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Lu Xun in 1926–1927

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The End of Fiction, the Start of Politics:
Lu Xun in 1926–1927

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SUMMARY

Two events relating to Lu Xun occurred in 1926–1927 that bear on his literary biography and on political readings of Republican-era literary history. First, his fiction, which formed the core of his exceptional influence, came to an end; second, he made his first overt steps towards an explicit political commitment to the left. The end of Lu Xun's fiction has been largely passed over for lack of explicit evidence, whereas his choice in political orientation is much studied as a critical factor in leftist literary history. This paper aims to bring the two actions into equal visibility, and by doing so, to enable the cessation of his fiction to revise our view of his turn to politics. It proposes that he did in fact make a kind of farewell to fiction, identifies the pertinent works, pinpoints and analyzes the oblique language employed, and proposes a relatively short period for this change. This conjecture uses puzzling passages from his fictional works and essays, as well as letters, diaries, and insider gossip. Their analysis re-contextualizes our view of Lu Xun's acknowledged prominent role in the development of leftist literature.

Lu Xun 鲁迅 was a towering figure in modern Chinese letters from his first contribution to New Literature in 1918 to his death in 1936. One consequence was that, already in his own lifetime, both his writings and his actions were integral to the narratives of literary-political events as they unfolded. Their subsequent deeper entrenchment in the literary history that was shaped under the Communist Party, compulsion aside (admittedly a big aside), was essentially a matter of degree. Scholarship today, however, is highly conscious of the extent to which contemporaneous narratives control legacies and especially of how the claims of New Literature to have created the modern era of literature had been too easily credited. In this light, literary historians such as Chen Pingyuan are revising the history of vernacular writing in the 1920s and 1930s, beginning with demythologizing the May Fourth Incident, and, by implication, revising the primary status long accorded Lu Xun in May Fourth literature. Other new scholarship has greatly expanded the study of topics and figures beyond the scope of Lu Xun's spheres and his life span, into cultural and urban studies, for example, and into the war years (1936–1945). In addition, studies of major figures such as Mao Dun, Shen Congwen, Hu Shi, Lao She, and more have provided Lu Xun with a cohort of equals in his own era.¹ Yet his role remains embedded in many literary historical topics because it is so multiply present. One such topic is the pivotal one of the early years of leftist writers, which culminated in the founding of the League of Left-Wing Writers in 1930. It is his still-central role in the leftist debates of these years that is placed under the microscope by the thesis here.

Two events relating to Lu Xun that are not usually connected occurred in close proximity: first, the fiction that formed the core of his exceptional influence came to an end, and second, he made his first overt steps towards an explicit political commitment to the left. The end of the fiction is largely passed over as an event for lack of explicit evidence, whereas his choice in political orientation is much studied as a critical factor in leftist literary history. This paper aims to bring these events into equal visibility, and by doing so, to enable the first to revise the second. What can be uncovered about the end of his fiction shows how the nature of its end facilitated his turn towards politics, and this in

¹ The website of Modern Chinese Literature and Culture (MCLC.osu.edu) has a comprehensive bibliography on (chiefly English language) scholarship on these points, especially useful because many studies of these figures, including Lu Xun, began in Western languages before they became feasible in China in the late 1980s.

turn should bring about a rethinking of the debates over revolutionary literature that were then firing up the literary scene.

That Lu Xun's evolution to the left can be traced to 1927 in Guangzhou is well known. For many other writers also, this year and this city constituted a political and literary turning point. In April, the Guomindang (GMD) carried out a purge of the Communist Party (CCP), which was followed at the end of the year by a short, bloody uprising of the CCP. As David Der-wei Wang notes, the first full-length modern novels came out of this sequence of political violence, as Ye Shaojun, Ba Jin, Mao Dun, and others, who were then or later identifiably leftist writers, tried to work out in fiction form how revolution intersected with the lives of individuals.² The mix of factors in Lu Xun's case differed, but the commitment he ultimately made to the left meant that this new wave of writing that began in Guangzhou became the literary context for his future, in which he wrote no further fiction. This article's thought experiment is to propose that there is an antecedent (mental) event that made it possible for Lu Xun to put the words "literature," "revolution," and later, "proletariat" together. This antecedent event, I propose, is his silent relinquishment of fiction, and can be gently extricated from among the distractors of satire and wit that were his forte.

Much of this article must be devoted to tracking down Lu Xun's relinquishment of fiction because he never directly addressed this issue. Then and later, fiction, together with a similarly small number of essays, was the basis for the exceptional reach of his influence. His body of fiction was small: two collections of short stories, within which individual works were often separated by long intervals. But each story was devotedly read upon publication in the avant-garde periodicals. The first batch was collected and published to great acclaim in *Nahan* 吶喊 (Call to Arms) in 1923, followed by a second collection, *Panghuang* 徬徨 (Hesitation), in 1926. Both were reprinted multiple times by Lu Xun himself into the 1930s. After *Hesitation*, however, there was no more fiction. In retrospect we can see that it is remarkable that he wrote *xiaoshuo* fiction for only the first eight years of a literary life that in all other respects was productive to the week of his death.³

² Wang, *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (2004), 79–83.

³ Today, with greater critical attention turned to it, *Old Tales Retold* 故事新編 (1936) is routinely referred to as Lu Xun's "third collection of fiction." This article, however, is concerned with works that the author himself termed *xiaoshuo* 小說, and these ended with *Hesitation*. For "Flight to the Moon" and "Forging a Sword" 鑄劍, both works from Xiamen that were collected into *Old Tales Retold*, he used the term *yanyi* ("romance") 演義, while in the same essay, he used *xiaoshuo* for the

Why did such a powerful if intermittent flow of writing stop after 1926? Specific answers have proved elusive. Lu Xun himself did not ever directly address this point. Furthermore, the life he led before and after 1926 were so comprehensively different that the cessation of fiction might well be one of the many features that divided the two periods. The most basic division was probably his departure from Beijing in August of that year. In doing so, he left behind fifteen years that had seen him increasingly active in multiple roles in the thick of a fast-growing vernacular literary world. He made a brief stay in Xiamen, then in Guangzhou, before a move to Shanghai in October of the following year proved to be permanent, and in Shanghai he lived for the remaining decade of his life. Another major change was in his relationship with his former student Xu Guangping 許廣平. Silent (though known) in Beijing, it was acknowledged by gradual steps over these months until it was openly established by their setting up a home together in Shanghai. The contrast between the Shanghai and Beijing years was great in the political world as well. About this time, two main alignments of power emerged, centered on the GMD and CCP. Modern letters, though it had grown in complexity since the May Fourth era of only five years or so earlier, was coalescing around these two centers and developing, on the CCP side, a strongly politicized language in which to discuss literature. The sudden and bloody purge carried out in Shanghai and then in Guangzhou by the GMD had national repercussions and also strongly affected Lu Xun, then teaching in Guangzhou. About this time, he also began a rethinking of his literary views, and this resulted three years later in an open commitment to the left. Thereafter his activities were largely centered on leftist ones. In sum, his life before and after 1926 was so comprehensively different that not writing fiction might constitute only one such change. Even so, I shall show that some factors specifically relating to not writing fiction can be discerned as he moved through these large changes.

