Inexplicably, General has stepped into the shallows of the river. Dragging him back, she stares oddly into his eyes. They depart together. General's summer has come to an end. He returns to his mountain-top.

Autumn, 1984: act four of WM.

Act four opens with the companions meeting again at a picnic. The reason for their reunion is a message from General, who has yet to appear. Meanwhile they "smile and beckon, shake hands and embrace urbanely". Their banter allows us to understand that each have become members of the emerging middle class. They reveal themselves as well on the way to a collective yuppiedom.

Pushcart has been promoted to assistant head of his political department, where, according to his own description, he busily accomplishes "bugger all". Big Head and Waifling have struck it rich as dealers of second hand goods. As a private entrepreneur,
Big Head is now financially secure enough to pompously proclaim that money is a "mere externality, a material object. You can't take it with you when you go."

Big Head is so busy at work that he has little time for Waifling. The day before the picnic he'd gone home especially to present her with a classy dress in the latest Japanese fashion. However Waifling had gone out to see Hatoyama's film, and stayed out to have dinner with him. Hatoyama warns Big Head that Waifling is lonely, "People need a little emotional lubrication".

Pushcart buys into their exchange, commenting that, "To have money is not enough by itself. Then again, it's no good relying solely on anything else, either.". Pushcart, we learn, is still studying for his diploma after working hours. Big Head responds with a complaint that recently, after buying some government reserve notes, he'd been forced to make a contribution of ten thousand "yuan" for repairs to the Great Wall. "After arriving at this position in life, perhaps I should be grateful to your lot for expelling me from the party in the first place."

Sister Superior is soon to leave for overseas. She is going to the United States to pursue advance studies. Princess has long since completed her canvas, "Spring", and, it is implied, is well along to road to artistic success. Hatoyama has recently finished directing a television drama. It was entered in a competition, but failed to win. Big Head opines that the problem was its portrayal of "unconventional romances", as was pointed, of course, out in a review he'd read.

Hatoyama's illusions about the literary and artistic world have dissolved: "It's just the same as yours; it's a business. ... the bottom line is that they're all as sleek as cats, they'll use any means ... forget it. Don't lets discuss it. I haven't the spirit to!" He no longer considers there is any point in changing jobs as, in the end, "They're all the same". For
Waifling, meanwhile, people are still "pitiful small potatoes" A long silence ensues until, "Looking crushed and solemn", General finally appears.

**General:** Which of you, may I inquire, is my "fiancée"? Speak up! Who is it? Which one of you wrote that poison letter, anonymously, to my superiors? [He produces a letter.]

{Pushcart takes it. They all crowd around to read.}

**Pushcart:** [Reading aloud] "A head-wound ... possible loss of sight ... an early discharge! ...

The men are livid. Princess coolly steps in and owns up. "I just hoped you'd come back, that's all, and finish Autumn together with me". "Fuck!", responds General, and the others rail against her till suddenly Sister Superior cries out, "It wasn't her! ... The letter was written by me!" General is stunned.

**Sister Superior:** Ever since that summer when you saved my life, I just found that, ... I've been classified as an expert, ... I had my reasons! ... Tell us, how did the results of the tests conclude?

**Keyboardist:** Results of analysis: General, male. In 1979 he received head-wounds and suffered shell-shock. The optic nerve was severely damaged. Vision in right eye reduced to 0.2. The prognosis is total blindness in future.

**General:** A general! A general! ... [He laughs] What a dream! Golden and glorious, a fantastic dream! ... But dreams are always just dreams! [He laughs sadly] Why should I be blaming you lot? I really am a fool! ... [To his friends] It's
always the opposite of what you dream that comes true, right? [He continues, quietly and despondently] I'm going to become a blind man ...

His companions immediately fall over themselves with offers of support. Big Head vows to spend all his money sending General overseas to find a cure. Waifling offers her money as well. General's response is simple, "I want to be a soldier ... ". Hatoyama beseeches General to stay on with them; he can play the lead role in Hatoyama's new film, he improvises, titled "Tomorrow's Generals". Sister Superior also offers to set aside her career; "Come back to us! I'll take care of you always! ... I fell in love with you soon after we first met. I need somewhere to channel my feelings." General merely keeps repeating, "I want to be a soldier ..."

His friends eventually become frustrated, and then angry. He's insane, they say. They accuse him of not facing up to reality. "What sort of soldier do you think you'll make, with one eye?", demands Big Head. It remains to Princess to ask the reason why he is so determined to remain a soldier.

General: [Anxiously] I'm addicted to it, O.K.? ... None of you have seen how, in battle, your comrades fall around you! You couldn't understand! ... It's true, I'll never make general ... but then how many from the ranks really do make it? And if it turns out, however, that I don't become completely blind, I can still finish going down this particular road! It doesn't matter what you think of me. I feel content with myself! People should always retain a little spirit, must always make some kind of contribution, must leave at least something of themselves behind while still alive. Without these anchors, I'd live terrified that one day I'd find myself unable to go on! Don't try to coerce me! None of us should compel another, all right?"
He starts to sing the "Song of the Young Pioneers":

**General:** "Are you all ready? ..."

**Urblings:** [Joining in] "We're always ready,/ We're the Young Pioneers ..."

Then abruptly they start to glance about at each other, conscious of their individual status. They laugh awkwardly and cease their singing. Suddenly, from all sides builds the "cheerful and resonant strains" of children singing the same song. The companions listen, completely engrossed.

**General:** It's children singing.

**Drummer:** That's right. They're going through the streets and lanes cleaning away all the gobs of spit. Will you join them?

**General:** [With playful hyperbole] We'll go too!

**The Youths:** Shall we go? ... Come on! Let's go! ... Come along!

{Singing cheerfully and shouting slogans like, "Don't spit everywhere", brandishing brooms and other cleaning implements, they converge with the ranks of the Young Pioneers ...}

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The seasons of the play, from acts one to four, whirl and finally blur into each other. The youths march round and round, to the sound of a distant drum, emerging from the rural commune of 1976 only to re-merge with the ranks of the Young Pioneers of 1984.
A finale with, perhaps, many shades of meaning. And for the official PRC literary critic, one which is stupendously unsatisfactory. The essential meaning of the play seems, somehow, to be swimming submerged out of sight. The swimmer occasionally struggles up for air, but before the critic can point an identifying finger, it has resubmerged and the text has rolled on.

Like many apparently ingenuous plays, WM is able to achieve much. Fundamentally, the play expresses some of the basic thoughts that guide people's reactions within a situation of generalised and deep alienation arising from systematic political repression. Like many of the powerful, popular plays produced, for example, in Brazil, South Africa, Chile, or the Philippines, WM succeeds in identifying, perhaps more clearly than some more openly polemical works, a system of ongoing, inbuilt political repression, and has the potential to sharpen any oppositionist sentiment. In this sense WM is a subversive play, a dangerous play. It can win people over to an entirely different, non-official way of thinking about their own lives as well as the life and political direction of their society.

For a work which details the thinking of a contemporary, politically controversial playwright from Brazil, for example see, Augusto Boal, The Theatre of the Oppressed, (Teatro de Oprimido. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride, transl., 1974), Theatre Communications Group, New York, 1979, 1985. Interestingly, Boal argues for a theatre which moves away from the influence of realism, which heavily influenced Brazilian theatre from 1956 on, "That path, although necessary in its moment, entailed a great risk of nullifying the work of art. Art is a form of knowledge: the artist, therefore, has the obligation of interpreting reality, making it understandable. But if instead of interpreting, he limits himself to reproducing it, he will fail to comprehend it or make it comprehensible. And the more reality and art tend to be identical, the more useless will be the latter. The criterion of similarity is the measure of inefficacy", p. 171. This would appear to be the inverse of the demands of many controversial Chinese playwrights. If any and every kind of art does, in the end, dramatise politics, perhaps the important thing is always to work out what kind of politics is being dramatised.
CHAPTER THREE:  

Building the Climax at the Centre: Ambiguity and Interpretive Dilemma

All men have stood for freedom, ... and those of the richer sort of you that see it are ashamed and afraid to own it, because it comes clothed in a clownish garment ... Freedom is the man that will turn the world upside down, therefore no wonder he hath enemies ... \(^1\)

In chapter one the problem was posed of how we interpret plays that may have been written with the fundamental aim of producing interpretive ambiguity. But how can we arrive at a closer idea of authorial intention when it comes to plays written necessarily with a view to, as Perry Link puts it, "crisscrossing suggestion" and the limits of the permissible? How can we trace those "little sailboats" as they tack and turn into and against the winds of shou and fang? This chapter will investigate the background and develop the evidence for a hypothesis that a structural analysis of the text is crucial for our resolving of such interpretive dilemmas. And central to this hypothesis is the particular literary device known as chiasmus.

**Chiasmus**

One simple definition of chiasmus can be found in Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Unabridged):

chiasmus: [Gk *chiasmos*, Fr *chiasien*, to mark with a chi]; the inversion of the order of syntactic elements in the second of two juxtaposed and syntactically parallel clauses or phrases (as "a superman in physique but in intellect a fool"); also: an instance of this.\(^2\)

Another definition can be found in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*:

chiasmus (from the form of the Greek letter chi, X), figure of speech in which the terms in the second of two parallel phrases are in reverse order to the corresponding terms in the first.\(^3\)

In his introduction to the work *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, John Welch offers further elucidation and commentary on this unusual literary device:

Basically, chiasmus is inverted parallelism. Yelland's *Handbook of Literary Terms* captures the essence of the form with the following definition:

"A passage in which the second part is inverted and balanced against the first. Chiasmus is thus a type of antithesis.

A wit with dunces and a dunce with wits. (Pope)

Flowers are lovely, love is flowerlike. (Coleridge)"

Critical here are 'balance' and 'inversion'. The 'antithesis' involved need not necessarily be more than a formal one, since the second half of a chiasm can be complementary as well as antithetical in content to the first half of the structure.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, introduction, p. 9.
Welch goes on to cite various other literary terms under which chiasmus has been exoposed: epanodos, introverted parallelism, extended introversion, concentrism, the chi-form, palistrophe, envelope construction the 'delta'-form, recursion etc. However these terms still basically describe the same phenomenon, "namely, the appearance of a two-part structure or system in which the second half is a mirror image of the first, i.e., where the first term recurs last, and the last first".\(^5\)

Richard Lanham, in his *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, notes that the Greek word "chiasmos" means "a crossing over". The word itself is derived from the Greek letter "chi", written as "X", which symbolises this process. Lanham offers an example of its usage in the construction of a poetic conceit;

\[
\text{Obit} \quad \text{anus} \\
\text{abit} \quad \text{onus} \quad ^6
\]

which might, retaining the chiasmic form, be translated from the Latin as;

The old woman dies,

Away goes the burden.

According to Welch, it was the work of the scholar Nils Lund that laid the basis for modern investigations and evaluations of the existence of chiasmic structures in texts. Lund initially addressed himself to the problem of chiasmus, or what was known as "the inverted order", in 1908. His work *Chiasmus in the New Testament* was published in

1942. However the beginnings of literary commentary upon chiasmic forms as such can be traced back to 1742.\footnote{The early trickle of chiastic commentary, beginning with some initial observations by Johannes Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (Tubingen, 1742), John Jebb, *Sacred Literature* (London, 1820), Thomas Boys, *Tactica Sacra* (London, 1824), and then by John Forbes, *Symmetrical Structure of Scripture* (Edinburgh, 1854), first grew to a steady flow of productive commentary through the efforts of Nils Lund from 1930 to 1955, and recently has increased dramatically, in both quantity and diversity*. Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, introduction, p. 9.}

(It) can now be said that one of the most salient developments in the study of ancient literature over the past few decades is the growing awareness of the presence of chiasmus in the composition of ancient writings. This development has been especially notable in the field of biblical studies, but is also manifest in the study of ancient prose and poetry generally.\footnote{Ibid.}{\footnote{Ibid., introduction.}}

As with many literary devices, and particularly as regards such mnemonically useful devices as chiasmus, their existence within texts can long remain hidden by virtue of the fact that we utilise them, all too often, unconsciously. Sometimes, the more obvious a thing appears, the less we are inclined to regard it as being of particular importance, and this adage would seem very relevant, until recently, to our appreciation of the importance of chiasmus.

The variety of modern studies which attempt to elicit and analyse chiasmic structures from within a growing number of ancient and sacred writings, from ancient Greek and Latin texts to Sumero-Akkadian texts and the New Testament, suggest above all else that the utilisation of chiasmus is not culture-specific.\footnote{Ibid.}{\footnote{Ibid., introduction.}}

A more complex instance of poetic chiasmus, in terms of its concise juxtaposition of ideationally opposed terms, can be found, for example, in Cicero's *Pro Murena*:
Odit populus Romanus privatam luxuriam,

publicam magnificentiam diligit.

which may be translated as:

The Roman people hate private luxury,

but public display they love.\(^\text{10}\)

Here, the words printed bold, hate and love, and those underlined, private and public, are the ideationally opposed terms which form the extended arms of the "chi" or "X" structure. The complexity of this chiasm arises from the further ideational opposition, on the one hand, of the reflected terms "hate" and "love", and on the other, of "private" and "public", within the overall categorical opposition of the notions of emotion vis-a-vis spatiality.

In the Latin, both the adjectives and the sentence-objects, privatam; publicam; luxuriam; magnificentiam, rhyme. In the poetic force of its juxtaposition of terms and its grammatical presentation, this chiasm comes far closer to describing an overall challenge to a certain world view, that is, it may be interpreted as a polemical challenge by Cicero to a set of perhaps dominant assumptions about the nature of the supposed likes and dislikes of the Roman people of his time.

In a slightly more complex example from Livy, the rhetorical force of the chiasm is emphasised by its partial disguise:

\(^{10}\) Howatson (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, p. 125. This example of chiasmus is from Cicero, "Pro Murena", 32 (emphasis added).
Fabius killed the people but spared their gods;

Marcellus spared the people but took their gods.\textsuperscript{11}

At first glance, the repetition, of the terms "people" and "gods" (gods here meaning crafted idols and religious images) in the second line might be seen to announce an instance of iteration, that is, simple repetition, only. However at second glance the reader can see that the verbs, organised as they are in an A-B-B'-A' fashion, definitely announce the existence of a chiasm as well. The example shows that neither are iteration and chiasmus so formally constructed that they cannot, under certain conditions, co-exist. Moreover, two poetic lines can sometimes contain a number of chiasms, as the example given below, from David Hawkes' \textit{The Story of the Stone}, a translation of the famous novel \textit{Hong Lou Meng} attributed to Cao Xueqin. An initial rendering of this chiasm might be:

\begin{center}
\textbf{Truth} becomes fiction when the \textbf{fiction}'s true;
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Real} becomes \textbf{not-real} when the \textbf{unreal}'s \textbf{real},
\end{center}

Upon second glance, a further chiasm comes to light:

\begin{center}
\textbf{Truth} becomes \textbf{fiction} when the \textbf{fiction}'s \textbf{true};
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Real} becomes \textbf{not-real} when the \textbf{unreal}'s \textbf{real}.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{center}

Utilising Welch's lettering system for the ordering of chiasms, the example can be described either as two distinct chiasms:

A  B  B'  A'  
Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true;

A  B  B'  A'  
Real becomes not-real when the unreal's real,

or alternatively as a single, coherent chiasm:

A  B  C  D  
Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true;

D'  C'  B'  A'  
Real becomes not-real when the unreal's real.

In their chiasmic complexity, the two lines above rather neatly reflect Cao Xueqin's literary antics in his treatment of the Zhen Baoyu and the Jia Baoyu figures. While, as far as this writer is aware, no scholarly research in the field of the identification and analysis of chiasms has to date borne down upon classical Chinese texts, "sacred" or otherwise, it does not take long, when one looks for the obvious, to elicit examples of

12 David Hawkes (transl.), The Story of the Stone: a Chinese novel by Cao Xueqin in Five Volumes; Vol. 1, The Golden Days, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 44. "Jia zuo zhen shi zhen yi jia; wu wei you chu you huan wu" is the inscription written up over the gateway to the Land of Illusion which we pass through at the beginning of Cao Xueqin's ([1715?-63) novel. Comments Hawkes, "As regards the various 'devices' which Xueqin employs for converting remembered fact into artistic fiction, one he makes persistent use of throughout the novel is the antinomy of zhen and jia, meaning respectively 'real' and 'imaginary' but both regarded by Xueqin as being different parts of a single underlying Reality ... 'Jia', the surname of the family in the novel, looks, in Chinese script, a little bit like the character for Cao; but it is also a pun on this other jia which means 'fictitious'." Ibid.
chiasmus from this area as well. When reading of The Art of War, by Sun Zi, we early come across the chiasmic lines,

\textit{Jin er shi zhi yuan, yuan er shi zhi jin}.

which Ralph Sawyer translates as:

when [your objective] is nearby, make it appear as if distant; when far away, create the illusion of being nearby.\textsuperscript{13}

Another quite explicit example of chiasmus can be found in the relatively late classical work, Shi Naian's Shui Hu Zhuan. Here, the chiasm takes the form of a poetic conceit. Recalling Welch's conclusion that the second half of a chiasm can be complementary as well as antithetical in content to the first half of the structure, we find in this instance an example of what the translator J.M. Jackson has aptly described as a piece of "doggerel".

\textit{Wen ming bu ru jian mian},

\textit{Jian mian sheng si wen ming}

which J.M. Jackson translates as:

To learn of your name is not as good as to see your face,

To see your face is better than knowing your name!\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} The chiasm occurs in line 19 of the first chapter (Shiji Diyi) of the Bing Fa by Sun Zi. The translation is taken from, Ralph D. Sawyer, Sun-tzu, The Art of War, Westview Press, 1995, p.168. (See also Sawyer's footnote to his translation on p.305.)

It only remains for us to imaginatively superimpose the "chi", or "X" form, upon these two parallel lines in order to highlight the chiasm and its A-B-B'-A' structure.

What are the implications of our observing the existence of a chiasmic structure within a text? Do literary chiasms always, as in Shi Naian's example above, remain a simple poetic conceit, a bit of doggerel perhaps, or at best a mere mnemonic device, a verbal bookmark for the Chinese storyteller by which he might introduce a new section of the tale? To respond to this problem we must return to Welch.

But chiasmus is also much more than simple inversion or repetition, an A-B-B'-A' pattern. As the structure expands in the number of elements, the abrupt repetition by which the last elements of the first of the system become the first elements of the second half can draw unusual attention to the central terms, which are repeated in close proximity to each other. This is observable, for example, in the case of an A-B-C-D-E-E'-D'-C'-B'-A' arrangement. An emphatic focus on the center can be employed by a skilful composer to elevate the importance of a central concept or to dramatise a radical shift of events at the turning-point. Meanwhile, the remainder of the system can be used with equal effectiveness as a framework through which the author may compare, contrast, juxtapose, complement, or complete each of the flanking elements in the chiasmic system. In addition, a marked degree of intensification can be introduced throughout the system both by building to a climax at the center as well as by strengthening each element individually upon its chiasmic repetition.15

For Welch, the very recognition that chiasmus may not necessarily be confined to an A-B-B'-A' structure, but can also be shown to be expanded into extended chiasmic

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systems, immediately poses the question of whether chiasmus as a "literary structure" may also be found in prose.

Modern minds, particularly ones which have grown accustomed to pragmatic uses of literature and to languages which depend to a large extent upon syntax rather than upon inflected word endings to determine meaning, naturally conceive of a device such as chiasmus as one which functions strictly as a poetic novelty...

Once it has been recognised, however, that chiasmus operates fluently in prose, it becomes evident that chiasmus may give order to thoughts as well as to sounds, and that it may thus give structure to the thought pattern and development of entire literary units ...

Welch considers chiasmus to be, in effect, a significant ordering principle operating not only within certain rather obviously chiasmically structured verses and sentences, but also operating within and ordering the structures of certain entire books and extensive poetical units. Such complex structural applications of chiasmus elevate its importance to a level where it becomes more than a mere literary device, and,

more than a skeleton upon which thoughts and words are attached. When chiasmus achieves the level of ordering the flow of thoughts throughout an entire pericope, or of a sustained unfolding of an artistic verbal expression, the character of the form itself merges with the message and meaning of the passage. Indeed what is said is often no more important than how it is said ... the task of understanding the meaning of a writing is never complete until its formular aspects as well as its thought contents have been grasped. 17

16 Ibid. introduction, p. 11.
17 Ibid. introduction, pp. 11-12.
That the utilisation of chiasmus is not culturally-specific has been shown through the examples given above. That chiasmus can operate outside the realms of prose and poetry has been revealed by anthropologist Michael Jackson who has recovered instances of chiasmus in folktale.

**Mediation in a Kuranko Folktale**

*This same power in man that causes divisions and war is called by some men the state of nature, which every man brings into the world with him ...*

*Here is disorder, therefore this subtle spirit of darkness ... tells the people, You must make one man king over you all and let him make laws, and let everyone be obedient thereunto.*

In his article, "Ambivalence and the last-born: Birth order position in convention and myth", Jackson reveals how the Kuranko people of Sierra Leone utilise chiasmus to achieve an effective cancellation of differences between the socially-constructed, antithetical categories of "human position" vis-a-vis "human disposition". "In their fiction", writes Jackson, "as in certain institutionalised joking relationships, the Kuranko dissolve the (socially given) absolute distinctions between elder and younger by a device known as chiasmus".

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"In fiction", continues Jackson, "life becomes a play upon forms, a dialect between different version of 'reality' or different ideational levels. This is consistent with the fact that such fictions are regarded as both comic (they play upon forms) and make-believe (they achieve 'unrealisable synthesis')". Chiasmus, utilised as a device for the mediation of opposed categories, appears to be quite commonly utilised in folktale. One such Kuranko folktale uses chiasmus to mediate between what is perceived as the opposed ideas of hereditary status and moral disposition.

According to Jackson's fieldnotes, this folktale has it that a chief named Saramba is obliged to go on a journey to another village. He is accompanied by his "finaba", a

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20 M. Jackson presented the folktale and his analysis as part of a lecture series titled 'Religion and Ritual', for a course offered by the Department of Anthropology, Australian National University, in 1985.
Kuranko title denoting a genealogist cum servant, by the name of Musa Kule. Having entered "the bush" (according to Jackson, perceived by the Kuranko as a "marginal" area, i.e., situated spatially between villages, the social domains, and therefore associated with danger), Saramba becomes fearful that he will be an easy target for assassins. Musa Kule suggests that they exchange clothes (and thus identities), with the consequence that the worthy "finaba" is assassinated while his fearful, unworthy lord is saved. Through the operation of the process of chiasmus, therefore, status distinctions (what the Kuranko perceive to be "naturally" given via the dogma of hereditary succession) and human dispositions (which are perceived to be "socially" given or acquired and often expressed in essentially anti-dogmatic fashions) are mediated.

The chiasmic, or "crossing over" process, using Jackson's example above as a model, can be utilised to elicit the structure of the folktale as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is Expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(according to status distinctions/dogma)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Period</th>
<th>Final Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Status</td>
<td>High Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Saramba</td>
<td>—— —— —— ——</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Status</td>
<td>Low Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musa Kule</td>
<td>—— —— —— ——</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through this relatively simple model, the chiasmic structure buried within the folktale can be revealed and the "balance, inversion and intensification of the narrative" can be discovered as ordered about an act of identity exchange involving cross-dressing. Indeed this act of cross-dressing is itself disclosed as the "climax at the centre" of the folktale as a narrative unit. Of course identity exchange through cross-dressing itself attained the level of a central dramatic conceit on the Elizabethan stage. A common theme within narrative and literature generally, identity exchange has produced that character known as the "Imposter". It will be recalled that just such an exchange of identity is the basis for the development of the plot of Sha Yexin's and others' controversial play, The Imposter. But more on this theme later.

Returning to the Kuranko folktale, it is appropriate to pose the question, how did this rather strange act of cross-dressing come about? Who initiates this act? And to what
purpose? Jackson's own observation on this question is that the finaba Musa Kule, who initiates the cross-dressing to his own detriment, closely resembles that fictional character known as the "Trickster".

The Trickster

As Victor Turner has noted, trickster tales are widely distributed and a considerable scholarly literature has accumulated on them.21 Indeed trickster tales are so widely distributed that, according to Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, it becomes difficult to identify the immutable characteristics of this figure.22 Characteristics most often associated with the trickster, however, do include:

1. A highly ambiguous nature; trickster figures often evince a combination of human-divine and/or human-animal characteristics;

2. An association with marginal areas and/or liminality; in the Kuranko tale above a marginal area is described in "the bush", perceived as peripheral to the village domain (culture) as it is to the wilds proper (nature). Trickster figures are often portrayed as being most active around the times of dawn and/or dusk (liminality);

3. The activities of tricksters are perceived to often result in the injection of a new form of "energy" into the world. When injected into the social domain, this energy often results in the inversion of the previously prevailing social order. The energy always appears as ambiguous in form in that its injection always results in unforeseen consequences. Importantly, tricksters are most often characterised as

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22 Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, 'A Tolerated Margin of Mess; the Trickster and his Tales Reconsidered', in *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, Indiana University, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 147-87.
being essentially unconcerned with the results of their activities, often, indeed, becoming victims of their own activities (as does Musa Kule in the Kuranko tale).

Perhaps no other literary character is more closely associated with processes of inversion, or more concisely expresses the concept of a form of disorder wherein "things turn into their opposite", than does the trickster. In its nature and range of activities, the trickster differs markedly from any other literary character. Where the trickster operates, inversions become the "dis-order" of the day.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the problem of the essential nature of the trickster has elicited some comment. A short review of some of this commentary would seem to be germane to this thesis in order to comprehend some of the wider implications of how inversion "works" within literature in general as well as to throw some light upon the importance of the theme of "things turning into their opposites" within Chinese literature in particular. For it is through an understanding of the pivotal place of inversion that we can more clearly see just what the dissenting Chinese playwright is commenting upon, and often begin to glean what other types of social order the playwright would juxtapose with the existing order.

A short commentary on the trickster by Karl Kerenyi which appears to validate this hypothesis is to be found in Paul Radin's, The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology, itself a study of the trickster myth cycle of the Winnebago Indians.23

The Trickster in Drastic Entertainment

To Top: To cheat, or trick; also to insult. 24

Kerenyi compares an American trickster myth cycle with trickster figures of Greek mythology, whose development he traces through their representation in Greek drama and art. He discovers trickster figures to encompass, "a single active principle, the component elements of 'phallic', 'voracious', 'sly', 'stupid', - the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries". 25

Representations of trickster tales are predominant during what he defines as the 'relatively late state' of the archaic period - archaic here meaning not the chronological period as such but associated instead with a "stylistic judgement" of a phase, wherein "human psycho-physical and mental-structure", as represented in art is perceived to have become "used up and worn out". However within the archaic, social hierarchies are "extremely strict":

Archaic social hierarchies are extremely strict. To be archaic does not mean to be chaotic. Quite the contrary: nothing demonstrates the meaning of the all-controlling social order more impressively than the religious recognition of that which evades this order, in a figure who is the exponent and personification of the life of the body: never wholly subdued, ruled by lust and hunger, for ever running into pain and misery, cunning and stupid in action. Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the trickster. His function in an archaic society, or rather the function of his mythology, of the tales told about him, is to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of the permitted, an experience of what is not permitted. 26

25 Kerenyi, in Radin, The Trickster, p
26 Ibid, p. 185 (emphasis added).
It will be recalled, for example, that the finaba in the Kuranko tale, through his action of identity exchange with his chief, adds disorder to order. In effect, a social-given concerning the status quo of Kuranko society is juxtaposed with the contradictions this produces when compared with the perceived realities of Kuranko life. The chief should be morally superior as well as socially superior, but he is not. The action of the finaba, encompassing an identity exchange as an experience of the "not normally permitted", serves to drive home this point regarding the contradiction between dogma and the living realities of social life.

Archaic forms of trickster myths, Kerenyi argues, survive notably within the sphere of what he terms "drastic entertainment". An example of this is to be found in the first half of Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Dionysus dresses himself in the costume of Heracles for a journey to the underworld. When confronted with the Empusa he flees in terror, even hiding behind one of his own priests. His slave Xanthias becomes so terrified he shits himself, and presents his rear for the audience to view.

Other examples of drastic entertainment can be found in, "the Doric farces of southern Italy, where the gods were represented by the obese, phallus-bearing actors, the 'phylakes'". The farces "may be compared to the picaresque tales of Winnebago mythology - not in terms of outward chronology, but in terms of inward chronology by which the archaic grows old".

For Kerenyi, the dominance of drastic entertainment as a main sphere for representing the trickster's activities offers a clue to the core problem of the ambiguous nature of the trickster with its contradictory cunning and stupid manifestations. The distinctive style of drastic entertainment comes to be intensified when the trickster is caused to appear as a predominantly stupid figure, and Kerenyi develops this point in relation to the

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mythological figure Prometheus whose every invention brings new misery upon humanity:

No sooner has he succeeded in offering sacrifice than Zeus deprives mankind of the fire. And when, after stealing the fire, Prometheus himself is snatched away from mortals to suffer punishment, Epimetheus is left behind as their representative: craftiness is replaced with stupidity. The proud affinity between these two figures is expressed in the fact that they are brothers. One might say that in them a single primitive being, sly and stupid at once, has been split into a duality: Prometheus the Forethinker, Epimetheus the belated After-thinker. It is he who, in his thoughtlessness, brings mankind, as a gift from the gods, the final inexhaustible source of misery: Pandora. 28

Kerenyi allows that he is fascinated, after reading Radin's description of the "Winnebago Hero Cycles", with the concept, expressed in a trickster tale wherein the trickster literally fights himself, that, "the dualism of a sly-stupid primitive being could be expressed so drastically in a mythological tale that his left hand literally does not know what his right hand is doing". 29 In a short while, we shall re-examine this notion in particular with reference to the literary figure Sun Wukong, a character in the sixteenth century Chinese novel, Xi You Ji, attributed to Wu Cheng'en.

But first, in order to understand some of the more profound implications of symbolic inversion within literature in general as well as contemporary Chinese drama, it is necessary to pursue a little further the relationship between the broader "genus" trickster and symbolic inversion.

28 Ibid, p. 181 (emphasis added).
29 Ibid.
Fooling with Inversion

In a thousand observations, the wise may make one that is foolish and the fool one that is wise.  

This fellow's wise enough to play the fool
And to do that well craves a kind of wit.

In a still humorous, if somewhat dated, 1950s Hollywood musical spoof of "merrie olde England", the actor Danny Kaye played an incompetent hero who disguises himself as a court jester in order to right some social wrongs and court the lady he loves. The jester's actions set off a series of tragi-comic inversions wherein the corrupt local representatives of the feudal status quo are overturned and displaced by more moral representatives. In this regard, the conclusion of the film, which has Good King Richard returning to re-establish his authority, is reminiscent of the conclusion of If I Were For Real, as will be shown later. It hardly needs adding that throughout the Danny Kaye film the jester humorously describes himself, through word and song, in chiasmic fashion as, "a king of jesters and a jester of kings".

If the trickster may serve as an agent par excellence for the initiation of chiasmic inversion, what other literary figures may also serve this purpose? What other well known character shares some of the essential characteristics, a complex mixture of marginality and ambiguity, of the trickster? It is certainly difficult to ponder such attributes without that popular and recurring figure, in fact an historical figure that established a place within European literary tradition, known as the Fool, springing to mind. In the introduction to her work on the social and literary history of the fool, Enid

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31 William Shakespeare, As You Like It, (act and sc., etc).
Welsford begins by defining the fool generically and in comparison with the far more scrutinised figure of the tragic hero.

The Fool or Clown is the Comic Man, but he is not necessarily the hero of comedy, the central figure about whom the story is told ... As a dramatic character he usually stands apart from the main action of the play, having a tendency not to focus but to dissolve events, and also to act as intermediary between the stage and auditorium ... The Fool, in fact, is an amphibian equally at home in the world of reality and the world of imagination ...

Welsford's introduction to the "peculiarities" of the fool, citing his tendencies to "stand apart" from the main action of the play, to not "focus but to dissolve events", his role as "intermediary" and his "amphibious" nature, all call to mind the characteristics of trickster figures discussed previously. In fact this overlapping of not only character but also function of the fool with that of the trickster becomes far more clear as Welsford later develops her thesis of the fool's relative complexity, with the stress on his essential marginality and ambiguity: in the guise of the Lord of Misrule, the fool appears historically during festival periods occurring as a result of the mismatching of the pagan lunar calendar and the Christian solar one within the medieval epoch; he evinces a dual nature; he initiates inversions of the existing social order and acts as a sort of "licensed" social critic.

Welsford traces the development of the fool in both its historical and literary aspects, from his appearance at the banquet table of classical Greece through to the twentieth century and the film-star Charlie Chaplin, encompassing the fool's evolution from "Parasite" to "Buffoon" through to the "more complex" Court-Fool (encompassing

33 Ibid. p. 201.
mascot and scapegoat, poet and clairvoyant, as well as "sage-fool") then on to Stage-Clown ("Harlequin", "Punch", "Pierrot", "Clown" and their successors). Indeed it becomes apparent that Welsford's Fool is a shorthand description of sorts which is used to link and label an exceptionally wide variety of historical and literary figures through an evolutionary or developmental framework primarily through their association with the comic.

Yet strangely, and according to her own investigation, the fool ranges far beyond the simply (or essentially) comic to operate at various times as "scapegoat" (in the sense defined by Sir James George Fraser's, The Golden Bough) and as quite serious social critic, as in King Lear, where his "role and nature form a vital part of the central tragic theme". Welsford's explanations as to the main reason why the fool and its actions range beyond the immediately comic are of great interest. The key to this, Welsford argues, lies in an understanding of the historical development of the fool.

During the Dark Ages and the first part of the medieval epoch the fool makes but fitful appearances, by the beginning of the Renaissance he has become a fashion in society, and an obsession in literature. How did this come about? ... The growth of towns, the increasing importance of the bourgeoisie, the guild movement, the spread of education, did not leave even the folk festivals unchanged.

An educated clerk with a witty outlook, Welsford argues, would play the fool role in new ways, taking advantage to experiment and improvise with satire and comment.

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When a lively young clerk took the part of the traditional fool, he was not likely to rest content with an unintelligent repetition of the actions of his predecessors; on the contrary the role would afford him an admirable opportunity for dramatic experiment and satiric comment.

He was a 'Fool,' the elected 'King of Fools:' very well, then, he would exercise the fool's right of speech, and he would model himself on the ways of the court rather than of the country village; he would in fact adopt the dress, assume the role, and claim the privileges of the court-jester. And so the two divergent types of fool come to be reunited in the person of 'the Lord of Misrule,' 'the Abbot of Unreason,' 'the Prince of Fools', who is none other than the traditional mock-king and clown, who has adopted the appearance and behaviour of the court-jester and in that guise exerts an influence on literature and the drama quite beyond the scope of his simpler brother.37

By the end of her chapter on "The Lord of Misrule", Welsford is describing the role of fools and "fooling" as a kind of "safety-valve".38 Indeed the powerful symbolism regarding inversions of social status implicit in fooling, Welsford implies, drove the authorities to attempt to co-opt this ritual.

Circumstances, as we have seen, drove the vicars and subdeacons to emphasise the idea of folly as a safety-valve, a permitted form of relief and relaxation. The Enfants-sans-souci emphasised the idea of folly as a mask for the wise and an armour for the critic. Their 'Misrule' was no temporary relaxation of law and order, but a more subtle and permanent reversal of ordinary judgements. It was

37 Ibid.
the wisdom of Mere-Folle to display the folly of the wise, and it was the intellectualisation of folly which gave the fool his influence over literature and drama, and also made the fool's licence a very desirable privilege.

Fool-societies, continues Welsford, adopted motley\(^\text{39}\) in order to tacitly claim the privilege of the licensed court-fool. The garments jokingly labelled them as irresponsible, so that they would not be blamed for their actions.

The French Lord of Misrule was in fact a middleman who conveyed the cap and bells from the shaven heads of the half-witted into the creative imagination of the philosopher, the satirist and the comic poet.\(^\text{40}\)

The translation of the idea of the comic fool to a higher plane, according to Welsford, is best exemplified by the role of the Court-Fool in literature, and perhaps this sub-species is itself most fully developed in the character of the Fool in Shakespeare's King Lear:

[Lear's Fool] is in fact the sage-fool who sees the truth, and his role has even more 'intellectual' than emotional significance. For 'King Lear' is not merely a popular play. If it offends against classical decorum, it is nevertheless true to a definitely intellectual tradition and makes use of the conventions of 'fool-literature' which were ... clerical rather than popular in origin, and were used as the vehicle for a reasoned criticism of life. The Fool ... is here used both as a commentator whose words furnish important clues to the interpretation of a difficult play; and also as a prominent figure caught up in the drama, whose role and nature form a vital part of the central, tragic theme.\(^\text{41}\)

\[^{39}\] A fool's parti-coloured dress.

\[^{40}\] Welsford, The Fool, pp. 218-19.

\[^{41}\] ibid, p. 256.
Welsford's fool, as is seen here, certainly does tend to range beyond the purely comic. Yet Welsford's work on the fool as a whole appears to be premised on her assumption that the fool is very much anchored, by its nature, within the comic. Welsford appears to define the fool as essentially comic because of this figure's ideational, or categorical, opposition to the tragic-hero figure. Despite the "development" of such fools as Lear's "sage-fool", with their often more serious roles and their sometimes deeply ironic commentaries, Welsford's proposition that the fool is essentially comic is a central theme in her introduction and throughout her work.

However by focusing first and foremost upon this relationship of fool to tragic-hero, could it not be that Welsford at the very start misses a quite crucial point underlying the problem of the fool's essential nature? If, as for the trickster-figure previously, the fool is also approached with the question of not so much, "What is it?", but rather, "What does it do?", then the ground for understanding this figure undergoes a subtle yet significant shift.

As shown previously, the trickster is an agent for the initiation of chiasmic inversion, an inversion often expressed in the reversal of the social status of the characters with whom the trickster interacts. Yet whether a particular inversion is ultimately perceived as signifying that the trickster in question is primarily clever or stupid depends very much upon the type of trickster concerned and even more upon the content of the narrative within which it operates (i.e., what categories within the narrative undergo the symbolic inversion).

The same way of thinking might well be useful when we attempt to understand the figure known generically as the fool, in that whether the inversions associated with the fool come ultimately to be perceived as either primarily comic or serious is more a function of the type of fool under analysis, but even more importantly of what
ideationally opposed categories or "versions of reality" are therein being manipulated. Using this mode of definition, it is possible to conclude that the fool is in fact a "subgenus" of the trickster, for ultimately both figures are constructed as the agents of processes of inversion within the text.

In whatever form or guise, the fool, it is evident from Welsford's own multitudinous examples, is associated with processes of inversion. An important point to make, though, is that the fool remains "constant", that is, his status may undergo some dramatic shifts, but he remains consistently true to his marginal and ambiguous characterisation. The tragic-hero figure, on the other hand, does not remain constant in this fashion. More often than not his suffering of a decline in status (or as is often the case, a rise followed by a decline) goes hand in hand with a fundamental change in the way he perceives the world.

**Jung on the Trickster**

*Topsy-turvy: The top side the other way; the wrong side upwards; some explain it, the top side turf ways, turf being always laid the wrong side upwards. 42*

Jung, in his own commentary found in Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth Spirit, Trickster, "defines" the trickster as being essentially cross-category in nature, expressing characteristics of an "animal-human-divine" being:

The trickster is a primitive "cosmic' being of divine-animal nature, on the one hand superior to man because of his superhuman qualities, and on the other hand inferior to him because of his unreason and unconsciousness. He is no match for the animals either, because of his extraordinary clumsiness and lack of instinct.

These defects are the marks of his human nature, which is not so well adapted to the environment as the animals' but, instead, has prospects of a much higher level of consciousness based on a considerable eagerness to learn, as is duly emphasised in the (Winnebago) myth.43

Jung takes up Kerenyi's point, on the sly-stupid nature of this primitive being, as a central one:

Anyone who belongs to a sphere of culture that seeks the perfect state somewhere in the past must feel very queerly indeed when confronted by the figure of the trickster. He is the forerunner of the saviour, and, like him, God, man, and animal at one. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness, which seems to indicate that he has fallen below the level of consciousness. He is so unconscious that his body is not a unity, and his two hands fight each other.44

This reference to the trickster's two hands fighting each other immediately suggests a symbolism expressive of, as Michael Jackson might put it, the juxtaposition of two ideationally opposed categories.

The importance of Jung's and Kerenyi's discussions of the trickster figure will be highlighted a little later in this thesis when the questions are posed: what happens to the figure of the trickster in the controversial plays of contemporary China, and what

43 C.G. Jung, Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster, Great Britain: Ark Paperbacks, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 144. This work includes a slightly revised version of C.G. Jung's commentary on the Trickster from that in Radin, The Trickster.

44 C.G. Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure', (R.F.C. Hull transl.), in Paul Radin, The Trickster, p. 203 (emphasis added).
relationship have the victimised Kafkaesque characters of the play WM with the trickster and notions of inversion?

How does the figure of the trickster relate to concepts of inversion in traditional Chinese literature and drama? Perhaps this will become more clear if a specific example from the pre-modern period is chosen for some brief comment. And what better example than a literary work that has itself, time and again, become the subject of dramatisation from within the arenas of theatre and film to the travelling countryside puppet show, retaining its popularity all along.

\[ \text{Citations and references have been omitted for brevity.} \]
CHAPTER FOUR:

Burying the Climax at the Centre: Authorial Intention and Interpretive Dilemma.

The Great Sage Equal to Heaven: Sun Wukong the Monkey King

*Heaven does not make holiness, but holiness makes heaven.*

Trickster tales abound in China as elsewhere, and arguably the literary (and dramatic) character most closely associated with a capacity for trickery is also one of the most well known literary characters in Chinese literature. Found in the sixteenth century novel, *Xi You Ji* (*Journey to the West*), the tricksterish character known as Sun Wukong is now widely known in the West by the descriptive title "Monkey". The novel itself is a brilliant comic allegory of a journey towards Buddhist enlightenment, with the Tang monk Xuanzang (also known as Tripitaka) despatched on a long and dangerous quest to the Western Heaven to return with a collection of holy sutras to China. Xuanzang is to greater and lesser degrees "assisted" on this pilgrimage by the fabulous characters Sun Wukong (the former Monkey King) as well as "Pig" and "Friar Sand". From the moment of his entirely supernatural birth, Monkey evinces the three main characteristics associated with trickster figures described above:

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3 The *Xi You Ji* is attributed to one Wu Cheng'en (ca 1506-1582). The *Xi You Ji* has been popularised in English-speaking countries via Arthur Waley's abridged translation, for which he adopted the title *Monkey*, underscoring the central role of this character (cf. Arthur Waley, *Monkey*, Sydney: Unwin Books, 1942). However the Chinese title is more properly translated as "Journey to the West" (cf. W.J.F. Jenner (transl.), *Journey to the West*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, vols 1-3, 1984. Xuanzang is the monk's Buddhist name. Jenner refers to him by his title, 'Sanzang', as the monk is commonly referred to in literature.).
There was once a magic stone on the top of this mountain ... Ever since Creation began it had been receiving the truth of Heaven, the beauty of Earth, the essence of the sun and the splendour of the moon; and as it had been influenced by them for so long it had magic powers. It developed a magic womb, which burst open one day to produce a stone egg about the size of a ball. ... When the wind blew on this egg it turned into a stone monkey ... When (he) had learnt to crawl and walk, he bowed to each of the four quarters. As his eyes moved, two beams of golden light shot towards the Pole Star Palace and startled the Supreme Heavenly Sage, the Greatly Compassionate Jade Emperor of the Azure Vault of Heaven ... In his benevolence and mercy the Jade Emperor said, "Creatures down below are born of the essence of heaven and earth: there is nothing remarkable about him". 

Monkey is here described in terms of his outrageous birth and his entirely marginal characteristics. From the very beginning he displays a combination of "animal-human-divine" characteristics; a magical stone ape, his first act is to "bow" to the four quarters. He soon reveals himself as equally able to traverse the borders of heaven, the mundane world, and hell, while it also rapidly becomes apparent that his activities result in the injection of a new form of energy into the world which acts to invert the social domain, turning society on its head. Initially at least, Monkey appears very much unconcerned with the results of his activities, and indeed like the finaba in the Kuranko folktale, soon becomes a victim of them.

His notoriously iconoclastic outlook soon has Monkey attempting to overthrow heaven itself. In the process he rampages in trickster fashion through the cosmos initiating processes of inversion. Even managing to trip up the Patriarch of Tao, Monkey defeats all forces sent against him. Heaven, apparently, is in dire straits until, at the last moment, Monkey is himself "tricked" by Buddha.

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4 Jenner (transl.), Journey to the West, vol. 1, pp. 4-5.
Monkey is punished for his disorderly conduct by imprisonment in a mountain. Much later, he is placed under the tutelage of the monk Xuanzang, who is obliged to teach Monkey the moral ramifications of his actions. A poor student of morality, Monkey can for some time only be controlled by a golden band secured around his head which Xuanzang can tighten at will through magic spells. At defeating their enemies, though, Monkey proves extremely adept, learning how to master magical weapons and trick up enemy monsters along the way.

The 'true' and 'false' Monkeys

How useful are Kerenyi's and Jung's analyses of non-Chinese tricksters for our understanding of tricksters and inversion in Chinese literature? Some answers to this may be found by a closer examination of a section of the Xi You Ji.

Just prior to the start of Chapter 57, the scene has been set with Monkey succeeding in saving Xuanzang's life through stopping their small group being captured by bandits. Monkey has had his fill of yielding to his master the monk's desire for non-violence and slaughters most of the soon despairing bandits with a few whirls of his cudgel.

Xuanzang, sicken by Monkey's massacre, denounces and expels his guardian. He tightens the golden band around Monkey's head until Monkey is forced to flee in pain. Doubting he will be able to return to his own palace and monkey minions without losing face, and fairly certain of a frosty welcome from other quarters of heaven, Monkey decides to try again with Xuanzang and see if they can't put the incident behind them. But Xuanzang's only response is to continue tightening Monkey's headband, abusing him the while as a brutal murderer and macaque.5

5 A type of Monkey found in Northern China.
Highly indignant, Monkey takes his case to the Bodhisattva Guanyin's servant, Sudhana, who owes him a favour. However even here Sudhana finds against Monkey's wickedness. Scanning Xuanzang's future, though, the Bodhisattva becomes fearful for the monk's safety, and determines to go visit him with an order to re-accept Monkey's services.