This article proposes that he did make a kind of farewell to fiction, identifies and analyzes the oblique language he employed to do so, and proposes a relatively short time period for his thoughts on this matter. The oblique language occurs in two pieces of writing: the essay "The Writing of 'The

works in *Call to Arms* and *Hesitation* ("Preface to Self-selected Anthology" 自選集自序 *Lu Xun quanji* [hereafter *LXQJ*] 4:469). In 1982, his disciple Tang Tao quoted Lu Xun as saying that "they are more suitably termed sketches than works of fiction," in "Old Tales Retold," *China Quarterly*, no. 92, 696–697. I will add that five of the eight pieces in *Old Tales Retold* were not written until 1934–1935, while the collection itself was not made until 1936.

True Story of Ah Q" 阿 Q 正傳的成因 and the *yanyi* "Flight to the Moon" 奔月,⁴ dated December 3 and 26, 1926, respectively. A third, earlier work from 1925, the short story "Regret for the Past" 傷逝,⁵ is relevant for elucidating a key phrase in "Writing of 'Ah Q.'" In addition, there is some supporting evidence from the month before and after. Thus the duration of the evidence is altogether about three months, from late October 1926 to January 1927, during which he was in Xiamen (he joined Xu Guangping in Guangzhou on January 18, 1927).

There is much scholarship on these three works, which is to be expected, given their intricate narratology and subtle manipulation of voices and given the author's stature. My points of contact with these works complement rather than destabilize these analyses, for my assumption is that the complexity of the voices in these works is such that one thesis does not crowd out others. In each case, scholarly analyses of individual works move an argument forward about a larger issue. This is the case in the scholarship for "Flight" and "Regret."⁶ "Writing of 'Ah Q'" differs in that it is primarily cited for its plentiful and varied information about "Ah Q" and sundry other matters. This article likewise uses this essay for information, in this case, a passage that has not attracted attention.

I will argue the evidence shows the following:

1. The metaphor of *warrior=writer*, which had long been both clarion call and self-identification for Lu Xun, is used in "Flight" in a way that constitutes a farewell to fiction. I also compare its use in "Flight" to its use in the slightly earlier "Writing of 'Ah Q,'" where *warrior* is raised as one

⁴ For "Flight" as *yanyi* rather than *xiaoshuo*, see n.3. As Qian Liqun says of *Old Tales Retold*, "it is a different kind of fiction," (*Fifteen Lectures on Lu Xun* 魯迅作品十五講 [2003], 81).

⁵ "Flight," LXQJ 2:370-381; "The Writing of 'Ah Q,'" LXQJ 3:394-400; "Regret," LXQJ 2:113-133. Translations by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, *Selected Works of Lu Xun* (hereafter *Selected Works*) (1956), "Flight" 1:283-295; "Writing" 3:313-320; "Regret" 1:249-271; and by Julia Lovell, *The Real Story of Ah Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun* (2010).

⁶ Studies of "Flight" in http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_609f47800100j8bf.html are grouped according to their interpretations: as a portrait of love and livelihood, as the decline of a hero, as a study of the meaning of life. No interpretation rules out the others. The situation is similar with "Regret." In two recent English-language studies, "Regret" is used to build a larger argument about May 4 cultural phenomena. See Feng Jin, *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (2004), 57-59; Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (2007), 118.

possibility for himself, but neither taken up nor rejected. The key moments and the evidence in both works occur glancingly, which is typical of this author, who often slips in something personal while amusing and diverting the reader.

2. The issue is connected in some way with Xu Guangping 許廣平. They had left Beijing together, which soon became known, but she went on to Guangzhou and he to Xiamen, a separation that produced the many letters later published as *Liang di shu* 兩地書. In the works “Flight” and “Writing of ‘Ah Q,’” writing and love are both paired and contrasted. They are not mutually exclusive, but neither are they conjoined possibilities.
3. The younger literary figure Gao Changhong 高長虹 is also involved, for he is present by language in both pieces at the moments that are key for this thesis. At one time Gao was a follower of Lu Xun; he subsequently wrote several satirical pieces about his time in Lu Xun’s circle. According to one version Gao gave, which seems to be supported by third parties, he and Xu Guangping had earlier briefly caught each other’s attention until he cottoned on to Lu Xun and Xu’s connection, whereupon, as he put it, he stepped aside. Then, the month before “Flight to the Moon,” Gao published a set of love poems, one of which featured a moon, a sun, and the night that came between them. Gao provided hints, and literary gossip took it to be an allusion to their triangle.⁷ The role of this young poet’s fleeting, vivid passage through Lu Xun’s life is difficult to untangle. There was chatter in circles that mattered to Lu Xun, and Gao seems to have been both prickly and irreverent, but Lu Xun was by far the senior figure and, unlike Gao, he emerged unscathed. Only lately has *lèse majesté* eased to permit a review of Gao’s life that takes him seriously.⁸

The answer provided in this article to the question of Lu Xun’s ceasing to write fiction is necessarily incomplete, but even a partial answer can provide for a re-orientation of the important

⁷ On his stepping aside, see *Kuangbiao* No. 10, for the poems, *Kuangbiao* No. 11, both easily searchable on the Internet.

⁸ An early instance is the 1992 article by Li Yunjing, “The Literary Reappearance of a ‘Crisis’ in Love — A Reading of ‘Flight to the Moon’” 愛情《危機》的藝術再現 — 讀《奔月》; book-length studies are Dong Dazhong, *Lu Xun and Gao Changhong: A Case Study in Modern Literary History* 魯迅與高長虹：現代文學史上的一樁公案 (1999); Liao Jiuming, *Gao Changhong and Lu Xun as well as Xu Guangping* 高長虹與魯迅及許廣平(2005).

question of his move to the left that began about this time. This commitment became explicit three years later when he delivered the speech at the founding of the League of Left-wing Writers on March 2, 1930, and, as Leo Lee put it, adopted "the public stance of a committed leftist on the literary front."⁹ The beginning of that journey is less clear. Two markers are usually cited: a speech he made April 8, 1927, in Guangzhou at the Whampoa Academy entitled "Literature in a Revolutionary Time," and the April 1927 GMD purge of the CCP, which in Guangzhou began April 15 and ensnared many students at the university. The argument here, that he relinquished the option of fiction, uses evidence whose time frame predates both events of April 1927, and therefore also predates his participation in the debates over what literature should be. What this means for the history of the early literature, during which, with Lu Xun's active participation, "proletariat literature" emerged as a goal on the left, will be considered in the concluding section.

THE EVIDENCE OF "FLIGHT TO THE MOON" 奔月: WARRIOR, ARTIST

"Flight to the Moon," is based on the mythical figures Chang'e and Hou Yi. Chang'e was the beauty who stole a long-life elixir from her husband Hou Yi and fled to the moon, where we can still see her silhouette today. Hou Yi was the great hunter who shot down nine of the ten suns in the sky, thus rendering earth habitable. He also killed the wild boars and other monstrous beasts that roamed the land, making possible the settled agricultural society that has marked China since the beginning of history. In his Beijing University lectures on the history of Chinese fiction, in the chapter "Myths and Traditions," Lu Xun describes the mythological figures as "ancient heroes" 古英雄 of "extraordinary gifts, outstanding abilities, and a godly courage beyond the reach of ordinary man" 奇才異能神勇為凡人所不及.¹⁰

The stories of Chang'e and the elixir and of Hou Yi and his heroic feats are among many tales briefly recorded in two or three sentences in such second-century BCE compendia as *Huainanzi* and *Shanhajing*. Lu Xun's much longer retelling in "Flight" is quite different. In his version, the heroism is all in the past. The couple and their household are barely surviving, for Hou Yi is such a great hunter

⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun* (1987), 134.