But meanwhile a 'false' Monkey, an imposter of the true Sun Wukong, has strangely appeared, and arrives at Xuanzang's side. When Xuanzang "again" rebuts this imposter's offer of service, he strikes the lone monk and steals his baggage. Pig and Friar Sand soon return only to find their master wounded, and declaring how, "That evil macaque," whom he has mistaken for the real Monkey, "tried to murder me."

Friar Sand sets out on the long journey to Monkey's palace. Arriving, he finds the imposter making preparations to continue the pilgrimage to the West with even a fake set of companions identical in every detail to Xuanzang, Pig and Friar Sand himself. The friar flees to take word of "Monkey's" plot to Sudhana. Discovering Monkey (this time the real one) waiting with Sudhana, Friar Sand angrily denounces the false Monkey's crimes. Sudhana defends Wukong as the true Monkey, but just to be on the safe side dispatches Wukong to deal with the imposter.

On seeing the imposter, Monkey is outraged and launches an attack. But victory is not so easy. The false Monkey is equal to Wukong in every respect and, worse still for Wukong, it is now impossible for anyone to tell them apart. Fighting their way all along, they both present themselves to a series of immortals for a decisive judgement. Unfortunately none of these worthies dares to choose between them. Ultimately, both Monkeys petition the Tathagata Buddha for a decision. The latter, knowing all creatures and categories under the sky, instantly identifies the imposter as a "six-eared macaque", captures it, and explains how it has managed to look and sound just like Wukong.
Monkey is accepted back into the monk’s service. Pig announces he has killed the imposter pilgrims at Monkey’s palace and retrieved the stolen baggage. They saddle up their horses and continue their journey to the west.

"The Great Sage" as Trickster and Sage-Fool

Firstly, it may be noted that the very fact the main trickster in the Xi You Ji is a monkey and not some other creature says something of the kinds of traits tricksters may have in order to most easily bridge human-divine and human-animal categories. Jung, in his commentary on Radin’s Winnebago Trickster, mentions how he was struck by the reversal of the hierarchic order during carnival in the European medieval Church, and notes that:

Something of this contradictoriness also inheres in the medieval description of the devil as 'simia dei' (the ape of God), and in his characterization in folklore as the 'simpleton' who is 'fooled' or 'cheated'. A curious combination of typical trickster motifs can be found in the alchemical figure of Mercurius; for instance, his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of torture, and - last but not least - his approximation to the figure of a saviour. 6

Without stretching a point, perhaps similarities between Monkey and Jung's medieval trickster-devil can be made in that, for example, Monkey might be initially seen as a kind of mocking "ape of heaven" who rampages until he naively attempts to win a wager with Buddha. In this part of the story, which occurs early in the Xi You Ji, we also find Monkey indulging in a humorous act of 'drastic entertainment'. Monkey agrees to a bet with Buddha that he can jump out of Buddha’s hand. He makes a huge leap and, arriving at what he thinks to be one of the pillars at the end of the universe, scrawls

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some graffiti and pisses on it. At first the "simple" (and self-appointed "Great Sage") believes he has won the wager, but it becomes clear he has unwittingly allowed himself to be "fooled" by Buddha. The pillar turns out to be one of the Buddha's fingers. Monkey loses the wager.

It hardly needs re-emphasising that Monkey's nature is extraordinarily ambiguous (half-animal, half-divine) and furthermore becomes explicitly dual in the chapters outlined above. Like the other lesser tricksters Pig and Friar Sand, Monkey is a shape-shifter. In the majority of cases he uses his shape-shifting skill to trick fiends and enemies, saving Xuanzang from the dangers of the road as well as extricating Pig and Friar Sand from hot water. Through his being continually exposed to all kinds of torture, Monkey can also be seen as approximating a saviour figure (for Jung, a further characteristic of the trickster figure), the most impressive case being his wearing of the magic headband, which in Chapter 58 he voluntarily re-dons.

Secondly, according to Kerenyi and Jung, trickster figures undergo a kind of transformation or development. Kerenyi, it will be recalled, argues that in its original mythological framework, the trickster figure is characterised by its combination of cunning and stupid actions, while alternately within the folktale of the late archaic, this essential duality of the trickster's nature comes to be debased and simplified; its role has "worn out", witness the drastic entertainment of Aristophanes' The Frogs or the stupidity of Epimetheus compared with his brother Prometheus ("originally a single primitive being, sly and stupid at once").

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7 Cf. Angela Cheater's fascinating article on death ritual as political trickster in contemporary China; "Why .. is Mao's final resting place, as well as his memorial in Shaoshan, referred to as a 'memorial hall'? Has it perhaps to do with the ambiguity, in Chinese funerary custom, of permanent preservation of the flesh, as opposed to the bones? Is Mao, dead or alive, or ambiguously neither - the perfect joker defying normal classification, Monkey forever?!". A.P. Cheater, 'Death Ritual as Political Trickster in the People's Republic of China', in The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs, No. 26, July 1991, pp. 67-97 (pp. 86-87).

8 Kerenyi, Radin, The Trickster, p. 181.
Monkey's companion in pilgrimage, "the idiot" Pig can likely be viewed as, if not embodiment of, then at least related to, Kerenyi's concept of drastic entertainment, especially when Pig is juxtaposed with the more reserved, or refined, Friar Sand.

Jung also concludes that Radin's Winnebago Hero Cycle expresses a certain development of the trickster figure which he calls a type of "civilizing process"; "instead of acting in a brutal, savage, stupid and senseless fashion the trickster's behaviour towards the end of the cycle becomes quite useful and sensible ... one wonders what has happened to his earlier evil qualities."9

The survival and retelling of trickster myths, Jung's argument will be recalled, is an attempt to cope with an earlier, disorderly form of consciousness that albeit withdrawn, survives as a dark, autonomous element within the psyche. Warns Jung, "it soon becomes apparent that the shadow has not withdrawn into nothing (but can) reappear as a projection upon one's neighbour (when consequently) immediately there is created that world of primordial darkness where everything that is characteristic of the trickster can happen - even on the highest plane of civilization."10

The occasion for Monkey's expulsion from the monk Xuanzang's company is his "wicked" slaughter of the bandits. Hence a critical and doubtful situation emerges, and Xuanzang's labelling of Monkey as a brutal, murdering macaque provides the catalyst that opens the way for the arrival of a real macaque, that is, the false Sun Wukong. For Monkey's "civilizing process," as Jung might put it, to proceed, he must in effect engage in a desperate struggle with a projection of his own lower state of consciousness - with, in effect, his own self - and of course this deadlocked struggle becomes a

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9 Jung, in Radin, The Trickster, p. 206. Interestingly, Jung elsewhere implies that the description "evil", as it is used above, is perhaps an inadequate one; "Although the trickster is not really evil, he does the most atrocious things from sheer unconsciousness and unrelatedness".
10 Ibid. p. 206.
dramatic highlight of the novel as well as supporting brilliantly the rather obvious wider Buddhist allegory which sustains the story as a whole.

The portrayal of this physical struggle of Monkey's with his darker aspect goes perfectly to express both Kerenyi's and Jung's observations that tricksters in myth are figures essentially dualistic in nature. Jung finds in this characteristic the most profound expression of "unconsciousness".  

The situation of essential duality as described above can perhaps be seen to symbolise some form of interaction of "opposites", while the symbolism inherent in the two hands fighting each other might well suggest the juxtaposition of fundamentally opposed ideational categories. If this is the case, then according to the arguments outlined previously in this thesis, this form of intense struggle should produce a "climax at the centre" wherein the status of the antagonists is at least begun to be inverted. Is this the case in the Xi You Ji?

"Synthesis" or "The World Upside Down"?

_The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,_

_Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven._  

In Chapter 58 of the novel, Friar Sand has returned to an ordinary house wherein the family living there are waiting on their strange guests, Pig and Xuanzang. He brings news of the "two" Monkeys and admits to them that he cannot tell them apart. The story continues in this way:

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11 Recall Jung's comment above that, "He is so unconscious that his body is not a unity, and his two hands fight each other." Ibid, p. 203.
12 William Shakespeare, _Midsummer-Night's Dream_ (V.i,12)
As they were talking they were interrupted by a noisy quarrel in mid air, and when they rushed out to look they saw two Monkeys fighting. The sight made Pig's hands itch. "I'm going up to tell them apart", he said, and with that the splendid idiot leapt up into the air and shouted, "Stop yelling, brother, Pig's here."

"Hit the evil spirit," both Monkeys shouted, "hit the evil spirit." All this both horrified and delighted the family (and they) were now more generous with their food and tea than ever. Then they began to worry that if the fight between the two Sun the Novices turned nasty, heaven and earth might be turned upside down: it could be disastrous. ¹³

The poetic expression utilised here to express the possible results of the two Monkeys' struggle is that commonly described by the acronym WUD, meaning the "World Upside Down", and, as will be shown, is one of the most enduring and powerful images in literature. Nor is it likely to have been introduced coincidentally, as a mere literary image devoid of deeper symbolism, in this particular passage.

Despite Xuanzang's reassurances to the family head that, "There's no need to worry or alarm yourself ... when I made him submit and become my disciple he gave up evil and turned to good", he is only temporarily able to stop the struggle by invoking the headband-tightening spell. Both Monkeys appear equally in pain, and the kindly monk breaks off the spell, as he explains, before he has had the opportunity to tell them apart.

The symbolism in these chapters brilliantly reflects the intricate symbolism utilised in the work as a whole. To employ Jung's terminology, during Monkey's earlier, most unconscious stage he was so tricksterish he almost succeeded in overthrowing heaven (i.e., effecting an inversion of the cosmic social order). But ironically, through a trick by the Buddha he was foiled. Later, in Chapters 57 and 58, Monkey is forced by

Xuanzang to confront a crisis which he can only resolve by putting aside his "evil" (or, using Jung's term, his "unrelated unconscious". And it is here that the symbolism of the story as a whole comes to be directly focused.

It is in effect Xuanzang himself who initiates Monkey's crisis and struggle by his initial denouncement of Sun Wukong as an "evil macaque". The strange and sudden appearance of a "false" Monkey, which of course the reader later learns is in fact a true evil macaque, suggests Jung's argument that that dark world characteristic of the trickster may, during periods of psychic crisis, re-emerge from the deep unconscious to initiate all types of tricks and inversions.

Thus Monkey does battle here with the more unconscious aspect of his own self, with a macaque whose actions reflect perhaps Monkey's own initial character when earlier, as the Monkey King, he tried to overthrow heaven. The struggle between the two ideationally opposed Monkeys that ensues takes the form, to use Jackson's term, of an "unrealisable synthesis", which, as Xuanzang's host-observer becomes aware and explicitly states, is so powerful that the wild energy unleashed might mean the dispute can only be mediated at a cosmic level: by heaven and earth themselves undergoing an inversion.

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15 The term "wild energy" is Michael Jackson's, from his lectures on "Religion and Ritual" (cf. above). This wild energy associated with the activities of the trickster might be seen as a sub-category of the energy, or "power", which David Gutmann has argued is associated with animistic beliefs; "Power resides in all those agents which are not quite human, but which intrude into a human world . . . All primitive communities, while they have different ideas as to the particular sources of power, exist as islands in a sea of power that beats up on the shores of the known, comprehensible world but that stretches into the disquieting reaches of the unknown. Power gets into the mundane world, to sustain the self and the forms of nature, but it does not originate there; and the major task of the community is to ensure - through all of its cultural activities - a constant supply of the vital essence ... (It) is collected by those representatives of the community who can live on the borderline of sacred power, contain this power, refine power and disperse it into the community for collective purposes" (David Gutmann, 'The Subjective Politics of Power: the Dilemma of Postsuperego Man', in Social Research, vol. 40, (pp. 571-616), pp. 576-77). The point regarding "wild energy", of course, is that it is not "refined" by sorcerer, priest, hero or chief, and is therefore seen as having essentially ambiguous effects.
In the end, when all else has failed, this threat is avoided by recourse to perhaps the ultimate cosmic embodiment of ideational opposites, of duality and unity and the contradictions therein. The Tathagata Buddha is the agent of this "synthesis", immediately identifying the false Monkey as, in fact, a real evil macaque, whereupon the macaque is "captured" (i.e., the "projection" is "repressed") and Sun Wukong can continue his steps on the journey to a higher form of consciousness.

Hence, at the "climax at the centre" of these chapters of the Xi You Ji, as perhaps at the centre of the novel as an entire unit, the plot can be seen to revolve about the concept of things changing into their opposites. Later, it will be shown how this important theme is utilised by Sha Yexin et al in their play, The Imposter, wherein through a process of chiasmic inversion involving a "true" and "false" protagonist, the nature of a layer of cadres within the Chinese party-bureaucracy is revealed.

**Burying the Climax at the Centre: Ambiguity and Interpretive Dilemma**

*Impiety does not consist in destroying the gods of the crowd, but rather in ascribing to the gods the ideas of the crowd.*  

"You come from Lord Adam and Lady Eve", said Aslan. "And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth".  

Is it in fact true, as Welch suggests, that the task of understanding the meaning of a writing is never complete "until its formular aspects as well as its thought contents have been grasped?"  

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18 Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, pp. 11-12.
The two Tamburlaine plays by the Elizabethan playwright, Christopher Marlowe, fall well within the bounds of such a text. The plays, which can be regarded for analytical purposes as a unified whole, are notorious for the amount and intensity of critical conjecture they have inspired. Historically, a central problem for the Tamburlaine critic has been the extremely ambiguous relationship the central characters of the plays enjoy with the deities with which they align. Not only is the religious imagery within the plays eclectic and disparate, but it is often so richly entangled that when the critic attempts an unravelling the imagery contracts into something resembling a Gordian knot.

Moreover the characters themselves, and particularly the protagonist, Tamburlaine, often appear to combine conflicting, or ideationally opposed, personality traits. A further complication for the critic is that, in a strangely consistent fashion, what the audience is led to expect to occur within the development of the plays' action rarely in fact does occur. More often than not, the opposite result to the one expected is derived. Historically, these problems have led the critic into apparently endless channels of interpretive conjecture. Indeed, a more controversial play would be difficult to find.

Let us take, for example, a scene from the plays which has caused major interpretive confusion for critics of the Elizabethan drama. The scene begins with Tamburlaine, a lowly Scythian shepherd who by dint of his conquests has risen in status to control most of Asia, proudly proclaiming his invincibility to all. He has recently conquered a mighty Moslem army, which itself had just gained a stunning victory over a stronger army of Christians in the Holy Land. Tamburlaine has harnessed the Moslem monarchs

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19 The texts of the plays referred to below are from J.B. Steane (ed.), Christopher Marlowe, The Complete Plays, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1969, 1984. The plays, which may be regarded for analytical purposes as a unified whole.
to his chariot. He has overcome all his enemies. Now he is at the zenith of his powers; none can stand before his armies. Yet, ironically, before the close of the scene, Tamburlaine announces to his minion Techelles that he feels ill;

**Techelles:** What is it dares distemper Tamburlaine?

**Tamburlaine:** Something, Techelles, but I know not what...20

Within a short space of time, Tamburlaine the invincible succumbs to some strange, unknown illness, and dies, leaving incapable sons to hold, or extend, if they can, his empire. But before his sudden "distemper", Tamburlaine performs a small, gratuitous, yet in terms of the structure of the plays, extremely important act. He has just slaughtered "millions" of Moslem soldiers, and drowned a conquered city's inhabitants in a nearby lake. Now he determines to burn all of Mahomet's books, and this book-burning provides him an opportunity for a direct challenge to Mahomet:

**Tamburlaine:** Now, Mahomet, if thou have any power,

Come down thyself and work a miracle. 21

This, of course, Mahomet does not do. Or does he? For it is at the end of this scene, a matter of mere moments in stage time, that Tamburlaine suddenly, inexplicably, experiences the first symptoms of his fatal illness.

Not wishing to labour the point, it is obvious that as audience we are invited to fall into the trap of misinterpreting a highly ambiguous situation. Yet, as the analyses of various critics have shown there is no convincing interpretation of this scene which can be consistent with any overall interpretation of the action within the plays as a whole.

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Or is there? If we start from the premise that the playwright, Christopher Marlowe, was obliged, like his counterparts in contemporary China, within the "limits of the permissible" as defined by the sixteenth century English state, this might suggest that, in order to present his socio-political critique and have it performed, Marlowe would be obliged to utilise ambiguity-producing devices and structures within these plays.

Such a premise might certainly account for the tangle of religious affiliations professed by Tamburlaine and the other characters within the plays. It might also suggest a structural significance to the mysterious manner by which the characters' and the audience's expectations as to what will occur are consistently overturned.

**Expectations vanquished**

*The Lord maketh the earth ... waste, and turneth it upside down ... And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with the master ... The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard ... The Lord shall punish the host of the high ones ... and the kings of the earth upon the earth.*  

How can we avoid the interpretive traps laid for us by a playwright writing within the limits of the permissible, in this case, Christopher Marlowe? Possibly, by posing and emphasising the question, "What actually happens here?" That is, if we can momentarily suspend our often habitual inclination, as critics, to look for any "causes" of the events in the above scene (religious affiliations, etc), and instead direct our scrutiny towards the "effects" of the action, then, bearing in mind we are seeking structures which create ambiguity through the inversion of our expectations, we are able to observe a curious and recurring structural pattern within these scenes.

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Utilising and developing Michael Jackson's model for chiasmic inversion, we can describe the scene's action structurally through the diagram below:

**Expectation of Result Encouraged by Marlowe**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Period</th>
<th>Final Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Status</td>
<td>High Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamburlaine</td>
<td>Victorious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- at zenith of power, brindles monarchs. slays Moslems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Status</th>
<th>Low Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahomet</td>
<td>Vanquished</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- "pagan" god, inanimately represented,

"millions" of Turks killed

**Result of Action Concealed by Marlowe**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Period</th>
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<tr>
<td>High Status</td>
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<th>Low Status</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mahomet</td>
<td>Vanquished</td>
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</table>

The diagram illustrates the chiasmic inversion, showing the expected and actual outcomes对立.
It is important to note that the explanation of events above which can be derived from "resurfacing" the chiasmic structure is not a one-off occurrence. On the contrary, the chiasmic structure can be resurfaced throughout the plays, and particularly within the most ambiguous and interpretively difficult scenes.

A further fine example of utilisation of chiasmus by Marlowe can be observed within a series of scenes earlier in the play. The striking feature of these scenes, and the cause of much critical conjecture, is what is often thought to be their basic irrelevance to the development of the plays' overall action. Initially, at least, the scenes do promise the audience some relief from the tangle of religious affiliations previously proclaimed by Tamburlaine and others. The scenes do promise a simple combat between Sigismond (a Christian) and Orcanes (a Moslem).

**A Further Expectational Inversion**

*The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and the widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.*  

Consider the juxtaposition of these two characters, and how Marlowe plays with our expectations and sympathies. The Christian Sigismond is initially represented in quite a sympathetic light. His city is laid siege to, his forces are vastly outnumbered. Marlowe's English audience will probably tend to identify with Sigismond both culturally and as the likely underdog. However, within a very short space of time we find the situation has become reversed.

The majority of the Moslem forces depart while a tiny remnant maintains its position under a sworn treaty with the Christians. In the light of this development, it doesn't take Sigismond long to be persuaded his best interests lie in breaking the truce and attacking

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the pagans. The expectation that Marlowe now creates is that Sigismond will be victorious. Although, as audience, we perhaps feel some unease at Sigismond's easy oath-breaking, we are again referred to the fact that the Christian army now vastly outnumbers that of the Moslems. Our growing expectation of a Christian victory is then dramatically reinforced by the stoic acceptance of coming defeat by Orcanes, leader of the remnant Moslems, who, while raging against the perfidy of the Christians, proceeds to temporarily reverse his own religious affiliation:

```
Thou, Christ, that art esteem'd omnipotent,
if thou wilt prove thyself a perfect God,
... make the power I have left behind
(Too little to defend our guiltless lives)
Sufficient to discomfit and confound
The trustless force of those false Christians! 24
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Then, seemingly caught up within his own image of reversed religious affiliation, Orcanes goes on to see this reversal through to its logical conclusion:

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To arms, my lords! On Christ still let us cry:
If there be Christ, we shall have victory. (Exeunt.) 25
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The result of this battle, strangely, is that Orcanes is victorious and Sigismond dies rueing his oath-breaking, offering the audience his personal interpretation of the cause of the events; Christ's displacement by an Old testament God who thunders down vengeance upon "hateful perjury".26

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25 Ibid. part 2, act 2, sc. 2, ll. 63-64.
26 Ibid. part 2, act 2, sc. 3, l. 3.
However the real importance of this seemingly "irrelevant" scene-cluster is that the audience is left with an ever expanding, yet somehow always fundamentally unsatisfying, list of possible interpretations as to the cause of these events.

The audience might, for example, see Orcanes as ironically confirming his Moslem faith by calling upon Christ's aid prior to a battle he was certain he would lose. Alternatively, the less Machiavellian amongst the audience might see Orcanes as a more moral character than Sigismond and, judging Orcanes' moral worth as more important than his previously avouched religious affiliation, find his new orientation towards what we might think of as an essentially morally-spirited Christ (especially if they consider that Sigismond has mistaken a Jehovah for a Christ) in terms of a rather timely but still somewhat plausible conversion. Or again, it is quite possible, as J.B. Steane implies in his introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of the plays, that the audience might see Orcanes as praying to Christ-Mahomet, To quote Steane, "a sort of universal spirit".  

Whatever our reaction to these events, however, we will probably attempt to interpret the "causes" of this highly paradoxical situation. We will seek, somehow, to rationalise and justify what has occurred, for we have fallen rather neatly into the trap laid by a playwright who is presenting a controversial socio-critique within the "limits of the permissible". Once, however, we resurface the chiasmic structure in these scenes, we find very different channels of interpretation opening before us;

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27 Ibid., introduction.
Expectation of Result Encouraged by Marlowe

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<td>High Status</td>
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<td>Sigismond</td>
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<td>-Christian, larger army, expects victory</td>
<td>-Vanquished</td>
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<td>Orcanes</td>
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<td>-pagan, smaller army, expects defeat</td>
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Result of Action Concealed by Marlowe

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<td>Orcanes</td>
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We can see, then, how the action within these two scene clusters, the Sigismond versus Orcanes combat and the Tamburlaine versus Mahomet combat, are structural reflections of each other. The first scene cluster was likely cunningly inserted by the playwright in
order to prepare the ground for the second, more important, scene cluster depicting Tamburlaine's demise. Yet viewed from a stance that does not recognise the operation of chiasmic structures here, the events within both scene clusters appear ambiguous, strange, and perhaps ultimately uninterpretable.

If Marlowe was, as has been suggested, an atheist, he could have picked upon no better fashion of concealing his own stance while succeeding in "playing" with his audience's beliefs regarding the major recognised religions of his time. However to completely conceal his socio-critique would be, for an essentially subversive playwright, tantamount to failure. Does Marlowe, then, like a good mystery writer, leave at least one significant clue as to the structural key to the unlocking of his plays' essential meaning also lying about in the text?

Towards the close of the plays, we find Tamburlaine's warrior Usumcasane poetically describing the imaginative effects of the death of his lord:

To see the devils mount in angels' thrones,

And angels dive into the pools of hell!  

A perfect instance of poetic chiasmus. The ideational opposites are beautifully juxtaposed, the imagery powerfully reflecting the literal crossing-over or chiasmic process. The lines form the poetic centre of a speech richly imbued with images of inversion, beginning with, "Blush, heaven, to lose the honour of thy name./ To see thy

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28 Two days after Marlowe's death in a pub fight a document by one Richard Baines, titled, "A note containing the opinion of one Christopher Marly concerning his damnable judgement of religion, and scorn of God's word", was handed to the authorities. In the final paragraph is stated, "almost into every company he cometh he persuades men to Atheism, willing them not to be afeared of bugbears and hobgoblins, and utterly scorning both God and his ministers ... he saith likewise that he hath quoted a number of contrarieties out of the Scripture which he hath given to some great men who in convenient time shall be named". Thomas Kyd, another playwright under arrest at the time of Marlowe's death, also stated that Marlowe would "jest at the divine Scriptures, gibe at prayers, and strive in argument to frustrate and confute what hath been spoke or writ by prophets and such holy men" (Steane (ed.), *The Complete Plays*, introduction, pp. 12-14.

footstool set upon thy head" and closing with, "For, if he die, thy glory is displac'd./ Earth droops, and says that hell in heaven is plac'd".30

What is essentially being described by Usumcasane is a total inversion of the status quo, one that extends to a cosmic level and which rather neatly parallels the imaginative cosmic inversion referred to in the *Xi You Ji* when the true and false Sun Wukongs struggle for supremacy. At the same time, the imagery, in its almost graphic depiction of the crossing-over process, is easily as poetically memorable as the quite similar chiasm found in C.S. Lewis' *Prince Caspian*, quoted above. Writing on Tian Han's *Guan Hanqing*, Rudolf Wagner comments that:

> the craft of playwrights is the writing of plays and not the making of speeches ...
> Confined to the Procrustes bed of the official discourse, the playwright follows the internal and administrative coercion encoded in its language. Writing in his own medium, the rich variety of verbal and structural devices in drama allows for artistic statements about the complex issues which in any explicit form would be anathema.31

For the controversial playwright who ostensibly writes within the limits of the permissible, the "rich variety of verbal and structural devices in drama" must be utilised, at the same time, to both conceal and expose his socio-political critique. The problem for the critic, then, becomes that of how to elicit the structures which conceal the central terms of the drama, for it is these terms that compose the core of the

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30 *Ibid.* part 2, act 5, sc. 3, ll. 28-29 and ll. 40-41 respectively.
31 Rudolf G. Wagner, 'A Drama about Drama in a Dramatic Time', a paper presented at the Colloquium on Contemporary Chinese Drama and Theatre, 1949-1984, Oct. 15-19, 1984, Buffalo: State University of New York, p. 2 (My thanks to Rudolf Wagner for permission to quote from this draft paper).
playwright's critique, and therefore assume such importance that much of the rest of the text might be regarded as so much "bricolage".32

Chiasmus is an example of a useful tool which can bring out these central terms. Its significance as a tool, moreover, becomes greater when we are confronted by a text which is imbricated by discourses many steps removed from those which, within our own socio-political culture, we are more or less familiar. Thus a "sacred" text from antiquity may be subjected to our scrutiny and become the object of our linguistic analysis. Despite, however, even the best of meticulous translations, its central terms may escape us if the problem of the structure of the text itself is left unaddressed. In similar fashion, a sixteenth century Elizabethan drama, both historically and often culturally closer to the modern Western critic in terms of the discourses permeating it, may still present an interpretive puzzle if the problem of its structure is not addressed, especially if the Elizabethan playwright is intent upon concealing, at some depth, the central terms of his play.

Symbolic Inversion as a "Tool": The Potential for Disorder

It starts when you sink into his arms,

it ends with your arms in his sink. 33

What, primarily, is the function of these symbolic inversions? Is their basic function therapeutic in nature? Do they act as a sort of safety-valve for the relief of stress built up within rigidly hierarchical social systems? Certainly this view is the one historically put forward by anthropologists such as Gregory Bateson, whose conclusions derive from his study of cross-dressing rituals (and thus gender-role reversals) in a New

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33 A popular slogan from the women's liberation movement.
Guinea society.\textsuperscript{34} Alternatively, do such symbolic inversions and reversals also potentially involve something more? Might they not point to some potential for challenging the social status quo in some more concrete fashion?

Natalie Zemon Davis poses precisely this question in her paper, "Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe",\textsuperscript{35} wherein she traces the historical theme in art and literature of gender-role reversal, expressed in the portrayal of women doing "men's" work and acting out male social roles, as well as the political implications of what was specifically categorised as "female disorderliness". What was the basic justification for this categorisation? Certainly, men of "the lower orders" were categorised as much prone to disorderliness; in the form of riot and sedition:

But the defects of the males were thought to stem not so much from nature as from nurture: the ignorance with which they were reared, the brutish quality of life in the peasant's hut or artisan's shop, and their poverty, which led to envy.\textsuperscript{36}

The notion of female disorderliness, however, was justified through physiological categorisation:

As every physician knew in the sixteenth century, the female was composed of cold and wet humors (the male was hot and dry), and coldness and wetness meant a changeable, deceptive and tricky temperament. Her womb was like a hungry

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Cf. Bateson, The Naven.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid, p. 147.
\end{itemize}
animal; when not amply fed by sexual intercourse or reproduction, it was likely to wander about her body, overpowering her speech and senses ... 37

This categorisation of women as "naturally" prone to disorderliness, which established the relation of the "potentially disorderly wife" to her husband, fitted in well with the ruling class' need to ideologically express the general relationship of subordinates to superiors. Davis explains why this was so:

First, economic relations were still often perceived in the medieval way as a matter of service. Second, the nature of political rule and the newer problem of sovereignty were very much at issue. In the little world of the family, with its conspicuous tension between intimacy and power, the larger matters of political and social order could find ready symbolization. 38

Davis underlines the important role attributed to identity exchange within many of the political rural and urban movements by the lower classes in this period. The carnival ritual of mock criticism, for example, sometimes had the potential to develop into real rebellion:

In 1630 in Dijou (sic) ... Mere Folle and here Infanterire were part of an uprising in masquerade against royal tax officers. 39 Reminiscent of the nature, guises and marginal origins of trickster figures themselves, rebels and rioters would often describe themselves, or be described to the authorities by their supporters, as

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37 "The male", Davis concludes, "might suffer from restrained sexual juices too, but (as Doctor Francois Rabelais pointed out), he had the wit and will to control his fiery urges by work, wine or study. The woman just became hysterical." Ibid, pp. 147-148.

38 Ibid, p. 150.

39 Davis finds that "the donning of female clothes by men and the adopting of female titles for riots were surprisingly frequent in the early modern period. In many of the disturbances, the men were trying to protect traditional rights against change, in others, it was the rioters who were pressing for innovation". Ibid, p. 178.
"faires' who came from the mountains from time to time," or as "servants of the Queen of the Fairies. 40

Davis goes on to sum up the traditional viewpoint held by anthropologists concerning the primary function of ritual inversion and other rites or ceremonies of reversal:

They can clarify the structure in the process of reversing it. They can provide an expression of and a safety valve for conflicts within the system. They can correct and relieve the system when it becomes authoritarian. But, it is argued, they do not question the basis of the society itself. They can renew the system, but they cannot change it. 41

Davis, on the contrary, attempts to show that comic and festive inversion can serve to undermine as well as reinforce the status quo. The notion of the disorderly woman, she argues, could be used by women (and men) of the lower classes to establish sanctioned forms of protest within "a society that allowed the lower orders few formal means of protest". 42 Thus for women ensnared within patriarchal strictures, symbolic ritual inversion could open up the possibilities for a process of perhaps continuing and widening demands for reform as part of an ongoing struggle for emancipation.

In such cases inversion is also, therefore, an expression of political struggle wherein efforts are made not just to enjoy a festive, sanctioned ritual, a type of busman's holiday from rigidly hierarchicised social roles, but to change the basic distribution of power within the society. Symbolic inversion could be used as a tool to promote continued resistance to the existing order.

40 Ibid, pp. 178-79.
41 Ibid, p. 153
Of course the crux of the matter here is that symbolic, ritual inversion is essentially just that, symbolic only. In response to the question, "What are people?", General, in the play WM, cries out, "And I say we're a supply of bricks ... you can raise up the Great Wall with us, or build a chickencoop, it just depends on how they want to use us!" In other words, it depends on how such symbolism is intended to be utilised in reality. Thus the question addressed by Davis of whether symbolic inversion is essentially "corrective" or "reformist" (or might even perhaps include an intention to go beyond reforms within the existing system, replacing the system itself in a revolutionary fashion), while still being valid, also becomes an almost tautological one.

What, in the end, cannot be underestimated is the symbolic force such inversions may potentially offer during periods of social crisis, as either clarion calls for the overthrow of the social status quo, or as symbolic descriptions of a reversal or inversion of social status that has actually occurred in reality. Later it will be shown, in illustration of the former case, how a particular symbolic inversion utilised in the play WM and involving a deng (a type of stool) came to stand as an important symbol of a mass political movement in China during 1989.

Revealing the "True Nature" of Things

*Those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know.*

It is no surprise that the literary figure most identified with this process of chiasmic inversion, the trickster, may itself symbolise this process of juxtaposition it is seen to initiate. Recall Jung's comment that, "He is so unconscious of himself that his body is

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43 Cfr. Appendix, B.
not a unity, and his two hands fight each other".\textsuperscript{45} What is then made of these juxtapositions by way of interpretation depends very much on the particular socio-historical context, and of course on the subjective bent of the observer.

To clarify this point all that is necessary is to return a moment to Kerenyi's commentary on Radin's "Winnebago Hero Cycle". In dealing what he recognises as the "clever-stupid" paradox of the trickster, Kerenyi promotes his notion of drastic entertainment and the "worn-out god"; the clever Prometheus becomes the stupid Epimetheus, Aristophanes' \textit{Frogs} associates Dionysus with a crude scatology. Cleverness essentially "precedes" stupidity.

However in the same commentary Kerenyi also cites Nasreddin Hodja as a trickster figure par excellence, and poses the question, "Where does his cunning end and his stupidity begin?" His own response to this rhetorical question is that they, "go essentially together", but then we hear no more of this figure from Kerenyi, which is rather strange, since he is, as Kerenyi admits, so well known within many cultures; in China going under the name Afanti,\textsuperscript{46} and popularised in the West by Idries Shah under the name the Mulla Nasrudin. These tales are replete with reversals and inversions of meaning, which serve on the one hand to expose both many commonly-held beliefs as fallacious and the more labyrinthine philosophic arguments that are based upon irrational assumptions or imprecise definitions of terms as often, in their practical, logical consequences, simply silly.

At least as utilised within the Sufic tradition, the tales of this trickster figure may also, moreover, be perceived as serving to juxtapose ideationally opposed categories (such as those, indeed, of "stupid" and "cunning", or "sacred" and "profane", etc). However the way in which this juxtaposition is utilised (or rather, may be intended to be utilised) is

\textsuperscript{45} Jung, in Radin, \textit{The Trickster}, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{46} Cf. for example, the stories about 'Nasrdin Avanti' in Zhang Suzhu and Zhang Dayu (transl.), \textit{Folk Tales from China}, first series, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1957, pp. 117-47.
quite different from the way in which, for example, the Kuranko utilise the finaba trickster tale referred to above.

In many of the Nasrudin tales, ideationally opposed categories are juxtaposed and thereby exposed as often fundamentally contradictory "versions" of reality, the purpose being to lead the audience to a state where they effectively cancel or annihilate both ideational versions or categories in favour of a non-dualistic and therefore unified cosmic vision, after the manner, also, of the traditions of Taoist and Zen philosophic parables.

There is a shared process of inversion at work within the Kuranko and many of the Nasrudin tales. However it is clear that the intended effect of this process is different in each instance. The Kuranko tale takes already obvious, well-recognised contradictions (social status versus moral worth) and utilises inversion to "mediate" these. The Nasrudin tales (or at least many of them) take examples of accepted ways of thinking and juxtaposes these in order to "expose" their self-contradictory character. However each process of inversion, ultimately, serves to reveal the "true" identity or nature of the subject via the "climax at the centre".

The irony is, of course, that the essential meaning of the Nasrudin tales cannot easily be comprehended without this understanding that they are essentially "tools" to achieve a particular end. Just as Nasrudin appears as continually pestered by persons, from paupers to princes, asking him the "wrong" questions, similarly, the wrong question is often asked of these stories (e.g., "Where does Nasrudin's cunning end and his stupidity begin?") and the tales thereby may become essentially meaningless.

This is not to argue that Kerenyi's notions of the worn-out god and drastic entertainment are completely irrelevant to an understanding of the trickster. On the contrary, they may be especially useful. For it may be that the role of trickster figures that do occur within
drastic entertainment is precisely to initiate such inversions so as to highlight and expose a socially-given version of reality (one that, while perhaps still being generally accepted as dogma, has, in a sense, had its day) by juxtaposing this with a "new" version of reality. And this appears to be the case in, for example, Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine plays, wherein a babble of gods might be seen to be exposed as worn-out irrelevancies through their being chiasmically juxtaposed with each other and with the plays' characters.

The key point, however, is that an inversion itself necessitates the rise of something together with the corollary decline of something else. The trickster is the catalyst who often initiates this process, and may well himself symbolise the process in his very character to an extraordinary degree. But in order to understand the often "hidden meaning" of a particular inversion, it is essential to focus attention on just which category is suffering the decline and which is enjoying the rise in status. And it is this juxtaposition of categories that must be understood in order to bring to the surface the hidden meanings of the most politically subversive of playwrights, Chinese or otherwise, who utilise processes of inversion when writing within the limits of the permissible. For it is through this process as it operates within the text that the "true" nature of society, at least according to the understanding of the subversive playwright, may be explicated.

Political Polemics and Subversive Slogans

A Chinese cartoon from the year 1909 depends upon similar imagery and shares a similar symbolism with the "World Upside Down" pictures from the English Revolution as well as the portrait of the court jester, both reproduced above.

It is a simple matter to outline the chiasmic structure from which the cartoon derives its polemical power, i.e.,
The cartoon depicts "both the external and domestic visages" of the Qing government of the period. A smiling countenance (xiaorong) is presented to foreign countries. When the face is inverted, however, the happy expression changes to an angry one (nurong) once turned towards the domestic population.

While being able to be transposed into powerful visual imagery, chiasmic structures may also be found to occur in the realm of political slogans. Indeed, here chiasmus is often a superb vehicle for exposing the political climax at the center, or, literally, the "crux of the matter". In the following imagery, Roland Barthes, describing the "birth" of new discourses, nicely encapsulates the workings of chiasmic inversion under certain conditions of authorial intention.

A new discourse can only emerge as the paradox which goes against (and often goes for) the surrounding or preceding doxa, can only see the day as difference, distinction, working loose against what sticks to it. For example, Chomskyan theory is constructed against Bloomfieldian behaviourism; linguistic behaviourism once liquidated by Chomsky, it is then against Chomskyan mentalism (or anthropologism) that a new semiotics is being developed, while Chomsky himself, in quest of allies, is forced to jump over his immediate predecessors and go back as far as the Port Royal Grammar. But doubtless it is in one of the greatest thinkers of dialectics, Marx, that it would be most interesting to verify the undialectical nature of language: Marx's discourse is almost entirely paradoxical, the doxa being now Proudhon, now someone else, and so on. This twofold movement of separation and renewal results not in a circle but, according
to Vico's great and beautiful image, in a spiral and it is in this drift of circularity (of paradoxical form) that historical determinations are articulated. 47

Whether or not one agrees with Barthes' assertion here, this "twofold movement of separation and renewal" is quite apparent in Marx's most polemical works, where it is expressed through chiasmic inversion. Thus in Marx and Engels', *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in the section titled, "Proletarians and Communists", perhaps the following chiasmic passage, for example, might be seen to mirror Barthes' description:

In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour. In Communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer. 48

And again:

It has been objected that upon the abolition of private property all work will cease, and universal laziness will overtake us.

According to this, bourgeois society ought long ago to have gone to the dogs through sheer idleness; for those of its members who work, acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything, do not work. 49

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49 *Ibid*, pp. 66-67. Chiasmic lines seem to have a habit of continually reappearing elsewhere, as they both emphasise the central terms of an argument and order these terms in a highly memorable fashion. It isn't surprising, then, to find that this chiasm occurs in an introductory illustrated work about Marx (*cf.* Rius, *Marx for Beginners*, London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society Ltd, 1976, in association with Unwin Paperbacks, 1986, p. 118.
Or, from V.I. Lenin's, *State and Revolution*, the aphorism summing up the incompatibility of the existence of the state within the classless society of communism, that is, a simplification of Engels' description of the process of the withering away of the state during the transition from socialism to communism:

So long as the state exists, there is no freedom. When freedom exists, there will be no state.  

In the context of recent debates regarding issues of ecologically sustainable populations and immigration policy, comes one argument that:

Engels concluded that under capitalism the distribution of hunger in the population was not due to the abundance of the poor, but to the poor distribution of society's abundance.

These few examples notwithstanding, possibly nowhere else than in China, and at no other time than during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution does the association

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52 Other examples include 1. From the organisation Committees in Solidarity with Central America and the Carribean, "Peace in Central America, or Central America in Pieces" 2. From the Australian Aboriginal Land Rights movement, "Aboriginal land! Where my spirit belongs, where my soul longs to be!" 3. From a First World-based organisation encouraging community provision of aid to third world countries, "Live simply, so that all may simply live!" 4. A saying attributed to Joseph P. Kennedy advises that, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going", while his son, President John F. Kennedy's inauguration speech suggested, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.", and President George Bush selected this chiasm as a vehicle for summing up his attitude to a question often faced by warrior statesmen, "God is not on our side. We are on the side of God" (as related by a news announcer on Canberra Public Radio 2XX after the commencement of "Operation Desert Storm" in the Persian Gulf in 1991. President Bush was apparently addressing representatives of some of the main US religious organisations). 5. One chiastic comment on the role of the media holds that, "The duty of the media is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable (Anon, from, Arrest that Cartoonist, compiled by Mary-Lou Considine for Amnesty International Australia, Penguin Books, 1986, introduction). 6. One cigarette manufacturer's advertising jingle long centered on the proposition that, "You can take Salem out of the country but, you can't take the country out of Salem". 7. The hosts of the Australian radio comedy program, "This Sporting Life", coined this chiastic gem as a send up expressing their own particular notion of bad-taste advertising, "Buy Col Eager's muffins! The muffin for the man in
between political polemic and its explication in both visual and verbal imagery so jump to the ear and eye. As we shall see in the following chapter, it is an appreciation of the pervasive and deeply ingrained symbolism of inversion in contemporary China that is so important to our understanding of the central messages of Chinese playwrights working within the limits of the permissible ... and occasionally skating over the borderlines.

In this chapter, I will look briefly at some Chinese opera, specifically some "Model Operas" of the Cultural Revolution, in order to test an hypothesis that on identification and analysis of thematic structures within a drama text can enable us to clarify textual intentions at a structural level, and trace how those intentions came to be explained. Specifically, the Model Operas are related with Marxist dogma, often seen as the "backdrop", or, as Roland Barthes might have put it, the "orange peel", and against which, controversial dramatizations such as Witi Pene's indicate their anti-political critiques.

WelshRev

Welsh faced the specific problem of how to understand Chinese history without using Chinese interpretations could be produced, yet when the war ended in 1945, by itself brought the telephone not that much closer to an understanding of cultural imperialism. Pages of reference for adequate interpretation were taken expressly formed in almost instantaneous. Fundamentally, the question Welsh asks in "Can a culture of reference be discussed within the text literally? that it written a continuous flow of action, or the middle, or the muffin for the middle in the man" (The quote was broadcast on Radio 'Three Triple J', on November 14, 1992. The 'Col Eager' referred to is presumably a football referee).
"Turning Ghosts into People": some Model Operas.

The truth will make you free. And if you are killed because of it, may that death be welcome: Resurrection will also come because 'He who looks after his life will lose it and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.'

In this chapter, I will look briefly at some Chinese operas, specifically some "Model Operas" of the Cultural Revolution, in order to test an hypothesis that an identification and analysis of chiasmic structures within a drama text can enable us to clarify authorial intentions at a structural level, and trace how these intentions come to be explicated. Significantly, the Model Operas, so imbued with Maoist dogma, often exist as the "backdrop", or, as Roland Barthes might have put it, the preceding "doxa", from, and against which, controversial dramatists such as Wang Peigong articulate their socio-political critiques.

Welch Revisited

Welch faced the specific problem of how to understand ancient, often sacred, texts. Translations could be produced, yet often the act of translating by itself brought the translator not that much more closer to an understanding of authorial intention. Frames of reference, for adequate interpretation, were often extremely limited or almost non-existent. Fundamentally, the question Welch asks is, "Can a frame of reference be disclosed within the text itself?". That is, within a continuous flow of terms, or

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1 This quote, attributed to Father Alfonso Navarro (Salvadoran martyr), appeared on a Canberra poster advertising a "Candlelight vigil in commemoration of the assassination of the six Jesuits in El Salvador in November, 1989", sponsored by the Committee to Defend Human Rights in El Salvador, 1990.
"narrative", can we find a way to establish that some terms are in fact more important than others for our understanding of the text as an entire unit?

The response was to look for terms that were repeated within the finite set of the text-unit. If certain terms were found to be repeated, they assumed that some emphasis was placed by the author upon these particular terms. The more closely the repetition (geographically and/or as like-concepts), the more likely it was that these terms would be more basic to the author's construction of meaning within and through the text, that is, the text would more likely be constructed about these key terms.

Welch defines chiasmus as the process and structure most able to centrally organise like-terms, and thus most to able direct the reader's attention towards these terms. Chiasmus organises terms so that they are necessarily and directly reflected within the narrative. For example, a text-unit (narrative) may be found to consist of a set of repeated, reflected like-terms:

G F E D C B A A' B' C' D' E' F' G'

and, arranged into a two line chiasm:

G F E D C B A

A' B' C' D' E' F' G'.

Chiasmus, as noted, is based upon repetition of like-terms, within a directly reflective structure. However another example of like-term repetition, which is also a structural device for focusing reader or audience attention, exists in the form of "iteration", for example:
Simple repetition, on the other hand, can be described as below:

A B C D E F G
A B C D E F G
A B C D E F G

In the text of *Bai Mao Nu* (The White Haired Girl)² for example, simple repetition most often occurs in choral sections;

Xi'er:
I'll speak ...
But what's caused such a great change
That I can beard my enemy today?
Landlord Huang -
To be cut into pieces is too good for you!

All (sing):
To be cut into pieces is too good for you!
To be cut into pieces is too good for you!
To be cut into pieces is too good for you!³

² He Jingzhi and Ding Yi, *Bai Mao Nu*, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1954. *Bai Mao Nu* was a "Stalin Prize Opera" for 1951.
In the following section several works of Chinese drama will be analysed with a view to eliciting firstly, examples of iteration and secondly, examples of chiasmus from the dialogues. The relationship between these examples and any instances of chiasmus within the structure of the texts will then be explored. Finally, general conclusions as to authorial intention will be drawn.

**Building the "Climax at the Centre"**

_In bourgeois society, the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past._

4 Marx and Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, p. 65.

The first text for analysis is the libretto of an opera originally produced in Yan'an in 1945. The White Haired Girl, attributed to He Jingzhi and Ding Yi, was revised on numerous occasions during the late forties and early fifties. Below are two of the most clear and precise instances of iteration to be found in the text:

a.) 3 times 3 lines of iteration; Format: A A' B B' C C'

b.) 2 times 2 lines of iteration; Format: A B A' B'

In the first instance, protagonist Xi'er, the "White Haired Girl", sings to herself inside a village temple. For several years now, she has been hiding from her oppressors in a dark cave, and consequently her skin and hair colour have turned a deathly white. She has survived by venturing out by night to steal food from the altar of the local temple. She has had no idea, till now, that the villagers have in fact spied her activities and assumed she is a type of ghost or goddess.
Xi'er only realises this after she happens upon Landlord Huang and his henchmen in the temple vicinity. Huang, the village tyrant who had kidnapped, raped and attempted to murder her, is now terrified by her ghostly appearance and flees, screaming, "Ghost! Ghost!"

At first, Xi'er is horrified by the realisation that her appearance has been so altered by her sufferings. However, she soon adopts an opposite mode of thinking that accords with her ghostly status and new identity. Below, expressed and emphasised through poetic iteration, is the description of the lead-up to, followed by the act of adoption of, this new identity.

_Huang and Mu_ (flying in terror):
Help! ... Help! ... Ghosts! ... Ghosts! ...
(They rush off followed by Dasheng.) ...

Xi'er (halting in alarm and uncertainty):
Ghosts? Ghosts? (She looks around, then is silent for a moment.) Oh, you mean I'm a ghost? (She looks at her hair and clothes.) So, I don't look like a human being! (Her voice trembles with indignation and grief.) This is all your doing, Landlord Huang! You brought me to this! And you call me a ghost? ...
(Wind, rain and thunder are heard, and lightning flashes, as Xi'er sings.)
I'm Xi'er whom you ruined,
I'm not a ghost!
(Thunder crashes even closer.)
I've lived in a cave for more than three years,
Gritting my teeth for misery;
Hiding by day for fear folk see me,
While at night there are tigers and wolves;
I've only rags and leaves to wear,
Only temple offerings and berries to eat,
So my hair and skin have turned white!
(Accusingly):
I was brought up by parents too,
But now I've come to this pass!
It's all through you, Landlord Huang,
You brought me to this, yet now you call me
A ghost! All right -
I'm a ghost!
The ghost of someone cruelly killed!
The ghost of someone hounded to death!
I'm going to scratch and pinch you!
I'm going to bite you!
(Shrieks.)
(She rushes headlong into the storm.)

In example "b" some villagers are waiting for salvation (in the form of the Eighth Route Army) from Landlord Huang's oppression. The situation appears bad, as described by Hucu's lines below. These lines are followed by others wherein the term "Eighth Route Army" is repeated almost "ad nauseam".

Hucu (sings):
When the Guomindang troops fled from the market town,
There was cursing, conscripting, beating and looting!
And when the Japanese come, so they say,
There'll be burning, raping, shooting!  

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5 He Jingzhi and Ding Yi, Bai Mao Nu, act 4; sc. 1, pp. 69-70 (Yang and Yang (transl.), The White Haired Girl, p. 74).
6 Bai Mao Nu, act 4; sc. 2, pp. 71-2 (The White Haired Girl, p. 76).
Again, there are only two prominent examples of chiasmus in the text:

a.) Mu:
And the goddess said too - (Sings):
The Eighth Route Army won't last long,
It'll vanish like dew in the sun
When the sun comes out the dew disappears,
And the Eighth Route Army will soon be gone! 7

b.) All (sing):
Country folk, comrades, don't shed tears!
The old life forced men to turn into ghosts,
But the new life changes ghosts back into men,
It's saved our unhappy sister here!
The new life changes ghosts into men,
She's been restored to us again! 8

In The White Haired Girl, the most clear and striking examples of iteration occur in the libretto when:

a.) Xi'er turns herself into her "opposite", that is, into a ghost (i.e., "alive" -> "dead")

b.) the villagers are on the point of being rescued by the Eighth Route Army, that is, about to undergo a drastic change in status (i.e., "dead" -> "alive")

Again, the most clear and striking examples of chiasmus occur in the text in the libretto when:

7 Bai Mao Nu, act 5: sc. 1, pp. 80-1 (The White Haired Girl, p. 86).
8 Bai Mao Nu, act 5: sc. 3, p. 89; (The White Haired Girl, p. 94).
a.) the villagers are on the point of being liberated by the Eighth Route Army, that is, about to undergo a radical change in status (i.e., "dead" -> "alive")

b.) Xi'er turns herself, again, into her 'opposite', that is, from ghost into human (i.e., "dead" -> "alive")

Common to both iteration and chiasmus in *The White Haired Girl* is their occurrence when characters undergo a fundamental change in status. If we use Landlord Huang (here symbolic of the "old" society) as an example, status changes in these instances can be depicted graphically, as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Initial Period</th>
<th>Final Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Status</strong></td>
<td>Landlord Huang</td>
<td>Xi'er</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Status</strong></td>
<td>Xi'er</td>
<td>Landlord Huang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writes Colin Mackerras, "The moral of the opera is stated in the last scene but one: 'The old life forced men to turn into ghosts ... The new life changes ghosts into men'. The
The final scene shows Xi'er taking the lead in accusing the landlord of his crimes. The "point of chiasmus", of course, refers to the stage in the text where "things turn into their opposites", that is, it represents the intervention of the Eighth Route Army. As in Marlowe's Tamburlaine plays, the poetic chiasms do not necessarily occur at the exact textual point where such transformations could be said to occur. Rather, the poetic chiasms define what has already occurred and been explicated through the action of the play.

The above examples have shown that literary, or poetic chiasms exist within an early libretto of The White Haired Girl. These poetic chiasms describe a process of things turning into their opposites. It's interesting, then, that far fewer instances of poetic chiasms appear within the texts of the several Cultural Revolutionary Model Operas referred to below.

Yet, at a structural level, chiasms evidently do exist in these examples. The basic agenda of the plots of these Model Operas remains basically the same. In Hongdengji (The Red Lantern), Li Yuhe and his "daughter" Tiemei, with the aid of the Eighth Route Army, succeed in wiping out Hatoyama and his Japanese Gendarmes; in Zhign Weihn Shan (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy), Yang Zirong, with a little help from his PLA comrades, succeeds in wiping out the Guomindang-backed bandit "Vulture" and his "terribles"; in Shajiabang, Guo Jianguang, Sister Aqing et al succeed, with the aid

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of the peasants, in liberating their district from the Japanese colonel Kuroda and his puppet Hu Zhuangui. The list goes on ...

For example, in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the action of status inversion can again be described graphically as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Period</th>
<th>Final Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Status</td>
<td>High Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandits</td>
<td>PLA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Status</td>
<td>Low Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>Bandits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why, then, since there are evidently structural chiasms within the Model Opera texts, are there relatively fewer poetic chiasms?

The Importance of "Jiaoxin".

*We select our leaders purely on merit, on their demonstrated capacity to lead our disciplined party team. This flows from what Cannon called a proletarian attitude to the party - not thinking of what the party can do for you (which is the outlook of middle class careerists), but what you can do for the party. And gaining satisfaction from the achievements of our collective efforts.*

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13 John Percy, *A History of the Democratic Socialist Party: The First Two Decades*, Sydney: New Course Publications, 1990, from an unpublished DSP pamphlet, based on two talks presented by John Percy, DSP National Secretary, to the 13th National Conference of the DSP in January, 1990, p. 24. James P. Cannon was formerly National Secretary of the U.S. Socialist Workers' Party. This chiasm is evidence of the fact that even chiasms may come to be inverted. The chiasm is a rather neat inversion of
Poetic chiasms, as shown previously, exist simply to draw the reader's or audience's attention to the "central terms" of authorial intention. The Model Operas of the Cultural Revolution are primarily characterised by the fact that the central terms are, if anything, over-explicit. The audience is left with absolutely no doubt as to the authorial intention. The Model Operas tend to become so politically explicit through a process of editing and re-editing which is contingent on the development of, and changes within, the general and particular lines of the CCP leadership's policies.

In China itself the White Haired Girl was first adapted as a ballet in 1965 in Shanghai, where Jiang Qing who had for some time been trying, against opposition, to have such an idea accepted, enjoyed particularly strong influence. Certain changes have been made in the story for this ballet, designed to intensify the portrayal of class struggle and the heroism of the people. In the new version Xi'er's father does not commit suicide, an act which would run counter to the theme of struggle against oppression, but is murdered by the landlord's henchmen. Xi'er is not raped, for the revolutionary masses cannot submit to such treatment, and consequently bears no child. It is other forms of suffering in the mountains that cause her hair to go white. 14

Indeed, the text of the Model Opera, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, was edited several times at the behest of Jiang Qing in order to emphasise the revolutionary ardour and bravery of its hero, Yang Zirong. The scene where the hero shoots a tiger on his way up the mountain was to this end added to later versions of the text.15 Bearing this in mind, perhaps a more appropriate question to pose is, "how" are the poetic chiasms in the Model Opera texts missing? That is, how are the structural chiasms within the texts

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15Ibid.
explicated? What fulfils the function of the by and large "missing" poetic chiasms instead?

In *The White Haired Girl*, as we've seen, the structural "point of chiasmus" occurs at about the time of the Eighth Route Army's intervention. Prior to this time, the oppressed must adopt an attitude of *ren nai* (of putting up with their suffering). Otherwise they are murdered, commit suicide or take flight from their oppressors. Thus Xi'er, escaping from Landlord Huang's murderous intentions, runs and hides to a dark cave, where she remains for several years. Dachun, her boyfriend, flees from their village and eventually joins up with the Eighth Route Army. Later, the intervention of the Eighth Route Army turns pre-existing status on its head and the social order is, in political and moral terms, corrected.

In the Model Operas, however, the reaction of the oppressed is very different. In some cases (e.g., *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and *The Red Lantern*), it is the peasants who are oppressed. In another case (e.g., *Shajibang*), it is a detachment of the PLA that is oppressed, in that it is weakened by combat losses and pressed in from all sides by the enemy. What primarily characterises the reactions of the oppressed in the Model Operas is their determination to stay put and fight it out with the oppressors. They may in fact be killed, as in the cases of Li Yuhe and Granny Li in *The Red Lantern*, but they definitely "stay put". The next obvious question, then, is precisely "how" do they stay put?

In scene five of *Shajibang*, an Eighth Route Army detachment has approached the point of desperation. Diao Deyi, the commander of Kuroda's puppet army, is starving the detachment out of the marshes where they lie hidden after a battle with the Japanese Imperial Army. The atmosphere is tense, and, as so often in Elizabethan drama, nature reflects the subjective state of mind of the soldiers, "the sky is dark" and "a storm is brewing". The following exchange takes place between rank and file soldiers:
Liu: Comrades! What was that shooting from Shajiabang?

A Soldier: It means that there are enemy troops there, either Japanese or traitors.

Xiaohu: Then our people there are in for a hard time again.

Zhang: If the enemy is still in Shajiabang, we'll have to stay where we are for the time being. But we've run out of food and medicine. This is quite a problem.

(Guo enters, observes the mood of the soldiers.)

Xiaohu: Why did we come here anyway? Much better if we'd stayed in Shajiabang to fight the enemy! 16

Guo, their political instructor, then offers them solace and an inspiring speech:

Guo: Chairman Mao and the Party Central Committee guide us forward; Encouraged, we are keeping up the fight around this lake town. We must be patient and hold out among the reeds, Take the initiative and be flexible, So we can defeat a stronger foe. 17

The scene ends with a rousing chorus (with dance accompaniment) of the song, "We Must Be Like The Pine on the Summit of Mount Tai", with the soldiers standing, "in the teeth of the storm, steady and firm, forming a tableau of heroes". The scene following, of course, is entitled "The Rescue Plan". Things suddenly begin to look

16 Shajiabang, sc. 5; p. 25.
17 Ibid, sc. 5; p. 26.
brighter for the oppressed. New inspiration is found to continue the struggle and eventually win out.

In The Red Lantern, the situation appears darkest when Li Yuhe's family is about to be shot on Hatoyama's orders. They have been unable to send a secret code to the communist guerillas in the mountains. Li sings to his "daughter" Tiemei:

**Li:** People say that family love outweighs all else,
But class love is greater yet, I know.
A proletarian fights all his life for the people's liberation.
Making a home wherever I am,
I have lived in poverty all these years.
The red lantern is my only possession,
I entrust it to your safe keeping. 18

In the following scene Tiemei, having survived the firing squad that has killed Li and Granny Li, spies the red lantern and proclaims:

**Tiemei:** Granny, Dad, I know what you died for. I shall carry on the task you left unfinished and be the successor to the red lantern. 19

while the next scene again is entitled "Ambushing and Annihilating the Enemy", descriptive, of course, of the rapid way fortunes have changed.

In Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, on the other hand, the formula becomes slightly different. The unashamedly hyperbolic words and deeds of the proletarian hero and protagonist Yang Zirong preclude his being weakened or oppressed by anyone or

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18 Red Lantern, sc. 8; p. 36.
19 Ibid, sc. 9; p. 39.
anything (tigers included). Like the character Tamburlaine, he strides invincibly across the stage. However unlike Tamburlaine, he does not suffer a mysterious decline in status. Chiasmus operates in both plays, but operates very differently. Instead, the primary reason for this PLA detachment's inability to overcome "Vulture" and his bandits is a political one. The soldiers need the full support and co-operation of the villagers, but the villagers continue to be extremely cynical regarding the purported good intentions of any soldiers. Consequently, the following exchange ensues between the PLA detachment's Chief of Staff and an officer:

Zhong: It's really tough to do mass work here.

Chief of Staff: The villagers here don't understand us. They've been fooled before. Don't you remember - Howling Wolf tried to pass himself off as one of our scouts?

Zhong: I know that.

Chief of Staff: If we don't arouse the masses, Young Zhong, we won't be able to get a firm foothold and wipe out Vulture. On the other hand, unless we destroy the bandits, the masses won't be aroused.

Zhong: (smiles): I realise that.

Chief of Staff: Go and tell our men, we must be concerned about the welfare of the masses. We must explain our Party's policy patiently ... We've got to get things moving here by action. 20

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20 Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, sc. 7; p. 33.
They proceed to put this strategy into action, with the immediate result that Li Yongzhi, a railway worker and one of the most cynical of the villagers, is soon exclaiming:

**Li Yongzhi:** ... Dear brothers,

I shouldn't have taken friend for foe. I am ashamed beyond words...

Some said our suffering would go on and on.

Who would have believed an iron tree could blossom,

That we would at last live to see this day.

I'll go with the Party to wipe out those beasts,

Whatever the sacrifice and danger, be it fire or water,

When Tiger Mountain is being swept clean and free,

I, Yongzhi, in the front ranks will be. 21

Li's prophecy is soon fulfilled. If we examine the "turning points" in the actions of the Model Operas examined above, we can see a distinct pattern emerging:

1. In *Shajiabang*, the turning point rests on the solution to a quandary, i.e., should the soldiers, nearing the end of their tether, leave the marshes to go and fight it out with the Japanese army, or should they await further developments and orders from higher up?

Their political instructor Guo Jianguang encourages them to put their faith entirely in the Party apparatus ("Chairman Mao and the Party Central Committee guide us forward" 22).

21 Ibid, pp. 35-6.
Expressed politically the action of this Opera as a whole turns upon the key question of whether individual/small group action or Party/mass action is appropriate. The question is decided in favour of the latter, and soon enough the underground Party and villagers in Shajiabang market-town are resolving all problems.

2. In *The Red Lantern*, when things look their worst for Li Yuhe and his "family", the turning point of the action rests on the solution to a quandary, i.e., what should the members of Li Yuhe's family do; should they attempt to save their own lives by dealing with Hatoyama or should they refuse any dealings with the enemy?

Li Yuhe encourages his family to put their faith entirely in the revolution and the Party:

> People say that family love outweighs all else,
> But class love is greater yet, I know. 23

Expressed politically the action of this Opera as a whole, then, turns on the contradiction between preservation of the family line at all costs and revolutionary duty, self-sacrifice and total allegiance to the Party. Li and his family decide upon the latter course; even his daughter Tiemei, it is assumed, will not be spared a revolutionary's death. Ironically, of course, Tiemei is spared, and carries on Party work.

3. In *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the turning point of this Opera's action rests on the solution to a quandary; i.e., in the face of cynicism from the masses, should the PLA first militarily destroy the bandits in order to win mass support, or should they first set out to win the support of the masses through political work and only then move to destroy the bandits?

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It is hardly surprising to find the Chief of Staff expressing this turning point quandary through a poetic chiasm:

If we don't arouse the masses, Young Zhong, we won't be able to get a firm foothold and upset Vulture. On the other hand, unless we destroy the bandits, the masses won't be aroused. 24

Or, rearranged to more nicely reflect the A B B' A' structure of the terms in the above lines:

If we don't arouse the masses ... we won't be able to upset Vulture...

unless we destroy the bandits ... the masses won't be aroused.

The Chief of Staff, of course, determines to first politicise the masses about the role of the PLA through sticking rigidly to the "Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention".25 Soon enough, the cynical villagers have turned into optimistic supporters all.

In each of the above instances, therefore, the fundamental turning points in the Operas encompass a debate over the status of the Party and its line. In each instance, the debate is resolved through a decision to adhere to the Party line, or indeed to the notion of loyalty to the Party as a whole. In each instance, the characters undergo a process of jiaoxin or, as Kam Louie26 translates this term, "tendering one's heart" (to Chairman Mao, the Party, etc), whereby new inspiration and strength is found to overcome objective obstacles.

24 Shujiabang, p. .
New Ghosts, Old Dreams ...

Every Communist must grasp the truth, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun". Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to control the Party. Yet, having guns, we can create Party organizations, as witness the powerful Party organisations which the Eighth Route Army has created in northern China.\footnote{Mao Zedong, 'Problems of War and Strategy', November 6, 1938, in Selected Works of Mao Zedong, vol. 2, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, p. 224.}

Poetic chiasmus in the Model Operas is far less evident than in pre or post Cultural Revolutionary drama. Its poetic function is co-opted or usurped by the jiaoxin poetic device. In Chinese drama written in the pre-Cultural Revolution period, chiasmic structures within the texts served to emphasise certain central terms which describe a process finally portraying the "world turned upside down"; the old order's being replaced by the new revolutionary order. Here, structural chiasmus serves more to highlight questions of Maoist revolutionary strategy. Within the three Model Operas referred to above, these questions of fundamental strategy can be reduced, simply and distinctly to:

1. individual/small group action vis-a-vis Party/mass action

2. the preservation of the individual/family vis-a-vis personal sacrifice for the survival of the Party

3. politicising the masses in order to defeat the enemy vis-a-vis defeating the enemy in order to win the support of the masses
In each of these instances, the problem of what emphasis, or political weight, should be attributed to each of the choices is finally resolved for the reader/audience through the jiaoxin process. Although the Model Operas themselves have their historical setting in the pre-revolutionary period, their authorial intention, when viewed through our chiasmic lens, appears more relevant to the post-revolutionary period, i.e., the relationship between the Party and society is given more weight than is the relationship between society and the enemy invader. Their historical setting still very much depicts a revolutionary process, "world being turned upside down", however the central terms now emphasise above all else the requirement, when dealing with problematic situations, to be dutiful to the Party and recognise the correctness of the Party line.

In controversial plays written after 1979, again, structural chiasmus exists where authorial intention is to depict "the world being turned on its head". However the form this poetic explication takes points to the Party being accorded an entirely different status than in the examples referred to above. Indeed, the new generation of dramatists make free use of both the underlying structural chiasmus evident in pre-‘79 drama, and poetic chiasmus together with jiaoxin, to make far more complex comments about their socio-political environment.
"Subverting the Dramatic Agenda": some controversial post-Cultural Revolution plays.

In fact, if one had drawn up a list of those things for which Mao's China had once stood, and then played the child's game of "opposites" by writing down their antithesis beside them, one could have quite blindly arrived at a fairly accurate description of Deng's new China without the expense and effort of actually going there. ¹

Sha Yexin, Li Shoucheng and Yao Mingde's controversial and heretically satirical play, Jiaru Wo shi Zhende (The Imposter), was produced in August 1979 by the Shanghai People's Art Theatre.² The play shares with WM the premise that its protagonist, Li Xiaozhang, is an educated youth who has been sent down to a state farm in the countryside to teach and learn from the peasants.

Like the educated youths of WM, Li Xiaozhang is also bent on returning to urban life. At the start, however, he merely wants to obtain some theatre tickets for a production of Gogol's play, The Inspector General. While waiting in a queue at the theatre door he finds that all the unsold tickets are being held for patrons with privileged status; local party cadres and others of rank or influence. The inspiration comes to him to pose as the

son of a high-ranking party cadre and veteran of the revolution. In consummate trickster-like fashion, he achieves this by simply reversing his own name, becoming Zhang Xiaoli.

Li Xiaoazhang and Zhang Xiaoli

You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time. ³

Not only does this ruse enable him to obtain the tickets, but he finds his foot precariously placed on the first rung of a social ladder of privilege where he can use his newfound status to influence and manipulate a hierarchy of local party cadres into organising his return from the state farm. The play, as Perry Link comments, presents, "a basketload of cadres as so much overripe fruit nourished on the branches of bureaucratic hierarchy and the soil of a privilege-oriented mentality, juggled and manipulated in scene after scene by a saddened and cynical young picaro, until the circus of corruption and hypocrisy is finally quashed with the arrival, 'deus ex machina', of a leading cadre with social authority and personal integrity ".⁴

Link goes on to note that the play was inspired partly by a newspaper report of the arrest, earlier in 1979, of a privilege-seeking youth on charges of impersonating a high-ranking cadre. A result of its production was that for several months the script became an important document in Party-led discussions of what was to be considered responsible and permissible in literature.

³ Attributed to Abraham Lincoln in Alexander K. McClure Lincoln's Yarns and Stories (1904); also attributed to Phineas Barnum.
⁴ Perry Link (ed.), Stubborn Weeds, p. 199.
Official critics, who sometimes lauded the principle of hard-hitting social criticism, found its execution in 'What If I Really Were?' to be disturbingly unbalanced. The central action of the play was considered typical enough to be significant, but the context created for the action was too exaggerated to count as an accurate portrayal of Chinese society. Similarly, the play was too cavalier in its treatment of negatively portrayed cadres, reducing them to a mere parade of acquisitive clowns rather than distinguishing them as individual characters more fully representing varied aspects of social failure. 5

Like the later WM, this play presented the official critics with a serious conundrum. While some forms of literary social criticism in the years following the fall of the Gang of Four were allowed, indeed encouraged by the new Party leadership, The Imposter could readily be interpreted as portraying that massive layer of middle-ranking Party cadre in general as stained by privilege and corruption.