¹⁰ LXQJ 9:20.

that he has killed off all animals and fowl for a great distance around, an interesting early ecological sensitivity on Lu Xun's part. As the story opens, Hou Yi is returning from a day of hunting with only a crow and a sparrow to show for it. He and his horse practically slink in. He hopes that she could have the sparrow for her soup and they could have the crow as minced sauce on top of noodles (*zhajiang mian*), not exactly lavish dishes. "Noodles with crow sauce again!" Chang'e cries, on learning this. "Nothing but noodles and crow sauce year after year!" Her voice fades as she moves out of hearing. The rest of the evening proceeds on the same note as he clumsily tries to placate her, bringing up topics from their days of ease in the hope that she will respond. She remains gloomy, while his heart is pierced to see her beauty worn so thin. Lively and amusing, yet unexpectedly touching, this segment is the domestic comedy of a hero shorn of his fearsomeness.

The moment of interest occurs the next day, near the story's end. After that melancholy evening, he vows to go further on his hunt, and so it is very late when he returns and finds, as in the myth, that Chang'e has stolen his elixir and fled to the moon. In his anger, he calls for his bow, the one with which he had shot down the nine suns, and taking up three arrows, he fits them all on the bow, and shoots them, one after the other, at the moon. Each lands, as intended, immediately next to its predecessor. The moon quivers from the assault; he takes three steps forward; it moves back a length; he moves back three steps; it moves forward. They look at each other. Here in the wonderful face-off between a heavenly body and a human, we see a flash of that hero of old, that godly courage beyond the reach of ordinary man. The moment, however, does not last: soon he sits down, despondent. Why has she left him, he wonders disconsolately. Perhaps he has gotten old, he thinks. Two maidservants try to cheer him up. And this is where it happens. One of the maids says, encouragingly, "Some people say the master is still a warrior" 有人說老爺還是一個戰士. The second chimes in with, "Why, sometimes you positively look like an artist!" 有時看去簡直好像藝術家!

The first maid's comment makes narrative sense as a way of bracing Hou Yi's spirits, but what the second maid said is mystifying. Why would it be a consolation to tell Hou Yi he looks like an artist? How is "artist" even relevant to this moment? There are many deliberate anachronisms in "Flight," both of emotions and of circumstances, but this particular suggestion of "artist," while it has a comic, deflating effect, lacks a point of connection with Hou Yi. Whereas only *warrior* can fit Hou Yi, both terms are applicable to the author. To the consolation that he is "still" a warrior, Hou Yi does not reply,

but to the consolation that he "sometimes" looks "positively" like an artist, Lu Xun supplies the response: "Garbage!"¹¹

It is evident that Hou Yi and Lu Xun share many traits. The parallels are worked in with a light hand, but they are everywhere in "Flight." Lu Xun's situation resembles Hou Yi's, for Lu Xun too must confront the basic problems of livelihood. In his case, for the first time in more than fifteen years he does not have a salary from the Ministry of Education as a welcome base for his income from writing and teaching. Though Hou Yi's difficulties in putting food on the table are comically presented, Lu Xun's letters in the weeks and months after leaving Beijing often soberly mentioned the importance of a basic income, for himself and also for those whom he was advising. His salary from Xiamen was good, but the desire to leave must have caused it to be discounted. Another parallel is that he and Hou Yi are also of the same age. We see this on the second day, when Hou Yi kills a hen by mistake. The old woman whose hen it is upbraids him. "Are you blind?" she says, "You must be forty if a day!" to which Hou Yi replies humbly, "Yes, ma'am, forty-five last year," which was in fact Lu Xun's age the previous year. Most important, both Hou Yi and Lu Xun stake their identity on being warriors, Hou Yi because he *is* one and Lu Xun because *warrior* is synonymous with his identity as writer. He had used this metaphor repeatedly in his writings, beginning with his 1907 "The Power of Māra Poetry" 摩羅詩力說 and extending to the previous year, a 1925 rousing call to arms, "On 'Looking Facts in the Face,'" 論<睜了眼看>.¹² He often rejected any definition of writer other than one using the metaphor of warrior. Indeed he felt disdain even for the neutral, new word *zuojia* 作家: describing what was left after the initial widespread enthusiasm of the May Fourth years, he wrote with disdain of the term, "I had the experience of seeing former comrades-in-arms alter greatly, while on me fell the job label (頭銜) of *zuojia*."¹³

¹¹ 放屁 in the original. "Garbage," with its vehement near-trochee beat is the Yangs' inspired translation. It was pointed out to me that "Garbage!" could be a response to both maids, who speak in quick succession. This is true. In mild defence of my reading, which I do not absolutely need for this thesis, I suggest it is difficult to imagine "Garbage!" after the first maid's words alone, and it is also difficult to imagine the two maids speaking in reverse order.

¹² "On the Power of Māra Poetry," written 1907, published 1908, *LXQJ* 1: 65-103; "On 'Looking Facts in the Face,'" 1925, *LXQJ* 1:251-257.

¹³ "Preface to Self-selected Anthology," see n. 3.

Yet *now*, at a time that will prove to be followed by no more fiction, through Hou Yi, Lu Xun relinquishes the identification of warrior. He is only someone who “still” looks like one. This is what makes the response a farewell. In assuring Hou Yi that to “some people” “the master is still a warrior,” the first maid unwittingly casts doubt on it: a formerly incontestable identity now needs affirming and can only be discerned by “some people.” Indeed, earlier that day, the old woman had not recognized Hou Yi: she saw only a dunderhead. Hou Yi does not reject *warrior* the way he next rejects *artist* — he merely passes over it — but we see that the Hou Yi of “Flight,” unlike the one in the eternal time of mythology, cannot live on in his prime as a warrior. So we have a kind of renunciation of identity.

Here the core of my thesis has been reached, but it is not complete without considering two further questions. One is whether *zhanshi* refers to the writer of fiction or whether it includes other genres such as *zawen*. The second question concerns Gao Changhong, who was, as mentioned earlier, a disaffected former follower. He was the source for the crucial words *zhanshi* and *yishujia* as well as for many other seemingly innocuous (because smoothly integrated) details. He was also the immediate cause of Lu Xun’s writing “Flight” (written, as he said, to “take a poke at Gao”¹⁴). This kind of involvement means we must ask in what way Gao factors into this moment in “Flight.”

The reference to *zhanshi* first: Lu Xun did use *zhanshi* in a general, though very private, sense, referring to a solitary figure combating adversaries. When he used this metaphor specifically in relation to writing, however, he did not include the prose of argument, which he continued to write to the week of his death. He meant writings of the imagination that are aimed to engage with the world in action. Initially this was poetry. In 1907’s “Power of Māra Poetry,” he called for a “warrior of the spirit” 精神界的戰士, and the warriors were, as the essay title indicates, poets. He wrote of Byron above all, but also Shelley, Petöfi, Pushkin, and others, “those, among all the poets, who were committed to resistance, whose purpose was action.”¹⁵ At that time poetry was still the medium through which men, and some women, gave voice to their political concerns and issued calls to action. At the other end of the time range, when he wrote “Flight,” this role of poetry had been largely replaced in his mental landscape, and *zhanshi* meant fiction. In the 1925 essay “On ‘Looking Facts in

¹⁴ Letter to Xu Guangping, *LXQJ* 11:280.