As Link points out, following the Cultural Revolution satire grew more pungent. A one act play performed in Shanghai, The Artillery Commander's Son, is a notable example wherein a group of young people reassert a more moral order by tricking "a hypocritical, social-climbing timeserver in the Party under the Gang of Four" who "attempts to steer his daughter into an alliance with the son of a high-level cadre at the expense of her desire to marry a common worker".6 The young people trick the cadre into allowing his daughter the spouse of her choice.

However the differences in terms of the political implications of a play which exposes a single cadre as a "rotten apple" as opposed to another which portrays an entire layer of cadres as a "basketload .... of overripe fruit" are fairly self evident. Yet The Imposter, it appears, was not immediately viewed by at least some of the official critics as being

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
entirely outside the bounds of the permissible. It was marginal. The process of status inversion unleashed by the trickster Li Xiaozhang is finally put an end to with the appearance, at the close of the play, of the high-ranking cadre Zhang senior, whose son Li Xiaozhang has impersonated.

The Importance of being "Zheng"

View but his picture in this tragic glass,
And then applaud his fortunes as you please.  

The social order is corrected. Or is it? On the one hand, Li Xiaozhang is arrested and put on trial. On the other hand, the final judgement is indeterminate. But how does this happen? Zhang senior volunteers to act as Li's defence counsel. He points to Li's guilt, but the corrupt cadres who fawned upon Li also earn a stern rebuke. Zhang senior then proposes that Li's punishment be mitigated.

The essential ambiguity of this non-conclusion might well point to a further level of inversion within the play, that of the playwrights' subversion of what might be termed the zheng role. Zhang senior oozes moral authority. He is characterised by his dealing with the problems which confront him from the standpoint of "uprightness", and such zheng characters have had a long and interesting history in Chinese drama.

It was during the Yuan period that divisions of subject and character in Chinese drama became fixed. The dramatic role which might be termed "the upright official" was also

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7 Marlowe, Tamburlaine (The Prologue), in J.B. Steane (ed.), The Complete Plays, p. 105.
crystallised. His purpose was to act as the spokesperson of the oppressed and to correct social injustice, thus alleviating the hardships of the common people.

This role has been popularly viewed to be exemplified by the character known as Judge Bao. In accordance with the zheng agendum, Judge Bao was straightforward, unbending, virtuous, honest, proper, unbiased and just. Indeed, as George Hayden notes, in the earlier Judge Bao plays his solemnity and almost over-powering dedication makes him, "an excellent 'straight man' to the clownish antics of courtroom attendants".

Zhang senior's act of volunteering himself for Li's defence counsel is crucial. It serves to set up the open-ended, or at least extremely ambiguous, finale, wherein an appeal is made for the members of the audience to act as Li Xiaozhang's judges. On the one hand, then, Zhang senior can be viewed as very much partaking of this zheng role. However within the context of the play's action, this role has come to be co-opted into the service of a swindler.

Instead of a scenario whereby Zhang senior places the weight of guilt upon Li (for example, using the time worn rationale that the perception of any flaw in the system does not give Li the right to further abuse that system), the implication comes to be that the system itself is so flawed that there exist mitigating circumstances for Li's abuse of it. The balance of guilt has subtly, but significantly, shifted away from Li.

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9 With the social dislocation of the Confucian literati to the ninth category of subjects under the Mongol rulership, popular drama came to be one of the most important mediums for the expression of social discontent. Cfr. Liu Jung-en, *Six Yuan Plays*, Great Britain: Penguin, 1972, introduction.
10 This dramatic character was based upon the historical figure of Bao Zheng (999-1062), of whom the Song Shi records; "Stern and impatient by nature, he hated the high-handedness of clerks and strove toward sincerity and generosity. He loathed evil, yet he was ever ready to apply good faith and sympathy. He would not toady to the opinion of others, nor would he try to please them with false words and manners", George A. Hayden, *Crime and Punishment in Medieval Chinese Drama: Three Judge Pao Plays*, Harvard: University Press, 1978, p. 18.
11 Ibid. Hayden notes, with some wonder that, "in the play, Selling Rice at Ch'en Cou", the Judge "actually makes a joke".
The official critic, unable to point to any definitive textual evidence that the message of the play is fundamentally anti-Party and "therefore" anti-socialist, must rely upon nit-picking, "Zhang senior was given inadequate attention, and Director Zheng was unduly despairing over the state of his farm". This is followed by broad condemnatory brushstrokes, wherein the political problem becomes overwhelmingly that of the protagonist's petit bourgeois individualism, "Currently there is quite a market for petit bourgeois thinking among a portion of the people ... while the vast majority of youth may belong to the worker class, many among them have been influenced by all kinds of petit bourgeois thinking or have never had their petit bourgeois thinking reformed".

More to the point, the protagonist's activities have successfully exposed the hypocrisies and corruption of the middle-ranking cadres to the point where the seriousness of his own crimes becomes relatively minor by comparison. The audience's sympathy for Li Xiaozhang's predicament and actions increases in inverse proportion to the extent which the corrupt authorities are exposed. Certainly, Zhang senior intervenes to correct the social order, but his intervention at the very end of the play might also be seen to be treated by the playwrights in an almost desultory fashion, when the chiasmic process has almost been completely played out.

**Chiasmus and the 'Guangming weiba'**

No definite conclusions as to Li Xiaozhang's political and moral worth need be drawn by the playwrights because the chiasmic process at work, by its own nature, builds up sympathy for the swindler Li Xiaozhang at the expense of the corrupt cadres. Indeed, the chiasmic process is utilised by the playwrights in order that they will not have to

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12 Ibid.
draw such conclusions in their text, and thereby lay themselves open to more serious charges by the official critics of political incorrectness.

The conclusion of the chiasmic process in *The Imposter* might be seen as somewhat similar in impact to the *guangming weiba* (bright finale) sometimes tacked onto the end of Chinese literary works of the late nineteen seventies and early eighties. To a devastating satirical work exposing the flaws of the socio-political system would be added, as a final touch, a denouement so manifestly unconvincing that, while the author would succeed in covering his own tail against official ire, the audience would be left in no doubt that the *guangming weiba* was by no means meant to be seen as the work's real message.

The two types of conclusion are interesting to compare, as both involve processes of expectational inversion. The 'bright finale' as a literary device often serves to invert audience expectations with the impact of a sledge-hammer. The rug of suspended disbelief is well and truly pulled out from beneath the plot and action. The literary work concludes with a jarring discord. Expectational inversion based upon chiasmic structures woven into the plot and action, on the other hand, serves to centralise the meaning of a play (or narrative, etc). The structure and plot of the play evolve in similar fashion to a symphony which builds through a sustained crescendo to its climax before culminating with a diminuendo. In the latter case, the diminuendo can complement the climax through sheer understatement. The climax, because it resonates through the diminuendo to the play's conclusion. The gradual trailing off of the diminuendo in turn underscores the central ambiguities of the play.

Perhaps more importantly, the chiasmic process produces a form of ambiguity which can directly reflect the ambiguities inherent in life itself as seen through the eyes of a dialectician. In plays like *The Imposter* and *WM* chiasmatically-produced ambiguities often better reflect and comment upon the Chinese regime's own fundamental political
nature and practices. However distorted and degenerated the regime's collective dialectical thinking and practices might be thought to be during a particular period, chiasmically-produced ambiguities are better suited to exposing and commenting upon any perceived rottenness or problematics of the system because they are better able to directly reflect, with many of its subtleties, the nature of the system itself.

Status Reversal Reflected in a Name Change

The Imposter is a controversial play wherein the process of chiasmic inversion underlying the rise in the status of the protagonist as opposed to the decline in status of the middle-ranking cadre is reflected in Li Xiaozhang's name-changing. As in the Kuranko folktale referred to in chapter three above, The Imposter describes a situation wherein the contradictions between the "status distinctions" and the "personal dispositions" of the characters are explicated in the narrative through the building of the narrative about a structural chiasm. Like the "finaba" of the Kuranko folktale, Li Xiaozhang becomes "a victim of his own activities", eventually standing trial for impersonation. Writes Link:

"What If I Really Were" ... was criticized for encouraging youth to sympathize with a deceitful impersonator, "a swindler". It is perfectly obvious that the message of this play is not to glorify deceit. The play's whole point, which could hardly be clearer or more colorfully portrayed, is to denounce deceit, bribery, sycophancy, and string-pulling - not of the impersonator, to be sure, but of the official circles he moves in. (The critics might be credited with considerable originality for pointing out a problem that the audience did not even notice until it was found to be the central problem of the work.) Yet viewed against its own goals, the critics' emphasis on the swindler was brilliant. It drew attention away from the sore point - the play's devastating portrayal of official corruption - and
The Imposter, therefore, comes to be situated in a politically grey area. It still partakes of the political discourse of "literature as social criticism" in the anti-Gang of Four period, whereby the Party's Zhang seniors emerge to reassert moral authority onto Cultural Revolutionary social chaos. One possible interpretation of the play's action might be that the Party is capable of being reformed, but only through the moral leadership of those near the apex of the Party hierarchy, who in turn must win back the faith of the masses.

However, the play also partakes of an entirely different anti-official political discourse whereby much broader conclusions as to the nature and extent of privilege and corruption may be drawn by the audience. As with several other controversial plays discussed in this thesis, the strategy of disrupting "time" itself, as Link shows, is also used to devastating effect, "The social problems depicted in the play are linked to the misrule of the Gang of Four, but it is also made clear that two years have passed since the Gang was toppled."

This careful identification of time clears the way for the inference that some problems are attributable either to the present leadership or to socialist society in general. Political critics were always quick to challenge works that did not associate social failures strongly enough with the Gang of Four, and it was probably for this reason that What If I Really Were?, despite its great fame in the People's Republic, was never published there except in restricted-circulation publications for cadres. It was performed in major cities, but not for the public except very briefly in Shanghai and Guangzhou. 15

14 Link, Stubborn Weeds, pp.16-17.
15 Ibid., p. 200
Dreams

It has been objected that upon the abolition of private property all work will cease, and universal laziness will overtake us. According to this, Bourgeois society ought long ago have gone to the dogs through sheer idleness; for those of its members who do work, acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything, do not work.  

Where the "subversive" playwright can most effectively intervene to inject a socio-political critique is in the engagement of the reader's/audience's conventional expectations as to what will ensue in the play's action, and subsequently overturning those expectations. This, again, is perhaps no more than recognising that no dramatic work is created within a vacuum historically separated from socio-political discourse.

The playwright who succeeds in presenting a socio-political critique, however, will have successfully "played" with these discourses by manipulating the conventional expectations such discourses produce for the audience. An example might be the audience that is "programmed" to expect in a drama a Sophoclean tragic "fall" would "naturally" find Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot a puzzling, perhaps even somewhat boring piece of theatre.

The subversive playwright will, then, tend to disrupt and invert dramatic conventions produced by prevailing socio-political discourses. Disruption will be achieved by inverting the result of a sequence of actions away from that which conventions would lead the reader/audience to expect. Paralleling this inversion, the movement in status of signifying objects will also tend away from what convention would have us expect. If we turn to WM, it is possible to sketch a clear example of this process at work.

16 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party. 1848, Moscow: Progress Publishers pp. 64-65. (Emphasis added to highlight the chiasm.)
The text of *WM* includes a number of references to dreams. For the critic, the very fact that references to dreams recur should perhaps set warning-bells ringing. Evidently the playwright accords this subject a particular emphasis. At the same time, it is the reiteration of terms which sometimes allows the critic to disclose hidden chiasmic structures.

We can look at a first example of chiasmus by returning to act one. It is just after new year's day of 1976, a year loaded with significance for the audience. The youths are huddled together for warmth in their ramshackle hut on a rural commune. After a day spent labouring in the fields, their only entertainment is their own conversation. The atmosphere is one of somewhat enforced camaraderie. Bitterness at the senselessness of their situation never lies far beneath the surface.

They have just gulped down their meagre rations. Waifling has just been obliged to substitute the editorial section of an unspecified newspaper for a sanitary napkin, since the latter are unobtainable. Sister Superior, meanwhile, muses over her own condition. Due to general poor conditions and ill-health, she hasn't had her period for three months. Waifling and Princess continue the dialogue:

*Waifling*: Listen to me. Just now I dreamed that my grandmother ... died. But her eyes were still following me.

*Princess*: It's on account of you missing your granny so much.

*Waifling*: You don't understand. While I was still at my mother's bosom, my father was vilified as a "Rightist". He died just afterwards. Mother ... left too ... They hung a sign on grandfather that read, "Reactionary Capitalist" and he dropped dead while being denounced and paraded through the streets ...
Grandmother and I were the only ones left. If there's any possibility at all that she really has ... [on the point of tears] ...

Princess: Hey, haven't you heard? What comes true is the opposite of what you dream.\(^{17}\)

In act two, this notion that dreams are the opposite or inverse of reality recurs. By the spring of 1978, the youths have been permitted to return to the city. Princess is berating her lover, General, for persisting in what she considers to be his futile hopes of a career, rising quickly through the ranks, in the People's Liberation Army. Such a career path, she reminds him, can only be made at the expense of his leaving her.

Princess: You're determined to fight for twenty years. Does that mean I'll have to wait twenty years for you? ... and all for the sake of some would-be "generalissimo's" daydream? \(^{18}\)

By the close of the play, of course, objective conditions have worked against the General's realising of his hopes; all avenues for his advancement within the PLA are blocked. Not only, moreover, must he confront the fact that he is destined to remain a common footsoldier, but he also learns he is to be retired from active duty after it's disclosed that a battle wound he had received will eventually make him blind:

General: "A general! A general ..." [He laughs] What a dream! ... But dreams are always just dreams! It's always the opposite of what you dream that comes true, right? [With quiet disappointment he continues] I'm going to become blind ... \(^{19}\)

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\(^{17}\) Compare with Appendix B.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
Dreams are the opposite of reality. Within the playwright's portrayal of an upside-down world, awareness of the true realities and limitations of daily existence involve the character's "crossing-over" to an inverted stance. The irony of the General's situation is, of course, deepened through his identification, in act one, with the one-eyed Duke Potchensky, a character from the Soviet film, "Lenin in October" (c.1938). Potchensky is portrayed as a White Russian who, on the eve of the success of the October Revolution, attempts to sabotage it from within. Like Oedipus, Wang Peigong's General is also forced to confront a more "true" version of reality only when his own sight is about to be lost. The process at work, in this instance a chiasmic inversion based upon the recurrence of references to dreams, is illustrated below:

**What is expected to happen**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Period</th>
<th>Final Period</th>
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<tr>
<td>High Status</td>
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<td>dreams</td>
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<td>Low Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>reality</td>
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Every aspect of the action that takes place during act one encourages an expectation on the part of the audience that the General will succeed in realizing his dream. He is represented as the natural leader of the youths. He appeals to the official party-appointed leader to expose and eradicate the strength of the youths. He is sought after by the most intelligent, capable, and experienced youths. He has a close relationship with Princess. He shows evident traits of physical and mental vitality. He has the greatest contribution in the different situations which appear to be important. He has political structures up to the death of Mao, but they decline in the General's body. The central point to make here concerns the status that the General has during the "Initial Period." Becoming a general in any context involves all that is made to the notion of "crossing-over."
What actually happens

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<td>High Status</td>
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<td>dreams</td>
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<td>Low Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>reality</td>
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</table>

Every aspect of the action that takes place during act one encourages an expectation on the part of the audience that the General will succeed in realising his dream. He is represented as the natural leader of the youths (in contrast to the official, Party-appointed leader, Pushcart). He is physically and emotionally the strongest of the youths. He is sought after by the most vivacious, outspoken and apparently beautiful woman of the group. He evinces a commitment to an army career which will over-ride his relationship with Princess. He shows concern for the weaker members of the group and metes out what retribution is possible to a bullying Brigade-leader. In short, General shares in the conventional set of attributes which, according to the socio-political discourses up to the death of Mao, largely defined the character of the "hero". But more of this later.

The central point to make here concerns the status that the General accords to dreams during the "Initial Period". Becoming a general in reality epitomises for this character all that is basic to the notion of "transforming the dream into reality" as this finds expression in the socio-political discourses of the historical period in which the action is set, that is, that the effecting of "revolutionary" change by subjective means, through personal and collective struggle and development, should be emphasised over and
above the effecting of revolutionary change through defining and planning in accordance with the limitations of objective conditions.

The Great Wall

*I have always felt hemmed in on all sides by the Great Wall; that wall of ancient bricks which is constantly being reinforced. The old and the new conspire to confine us all.

When will we stop adding new bricks to the Wall?

The Great Wall of China: a wonder and a curse?20

*Humanity will be you,

and you,

will be humanity. 21

The centrality of this dialectic within the playwright's socio-political critique is reinforced when references to another reiterated term are examined through a chiasmic lens: that is, references to the "Great Wall".

Towards the close of act one the youths in their hut discuss the question of the relationship between the individual and society. Each of the youths offers a different response to this question. For example, Waifling's response is that individuals can be likened to pitiful little pebbles. This response inversely reflects a line shortly to be

21 These chiasmic lines form the final words of the poem, 'The Rights of Man', by Ling Bing. The poem appeared in the magazine 'Science, Democracy and Law', No. 9, p. 8. The translation is from David G.S. Goodman, Beijing Street Voices: the poetry and politics of China's democracy movement, London and Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981, p. 151. The book is a collection of unofficial political literature from the period November, 1978 to April, 1979. Goodman notes that the poet's name is a pseudonym for 'Icicle'.
proclaimed by the Drummerwoman, "As long as there shall be stones, the seeds of fire will not die". 22

But last of all these responses, and assuming a certain authority, comes the General’s considered reply, "And I say we’re a supply of bricks ... you can raise the Great Wall with us, or build a chicken-coop, it just depends on how they want to use us". 23

According to Maurice Meisner, in 1965 Mao posed the rhetorical question, "Is Communism only the piling of brick upon brick?" Meisner argues that Mao’s question is located in terms which reiterate "the role of man's subjective will and efforts", a point argued for by Mao for which he was posthumously criticised in June, 1981. 24 The playwright himself has this to say;

Waifling's answer [to the question, 'What is humanity?'] is a very common one. For many years the youths have been educated in preparation for viewing themselves as 'little stones'. For instance in the play they also say, 'We are all small pieces of brick. We could be used for building up the Great Wall, or a pigsty, 25 depending upon where we're put'. Such ideas were promoted even before the Cultural Revolution. As a child I was taught such ideas too. There was the phrase, 'Revolutionary soldiers are like bricks. They can be laid anywhere they're needed ... The idea views people as non-humans. 'What are people?'. They should be little stones. They can be used to pave roads. They should be prepared to become paving stones. This expression may have been first used by Kang Sheng.

22 Ibid. p. The quote, slightly modified in Wang Peigong’s text, is taken from Lu Xun, "Ti wei ding" cao, (9), "Qiu jie ting zawen", er ji.
23 Cf. Appendix B.
25 Wang Peigong changes his "chicken-coop" allusion in the text of his play to a "pigsty" in the interview. The point of the allusion, of course, remains the same.
'View yourself as a little paving stone; let the wheels of revolution roll over your body'. Mao Zedong might have said something similar.26

This juxtaposition in the text of the Great Wall with an ideational antithesis, the chicken-coop, leads us to the expectation that the status accorded here to the Great Wall as a signifying concept is very high. Further, in asserting that individuals are not simply building-bricks the General's comment here reinforces, by taking the image to an extreme, the role of humanity's subjective will and efforts.

By act four, however, the status of the Great Wall within the play has come to be inverted. Big Head, who by this stage is making money hand-over-fist in a garments factory venture, rails at his erstwhile friend Pushcart who is now an up-and-coming but still financially insecure Party bureaucrat,

Big Head: What do you mean? That I've only an eye for profits, is that it? Your eminence! I bought some government reserve notes. As soon as I'd bought four or five thousand, I was obliged to make a ten thousand "yuan" donation for repairs to the Great Wall! So I ask you, Departmental Director ...

Pushcart: Assistant Director!

Big Head: How much did our Assistant Director-graded cadre contribute? 27

Pushcart evades the question by changing the topic of conversation. But in the meantime the status of the Great Wall has been inverted from high to low. It is no longer built through the voluntary employment of "the subjective will and efforts" of the Chinese people, but instead involuntarily, through the Party's "extortion" (according

26 Cf. Appendix B.
27 Ibid.
to Big Head) of funds from China's "nouveaux riches". The inversion of status can be described by bringing out the chiasmic structure as below;

The Expectation according to Dogma

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<th>Initial Period</th>
<th>Final Period</th>
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<tr>
<td>High Status</td>
<td>High Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary building — of Great Wall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Status</td>
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<td>Involuntary building — of Great Wall</td>
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The Result according to Reality

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<th>Initial Period</th>
<th>Final Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Status</td>
<td>High Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary Building of Great Wall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Status</td>
<td>Low Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary Building of Great Wall</td>
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To the Beat of a Different Drum

In the above section I have taken two examples of term reiteration from the WM text and shown how these constitute the tips of chiasmic icebergs lying for the most part submerged within the text. According to the analysis of chiasmus I have developed, an examination of these chiasmic structures will disclose the central terms of the playwright's socio-political critique.

Both the terms "dreams" and "great wall", as these are constituted within the text, become expressions of political discourses based on a particular version of "reality". The official version of reality emphasises the role of the will and efforts of the subject; General's dream of an army career that will see him promoted from the non-commissioned ranks to becoming an officer reflects, initially, the higher status this character affords his subjective will and efforts over and above growing obstacles. He does not, initially, consider whether or not it is objectively likely that he could become an officer.

In the same fashion, the building of the Great Wall (and the socio-political implications that this notion symbolises) is initially seen by General as possible primarily through the subjective spirit and toil of the Chinese people. This idea, derived from dogma and initially accorded a high status, might be summed up neatly by a line from "March of the Volunteers", the Chinese national anthem; "Let us use our flesh and blood to build a new Great Wall". General affords comparatively low status to the notion (and version of reality this notion entails), that within Deng's changing China, such feats of sheer human struggle belong to a bygone period, and may no longer be a priority.

In order to test this hypothesis let us return to act four of WM. The General has reappeared after a length absence to discover his friends discussing their individual gains made and setbacks suffered in the drastically new China of Deng Xiaoping.
Princess is on the verge of becoming a famous, not to mention very wealthy, artist. Sister Superior is preparing for postgraduate studies overseas. Hatoyama has become an up-and-coming television-film director. Waifling has discovered financial security (if not requited love) as Big Head’s spouse. The youths are living in a very different China to that reflected in their collective-hut existence described in act one. Now, the prevailing atmosphere is one of "individualism", neatly reflected in the dialogue between Big Head and Pushcart quoted above.

Into this scene strides General. He is angered and dismayed by his recent involuntary discharge from the PLA on account of his combat wound. In fact, the discharge was prompted by a letter purportedly from his supposed "fiancée" (secretly written by Sister Superior, calling for his discharge on medical grounds). Suspecting one of his friends to be the culprit, General angrily denounces this interference and, against all their remonstrations, declares his determination to continue with his army career ... to somehow make what he calls his "contribution",

**General**: I want to be a soldier ...

{His friends become angry.}

**Big Head**: What sort of soldier do you think you'll make, with one eye?!

**Waifling**: Are you crazy!?

**Pushcart**: You should face up to reality!

**Hatoyama**: You really are pig-headed!

**Princess**: Why is it you feel so strongly about staying a soldier?
General: [Anxiously] I'm addicted to it, O.K.? ... None of you have seen how, in battle, your comrades fall around you! You couldn't understand! ... It's true, I'll never make general ... but then how many from the ranks really do make it? And if it turns out, however, that I don't become completely blind, I can still finish going down this particular road! It doesn't matter what you think of me. I feel content with myself! People should always retain a little spirit, must always make some kind of contribution, must leave at least something of themselves behind while still alive. Without these anchors, I'd live terrified that one day I'd find myself unable to go on! Don't try to coerce me! We shouldn't compel one another, all right? 28

In this short speech, General summarises the version of reality which he consistently stands for throughout the play. Laden with values that stem from the idea that individuals can only realise their full worth and potential through collective activity, an idea reinforced through the propaganda of the Cultural Revolution, this version of reality supported by the General is fundamentally ideationally opposed to that "other" version and its corresponding values of individualism arising in the post-Cultural Revolution period.

An "Out of Season" Protagonist

"Times change, and we change with the times." 29

Says Wang Peigong of this character:

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28 Ibid.
29 A quip by the character Sir Humphrey Appleby in a program of the humorous B.C.C. television series, "Yes, Prime Minister". The line is ironic, as Sir Humphrey proceeds to successfully defend the status quo of the old civil service order against the reforming initiatives of the naive and opportunistic Prime Minister.
Someone once opined that my play reveals an approach of de-heroisation. I don't think so. I think I just want to show "naked" persons. But there is one exception as far as the characters are concerned - General. Certainly this character has provoked different interpretations. One person has declared, "The only hero in *WM* is a blind man", while another has asked, "Why has the author allowed this character to become blind?" Does it mean that to join the PLA is an act of blindness? Yet another has thought this character a failure because General is above and beyond reality, while the other characters appear as more "flesh and blood" types. Another has thought that I, as a PLA man too, must identify with General. 30

I think in fact he is not a character. He is the author; my eyes and mind. He is the first character to appear in the play. Every episode is introduced with his thoughts or recollections. He is only a reference, something that others can be compared with. He is not my ideal figure, not my ideal. I've used him to introduce the others and to analyse them ... Why did I make him blind and still have him return to the PLA? I feel that is his ascension to a higher state of awareness. So he gets something out of life too. 31

General is not at all at home in post-Cultural Revolutionary China. The driving force of his existence is his expressed desire to still make a "contribution". By 1984, however, the Great Wall has become a symbol that the new China is no longer being built through "flesh and blood", but through financial contributions. Still marching to the beat of a different drum, one now historically passe, General is increasingly out of time and out of place, and would retreat, if only he could, to his "mountain-top" and surviving comrades-in-arms.

30 *Cf. Appendix A.*
Has Wang Peigong constructed General as a trickster figure? General might possibly be seen as approaching a type of "saviour" figure (he is willing to lie down his life for his country). As well, he suffers the consequences of his own actions (the others learn he is going blind). Indeed his reappearance, at the close of act four, initiates some rather drastic inversions in the outlooks of his friends, who now see their own problems as quite petty by comparison. However it is not General who really initiates the more important chiasmic inversions in the play. It is more likely, therefore, that Wang Peigong has constructed General along similar lines to those which Shakespeare constructed his protagonist Othello.

According to one interpretation of Othello, Shakespeare constructed an heroic protagonist by drawing upon traditional ideas of heroism relevant to English society of the 1580s. He then located his protagonist on a stage set in the early seventeenth century. Othello, a sincere, high-minded and noble figure thus came to share the stage with characters of a very different type; ignoble, manipulative and insincere. This juxtaposition allowed Shakespeare to portray his protagonist as a sympathetic figure. But at the same time the audience's sympathy for him is undercut by Othello's completely bizarre and hyperbolic character, actions and speech. Othello's habit of hyperbole, it might be argued, allows his character to have more in common with Marlowe's Tamburlaine (thus expressing, stylistically, "worn out" notions of the hero), than with Iago and the others.32 Beside the all too mundane, the too "real" Iago, Othello becomes a fundamentally unbelievable figure. As he is a man truly out of season,

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32 Leo Kirschbaum argues that Marlowe's Tamburlaine character, on the other hand, is representative of an emerging post feudal Machiavellian model, standing for "the absolute dependence of the individual ruler on his own abilities ... The medieval concept of the body politic as the mystical body of Christ was completely antithetical to Machiavelli's concept of the state". In short, "the medieval class system was breaking down", giving way to emerging "capitalism", and therein "a whole new class of nobles whose loyalty was founded securely on economic grounds". Tamburlaine, like the merchant adventurer Drake, sees "no limit to the amount of gold or territory to be won" (Leo Kirschbaum (ed.), The Plays of Christopher Marlowe, Cleveland: Meridian Books, The World Publishing Company, 1962, pp. 30-33).
Othello's heroic attributes, indeed the very discourse upon which his heroic image had been constructed, come, in short, to be debunked.  

A consequence of this characterisation comes to underscore the essential tragedy of characters such as Othello and General. Neither protagonist is capable of perceiving, until too late, that the particular version of reality of which they partake isn't shared by the characters around them. In presenting a subversive socio-political critique, the usefulness of the construction of such protagonists by the playwright cannot be overestimated. Simply by posing a different version of reality, the playwright can bring into focus problems inherent within existing social structures, while such clarification can potentially lead to the audience's overturning of certain accepted and prevailing dogmas. 

In *The Imposter*, playwrights Sha Yexin, Li Shoucheng and Yao Mingde have constructed a play wherein not merely the protagonist Li Xiaozhang, but the entire action and the play itself is officially "out of season". As noted above, the action of the play takes place two years after the fall of the Gang of Four. The inference is that not all the blame for post 1976 corruption and privilege within the Party can be laid at their feet. And if not, at whose feet should the blame be laid?

**WM**, on the other hand, is a play the four acts of which follow the seasons from winter to spring, with lapses of several years in between each of them. Playwright Wang

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33 From the lecture notes of Dr John Gillies, for the course Shakespearean Drama, 1986, at the English Department of the Australian National University.

34 Vladimir Mayakovsky appears to have followed a similar strategy in his brilliant work of dissent drama, *The Bedbug*. The protagonist, an ex-Party member, is a figure sharing some of the characteristics of Pushcart Prisypkin's earthy proletarian background ensures his high "official" status in the early scenes of the play, set around the year 1931. One day, however, he miraculously awakes to find himself in the ideal, futuristic Soviet society of 1976, wherein his every word and action is made to appear ludicrous. Through this technique of relocating Prisypkin in time, Mayakovsky produced perhaps the most biting contemporary satire of Soviet society up to that point in the development of Soviet drama. Cf. Vladimir Mayakovsky, *The Bedbug* in, Michael Glenny (ed.), *The Golden Age of Soviet Theatre*, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1966, 1981, pp. 35-81.
Peigong takes an approach in which he constructs an "out of season" protagonist. While Wang Peigong's treatment of "time" in *WM* is entirely different from that of the authors of *The Imposter*, it can similarly be viewed as a strategy for producing a subversive socio-political critique.

The "out of season" protagonist, or entire play, however, is merely one technique or "rusty old weapon", available to the subversive playwright. Other strategies, which may again utilise chiasmic inversion in a systematic manner, are described in the section following.

"Where is the Road which will Lead Out of Here?"

Of all the themes that have emerged from the best known controversial Chinese drama in the eighties, perhaps the most important for the critic are the inter-related themes of "impasse" and "cyclical return".

By impasse is meant here an impassable road or way, a blind alley or cul-de-sac" as well as a predicament affording no obvious escape. By cyclical return is meant the period of time during which something becomes established, reaches a peak, and declines as well as the complete course of operations or events returning upon itself and restoring the original state; reversion or restoration.

Two questions asked here of some selected recent and controversial *huaju* are, "How are these two themes explicated in very particular instances?" and "What general implications arise and conclusions can we draw from such an examination?"

I have suggested that the two themes of impasse and cyclical return are inter-related. In order to discover precisely how they are so, the following section will first consider some of the more obvious, concrete examples of each of these themes.
Examples of Impasse

The world is a perpetual caricature of itself; at every moment it is the mockery and the contradiction of what it is pretending to be.  

Discover the truth through practice, and again through practice verify and develop the truth.

Tao Jun, a Shanghai university student, wrote the dramatic skit, Raodao er xing (The Detour), in 1985. The skit was part of a larger revue entitled Mofang (Rubik's Cube). Although not banned, the official critics "strove to ignore it". Despite this, the play "attracted large audiences in Peking and Shanghai in late 1985 and early 1986". The programme notes explain the play's title:

The fifty-four coloured squares of a Rubik's Cube represent the infinite changes of the world; twisting, turning ...

"It is said that there are one hundred million ways to solve the puzzle of the cube, and everyone must look for their own solution; searching, seeking ..."

In The Detour, the stage represents a place where a muddy track lies near to a "bright and sunny highway". Both routes lead to the same destination. A stage "Compere" explains to the audience that:

35 Douglas (ed.), Forty Thousand Quotations, p.939. The quote is from George Santayana, Soliliques in England, "Dickens".
38 Barne and Minford (eds.), Seeds of Fire, p.38.
39 Ibid.
The world is presently full of fakes. Fake watches, fake medicines, fake art and fake socialism. The way to identify a fake is to subject it to a series of laboratory tests. 40

The Compere then places a detour sign on the "bright and sunny highway", then retires to observe the reactions of a group of travellers who soon happen upon it. The travellers express dismay at the prospect of negotiating the muddy track and wonder why the detour sign has appeared so suddenly. For a long time they argue amongst themselves over the import of the sign, speculating as to the type of danger it warns of and indeed whether the danger is real or perhaps simply illusory. Amid them, a "Youth" uses the travellers' reactions to loudly develop his personal critique of how his companions themselves generally represent the ills of contemporary society. He turns to address the audience, saying:

"Today the road may be closed off forever and yet you stand by watching passively. Won't any of you take a stand and say something? Won't anyone make a plea for commonsense and justice?" 41

Applauding the Youth's speech, the Compere intervenes and removes the sign, explaining to the travellers that they are part of a "sociological experiment". In reality, no danger lies ahead on the bright and sunny highway.

However the reaction of the travellers is the opposite to that which the Compere expects. They refuse to believe him and will not budge. The Compere decides to prove to all the safety of the highway by walking it himself. An eerie noise from further down the road is enough to release his own self doubts and turn his knees to jelly. All then turn to take the detour. After which:

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., p. 43.
A SMALL GIRL runs on stage calling out for her father. She searches for him, crying "Father, father," and runs past the warning sign down the broad and sunny road.  

While the metaphor of Compere/Party functionary and Travellers/Masses is a rather simple and obvious one, and the bright and sunny road very reminiscent of the title of Hao Ran's famous cultural revolutionary novel, the skit has more to say about the framework of thinking within which Party and Masses are seen to operate; a framework portrayed here as a self-enclosed model, one based upon irrational assumptions and fed on an inbuilt form of paranoia.

In act one of WM, seven educated youths pass their days performing heavy labour in a rural commune towards the close of the Cultural Revolution. It is near the close of one of countless evenings spent in their squalid hut attempting to come to terms with the seemingly endless postponement of their individual and collective aspirations. The playwright heightens the atmosphere of utter futility regarding their "predicament that affords no escape", their state of "impasse", by having the characters sing two songs.

General, the natural leader of the group and characterised by his indomitable heroic outlook, leads the youths in singing a familiar tune from their childhoods, the "Song of the Young Pioneers":

General: [Sings] "Are you all ready?/ We're always ready!/ We're the Young Pioneers ..."

{At first everyone listens quietly, then they sing together with him.}

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42 Ibid, p. 45.
43 Hao Ran was the author of several novels, including one titled "The Bright and Sunny Road." According to Link, in the latter part of the Cultural Revolution Hao Ran was promoted as the only significant contemporary Chinese novelist. cf. Perry Link (ed.), Stubborn Weeds, p. 10.
Urblings: [Singing] "The masters of the future./ We surely will be ..."

The more they sing the more they forget their concerns and their singing builds to a crescendo.

Urblings: [Singing] "Hey little brothers./ Ho little sisters,/ Our road goes ever on and on!/ The masters of the future./ We surely will be!"

This song, however, soon comes to be juxtaposed with another, starkly reflecting their actual condition of impass:

Princess: [Setting aside the guitar with the missing string, with an increasingly powerful voice she hums, "The Song of the Urblings"].

"The light from the oil lamp shines on the wall,/ How desolate the night appears./ Looking back on events now so far away,/ Where is the road that will lead out of here?" 44

Or again, in The Imposter, impasse is expressed through Li Xiaozhang's initial inability to share in the privileges of a rigid social hierarchy of self-seeking Party cadres. His success in doing so involves a total identity change. Such a transformation, however, is only temporary. The law eventually catches up with this imposter and he is dragged before the courts.

In The Retrial (revised version) 45 by dissident emigre sculptor and playwright Wang Keping (who also produced act one of WM in Paris 46), the impasse finds expression in

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44 Cf. Appendix B.
45 Wang Keping, Chongshen, (Cai Tianqiang, transl.) The Retrial, directed by Yu Junwu and Wang Yenny, was performed in several Australian cities during late 1989 by the Chinese Student Artist Group.
46 Wang Keping's production of WM was reported in Taiwan's Zhongyang Ribao, 23 February 1986.
the wordless scream of the actor playing the political prisoner Wei Jingsheng. Wei is portrayed as trapped between two implacably well meaning but obtusely naive forces. On the one hand his remaining friends and supporters urge Wei to "buy" his freedom by confessing aspects of the "crimes" with which he was originally charged. On the other hand, he is forced to attempt to educate a politically naive foreign defence lawyer hired by Amnesty International. The lawyer believes that as long as they present the right defence, Wei's coming retrial is "winnable".

Wei is portrayed as choosing a third alternative. In his view, little or no fundamental progress has occurred in the area of human and political rights in China since his first trial, and he refuses to place false hopes in such a retrial. At the same time, he is aware that his very refusal to recant and attempt deals with his imprisoners is a factor of some importance in helping to inspire the development of more calls for fundamental political reforms and human rights.

**Cyclical Return in WM and The Detour**

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Wrong was right and right was wrong, and everything was made of paper.  

Examples of cyclical return are perhaps most evident in WM. Aside from the Prologue, each of the four acts of this play follows a seasonal cycle, separated each from each by several years (recalling the structure of Lao She's famous play, Teahouse). Within this schema particular instances of impasse serve to introduce a theme of cyclical return.

For example, in act one, just prior to the singing of the "Song of the Young Pioneers" referred to above, a discussion develops amongst the youths around the problem of how to interpret the latest twist in the Party line (that is, they are trying to work out who is

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the main victim of a new Party purge). The youths have been burning paper to keep warm.

**Pushcart:** [Snatching up the book Sister Superior is reading] Here, burn this one too.

**Sister Superior:** But that's Hatoyama's!

**General:** [Taking it and having a look] *Popular Philosophy*, by Ai Siqi. This one we should keep. What about your newspapers, Pushcart?

{Everyone cheers, and some take off to get them.}

**Pushcart:** No, don't! There's some articles in that lot by "Liang Xiao" about the revolution in education. We've still got to study and discuss them.

**Hatoyama:** "Farting is forbidden"!

**Pushcart:** What did you say, laddie?

**Hatoyama:** I ... so I memorised Chairman Mao's poems. What's wrong with that?

**Hey, the chicken's ready!**

{Everyone tears off a piece to gnaw at.}

**Big Head:** Yeah! I've heard that this time the movement is aimed at ... [he makes a gesture which indicates he is referring to a famous cadre].
General: [Surprised] So what did he mean when he said, "talented men are hard to obtain"?

Princess: That'd be right! And just when things have started to improve ...

Waifling: But didn't the poem by Chairman Mao which was published on new year's day say, "Everywhere, orioles carol and swallows dip!"

Hatoyama: But there's also that line which forbids farting about, isn't there?

{THe urblings are puzzled. There is silence.}

Big Head: [Heaving a long sigh.] Oh! Roll on Cultural Revolutions ... we're supposed to remake one in seven or eight years ...

Hatoyama: [Lying down on the spot] One lasts seven or eight years ...

The impasse here arises from the youths' inability to be certain in their interpretation of the polemics (in the form of literary allusion) surrounding the Gang of Four's attack on Deng Xiaoping as a "Capitalist Roader". The Gang here has made use of an earlier poem by Mao which attacks Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin (the "Secret Speech") and subsequent "revisionism", to attack Deng, who not long before had been rehabilitated through the efforts of the Zhou Enlai faction.

In the end the youths simply give up. Reminded of Mao's formula that it's necessary to remake revolution every seven or eight years, they sink into despair. Within the context of the play's seasonal structure, this formula comes to be brutally ironic. From act one

^{48} Cf. Appendix B.
(winter, 1976) to act four (autumn, 1984) is of course a duration of seven or eight years. The playwright's cycle is complete.

At the close of act four, just after the youths have once more sung the "Song of the Young Pioneers", this cyclical return is explicated in a scene awash with irony.

General: ... [He sings.] Are you all ready? ...

Urblings: [Joining in] We're always ready,/ We're the Young Pioneers ...

{Suddenly they all become self-conscious and glance about at each other. They stop singing and laugh awkwardly. Transmitted from all around come the cheerful and resonant strains of children singing "The Song of the Young Pioneers" ... The urblings listen, completely engrossed.}

General: It's children singing.

Drummer: That's right. They're going through the streets and lanes cleaning away all the gobs of spit. Will you join them?

General: [With playful hyperbole] We'll go too!

Urblings: Shall we go? ... Come on! Let's go! ... Come along! ...
Singing cheerfully and shouting slogans like 'Don't spit everywhere!', brandishing brooms and other cleaning implements, they converge with the ranks of the Young Pioneers...

This example of cyclical return is similar to that in the conclusion of The Detour. When, in full view of the travellers, the Compere removes the detour sign, his action has unexpected results. The iconoclastic "Youth" who was previously scathing of his fellow travellers' collective paranoia, now joins in expressing his deep suspicions at the Compere's motives. Is there a "hidden agenda"?

Compere: But sir, this road is safe.

Youth: Practice is the sole criterion of truth. So go on: take a walk.

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49 Ibid.
50 This quote is from Mao Zedong, Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Vol 1, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967, p. 297, and was later used by Deng Xiaoping. Mao here states, "Thus Lenin said, 'Practice is higher than (theoretical) knowledge', for it has not only the dignity of of universality, but also of immediate actuality. The Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism has two outstanding characteristics. One is its class nature: it openly avows that dialectical materialism is in the service of the proletariat. The other is its practicality: it emphasizes the dependence of theory on practice. The truth of any knowledge or theory is determined not by subjective feelings, but by objective results in social practice. Only social practice can be the criterion of truth". According to the editors of Mao Zedong's Selected Works, 'On Practice' was presented by Mao in July, 1937 and was "written in order to expose the subjectivist errors of dogmatism and empiricism in the Party, and especially the error of dogmatism, from the standpoint of the Marxist theory of knowledge. It was entitled 'on Practice' because its stress was on exposing the dogmatist kind of subjectivism, which belittles practice. The ideas contained in this essay were presented by Comrade Mao Zedong in a lecture at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College in Yen'an" (Mao Zedong, Selected Works, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 296, footnote). In his 'Speech at the All-Army Conference on Political Work' presented on June 2, 1978, Deng Xiaoping used the following quote from Mao, "He pointed out, 'Marxists hold that man's social practice alone is the criterion of the truth of his knowledge of the external world ...'" (Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1982, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984, p. 129). On Deng's speech, Craig Dietrich comments, 'In June, 1978, Deng gave another speech strongly emphasizing the principle that 'practice is the sole criterion of truth'. He supported his views with Mao Zedong quotations and suggested that even Mao's pronouncements were correct only if they worked. Blind obedience, said Deng, could only stifle progress. This emphasis on 'truth from facts' and 'practice as the sole criterion of truth' was the core of Deng's counterattack against the 'Whateverist' supporters of Hua Guofeng. By subjecting even Mao's own pronouncements to the test of pragmatism and empirical verification, Deng was undercutting the dogmatic reverence on which his rivals depended" (Dietrich, People's China, pp. 244-45).
Old Man: (shouts at Youth): Don't pressure him.

Youth: (coldly): Come on, everyone's waiting for you to do something.

(The Compere hesitates for a moment but finally summons up the courage to walk towards the forbidden zone.)

Compere: (Having walked a few steps, he slows down and then stops): My legs won't go any further. (Turns around and looks at the others. They all stare at him blankly. He can hear the eerie noise faintly in the distance, but it is getting closer.) Why aren't any of you following me? Come on.

(The mysterious sound grows louder and louder. The COMPERE gets scared and turning suddenly he takes a few dispirited steps back ...)

(Silence...) (After a pause the group finally decides to take the detour, and starts moving towards the muddy track.) 51

Recall the following scene, referred to above, 52 where the Small Girl, searching for her father, plunges headlong past the detour sign into the unknown. Do we interpret the small girl’s action through an optimistic or pessimistic glass? Does she face real danger further down the road, or will, ironically, her very naivety expose the absence of danger? The cleverness of this conclusion lies, of course, in its essential ambiguity. However no matter how we interpret the skit’s action, we have definitely witnessed some strange role reversals.

51 Barme and Minford, Seeds of Fire, pp. 44-5.
52 Ibid.
The Youth has suddenly adopted the cautious stance of the Old Man, who'd previously justified his outlook in terms of his terrible experiences under the Gang of Four. The Compere at first changes his stance to adopt that of the timid traveller, the Husband, then further reverts by adopting the stance of the least courageous, the Wife. Indeed, the Compere's paranoia increases in geometric progression till he becomes totally a victim of his own illusion and indistinguishable from his experimental "subjects". The Small Girl, in turn, innocently expresses the previous bravado of the Youth; closing the series of cyclical returns. Just as in WM, when the cycle finally closes, and when the "complete course of operations or events returns upon itself and restores the original state", nothing has been resolved.

Cyclical Return in The Imposter

I'd rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal lobotomy. 53

In The Imposter, the most potent image of cyclical return is imparted by the fate of the bottle of seemingly expensive, but in fact fake maotai spirits, presented by Li Xiaozhang to his girlfriend, Zhou Minghua, as a gift for her father. Li's aim is to get Minghua's father on side. The bottle, however, is never opened. Initially, Minghua's father returns it to Li because he himself doesn't drink strong spirits. Later, after Li has established himself firmly on the first rung of the ladder of the system of Party privilege, through his cultivation of a middle ranking cadre, he presents the bottle to this cadre as a token of appreciation. The bottle is then continuously passed on as a gift, travelling magically upwards through the cadre ranks, tracing a cycle of corruption, until it is ultimately returned as a gift to Li himself by the unsuspecting cadre at the apex of the local heap.

53 Anon., graffito in toilets, Union Building, Australian National University, ca 1989.
Impasse, Cyclical Return and Chiasmus

In a previous chapter has been discussed the problem of how chiasmic structures may be elicited from the text through the identification of instances of term iteration (that is, the "repetition" or "recurrence" of identical clauses, phrases or symbols, as in the terms "the great wall" or "dreams").

In the case of WM we can identify a further instance of term iteration in the repetition of the 'Song of the Young Pioneers'. Does a chiasmic structure also link the two instances where the song occurs in the text? In answering this question, we must briefly recall the context of each of the instances.

Instance 1: act one; spring, 1976.
The urblings are in desperate straits in the rural commune (e.g., they need to steal food to survive.)
They sing "The Song of the Young Pioneers".
Almost immediately afterwards, symbolising the death of Mao Zedong, a devastating earthquake strikes. The village is destroyed and the youths are able to begin the process of returning to the city.

Instance 2: act four; autumn, 1984.
Within Deng's China, each of the urblings faces a deep level of personal dissatisfaction regarding their careers, personal relationships, financial status, ideals, etc.
They sing "The Song of the Young Pioneers".
Almost immediately afterwards, they converge with a group of Young Pioneers in an extremely ironic "return" to a period of naive idealism. They clean away sputum from the streets and lanes. At one level, perhaps, they might be seen to be metaphorically erasing the stains from their own past as well as the mistakes and nightmares suffered.
by society at large. At another level, their action might well be viewed as a quite
consciously poignant gesture of futility.

In Instance 1, the unseen "agent" initiating the chiasmic process is the purge of the
Gang of Four following the death of Mao Zedong. New opportunities flow from the
close of the Cultural Revolution, and the status of the youths begins to undergo a rather
swift and remarkable inversion.

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<th>Status Distinctions</th>
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<td>Maoist Values</td>
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<td><strong>Low Status</strong></td>
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<td>The Youths</td>
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In Instance 2, the agent triggering the chiasmic process is General's admission that he is
going blind, ironically symbolising the opening of his understanding to and acceptance
of the reality that his future will never include the scenario where he might be able to
rise through the ranks of the PLA to become an officer".

Recalling that by this stage of the play all of the youths bar General have become very
upwardly mobile (reflected in their "yuppie"-like tastes and concerns), the personal
dispositions of the urblings, now that they realise the dreadful long term effects of
General's war wound, undergo a swift and remarkable transformation.
### Personal Dispositions

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<td>Other Youths</td>
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By the close of act four the "cycle" is complete and the urblings establish a form of ironic catharsis through their act of converging with the Young Pioneers. Confronting a strange, fickle world, they play at returning to a state of relative innocence, homogeneity and comradeship similar to that in which they faced their harsh communal existence in act one. Yet the question remains, of course, as to what their future really holds. The cycle may be complete, but the chiasmic structural device linking the themes of impasse and cyclical return has also produced, at least at a superficial interpretive level, an ambiguous finale for the audience to ponder.

### Obstacles to Social Emancipation: the "Moral versus Corrupt" Dilemma

**WM**, can indeed structurally be described as a series of chiasms. These chiasms are most often based upon the series of obstacles most fundamentally affecting the lives of the youths. Moreover, each chiasm at the same time produces, reflects, and ultimately comments upon fundamental aspects of China's socio-political dilemmas. Take the concept of the Maoist definition of "class", for example, and its treatment by Wang Peigong.

Of the seven youths in **WM** only two, according to the Dramatis Personae, General and Pushcart, are linked to the social strata of the "worker, peasant, soldier" class category
as defined by Mao. The five other youths are linked to "unreliable" social strata connected, again according to the Maoist worldview, to the petit bourgeoisie, feudal landlord or capitalist classes.

In act one, both General and Pushcart enjoy a status that is relatively high. General's father is a retired soldier, while his nickname affirms his own career hopes. He is also the strongest, most honest and most "moral" of the youths. He is self sacrificing, evincing an almost "Lei Feng"-type character, but instead of tendering his heart to Chairman Mao and the Party, General appears to tender his to the Chinese people as a whole.54 General is without doubt the natural, if unofficial, leader of the group.

Pushcart's nickname derives from the occupation of his father. He has official status as the group leader, and is conscious of his responsibilities regarding political education work. His class background and outlook often makes him the butt of jibes from the others (General aside), and his somewhat vicious responses to these only deepens their prejudices against him.

Within Deng's China, however, the status of General and Pushcart relative to the other youths becomes inverted. Their erstwhile companions are slowly able to take advantage of the economic reforms and the new opportunities afforded for personal enrichment through education, the arts or business ventures. However Pushcart can ultimately only improve his personal status within society through marrying the daughter of a senior cadre, while General is left well and truly behind as a "common footslogger" in the

54 Lei Feng was a probably non-existent model soldier whom Mao, in 1963, enjoined the PLA to imitate. Lei Feng is ironically referred to in act one of WM. In 1981, just less than four years before the writing of WM, Deng Xiaoping signalled a new policy course which included a call for more attention to ideology and political work. Soldiers, "were once again enjoined to learn from Lei Feng, the humble PLA hero and Maoist of yesteryear, who was said to personify the new spiritual civilization", (R.D. Nethercutt, 'Deng and the Gun: Party Military Relations in the P.R.C.' in, Asian Survey, Berkeley: University of California Press, August, 1982, p. 698.).
PLA. The chiasm which has developed, one based on class-affiliation, can be described as below.

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General becomes an essentially tragic character through his maintenance of personal integrity. He is honest, open and upright throughout the play, even when such a stance is very much against his objective personal interests. As we have seen, General, like Judge Bao of the Yuan, evinces a zheng stance, remaining a morally incorruptible individual throughout.

Importantly, General's maintenance of this moral stance undercuts the audience's essential sympathy for his companions. More easily buffeted by the changing winds of fortune, they reveal themselves as often quite venal and ruthless in the pursuit of their individual aims. They are quick to participate in the developing corruption characterising aspects of the social life of China in the early nineteen eighties. Instead of attempting to become part of any solution for China's ills, they instead more and more come to be seen as part of the problem.
In many ways, therefore, **WM** can be likened to a kaleidoscope through which can be viewed the seemingly random "ups and downs" of the seven youths. But the play is also a kaleidoscope which, if the tube is shaken or the lens appropriately adjusted, reveals a series of chiasms in the structure of the play that continually construct, reproduce and comment ambiguously upon the dilemmas confronting these youths. When the lens comes to be focused upon the "class chiasm" outlined above, for example, the dilemma of "the moral versus the corrupt" emerges to dominate the central meaning of the play.

Indeed, the implications of our understanding of the importance of this dilemma in **WM** become profound when we pose the questions, does the production of this dilemma go, perhaps, to the heart of Wang Peigong's socio-political critique? And if so, might not this dilemma be fundamental and common to each of the critiques developed by the playwrights of the *huaju* here under analysis?

It is only necessary to recall the final scene of *The Imposter* in order to conclude that this is so. At the close of **WM**, the moral rectitude of General allows him to play the central role in initiating a return to humanity and friendship amongst the youths. Faced with the problem of General's potential blindness, their former bickerings and petty complaints are shown up for what they are and fade into the background. What emerges amongst them is the hint of a more moral order. In precisely this fashion, the moral rectitude of Zhang senior, the cadre in charge of the Party Central Commission for Inspecting Discipline, allows him to play the key role in re-establishing the moral order for the wayward Li Xiaozhang and the corrupt cadres.

Morality and righteousness triumph, but only, it seems, for the moment. **WM** closes ambiguously at the beginning of what is certain to be a new "cycle" of experiences for the youths. But where will they go from here? *The Imposter* closes at the beginning of what is certain to be a new cycle for Li Xiaozhang, but will it be one involving
imprisonment or freedom? Little, if anything, is resolved, and nothing is established! And this, of course, is precisely the result required by the subversive playwright in China. Or at least by those subversive playwrights who cherish no desire for self-martyrdom, but who would continue to navigate their way between what Link aptly describes as "the Scylla of capitulation and the Charybdis of serious political trouble",\textsuperscript{55} wary always of changes in the "wind".

\textsuperscript{55}Perry Link (ed.), \textit{Stubborn Weeds}, p.23.
Chapter one posed the question of how, as students of Chinese literature, we approach the problem of the "ambiguous" play. What happens when, in our attempts at literary criticism, our various traditional analytical tools by themselves seem perhaps a little inadequate for discovering the central meaning of the text at hand? What if certain curiosities and ambiguities remain, and the meaning still appears to be elusive?

We have argued that within "bureaucratised socialist", or "Stalinised" societies, playwrights who have desired to cross over the political limits of the artistically permissible to produce controversial, even subversive socio-political critiques, have sometimes adopted unusual literary strategies. In China, the legacy of socialist realist literary production, combined with the Cultural Revolution, has meant that playwrights especially have come under the scrutiny of the official critics.

This thesis argues that in order to understand more closely the unusual literary strategies adopted by playwrights like Wang Peigong, the student of contemporary Chinese literature may also be required to adopt an alternative analytic stance. It may be necessary, therefore, to deal with the text in an alternative way. If a certain text is

2 Some commentators might argue that this particular genre as practised in the countries referred to above was in fact neither "socialist" nor "realist", nor anything in between.
perceived to be somewhat ambiguous in its essential meaning, then perhaps we should look within the text itself for ambiguity-producing literary devices, and analyse these in turn.

In attempting to cross over the historical, political and cultural gulf between ourselves as students and authorial intention, we certainly cannot afford to ignore the traditional, proven methods that have led to much academic understanding of the complexities of Chinese political culture and the manner in which controversial playwrights react and interact within this culture. As far as possible, we need to acquaint ourselves with the system of sometimes subtle, sometimes weighty political pressures brought to bear upon playwrights by those in authority who are also responsible for overseeing literary production. We need to understand the manner in which China's particular system defines relations between the official critics, publishing houses and playwrights, and the implications this holds for the relationship between playwrights and "foreign" students of literature.³

The recognition of these problems does not necessarily mean, however, that criticism of controversial Chinese literature as a project should be undertaken only by those students who already enjoy well developed personal, political or academic connections with those on the inside of Chinese literary circles. In unravelling authorial intention, much may also be gained through the development of alternative structural approaches. Through analysing particular ambiguities, even contradictions, within certain texts deemed controversial, we may perhaps begin a process of shedding some of our own

³ We need to understand, for example, the question of post revolutionary Chinese "nationalism" as expressed by many controversial writers, as opposed to "internationalism", and the forms in which such nationalism, even ethnocentricism, may be expressed by certain of these writers. Especially we need to understand the way in which such nationalism opens up possibilities for utilisation by the Party leadership regarding its encouragement of an identification of the broader political interests of playwrights, as indeed of the Chinese people at large, with the more narrow national interests of the same Party leadership, and the contradictory stances such an identification may encourage within the attitudes and works of particular controversial playwrights.
more deeply received assumptions regarding the hows and whys of Chinese political culture. At the same time we may perhaps begin to see the ambiguities and contradictions within contemporary Chinese society with eyes more akin to those of controversial authors.

This thesis has developed the argument that our identification and understanding of the importance of processes of chiasmic inversion may be one means by which we can come closer to authorial intention. Some weight in the thesis has been given to elaborating examples of non Chinese-specific chiasmic processes in order to underline the arguments that, firstly, chiasmus is utilised as a literary device in many cultures and, secondly, that chiasmus comes to be most clearly utilised as a literary strategy during historical periods when the contradictions between perceptions of "dogma" and "reality" within society become most clearly defined. We have thus seen that chiasmus is effectively utilised both in a Kuranko folktale and in plays by the Elizabethan playwright, Christopher Marlowe.

Traditional perceptions of premodern society as it evolved in China as having developed extremely hierarchical social and political structures allowed Wu Cheng'en, for example, to make great play with trickster and imposter characters together with notions of cosmological inversion. In the late Qing period, a cartoon depicting an invertible face gives the lie to official Qing dogma regarding the relationship between the government's domestic policies and those toward the intruding colonialist powers.

In the post revolutionary period, on the other hand, we find that the Cultural Revolution, ostensibly an anti-bureaucratic movement, witnessed the inversion or crossing out of the names of political prisoners during the staged, street theatre-like mass demonstrations. Anecdotal evidence of status inversion during the Cultural
Revolution abounds in works such as Anne Thurston's, *Enemies of the People*, and Yang Jiang's, *Lost in the Crowd*, wherein academics are put in charge of cleaning the lavatories and lavatory attendants are put in charge of the academies. During the same period, such awareness of the importance and implications of chiasmic inversion can also be discerned in the role of imposter characters, such as Yang Zirong, in the Model operas, in which chiasmus also takes on the role of essentially defining the political line of these Operas.

By mid 1989, public concern regarding, amongst other things, the extent of official corruption in China, especially at the higher levels of the Party and state, produced the slogan *Dadao guandao*. (A *guandao* is a child's toy. The toy depicts a state official. Its heavy, rounded base makes it impossible to topple as, when pushed down, it bounces right back again.) The slogan, as utilised by the 1989 pro-democratisation movement students and workers in Beijing, might loosely be translated as "Down with corrupt officials".

**Playwrights and the Dialectic of Revisionism**

*What is meant is never said, and what is said is never meant.*

Much of the official criticisms of *WM* in particular and other contemporary, controversial Chinese plays and literature in general can be seen as partaking of a wider and pervasive political discourse informing Maoist understanding of the world. This

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6 Quote from a programme reviewer on the ABC series, TVTV. The line is in reference to the English black comedy, *The Wolvises*. 
discourse is based primarily on the Maoists (but also their successors') rather unusual interpretation of dialectical materialism. Writes one commentator on this question:

According to Maoist dialectic, in which everything, including theory, divides in two - not three or four but exactly in two - the tendencies in the world socialist movement are neatly separated into two compartments: revisionism and Marxism-Leninism. Revisionism is elevated to the status of an abstract category: the term assumes a generic character in which is assumed all that is not accorded the sovereign title of Marxism-Leninism. Reformism, sectarianism, dogmatism, opportunism, ultra-leftism - each or all are included or may be inferred in the general term. What is revisionism today can become Marxism-Leninism tomorrow, and vice versa. It has become, par excellence, a cult term. Only the initiates who are privy to the thought of the cult leader can be sure of what it means at any given moment. Instead of a precise word defining a specific tendency, it has been transformed into an epithet to smite those bold or foolhardy enough to question or disagree with the latest revelation of the 'leader'. (italics added.)

This tendency to interpret and explain the world through a process of dichotomising was, of course, not invented by the Maoists or their successors in the Chinese Communist Party's leadership. Instead, it can be seen more as a development of the crude Marxism which emerged within the Russian Communist Party paralleling the rise of the Soviet bureaucracy headed by Stalin at the expense of the Party's "Left Opposition". Indeed, the political importance given by the Maoists to the notion of "criticism and self-criticism" can also be seen as a development of practices under

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Soviet bureaucratic socialism, albeit perhaps with "Chinese characteristics", rather than a Maoist innovation as such.

It is not for nothing that Mao claims the distinction of being Stalin's foremost disciple. The monstrous formula of 'criticism and self-criticism', or 'thought remoulding', if you prefer, developed parallel with the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union. In the process, the soviets were emasculated and the Russian Communist Party was converted into an instrument for consolidating the stranglehold of the bureaucratic caste on the economic, political and social life of the country.

Throughout the Comintern, Lenin's concept of democratic centralism was horribly perverted into the theory of 'monolithism' based on the practice of bureaucratic centralism ... Under Lenin's concept, a minority in the party was required only to accept the decision of the majority in action. Under the Stalinist version, a minority was obliged to agree with the majority - to expunge from their minds their 'erroneous' views, to confess their error, to swear eternal fealty to the infallible 'leader', and to repent of having failed to correctly apply the self-immolating purgative of 'self-criticism' ... In addition, the limits of 'criticism and self-criticism' are strictly defined. It could be applied only to criticism of the application of the 'general line' and under no circumstances to the 'general line' itself - and never, never, never, under any circumstances, was it to be understood as a license to 'criticize' the infallible leader. 8

8 Ibid. p. 95. The political norm of the minority's "acceptance" of the decision of the majority in action was viewed as basic to party democracy by Lenin and the early Bolsheviks. Furthermore, it was viewed as the only real way to "test out", in action over a period of time, whether the majority's decision was in fact the better one. The Bolsheviks argued that this process of testing out decisions would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, if Party factions continued to implement the general party programme according to their own particular views; the Party needed to test out decisions in a more coherent fashion, particularly in times of rapid and turbulent objective political change. The "centralist"
It could be argued that the Chinese Communist Party's adoption, especially during the 1940s, of a system of monolithic bureaucratic centralism based on the Soviet model, paved the way for the later rise in status of Mao Zedong and his supporters within the party.

Mao's rejection of dialectics is not accidental. The blurring of concepts as motive forces in history, the rigid formalism, all have a point. The point is a conception of the party and the role of the party in Chinese society. Contradiction within the Communist party is resolved by the method of criticism and self-criticism. This bears a striking resemblance to the philosophical views imposed in 1947 on Russian philosophers by Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin's chief "ideologist": "In our Soviet society, where class antagonisms have been liquidated, the struggle between the old and the new, and consequently the development from the lower to the higher, proceeds not in the form of struggle between antagonistic classes and of cataclysms, as is the case under capitalism, but in the form of criticism and self-criticism, which is the real motive force for our development, a powerful instrument in the hands of the Communist Party. This is incontestably a new type of movement, a new type of development, a new dialectical law". This was presented in a report to a part of the "democratic-centralist" decision-making equation developed by the early Bolsheviks was viewed as essential for the survival of revolutionary organisations forced to exist and work underground. In between regular national conferences (or until, in the case of a party underground, the next national decision-making conferences could be held), the previously elected leadership was required to carry out party work in line with the decisions adopted by conference delegates at the previous conference. The elected national leadership was also expected to act "centrally" (i.e., not consult widely amongst all delegates) when dramatic changes, perhaps unforeseeable by the previous conference's delegates, occurred in the objective political situation. The system was perceived to provide checks against both ill-informed decisions and anti-democratic practices on the part of the Party leadership by dint of their accountability to party national conferences and interim-meeting Party bodies. Like the early legal system the Bolsheviks set up, and other forms of state organisation, the system of Party "democratic centralism" broke down over a longer period than is often assumed, and more as a result of the huge economic-political pressures the Party faced during and after the invasion of Russia by the imperialist powers, which provided fertile ground for the bureaucratisation of the state and the Party itself. For an unusually thorough account and analysis of early Bolshevik party norms see, Marcel Liebman, Leninism Under Lenin, (Brian Pearce, transl.), Great Britain: Jonathan Cape, 1975.
conference on philosophy in June 1947 to impose a new line in the name of the CPSU Central Committee. Mao duplicates this view in all essentials. The question whether Mao or Zhdanov first discovered this "new dialectical law" is not crucial to the theme being developed here. The point is simply that it was required by the political needs of both Russian and Chinese Stalinism".  

The lack of recognised, official forums for democratic discussion within the CCP meant that a party system was produced wherein the most crucial political decisions were arrived at through internal faction-fighting. Lacking processes for democratic discussion, leadership positions came to be held and decisions came to be made much more on the basis of who had the numbers, in other words, who controlled the largest factions. The history of the CCP has thus been viewed by at least some commentators as a series of rapid shifts from ultra-left to right-wing political positions, often unexpected by those unacquainted with the relationships between the major leadership factions in relation to the internal party power struggles at any given time.  

At the same time, political discussion on questions of Marxist-Leninist theory, on strategy and tactics, could not fundamentally be based on the party's ability, as a whole, to generate solutions through wide ranging discussion of the problems confronting it. Within this situation, the status of the "moral worth" of decisions came to be emphasised. For example, Mao's emphasis on the need to concentrate work on winning over the rural peasantry, and the subsequent victory of his political line in action as a strategy in this instance, came to be viewed as morally, and therefore politically, in a general sense, correct.

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This tendency of the Chinese Maoists to elevate a particular tactic to the level of a general strategy was also dogmatically replicated by Maoist revolutionaries abroad, where the problematics derived have, particularly since the 1950s, been highlighted within southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, although also in Peru, as in other countries of Central and South America and Africa. Maoist revolutionaries in the third world often uncritically adopted tactics which were conveyed to them as general strategies via the Comintern under Stalinism and/or the Chinese Maoists. In true dogmatic fashion, the imported revolutionary tactic became the only tactic, and thus the general strategy. The third world revolutionaries identifying with the international Maoist tendency would thus attempt to encircle the cities with peasant-based guerrilla forces (effectively isolating the revolutionary forces from the most politically conscious layer of the oppressed, the urban workers). The one way they "related" to the urban activists was to remove them from any possibility of potential leadership of the workers' struggles by recruiting them to the rural-based armies.

The overseas Maoists would call for electoral processes to be boycotted even while the masses of urban workers were still orienting and mobilising for local and national elections, seeing in them the possibility for achieving at least some progressive reforms in the short term. United fronts would be attempted to be built with the "revolutionary sections" of the national bourgeoisie, continuing even after the majority of their own members had concluded through first hand experience that this direction was at best a dead end, and at worst organisational and political suicide.11

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11 Absurd as it may seem, this outlook was adopted even by Maoists in developed countries like Australia, who called upon the patriotic elements of the national bourgeoisie to join workers and small farmers in opposing U.S. imperialism and Soviet hegemony, a rather strange political stance which left these Maoists in the embarrassing situation of having to identify which sections of the national bourgeoisie were "potentially revolutionary", something they were never quite able to do. Cf. almost any edition of Vanguard newspaper (published by the Communist Party of Australia, Marxist Leninist) from the late sixties on.
The solutions to objective problems came to be based by the Chinese Maoists increasingly upon what might be described as a strange form of opportunistic pragmatism, that is, more and more upon a combination of pragmatism together with perceptions and considerations as to their "moral worth". Moralism came to be both the basis and rationale for the decision-making system, and probably owed much to, as well as fed back into, traditional dichotomising forms inherent in traditional Confucian practices. This feedback system of enforced political moralism and monolithic bureaucratic centralism in the CCP ensured that the political system as a whole would require an ultimate arbiter.12

As decisions in the CCP came to be viewed as overwhelmingly "correct" or "incorrect" on the basis of their moral characteristics instead of their objective worth, the final arbiter in this case came to be the 'mass line' as interpreted by the top leadership. Given the rural-based history of the party, the mass line was heavily weighted towards the leadership's interpretation of the purported attitude of the peasantry towards the party's political initiatives. However the party's attitude to the peasantry was distinctly different from that practiced by the Bolsheviks under Lenin.13

12 Kerry sums up the doctrinal dilemmas produced by such a system. "From time to time, differences of interpretation may arise between even the most devoted disciples that might lead to serious doctrinal disputations. The system cries out for a final arbiter around whom must be draped the aura of infallibility. Just as the Catholic church requires its pope to interpret holy scripture, so does every bureaucratic formation in the labour movement require its 'pope' to resolve disputes that arise as a result of the inevitable conflict of interest between individuals and groups within the bureaucracy. To submit such disputes to the democratic process of discussion and action by the masses would endanger the existence of the bureaucracy as a whole. The bureaucrats fear this course as the devil fears holy water. With the hothouse growth of the Soviet bureaucracy after Lenin's death, Stalin was elevated to the position of supreme arbiter of the parvenu bureaucratic caste, and invested with the infallity of infallibility". Tom Kerry, The Mao Myth, pp. 79-80.

13 At the same time as Lenin exhorted the Bolsheviks to give more weight to their their political work with Russia's industrial proletariat, he also warned the Party not to ignore its political work with the peasants' organisations. Fundamental to such political work, according to Lenin, was the necessity to take every opportunity to raise the political consciousness of the peasantry, not only on questions that affected them as peasantry, but on wider political issues affecting the country. The history of the CCP, on the other hand, has been one of 'consulting' or 'learning from the peasants' in an overwhelmingly formalistic, paternalistic and rhetorical manner within the context of the leadership's practice of the mass line theory.
The result has been an historical inversion, of sorts, of the Leninist approach. Instead of seeking to raise the political consciousness of the peasantry to a level closer to the more advanced layers of the industrial proletariat, the party has sought to retard the development of the political consciousness of the non-peasant social sectors to a level approximate to that of the peasantry. Thus the party leadership's unofficial chiasmic exhortation, "Never lead the masses, but wait for the masses to lead the party".

With minor historical variations within these larger themes, contemporary Chinese playwrights such as Wang Peigong have been required to produce their work under just such political constraints. Within a political system wherein, 'what is revisionism today can become Marxism-Leninism tomorrow, and vice versa', playwrights intent on presenting a controversial socio-political critique must, to some extent, rely on alternative structural processes in their texts that at the same time produce, highlight and then make ambiguous their authorial intentions. The political system, sketched above, which itself depends upon formalised, official production of ambiguities in meaning for its very continued existence, necessitates a response in kind from the controversial playwright. Ambiguity in meaning in the text itself may be designed as a direct reflection of perceived ambiguities in meaning within the wider political system.

Indeed a large part of Chinese political vocabulary, Geremie Barme has pointed out, is underscored by notions of twisting and turning, of reversal and inversion. Thus a politically unhealthy trend, or "evil wind", is expressed through the Chinese characters for "waifeng", where "wai" symbolises a process of twisting of bending, while a "perverse trend" or "evil influence" is described by the term "xieqi". Dishonest practices or methods are described by the chengyu, or four character phrase, "xiemen waidao", literally meaning "a crooked door and twisted street". Indeed the end of the Cultural Revolution saw a revival of classical literary terms expressing processes of overturning.

14 My thanks to G. Barme and Sang Ye for pointing this out to me in a conversation some time ago.
and reversal, encapsulated such phrases as, "bolun fanzheng" (to bring order out of chaos), "pingfan" (to rehabilitate) and "gaizheng" (to rectify a case). Similar notions underline the idea of "zhengmian renwu" (positive characters) and "fanmian renwu" (negative characters), juxtaposing basic images of zheng (uprightness) and fan (inversion). In his presentation of an inverted world, what playwright Wang Peigong does, in effect, is play with such notions by taking the official dogma regarding zhengmain and fanmian characters and substituting lizhe and daozhe ones, that is, characters who, instead of remaining constant in their stance (as does the good Judge Bao), find themselves undergoing a process of inversion.

The "central meaning" of a particular controversial text, as we may discover through alternative methods of literary analysis such as one based on an appreciation of the implications of chiasmus, may be a direct literary assault on the political system within which the playwright is existing through the disguised inversion of official political dogma within the play. At the same time, of course, the central meaning of the text might well be viewed, through the same chiasmic lens, as the production of an essential ambiguity itself.

**Signposting the Trickster**

*As long as there shall be stones, the seeds of fire will not die*¹⁵

_We didn't land on Plymouth rock, my brothers and sisters - Plymouth rock landed on us._¹⁶

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In chapter five various comparisons were drawn between *The Imposter* and *WM*, particularly in regard to notions of impasse, cyclical return and the treatment of time. An obvious contrast emerges when we examine the playwrights' treatment of their respective protagonists.

It has been shown above that *The Imposter*'s Li Xiaozhang evidences many of the characteristics associated with trickster figures. Li Xiaozhang's actions serve to initiate a series of chiasmic inversions regarding the status of the play's characters, in particular the protagonist's status in relation to the middle level Party bureaucrats.

However the previous chapter also posed the question of whether, Wang Peigong has constructed General as a trickster figure. It was implied that General might perhaps be seen as approximating a "saviour" figure (also closely associated with the trickster), but that while General is associated with various status inversion throughout the play, the construction of this character is entirely different to that of Li Xiaozhang.

It is far more difficult to argue, for example, that General is the clear cut initiator of the chiasmic inversions throughout *WM*. Since the plays have so much else in common, why is this so? Furthermore, if *WM* contains no trickster figure per se, does this mean that, in terms of our understanding of authorial intention, this play's chiasmic inversions should be attributed less weight?

*An Implicit Chiasm*

At the close of act one of *WM* there appears an especially ambiguous and therefore "troublesome" scene. It is the winter of 1976. within their collective shack, the urblings have finally fallen asleep. After a moment, the Drummer and Keyboardist, who play the commentating role of a chorus, steal onto the stage.
Drummer: Have they all frozen solid? They all wear such fixed, anguished smiles.

Keyboardist: People who've frozen to death all wear such grimaces.

Drummer: Wake up! Everybody, wake up! Disaster is nigh!

Keyboardist: Look! It's those peculiar flashes of lightning which announce an earthquake!

Drummer: Listen! The whole earth is roaring like a bull! [She beats her drum.]

Urblings: [Jolted awake, they cry out in alarm] An earthquake! It's an earthquake!

(In the midst of the sound of rumbling, the walls collapse and the roof caves in. The urblings are thrown tumbling about, frantically dodging and struggling ...

Finally calm returns. Everyone crowds together to gaze outside through a broken window frame.)

General: Look! Not a light to be seen! Where's the village? The people?

Big Head: Gone! Completely wiped out!

Hatoyama: And the sun? How can the sun have vanished?

Waifling: There's such a heavy snowfall! Where can we find sanctuary?
General: Come on! Let's hug together.

Sister Superior: [Fearfully] The earth's crust has cracked open. We might be swallowed up!

Pushcart: [Despairingly] We're finished! [Screaming wildly] Finished!

Big Head: There's no need to scream! We're still alive! Let's think for a moment!

Urblings: Let's think a moment!

General: Pack together! Keep hold of each other! If one comes again we don't want to be caught unawares! Or become separated!

(The urblings huddle close together - and are seemingly transformed to resemble a stone statue.)

Drummer: "As long as there shall be stones, the seeds of fire will not die". "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Is it possible you haven't seen how, after the west wind has scattered the old order, the whole land has returned to spring? The frosts have thawed, the snows melted, branches have sprouted tender new shoots! This is the spring which you've been waiting for so many years! Hurry! Rush out to the fields, dash onto the road! Go forth and breathe! Go running! Go singing!
(One by one the urblings wake up. In a blissful daze they take off their heavily padded winter clothes and, throwing them on the ground, walk off, each going their own way. They stroll about, breathing deeply, advancing into Spring).

Viewed through a chiasmic lens, the Drummer's final lines of this seemingly rather innocuous poetic speech come to be of great interest. The Drummer's first poetic quote here, "As long as there shall be stones, the seeds of fire will not die", is taken directly from the lionised Chinese revolutionary writer Lu Xun (1881-1936). This poetic quote is then immediately coupled with another taken from the Poem "Ode to the West Wind", by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822). In a purely poetic sense, in fact, the final three verses of Shelley's "Ode" wonderfully complement Lu Xun's imagery.

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Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?
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"Is it possible", the Drummer now asks of the sleeping youths, "you haven't seen how, after the west wind has scattered the old order, the whole land has returned to spring?". Recalling that Mao Zedong dies in September, 1976, the Drummer's words can, at one level, be interpreted as a prophecy of political change bringing about a social rebirth.
As it stands, this small scene can be interpreted as fitting quite well within the post Mao official political discourses. Writing in the mid 1980s, the playwright might merely be seen to be foreshadowing, in hindsight, the tumultuous political and social changes engendered by the official closure of the Cultural Revolution period, changes giving rise to the new order of Deng Xiaoping and his supporters.

At a different level of analysis, however, the Drummer's words can be interpreted as partaking of an entirely different, unofficial and therefore controversial, discourse. The notion of an old order coming to be scattered by a "west wind" is also antithetical to the received, Maoist sponsored dogma, which holds that the "east wind" (revolutionary China), will inevitably overcome the west wind (Western imperialism and Soviet hegemonism). The latter dogmatic notion can be concisely summed up by the well known Maoist slogan, *Dongfeng yadao xifeng* (The east wind will overcome the west wind).

Without a chiasmic lens, the poetic lines by Lu Xun and Shelley as quoted in the text can be seen as most likely to be complementary. It is important to note that the works of Shelley appeared on the reading lists of a very large number of English Department reading lists in Chinese universities during the early 1980s. With good reason. Shelley was regarded by the Party as an early English revolutionary writer.\(^{17}\) According to such a reading of the two quotes, the official discourse is still maintained.

Utilising our lens, however, we are able to produce a different interpretation. If we hypothesise that Shelley's west wind quote is meant by the playwright to be primarily understood as a signpost to a different level of interpretation, then we can ask whether the quote may have in fact been "worked in" to the scene with a different intention in

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\(^{17}\) Arguments for Shelley's "revolutionary credentials" can be found in Paul Foot, *Red Shelley*, Bookmarks, London, 1980, 84.
mind. If we view the quote as meant to be seen as being in juxtaposition, rather than complementary to, another notion, then we can ask what this "other" notion might possibly be. And the most obvious oppositional notion to the concept of west wind is, of course, the east wind. In effect, the west wind quote from Shelley is used to signpost, or provoke in the audience's minds, recollection of the Maoist slogan concerning the east wind, together with all its political implications. In the audience's minds, the notions of west and east winds come to form the extended arms of a two line poetic chiasm, that is,

*Dongfeng yadao xifeng,*

*Xifeng yadao dongfeng* 18

with the imaginative force of the chiasm deriving from the contradiction of the coupled assertions - Shelley's line originally, of course, referring to the overthrow of the European feudal aristocracies, but being co-opted by Wang Peigong to mean the overthrow of, at the very least, Maoism in China.

Given the context of the timing of the action here (1976), however, and the content of the preceding action in this small scene, audience interpretation of this contradiction is surely weighted on the proposition that the west wind is meant to be seen as triumphant. In this example, it might be argued, the chiasm is hidden by the playwright. Any explicit proposition of a west wind triumphant over its eastern adversary might be seen by the playwright as far too politically controversial, even volatile. Instead, the chiasm is beautifully hidden within quotes from two established, well credentialed revolutionary writers, giving even the most suspicious official critic a bit of a headache,

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18 "The east wind will overcome the west wind, the west wind will overcome the east wind".
while providing for the most insightful and bold official critic a politically problematic conundrum when it comes to an unravelling of authorial intention.

For the latter official critic, especially, it may well be easier to ignore the small scene altogether rather than open himself up to accusations of political paranoia by the playwright on the one hand, or placing the notion of a triumphant west wind on the table for public discussion, with all the wider political consequences this might produce, on the other. As in the case of official criticism of The Imposter, as Link has noted, the official critic, either unable or unwilling at the time to point to any definitive textual evidence that the fundamental message of the play is "anti-Party" (as distinct perhaps from "anti-Party leadership") and "therefore" anti-socialist, must rely upon a combination of nit-picking and broad condemnatory brushstrokes.

**An Explicit Chiasm**

Act one of WM contains a scene, referred to previously, where the urblings are cooking the chicken stolen by General. The occasion gives rise to a series of jokes as they decide on which of their political works should be sacrificed for fuel. Waifling is a little confused on the question of whether Chairman Mao currently supports Deng Xiaoping, as two different quotes from Mao, "Farting is forbidden!" and "Talented men are hard to obtain" are juxtaposed. Then the others admit that they can't work it out either. It is at this point that the conundrum is humorously summed up by Big Head and Hatoyama.

Big Head: [Heaving a long sigh] Oh! Roll on Cultural Revolutions ... we're supposed to remake one every seven or eight years ...

Hatoyama: [Lying down on the spot] One lasts seven or eight years ...
In the Chinese, the joke is both arrived at and emphasised by a reversal of the order of terms in order to arrive at an inversion of meaning:

**Big Head:** ... *Qi, ba nian, zai lai yici*

**Hatoyama:** ... *Lai yici qi, ba nian.*

Mao Zedong's famous line regarding the necessity of implementing cultural revolutions on a regular basis in order, supposedly, to keep the power of the state bureaucracy in check, is wittily inverted by Hatoyama. The resulting image that is transmitted describes a future of endless, or "continuing" revolution, expressed via a perfect chiasm.

**Now Stand on Your Head**

"When you die, Mulla", asked a friend, "how would you like to be buried?"

"Head downwards. If, as people believe, we are right way up in this world, I want to try being upside-down in the next". 

Early in act two of *WM* (spring, 1978), we find the urblings have just sat for their university entrance examinations. So much, we learn, depends on their having passed. However during the late 1970s there was a huge backlog of Chinese youth waiting for university places as urban youth poured back from the countryside into the cities. Understandably, the urblings are in a state of extreme anxiety as they await their results. Sister Superior almost had a nervous breakdown at the entrance to the exam hall. But, only a few moments in stage time after they've emerged from the hall, the Keyboardist

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appears to hand out their results. First, however, the Drummer emphasises her own shock at seeing the emotional state of the urblings.

Drummer: [Incomprehendingly] How has this happened?

General: Right, how has this happened? ... It's because, for the time being, the examination route is about the only "Bright Golden Road" we have left. It's because we were delayed for too long, to the point where we'd lost almost all hope, so that now we're desperately clutching at this last opportunity to realise our ideals ...

Keyboardist: [Running up holding a few scraps of paper.] The results are out!

{The urblings are handed the transcripts of their exam results and their faces reveal various kinds of complex responses ...}

Interestingly, it is at this point that at least one of the stage productions of WM differs from the playwright's script directions quoted above. In a video of what is most probably the Shanghai production, the director has the actors go beyond merely revealing, "various kinds of complex responses". In this stage production, each of the urblings momentarily freeze their bodies into a variety of grotesque, contorted attitudes emphasising their range of feelings from abject dejection to disbelief. The important exception is Big Head who, for some strange reason, but presumably at Director Wang Gui's instigation, proceeds to stand on his head. Big Head and the other urblings hold their poses for a few moments only. At the same time, the stage is darkened except for several spotlights which play and flicker crazily upon the frozen characters. The spotlights dim. The stage lights are turned up, and the play's action moves almost casually on.
Why does Big Head stand on his head? Why does he literally turn himself upside down? It will be recalled, of course that in chapter five it was argued that an upside down figure of a person might be seen to symbolise the figure of an "X", with the extended arms and legs of the figure forming the branches of the letter, as in the example of the inverted figure in the woodcut produced during the English revolution and reproduced above.

Following the next small scene, we learn that amongst the urblings only Sister Superior has in fact gained entrance to a university. We find the urblings sitting on a riverbank conducting an examination postmortem. Suddenly, General reaches for Big Head's transcript of results.

General: Big Head, give us a look at yours. [He takes Big Head's results transcript and reads it.) You little imp! You passed!

Big Head: [Laughing coldly] Even though I passed I won't be accepted. Yours truly is quite aware of his own limitations! [He slowly tears the transcript to pieces.]

Hatoyama: Why is that?

Big Head: My father's been sent to a "Five Prohibitions Political Study Class". Didn't you know? [He casts the bits of paper onto the water and walks off.]

For Big Head, the contradiction between the perceived dogma and the "realities" of life for the urblings in the China of 1978 serve to turn him upside down. Hatoyama immediately emphasis this contradiction when he then softly asks, "It's not possible, is
it? That even now the "Nine Degrees of Kindred" can be implicated by one member's crime?"

The particular stage direction, of course, might simply be explained by various factors; perhaps Wang Gui or one of the cast had a bit of personal inspiration at the time, for example, innocently unaware of any hidden agenda. However even this, it could be argued, would only reinforce for the critic the status of notions of structural inversion throughout the play.

Significantly, there are some unusual similarities in the "Inverted Big Head" scene with the earthquake scene at the close of act one discussed above. In both scenes, unusually, the Drummer and Keyboardist are on stage. In both scenes, the youths freeze momentarily (in the former scene, into an imaginative rock). In both scenes, the usual stage lighting gives way to special lighting effects.

More "bottles in front of me and frontal lobotomies"

Is it drawing too long a bow to assert that controversial playwrights like Wang Peigong consciously utilise literary and dramatic structures to get their points across? I think not. Given the nature of the bureaucratised socialist system in China it should, on the contrary, be assumed that controversial writers will necessarily tend to be as ambiguous in their communications as the proponents of the political system themselves. Wang Peigong's comments in the Appendices of this thesis are a good example of how polished such writers can be at negotiating their way through the pitfalls of official criticism. For example, by candidly admitting and arguing for his trespass into the so-called "forbidden areas" of literary production, in this instance, through portraying only "middle characters" in WM, Wang Peigong rather neatly relocates the debate away from what is perhaps the more dangerous subject of his overall dramatic technique in
the play. His fundamental political critique, moreover, while lurking beneath the surface of his dramatic work in this instance, may still occasionally surface, shyly and briefly, for air, as in the situation of a lengthy interview.

Wang Peigong: I am reading Eric Fromm's works. He says that everyone should ask, if they are allowed to speak freely, whether in fact their speech derives from their own thinking. I think that's great. ... Do I think that I have achieved complete freedom [as in being unaffected by his environment]? I think not. I can still feel the bindings around my mind, the results of long term education. I once read somewhere, perhaps in a novel, about a man who was imprisoned. The man had nothing to do and nowhere to go beyond the space of his room. One day he discovered a small bottle in his room, and everyday he'd put a small piece of iron wire inside it. As he was actually wrongfully imprisoned, he was finally set free. But he had difficulties readapting to the outside world. He used to pace about at home. He brought the small bottle back with him and, one day, smashed it open. Surprisingly, he found that all the pieces of iron wire had fused together, becoming solid.

It's not surprising that this little story, which Wang Peigong had "read somewhere", can be interpreted in many ways. First, it might be seen as a general commentary on the effect of environment upon prisoners. By extension, it might be viewed as a comment on the effect of the political environment on writers in China. The interesting point is, however, that one would be less likely to be able to interpret this highly ambiguous story satisfactorily without making an educated guess that the small bottle [in Chinese, xiao ping] is meant to be interpreted as a homophonic euphemism for Deng Xiaoping. 20

20 My own interpretation of this story has the small pieces of iron representing people's ideology, as instilled into their minds by the CCP leadership. Over a long period the received ideas fuse together and become inseparable, even after the original binding bottle is smashed (that is, Deng Xiaoping dies or is toppled).
One might argue for this assumption by referring to reports in the international media, on June 4, 1990 [the first anniversary of the Beijing massacre], that students inside Beijing university campuses passed the evening in symbolic protest, smashing hundreds of "small bottles".

"To see thy footstool set upon thy head"

It hath been ... mine endeavour ... to give unto every limb and part not only his due proportion but also his due place, and not to set the head where the foot should be, or the foot where the head. I may peradventure to many seem guilty of that crime which was laid against the Apostle, to turn the world upside down, and to set that in the bottom which others make the top of the building, and to set that upon the roof which others lay for a foundation. 21

Then there is the famous deng, or long trestle-stool, referred to in chapter one, which became an object of wonder or amusement for many members of WM's audiences. The trestle-stool was suspended, but suspended upside down, above the stage throughout the play. In Chinese, an inverted trestle-stool is literally a daodeng. And the symbolism of this inverted deng has been interpreted by many to reflect a homophonic euphemism daodeng, the deng in the latter example being a different character referring to the family name of "paramount leader" Deng Xiaoping. The character "dao", of course, can mean to invert or overturn. However it can also express the more political action of overthrowing something or someone. As noted, many have therefore interpreted the daodeng of the inverted stool as being a homophonic euphemism for a daodeng meaning "overthrow Deng (Xiaoping)".

Finally, there is the problem of the play's title. As mentioned in chapter one, the two English letters of the title have been interpreted by many to represent the first two letters, respectively, of the *pinyin* for the Chinese term for "we" or "us"; that is, "women".

Even at this level of interpretation, it might be said that the title could be seen as controversial on at least three accounts. Firstly, the utilisation of two English letters for the title was apparently interpreted by some official critics as a sign that the play was "modernist". Secondly, taken in the context of the play's action as a whole, the title could pose an alternative to the official dogma that it is the Party and the Party only that officially expresses the true aspirations of the mass of China's citizens. The implications of any individual playwright who, through his play's title, might be seen to be co-opting the role of the Party in this regard could be profound.23

Alternatively, and more likely, the play's title might be more generally viewed as symbolising the stories and aspirations of the generation of urblings sent down to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. In terms of the official discourse, however, this too might be viewed as having entered dangerous territory. Given the Party's

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22 "Ren chi ren de shehui". A popular Chinese urban folk-saying.

23 Precedent for such titles does exist in the realm of anti-Stalinist (and truly anti-socialist) literature. The title of the Soviet novel by Zamyatin, for example, appears most often to have been translated into the English as *We*. The novel purports to depict life in the perfect communist society, while representing the latter as largely based upon the bureaucratic distortions and developing authoritarianism of Soviet society in the early 1920s, the period of Lenin's death and the emergence of the increasingly powerful and authoritarian Party-state bureaucracy represented by Stalin. Foreshadowing the conclusion of Orwell's, *1984*, the protagonist of "We" is forced to submit to mind controlling psychiatric treatment, and in *We* this leads him to betray his lover. The novel was banned by Soviet authorities in the early 1920s.
purported practice of the "mass line", and the implication that through the dialectic of theory and practice of this line the Party represents the "mass" of China's citizens, it could be argued that any playwright purporting to represent in turn the concerns of a mere few million urblings, as opposed to representing the concerns of China's one billion persons, has a highly developed ego problem.

On this question of the significance and symbolism of the play's title, it is pertinent to quote the playwright's own words on how the title developed, bearing in mind, of course, the points raised above regarding the sometimes quixotic relationship between controversial Chinese playwrights and "foreign" students of Chinese literature.

Wang Peigong: The environment within which they exist is very confusing for young people. It's quite upside down. This point is linked to the title of my play, WM. Originally I gave the play the title, "The River flows East After All", meaning that, no matter how much meandering is involved, a river will ultimately join the sea. This title is taken from a line in an ancient poem written by Xin Qiji, a poet of the Song Dynasty. The first lines of the poem are, "Mountains cannot hinder it, the river will flow east after all".24 The following lines go, "Standing at evening on the riverbank feeling lonely and sad, I heard birdsong sounding like, "bu ru gui qu".25

At first, I used that line as the title of my play. But the director and others felt that the title was too literary. It wasn't accessible enough. In the end the play was called Women. This name sounds both interesting and a little funny. Just imagine someone asking, "What play are you going to this evening?", and in response, "We're going to catch ourselves". It sounds amusing.

24 "Qing shan zhe bu zhu, bi jing dong liu qu".
25 "Jiang wan zheng chou ning, fu shan wen zhe gu". "Zhe gu" sounds like "Bu ru gui qu", meaning, "it would be better to admit defeat and retire".
We have an assistant director, Hu Xuehua. He's studying in the U.S., and is a friend of mine. He played the character Hatoyama in the play. He then suggested we call the play, "W", as it sounded better than *Women*. "W" is also the first English alphabet letter in the *pinyin* form of "women". I then thought of "WM" as being better than "W". "W" is the first letter of "Wo" and "M" is the first of "men". In addition, this name could imply several meanings, for example, "for women and men".

I wrote a short interpretation of the title "WM", but when the play was banned it was unable to be published. My interpretation goes like, 'It happens that quite often it's more difficult to give a baby a name than it is to give birth to the baby. Parents often try hundreds of names only to eventually decide upon the most commonplace one. For this play it's the same. We finally gave it the most casual name, 'Women'. It order to make it sound fashionable, we used the letters "WM". "WM" looks very beautiful. It resembles mountains and mountain valleys. It looks like flame, like thickly growing weeds, like woods, like waves, like flying birds and like human beings standing upright and upside down. You can interpret it in whatever way your imagination leads or allows you to.

The play was soon criticised. The title, "WM", was used in the official documents. What I really intended to write about was flames, mountains, waves, birds, weeds and people who are standing upright or upside down.  

**KW:** You say that the title "WM" also represents people who are standing upright and upside down. In the play certain characters are fond of saying, "It's always the opposite of what you dream that comes true". Does this also

26 *Lizhe de daoze de ren*. Emphasis added.
27 *Meng shi fande*. 
indicate that we are talking about a process of things turning upside down, or inversion, here?

Wang Peigong: Yes.28

"W" and "M", of course, are the same letter, inverted. Written side by side, suggests Wang Peigong, the characters resemble a person standing upright next to a person who is upside down, a sort of inverted reflection. Interestingly, if the two English letters which form the play's title are placed horizontally, they might well, as the playwright suggests, be viewed as representing people, one standing upright next to one standing upside down. The same two letters, if situated vertically, may be seen to take on a further level of symbolism. Aligned in this fashion, the two letters take on the character not only of an inversion, but also of a direct reflection. Aligned vertically, in the traditional manner of Chinese characters, the two English letters take on a remarkable resemblance to an "X" configuration.29

28 In order to place this exchange in context, it needs to be said that it formed only a very small part of a wider interview concerned more with particular translation problems, the playwright's views of the characters and their actions, and the general political atmosphere surrounding the banning of the play. The interview took place in 1987. Nor have I had the opportunity to pursue further the subject of inversion with the playwright. Nor, at the time, did the playwright elaborate further on the subject of inversion in WM, and it was only much later that I began to ask myself why this was so. For a transcript of the interview, see Appendix A.

29 Cf. the title of the play as published in The Nineties.
CONCLUSION

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being,
but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness\(^1\).

Creative writers in highly politicised cultures are often caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand the combination of creative urge and personal political and artistic integrity spurs some to write about reality as they see it. However this very action may bring them up against the constraints of a political system within which state-sponsored dogma defines how writers are supposed both to view and in particular represent "reality".

Particularly in recent decades the highly politicised culture within which many Chinese playwrights have lived and worked has often been between characterised by sudden and extreme shifts in policies. To a large extent these shifts reflect the opportunist character and shifting power bases of the ruling elite within the Chinese Communist Party. During times of political crisis, policies emanating from the apex of the Party can undergo sudden and dramatic inversions, twists and turns, often apparently primarily on the basis of factional opportunism.

For some such playwrights as Wang Peigong, the means by which they have attempted to overcome this dilemma has at times been the production of literature which is

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characterised by a high degree of ambiguity. For these writers, in their struggles against
the imposition of state dogma, ambiguity can be utilised as both a weapon and a shield.
Ironically, the very same ambiguity, while encouraging the blooming of a number of
differing interpretative possibilities of their works and serving thereby to mask them
from accusations of direct political meddling and subterfuge, may also constrain their
ability to get the crux of their concealed message, or vision of reality, across to their
audience.

The thesis has argued that when we have identified an ambiguous text it may be more
useful to ask "how" such ambiguities are expressed. When we can identify a
relationship between ambiguity and symbolic inversion in the texts, it is precisely by
posing this question of "how" that the critical reader can then proceed to understand the
new relationship in terms of "status" between what, symbolically or by proxy, has
undergone inversion and its ideational opposite.

The thesis has attempted to clarify how ambiguity can be utilised in order to produce
politically controversial effects within texts. The literary device known as "chiasmus"
has been identified and shown to be useful because it highlights in whole or in part
ideational notions or wider political ideologies that are believed to stand in opposition
to each other.

The key to understanding chiasmus, it has been argued, is to view it is a process through
which such ideationally opposite notions are thrown into relief. The question arises,
however, of which ideational notions are being juxtaposed.

Through the analysis of a variety of examples of chiasmic inversion across time and
place, it has been found that within the construction of plots and narratives chiasmus
can be utilised to "set up" scenarios wherein expectational inversion on the part of the
audience/reader can be achieved.
In arguing for the force and relevance of chiasmus as an analytical concept, the thesis has ranged widely, discussing Native American mythology, Elizabethan drama (in the form of Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* plays), the trickster and fool, the World Upside Down, the *Xiyouji*, and several Model Operas from the Cultural Revolution period, amongst other things.

The examples show that chiasmus often has the effect of encouraging the audience/reader to attain a different (and potentially anti-dogmatic) understanding of the broad subjects dealt with in the texts. Notions of the "idea" versus the "reality" are highlighted and juxtaposed through a process involving the building up and then the inversion of certain audience/readers expectations.