¹⁵ Translation by Shu-ying Tsau and Donald Holoch, “The Power of Māra Poetry,” (1996), 99.

the Face” 論<睜了眼看>, he is once again rallying the troops, this time against fiction that leaned on happy endings. Instead, he insisted that “We have long needed our writers ... to boldly take up actual life and write of its blood and flesh.... We have long needed fierce warriors to charge into battle!”¹⁶

With regard to the second question, how Gao Changhong factors in, though the answers take a bit of sorting out, in the end we can say that the romantic triangle that readers immediately associate with Gao’s name, hints of which Gao skillfully cultivated as an irritant, becomes relevant to this thesis because it prompted this riposte. Gao’s presence in “Flight” also points up Xu Guangping’s presence there, as Chang’e. (Her involvement will be taken up when discussing “The Writing of ‘Ah Q’” in the next section.)

The passage of Gao through Lu Xun’s life is intriguing because Lu Xun hit back so hard. There are many allusions to Gao in “Flight,” all bound to be understood by contemporaries and well documented by the editors of *LXQJ* and others.¹⁷ Many seemingly innocuous details and wording lob back to Gao mocking comments that he, Gao, had published earlier that year, mostly in the magazine of his own Kuangbiao Society. In “Flight,” for example, Gao is Feng Meng, the former disciple of Hou Yi, a younger man who is now a rival.¹⁸ Indeed Feng is the only hero the woman with the hen has heard of, and she accuses Hou Yi of attempting to steal Feng’s accomplishments. Later that day, when Feng ambushes his master, as the two archers aim their arrows at each other, they shout out challenges that re-use language from Gao’s jabs. Finally, Hou Yi twice mentions his age, once when he humbly tells the old woman that he is forty-five, and again near the end, when he asks himself whether Chang’e has left him because he is old. Both are from Gao, who had kindly assured him that forty-five is not old.

With these echoes of Gao’s words as background, let us look at Lu Xun’s use of *warrior* and *artist*. Gao had first used the words as a pair the previous year when “recalling” the early days of his acquaintance with Lu Xun:

¹⁶ *LXQJ* 1:251-255; *Selected Works*, 2:198-204.

¹⁷ *LXQJ* 2:382, nn. 8, 10.

¹⁸ Feng Meng learned his skills from Hou Yi and then, considering Hou Yi his only competition, killed him, though in “Flight” he does not succeed (*LXQJ* 2:382, n. 10).

The impression he gave me was sharpest during this brief time [when we met frequently]. At this time he really had the look of a true artist, but later, he declined into the look of a warrior of a not very enlightened but nonetheless combative mien.¹⁹

然他所给我的印象，实以此一短促的时期为最清新，此时实在为真正的艺术家的面目。过此以往，则递降而至一不很高明而却奋勇的战士的面目。

Gao's "recollection," guaranteed to annoy, inverts Lu Xun's well-known preferences and mischievously puts "true artist" 真正的艺术家 above "warrior," and a "not every enlightened," "combative" warrior at that 不很高明而却奋勇的战士. It seems that Lu Xun looked a "true artist" when his, Gao's, admiration for him was at a height; whereas later he declined 递降 into a "warrior," moreover a warrior in a debased sense, merely a combative person. Lu Xun rejects the favor. That Gao's gibe smarted can be seen in the force of the rejection: "Garbage!" Gao's article was an exposé-style article, both payback and preemptive strike against his erstwhile coworkers in the little magazines in Beijing associated with Lu Xun. It focused on Lu Xun in part for the publicity value, so Gao wrote a friend much later, in 1940. This piece certainly succeeded in arousing Lu Xun's ire, for he wrote about it to Xu on the 15th, the 18th, and the 20th.²⁰

(I should add that though the elevation of "artist" is done mischievously, it also reflects Gao's own esteem for "the artist." For both his literary society and for its successive magazines, Gao chose the name *kuangbiao* 狂飙, the translation of *Sturm und Drang*. Here was an eighteenth-century German Romantic movement whose devotees exalted above all the individual's heightened emotion and subjectivity. Both Gao's life and poetry at the time bear this out. Earlier he had experienced an unrequited, impossible love, about which he wrote much poetry. He retained his intense devotion to the European poets of his youth: an account of him in the 1950s spoke of co-workers avoiding him as

¹⁹ "A Pocket Map of the Beijing Publishing World in 1925" 北京出版界形势指掌图, 1925; rpt. Dong 1999, this is on p. 396; Lu Xun's allusion to this passage is given in *LXQJ* 2:382, n. 8.

²⁰ Gao's 1940 comment in "Some Recollections — Lu Xun and me" 一點回憶 - 關於魯迅和我, collected in *Recollections of Lu Xun: Articles* 魯迅回憶錄, 散篇, ed. Beijing Lu Xun Museum, 1:96. Lu Xun's several comments on Gao's essay are found in Liao, *Lu Xun and Gao Hongchang as well as Xu Guangping*, 2005, 147–148.

an odd person who kept poems of the English Romantics in his desk drawer and read them to anyone who would listen.²¹)

The two words *zhanshi* and *yishujia* were Gao's; so were many others in "Flight." And so too was the moon itself, for the immediate stimulus for writing "Flight" was Gao's poem, mentioned earlier, in which night came between the moon and the sun. How then to read Gao's role? I suggest that all the allusions to Gao, including *zhanshi* and *yishujia*, add up to a demonstration of Lu Xun's skill in creating a seamless narrative that is in fact made up of multiple layers of allusions and many topical jabs. A hapless victim is dispatched, the knowledgeable reader is amused and diverted by the deadly aim taken on a small object, while the author makes a concealed personal point about the warrior-writer. In all this cleverness, we should feel some sympathy for Gao, who as collateral damage, was dogged for the rest of his life by this moment when he crossed Lu Xun's path, a Colly Cibber to Alexander Pope (to change my comparison of Lu Xun from Swift). At the same time, one personal point that Lu Xun likely did *not* intend to make but which does come out is that, however unequal this challenge issued by Gao over literature and love, Lu Xun recognized that Gao, after all, had the advantage of being a younger man, and this challenge did get under his skin.

LOVE AS A THIRD ELEMENT: THE EVIDENCE OF "THE WRITING OF 'THE TRUE STORY OF AH Q'":

"Flight" contains the words *warrior* and *artist*, but not the word *love*. Instead "love" is built into the plot: Hou Yi's love for Chang'e pervades the story and advances the action. "Writing of 'Ah Q'" 阿 Q 正傳的成因, from only three weeks earlier, is different. Here, *warrior*, *artist*, *lover* are lined up as parallel elements, but none is either chosen or rejected. Three weeks later, in "Flight," Lu Xun rejects the first two. Comparing the story with the essay is instructive.