Many creative writers within politicised cultures have viewed dogma as being necessarily “worn out”, and in need of replacement by interpretations of reality which more closely represent realities of their time which appear more objectively true. That is, for the most part, they hope through their literary productions to sponsor anti-dogmatic political conclusions.

At a political level the central terms within a controversial play may simply be symbols or proxies of what the audience, through the building up of certain expectations by the playwright and director, understands to be the ideational theme or political dogma at the heart of the play. The symbolic proxy representing this political dogma then undergoes an inversion in order to highlight alternative, oppositional (and therefore potentially subversive) notions which are shown to exist "in reality" and which serve to undermine that dogma.

The question of precisely which ideational notions are being juxtaposed within any given text is answered through the identification of what Welch calls the "central terms" of the text. Where such terms do exist, they will probably exist at key points in the
narrative, that is, at points or stages of the narrative where the playwright wishes to imprint a stronger impression than usual upon the minds of the audience.

Based on a survey and analysis of concepts of ambiguity of idea and marginality of character in a variety of texts, it is possible to utilise alternative strategies to gain insights into texts which may be more consistent with authorial intention. Recognising marginality of character may be the key to appreciating the function of ambiguity because of their close association within various forms of subversive narrative. For similar reasons our appreciation of the cross-cultural figure known as the trickster is crucial to our understanding of how this primordial and dysfunctional character can be utilised by creative writers, intent on subterfuge, to expose what is worn out in society while at the same time pointing to the possibility of something new.

In some controversial texts the operations of chiasmic inversion are more deeply submerged within the plot and narrative structure than in others. This is clearly the case with WM as opposed to The Imposter.

Both plays have been viewed as "ambiguous" and already been the subject of various attempts at interpretation. Compromised and restricted discussions which took place within official circles during the period when WM was banned took that form, it appears, because the subject matter of the play was so politically explosive. Because debate among official critics which was restricted in dealing with the big issues, official criticism was obliged to concentrate on what Perry Link calls, in relation to much of the official criticism of The Imposter, "nit-picking".

The rise and fall in status of the main characters in The Imposter is fairly clearly described by the action and also reflected symbolically in the transfer of the bottle of liquor. In many ways the plot (and the chiasmic inversion) of this play is much more explicit and therefore "neater" than that of WM, and it is argued that a reason for this is
the presence of a clearly drawn character, Li Xiaozhang (or Zhang Xiaoli) who is a "trickster" figure.

For example, one key difference in the two plays is that The Imposter obviously contains a trickster figure in the character of Li Xiaozhang. WM, I have argued, does not contain a readily identifiable trickster figure, and this absence of a trickster has implications for the manner in which chiasmic inversion operates in that play. This leads to the question of whether the playwright has in this play co-opted the role of trickster unto himself, and in the final chapter, titled, "WM and Authorial Intention: the Playwright as Trickster", it is hinted that this is indeed likely the case. However whether Wang Peigong's exclusion of a trickster character has been a conscious or unconscious decision remains perhaps a less useful question than that of how inversion in his play can be explained.

In the final chapter of the thesis, "WM and Authorial Intention: the Playwright as Trickster", I have sought to compare the various other ways by which chiasmus operates in WM. An assumption drawn is that while the operation of chiasmic inversion can be shown to be quite complex, it is not necessarily always so. A further assumption is that while chiasmic inversion can be identified within a text, that text is not necessarily going to be littered with such examples.

With the possible, yet for this reason important, exception of Tamburlaine, within few of the materials surveyed can a narrative structure be easily disclosed whereby chiasmus can be seen to operate in a sustained (by which I mean an essentially lineally graphic) fashion. It is more difficult in the case of WM to disclose the "central terms" of the text as a narrative unit.

However it does appear that in this play the remainder of the system (ie, those terms which are to some degree "reflected" while not being elevated to the point of
"centrality") "can be used with equal effectiveness as a framework through which the author may compare, contrast, juxtapose, complement or complete each of the flanking elements of the chiasmic system. In addition, a marked degree of intensification can be introduced throughout the system both by building to a climax at the centre as well as by strengthening each element individually upon its chiasmic repetition." (Welch, Chiasmus in Antiquity, quoted above).

In the case of WM it appears that "the wider chiasmic system" can be seen to exist, for example, in its "extreme terms". These terms comprise the actions of the seven urblings at the beginning and end of the play. In act one the youths perform collective labour on a rural commune. At the end of the act four the urblings have reverted to performing a similar form of work when they playfully join the Young Pioneers in cleaning the streets and lanes.

Of course the last scene is painted with an ironic brush. However there is a similarity in the urblings' actions which is to some degree reflective of their initial actions in act one - they are bound together by the nature of their work. What has changed is the wider political environment within which they have found themselves and have been obliged to survive and interact. Yet the playwright's structuring of the play around the four seasons (though these seasons are dispersed over a number of years) does imply a notional closing of a set of terms (the latter reflected in the urblings' actions).

The chiasms support each other. By our attempts to derive a consistent interpretation of the emphasis which they build (in an almost incremental fashion, each informing meanings upon each other), we can put forward an argument as to the central terms of the theme we are interested in (for example, as expressed through the theme juxtaposing the status of dreams vis-a-vis reality and of "building the great wall" through voluntary or involuntary effort).
The final chapter details some of the different forms of symbolic inversion utilised in *WM*. It is argued that these instances occur both in the text and in the performance (for the latter through set construction and stage directions) in both explicit and implicit form. Choice of these forms may have depended on how far Wang Peigong and director Wang Gui believed they could go without getting themselves into seriously trouble.

The more sensitive the political environment within which playwrights work, the more careful it is in their interests to be. It is therefore hardly surprising that, compared with *The Imposter*, relatively fewer implicit and certainly explicit examples of inversion can be readily identified in *WM*.

Perhaps all that needs to be added at this point is that, taken individually, instances of chiasmic inversion occurring in the text of *WM* can retain high degrees of ambiguity. And if this was the end of the story then our recognition of the "chi" form within a text would have limited value as a high degree of ambiguity would still remain.

As a corollary, however, it is likely that those inversions which can be identified will have a great deal of significance indeed for our gaining insights into authorial intention. When such symbolic inversions are identified, they may for the reason of their very rareness appear as quite bold, such as the *deng* or trestle stool which was suspended above the stage.

Indeed, if the meanings of their plays are ambiguous, the comments those writers make about them must often also be ambiguous. Indeed this appears to be reflected in aspects of the interview with the playwright, which is included as Appendix One. Wang Peigong appears to play a game of quite stealthily concealing and yet at the same time through certain hints revealing at least some of his underlying political views of that time.
Those within China's politicised culture who can often speak most loudly are those official critics who do service as the defenders of state dogma. However while controversial Chinese playwrights have to choose their words, other critics may still venture to speak.

Those interpreters residing in politicised cultures outside of China, where such freedoms are currently relatively greater, can only attempt to unravel authorial intention, often through recourse to means which are at least "once removed", in the hope that sooner or later the political environment within China will change and the author will be far more freely able to comment about his or her own work.

Perhaps a play like WM could actually be compromised or restricted by the context and strategies outlined in the thesis. However as quoted above, Welch writes that, "Indeed what is said is often no more important than how it is said ... the task of understanding the meaning of a writing is never complete until its formular aspects as well as its thought contents has been grasped".

Sadly, playwrights like Wang Peigong often have little or no recourse to disputing such interpretations. They cannot easily, to quote T.S. Eliot, say, "No, that is not what I meant at all. That is not it at all". Does this mean that we should make no attempts to grasp the formular aspects of the works of such playwrights?

Writers of ambiguous plays do so in the expectation, and often the hope, that within their own politicised cultures their works will be misinterpreted by some and properly understood by others. The very ambiguity of their work allows them the possibility of defending that same work by posing alternative interpretations to their real audience on the one hand and to official critics and their political masters on the other. And that same essential ambiguity allows them, through posing alternative interpretations, the possibility of defending their works against interpretations produced by persons outside
of their politicised cultures. In this sense, as the thesis points out, ambiguity can be used as a shield as much as it can be used as a weapon when playwrights produce works which act, as Perry Link puts it, as "little sailboats crisscrossing suggestion".

It should be stressed once more that conclusions about authorial intention within politicised cultures which are based on a textual analysis based in turn upon our recognition of "chi" forms can not be taken as definitive ones. There is a very basic reason for this. Even though we can say that there exists a set of "chi" forms from which we can derive meanings which we believe to be consistent with each other and with the wider text, ultimately we are still obliged to interpret those meanings according to our own often deeply held assumptions concerning the author's "political" stance, and therefore authorial intention in regard to that specific text.

It follows that for one critic Christopher Marlowe's apparent playing with "chi" forms in Tamburlaine, may be interpreted as consistent with contemporary rumours regarding his both revealing and concealing an essential atheism. However other critics, although finding perhaps the same consistency of his manipulation of those same "chi" forms, might attribute his philosophical stance, for example, as approximating a particular (though one would suspect quite iconoclastic) contemporary religious sect.

However whether texts may in fact be compromised or restricted by the strategies outlined in the thesis is perhaps dependent upon how a particular context and strategy is treated. It might also be possible to argue that through an alternative approach which involves identifying and playing with "chi" forms elicited from the text, the parameters for critical analysis might actually be broadened.

How? From the work in particular of Welch and others it appears that texts can contain a number of "chi" structures which often reside at points approximating ambiguous statements or actions. The existence of one "chi" form in a particular text
implies the possibility of the existence of others. If we then turn to examine other apparently ambiguous statements or actions in the text other "chi" forms may be disclosed to the point where we may be left looking at a set of such forms.

Recognition of the "chi" forms simply allows us an alternative framework upon which to "hang" certain notions we have reason to believe are being treated by the playwright. As a framework the "chi" form allows us to view and think about these notions in a dichotomised manner - to see them in relation to other, often antithetical, ones.

It is then possible to test out a variety interpretations of ambiguous scenes of the play before arriving at any tentative conclusion that a particular interpretation seems to fit better as it is more consistent with interpretations of other instances of chiasmus in the play and with the general context of the text. The identification and analysis of a wider set of chiasms allows one the flexibility to think alternatively about how the playwright may be "playing" with such ideationally opposed categories.

Of course our understanding of the general context of the text may dramatically change according to what we now seeing hanging upon the "chi", of what specifically those two (or more) ideational categories thrown up by the "chi" form are. Essentially the thesis argues that, in our analysis of a drama commonly perceived as being highly ambiguous, if our own playing in turn with the "chi" forms allows us to show a certain consistency in the playwright's treatment of a number of themes, then this may well have brought us to a closer understanding of authorial intention.

In WM as in Tamburlaine, certain notions are thrown up by the "chi" forms in a manner which has a relatively high degree of consistency. Assuming the text is not the product of a totally anarchic mind and that instead the author is to some degree indulging in political subterfuge, it would seem logical that the higher the degree of consistency that can be developed in relation to our interpretation of both the notions juxtaposed by the
"chi" forms and the weight that we give each notion in relation to the other, the closer we may be to understanding authorial intention at key points of the text and then of the text as a whole.

At the beginning of the closing chapter as well as earlier in the thesis there is a brief discussion of the political character of what is termed the bureaucratised (or "Stalinised") Chinese socialist state. In particular the discussion highlights features such as the "cult of personality" and the debasement of theory (the rather gross distortion of dialectical materialism) and policy formulation (the "mass line").

This political and cultural background as outlined above is taken as "the general context of the text" of WM. It is against this background that the "chi" framework is pinned and the ambiguities identified within the play are thrown into relief, then tested against each other in order to establish any consistency of treatment by the playwright.

However, as implied above, the process is two way. An understanding of the "general context of the text" of WM might be dramatically changed by the identification of more ideationally juxtaposed but at this point undisclosed categories. However the argument of the thesis is that at this point the conclusions drawn above concerning authorial intention in the play do appear to "fit" in terms of revealing a relatively high degree of consistency of treatment of a number of themes on the part of the playwright, and within the general context of the text as outlined.

Wang Peigong's treatment of revolutionary themes appears to be particularly playful, drawing as it seems to upon earlier usages of chiasmic inversion such as those to be found in plays like The Red Lantern, Shaijabang and Tiger Taking Mountain by Strategy. Within these latter plays, as discussed in chapter five of the thesis, "Turning Ghosts into People: Some Model Operas", chiasmic inversion appears to be used by
those writers in ways which pose political dilemmas which were inevitably resolved in a manner which endorsed the Party's official political line.

Alternatively, in his treatment of the terms "east wind - west wind" and other ideationally juxtaposed notional categories, Wang Peigong seems to play with an entire set of such previously existing officially endorsed resolutions of political dilemmas through his own rather telling chiasmic inversion. He does so by symbolic proxy, but even so, many members of an audience of theatre-goers in the mid-1980s would have been familiar with the previous official treatment of such themes. For many years previously, had not basic revolutionary concepts often been expressed as the struggle for supremacy between ideationally opposed symbols within polemically charged drama which was served up by playwrights as political instruction for the masses?

If it is true that, in a Marxian sense, every ideology contains the seeds of its own destruction, then the chiasmic process serves to throw into relief both the dogma (or "idea") and the anti-dogma (or "reality") which constitute the central terms of the text. The chiasmic process can thus be utilised by politically subversive playwrights in order to lead the audience towards developing anti-dogmatic conclusions about the subjects treated within their texts, and, by implication, anti-dogmatic conclusions about, for example, more general ideological "truths" produced and enforced at different times by the leaderships of China's bureaucratised socialist state.

Particularly for texts produced within politicised cultures, our recognition of chiasmus together with its implications may assist us to more closely chart the passages of Link's "little sailboats crisscrossing suggestion", and thereby plot with a little more surety the latitude and longitude of their journey's end.
Appendix A

An interview with playwright Wang Peigong.
Beijing, August 1987.

"It's not that I intended to use such an approach in my play, but rather that the play reflected the real life situation". ¹

KW: One of the more unusual aspects of WM is the complete absence, within the play's characters, of representatives of elder generations. At the same time, however, the Dramatis Personae clearly mentions the social status of the parents of each of the urblings. Reading the play, one gets an impression of the elder generations having a very definite, but unseen impact upon the actions of the youths. What are your thoughts about such a comment?

Wang Peigong: This is a difficult problem which I set myself to tackle - the reason for the parents not appearing in the play. And not only their parents, but also brothers and sisters and other relatives are absent. To use a Chinese expression, "There are neither ancestors nor younger generations".²

I think in fact you could quite easily figure out my reason for this. I intended to attempt a new approach. I attempted to show their changes, their relationships and other matters through the youths and the youths only. This approach is new, or at least has rarely

¹ The line, spoken by Wang Peigong, is in the form of a chiasm, and occurs later in the interview.
² Shang wu lao, xia wu xiao.
been used. Most plays depict characters, such as sisters, brothers, school friends etc, aside from the central ones. In my play you can find no such characters, only a few youths of both gender, plus a male drummer and a female erhu player.3

Those two roles are included in the play for two reasons; firstly to animate the scene and, secondly, for a kind of contrast - to view yesterday's youth through the eyes of today's. Those two can't be regarded as characters - they aren't. The only characters in the play are the several youths. I focused upon the interrelations of these youths and their changes, while all other aspects including the social environment are reflected through their activities.

Accordingly there are some blank spots that remain untouched by me in this play. There are many things I intentionally avoided to write down. However people who are familiar with life in China, with the youth, can certainly fill in these blank spots using their own life experience. They certainly know exactly what I mean and can figure out the future developments. Why? Because we've all gone through this kind of life.

A writer therefore need only illustrate several key scenes and can then let the audience fill in the other parts of the story for themselves. There's no need for me to pen in, for instance, what so and so's father said, and how he explained such and such. All these details which other writers are used to stressing are for me neither necessary nor important.

I only wanted to write about the youths, to concentrate upon them alone; their internal struggles, their changes, their inner conflicts and their relationships. I think the materials in my play are enough to serve my purpose. The story and characters are sufficient. There's no need to add other characters.

3 The "erhu", or "Chinese fiddle" player, becomes an electronic keyboard player in the stage play.
KW: How do you react to official criticism that your play is "too pessimistic"?

Wang Peigong: The play is about society and the youths themselves. A certain person here [in Beijing] noticed this point. After watching the play Hu Qiaomu commented that it was a play about "social pessimism". I don't know the definition of this term, but I comprehend its meaning. In fact my intention was not to write only about a socialist society. Nor do I believe that the society I live in is completely hopeless. I am not pessimistic in that sense.

In general, I do think that the society humankind lives within has nothing to be optimistic about, but on the other hand every individual existing within society is striving for something. Through their efforts the youths find a position in society that is right for them. They have achieved something while, at the same time, they have lost many other things. From this point of view the play is optimistic, and not entirely pessimistic. The youths have not given up on their struggles. At the end of the play I still keep their hopes alive. The only difference is that what can be termed hopes or ideals are no longer as simple as those which they talked about in the old days, when they sat around their hut fires.

If you think that this play is merely about China and Chinese society then you have a too simplistic understanding. Just think about if you used this approach to write about youth who are not Chinese, who live under capitalism. Your play could be quite similar. There might not be that much difference. It follows that the Chinese authorities have no reason to be so angry. It's not necessary. Nor is it reasonable. That's my opinion.

The environment within which humans exist is very confusing for youth. It's quite upside down. This point is linked to the title of my play - "WM". Originally I gave my
play the title, "The River Flows East After All", meaning that, no matter how much meandering is involved, a river will ultimately join with the sea. This title is taken from a line in an ancient poem written by Xin Qiji, a poet of the Song Dynasty. The first lines of the poem are, "Mountains cannot hinder it, the river will flow east after all". The lines following go, "Standing on the river bank at evening, feeling sad and alone, I heard birdsong that sounded like, 'bu ru gui qu'."  

Initially I used that sentence as the title of my play. But the director and others felt that this title was too literary ..... not accessible enough. In the end the play was called "Women ". This name sounds interesting and a little amusing. Just imagine someone asking, "What play are you going to this evening ?", and the response, "We're going to watch "Ourselves". It sounds interesting and a little amusing.

We have an assistant director, Hu Xuehua. He is studying in the US, and is a friend of mine. He played the character Hatoyama in the play. He then suggested that we call the play "W", as it sounded better than "Women ". "W" is also the first English alphabet letter in the pinyin form of "Women ". I then thought of "WM" as being better than "W". "W" is the first letter of "wo ", and "M" is the first of "men ". As well, this name could imply several meanings, for example, "for women and men."

I wrote a short interpretation of the title "WM", but when the play was banned the interpretation was unable to be published. My interpretation goes like; "It happens that very often it's more difficult to give a baby a name than it is to give birth to the baby. Parents often try hundreds of names only to finally decide upon the most commonplace one. This play is the same. We finally gave it the most casual name, 'Women '. In order to make it sound fashionable, we used the letters 'WM'. 'WM' looks very beautiful. It

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4 "It would be better to admit defeat and retire".
5 In pinyin.
looks like mountains and mountain valleys. It looks like flame, like thickly growing weeds, like woods, like waves, like flying birds and like human beings standing upright and upside down. You can interpret it in whatever way your imagination leads or allows you to."

Wang Peigong: Yes. In fact it was read as name written by a character created by the author.

The play was soon criticised. This title, "WM", was used in the official documents. What I really intended to write about was flames, mountains, waves, birds, weeds and people who are standing upright or upside down.

KW: You mentioned that the title of "WM" also represents people who are standing upright and upside down. In the play certain characters are fond of saying, "It's the opposite of dreams that always comes true". Does this also indicate that we are talking about a process of turning things upside down, of inversion, here?

Wang Peigong: Yes.

KW: In the play the term existentialism is mentioned in passing. It seems also to be referred to in other ways.

Wang Peigong: Yes, there is a relation. And I understand existentialism in this way: it doesn't mean that one has necessarily read Sartre's works. Existentialism existed before Sartre. Sartre only defined it, giving it its name. One may have come to be aware of it before reading his works. General could have these feelings even though he never read Sartre's works. It is a feeling. You can sometimes reach the same conclusions as a work even though you have never read the particular books. It's the same case as when a person reaches the same conclusions as did Marx even though he never read Marx's books. This can happen.

6 "Meng shi fande".
KW: The play is written in a very "street-wise" style, and here your style in itself tends, perhaps, tends to more closely reflect the realities of the period WM is concerned with.

Wang Peigong: Yes. In fact I once read an essay written by a Chinese student in the US about WM. He said that in his opinion it would be very difficult to translate the play into English because many footnotes would need to be added to assist interpretation. He said there are at least three hundred places that need footnotes. And even with such footnotes, the play is not easy to understand. The space for the footnotes may be longer than the text itself.

Many things referred to in the play are uniquely Chinese. For example, when General is about to leave the village, he says something like, "If I do my duty, why shouldn't I become a division or brigade commander?" This is difficult to translate, because the line doesn't mean that he seriously wanted to make the effort to become a division commander. The sentence is lifted from another Chinese play, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy. Many languages have this characteristic. Some expressions used during the Cultural Revolution have gradually become expressions used in real life. People use them in daily conversation with a very fixed meaning.

Some parts of the play would be very difficult to translate. For example, the lines during "Winter" where the characters discuss Deng Xiaoping. The dialogue goes something like, "I can't play the guitar because a mouse gnawed the strings". Another responds, "Let's get a cat". "What kind of cat, white or black?" "Who cares? Whether white or black, a cat which can catch the mouse is a good cat". "Don't get yourself into trouble. Be careful!" "What's wrong?" To understand this exchange, you have to know China.
Other examples are, "once every seven or eight years", and "orioles carol, swallows dip", etc. Now the youths changed the former sentence to, "each one lasts seven or eight years". The phrase could then be understood to mean an endless, never ceasing process, because "once every seven or eight years", Mao's original well known phrase, becomes "each one lasts seven or eight years". If you understand the Cultural Revolution, then you can understand the dialogue. Examples of the same kind can be found everywhere in the play. Why didn't they want to burn Ai Siqi's, Popular Philosophy, while instead wanting to burn materials concerning criticisms of Song Jiang together with the Liang Xiao articles?

Shu Yi participated in the discussion about WM. He said something of great interest, "Your play presents a hard test to the people who are in charge of the Party's cultural policy". At the time I was very puzzled by his words. He said the play was very unorthodox. Why? Because the play is about every political incident during the last ten years. "It includes all major events. But your interpretations regarding these events diverge from the common interpretations".

He gave some examples: one was 'the re-examination of the cases of the old Party officials'. "Most people, within and outside of China, feel that this is a correct policy. However in your play you say something along the lines of, "Please don't only consider the old ones. please also consider the youth". How do you dare to say this? Moreover, everyone supports the resumption of normal entrance examinations for university students. But you say that entrance exams ruin the youth. This, certainly, seems very strange.

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7 Shu Yi, the son of the famous Chinese playwright Lao She, was the deputy director of the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Literature.
8 "Wei lao ganbu pingfan".
"Then there's the campaign promoting the five poisons and the four beauties". (I'll tell you the background to this. At that time society was a little disorderly, so a campaign attacking crimes and criminals\(^9\) was organised by the authorities. The policy was extremely tough. All of the detention centres were full. Many charges were groundless, but most people were in favour of the policy.) "But in your play you allow Big Head to be arrested. Your play includes all the major political campaigns, but your opinions regarding these are all different to those of the authorities. I suggest you either not write about them at all, or, if you want to write about them, you adopt the common opinions regarding them. Don't come uttering your strange, idiosyncratic interpretations". When I heard that, I felt extremely amused. But when I think back I know he had some reasons for saying so.

The play did include all the political campaigns. But I didn't plan this intentionally. If I want to write about the youths, their changes, their lives, then I have to write about the political campaigns. It's unavoidable. That's my first line of defence. Secondly, I didn't intend to write about those policies as such, but instead wanted to write about their real lives. It's really not my business to take heed of what some foreigners might say, or the opinion of the Chinese authorities. I never pay attention to them. I didn't intend to write a book of policy interpretations.

The authorities brought up another accusation against me. That was, as the playwright, throughout the entire play I expressed anti-Party sentiments, in particular the Party's policy since the Third Session of the Twelfth Assembly. In the past such criticism could have led to my execution, or at the least my arrest. Absolutely counter-revolutionary behaviour. So I was extremely angry. I didn't intend any such thing. Recently, a series of articles criticising WM appeared in official publications. They concluded that while the approach used by the playwright had some exploratory value, the content of the

\(^9\) "Dazhuan huodong"
play was rubbish; the play simply reflected the complaints of some youth, representing these on stage.

Wang Shi's article in the *Xijubao* 10 (ed., Theatre Journal, no. 9, 1987) commented that artists should also be thinkers; "WM, which was once the subject of wide attention due to its exploratory approach, is in fact lacking in any analysis and thoughtfulness. It is poor, shallow and vulgar. New forms of performance cannot simply substitute for new thoughts. Like smoke and clouds, some kinds of new approaches will soon pass into obscurity, for example rooster blood injections, black tea fungus and shaking hands".

This criticism was extremely venomous. What he's referring to are some forms of healthcare that have become popular in recent years. The *Xijubao* is the official publication of the Chinese Writers Association. His words represent a new technique adopted recently by critics. They admit to the value of the performance while denying any value for the play's content. The Central Propaganda Department simply ordered a prohibition of any comments regarding the play.

When the play was banned in 1985, the Central Propaganda Department instructed that the play should not be discussed. They wanted to let the fuss die down. But it cannot die down. People still can't forget it. Therefore the new approach was adopted; admitting to the value of the performance while denying any value for the play's content. I think it is a contemptible approach because the performance cannot be severed entirely from the play's content itself.

Why did the play experiment with a new form of performance? Because there was no way to use the conventional approach. The story jumped back and forth too rapidly.

When I wrote the play I told the Director, Wang Gui, "I'm giving you a hard nut to

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10 Wang Peigong is referring here to an article in the September, 1987 issue of *Juben* (Drama).
crack". We wanted to show a broad scene. Young people enjoyed the play not only for its fancy performance technique but also because the play is about themselves. The play also contains a large amount of information. It expresses a great deal. It made them think quite a lot.

One person in the audience who used to be an urbling said he had to leave the theatre three times during the performance. He couldn't bear it. It made him too depressed. Finally he bought a bouquet of flowers and threw it onto the stage. I received many letters after the play was banned. One young worker offered me his savings. "I have 1000 yuan in savings", he wrote, "and I'd like to present it to you". I refused. Things can't be conducted in that way. They liked the play. The play touched them not because of the performance technique but through the play's message; their strivings, the distortions, etc. They can easily understand the play.

We also tried to make the play humorous. Very humorous. The performance you watched on video is not a very good one. You should see the performance recorded by our troupe. But all the actors in that performance are no longer here. They've all been sent away. If the opportunity should arise sometime in the future, I'd like to reassemble that troupe. Theirs is better than the Beijing performance.

The ending of the Beijing performance was altered by Wang Gui. I disagreed with him on this. He wanted to change the ending in order to obtain the approval of the authorities. At the last performance in Beijing Hu Qiaomu was very angry. He left without seeing the players. Someone overheard him saying, "This play is hopeless. It's not right to be cynical about "the five stresses and four beauties". Hearing this, I laughed, saying, 'I didn't expect him to be complimentary'. But Wang Gui was silent and depressed. I felt sad for him. He joined the Army and the Party earlier than I. He

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11 I was able to watch a videotape of a Beijing performance of WM earlier in 1987.
had a history of forty years with them. He is loyal to the Party. He wept. I felt sad. The players also wept.

**KW:** One of the main accusations levelled at the play was that it contained no positive or negative characters.

**Wang Peigong:** There are no positive and negative characters in the play. They don't exist. Such characters are artificial constructs and don't exist in real life.

The play was staged in the theatre of the National Palace Ceremonial Hall. I was there. I stood outside to observe the audience. A young worker at the National Palace saw me and asked whether I was part of the theatre company. He'd seen the play five times, he said. He felt the play was very realistic but that he found one thing strange or different from other plays; he couldn't decide which was the main character, nor which of the characters were positive or negative. I asked him how long he'd worked there. Two years, he replied. Of the organisations within which he'd worked, I asked, which was the main one, and which were the positive and the negative ones. He felt confused by this, and asked, 'Why?' In real life then, I responded, there is no such thing as No. 1 or No. 2, positive or negative.

Every individual has several aspects; positive and negative, dominant characteristics and characteristics of less importance. This is reality. Life changes endlessly and so do people. An individual can be in various states.

For instance, a young worker who doesn't like his current job or the boss may act in destructive ways or say unpleasant things at the office. So others might think him not a good person, not a positive character. But when he is with his fiancee he may become a

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12"Minzugonglitiang"
very interesting person. He could behave like a different man. Or under exceptional circumstances he could make a heroic decision.

A friend told me of a youth who had saved someone’s life from an ice-covered river. The youth didn’t reveal his name. People found out his name only after a long while, when he came to be under detention. In order to help one of his friends, he’d joined in a street-gang brawl and had beaten someone badly. It’s an interesting story. In fact people stick on all sorts of labels, "this one is a hero, that one is good or bad". The best way is to show "naked" individuals and let the audience themselves decide upon appropriate labels. This is my approach.

Someone once opined that my play reveals an approach of "de-heroisation".13 I don’t think so. I believe I just want to show "naked" persons. But there is one exception as far as the characters are concerned; General. Certainly this character has provoked different interpretations. One person has declared, "The only hero in WM is a blind man", while someone else has asked, "Why has the author allowed this character to become blind? Does it mean that to join the Army is an act of blindness?" Yet another has thought this character was a failure because General is above and beyond reality, while the other characters appear as more flesh and blood types. Another has thought that I, as an Army man too, must identify with General.

I think in fact General is not a character. He is the author - my mind and eyes. He is the first character to appear in the play. He returned from the front. Every episode is introduced with his thoughts or recollections. He is only a reference, something that others can be compared with. He is not my ideal figure, not my ideal. I’ve used him to introduce the others and to analyse them.

13 Feiyingxionghua."
This is most obvious within the "summer" act. General has returned from the front. He meets his friends Big Head and Hatoyama. When he witnesses Sister Superior attempting to commit suicide he develops a strong aversion to the lot of them. He says he is going back to where he came from, returning to the mountain. But in this he has finally reached an understanding, reached the conclusion that it is not as serene as we all think down here. Here you can also see sacrifices, struggles, suffering and striving. That's it. Why did I make him blind and still have him return to the army? I feel that is his ascension to a higher state of awareness. So he gets something out of life too.

Big Head becomes wealthier, a manager. Pushcart becomes the director of a department. Hatoyama becomes a film director. Princess becomes a successful painter and Sister Superior gets her degree. They each attain some achievement. But in real life there are still people who attain nothing and become nobodies. I use General to make comparisons with characters who achieve some goals.

The urblings grew up together, joined the League of Young Pioneers together, and went to the countryside together. Usually secondary school would be the turning point for these youth, where their roads would diverge and each begin to think differently. But the campaign for re-education was a special circumstance that forced the youths to remain together.

All the play's characters wear the same kind of cloth, which conceals their individual personalities and even their gender. The re-education campaign delayed their maturity. While they learned a lot about society, they still lived and behaved like kids. Their paths finally diverged when the universities re-opened, with some gaining entrance and others failing to. But after a long period they all return to their starting point.
Well, that's my interpretation. Many people disagree with the play. The authorities dislike or hate it mainly because of the last part of the play. They thought that the conclusion should run along the lines that although in the past the youths had met with many frustrations, today they should feel optimistic and expect everything to turn out well. I think not.

The youths still have a lot of worries and frustrations. Many feel hollow or as though they've lost their direction. This isn't to say they don't work hard or have given up striving. But they don't feel that their lives are fruitful. They suffer from a continual feeling of loss. They long, impossibly, for certain things to return. So, at the end, when they try to sing the "Song of the Young Pioneers" together, they stop in the middle of the song.

At the same time, I feel nobody should have the right to compel others. If towards the end I had set General up as a positive figure, then I feel the play would have been downgraded. Nobody's life is that simple. Nobody's life is easy, even for Pushcart. In fact he sold himself out. He sold his soul for some shitty position .... talking bullshit everyday. So nobody has the right to compel others.

KW: I know the other characters, and the audience, look down on Pushcart. But at the same time it is he who can clearly see the real society, and it is he who can foresee the way the society is developing. Is that right?

Wang Peigong: Yes, yes. But how can he foresee the future? It's because he's at the bottom of their social scale.
KW: For example, his comrades are able to utilise various strategies to attain their goals, but for Pushcart there exists only one strategy, nepotism, so he feels he has to use it.

Wang Peigong: Yes, yes.

KW: While pointing at Pushcart's blatant use of nepotism, Hatoyama also uses his privileged background for all it was worth.

Wang Peigong: Yes. Hatoyama was dishonest in saying that he was opposed to the use of privilege, because he also needed to use it. He disagreed with and became angry about using privilege. But in the end what did he rely upon? It was still privilege. How is it he could change jobs as easily as he could change his clothes? He always complained that you could see cheating, fraud and hypocrisy everywhere. Yet isn't he hypocritical? Doesn't he cheat others? Right? So don't just look at what he says. He can damn the world and its ways with words as sharp and strong as he can find. But you must watch what he does. This is today's society in China. We can curse society, we can criticise "feudalism" sharply, but how many people who are living on it are following its principles. This is reality.

Therefore the youth return to their starting point. Of course some couldn't return. They were pure only during the days when they sang the "Song of the Young Pioneers" together. So ultimately they joined with the children's brigade, cleaning spittle off the road, chanting, "Don't spit". I wrote a footnote, "Their childlike spirits suddenly return". In fact it is more than that they were bursting with childish playfulness. They still failed
to jump out of the circle. The children had been organised to do it, they didn't do it of their own free will.\footnote{That is, the children were organised as part of the "five stresses and four beauties" campaign.}

Your view of Pushcart is correct. The people who live at the bottom of society often follow the traditional attitudes of society, that is, they try to fit in. They are often very wise, and hold wise opinions. For instance, Pushcart repeated what his father had replied to the question, "What is a man's life?"; to have three full meals everyday, a sound sleep at night and, in addition, two liang of spirits. This, supposedly, is the good life. In fact this is the minimum standard of life. You can well imagine that Pushcart's father is a labourer. He wouldn't suffer from the troubling thoughts that Pushcart does. He'd find it very easy to lead his "normal" life.

Why do today's youth feel so unsettled, so unsatisfied? Because their life's aspirations have drifted far away from those of their fathers. You can imagine that the roads of Pushcart's father, Hatoyama's father (Big Head's father is a different case) diverge greatly from those of their sons. But it should be noted that the sons' roads do not entirely diverge from those of their fathers.

The youths concentrate more on themselves. They seek the realisation of individual worth. They want to achieve self-realisation. By the end of their search they've found that the best way to do so is to not put pressure on each other.

KW: A feature of this play, apparent in the Dramatis Personae, is that each character has a nickname, but also that their fathers' social status are clearly described. Why did you use this approach? Is it because during the Cultural Revolution society became more clearly hierarchised?
Wang Peigong: Chinese society has always been clearly classified, and not only during the Cultural Revolution. It is always classified. Clearly. I pointed out their fathers' social status because it made it easier for me to define my characters and because I intended to write about various aspects of their lives. Their family background certainly impacted upon them.

KW: From their dialogue one feels that their parents influenced them very heavily. The pressure on them was immense. Excepting two, all the fathers imposed pressures on their children.

Wang Peigong: This really has two aspects. One is the parental pressure and this is an important issue in China. You have read Ba Jin's Family, Spring and Autumn. It is still true of today's China. As Pushcart said, "Why should the son of an official also become an official? Why are we doomed to live in this daran yuanshan?" It's true. Though nowadays the son of a family living in daran yuanshan wouldn't necessarily continue to live in the daran yuan, the son of an official would still become an official. This hasn't changed. It's so obvious in China. And also in today's China. It's an important reason why the youth dislike or feel critical of society. It's impossible to ignore such parental pressure.

But there are some exceptions, or rebels, in the play. One is Pushcart. Though he is from a daran yuan family, he doesn't want that to be his own fate. He tries everything he can to climb into the high social ranks. He uses the old approach and tries to change his social status through marriage. Although he didn't love Princess, he used this means to climb from being a third class citizen to a second class one. But did he really love her or not? What do you think?

15 "Shitty place".
KW: I don't know. I can't tell.

Wang Peigong: No, neither can I. If you answer "Yes", then from his final words in the play you could conclude that the two couldn't enjoy the same lifestyle. He says, "farty concert". He couldn't enjoy that. He just wanted to enter into a higher social rank. But he also retained many of his father's views. For example, his concept of family status reveals his craftiness. When he became head of the zhi-qing family he really begged his way to that position. He could act extremely modestly and courteously, though he really had his sights set high. He used the same strategy when he became departmental head. He hadn't changed that much. He retained the imprints of a family at the bottom of the social heap.

KW: I think all the characters finally undergo some change, except for Pushcart.

Wang Peigong: Yes! But on the other hand he does change his social status. Just think of it in this way; from an external viewpoint he has undergone the most dramatic change, that is, his social status. From an internal one, he has undergone the least change - his character.

The other exception is Big Head. His father was an "upstart" within the Cultural Revolution. At the time, Big Head could have avoided being sent down to the countryside. But he hated the thought. He felt his father's behaviour was disgusting. He insisted on going down to the countryside with his schoolmates.

Big Head is my favourite character in the play. If you can argue that any character has maintained some idealism, then it's him. I find him very sympathetic. He was good to all his friends. He is good to Princess. He prefers justice. He eventually passed the university entrance exam but was denied admission on account of his father's political
behaviour - that is, during the Cultural Revolution. His own future was affected, though he never took advantage of his father's position within the Cultural Revolution. He was unfairly affected. Afterwards, he decided to teach himself. He bought a lot of books. He said, even at that time, that without changes to the political regime, resolving all other issues would be impossible.

Now I can't remember the exact words. Maybe it is, "fundamental system". This was sharply criticised by my leaders. They stated that "the reform currently carried out involves only economic reforms, and our political regime can never be touched. Our system is socialist. What do you want? A capitalist one?" Now, however, the Central Committee of the Party also speaks of political reform.

Big Head had a more liberal way of thinking. He soon reached that conclusion, regarding the need for reform of the political system. But he was denied any opportunities because of this father's trouble. Big Head never wanted to be a privileged son. He became a boiler worker, and that is one of the worst jobs in China. He tried to find a different job, but couldn't. Finally he got drunk, ended up in a street fight and was detained.

In the end, I didn't have the heart to see him end up so miserably. I arranged it so that Waifling fell in love with him. I wanted him to achieve something. Finally, with Waifling's money, he improved his status. But in fact he still remained very, very unhappy.

Hatoyama is a different case again. When his father fell into political trouble, Hatoyama's privileges were withdrawn. After his father returned to office the social distance between Hatoyama and his school friends widened again. One character speaks the line, "Such things still happen in China?" And Pushcart replies, "Our China
can never change ..... never ever". Hatoyama really understood this. He saw that China could never be changed (with regard to conceptions of status, rank and privilege). So he finally adopted the strategy of submitting himself to it. He climbed up the social ladder.

Although he didn't really like his social circle, Hatoyama couldn't escape from it either. In the end, he was forced to give up the woman he loved. Then he was faced with the prospect of having to chase after some other woman. From a long queue of women he didn't like, he had to choose one to marry. This really happened. The old woman who spurned him now presented her daughter to him. This part is from a true story. It happened to one of my friends during the Cultural Revolution. Both his parents were arrested. He was fourteen. He hadn't eaten anything for two days. He went to his father's friends, asking for a meal. Nobody had the guts to open the door to him. Not even one.

Finally, a girl of his age brought him some food. They fell in love with each other. During that time of hardship they loved each other ardently, but in the end they didn't get married. What happened was that when his father returned to power again, an old woman who had formerly refused him food invited him to dinner. After dinner he became drunk. He woke up only to find himself naked with the old woman's daughter lying there beside him. He felt he had to marry her, so he left his girlfriend. They are all my old friends.

Hatoyama eventually has to leave Waifling. Afterwards he transfers from one job to another. Finally, he enters the art and literary circles. There he sees a lot of dirty

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16 At certain places in this translated interview quotes from the play in English are slightly different from those to be found in the translation of WM in Appendix B. This results from Wang Peigong's habit of not referring to the text of WM during the interview, relying instead on his memory of the dialogue.
transactions. No place is pure. He feels disappointed and disgusted, but he can change nothing. He is also a victim of the system.

Waifling too is a victim of the system. Even while she was still in her mother's womb she knew about inequality. She was so pitiful. One person commented that I was quite unfair to her in the play because I portrayed her as a very disagreeable figure, having her ask her husband to do this or that, for instance. But I don't think that's true. She also has inner conflicts and sorrows. She realised that, and at the end when her husband becomes wealthy, she still cuts a pitiful figure.

KW: The unseen influence of family pressure on the urblings is portrayed quite powerfully.

Wang Peigong: Yes. For all these youths, the shadow of their families still covers their lives. Some want to rebel, others decide to submit to reality. But they all fail. The impact of the family is a very complex one. We often say that the sons of a high ranking family can obtain rapid advancement in their careers or in social status. But few people realise how humiliated such sons can feel. Few would see them in this light. I know this from some friends. They are extremely self mocking and cynical about themselves. Hatoyama is very dissatisfied with himself. Even though he can change jobs as easily as his clothes, he still isn't happy. He tells Big Head to beat him up. My approach was to explore the relationship between the youths and the pressures imposed by their families. I discovered that few writers had adopted this approach. I feel this reflects a deeper reality.

KW: It's now a couple of years since the play was banned. Do you see any prospect of it being able to be staged in future? What would your feelings be about it becoming unbanned?
Wang Peigong: Someone once asked whether I thought it likely the play would be permitted to return to the stage in the future. I responded that I thought it possible. At the time, my feelings were quite complex. I felt it was unnecessary to ban the play. In fact I never wished to criticise the socialist system. I didn't mean to portray any such thing.

KW: You have said that General is your eyes. In the prologue someone asks General whether he is a devotee of Napoleon. He replies, "No". The questioner then asks him, "Are you a Marxist?" He doesn't answer. Why is this?

Wang Peigong: I think General doesn't believe in Marxism. A player next to him declares, "General is a Marxist", but he doesn't respond. What do you think?

KW: He appears to me to act in some ways like an "idealist" Marxist. His words and actions often seem to express a type of Marxist idealism. He acts according to his moral principles. Some classical Chinese dramas had such characters, for example the Song Dynasty's Bao Gong, who were represented as very moral, very positive, very upright figures. General certainly expresses deep reservations about the leadership and the form of socialism promoted in China, but he seems just as critical of his friends for not putting their ideals into practice, or at least for not holding true to them. One feels he might be a utopian socialist in that he seems to desire a society without rank or privileges but has no realistic solution to the current state of affairs other than a personal one, which is to be allowed to go his own way.

Wang Peigong: Yes, you may say so. General is a bit of an idealist. I said before that he is my mind and eyes. But to compare General with me, I'd say that he has his own ideas. For instance, in act one he steals a chicken. During that period I could have done so too, but I have my own principles and will follow them. I can understand him, but I
wouldn't do things which are harmful to other people. It's not easy for anyone to survive in this world. An old Chinese saying goes, "Everyone has their own life to lead".\textsuperscript{17} Everyone has their own road. But as far as society as a whole is concerned, people like General are needed.

However my ideas are different from those in the so-called "Military Man's Literature"\textsuperscript{18} which talks about "devotion" and "understanding". General didn't ask to be understood by others. He just wanted to follow through his ideas. He didn't ask of his friends that they understood him. He just believed he should pursue his chosen aim in life. He wanted to see everyone become more tolerant of others. He hoped that everyone could do their own thing and attain their goals. That's him. Inside this figure and his thoughts I placed my own understanding and own ideals to present to today's youth.

What is he? A Napoleon devotee? No, he is not. Napoleon once said, "A soldier who never wishes to become a general is not a good soldier". General only believed this during the earlier stage. He finally realised he couldn't achieve that goal. He had a very sad life. His eyes became almost blind. He couldn't enter the military academy. As a soldier, he only performed the most routine duties, such as sentry duty. He did not get any significant awards. But even though he missed the opportunity to enter the military academy he still stuck to his ideals. His friends couldn't understand him, he said, because they'd never seen with their own eyes comrades-in-arms dying in battle. So he told his old friends, "Let's stop arguing. Let everyone follow his own road. Nobody should put pressure on others". To this extent he expressed my own opinion.

\textsuperscript{17} "Ge you ge de shenghuor".
\textsuperscript{18} "Junshi wenxue".
But General still failed in terms of attaining an army career. This isn't an era for military heroes anymore. I know. I've been in the army for twenty-five years. It's hardly likely that a soldier could become a hero today, though we shouldn't complain about that. Anyway, to have peace is a good thing. General only experienced a small scale battle, in which he was wounded. When he first returned from the frontier he felt angry with his schoolmates. He asked, "What did the soldiers die for? Just for your rotten lifestyle back here". But gradually his anger died. Finally he became quite calm, feeling he understood the others.

KW: General's attitude towards the PLA seems out of step with the general attitude in the early nineteen-eighties.

Wang Peigong: The most glorious period, since the revolution, to be in the army was during the Cultural Revolution, when soldiers were quite privileged and popular. But General only joined the PLA after university education regained its popularity and became the goal of most youth. Nobody wanted to be in the army anymore.

KW: In the play it's a little unclear as to why he failed the entry exam for the military academy.

Wang Peigong: Initially he wasn't allowed to attend the exam because he was needed at his post. When he finally did get permission to take the exam, his age exceeded the maximum cut off point by only a few days. I deleted some lines from the play on account of length. When General met Sister Superior again, for example, and she asked him, "Have you become a General?", he replies, "No", and explains: "At first I wasn't permitted, but when I was allowed to take the exam I was too old by several days. At the same time I received a letter from Princess. I climbed a hill and lay on my back, alone and as if dead, for the whole day. The doctors and nurses were worried. They
were afraid something had happened to me. I returned to the hospital and asked, "Who's for some games of table-tennis?". That day I won every game". You could view each character in the play as derived from a real life figure, or you could take them a symbols, with each character representing a particular type of youth.

KW: Returning to the point about their nicknames, was there any general significance behind the way you have them address each other?

Wang Peigong: Originally I didn't give the characters any [formal] names, but then the director said that I should. "You only use nicknames such as Big Head and Princess", he said. "The leaders who will examine the play won't like that ". So I had to give them [formal] names. However in the play the characters don't address each other by their formal names. But if you're going to translate the play, you could simply drop all the formal names, because amongst themselves they would never use them, no matter how wide the social gulfs between them became.

All the nicknames are interesting. The reason for the nickname "Jiangjun" [General] is obvious. "Banche" [Pushcart] received his nickname on account of his family background. His father was a labourer who spent his life transporting goods for others on a flatbacked tricycle. Such people were called "barye" [literally: a flatbacked tricycle rider]. Today we call them "daorye". They are strong, naked-chested types who ... ride their tricycles all day every day. After work, they head off to small wineshops to order dried beancurd or pigshead offcuts to go with the strong liquor ... so he's [also] called Pushcart by his school friends.

The nickname itself has some connotations of humiliation. His school friends would have looked down on him. Though Pushcart accepted the nickname he always felt uncomfortable with it. During the Cultural Revolution he went through a glorious