"The Writing of 'Ah Q,'" as its title indicates, is mostly about one of his most famous works, "The True Story of Ah Q" 阿 Q 正傳. As is typical of his essays, it is loosely organized and there are

²¹ Lai Chen 賴晨, "The Night of Lu Xun's Rival in Love, Gao Changhong" 魯迅情敵高長虹之夜 posted in "The Last Days of Famous People: Gao Changhong" 名人最後的日子 (高長虹) http://www.36odoc.com/content/12/0317/10/2730734_195086900.shtml

many digressions. The words of interest occur in a passage where Lu Xun considers his options. As usual, he takes an indirect approach. He begins by talking about how people often ask him when he “knew that Ah Q would end up dying.” He protests ignorance: “As far as I remember, I had not [guessed it from the start]. But that is only natural, for who can guess a man’s ‘grand finale’ 大團圓 from the beginning?” (“Grande Finale” is the title of the novella’s last section, in which Ah Q dies.²²) This is a reasonable enough answer even though it is not in fact true, for Ah Q’s death was already mentioned in the first installment.²³ But Lu Xun is not done. He then responds to his own question “who can guess a man’s ‘grand finale’?” even though it was posed as a rhetorical one. His answer begins, also reasonably enough, “I cannot guess even my own grand finale, let alone Ah Q’s.” True in general and particularly true at this moment, when he finds himself stranded in an uncongenial Xiamen. This reasonable thought, however, also serves to change the topic from Ah Q to himself, and becomes the starting point for a lengthy riff on the idea that “I cannot guess even my own grand finale.” He considers what might await him in his own future, employing rhetorical flourishes that distract readers from the seriousness of the question. He lists his possibilities:

Shall I end as “scholar” or “professor”? As “academic bandit” or “rascally scholar”? as “bureaucrat” or “pettifogger”? As “authoritative thinker,” “pioneer in the realm of thought,” or a “worldly old man”? As an “artist,” “warrior,” or an eccentric like “Aladiev” who liked to entertain callers? Or? Or? Or? Or?²⁴

終於是“學者”，或“教授”乎？或是“學匪”或“學棍”呢？“官僚”乎，或是“刀筆吏”呢？“思想界之權威”乎，抑“思想界先驅者”乎，抑又“世故的老人”乎？“藝術家”？“戰士”？抑又是見客不怕麻煩的特別“亞拉籍夫”乎？乎？乎？乎？乎？

²² This section heading appears in *LXQJ* 3:398; in trans. *Selected Works*, 2:328.

²³ In the first installment, the narrator says that “after Ah Q’s death,” no one ever remembered him enough to mention his name.

²⁴ *LXQJ* 3:398; trans. *Selected Works*, 2:318, with slight changes.

In this long list, the quotation marks are Lu Xun's. He wants to show they are not his terms. In fact they are all re-deployed from Gao's gibes over the past months. The terms basically all fall under the heading of "intellectual" except for the last three, which are the terms of interest here. *Artist* and *warrior* are already familiar, and the quotation marks around them mark them as being, like the preceding terms, words from Gao. (Gao's use of them was quoted earlier.) The last item, however, is puzzling. In the phrase *an eccentric like "Aladiev" who liked to entertain callers*, only one part, the name *Aladiev*, is in the quotation marks, indicating that the phrase as a whole is Lu Xun's. What does this phrase mean? The answer is that it works out to mean "lover." In other words, "lover," "artist" and "warrior" are outcomes that Lu Xun throws out as possibilities for his future.

Why does the phrase mean "lover," and what kind of lover is meant? The explanation comes in two parts: first "Aladiev," then the rest of the phrase. Gao Changhong is connected to "Aladiev," whereas for the phrase as a whole an explanation must be sought in the short story "Regret for the Past" 傷逝, written the previous year.

First, "Aladiev" through Gao: Aladiev is a character in the novella *The Worker Shevyrev* by M. F. Artzybashev (1878-1927). Lu Xun had translated this work as 工人綏惠略夫 in 1920; it was published serially in *Short Story Monthly* 小說月報 in 1921, then as a separate volume in 1922, and at this point, in Xiamen (in October), Lu Xun had been going over it for re-publication (it came out in 1927).²⁵ In the novella, Aladiev is a young revolutionary who serves in many ways as a foil to the story's title character, Shevyrev, an older, disillusioned revolutionary whose gradually narrowing options provide the main plotline.²⁶ Gao had used the two characters, in a rather clever analogy, to describe his first meeting with Lu Xun:

One windy night, carrying a few copies of *Kuangbiao*, I went to call on Lu Xun for the first time. He was in particularly good spirits, his manner sincere and his speech open even though we differed much in our outlooks. I was reminded of the circumstances

²⁵ See *Collected Translations by Lu Xun* 魯迅譯文全集 (8 vols., 2008), 1:137-214.

²⁶ Plot synopsis in Mark Gamsa, *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature: Three Studies* (2008), 117-119; analysis, criticism pp. 116-172. See also Gu Jun, "Lu Xun and *The Worker Shevyrev*" 魯迅與工人綏惠略夫 (2009) and Douwe W. Fokkema, "Lu Xun: The Impact of Russian Literature" (1977).

when Aladiev and Sheryev met for the first time. When I left, Lu Xun said I should come back often.²⁷

在一个大风的晚上，我带了几份《狂飙》，初次去访鲁迅。这次鲁迅的精神特别奋发，态度特别诚恳，言谈特别坦率，虽思想不同，然使我想象到亚拉籍夫与绥惠略夫会面时情形之仿佛。我走时，鲁迅谓我可常来谈谈，

In this meeting, Gao assigns himself the role of the young Aladiev and Lu Xun that of the older Shevyrev. (Gao is building up to the next sentences, the disparaging artist-warrior passage quoted earlier, so it is likely that it is a young, idealistic Aladiev and an older, embittered Shevyrev that Gao intends to evoke in describing their first meeting.) In the passage in “The Writing of ‘Ah Q,’” however, Lu Xun applies “Aladiev” to himself, though he was not making himself out to be either young or idealistic. As with any allusion, you have to lay aside the parts that do not fit.

How is Aladiev a lover? He is a potential lover in a subplot of *Worker Shevyrev* that explains the phrase “liked to entertain callers.” In this subplot, Aladiev comes to know Olenka, his seamstress neighbor in the rooming house. They talk together a great deal in his room (hence “likes to entertain callers”), and he lends her books that introduce her to new ideas such as individual choice, love, freedom. Such heart-to-heart talks about ideals are of course a first step to love and, although it does not happen in *Shevyrev* (Aladiev is too obtuse to notice), the ingredients are there. So in this phrase in “Writing,” Lu Xun invokes Aladiev in his role as lover.

The next question is, what kind of lover is he, and how is this related to Lu Xun? The link is made through the short story “Regret for the Past,” written the previous year. For Lu Xun’s judgment of Aladiev as lover, I rely on Mau-sang Ng’s analysis of the detailed parallels between the two works.²⁸ Although Aladiev is not mentioned in “Regret,” Mau-sang Ng shows that he is nevertheless invoked by the many parallels presented between Aladiev’s relationship with Olenka and the relationship

²⁷ Gao Changhong, “Addressed to *Hesitation*” 寫給徬徨 (1928), 34.

²⁸ Ng Mau-sang, *The Russian Hero in Modern Chinese Fiction* (1988), 237–243 and 198–199.

between Juansheng and Zijun in "Regret."²⁹ Like Aladiev, Juansheng (the man) talks a great deal to Zijun about freedom and love, and their growing love (which is mutual in their case) also advances through the new writers he introduces her to. In their case, she is persuaded to live with him. The particular parallel that renders a judgment on Aladiev comes in the similar partings in the two works. Ng points out that the parting between Juansheng and Zijun and its effect on Juansheng are modeled both in their general features and in their descriptive details upon the corresponding scenes in *Shevryev*. They suggest what Lu Xun might have meant in using this particular locution when he lists "lover" as one possible choice for himself. Earlier we saw that "warrior" and "artist" is each used in a specific sense. What kind of lover is Aladiev then, in the paragraph in which Lu Xun lists it as an attribute?

Ng shows how in both works, the awakening of the heroine to her validity as an individual is achieved through books and ideas introduced by the man, for both Juansheng and Aladiev begin as teacher (Aladiev telling Olenka about Chekhov; Juansheng telling Zijun about Ibsen, Byron, and Shelley). Then, faced with a fate made unbearable by her new awareness, each woman makes an appeal to the man. In each case, it is her only confrontation of the man, and in each case the man responds coldly. In *Shevryev*, when Olenka tells Aladiev that she is to be married against her will to an old brute of a man, he fails to act on this violation of all that she has learned to feel under his tutelage; he fails even to respond with sympathy, saying only, "This is just as well" (in Lu Xun's translation, 這也好的³⁰). In "Regret," as Ng notes, Lu Xun "restag[es] ... the parting scene of Aladiev and Olenka." Faced with daily coldness from Juansheng, Zijun feels she can only return to her father's house. Juansheng is "equally cool," Ng notes, and he only says to Zijun, "This is better for you" 這於你好得多. The stricken response of each woman is described in terms of her complete silence while her face (ashy-pale, like death) and eyes (searching, beseeching, fearful) speak for her. In each case, after the woman leaves, the man feels similarly oppressed, and his mind begins to fill with strange, unbidden

²⁹ Ng's parallels add a later writer to those Patrick Hanan gives in his readings of the echoes between Lu Xun and the Russian writers that he and his brother Zhou Zuoren had studied during their translation work ("The Technique of Lu Hsun's Fiction," 1974), esp. 55-75.

³⁰ Lu Xun's translation of Aladiev's words in *Collected Translations by Lu Xun*, 1:182. Olenka and Aladiev's final meeting on pp. 181-183.

images. Aladiev is haunted by a moaning and a cry of woe, Juansheng by the darkness in which he sees beseeching eyes and a “peculiar animal laughter.”³¹

These parallels suggest the meaning of the phrase as a whole. Like “Flight,” “Regret” is many things. On one level it is the imagining of a possible outcome in a love relationship, as “Flight” is of another possible outcome.³² The relationship in “Regret” occurs outside marriage, as Lu Xun with Xu would, exposing her to all the dangers of social opprobrium and leaving her vulnerable to her lover’s moods, as occurred to Zijun. (At about the time of writing “Regret,” he and Xu became lovers.³³) This general truth about the difference between society’s treatment of men and women he expressed again at the time of “Writing of ‘Ah Q’” in a letter to Wei Suyuan.³⁴ Regarding Juansheng, owing to Lu Xun’s skilled control of narrative voice and tone, the story allows for many different analyses of the narrator-protagonist, a variety especially evident in recent decades.³⁵ For the purposes of the options he lists for himself in “Writing of ‘Ah Q,’” we need to determine how Lu Xun sees Juansheng/Aladiev. This is told to us through Shevryev’s words. Through the thin walls of the boarding house, he has heard this terrible last interview, and after Olenka leaves, he harshly censures Aladiev for failing another human being. He says, “She has come to you [about her impending forced marriage] because she loves you... And what could you find to say to her? Nothing.”³⁶ In Shevryev’s judgment, we have an answer about Lu Xun’s sense of his responsibility as a lover (as well as his fears about himself). Thus all three options in “Writing” — *artist*, *warrior*, and *Aladiev* — have negative connotations, as do, of course, the preceding terms of “pettifogger” etc.

³¹ Ng, *The Russian Hero in Modern Chinese Fiction*, 240.

³² Lu Xun rejects the “rumors” of a parallel with himself and Xu (Letter to Wei Suyuan, December 29, 1926, *LXQJ* 1:667), but I take this to be a typical feint and also an expression of aesthetic irritation at the assumption that, as he said, “one can’t write like this without the experience.”

³³ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Love-Letters and Privacy in Modern China: The Intimate Lives of Lu Xun and Xu Guangping* (2002), 40, 223 n. 74; David Pollard, *The True Story of Lu Xun* (2002), 96.

³⁴ Letter to Wei Suyuan, December 5, 1926, *LXQJ* 1:644.

³⁵ For example: Lan Dizhi, “We Must Not Have Dreams of the Future — Analyzing ‘Regret for the Past’” 萬不可作將來的夢 – 論傷逝 (1998), 10:33–35; Feng Jun, *The New Woman*, 57–59; Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 118.

³⁶ My translation of Lu Xun’s Chinese translation, 1:184–185.

We are now in a position to ask how the three elements *warrior*, *artist*, *lover* are weighed. In the earliest of the works, "Regret," there are two elements only: writing and love. In this story, the woman leaves. What is a man when he is alone? Not much. When Zijun leaves, Juansheng is left with only his writing, such as it is ("short articles" "translations"). With these bits of income, he lives on, as he puts it, in a kind of "sentence in life." So in his fate is a kind of answer. When love is given up, the goals of the new elite — a story published, a mention in the press — seem small and hollow. In the next work, "The Writing of "Ah Q," the reader is given a long list of possible roles, which, though the tone is mocking, add up to a kind of genuine uncertainty. The excessive length of the list is useful for concealing its seriousness, the rhetorical structure gives equal weight to each option, and the list ends with the even more comprehensive uncertainty of "Or? Or? Or? Or? Or?" repeated five times. No choice is made, but a list of freighted words has been usefully compiled. Finally, in "Flight to the Moon," *lover* is integrated into the plot, *warrior* is passed over, *artist* is dismissed — and in these actions a farewell to fiction is embedded. As in "Regret," the woman also leaves, but in "Flight," love is implicitly ruled in: it permeates Hou Yi's thoughts and actions as he hunts for food during the day and tries to coax a smile from his wife in the evenings. When he discovers Chang'e has left him, he feels, in turn, anger, self-doubt, and sorrow, but throughout, his love remains a given. At the end, he brightens and thinks, he will get another vial of elixir and follow her to the moon. This works out nicely as a parallel to the situation in life, for Lu Xun leaves for Guangzhou the next month: *benyue* 奔月 and *benYue* 奔粵.³⁷

An intriguing parallel development of only a few months later is the appearance of "revolution+love literature," so named by Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈, in which young protagonists of both sexes struggle with the political and personal questions that intersect in their lives.³⁸ For Lu Xun, love soon has added to it the element of revolution. For him they are to coexist stably in a settled household in Shanghai. For Xu Guangping, a role and a voice might have been found in these new

³⁷ On *benyue* 奔月 = *benYue* 奔粵, see Li Yunjing, "The Literary Reappearance of a 'Crisis' in Love 愛情《危機》的藝術再現 — 讀《奔月》 — A Reading of 'A Flight to the Moon'" (1992).