period because his father really was a member of the traditionally poorest layers, and for that reason he became head of the "zhi-qing" family. Instinctively, he adopted a flattering manner towards the children of the senior-ranking officials, hating them at the same time. Have you noticed how he always tried to get up Big Head's nose?

Jingshan [Hatoyama] was originally a Japanese character in the opera, *Hongdengji* (The Story of the Red Lantern). Perhaps his face resembled Jingshan's. In any case, in the original opera Jingshan is a negative figure. Hatoyama wasn't able to get a better nickname, and if you think about his father you can understand why. A nickname like that is simply for poking fun, for teasing.

Da Tou (Big Head) was probably nicknamed for the size of his head. Many Chinese believe that a child with a big head is unusually bright, and this character actually was.

Gongzhu (Princess) received her nickname from the story about Snow White. Her real name, Bai Xue, means "Snow White". Her nickname suits her manner. She is from a famous intellectual family.

As for Xiunu (Sister Superior), I think most Chinese don't really understand what a "nun" is. The girl was given that nickname because she always dressed in plain-coloured clothes, was poor, and studied diligently. She had a lot of self discipline.

Xiao Kelian (Waifling) was called so because she was so pitiful. I felt her nickname was the most appropriate one. She remains a "poor little thing" right to the end of the play.

KW: Would you say that the women, as portrayed in the play, are meant to represent common perceptions of certain wider categories of women in China today?
Wang Peigong: Sister Superior represents professional women. Well, perhaps that isn't so true. When I first wrote them in I didn't intend to categorise them especially. Only afterwards, when I'd finished writing and was reading it by myself did I feel that they could be taken as some fairly typical character types. I portrayed them as they are because I knew some women who are like that in real life. She is much weaker than Princess. Princess is very strong, though weak at certain moments. Sister Superior was much affected by her family background and her mother's experience. She could only find freedom amongst her sea of books. In the end she attempted to commit suicide. She studied very hard to get into university but, once there, felt that she had lost her sense of direction.

Sister Superior fell in love with one of her classmates, despite being forbidden by her mother. She had vowed to her mother that she wouldn't get married until after she'd graduated. When she entered university, however, she found life there very dull. While the examinations were challenging, daily study and life there in general was very tedious. We call it "laosandiar" [the three dull places; classroom, dormitory and library]. So all the students fooled around and had love affairs, and she wanted to as well. After General's departure she went to see her classmate. It was only on visiting his home that she discovered he was married. He'd cheated her. Sister Superior was pregnant by him, but he was married. She had to decide whether to have an abortion.

However for an unmarried woman that would have been extremely embarrassing. On the one hand, she had no "right" to have the baby ... Some lines were deleted by the director, and because I was in too much of a hurry I didn't replace them before it was sent to the publisher ... In fact I don't understand why the director deleted them. The original lines revealed very clearly Sister Superior's reasons for attempting suicide. Now the revised edition gives the wrong impression, as if Sister Superior simply felt deeply insulted when she was cursed by her classmate's wife. That's wrong.
KW: You said previously that some have thought that "winter" was well written, but that the following three acts were not up to the same standard. However your intention seems to have been not only to expose certain aspects of the Cultural Revolution, but to describe the lives and reactions of the urblings up till the mid-nineteen eighties.

Wang Peigong: I think that the four acts ... form an integrated body. you can hardly say that one part of this integrated body is better than the other parts. [However that criticism] was not based entirely on artistic criteria, but more upon political considerations. "Winter" [act one, set in 1976] described the situation during the Cultural Revolution. Now it's come about that the Cultural Revolution has been officially criticised and negated. I'd be permitted to write any scathing story about the Cultural Revolution, even if it was a horrific one. After the Third Plenum of the CCP's Central Committee, however, they [the Party leadership] decided that all the youth had become "high spirited and vigorous", as the expression goes, and were prepared for the Four Modernisations. They thought that by "autumn" [act three, set in 1981] the characters should have been acting maturely and not as they actually did in the play when they still retained feelings of directionlessness, purposelessness and loss.

In "winter" I posed the question, what is humanity? Therein I wrote that people are "tiny motes of dust" or "small lumps of brick". I raised this question again in "autumn". The answer we received was that people are "small potatoes". Certain persons thought this intolerable and shouldn't be permitted because in the end I didn't offer any optimism. It was seen as contrary to the policy of the Third Plenum. Hu Qiaomu said, "This is a play which offers no optimism. Not only is there no hope in "winter", but also in "spring", "summer" and "autumn". If the situation described in the play is true it means our Third Plenum has been a failure and that "we have achieved nothing".19

19 "Wusuozuowei".
I don't think his attitudes should be reflected in literary production. But I also realised
the play involved the issue of how to understand the youth of today. The play reflected
my own understanding derived from the experiences of my friends and my own life. I
felt at a loss during the Cultural Revolution. I felt that there was no way to control one's
own fate or find out the rules determining one's fate. The Cultural Revolution saw
nearly every family involved, from the Chairman of the PRC to a small potato like
myself. Nobody could escape its effects. But I could still try to comfort myself with the
thought that it was a "revolution". Great. Later, as the campaigns developed, all my
ideals were destroyed. My belief was shaken.

As for my present circumstances, I have nothing to complain about. I am a member of
the Writers' Association. But I still feel it hard. While I am doing all my normal work I
still feel at a loss. I've always tried to suppress this feeling of loss. So I think that if
today I wished to portray the youth, I'd want to write about the reality ... Today I think
that, when it comes to the youth, I should portray the reality, so I don't think it's the
right approach to add in a lot of idealistic and romantic scenes.

There were some disagreements between the director and I. The play went into
rehearsal while I was still writing it. The director didn't like my plot, but when I'd
finished the prologue and act one, he decided to stage it. He said, "We need an
approach for this script" ... He approved both the "spring" and "summer" acts, but then I
had great difficulties with "autumn". He said to me, "You should write the last part with
care. The previous parts are good and the play has a nice flavour to it, but in the last
part you need to sound a brighter note. At the least you need to play your tune two
scales higher, otherwise the play won't be able to obtain approval.

He was very experienced. He'd joined the Red Army more than forty years ago. So I
asked him, "What can I do?" he replied, "At the end of the play, let the characters sing
an idealistic song". I knew he was right, if we didn't want to get into trouble with the authorities. I tried it. At the end I tried to let General emphasise their ideals. But that made the story become unreal. General became something akin to a saviour figure. So I rewrote it again and again, more than ten times. The three previous acts together had taken me one month to complete. The last act itself took me an entire month. I wanted to add in all sorts of romantic atmosphere while maintaining the central idea, that is, the characters' feelings of having lost some things while gaining others. It didn't work.

KW: What was the response of the members of the troupe and rehearsal audiences to the play?

Wang Peigong: The audience loved the play. Many could identify with it because they shared the same experiences. Some had been sent down to the countryside, others had been in the army. The response of the actors and actresses was the same. Even the director understood the reality of the situation. Everyone felt the added idealistic atmosphere to be unreal. So we had to write the last part again to expunge it. Hu Xuehua, the play's assistant director, discussed the problem with me and suggested we delete it. He'd concluded that the play would become meaningless if we didn't. He thought we'd do better writing about life as life is. I told this to the director and finally he agreed with me. He decided we'd prefer a play that reflected the reality, even in the case where we might fail to get [official] approval. He termed this "modern realism".

So I wrote the present draft in one evening. Three days late the rehearsals were completed. The play had developed quite a nice rhythm. If the "spring" and "summer" acts were imbued with a disco-like rhythm, then "autumn" more resembled a slow and elegant tango. It's interesting that the music selected for this part was in fact tango music. So we'ed thought about the possibility of being criticised because of the play, but
by then we had no choice. We'd decided to stage the play like this so we could maintain consistency in terms of characters and seriousness in terms of art.

Later, while the play was in rehearsal, the director added some references to Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang. I myself still find it difficult to agree with those additions. The published manuscript is basically the complete and correct one. This was the one that was banned. The version used in later performances had many revisions. I found that audiences didn't like the later one. Some asked me why I'd sounded a brighter note and added in the propaganda. However there were also some who appreciated the revisions. Chen Haosu, for instance, who at the time was deputy mayor of Beijing, after watching a performance commented, "It's good that the last part of the performance sounded a more optimistic note". I myself didn't like it.

Some of the people who offered criticisms of the last parts of the play came from a political angle, while others had artistic considerations. The latter felt the first part to be very poetic, beautifully abstracted and quite refined, while the later parts gradually sank into mundane reality. The play returned from expressionism to realism, and thus damaged its artistic merit. While, at the beginning, the characters were seeking something, by the end they had turned to concentrate on their own existence. I have my own opinion regarding such criticism.

First. I think the expressionism used in the first part of the play does reflect the reality. During the period of "winter" the characters were able to use their imagination and feel that they could think freely. When they matured, they turned towards being realistic - call it mean or vulgar. Let's use an example.
Why have most people who were rebels in the May Fourth Movement\(^2\) now become very "realistic"? When they discuss their own lives now, they are often quite cynical about themselves, but many of their actions are still rather mean. Why? It's because of social pressure. It's not that I intended to use such an approach in my play, but rather that the play reflected the real life situation.

The situation in the U.S., for example, is quite similar. Where are the people who were involved in the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations? Many of them have returned to the mainstream, and some now work for the government. If you wanted to, you could be very critical of such people, and then you yourself try a different path in life.

As far as style is concerned, some think that "winter" presents a good picture while "summer" and especially "autumn" fail to reach the same level. I think they are right. What caused this in my writing? I think it could be the distance in time. The period described in "winter" has already receded into the past. I've been able to explore all aspects of that particular period. The periods represented in "spring", "summer" and especially "autumn" are relatively recent and I haven't had enough time to ponder them. They're too close to my present life. Perhaps this made me write at a comparatively shallower level of understanding. I might agree with such criticism.

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\(^2\) "Sunday, April 4, 1976, marked Qing Ming, a traditional holiday for cleaning and repairing family graves. Thousands of Beijing residents came to ... Tiananmen ... to express their affection for the departed Premier [Zhou Enlai, who had died on January 8, 1976]. They came here because his ashes had been scattered, and no grave or monument honored his memory. For some days wreaths had been appearing at the large cenotaph that commemorates heroes of the Revolution ... People also attached paper slips bearing poems of slaymen lo lhe nearby hedges. Some of them were barely disguised denunciations of Jiang Qing, the Shanghai Group, or even of Mao himself ...In the early morning hours of April 5, on orders from the highest authority, city officials removed the wreaths. When dawn came and the public discovered this fact, a huge demonstration developed, the famous Tiananmen Incident ... It was a daylong riot that was answered by demonstrations elsewhere in the country". Craig Dietrich, People's China: A Brief History, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p. 232. Deng Xiaoping was regarded as Zhou Enlai's protege. After the suppression of the demonstration, Deng was blamed for the unrest and dismissed from all his positions by the Politburo. He retained only his Party membership.
I really didn't have enough time to think it through. For instance, while I wrote, in the last part of the play, about their feelings of uncertainty, directionlessness and loss, I failed to write enough about their other feelings; at the same time some felt rather pleased with themselves and their achievements. They felt satisfied that the younger generation didn't share their experiences of struggle and suffering. To some degree they also felt proud of themselves, in that they'd become "pillars of the state".\textsuperscript{21} Even Big Head felt this way. As the play progressed, I found myself writing more about the tensions between them as a circle of friends. Their relationship with wider society had become less tense. It wasn't such a keen issue anymore. The time when they'd reveal their deeper feelings would be when they were together again, although of course even then they wouldn't reveal everything.

\textbf{KW:} What was your intended message at the end of the play?

\textbf{Wang Peigong:} I wrote in all of the four seasons as a circle, or kind of cycle. At the close of the play I wrote in the scene where the children sing "The Song of the Young Pioneers". The characters also began their journeys in the same way. Which road would they take now? And the children? Would they follow the same path? I hope not, so I wrote this play. I wanted to remind those youth who shared the same past as my characters. Some have begun to forget about that period. In that sense, I hope my play is helpful. The structure of the play, "winter", "spring", "summer" and "autumn", could suggest another similar cycle to follow. There could be another "winter" coming. In the play the youths grow from being green to a state of maturity. Personally, it's not my desire to see that kind of maturity, in fact. However that is beyond my ability to influence. I can't change reality. While writing the play I rather stubbornly maintained one stance, that I wouldn't make any value judgements about them. I wouldn't in the play comment on who is good or bad, right or wrong. The reason was that I didn't want

\textsuperscript{21} "Guojia dongliang".
to put my own assessments into the mouths of the characters. Today's youth don't need lessons from others. They only need to discover themselves, carefully.

KW: What are the meanings behind the urblings responses to the question, "What are people?"

Wang Peigong: The answer, "small pebbles", is a very common one. For years the youths have been educated to think of themselves in this way. For instance, in the play one character says, "We are small lumps of brick, we can be used for building up the great Wall, or a pigsty, depending on where we are put". Such ideas were common even before the Cultural Revolution. There was a phrase I learnt as a child, "Revolutionary soldiers are like bricks: they can be moved anywhere they're needed".²² Even today some still quote this expression. One person is especially worthy of mention. He's the Director of the Bureau of Art and Literature in the Ministry of Propaganda. His name is Meng Weizai, and he's also a novelist. During the "anti-liberalisation campaign"²³ he gave a speech to the staff about the position of division head. He said he was unwilling to take the position of director, but, "revolutionary soldiers are like bricks; they can be posted anywhere they're needed". His audience was surprised to hear this because by then such ideas were considered outdated. But the expression was quoted quite seriously. Meng used to be editor in chief of the literary magazine called Dang Dai [The Present Age]. Then he became President of the People's Literature Publishing House. He advocated the anti-liberalisation campaign. He will leave that position shortly. Up till very recently, he quoted that expression several times.

This idea presents people as non-human. What are people? They should be little stones. They could be used to pave roads. They should be ready to be used as "paving

²² "Geming zhanshi yikuai zhuan, nali xuyao nali ban".
²³ "Fan ziyouhua".
stones". This phrase may have been first used by Kang Sheng. "Treat yourself as a little paving stone, let the wheels of revolution roll over your body". Mao Zedong might have said something similar. Another phrase made reference to screws. Screws can be used for anything. We were taught to regard ourselves as screws, so that wherever we were screwed in, there we would stay. All these notions are similar. They were taken not as jokes but as serious ideas. They assumed that people were material objects having only physical manifestations. Society as a whole was regarded as one giant machine, and every individual was considered to be a small cog.

KW: And what about the response, "We are small particles of dust"?

Wang Peigong: In 1971 I was in the army. When I was assigned to a literature-related job I was unwilling to go because I liked the job I had. Any literature related work could mean that you'd become politically involved. I thought it might be damaging to my personal life. There was a cynical line describing such jobs; "If you're writing well, you might end up in hospital. If you're writing badly, you might end up in court". You'd either become ill from working too hard or get into trouble. So I refused the new assignment.

I was called in for a talk. My superior told me that I should regard myself as a brick and be prepared for any kind of assignment. I said "No". I said that my own assessment of myself as a brick was that I was one suitable for an average house, but if I was used for a steel-making furnace I might be broken and end up suitable only for building a chicken-coop. His response was that a revolutionary soldier should be prepared to be broken up into pieces, even reduced to ashes. In the end I felt I had no choice but to obey. The concept of dust could be seen as Buddhist, too, especially by those who have

24 "Pulushi".
25 Xiedehao jin yiyuan, xie buhao jin layuan".
some education in classical literature. Within the universe, people were counted for nothing, within the universe.

I heard the expression "small potato" while talking with a university student. I liked the expression, so I used it in the play. Someone criticised my use of the expression. I replied, "If people can be called "small pebbles", why can't they be called small potatoes? Potatoes are nutritious.

KW: At what stage did you begin to reject the formula of portraying characters as positive or negative?

Wang Peigong: In my old works, especially in those concerned with soldiers or military affairs, you could tell from their first appearance which characters were good and which were bad. I used every means to make the audience sympathetic towards the positive characters, and made every effort to tell the audience how despicable and absurd the negative characters were. The good ones would end up well off and the bad ones miserable or humiliated. But, gradually, I felt this approach to be unsatisfying and meaningless. The change may have been caused by personal experience. My understanding of myself might have changed.

At the beginning I took a simplistic approach towards myself, that is, I am "a Party member and a Party writer". I followed the Party's instructions and did what the Party required of me. Everything was obvious. When I was posted like a brick to a certain place I'd work hard there and try to help improve life for people through the approach of exposing the good sides of peoples characters so that others might learn to be better and criticising people's bad aspects in order to help people be rid of them. This used to be my belief system.

26 "Dangyuan zuojia".
Gradually, however, although my work was appreciated and I received some awards, I became dissatisfied. My understanding of life became deeper and more complex. I don't mean that my old approach became totally redundant and unnecessary. It may still be needed at certain times. But I believe today's audience can't be convinced by such approaches anymore. They might be touched momentarily, but would soon forget. They might feel that those ideas weren't their own, but instead inserted into their skulls by someone else.

I used to work as a journalist and sometimes wrote speeches for my superiors. It seemed that as I wrote them I was in control, but in fact it was the opposite. They were in control. They controlled my pen and my mind. I had to figure out what they should say in certain situations. Later, a political commissar asked me to write everything for him, even down to five minute speeches, because I could make him sound so polished. But what I wrote was exactly what he wanted, or needed, to say. I simply transferred his thoughts into written form. There was none of my own thinking in them. That used to be the case with my plays, and there are still many plays produced like that today. If you strip away the shells from such plays, you'll find that the kernels don't reflect any thoughts of their own.

**KW:** How do you view, personally, the transition between these two very different styles of writing?

**Wang Peigong:** I've been reading Eric Fromm's works. He says something like everyone should ask, if they are allowed to speak freely, whether their speech in fact reflects their own thinking. I thought that was great. Do I think I have achieved complete freedom through changing my style in this way? I think not. I can still feel the bindings on my mind - the effects of long term education. I once read somewhere, perhaps in a novel, about a man who was imprisoned. While in prison the man had
nothing to do and, obviously, couldn't move beyond the space of his cell. One day he came across a small bottle in his cell, and everyday he'd put a small piece of iron wire into the bottle. Because he was actually wrongfully imprisoned, he was finally set free. However he found it difficult to readapt to the outside world, and would pace about in his home. He'd brought back the small bottle, and one day he smashed it open. Much to his surprise, he found that all the small pieces of iron wire had fused together, becoming solid. I feel that we are like that.

One person thought that in *WM* I'd written about pessimistic youth. I didn't. I just wrote about some rather ordinary urblings. Although they went through many experiences, the original imprint is still very much there. You could say they are like a piece of wooden board which has been painted with a thick layer of red paint. You can repaint it, later, with different colours, covering over the original red, but the red would remain. That's the point. They couldn't escape from themselves. You might call this a form of class imprint. Someone once said that the Cultural Revolution destroyed all belief. But no, it can't do that. The belief won't die, because that generation was heavily affected. They still have that thick layer of red paint.
Appendix B

WM

A Play by Wang Peigong

Respectfully presented for the International Year of Youth, 1985

Dramatis Personae

General (Yue Yang): The son of a retired soldier and afterwards himself a soldier.

Hatoyama 1 (Li Jiangshan): The son of a "Capitalist Roader" and afterwards a director at a television station.

Big Head (Yu Dahai): The son of a Standing Member of a Township Revolutionary Committee and afterwards the manager of a private enterprise.

Pushcart (Jiang Yi): The son of a worker, afterwards the Assistant Director of a certain bureau's propaganda department.

Princess (Bai Xue): The daughter of an intellectual, later the fine arts editor for a publishing association.

1 Hatoyama is the name of the chief of the Japanese gendarmes in the revolutionary Beijing Opera, The Red Lantern. For explanations of the nicknames of the other urblings, as well as to other features of the play, see Appendix A to this thesis.
Sister Superior (Pang Yun): The daughter of a clerk, later a university postgraduate student.

Waifling (Zheng Yingying): The daughter of a 'Rightist' and the grand-daughter of a "Capitalist".

A female drummer, a male keyboardist.

**PROLOGUE:**

{The drummer and keyboardist vivaciously step forward. They begin playing their instruments.

Gaily, they play a jaunty tune, 'The Gold and Silver Weaving Shuttles'.

The urblings come up and begin to dance a popular contemporary group dance.

General strolls amongst the animated dancers. While appearing to enjoy himself, at the same time he appears to be searching for something.}

Drummer: How are you, comrade? Welcome to our party!

{General appears not to have heard; he brushes his shoulder and passes by.}

Drummer: [Loudly] Hey! Comrade soldier!

{General stops still.}

Drummer: [Expressing concern] How come you ... is your hearing not that great?
General: My sight’s impaired, but I’ve no problems with my hearing. I can hear your drumming. It’s not at all bad ... just like the sound of a machine-gun.

Drummer: [Smiling] I’m greatly indebted for your praise. Ah, I’d heard that a group of heroes had returned from the front, might you be ...

General: [Decidedly] No! I’m no hero. [He walks across to one side and sits down]

Drummer: Interesting. [She beckons the keyboardist] Hey, take a look at this fellow.

Keyboardist: Oh, General!

Drummer: [Greatly startled] General? He’s a general?

Keyboardist: [Smiling] It’s his nickname. Actually, he’s an enlisted man who wants to be a general.

Drummer: Oh, so you might say he wants to be another Napoleon?  

General: No! I’m no worshipper of Napoleon!

Keyboardist: General is a disciple of Marx.

Drummer: [To General] Tell me, what are you thinking about?

General: Me? I’m thinking of my friends ...

---

2 Wang Peigong had recently read Leo Tolstoy’s novel, War and Peace, which described Napoleon Bonaparte’s attack on Russia. According to Wang Peigong, Napoleon once said, “A soldier who never wishes to become a general is not a good soldier.”
Keyboardist: [He walks up to General and pulls him to his feet] Your friends are all here! [He spins General around]

General: [Excitedly] Comrades! How are you?

{With their mouths the urblings hum to make a sort of the roaring of the wind.

{The urblings stop their dancing. Shouting wildly with joy they rush over to greet General. They all embrace, hugging together.}

General: [Performing the introductions] These are our friends from the "collective shack": Hatoyama, Big Head, Pushcart, Princess, Sister Superior, and even ... Waifling

{Following General's introduction the urblings pose, like players in a Beijing Opera, for the audience's admiration, then silently slip into some heavily padded winter clothes of all the same hue.}

General: [Dressing in his winter clothes while speaking] "Collective shack"! ... Now this term will soon fade from memory until finally a day will come when people will have to look up its meaning in a dictionary. But we cannot forget! Till the end of our days we will not forget! What does collective household symbolise for us? ... [With emotional sighs and shudders they form into lines.]
Act One

Winter (1976)

{With their mouths the urblings blow to make a sound like the roaring of the wind. They operate machinery and perform heavy labour - monotonous and boring work.}

Hatoyama: [Unable to keep working] Hell! I can't keep this up!

Pushcart: As the head of this family I solemnly declare: Finish up and let's get home!

{Leaning into a chilly wind the urblings make their way home.}

General: Ouch! That hunk of shit was completely frozen, it was really hard.

Big Head: So you could call it both 'stinking' and 'stubborn'!

Pushcart: Like the old saying: 'The potter shaped the pot, it should be valued'.

Hatoyama: 'Obstinate stinkers', shouldn't that term apply to us?

Big Head: In this stinking dungheap is a home? Clinging to the world's flatness, they blow their way like turtles and fish off the reef.

Pushcart: Hatoyama!

Hatoyama: It's true. Our brigade-leader said as much. Didn't you hear him?

Princess: Since intellectuals are labelled 'ninth level old stinkers', what should us urblings be tagged?

Hatoyama: 'Tenth level old stinkers'!
Big Head: 'Shitty old stinkers'!

Waifling: [Calling out sharply] 'Stinking shitheads'!

{The whole group laugh.}

General: [Coldly] Haven't you had your fill of everyone abusing you? Do you still find a need to curse at yourselves? [Angrily] Get home with you!

{No one utters a sound.}

The urblings use their shoulders to push open their door. Entering the room, they all quickly succumb to exhausted paralysis.

Hatoyama: [Lying down] When we first arrived here I was thinking what a sorry sight this broken down shack made ... but now I realise what a sight for sore eyes it really is.

Pushcart: Like the old saying, 'The poorer the home, the more it should be valued'.

General: Big Head, "the song of the Moon Ten Thousand Leagues Away"?

Big Head: Is this fucking dunghill a home? [Sings] "From the village of our birth to these distant borderlands, ten thousand leagues of remote roads and far off ways ..." 3

General: What the fuck have you got to sing about?

{Suddenly there is the sound of thunder and howling wind.}

Waifling: [Frightened, she calls out] The door! ... The door's blown down!

---

3 The urblings are singing revolutionary Beijing opera.
{None of the males move.}

Big Head: If it's blown down then it's blown down. At least we'll be saved from opening and closing it.

Princess: What? Quickly! Get up and fix it!

Hatoyama: Oh please, Uncle Lei Feng, deliver us poor urblings!

Pushcart: [To General] Fix it. Otherwise come evening we'll be freezing.

Hatoyama: [To Pushcart] Can our existence really be all that different from your old man's in "the evil old society"?

General: Wind! Snow! Hardship! We dare you - come and try us! [He sings] "Learn from the pine tree growing ... "

General & Big Head: "at the summit of Mount Tai ..."

Princess: You bunch of sloths! All the snow's blowing inside!

General: Stop your screaming, Princess. One more yell and ... if a huge bear comes in this evening, I might not rescue you.

---

4 Lei Feng was Mao's model soldier during the Cultural Revolution. This probably non-existent figure was resurrected in 1981, "when Deng called for a high level of spiritual as well as material civilisation ... Troops were once again enjoined to learn from Lei Feng, the humble PLA hero and Maoist of yesteryear, who was said to personify the new spiritual civilisation", R.D. Nethercutt, Deng and the Gun, Party Military relations in the PRC, Asian Survey, August, 1982, p. 698.

5 A line from a revolutionary Beijing Opera.
{The men laugh loudly.}

Waifling: Oh my God!

Sister Superior: [To the women] They really won't fix it. What'll we do?

Princess: If they don't fix the door then we'll simply refuse to cook dinner.

Sister Superior: Right!

Waifling: Yeah! We won't do it!

Big Head: And if you don't cook dinner then we'll have to drink the northwest wind. That slogan, "Reflect on past hardships but count your blessings" will really be appropriate. [He sings] "Heaven above brims with stars, ..."

The Men: [Lying where they are all sing] "... the new moon shines brightly. The production brigade departs a rally ..."

Waifling: Keep howling and not your dinner! [Persecutorily, they make a mess of it with her].

Princess: [Concerned] Bloody fools! You bunch of bloody fools!

General: Hey, who are you swearing at?

Princess: At you lot! Didn't you know? Because another group of urblings didn't bother to secure their door the women were raped!

{The men fall silent. General is the first to jump up, then the others all rise and go to fix the door.}
Princess laughs. The women go to prepare dinner and the glow from the fire lights up their features.

The door is repaired.}

Princess: Dinner's ready. Boiled water with some corn bread - two pieces each.

{Waifling starts doling out the cornbread. Hatoyama walks off to one side.}

Waifling: What are you doing? Dinner's ready!

Hatoyama: Going to wash my hands.

Pushcart: He really is a 'little lordling' ... still so fastidious!

{As usual, Hatoyama washes his hands and wipes them dry.}

Hatoyama: Oi, where's my change of clothes got to?

Waifling: Stop shouting and eat your dinner! [Perfunctorily, she pushes a piece of cornbread onto Hatoyama]

Hatoyama: [Secretively] Oh, don't launder them, my ... drawers ... are amongst them.

Waifling: [Indifferently] So what, 'Mister Particular'!

{Everyone eats silently. With her chopsticks, Princess dollops a little beanpaste into General's bowl.}
Hatoyama: {Picking up some with his chopsticks and tasting it} O.K., Princess, your partiality's showing.

{Laughing, Princess gives Hatoyama a little too.}

Big Head: But you're forgetting us!

Princess: What's so wonderful about a little beanpaste!

{She gives Big Head a little as well.} That's it ... only a smidgeon left. It's all gone.

Pushcart: Hand it over - I'll drink it with some hot water.

Princess: Fine, Pushcart, now pour me a bowl too.

Pushcart: Right.

Hatoyama: Pushcart, pour me a bowl too.

Pushcart: It's just over there, pour it yourself.

Hatoyama: Eh?

{Waifling pours a bowl of water for Hatoyama. Hatoyama takes it and laughs. They both drink, sharing it.}

Big Head: [Not without jealousy] What sort of catch have you made, Hatoyama? You look like you've just dined on honeybee shit. And don't be so partial, Waifling, or next time you're working in the fields I might not lend you a hand.
Pushcart: Here are your Workpoint Record Books. [He hands them out] Here’s yours, and yours …

Big Head: [Reading] By my aged granny, it’s only five points again!

Pushcart: You reckon five points is bad? If you’d received a mark of five points from your teacher, you’d have been so delighted that your buttocks would have been all atremble. You wouldn’t have been able to sit still.

Big Head: [Calculating] For each point I get one point four cents, so multiplying one point four by five … brother! For a whole day’s work I get seven cents. Seven cents!

Hatoyama: So how much do you reckon you’re worth? And who the hell insisted you come with us down here for "re-education"?

Pushcart: Right, Big Head. Is there truth in the rumour that your father’s been elected as a standing member of the metropolitan "Revolutionary Committee"?

Big Head: [Spits] Phoo! There was grit in that mouthful!

General: We’ve worked our guts out, Pushcart. How come they’ve recorded just five work points? It's ridiculous!

Pushcart: That’s what I thought, but at the brigade office they said that only half of all the urblings’ work will be recorded. That’s the regulation.

Hatoyama: Did you hear that? What a bummer of a regulation!
General: [Annoyed] Bedtime! Get to sleep!

{The men and women all go to their respective sides of the shack and turn in.}

Big Head: Didn't we just have dinner? How come as soon as I lie down I'm hungry again?

General: Stop all that drivel!

Hatoyama: Are you really hungry, Big Head?

Big Head: It's supposed to be only "drivel".

Pushcart: Seems to me that even in the three bitter years in the sixties I never felt so hungry.

Big Head: You'd better not make us think of our empty stomachs, or else how will we be able to put into practice that slogan, "Never forget the class struggle"?

Hatoyama: Away with ghosts!

General: No more blathering!

Hatoyama: [To Pushcart] Look, I'll teach you a trick. Don't you be thinking about how hungry you are. Have you seen that film, "Scaling Gan Tor"? They'd no water, so they thought about sour plum juice. Just think to yourself: I've dined so well! I've stuffed myself to death with ... steamed pies, stuffed dumplings ...
Pushcart: It's not working. The more I imagine it the hungrier I get.

{Big Head cheerfully chomps away.}

Hatoyama: Big Head, does your father use this same trick when he's making out reports?

Big Head: [Ferociously] Go fuck your mother!

Sister Superior: [Solemnly] Does it still hurt?

General: [Angrily] I'll rip the bloody arms off whoever says another word!

{The men don't make a sound. Silence. Then from the women's side comes the sound of someone's sobbing.}

Sister Superior, who's been reading by torchlight, nudges Princess.}

Princess: [Moving over to Waifling's side] What's up? What's the matter with you?

Waifling: [Clutching her stomach] My ... my stomach's hurting.

Princess: Because you're hungry?

Waifling: No ... it's ... my "time" has come again.

Princess: Quickly, then, fix yourself up.

Waifling: I haven't got any toilet paper ready.

Sister Superior: There's that newspaper that arrived just today.
Waifling: [Cries out sharply and throws the newspaper aside] Do I seem that far gone?
The front page has ... an editorial and photographs and everything.

Princess: No kidding, this editorial's arrived in the nick of time! [Softly] Listen to me, when I can't buy any toilet paper, I do exactly the same. Quickly now!

{Waifling quickly fixes herself.}

Sister Superior: [Solicitously] Does it still hurt?

Waifling: Much better, thank you both.

Sister Superior: [Sadly] I really envy you two ... mine hasn't arrived for three months now ... anaemia, dropsy ... I'm starting to wonder whether I'm still a woman ...

Waifling: Listen to me. Just now, I dreamed that my grandmother ... died. But her eyes were still following me.

Princess: It's on account of you missing your granny so much.

Waifling: You don't understand. While I was still at my mother's bosom, my father was vilified as a "Rightist". He died just afterwards. Mother ... left too ... They hung a sign on grandfather that read "Reactionary Capitalist" and he dropped dead while being denounced and paraded through the streets. He'd bought me a piano and it was also smashed to pieces ... Grandmother and I were the only ones left. If there's any possibility at all that she really has ... [on the point of tears].
Princess: Hey, haven't you heard? What comes true is the opposite of what you dream. Now go to sleep.

{Leaning against Princess, Waifling falls asleep. Sister Superior reads her book.}

Princess: Are you still reading?

Sister Superior: I'm so cold and hungry and I can't get to sleep.

Princess: So you're still dreaming about getting into university? They won't let us sit the entrance exam, you know. It's all done on "recommendation". follow me? If you sleep with them then they'll "recommend" you! [She laughs raspingly] Do you want to try it out?

Sister Superior: So how come you don't give it a go?

Princess: Me? Oh sure! [Heaving a sigh] A pass in the entrance exam would still be about as useful as a dog's fart! Don't talk to me about those idiot "uni students". My father, he graduated from a famous university, went overseas to study, could even read and write fluently in four languages, and has now graduated to his present position of herding ducks at a "Cadre School"! ... Oh! Go to sleep! "Long slumbers are blissful"!

{The women don't make a sound.

Big Head tosses about, unable to sleep, then let's fly a fart.}

Princess: [Pricking up her ears] Hey, you lot over there, how about showing some consideration.
Big Head: [Feigning shock and innocence] Who was it? Who's disturbing our Princess' sweet dreams? You deserve the death of ten thousand cuts for such crime.6 [Chuckles to himself] There's really no need to act so shocked, there's nothing in our stomachs except some corn flour noodles and dried sweet potato ... fart for your life, you'll never stink the place out.

{Someone's stomach growls.}

Hatoyama: Shoosh! Listen! What's that stirring? It's the cry of the "cow spirits and snake demons".7

{Secretive laughter.}

General: [Springing up] How about I go to try for a chicken from the coop?

Hatoyama: General, may you live for ten thousand years!

General: No Need. This surprise attack will be best carried out by one person.


Pushcart: None of us should go. Brigade-leader Bai is keeping an eye on us. He told me that in one place where an urbling stole some chickens the villagers gouged out his eyes with an iron spade!

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6 In the Cultural Revolution, a phrase shouted during mass rallies at persons who had not satisfactorily confessed their crimes.
7 A term describing intellectuals and Party members who had been denounced.
Hatoyama: [Giving a shudder] Mother in hell! And they really would have done it, too.

Big Head: [Gnashing his teeth angrily] Fuck their grandmothers!

General: [Icily] His meaning was that ...

Pushcart: It's always been that way: Bai could beat you to death and get away with it!

General: So that's what that "white-eyed wolf"8 said, is it? All right! Then today it'll be his turn! Big head, the knife!

Big Head: [Passes the knife] Be careful!

Pushcart: [Imploringly] If you really must steal a chicken, General, then don't steal one of his.

Hatoyama: For heaven's sake, General, don't take any from our neighbours, Uncle or Aunty Wang. They've been kind to us, even sent over some sweet potatoes!

General: I know ... and I'll keep that in mind! I'll specialise in stealing from "profiteers"!

[Grabbing the knife he dashes outside.]

{Princess clambers up and blocks General outside the door.}

Princess: So, exalted generalissimo, you're off to become a chicken thief.

---

8 The family name of the Brigade-leader is "Bai", which means "white". The "baiyan lang" [white-eyed wolf] is a frightening figure from children's stories. However "bai yan lang" is also used to describe ingrates, or worse, those who repay their benefactors with evil. Presumably the urblings would have been obliged to give the brigade-leader gifts out of any parcels they received from home.
General: [With a contemptuous grunt] Ha! And wasn't Shi Qian, one of the heroes of "The Water Margin", a chicken thief too?

Princess: What sort of trumped up hero do you think you're playing at? Don't you think you might have some use for your eyes?

General: If both my eyes were to be gouged out I would count that as a real misfortune. But with one eye left I'd still be the same old General. [Closes one eye] So... like Duke Potchensky.9 [He wants to go.]

Princess: [Urgently] Don't go!

General: What are you doing?

Princess: Don't go! If there are gluttons here, let them go instead.

General: [Dismisses her with a laugh] You're really being foolish! You think I'm doing this just because I'm hungry?

Princess: Whatever the case, don't go. I... I won't countenance your going!

General: [Speaking slowly while gazing at Princess] Once I've made up my own mind, it's made up, and I won't change it for anyone, not even for... you! [He grabs Princess passionately and gives her one long kiss.]

Princess: [Dumbfounded at first, she suddenly lashes out at General] You moron! You stupid bloody simpleton!

9 See p.164 above.
General: You're right! But it seems that even "bloody morons" can get away with certain things! [He pushes Princess away and hurries off.]

(Princess presses her finger to her cheek and gazes lovingly after him.

General: Wash it clean!

General nimbly makes off with a chicken.

Princess awaits him.

(They all lie face down on the floor and blow on the joints of the feet to speed up the

Elated, General hurries back with the chicken.)

General: [Flashing the chicken in front of Princess' eyes] Look!

(Princess merely turns around and enters the shack without a word.)

Urblings: [Shouting] Hail triumphant General!

(Screaming] Do you want some criticism of Song Ling?!

General: [Imitating the imposing manner of Lin Biao] Red Guards and Young Generals! The living reality of socialism has once again been attested to: the urblings who go down to the countryside will have the opportunity to provide a great service!

[Hurling down the chicken] Take it away!

(They all give a cheer and throw themselves at it. They hurriedly kill and pluck it.)

Big Head: Kill the chook!

Urblings: Kill! Kill! Kill!
Hatoyama: Pluck them feathers!

Urblings: Pluck! Pluck! Pluck!

(Everyone cheers and some take off to get their.)

General: Wash it clean!

Urblings: Scrub! Scrub! Scrub!

{They all lie face down on the floor and blow on the coals of the fire to speed up the cooking.}

General: Who can donate a bit of fuel?

Big Head: Burn this! [He passes over a stack of reading material] My father posted it to me - it's "Criticising Lin Biao and Confucius", the complete set of works.

Waifling: Do you want these criticisms of Song Jiang?¹⁰

General: Throw them over! By reducing them to ashes we'll be criticising him that much more thoroughly.

Pushcart: [Snatching up the book Sister Superior is reading] Here, burn this one too.

Sister Superior: But that's Hatoyama's ...

¹⁰ Song Jiang was the hero of Shi Naian's famous novel, Shui Hu Zhuan [The Water Margin]. Late August of 1975 found Mao Zedong "initiating further attacks on Zhou [Enlai] and Deng [Xiaoping] through criticism of a popular traditional novel, Water Margin. The novel's hero, a stand-in for Deng, was charged with "capitulationism" (and hence revisionism) to the emperor, that is, to Zhou Enlai presumably. A number of articles echoed this theme, orchestrated no doubt by the Shanghai Group". Craig Dietrich, Peoples China: A Brief History, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, pp. 228-29.
General: [Taking it and having a look] "Popular Philosophy", by Ai Siqi. This one we should keep. What about your newspapers, Pushcart?

{Everyone cheers and some take off to get them.}

Pushcart: No, don't! There's some articles in that lot by "Liang Xiao" about the revolution in education. We've still got to study and discuss them.

Hatoyama: "Farting is forbidden"!

Pushcart: What did you say, laddie?

Hatoyama: I ... so I memorised Chairman Mao's poems. What's wrong with that? Hey, the chicken's ready!

{Everyone tears off a piece to gnaw at.}

---

11 Goldman labels Ai Siqi, together with Chen Boda, Zhou Yang and Guo Moruo, one of China's major "literary bureaucrats". "Ai Siqi, born in Yunnan, was one of the top theoreticians on Marxism-Leninism from the late 1930's until the mid-1950's. In the 1930's he lectured on dialectical materialism in Shanghai and worked actively to promote the policy of a United Front adopted by the party in 1935. In the late 1930's, he went to Yen'an, where he was the editor of several party journals and was active in prosecuting the party's thought reform campaign of the early 1940's. When the party won control of the mainland in 1949, he became editor of Xuexi (Study), the party's most important theoretical journal until its dissolution in 1958. He tended to work behind the scenes in imposing ideological control over the intellectuals". Merle Goldman, Literary Dissent in Communist China, Harvard East Asian Series #29, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967, pp. iv-xv.

12 "Liang Xiao" was a pseudonym for writers promoting the Cultural Revolution in education. The writers were based on two university campuses.

13 A line from Mao's poem, "Two Birds: A Dialogue", the poem, written in 1965, a year after the fall of Khrushchev, attacked the latter's "potatoes and goulash communism". The poem, together with another by Mao titled 'Jinggang Mountain Reascended', written in May 1965, was republished in the People's Daily on new year's day, 1976, and was likely directed against Deng Xiaoping and his supporters, whom the Gang of Four depicted as "capitalist roaders".
Big Head: Yeah! I've heard that this time the movement is aimed at ... [he makes a gesture which indicates he's referring to a famous cadre].

General: [Surprised] So what did he mean when he said, "talented men are hard to obtain"?\(^\text{14}\)

Princess: That'd be right! And just when things have started to improve ...

Waifling: But didn't the poem by Chairman Mao which was published on new year's day say, "Everywhere, orioles carol and swallows dip"?\(^\text{15}\)

Hatoyama: But there's also that line which forbids farting about, isn't there?

{The urblings are puzzled. There is silence.}

Hatoyama: All right! Allow me, in mimicking of the revolutionary manner to have a stab at让他们 change their ways.

Big Head: [Heaving a long sigh] Oh! Roll on Cultural Revolutions ... we're supposed to remake one every seven or eight years ...

Hatoyama: [Lying down on the spot] One lasts seven or eight years ... \(^\text{16}\)

General: [Annoyed and impatient] Don't go on about it! Get your guitar, Princess, and play us something!

\(^\text{14}\) The line is attributed to Mao Zedong, who is describing Deng Xiaoping on the eve of the latter's political comeback in the mid-seventies.

\(^\text{15}\) The line is from Mao's poem "Jinggang Mountain Re-ascended" written, "in May 1965 when Mao was re-visiting the mountain on an inspection trip - 38 years after he established there the first rural base of Red power. The poem is a song of the Chinese people's victory in those stirring years of revolution and reconstruction, but still more, a clarion to fight on ... " Nancy T. Lin, *Reverberations: A New Translation of Complete Poems of Mao Zedong with Notes*, Joint Publishing Co., Hong Kong, 1980, p. 80.

\(^\text{16}\) Here the word play is on a phrase attributed to Mao Zedong, speaking on Cultural Revolutions. The phrase spoken by Big Head is Mao's original phrase, "Qi, ba nian lai yici" [once every seven or eight years], while Hatoyama chiasmatically reverses the wording of the phrase to "Lai yici qi, ba nian" [one lasts seven or eight years].
Princess: [Reluctant] I can't, a rat's gnawed through one of the strings.

General: Damn! Tomorrow I'll pinch us a cat!

Hatoyama: [Suggestively] A black cat or a white one?

Big Head: Look! If it can catch rats it'll be good enough!\(^{17}\)

Pushcart: [Very worried] Can't you be a little more discreet? Are you looking for trouble?

Big Head: Stay cool, we still haven't mentioned anyone by name. Have you the nerve to?

Hatoyama: All right! Allow us members of the revolutionary masses to have a bit of peace and quiet, just for a little while!

{General gazes at the fire. Suddenly, in a low but powerful voice, he begins humming a tune from their childhood: "The Song of the Young Pioneers".}

General: [Singing] Are you all ready?/ We're always ready! We're the Young Pioneers

Hatoyama: Hurrah! What are we really?

{At first they all begin to quietly listen, then they join in.}

Urblings: [Singing] The masters of the future/ We surely will be./ Da da da di da! Di di da di da! ...\(^{17}\)

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\(^{17}\)The line refers to Deng Xiaoping's famous quote of the mid-seventies, when he called for pragmatism over ultra-left ideology.
The more they sing the more they forget their concerns and their singing builds to a crescendo.

Urblings: [Singing] Hey little brothers,/ Ho little sisters,/ Our road goes ever on and on!/ The masters of the future,/ We surely will be!/ Da da da di da!/ Di di da di da!

[Suddenly Sister Superior starts to cry - then Waifling. Even the men's eyes fill with tears.]

Princess: [With tears welling in her eyes] Cry then! But what are you crying about? Even though a dream is beautiful it's still only a dream! If reality is cruel, it's still reality!

General: [Laughing coldly] Become a general? How many of our old marshals have been toppled?

Sister Superior: Any hopes I had have vanished ...

Waifling: The piano ... it was smashed to pieces! Towards the end it sounded so beautiful ...

Hatoyama: People! What are we, really?

Pushcart: My old man often says that for man the point of life is to have three meals a day and a sound sleep at night ... and two ounces of rice wine as well. Mmmnn, if you think it through it's pretty reasonable.
Big Head: Your reasoning's full of shit! If that's the case then why should we be alive at all?

Hatoyama: People ... people are simply particles of dust.

Waifling: We're pathetic little pebbles.

General: And I say we're a supply of bricks ... you can raise up the Great Wall with us, or build a chicken-coop, it just depends on how they want to use us!

Big Head: [Icily] They ... they throw you away to one side! Listen! [He raps rhythmically on a bowl] We're all just lumps of brick!

Urblings: [Chanting loudly together] They cart us north, south, east and west!

General: And if you want to ask if life is cruel?

Urblings: [Listlessly] Remember the Long March of twenty five thousand leagues!

Hatoyama: And if you wish to inquire whether labour is exhausting?

Urblings: [Approaching complete exhaustion] Remember the old society with its ten thousand evils ...

{They crash in different positions and fall asleep.}

Princess: [Setting aside the guitar with the missing string, with an increasingly powerful voice she hums, "The Song of the Urblings".}
"The light from the oil lamp shines on the wall, / How desolate the night appears. / Looking back on events now so far in the past, / Where is the road that will lead out of here?"

{Then she too nods off to sleep.}

{The drummer and keyboardist steal onto stage.}

Drummer: Have they all frozen solid? They all wear such fixed, anguished smiles.

Keyboardist: People who've frozen to death all wear such grimaces.

Drummer: Wake up! Everybody, wake up! Disaster is nigh!

Keyboardist: Look! It’s those peculiar flashes of lightning which announce an earthquake!

Drummer: Listen! The whole earth is roaring like a bull! [She beats her drum]

Urblings: [Jolted awake, they cry out in alarm] An earthquake! It's an earthquake!18

{In the midst of the sound of rumbling, the walls collapse and the roof caves in. The urblings are thrown tumbling about, frantically dodging and struggling...}

Finally calm returns. Everyone crowds together to gaze out through a broken window frame.}

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18 The Tangshan earthquake struck the area around Tianjin causing huge devastation in late 1975, and was seen by some as an omen preceding the death of Mao.
General: Look! Not a light to be seen! Where's the village? The people?

Big Head: Gone! Completely wiped out!

Hatoyama: And the sun? How can the sun have vanished?

Waiffling: There's such a heavy snowfall! Where can we find sanctuary?

General: Come on, let's hug together.

Sister Superior: [Fearfully] The earth's crust has cracked open. We might be swallowed up!

Pushcart: [Despairingly] We're finished! [Screaming wildly] Finished!

Big Head: There's no need to scream! We're still alive! Let's think for a moment!

Urblings: Let's think a moment!

General: Pack together! Keep hold of each other! If one comes again we don't want to be caught unawares! Or become separated!

{The urblings huddle close together - and are seemingly transformed to resemble a stone statue.}
Drummer: "As long as there shall be stones, the seeds of fire will not die". If winter comes, can spring be far behind? Is it possible you haven't seen how, after the west wind has scattered the old order, the whole land has returned to spring? The frost has thawed, the snows melted, branches have sprouted tender new shoots! This is the spring which you've been waiting for so many years! Hurry! Rush out to the fields, dash onto the road! Go forth and breathe! Go running! Go singing!

{One by one the urblings wake up. In a blissful daze they take off their heavily padded winter clothes and, throwing them onto the ground, walk off, each going their own way. They stroll about, breathing deeply, advancing into spring.}

19 The line is from Lu Xun, and is quoted in G, Barme and J. Minford (eds), Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience, Hill and Wang, New York, 1988. This work also contains an introduction and translation of part of act one of WM, (pp. 105-117).
Act Two

Spring (1978)

{The collective shack urblings have come together again. They are desperately going over their study notes, memorising theorems and formulae ...}

General: [Enthusiastically] Has everyone picked up their examination authorisation certificates?

Sister Superior: It's just like a dream!

Hatoyama: What subject will you be specialising in, General?

General: Aircraft engineering, naval vessel construction ... anything that'll get me into the military!

Pushcart: But our permanent addresses are still registered as being in the village.

General: I've stewed over the lot! This is what they mean by "crossing the Rubicon"!  

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1 Chinese term.
Hatoyama: "In year one we'll be able to see some initial results, and by year three some big results". By the year 2,000 we'll have realised the "four modernisations"! Let's go to it! When that time arrives ... oh sure!

Waifling: But meanwhile we must still prepare for our examination. Every morning my granny gives me a fritter of twisted dough, two eggs, and then prays that I get one hundred per cent. But my heart isn't the least heavy.

Hatoyama: [Solicitously] It's the same for us all. Why were all those years thrown away?

Princess: And what did we learn in those years? In total we learnt how to indulge in mass criticisms, hand in blank exam papers, smash glass, criticise and parade our teachers ...

Pushcart: Go sit the exam! But we'll be roasted alive ... we'll end up like a tray of overcooked pancakes!  

Big Head: Even so, first things first. Discouragement is forbidden!

General: Right! Spelling! Fuck it! ...

{Harbouring complex feelings, the urblings file into the examination hall.

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2 Science, industry and agriculture, technology, and defence.

3 "Shao bing" is a kind of pancake made from wheat flour baked in an oven. In Chinese the word "baked" is pronounced "kao". The word for "examination" is also pronounced "kao". If one fails an examination, one has kao huaile, and the same expression is used in the case of burning one's pancakes: "kao huaile" or "kao hule". According to Wang Peigong, Hu Yaobang, when speaking on the issue of the "zhi-qing", noted that those who failed the university exams came to be treated like "burned pancakes", that is, useless.
One by one they come out again, pallid faced, on the point of collapse from exhaustion ...
... as if suffering from serious illness.}

Big Head: [Asking General] How did your exam go?

General: Absolutely ... not at all that well!

Hatoyama: Oh damn, I made that same mistake!

(The attendings appear haggard and scared.)

Waifling: [With everyone on the point of tears] Eighteen forty three! ... It was eighteen forty-three! I should be shot! ... Eighteen forty three ...

Pushcart: So! The exam's over. What's the use in holding a postmortem?

Princess: Come quickly! It's Sister Superior ...

{They all gather around Sister Superior, who has fainted.}

Keybroadist: [Rushing up holding a few surgical instruments] The nurse has sent:

General: Water! Splash her with some water!

Big Head: Is it hypoglycaemia? If so she should rest up.

Sister Superior: [Coming to] No ... I, I have to take the exam ...

Princess: Are you tired of life?

Waifling: How can you sit for it in this state?

Sister Superior: I ... I am able to take it! ... [She strives to rise, but swoons.]
Hatoyama: Still, you'd best not go in.

General: I'll go have a word with them!

General (Walking away and with urgency) [Comprehendingly]

Sister Superior: No! ... [She throws herself upon General's legs] ... I want to sit it! [Distressed to the point of crying] I, I can pass it! ... I, I can't not sit it ... [She sobs silently]

Hatoyama: It's true! It's not as bad knowing this at least one of us has got up.

{The urblings appear hurt and scared.}

Drummer: [Incomprehendingly] How has this happened?

General (signaling Princess/Tomine and Weeping are off after him.)

General: Right, how has this happened? ... It's because, for the time-being, the examination route is about the only "Bright, Golden Road" we have left. It's because we were delayed for too long, till we'd lost almost all hope, so that now we're desperately clutching at this last opportunity to realise our ideals ...

Keyboardist: [Running up holding a few scraps of paper] The results are out!

{The urblings are handed the transcripts of their exam results and their faces reveal various complex responses ...}

Sister Superior: [Almost unwilling to believe her eyes] I've passed? I've passed! I really have passed! [Wild with joy] ... Take a look! I exceeded the matriculation mark. Ha ha ha ha! I've passed! Passed! ... [Suddenly she sobers, looks at her companions, and becomes terribly embarrassed. Speaking quietly] Sor ... I'm sorry ... I ... I really am! What have I been doing ... I. I didn't mean to ... ! I ... it wasn't intentional! ... [She stares at them all, begging them for pity].

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4 A reference to the revolutionary novel by Hao Ran.
{Staring at Sister Superior, some of the urblings force their expressions back under control. Others affect forced laughs.}

General: [Walking across, and with sincerity] Congratulations!

Pushcart: Right! You've given everyone from our collective shack more "face"!

Hatoyama: Oh ... my lord! Push .. Pushcart got it bloodywell right ... we were burned ... burned alive!

General: Completely incinerated! Ha ha ha ha!

Big Head: [Nudging Pushcart] Hey, how do you go about peddling burnt pancakes?

Pushcart: [Studiedly] "Burned - " go ask your own mother! Anyway, who'd still want to buy those types of pancakes?

General: Big Head, give us a look at yours. [He takes Big Head's results transcript and reads it] You little imp! You passed!
Big Head: [Laughing coldly] Even though I passed I won't be admitted. Yours truly is quite aware of his own limitations. [He slowly tears the transcript to pieces.]

Hatoyama: Why is that?

Big Head: My father's been sent to a "Five Prohibitions Political Study Class". Didn't you know? [He casts the bits of paper onto the water and walks off.]

{His friends stare off at Big Head Head's back.}

Hatoyama: [Quietly] It's not possible, is it? That, even now, the "nine degrees of kindred" can be implicated by one member's crime?