³⁸ Jianmei Liu, *Revolution Plus Love: Literary History, Women's Bodies, and Thematic Repetition in Twentieth-century Chinese Fiction* (2003), 72-103; Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 79-89.

plots — she was of the right age — but in the event, attached to a man of eminence, her plotline came to be subsumed into his.

The pivotal year 1926 coincided with a period of regrouping in the literary world between the dispersal of May 4 energies and the onset of the next groups of fervent activists. Clarion calls were no longer so simple to make: for many, the shift in titles from *Call to Arms* to *Hesitation* was significant. To some degree, the close of fiction writing summarizes the way in which, only eight years after Lu Xun's first work of vernacular fiction, very different paradigms prevailed in the relationship between the literary world and the social and political worlds in which it still sought to effect changes. Relinquishing the role of warrior in "Flight" might not have been a conclusive moment in the story, but in the life of its author it became one.

OTHER EVIDENCE

What is captured in "Flight" is a moment of revelation. Though fleeting and expressed by proxy, it provides a focus for other pieces of evidence. Chief among these is the open-ended questioning of "The Writing of 'Ah Q'" three weeks earlier, discussed above. The possibilities laid out there, although sardonically including many improbabilities, also provide a focus for the other evidence from these months. Ultimately the reasons for the transition boil down to being the cumulative effect of changes both large and small, as outlined in the introduction, but the evidence of these months in Xiamen provides meaningful specificities.

One evident factor was Lu Xun's sense of exhaustion, notable earlier in the year in the epigraph he selected for *Hesitation*. It consisted of two lines from *Chuci*, and so the allegorical-political meaning was primary, but the weariness ("Long, long has been my road and far, far was the journey") and the ideals that had driven him for such a length of time ("I went up, and down, to seek my heart's desire") are also evident. In Xiamen, that sense remained vivid ("wore my fingers to the bone in Beijing").³⁹ In an especially long comment in the Postface to the essay collection *Grave*, dated the day after "Writing of 'Ah Q,'" he writes, "I do not know which way to go" and "I do not know which is the better path," "even today I am still frequently searching." Though he has some fight left ("I keep some

³⁹ Letter to Xu, October 28, 1926, *LXQJ* 11:590.

plates of armor upon my person and stand there”), it is half-hearted (he wears only parts of armor and he only “stands there”) and he “cannot even be counted as the vanguard.”⁴⁰ Most clear of all is a retrospective summary of his condition in Xiamen: “After this,” he said, “I wrote no more: ‘My mind was a complete blank’” 空空如也.⁴¹ These succinct words take on, in the context of this article, even more meaning.

Another contributing factor was the exigencies of his situation after leaving Beijing. In Beijing, though the government was not always able to meet its payroll, he had drawn a salary from the Ministry of Education. In Xiamen, he wrote often of salary matters and gave detailed financial advice to those who might be planning to come. (Though his own salary was good, the possibility of leaving Xiamen opened up financial problems.) What is interesting here is that we can detect a trend away from fiction. Whereas in Beijing he had undertaken multiple activities that included writing, teaching, translating, editing, founding magazines, and much more, in the weeks before “Flight,” he seemed to be paring away, to be considering only one option at a time. Now, writing to Chuandao, he speaks of “writing something that would be some good for China” *or* of doing “research on literature” [this and next two emphases mine]. To another young colleague in Beijing, he was blunt: “In sum, a salary and a creative life 創作 — they are not compatible 勢不兩立, and whether I want to write *or* want a salary — this I cannot decide.” In a November 1 letter to Xu Guangping, he left out the financial questions, but the alternatives he named are the same: writing *or* teaching. Here “writing” meant, as he went on to specify, essays 做文章. To her, he phrased the incompatibility, also 勢不兩立, more discreetly in terms of the energies each demanded.⁴² Note that in his willingness to entertain choices, to give up writing for the steady income of teaching, he differed from Hou Yi, who when he traveled further to

⁴⁰ All from Postface to *Grave*, dated December 4, 1926, *LXQJ* 1:300 (translated in *Selected Works*). He re-uses the metaphor of wearing only bits of armor in a January 11, 1927, letter to Xu, *LXQJ* 12:12.

⁴¹ “Preface to Self-selected Anthology,” 1933; see n. 3. The sentence 空空如也 quotes from Confucius, *Analects* IX.8. D. C. Lau (1979) notes of the whole passage in which it occurs that it is “exceedingly obscure.” As it happens, the translation Lau decided on fits well here.

⁴² Letter to Chuandao, *LXQJ* 11; letter to another young colleague, Oct. 29, 1926, *LXQJ* 11:595; letter to Xu, Nov 1, 1926, *LXQJ* 11:599. The letter to Xu is discussed for its biographical import in Pollard, *The True Story of Lu Xun*, 110–111.

hunt the second day, saw in the distance farmers toiling in their fields, but never once thought to take up that form of livelihood.

The altered status of fiction in Lu Xun's thinking also surfaces at this time. In "The Writing of 'Ah Q,'" he makes a comment implying that fiction had lost its revelatory force: "I used to think that, as others say, I was guilty of 'exaggerating,' but I no longer think so. If I were to describe events in China today exactly as they happen, they would appear grotesque to people of other countries or to those of a future, better China."⁴³ It seemed events had caught up with him; or, as likely, writing fiction had opened his own eyes. (Shen Congwen and others, whose fiction did grapple with these cruelties, wrote after the mid-1920s; then, after a half-century gap, came writers such as Ma Jian [b. 1953] and Yu Hua [b. 1960].) At the end of this essay, he quotes at length a newspaper account of the execution of three men, which, he says, if fiction, would not have been believed. This became a motif of his *zawen*, to quote a newspaper item to make the point that brutalities in life had surpassed fiction. He did not consider that with these items, as with found art, the artist's framing and commentary are part of the items' meaning. We should note, however, that this comment about the limits of fiction was made as an individual; it was not a sweeping comment about the theoretical position of fiction, as he was to make in Marxist terms only weeks and months later.

Parallel with Lu Xun's comment is David Pollard's suggestion that *zawen*, "challenging and contentious," had come to be of at least equal expressiveness in Lu Xun's hands: "One can understand why it need not have been much of a wrench for Lu Xun to turn to writing *zawen* exclusively, which he did around this time" (though Pollard also felt that 1925 saw Lu Xun's "virtuosity as an essayist ... displayed in its fullness."⁴⁴ The idea that *zawen* could readily replace fiction is in line with my sense that it was literary-historical developments that "fixed his historical definition as a writer ... [whereas] in the pattern of his whole life, literature is better seen as a productive search of a way to move from understanding to action."⁴⁵ To read Lu Xun's life in this manner separates what he pronounced next

⁴³ *LXQJ* 3:398–399; trans. *Selected Works* 2:318, with some changes.

⁴⁴ "Challenging and contentious," Pollard, *The True Story of Ah Q*, 33. "Not much of a wrench" and "displayed in its fullness," Pollard, "Lu Xun's *zawen*" (1985), 73, 76.

⁴⁵ Eva Shan Chou, *Memory, Violence, Queues: Lu Xun Interprets China* (2012), 144.

on literature from his own history, although — and this is important — other participants were not aware of it. This is indeed the proposal of the next section.