Pushcart: Our country has never and will never be able to change that convention. Take you - Hatoyama, for example. I'll lay down a fart right here and now that you'll be the first of us to get his registered address transferred back to the city, and furthermore that you'll score a decent job! "Our road goes ever on and on!" General will also be spoken well of. It's only us who'll stay miserable: as long as my old man's unwilling to move forward his retirement date, shit! We'll still have to "burn" here! And sit for exams! [He slaps his thigh] Don't only concern yourselves with the elderly's rehabilitation. You should also be giving a little thought to us urblings! [Sick at heart, he wipes his eyes and ex...]

{General: [Startled] You won't wait to sit down, and get back?}

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5 Xuexiban [Political Study Classes] were created during the Cultural Revolution. They were similar to detention centres for those who found themselves in political hotwater. According to Wang Peigong, the "prohibitions" included going outside, seeing visitors, making and receiving phone calls and leaving for any reason including illness. The name "xuexiban" was used because inmates were obliged to study Party documents and instructions and then to confess [jiaodai] their misbehaviour. On May 2, 1968, the People's Daily ran a quote by Mao which supported this institution; "It is a good approach to organise Political Study Classes. Many problems can be solved through them".

6 A system of social control introduced during the Yuan Dynasty.

7 The early eighties saw the rehabilitation [pingfan] of many cadre and intellectuals denounced during the Cultural Revolution.
{Hatoyama looks at General. General gazes at the river.}

Hatoyama: {Putting his arm around General's shoulders, he asks softly} What will you do?

General: I'm still considering ... {He stands up, depressed, gently brushes away Hatoyama's arm and, head lowered, abruptly walks off.}

{At a street corner, General unexpectedly bumps into Pushcart.}

General: Where are you off to, carrying so many things?

Pushcart: I ... I'm going to pay a call on some relatives.

General: {Ragging pushcart} You, young fellow, aren't telling the truth! "Bags of explosives", "hand grenades", to be sure you're taking them to blow up some "mountaintop garrison".

Pushcart: Lord! And what else can I do? I'm going to beg the doctor for a medical certificate, "retirement on the grounds of ill health". In any case it'll be a foothold towards some assignment, then I'll see.

General: {Startled} You won't wait to sit the exam again next year?

Pushcart: Next year? Next year the cut off mark for matriculation will be even higher! The exam topics will be even harder! And in this respect we're suffering from such "congenital deficiencies that we simply won't be able to compete with the others.

General: Why not have a go? Dare to struggle, dare to strive! There's still hope!
Pushcart: You can fart on a fire to make it flare up, but the sulphur still won't be worth anything. You should lose no time and use any means. What if the government's policies happen to change again? You'll be blubbering because you'll all have been too late! [He hurries off.]

[General ponders this deeply, then turns around and walks off.]

General arrives at Big Head's place. Big Head is in the middle of reading something.

General: What are you up to, Big Head?

Big Head: Nothing special. Having a read, doing a bit of thinking. And you?

General: Going for walks and pacing about. There's nothing to do except read books, but when I do read I don't take anything in.

Big Head: Take a look at these: "Exploration", "Starlight", "The Good Earth" ... they're so called "popular periodicals".

General: Ha, those lousy rags! They should only be used to wipe your bum ...

Big Head: Don't look at them in order of publication. Some of the articles are bloody marvellous! There're also speeches here from some Beijing campus elections ...

General: I don't see you for a few days and you turn into an ideologue again? I think these are about as useful as a fart! Lord, you're not planning to ...

Big Head: [Kicks a bundle of books] Nah, just now I asked someone to buy a complete set of teaching materials for a uni course in economic management for me. Ah, I plan to read them closely: if this country doesn't resolve its fundamental organisation problems,
then these [He gives the books a kick] will still be just bundles of wastepaper! I wonder
whether those people who keep on blathering about how we should "work energetically
for socialism" understand what socialism is? I wish you'd take a look, and don't worry
about whether everything they say is correct ... I guarantee you'll feel differently about
it! All of them are youngsters like us. Take a look at what they're thinking! And at what
they're doing! [Quite pretentiously] In my opinion, China's hopes appear to lie within
our very own hands! [He slaps General on the shoulder] "When heaven produced a
genius like me it must have had some purpose in mind! Go for it, brother!

{General is in shock and looking at Big Head as though he is a complete stranger.

Pushcart and Hatoyama come up.}

Hatoyama: [Merrily] You've all been born under the same sun, haven't you? It's as if I'm not

Pushcart: Hey! Hear ye hear ye: Hatoyama's credentials have been sent back to the city
for registration! I told you so!

Hatoyama: [Disturbed] I really didn't have a clue: it was all the work of my father's
personal secretary .. don't look at me like that!

Hatoyama: [Anxiously] Don't gawk at me, brothers!

{His companions disperse without a word. Hatoyama sighs deeply.

He goes to find Waifling.}

Waifling: [Indifferently] I hear that you're returning to the city?
Hatoyama: Are you happy for me?

Waifling: Happy? Of course I'm happy.

Hatoyama: Then how come you're not smiling? Speak up! How come you're not smiling?

{He tries to catch hold of Waifling's hand.}

Waifling: [Gently breaking away] Don't be like that ...

Hatoyama: [Miserably] You're all the same! Even you're like them! ... It's as if I'm not Hatoyama at all, but instead Wang Lianju turned traitor!

Waifling: No one is saying anything like that.

Hatoyama: Do you think I'm a fool? You think I don't see it? You mean to say you're not intentionally distancing yourself from me?

Waifling: [Sighing softly] Any distance between us has been there from the beginning.

Hatoyama: [Laughing coldly] Distance! ... From when I was young I've felt this type of "distance". In kindergarten, the teacher gave out the apples so that I got the largest; whenever I raised hell, the adults would side with me. On Saturdays, the other kids' olds would all arrive on bicycles to collect their children. It was only me who'd be sitting in some small car that farted out smoke everywhere. ... Yet it took only one night for people to come up to spit on and throw stones at me, when I became a "capitalist roader's little bastard". Everyone was frightened I'd contaminate them! ... I resigned

8 Wang Lianju is a character from the revolutionary Beijing Opera, The Red Lantern.
myself and came down to the countryside. It seemed, within our collective shack, that
I'd become a real person again! [His voice becomes hoarse] Can I still seem like
someone who's real to you? Eh? Would it be that bad if we kept going on just like
before? Eh? Is it that impossible?

Waifling: [Not knowing how to reply] I ... [She sighs and grasps Hatoyama's hand] I
feel so sorry for you!

{Hatoyama grows angry and squeezes Waifling's hand tightly.}

Waifling: [Crying out in pain] You ... let go!

Hatoyama: [He discards her hand haughtily and goes to leave, but then comes back]
You're pitying me ... that in itself is pitiful! I want you to remember: I have power! I'm
going to think of a way to get us all back to the city! I still want to ... marry you!

{Waifling starts, ponders his words, then laughs.}

Hatoyama: [Shouting] I can't even tolerate you now! I don't want to hear it.

Hatoyama: What are you laughing about? I'm really serious!

Waifling: [With unexpected seriousness] I never thought in mother's name.

Waifling: It's simply ridiculous! [She turns her back on him] Go away!

Hatoyama: [He walks up to her and pulls her around] I want to tell them that we've
already ...

Waifling: You've laid to much importance on those things we've shared! You really
believe that having left behind that environment those trifles are still so important? You
think that your father and mother will also treat our relationship as seriously? You
really think that they'll give their blessing to your marriage with the daughter of a
"rightist", the grand-daughter of a "capitalist"? And merely on the basis of my having washed some clothes of yours once or twice? Just because there's a certain kind of ... of feeling between us? You've got to be joking!

Hatoyama: That type of thinking is reminiscent of the old saying, "A good match is between families of equal status"! I despise such forms of feudalism! I'll say it again: I just want to marry you!

Waifling: It's impossible!

Hatoyama: [Despairingly] You don't believe me?

Stilt: We just fight for the moment. For the sake of article. We simply say it. "spring".

Waifling: [Hurt] I don't believe in myself! I don't have faith in my existence within this social environment! ... All right! These ... these problems are all out of my control ... [Tears well up in her eyes and she begins to gasp for breath] Who ... who made us live at such a distance?

Hatoyama: [Shouting] I don't want to hear you say that! I don't want to hear it!

Waifling: [With unexpected composure] I, even when I was in mother's womb, I understood it's meaning. [Sadly] Leave me!

{The two face each other uncertainly. Hatoyama appears to want to grasp Waifling, but the distance between them grows greater and greater.}

{Princess and General stroll along together and enter a willow grove. Princess is in a good mood. She carries an art folder.}

Princess: Hey! Come over here! Stand here and lean against this tree.
General: I'm not joking, I tell you!

Princess: Neither am I. My uncle wants me to sit the entrance exam for the Central Fine Arts College. He says he knows the dean, but that sooner or later I'll have to submit a piece of work. What I want is to bring you and this glorious spring day together in paint.

General: [Not in a terrific mood] And I suppose you want to haul me along as your official "model"?

Princess: In every other way you'd be qualified, but your expression's too melancholy. Still, it's just right for this canvas. I've thought of a title. I'll simply call it "Spring".

General: Why won't you agree to my going?

Princess: Lower your head forward a little. Keep that pose.

General: The deadline for enlistment is only three days away! And I still have to rush back to the village to enlist! Do you understand that?

Princess: What a mess. The whole picture's ruined! [She sighs] All right, have your say. But damn your "dream of becoming a general".

General: It's no dream. It's possible that I can really do it! I've made inquiries: after a full year's service I can sit for entrance to military academy.

Princess: And after two years you'll come out again, having become a minor platoon leader, at grade twenty three in the official hierarchy with a wage of fifty two dollars
and fifty cents, and you'll still be made to foot the bill for your own meals. I've also been making inquiries.

General: And after ten years' more service? Or twenty years? After seeing some action? Won't I then be able to "try for promotion to Division Commander, or even try for Brigadier"?

Princess: And when they demobilise you half-way through? In principle you might be right but what about the convention, "where you come from, to there you must return"? "We're frightfully sorry", they'll tell you, "but we must request that you return to your village and remain there". Don't cut me off! What if they don't let you sit the entrance test for military academy? What will happen if you fail the exam? Or if you aren't able to see some action? And if you do go ... what if you're killed? My God, it's really frightening! ...

General: I've resigned myself to that possibility. I've always intended to fight in one battle!

Princess: And me?

General: [Puzzled] You? What problems do you still have?

Princess: You're determined to fight for twenty years. Does that mean I'll have to wait twenty years for you? Alone and friendless, keeping myself company, and all for the sake of some would be "generalissimo's" daydream? ... No way, I'm not interested in that! It doesn't matter whether or not you'll have a job, or how much money you'll earn, ...
I won't care in the slightest! I only need to be able to see you in front of me. ... To be able to touch you. ...

General: [Yielding to impulse he moves to Princess and gently embraces her] Princess!

Princess: [Leaning into his arms] Don't leave. Don't go away ... I can refuse to sit any Fine Arts College exam if sitting that, too, would mean we'd be separated for several years ... [She strokes General's neck and face, and says softly] How many springtimes have we wasted already? There's not that many left ... I don't need to make any more suffering for myself. I admire your decisiveness ... and hate it at the same time! ... Don't, don't leave me. Just keep on holding me like this ... my prince, you'll always be a "general' to me.

General: [Bridling, he recoils, then asks with composure] And if I still want to go?

Princess: [She pushes him away and calmly says] In that case I'll find someone else quick enough!

General: [Holding her back] And the Fine Arts College exam? And my duty for years...

Princess: [Sullenly] What? You don't believe me?

General: [Laughing] I believe you! I believe you! My darling Princess! [He moves to embrace her.]

{Princess dodges him. General gives chase but she manages to avoid him and they chase and dodge about the willow grove. Princess becomes flustered. She hurriedly snatches up an oils brush and points it at him.}
Princess: You dare come any closer and I'll smear your whole face with paint!

General: Alright! Alright! I surrender! [Laughing, he leans against a tree.]

{Princess gives a snort of contempt and flicks some paint over her canvas.}

General: Look, truly ... tomorrow I'm leaving. [Exclaiming] Those trees we planted in those days have all grown this high! If we wait for them to fall down with age, won't you feel like you wouldn't be able to face another spring?

Princess: Leave then! If that's the case you can put one foot forward while I'll take one pace back and be with someone else.

General: Look, don't turn this into a joke!

Princess: Then just you try me! [She gathers up her art folder and is about to leave.]

General: [Holding her back] And the feelings between us? Eh? And my love for you? Haven't you taken these into account?

Princess: [Disdainfully] And I suppose you've considered them too! Selfish ghoul! [She shakes off his arm and storms off.]

General: [In a rage] Me? Selfish? ... [With a mixture of indignation and remorse he breaks a branch from a tree and lashes the ground with it furiously. Abruptly he stops and sits down.]

{A sound is heard: The tune of "The Song of the Young Pioneers", combined with the sound of the urblings' past laughter. General listens closely ...}
General's companions come over and encircle him.}

Wailing: Do you really want to go?

Big Head: Don't go away. We'll tackle things together!

Pushcart: If you leave like this, Princess will probably be even more hurt!

Hatoyama: Wait a while yet. Hu Yaobang, the Head of the Department of Central Organisation, gave an important speech recently about the problems of the urblings ...

Sister Superior: Reconsider, O.K.?

General: I have thought about it, and I've decided. I don't want to wait any longer. I want to use my own two legs to set out on my own road!

Pushcart: How come Princess hasn't come back?

General: You go advise and watch over her ... look after her for me. Look out for while in your roles upon this "collective shack" stage. Tell her ... I've gone. [Glancing at the withe in his hand] I'll take this along with me and stick it wherever I'm posted. [Raising the withe General strides off ... not turning to glance back.]

{His companions follow for a few paces to see him off, waving farewell.}

Wailing: [Sighing with disappointment] He's gone ... and us?

{Singly and silently the urblings disperse to form a forest that gently waves and sways in the spring breeze.}
Princess walks up, carrying her art folder. She strolls about within the forest, alone and purposelessly.

Pushcart approaches her.

Pushcart: You should go to see him off...

Princess: [Spitefully] I told him: as soon as he left I’d find somebody else!

Pushcart: [Abruptly] I… I’ll be your "model", O.K.?

Princess: [At first startled, she laughs quickly] Fine! Go over and lean against that tree.

[She arranges her painting gear.]

{Pushcart has no idea how to pose. In the end he assumes a stiff, awkward stance.

Princess raises her head to look, then remorsefully hurls down her palette and materials.

She gets up and leaves.

Pushcart hesitates a moment then quickly hurries to accompany her.

General, wearing a military uniform and a proud expression, crosses the stage between them.}

Sister Superior: [Steadily tapping head] General?...General?

General: [Taken aback, he turns about] Is that Sister Superior? She drops her hands!

Hey! How come I’m addressing you like that? I should say “convent administrator”! Who are you here to be here here?

Sister Superior: I’ve not been up to any sort of spectacle myself.

General: Don’t be speaking like that! Going to see is that? You’re just k...
Act Three

(Summer 1981)

{In unison the urblings mimic the cry of cicadas: "Fu tian - Fu tian -. They come forward.}

General: After being stationed in China's vast southwest I was retransferred to the northwest region. What have I been up to during these years? [He knits his brows and appears to ponder this seriously.] What really is there for an enlisted man to do? He goes off to war, then is hospitalised and has to stand sentry and perform non-combatant duties ... it seems like I've had no spare time at all, but then again I don't seem to have done anything in particular.

Drummer: Have you achieved your dream of becoming a general?

General: [Quielty:] What do you mean? [Impoverished!] Are you making fun of me?

Drummer: Dreams will always just be dreams. I'm one of those who love to have them.

{General and Sister Superior cross each other's path, almost rubbing shoulders.}

Sister Superior: [Suddenly stopping dead] General? ... General!

General: [Taken aback, he turns about] ... Is that Sister Superior? [He clasps her hands] Hey! How come I'm addressing you like that? I should say: "comrade collegian"! [He pauses momentarily] How have you been?

Sister Superior: I've not been up to anything of spectacular interest.

General: Don't be speaking like that! Going to uni is dull? You're just a ...
Sister Superior: I have to keep an appointment ...

General: There's a boyfriend, then?

Sister Superior: Still out of the question. [Changing the subject] How have you been? Did you make it into military college?

General: [He winces, then says indifferently] I'm afraid I've had no such good luck. At the end of my first year I went off to see some action. But when I did think to sit the entrance exam the doc said my memory wasn't up to scratch. He told me I was disqualified from taking the exam. So when I did finish my term of enlistment I simply "about faced".

Sister Superior: [Suddenly occurring to her] Princess hasn't come to meet you?

General: [Quietly] What do you mean? [Annoyed] Are you making fun of me?

Sister Superior: You ... what do you mean?

General: You don't know? You really don't know?

Sister Superior: I haven't been in touch with her for over two years.

General: Oh. [He pauses momentarily] We broke up.

Sister Superior: [Terribly shocked] What? ... Why?

General: Why? No particular reason. ... She's better of with somebody else, that's all.
Sister Superior: [Wanting to ask more but thinking it inappropriate] Errh.

General: [Not really wanting to go on about it but doing so in any case] You know who she's with? ... Pushcart!

Sister Superior: I really didn't have a clue! ... What can I say? General, take good care of yourself!

General: [Laughing] I haven't minded for a long time. Quick, off you go. You're boyfriend will still be waiting for you! {He nudges Sister Superior gently} Say "Hi!" to him for me.

{Sister Superior waves farewell and exits.

General walks with her a few paces then, smiling, waves goodbye.

A siren sounds. The noise is abruptly transformed into the sound of artillery shells whistling overhead and then exploding.

General stops dead and, at a loss, peers about him.

General and Hatoyama stroll and chat.

They run into Big Head, who is coming the opposite way.]

General: [Going up to him] Big Head!

Big Head: [Happily astonished] General!

{Big Head and General clasp hands. Hatoyama offers his hand but Big Head merely gives him a glance, not reciprocating.}

General: Still stoking steam boilers, Big Head?
Big Head: Still at it.

General: And still reading for uni courses?

Big Head: Still studying. Independently studying. [Concerned] Are you still in the army?

Hatoyama: Come back to us, General. You can rely on me to find you a job.

General: How about thinking something up to help Big Head?

Hatoyama: Arranging a move for someone from a collective factory is a bit difficult. His relationship with his factory foremen has become deadlocked and on top of that for the last two years he's been talking about nothing but "existentialism" ...

Big Head: I believe it. Why couldn't I have joined?

Big Head: What sort of "ism"? I've no interest in that!

General: [Changing the subject] It's so stifling!

Big Head: [Ignoring General he places a hand on Hatoyama's] How come it's so difficult?

Hatoyama: Tonight I'll take you to a disco, and I've got some videos, with a few sexy scenes. Will you dare to watch? "While the villagers nod off to sleep ..."! Hey, Big Head, how about joining us?

Big Head: You mean you'd like to mind the boiler?

Hatoyama: [Unable to suffer him any longer] What's up, mate? Are you looking for trouble?
Big Head: They're your words: during these past few years how many times have you switched jobs?

Hatoyama: That's not the point.

Big Head: {Still half joking} As often as he seems to change his bloody clothes, isn't that so? Wherever there's a good opening he scurries after it.

Hatoyama: And I'm preparing for yet another change ... I've been in contact with a television station. It's handling a director's job.

Big Head: [To General] Did you hear him? A director ... the pisspot!

Hatoyama: [Angry with Big Head] Even though I wasn't qualified I still went and got the job. Can you believe it?

Big Head: I believe it. Why couldn't I? You "elitist"!

General: Oh, just for a moment stop your bickering.

Big Head: [Ignoring General he picks at Hatoyama] How come it's so difficult whenever we want to get something done, while it's always so easy for you? It's as if China allows you bunch of "little lordlings" to usurp things like "freedom" and "democracy" from us. You don't leave even a little for the common people!

General: [Urgently] I'm leaving! Are you two coming or not?

Hatoyama: [Whilst swaying on one leg] And what sort of transportation do you have, may I inquire?
Big Head: [Extremely angry] I don't have any, but you, my lad, should have no call to act so smug! You with your motorbike, your two-step dancing, your wine, women and blue movies. Does that cover it all? I may be poor, but I'm still a whole person! And what are you? A totally "empty shell"! You fart!

{General, watching them quarrel, abruptly jerks up his head as if in pain.}

Hatoyama: O.K., I'm a fart. [He laughs] But what's your running after Waifling, then? What's your rationale for that?

Big Head: So, in a rage, you bloody-well dump her, but then you grudge me my concern for her and helping her out a little?

Hatoyama: Now that it's possible for you to do so! After everything's been fixed up! With the First Supplement to the Policies of Pragmatic Government and handouts of twenty or thirty thousand "yuan". Hurry up and marry her! I wish you, "old ninth", every happiness! May you enter the "second world"!

Big Head: [Furious] You! ... [He clasps his own raised fist.]

Hatoyama: So I'm selfish, and you're so noble! So straightforward and upstanding! Completely without fault! And with such pure motives! Taking advantage of a little surplus money, then, is no failing for "those whose activities heaven and nature have decreed mighty!" ... 

Big Head: [He punches Hatoyama in the face, knocking him down] ...

General: [Hastily stepping between them] Big Head! Don't hit him!
Hatoyama: [Getting up and speaking with composure] Step aside, General. [To Big Head] Have a go, mate! Help Waifling vent her spleen!

Big Head: [Hoarsely] What I reckon is, while you're alive, you may as well try acting like a man! [He shoves Hatoyama violently and walks off.]

General: [Deeply pained] Big Head's gone ...

Hatoyama: [Disappointed] Gone ... [Bitterly] I really am a fool! What was I doing saying those things?

General: [Not looking at him] That affair, is it true?

Hatoyama: What?

General: You, and Waifling ...

General: How can this be? Have you forgotten all about friendship? Have you forgotten ...

Hatoyama: [Sighing] It's true ...

{General glances briefly at Hatoyama and walks silently away.}

{Hatoyama sits woodenly, dejected.}

Hatoyama: Forgive me, Big Head! I didn't mean anything by it. Though I feel sad myself, I still wish you both happiness!

{Big Head daydreams at the side of the river.}

Big Head: Happiness! Farewell ...
{In a state of deep anxiety, Waifling waits for Big Head.}

Waifling: Why didn't you come? I'm being continually pestered with marriage proposals, with letters and phone calls from people asking for money - so many! I didn't dare leave the house, but couldn't cope without you. I've been sick to death with worry!

Big Head: You shouldn't have waited for me. It's simply that ... we're finished!

General: [Sitting beside the river] What a headache! How has this happened?

Hatoyama: If it's because of those stupid remarks of mine ... [he gives a start.]

Waifling: Him? Is it because you paid attention to something he said?

Big Head: No ...

General: How can this be? Have you forgotten all about friendship? Have you forgotten our times at the collective shack? ... [He places his head in his hands.]

Big Head: [Heartrenderingly] Just about that time when we started to change from ugly ducklings into pure white swans, I knew it: we were ruined!

Waifling: [Remembering] He made me happy, but ... our laughter didn't come easily. For a laugh I gave him a look at those letters of proposal, only he ... he didn't laugh!

[She suddenly succumbs to a panic attack.]

General: [Confused and annoyed] Could it be that wealth and status are stronger than even love and friendship?
Big Head: And don't forget public opinion! ... Slander and rumour ...

Hatoyama: For God's sake, don't take what I said seriously! I confess: it was jealousy! I loved her after all. I still love her even now!

General: How did we get ourselves into such a mess!

Big Head: [He laughs bitterly] If you want to go back to the old status quo right now, then go ahead. She's no longer a "rightist's" daughter, nor the grand-daughter of a "capitalist" ...

Hatoyama: Do you still want to take back everything you gave her?

Big Head: And if I don't, what will I have left? I lost everything to her, even down to the least item of value I possessed. There's nothing left except failure. ... Aren't I an "empty shell" too? [Distressed] Wine! Some wine! [He throws back some cups of wine.]

Hatoyama: [Standing up] I've thrown myself away. I can't afford to lose my friends as well!

Waifling: [Rising at the same time] I've already lost Hatoyama. I won't lose him too!

General: [Standing up as well] Big Head, where have you got to?

Keyboardist: [In a low, solemn voice] He got drunk and got into a fight. He's been put away in the lock-up!

General and Waifling: What? [Shocked, they both peer off into the distance ...]
Big Head has been arrested and is being escorted to the lock-up. He struggles. A invisible, yet powerful hand gives him a shove and he is dashed to the ground.

General: [Sorrowfully] Big Head! Our Big Head!

Waifling: Big Head!

Big Head comes to. He sits up vaguely.

Big Head: The sun's gone down? What a mess! I'm late for work! [He clambers up and sprints off, but bumps into a wall.] The door! Where's the door? [He gropes about] This is absurd! Am I dreaming? [He bites his own hand and reacts to the pain.] Where am I? [Scared, he begins to think] I ... how did I get in here? Let me out! I've got to get to work! Master Worker Liu must still be waiting for me to relieve him so he can go home for dinner! He has a sick relative living with him! ... [Hopelessly] All right! I'll wait a whole week if you want! ... Impossible! How can I wait in here? What will everyone think? My co-workers at the factory, the General, Waifling ... He beats wildly on the door] Open the door! Open this door! Let me out! ... Here, how come it's so stuffy? Not even a breath of wind? I'm being boiled alive! ... I, I won't dare do it again! Would that set things right? You lot, let me out! Oh ... [Sobbing, he falls down onto the floor.]

Waifling is crying long and hard.

General is in the middle of discussing the situation with Hatoyama.

Hatoyama: This situation isn't going to be that easy to handle - his having indulged in "pugilistic" activities. What's to be done?

General: Look, forget about what happened between you two. We have to think of something. We can't let Big Head be ruined by this.
Hatoyama: [Very slowly] Then we have to go find Pushcart.

General: Find him?

Hatoyama: There's no other way. That young fellow has been bumbling along nicely. In line with the slogan, "use workers to substitute for cadres", he's found work in his department's political section. Big Head's factory is managed by his chief. Pushcart will only have to say a word in his ear ...

General: It's possible. ... You go. [He wanders off despondently to one side.]

Hatoyama: [Closing Pushcart down] We're not commenting correctly with those sorts of things.

Hatoyama: [Sympathetically] You're not coming? That may not be such a bad idea. I hear that he's been allocated an apartment ... because he's going to be married.

General: [Considers this, then says decisively] Let's go.

{They hurry off.}

Pushcart is busy decorating his new apartment. General and Hatoyama walk in.}

Hatoyama: Pushcart!

{Apparently Pushcart no longer recognises this name. He doesn't respond.}

Hatoyama: [Placing his hand upon Pushcart for a moment] Hey Pushcart!

Pushcart: Good lord! It's my old mate, Hatoyama. ... [On noticing General he is struck dumb.]

Hatoyama: Hmmn! Your new apartment is nicely furnished!
Pushcart: [Busyly continuing with what he is doing] It's a terrible mess. Come in. Sit down here. [He switches on an electric fan] The day's a scorcher. ... When did you get back, General? And not writing to let us know. I would have liked to go and meet you ...

Hatoyama: We've come on Big Head's behalf.

Pushcart: Yeah. I just heard about it myself. How can you explain it - his doing such a thing? ...

Hatoyama: [Cutting Pushcart short] We're not concerning ourselves with those sorts of questions. You've got to help us out.

Pushcart: ... Sure! On the strength of one word from the General and you! Come on, have a bottle of softdrink.

General: [Rising] Let's go. [He signals to Hatoyama.]

{Hatoyama places a plaster bust on the table.}

Pushcart: Ve ... Venus? It's beautiful! Incredibly beautiful!

Hatoyama: ... It's a gift for you both.

Pushcart: Thank you so much. Thank you very much. [Admiringly] This can't have come cheap! They're still hard to buy at the moment.

Hatoyama: Princess will like it, hopefully.
General: Is she ... well?

Pushcart: [Casually] Still well, but I can't say for sure. We haven't seen each other for two months.

Hatoyama: [Taken aback] Aren't you making your marriage preparations?

Pushcart: Sure. I received the marriage certificate two days ago.

Hatoyama: Then which of your bloody statements is true?

{Pushcart bursts out laughing and passes over a photo.}

General: [His face changing colour] Who is this woman?

Pushcart: The woman I love!

Hatoyama: Eh?! You little ...

General: And Princess? Have you ... ?

Pushcart: Listen, both of you ... to what I have to say. That relationship ... well, I spent some time reconsidering everything and we've never been quite suited. Think about it, that family of hers and my own family ... and then there's my parents as well ...

General: Then why are you still deceiving her ... emotionally?
Pushcart: That ... you can't say that I've "cheated" her. It was wishful thinking on both our parts. More ... moreover, and this is what she said, that after you left she'd find somebody else quick smart. I .. I'm only ... terribly sorry.

Hatoyama: You bloody-well just took her off guard? You think you haven't abused a friendship? Take him out front, General, and punch his head in ...

General: Don't speak like that!

Pushcart: I ... I must ask your forgiveness. You know that I've always been an ... ordinary fellow, always had some vanity in me ... yet, in my heart ... I still feel I can't marry her. General, your mutual feelings still run deep. It would be better if you were willing to start afresh with her. I could exit the scene ...

General: Fine! [He gives Pushcart a crushing look] Let's go!

Hatoyama: Pushcart, oh Pushcart, there really is a rather "nasty stink behind your smokescreens"!

Pushcart: You, you'll not stay a little longer?

Hatoyama: What? [He turns back and picks up the photo] I've seen this young woman before!

Pushcart: [Panicking] How ... that's impossible.

Hatoyama: I have seen her! She's the precious daughter of your departmental head, isn't that true? Ha ha ha ha!
General: [Suddenly catching on as well] Ha ha ha ha!

Pushcart: [He stares at them indignantly, then suddenly bursts into a peal of laughter. His laughter grows louder than their own.] Ha ha ha ha!

{General goes down to Pushcart. Pushcart faces up to General.}

-General and Hatoyama stand aghast.-

Pushcart: [Ferociously] Laugh then! Why aren't you laughing! Laugh at me! At my climbing social ladders! At my grasping onto apron-strings. At my seeking out an influential patron so I can rise to a "second class" citizen! Am I so different from you lot, then? On what basis does destiny decree that you scions of the official class should in turn become officials, while I'm bloody-well doomed to live out my days in this shitty place? You think you have the right to laugh at me in this way - just because I've found a departmental head's daughter? Alright, just allow that I don't love her and only think it opportune that I should take her for my wife. In that case a day might come when you might be obliged to treat old Pushcart more favourably!

General: [Completely stupefied by Pushcart's brazen self-vindications] Did you treat Princess like this, then?

Pushcart: [With a cold laugh] And how has she treated you on your return? Sure, she's a beauty - but you can reach a stage where you really regret playing around with a pretty thing like her. After finishing nightshift I'd be obliged to wander about the bazaars with her! I'd have to shelve my college classes and escort her to hear some farty concert! Why should I be afraid to "swap shares" when in fact apparently I was just her little lapdog! ... A beautiful "princess"! It's only now that I comprehend the actual meaning of the term "princess" ...

General: What do you comprehend?
Pushcart: That she's a "witch disguised with stage-paint"!

General: Shut your mouth! Get up!

{General faces down Pushcart.
In his own imagination General raises up a long whip to thrash him mercilessly ... 
Pushcart faces up to General.}

Pushcart: You think to give me a lashing?

General: That's right, and a bloody good one.

Pushcart: Then lash away to your heart's content. Why don't you start?

General: [Greatly anguished] Because I'm a soldier!

{General is dragged off by Hatoyama.}

Pushcart: Humph! [He snorts, as if nothing has happened.] "The masters of the future, we will surely be ..." [Suddenly he begins to dance. After a few steps, however, he feels hurt and has to wipe tears from his eyes.]

{General is dragged down to the riverside by Hatoyama, where they sit down.}

General: I suppose my face didn't make a very pretty sight just now, right?

Hatoyama: It was pretty awe inspiring. But have you looked closely at mine? [He whips out a flashlight and, switching it on, positions it under his chin so that it lights up his face.] Am I that much more ugly than Pushcart?
General: What sort of exhibition are you making of yourself?

Hatoyama: Since I've yet to be delivered, I have this hellish soul. [He really is in a state of terrible torment.]

General: [Angrily] Why did you so cold heartedly dump Waifling?

Hatoyama: I didn't ... No! ... I made her a vow: that I'd become independent. But circumstances compelled me. My parents forced me. They wanted to pressure me into changing into a different person. They won't let me love the person I do. Instead they're lining up strangers for me to choose from. That old bag who, when I was in less fortunate circumstances, "slammed the door in my face", used some honeyed words, forced drink upon me and then prettied up her daughter as a gift for my bed ... I blame myself, too. When people get drunk most change into monsters ...

{Silhouetted by torchlight appears an inebriated Hatoyama, in the process of being led into dangerous temptation ...}

Hatoyama: I can't possibly see her again. I'm far too unclean! ... [Nauseated to the point of retching] It's as if I've made my way into some sewer! There's filth everywhere! ... I've bided in a lot of places, but in every situation I've seen people hanging on men of influence, trying to outwit each other, hypocrites and swindlers! I could say that I've quite a few friends, but not one of them is a for real. They all want to exploit me. [He laughs gloomily] Mutual exploitation! And not one of you few real friends ever comes to seek me out! When Big Head swears at me, don't think that I hate him for it. On the contrary, I'm happy for him to do so. True! [He stands up] People, they're so pitiful! In the corridors of art where I hope to end up, I wonder if, in the end, I'll be able to discover my real self?
{His head bowed, he walks away.}

{General is left to miserably contemplate these events.}

{Big Head and Waifling are in a state of stalemate. A door divides them.}

Big Head: Go away!

Big Head: Well, I don't want you to go everywhere.

Waifling: No!

Waifling: But you new clothes don't suit you. Then open this door, please. Just open it.

Big Head: Leave!

Big Head: I beg you; go away!

Waifling: I don't want anything else—just you!

Waifling: And I refuse!

Big Head: There's no way I'll open this door.

Waifling: I'll wait.

Big Head: I'll never open up!

Waifling: Then I'll wait here forever.

Big Head: [Growing anxious] How can you be this shameless? I've already dumped you!...
Waifling: [With tears in her eyes] Keep on cursing! I'm listening.

Big Head: I've been convicted of assault and I've been fired, you understand that? No one would be willing to re-employ me!

Waifling: I want you! ... I need you!

Big Head: Well I don't want you, so go away! Leave!

Waifling: But you need money, don't you? I've got that open-deposit receipt here, twenty thousand "yuan". It's still all here ... if it's just because of this money that you've become so distant from me, take it! It's yours!

Big Head: No! It's yours.

Waifling: I don't want anything else - just you!

Big Head: [He sighs deeply] I've no career, no goal to pursue, and without these, how can I survive? Twenty thousand "yuan"! The monthly interest alone would probably be several times larger than my former salary! [Pained] And what if I take your money and spend it guzzling food and drink, on socialising and entertainment, frittering it away till the day I die? Then what - what would I count as? A zombie? A waster? ... What are you doing in love with such a squanderer? What do you want me to do?

Waifling: I think you're the same good bloke as before!

Big Head: Alright! [He opens the door.] Give me the deposit receipt! [About to take it] This will be a private transaction, you'll sell it to me. Listen. There's only one path I can take, and that's to start up a business. To achieve any of my dreams I'll have to organise
an individual enterprise! If I lose this money we'll both become paupers. But if you and I get married and I employ all my energies, if I work like a horse instead of the ox that I am, I'll repay you what I owe! If I'm able to make some money I'll just hand it over to you, and when that time arrives, then we'll be "equal" - I'll be entitled to take you for my wife! Have I your agreement?

Waifling: [Laughing] I consent! I'll return it all to you! I only want to say one thing: you and I are already equal - we're both human!

Big head: [Sobbing] Waifling! You're the most pitiful of all - I love you! [He holds Waifling tightly in his arms.]

{They kiss tenderly ...}

In unison, the urblings mimic the cheeping of cicadas: "Fu tian - Fu tian - "

Princess reclines, daydreaming, upon a sofa.}

Princess: [Muttering to herself] Bloody fool, the bloody fool! [She throws herself down and sobs.]

Princess: Paint ... paint what! The brush? It's colour's completely dried out. And there're no oils. You stupid fool! How much time have I wasted on your foolish image! You stupid, bloody fool!

{Princess cries, then bursts out laughing. Rising from the midst of her laughter comes the sound of here conversation with General ...}

Princess: Don't go. I ... I won't countenance your leaving!

General: Once I've made up my own mind, it's made up, and I won't change it for anything, not even for ... you!

{The sound of their kissing.}
Princess: You moron! You stupid bloody simpleton!

{There is a slight pause.}

(As the heavy silence, General continues to gaze at Princess.)

Princess: You dare come any closer and I'll smear your whole face with paint!

General: Alright! I surrender! ... Tomorrow I'm leaving ... Those trees we planted in those days have all grown this high! If we wait for them to fall down with age, won't you feel like you wouldn't be able to face another spring?

Princess: Leave then! If that's the case you can put one foot forward, while I'll take one pace back and be with someone else.

{The sound of General's laughter ...}

Princess: [Murmuring to herself] Bloody fool, the bloody fool! [She throws herself down upon her art folder and sobs silently, then begins a mad dance. While throwing herself about, she steps on a small kitten.] Oh! And whose kitten might you be? [She straightens up] Who do you belong to? And such a cutie. Could it be possible no one wants you? [She lifts up the kitten] Come on, little one! Come with me. I want you. Hmmn? Waifling? That's no good, I can't call you "Waifling" - that's the name of one of my old classmates. I'll call you ... Snow White, alright? Little Snow White! Little puss! But what about your friends? Oh, your friends have all rejected you? Don't worry! We'll make a good pair! I'll give you some milk to drink and sing for you: [She sings] "Little one, little one,/ We guess what you are saying ..." [She is unable to continue] You don't like it? Alright, we'll sing something more gentle: [In a melancholy tone she sings] "The light from the oil lamp shines on the wall,/ How desolate the night appears. ..."

{General walks up and gazes at Princess.}
Princess: [To the kitten] "Looking back on the past now so far away,/ Where is the road that will lead out of here? ..."

{In the heavy silence, General continues to gaze at Princess. Princess raises her head and spies General. There is an awkward silence ...}

General: [Breaking the silence] I'm really glad you remember that old song ...

Princess: [Feigning relaxed composure] Oh, I just happened to recall it to sing for the kitten. Isn't that right, kitty? [To General] Have you come to square accounts? I'm sorry, but I've completely forgotten the whole thing - it's the same as when I read a book; when I turn the page, that's it, I never think to read it twice.

General: If you insist on tearing out all of yesterday's pages and throwing them away then the work as a whole will be incomplete, so much so that you'll have to throw out the entire thing!

Princess: Is it because you thought to lecture me on such philosophic notions that you've come?

General: I came to see a friend from my past: to share some good memories together, and to recall some old and poignant ones ... but the main reason I came was that I was thinking of asking her: how's life these days?

Princess: [Gives a chuckle] How's my life? I pass it as you see me now!

General: And how long do you plan to go on living like this?
Princess: You want to poke your nose into that as well? The let me make it clear for you: My life's a fortunate one! What does Pushcart count for? I can find a dozen like him!

General: Sure, he's a bastard, but even he's striving in his work! But you? [He walks over to the art folder] Still that unfinished "Spring"! And summer's already here, with autumn just around the corner! When everyone brings in their harvest, what will be going through your mind?

Princess: Me? I don't have any thoughts. My life flows by and that's quite enough for me!

General: That's just fine, then. Although it means I came for nothing! You just lounge about on your sofa and play with your kittens and puppies. Go on wasting your life and artistic talents until you turn into a garrulous old bag!

{He turns around and walks off.}

Princess: [Jumping up] I loathe you! I really loathe you! [She paces back and forth wringing her hands ... then abruptly she stops still and stares blankly at her unfinished work - "Spring".]

General: [Irritated] It seems I really have turned into a "common footslogger" - I can't understand anything, it seems! [He pauses momentarily] I'll go back! I shouldn't think that life in my Company is so lonely! It's true that, "during daylight soldiers have only each other to gaze at, and at night only the stars", and there's no denying that tempers flare up and there are quarrels, but at least it's a more simple life than here! [He hears a sound] What? Is that cicadas chirping at night? No. Who's that laughing?
The sound of Princess’ laughter swells. Her form flutters within the grove.

General: No. It's someone crying. But who?

The sound of someone crying is conveyed.

General: Is it really someone crying? ... [He makes a quick foray.]

A young woman stands weeping. She walks listlessly towards the river.

General: [Jumping out] Who's that? What are you up to? [Startled for a moment, General then dashes forward and drags back a young woman who is on the point of throwing herself into the river.] What's this? Sister Superior?

Sister Superior recognises him and abruptly begins to cry.

General: What's the reason for this?

Sister Superior: He cheated on me.

General: Just because some man hoodwinked you, you want to commit suicide? Then what do you think I should have done?

General: [Angrily] That's killing the messenger of love!

Sister Superior: [Groaning] You're a man ...

General: But you're no ordinary woman. You're a university student!

Sister Superior: What's that got to do with it? I've had enough!
General: What's the real reason? For love?

Sister Superior: [Agitated] Love? Where is there any love? It's all a fraud! My father cheated on my mother, then abandoned her! My mother had to collect wastepaper to hawk and sold paddlepops on the streets so that I could have an education! I ... I made her a promise. I promised I wouldn't get a job and would on no account allow myself to get involved in a relationship. But then I deceived her! [She smiles wanly] Retribution! In the end my disgrace is due entirely to retribution! he's been married for ages! His wife ... she reacted like any wife, but why on earth should she trash my house and get everyone to curse me as a "stinking prostitute"! I am human, after all! I am a woman too! ... And you ... you still won't allow me to die?

General: That's right! You must not kill yourself.

Sister Superior: And why not? My life's my own! I'm not asking for anything - and I've nothing to offer. I don't have the zest to go on living! Please help me, General. Help me to end this absurd, empty life!

General: I wouldn't dare!

Sister Superior: Isn't it the way of soldiers to kill, then?

General: [Angrily] That's killing the enemy in battle!

Sister Superior: [She trembles and begins to shiver] I'm cold! So cold!

{General hurriedly takes off his shirt and drapes it about her. Revealed upon his naked chest are the tracks of a terrible scar.
Sister Superior is dumbfounded. She turns her head away and looks over her shoulder, at a loss what to do.

General: [With a bitter laugh] Ugly, is it? But this is nothing. Our Company Commander had his eyes blown out; his 2.I.C., who'd only graduated from military academy the year before, died in my arms. As he lay dying, he said something rather strange to me. He said: "My wife's nickname as a child was 'Roly-poly', and when she bore a daughter she nicknamed her 'Hoopy-loopy' ... 'Roly-poly, Hoopy-loopy' ..." It was a only after six months had gone by that I understood what he meant: that as soldiers we form a protective ring around the lives of our people! ... But you, you still profess that your life is your own! Don't trample all over our feelings! If you did, what could I say to my comrades-in-arms when I return to my mountaintop? Eh?

[Sister Superior has stopped crying. She raises her head and stares solemnly at the scars on General's chest. She stands slowly and returns his shirt.

General put on the shirt.]

General: I'll see you home.

[Sister Superior hesitates a moment, then sets off.

General intends to set off together with her, but almost steps into the river.

Sister Superior quickly drags him back, staring with astonishment into his eyes.

With General escorting her, they exit.]

[General steps forward.]

Drummer: Was this summer a lively one for you, General?

General: [Shaking his head] It was like watching a foreign movie ...
Drummer: Will you keep watching?

General: There's no time. I must return to my unit.

Drummer: And when you return to your mountaintop, what will you say to your comrades?

(The urblings all wear new autumn clothes.)

General: I'll say: don't think of life down here as being so wonderful, so contented, so peaceful! There's also loneliness down here, and depression, there's heated fighting and serious sacrifice ... am I right?

Drummer: It would appear you are correct. But when will we see you again?

General: Wait till autumn. Don't they say, "all accounts are settled after the autumn harvest"? [Offering a smile, he puts on his uniform and cap, and gives a military salute.]

I'll see you come autumn, friends! [He exits.]

{The urblings loudly mimic the chirping of cicadas: "Fu tian - Fu tian - ".}
Act Four

Autumn (1984)

{The urblings all wear neat autumn clothes.}

Drummer: The sweet osmanthus has blossomed. Autumn's arrived. Colours run riot in the fine weather and crisp air. This is the harvest season; the season for reflection ...

{The urblings walk in and greet each other. They smile and beckon, shake hands and embrace urbanely. They open out a picnic table and take their seats.}

Drummer: Oh, you've all come together again - I'll bet that wasn't arranged so easily. Who seems to be missing still?

Big Head: Strange. The person who organised this get-together appears to have forgotten to attend himself.

Hatoyama: General has only to appear on the scene for our bit-roles to be played out.

Princess: According to the postmark on his letter he must have come back a week ago.

Waifling: The writing on his letter was all over the place. I suspect it wasn't him who wrote it.

Sister Superior: It was him ...
Big Head: [To Pushcart] "Hut leader", I hear you've been promoted to Departmental Director.

Pushcart: Assistant Director.

Big Head: Oh. And how have you been whiling away your time? Disseminating propaganda to all and sundry? Ha ha ha ha!

Pushcart: [Also laughing] Oh, busily accomplishing bugger all.

Hatoyama: Don't go "oh" like that. We're holding a dinner party, your managerial magnificence, and you're invited!

Big Head: Such flattery. You mean we won't have to go "Dutch"? Which restaurant will it be?

Sister Superior: [To Waifling] How much did you make in the end?

Waifling: [Shrugging her shoulders] The devil knows. You'll have to ask him.

Big Head: [Laughs] I can't say for certain, either. Oh! Money! It's merely an externality, a material object. You can't take it with you when you go.

Drummer: [In exasperation] Oh - !

Sister Superior: [To Princess] Did I hear right, Princess, that a foreign dealer offered twenty two thousand dollars, U.S., for your prize-winning oil painting, "Spring"?

Princess: It's not for sale. when are you leaving for the States?
Sister Superior: Pardon?

Princess: Aren't they sending you off for advanced study?

Sister Superior: Yes. But I ... would you be able to give me 'Spring'? Oh, I mean, make a copy for me?

Princess: I'm suffering from creative exhaustion at the moment - the Muse has left me. Can I give you some other piece?

Sister Superior: Somehow I've always felt that I was portrayed in it too ... 

Drummer: Eh?

Princess: Oh ...

Waifling: [To Hatoyama] I understand! In any case, I understand!

Big Head: [Walks over] What are you talking about? That tele-drama? [He puts his arm around Waifling's shoulders.] Did you tell him? [To Hatoyama] We all voted for it.

Hatoyama: [He laughs bitterly] Thank you. Thanks.

Big Head: The reason it didn't win the prize was those unconventional romances you portrayed ... like that review in the circular said.

Waifling: [Decidedly] What has that got to do with art?

Hatoyama: [To Big Head] You don't understand the world of literature and art. It's just the same as yours; it's a business. But you lot are better than them, at least. At least
you're open about it. As for that lot, the bottom line is that they're all as sleek as cats, and they'll use any means ... forget it. Don't let's discuss it. I haven't the spirit to!

Big Head: How about coming to work with me, distinguished director? [To Waifling] Eh? What do you say?

Waifling: Become a "second-hand dealer" with you? [To Hatoyama] Don't listen to him! The only place for you is in the Arts!

Hatoyama: I've not been thinking about changing jobs either. They're all the same. [He walks off to one side, smoking a cigarette.]

Big Head: [To Waifling] Where did you go off to yesterday? I made a point of finding the time to come home. I brought back a real classy dress for you, one I'd just managed to lay my hands on. It's the latest fashion in Japan. I waited ages for you!

Waifling: Thank you. [She laughs] My darling husband! So you've finally found out what "waiting" really feels like. [She pauses a moment] I went to see Hatoyama's film. Was that permissible? Afterwards I asked him to have dinner with me. We talked about the past until evening. Should I ask your forgiveness?

Big Head: What's this all about? Come on, I want a word with you. [He wants them to leave.]

Waifling: [Stopping him] Yesterday, when you finally did come home, didn't you agree to go to the courts with me and ask for a divorce?

Big Head: [He laughs] O.K. Fine. I'll divorce you, as soon as I can find the time.

Waifling: [Angry] What are you laughing about?
Big Head: Don't forget the occasion. [He lifts Waifling's hand and kisses it, then starts to circulate.]

Big Head: I regret having to tell you! After serving in this position for life, perhaps I should try to look after the party in the first place.

Drummer: So "modern"!

Keyboardist: [Laughing] This couple really play up their trendiness!

Hatoyama: [Greeting Big Head] What do you two think you're doing?

Big Head: [Patting Waifling's shoulder] You mean she still hasn't reached "the age of consent"?

Hatoyama: She gets quite lonely. ... Take more care of her. ...

Big Head: [He laughs bitterly] I'm too busy to even bother about myself!

Hatoyama: People need a little emotional lubrication. [To Pushcart] What do you think, Pushcart?

Pushcart: [Nodding his head] To have money is not enough by itself. [Sighing emotionally] Then again, it's no good relying solely on anything else, either!

Big Head: What do you mean? That I've only an eye for profits, is that it! Your eminence! I bought some government reserve notes. As soon as I'd bought four or five thousand, I was obliged to make a ten thousand yuan donation for repairs to the Great Wall! So I ask you, Departmental Director, -

Pushcart: Assistant Director!

Big Head: How much did our Assistant Director-graded cadre contribute?
Pushcart: What are you doing picking on me? You're such a model!

Big Head: I pay homage to you! After arriving at this position in life, perhaps I should be grateful to your lot for expelling me from the party in the first place.

Hatoyama: And I say we should "discuss only friendship and nothing else", so how about it?

Waifling: I agree. What do you think you're doing?

Pushcart: [Sighing. To Big Head] You carry more weight than me these days! At least you're not in my position. Every day after work I still have to labour at preparing for exams to chase my diploma!

Hatoyama: It's a hard for everyone! Man, what is man?

Waifling: People are just pitiful little potatoes!

Sister Superior: [In English] "SMALL POTATO!"

Big head: What?

Hatoyama: Potato. A small potato ...

{Suddenly no one has anything to say. For a long while there is a heavy silence.}

Pushcart: How come General hasn't come yet?

Waifling: Yeah!
Hatoyama: There's still hostilities at the front. Could it be he's gone up to the front again?

Sister Superior: [Abruptly standing up] Him?!

Princess: What are you up to, "chook thief"?

{General appears, laughing and carrying a chicken which he tosses to them. Their cries and laughter are exactly as previously, when they were plucking the chicken. General put on his military cap, solemnly waves farewell, and departs.}

Big Head: I suppose he couldn't really have made general and forgotten us?

Sister Superior: [With disappointment] He'll never get to be a general ...

Princess: Of course I complemented him just before you came back, that's all, and finished.

Princess: How can you know that?

{Silence. General, looking crushed and solemn, really does appear.}

Urblings: General?

Hatoyama: Where did you get to? We've been waiting ages for you!

{General looks at them coolly, not replying.}

General: Which of you, may I inquire, is my "fiancée"? Speak up! Who is it? Which one of you wrote that poison letter, anonymously, to my superiors? [He produces a letter.]
{Pushcart takes it. They all crowd around to read.}

Pushcart: [Reading aloud] "A head wound ... possible loss of sight ... an early discharge! ... " Now ...

General: Who? [Speechless, they look at one another despairingly, then start arguing with each another.] It's outrageous! Really absurd! How immoral! Who did it?

Princess: [Calmly] Don't go on cursing. It was me.

Urblings: You?

General: You ... did you comprehend the consequences of this prank?

Princess: Of course I comprehended! I just hoped you'd come back, that's all, and finish "Autumn" together with me.

General: [Furious] You! You ... you! [There is nothing he can say.] Fuck!

Princess: Go on, abuse me! It was because I was indebted to you so much already that I went, later, to see your commanding officer and put my case in person, alright?

Hatoyama: You were too selfish, Princess!

Big Head: Haven't you ruined him now?

Pushcart: You really went overboard!

Waifling: You still want him that badly?
Sister Superior: [Crying out suddenly] It wasn't her! ... The letter was written by me!

General: [Stunned] You ... ?

Sister Superior: Ever since that summer when you saved my life, I just found that, ...
I've been classified as an expert, ... I had my reasons! ... Tell us, how did the results of the tests conclude?

Keyboardist: Results of analysis: General, male. In 1979 he received head-wounds and suffered shell-shock. The optic nerve was severely damaged. Vision in right eye reduced to 0.2. The prognosis is total blindness in future.

General: [He sits down forlornly, then quite unaccountably bursts out laughing]
Satisfied?

{No one makes a sound.}

Urblings: [Bowing their heads] General! ...

General: "A general! A general ..." [He laughs] What a dream! Golden and glorious, a fantastic dream! ... But dreams are always just dreams! [He laughs sadly] Why should I be blaming you lot? I really am a fool! ... [To his friends] It's always the opposite of what you dream that comes true, right? [With quiet disappointment he continues] I'm going to become blind ...

Sister Superior: [Grieving terribly] General! ...

Big Head: Come back to us, General! I'll spend all my wealth on your treatment, even if it means going abroad for a cure! The only consideration is that we find a cure for your eyes!
Waifling: And my money too! I'll throw in everything too!

General: I want to be a soldier. ...

Hatoyama: Come back to us, General! You've given more than enough of yourself already! I'll employ you as a model and ask you to play the lead in a film I'll shoot called "Tomorrow's Generals"! Really, I want to film it! I really want to! ...

General: I want to be a soldier! ...

Sister Superior: Come back to us! I'll look after you, always! I can lay everything else aside! I ... I fell in love with you soon after we first met. I need somewhere to channel my feelings. [Murmuring] That scar, ... that scar, ... that scar of yours. ...

General: I want to be a soldier ...

{His friends grow angry.}

Big Head: What sort of soldier do you think you'll make, with one eye?!

Waifling: Are you crazy?!

Pushcart: You should face up to reality!

Hatoyama: You're really are pig-headed!

Princess: Why is it you feel so strongly about staying a soldier?

General: [Anxiously] I'm addicted to it, O.K.? ... None of you have seen how, in battle, your comrades fall around you! You couldn't understand! ... It's true, I'll never make
general ... but then how many from the ranks really do make it? And if it turns out, however, that I don't become completely blind, I can still finish going down this particular road! It doesn't matter what you think of me. I feel content! with myself! People should always retain a little spirit, must always make some kind of contribution, must leave at least something of themselves behind while still alive. Without these anchors, I'd live terrified that one day I'd find myself unable to go on! Don't try to coerce me! We shouldn't compel one another, all right? Come, let's sing something! [He sings] "Are you all ready? ... "

Urblings: [Joining in] "We're always ready./ We're the Young Pioneers ..."

{Suddenly they all become self-conscious and glance about at each other. They stop singing and laugh awkwardly. Transmitted from all around come the cheerful and resonant strains of children singing "The Song of the Young Pioneers" ... The urblings listen, completely engrossed.}

General: It's children singing.

Drummer: That's right. They're going through the streets and lanes cleaning away all the gobs of spit. Will you join them?

General: [With playful hyperbole] We'll go too!

Urblings: Shall we go? ... Come on, let's go! ... Come along!

{Singing cheerfully and shouting slogans like, "Don't spit everywhere", brandishing brooms and other cleaning implements, they converge with the ranks of the Young Pioneers ... .}
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