"THE START OF POLITICS"

The first part of this article aimed to pinpoint Lu Xun's thoughts on the cessation of fiction during a short range of time, and his voicing of it to one instance. This section makes an argument about timing: that the farewell is not only antecedent to his atypical willingness to declare a political alliance, but that it also facilitates this large change. A more general question then follows: what is the situation when someone of great prominence silently has it in mind that fiction is no longer for him? and what is it like when others in this period, a time when the function of literature is being hotly debated (on the left), are not aware of this change? Definite answers are not possible, but as a thought experiment we can re-examine various scenarios now that we know a piece has been silently taken out of the mix.

The outward stages by which Lu Xun moved towards his open commitment to the left can be tracked by analyzing the speeches he gave and the essays he published, the seminal account being Leo Lee's.⁴⁶ He began with a public address entitled "Literature in a Revolutionary Time" 革命時代的文學 delivered April 8, 1927, at Whampoa Academy. Subsequent speeches and essays presented his developing thoughts on the nature of revolutionary literature, what its features should be in terms of subject matter, characters, and language, and who its authors and readers should be. His commitment was openly established when he agreed to deliver the inaugural speech of the League of Left-Wing Writers. The process took three years, after which, though his battles continued with various figures on the left, he was enfolded into the rapidly growing, often underground activities of the left in Shanghai.

His prestige affected both the contemporary development of debates over revolutionary literature and the historical record of the debates. The magazines that led the charge to convert the literary revolution into revolutionary literature, themselves rivals, trained some carrying voices in his direction. It might be that the most *ad hominem* of the attacks was strategic, guided by the CCP to

⁴⁶ Traced in Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House*, 136-144.

bring him into its ranks, though this seems a roundabout way to do it. But any intent is hard to sort out: in giving an account of the personalities and positions of this period, David Wang points out that one of the most devastating attacks came from a pen name that was only recently shown to have been Guo Moruo's.⁴⁷ Given Lu Xun's standing, it was publicity to have him in the debates, whether as an ally or as an opponent, as was also to be true of the next object of attention, Mao Dun. When these active voices, with some new additions, culminated in the Comintern's organization of the League of Left-Wing Writers, it was important to have the seal of Lu Xun as an inaugural speaker (although, typically, he did not join the League).

Where in this scenario is the warrior-writer role? It did not carry over, but this was not to be apparent until it no longer figured in the scheme of things. That there was to be no more fiction could become apparent to others only over time. His numerous essays and speeches continued to be published in the small press periodicals. Moreover, several volumes of widely different content, some that he had put in order while in Xiamen, came off the press. Each was notably different from the others: *Weeds* 野草 contained dark, enigmatic broodings in prose poem form;⁴⁸ *Dawn Flowers Gathered at Dusk* 朝花夕拾, evocative and sharply observed reminiscences from childhood years on; while *Grave* 墳, though his third collection of essays, reached back to materials from 1907 when he was still in Japan; there were, as well, the essays of the *Huagai Zodiac Collection* 華蓋集 in first, second, and addendum collections 續編, 續編的續編. The impression of an active writer was inescapable, and accurate. Only the fiction was absent, and to the extent that this became apparent, other features of his literary standing decoyed one's attention.

But the identity he had symbolically shed when he portrayed a Hou Yi past his prime was not so easy to shed as a public individual. As he wrote after arriving in Guangzhou, "I want to stop being 'a famous person,' to relax. As soon as you are a 'famous person,' your 'self' disappears."⁴⁹ It seems the self

⁴⁷ Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 85–86. Guo Moruo's identity was tracked down by Wong Wang-chi, *Politics and Literature in Shanghai: The Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers, 1930–36* (1991), 158.

⁴⁸ Recently translated with extensive analyses by Nicholas Kaldis, *The Chinese Prose Poem: A Study of Lu Xun's "Wild Weeds"* (Yecao) (2014).

⁴⁹ Letter February 25, 1927, *LXQJ* 12:21.

he wanted to protect no longer included *warrior*. A well-known incident after his arrival in Guangzhou suggests this. At an assembly at Zhongshan University, a speaker called him "a revolutionary" and a "warrior." There was huge applause. "I grit my teeth," he wrote, "and walked into the room bearing the sign 'warrior.'"⁵⁰ The incident shows how he disliked lionization by the crowd, of being, as he said of Qiu Jin 秋瑾, "applauded to death," but it also shows that what he wanted was to leave behind his public identity as a "warrior."

One striking feature of Lu Xun's undertaking is that, though he was a writer who had always used his own language and devised his own metaphors, now in debating the purposes of literature, he employed the vocabulary of others, or he debated the vocabulary of others until he adopted it. (I do not include the *zawen* on other subjects; those remained cogent and pungent.) He spoke exclusively in such terms as revolutionary writer, revolutionary man, revolutionary literature, people's literature 民眾文學, mass literature 大眾文學, proletariat literature 普羅文學, literature of the fourth estate, the class nature of literature. This was the case even though this vocabulary entailed accepting the associated political analyses and historical definitions. A term like "revolution," which was employed by all sides, including the GMD's Revolutionary Army 革命軍, he used in the terms of a Communist revolution; he assumed that there was a "revolutionary stage" that could be identified, to which literature had a relationship that was to be correctly specified.⁵¹

The consequence of this approach is also striking: what he advocated has no room for the kind of [fiction] writer he is, or rather, was. None of the vocabulary he employed could apply to him. Every position he takes along the way — his views of what is needed in literature in the present and what will be needed in the future — these have no connection to his own writings. As Leo Lee notes, "Lu Xun assigns to the writer a curiously superfluous ... role in the revolutionary process"⁵² It was neither the way he thought nor the way he wrote. If his writings fell into any category, it belonged to what he called "literature before the great revolution" 大革命之前. But he goes on to disparage that writing as

⁵⁰ Discussed in Pollard, *The True Story of Lu Xun*, 113; and Eileen Cheng, "Gendered Spectacles: Lu Xun on Gazing at Women and Other Pleasures" (2006), 6-7.

⁵¹ From the Whampoa speech, "Literature of a Revolutionary Time," *LXQJ* 3:436-442.

⁵² Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House*, 138.

“literature of complaint and grievance” 叫苦鳴不平的文學. This is what his fierce battles, carried out at that time with intensity, have now come to: “complaint and grievance,” literature, he said, that “had essentially no effect on revolution.”⁵³ This damning verdict is daunting, but it also made his self-reflection less troubled: writing fiction was no longer a factor in revolutionary change, but he had already given it up anyway. My suggestion of the timing may also solve the anomaly, if anomaly it is, that his April 8 speech at Whampoa Academy on “literature in a time of revolution” predates the GMD purge (April 15).

What would the situation have been if others had been aware of his new attitude to his fiction? It is hard to entirely re-cast his participation in literary controversies over what the literature of China must be and who was to write it. In a period of great changes for himself, when things could have gone many directions, the most important outcome in the long run was his decision to ally himself with the left — important to him and important to Communist Party historiography. For him, it was a fateful decision that determined everything about his last ten years, when he lived in Shanghai and played a role in necessarily underground activities. For the CCP, this turn of events was a feather in its cap, its greatest coup on the cultural front. His allegiance facilitated the Party’s posthumous appropriation of his reputation. The CCP also gained a literary history whose major wayside shrines coincided with those of its political history. Identifying the moment when Lu Xun actually did make his farewell to fiction disturbs a vital connection between his political conversion and the CCP.

⁵³ “Literature of a Revolutionary Time,” *LXQJ* 3:438.

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