The Short Story in the Cultural Revolution

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The history of Chinese Communist literature up to this point has been one of ever-contracting boundaries, and all efforts on the ground to push back the frontiers or mark out reserves for tolerance have only fortified that trend, by defining what become yet other heresies to be avoided. The process had been uneven until the Cultural Revolution came along; then the presses shut down, the board was swept clean, and a unique opportunity offered itself to create a literature cleansed of historical impurities, impeccable in doctrine (given the new vetting procedures), and immaculate in conception (the lure of personal gain and fame being banished). Positively the new art had to guide it communist thought sharpened by the struggle between the two lines, negatively the treacherous ground has all been freshly sign-posted. It is the purpose of this paper to show what was made of this opportunity in the field of the short story. It will first be necessary to review briefly the central literary dogma and the interdictions established by case-law in the few years prior to the Cultural Revolution.

The theoretical bases of Chinese Communist literature are only two, namely Mao Tse-tung's " Yenan Talks " and " Socialist Realism." Much of the prescriptive content of the " Yenan Talks " was foreshadowed in the Soviet-inspired programme of the Union of Left-wing Writers of November 1931,[1] and Mao also acknowledged in the talks that he followed Socialist Realism,[2] so in essence there is only one body of theory. The new colours run up in 1958 of a " combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism " [3] should not deceive anybody: the name and substance of " revolutionary romanticism " were already wrapped up in the Soviet package of Socialist Realism [4]; only the manner, influenced by Mao's poems, may have been peculiar.

* This paper was written after the " gang of four " fell, but before the literature produced under their patronage was subjected to systematic criticism. Rather than pretend to more insight than I had through revising the paper now, I have just added a postcript.

1. See *Chung-kuo hsien-tai wen-hsüeh-shih ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao* (*Reference Material for the History of Modern Chinese Literature*) (Peking) (1959), Vol. I, pp. 288–91.

2. *Mao Tse-tung hsüan-chi* (*Selected works of Mao Tse-tung*), Vol. III, p. 889.

3. Supposedly the brainchild of Mao Tse-tung, but explained by Kuo Mo-jo, e.g. in " Chiu mu-ch'ien ch'uang-tso chung te chi ke wen-t'i ta *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* pien-che wen " (" In reply to the editor of *People's Literature* on some questions in current creative writing "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1959), Vol. I.

4. See for the postwar period in China the speech of Zhdanov translated into Chinese

The basic theory was presented in a fairly complete form by Chou Yang in 1953, in a speech expounding Socialist Realism.[5] He made it clear, among other things, that the " real life " depicted in works of Socialist Realism must be so selected and interpreted as to conform to Marxist-Leninist principles, and in particular must show the Party's policies working as intended.[6] The stage must be dominated by the working class, things must be shown to be moving in the right direction, and for the reader the literature should be morally uplifting. The heroes have to be types the reader can wholeheartedly admire, and they should always be given more prominent billing than negative characters. Furthermore, they must not be described in isolation from the " contradiction and struggle between the new and the old in actual society ": their true character will be manifested only in " fierce struggle." [7] Naturally, all backward influences should be met and overcome.

These principles are not open to individuals to determine or question. They inevitably follow from the sincere profession of communism, given that literature is regarded in that ideology as an extension of life and not an alternative pursuit. Particular aspects have received particular stress at different times, and changes have been rung with the names, but this core of doctrine has held together; the only revolution the Cultural Revolution could effect on it was to undertake its wholesale implementation. (Which is not to say that refinements were not introduced, but they will be considered later.)

Let us now take the taboos that writers were reminded of in the 1960s, omitting those which are blindingly obvious. Of relatively long standing were:

1. Factuality – the description of " real people and real things " (*chen-jen chen-shih*). Objections to factuality arose from several quarters: it was the technique of Naturalism, in the unflattering light of which philosophical man was a biological animal, and it was also associated with critical realism, which had a place only in the old society; in any case it only reflected " perceptual knowledge " as opposed to " rational knowledge," i.e. believing the evidence of your senses instead of what you are educated to think.[8]

2. Psychological analysis. The " complexity of the inmost mind " (*nei-hsin te fu-tsa-hsing*) was dismissed as a " bourgeois concern." [9]

(2nd edition) in 1953, in *Wen-hsüeh li-lun hsüeh-hsi ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao* (*Reference Materials for the Study of Literature Theory*) (Peking) (1956), p. 650.

5. " Wei ch'uang-tsao keng to-te yu-hsiu-te wen-hsüeh i-shu tso-p'in erh fen-tou " (" Fight to create even more outstanding works of literature and art "), in *Chung-kuo hsien-tai wen-hsüeh shih ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao*, Vol. III, pp. 71–95.

6. *Ibid.* p. 79.

7. *Ibid.* p. 87.

8. See Yü Wen-p'ing, " Criticism of the theory of writing about reality," *Survey of China Mainland Press* (SCMP), No. 5043.

9. Chou Yang, " Wo kuo she-hui chu-i wen-hsüeh i-shu te tao-lu " (" The road for

3. Human interest (*jen-ch'ing-wei*), because it linked people together in a way incompatible with the only divisions acceptable, which are along class lines.[10]

4. Humanism, a ghost never quite laid, though Hu Feng (" the spirit of socialism is the spirit of humanism "[11]) had been silenced, and Feng Hsüeh-feng no less decisively repudiated for arguing that man's most fundamental need was the " general love of mankind."[12] The ghost walked abroad in the late 1950s as Jugoslav revisionism.[13] It would later be seen in Chinese garb in the anti-Confucius campaign.

5. Love between the sexes which transcends class, or overshadows social issues, or reveals petit-bourgeois mentality.[14]

Others given prominence in the run-up to the Cultural Revolution or proclaimed during its course include:

6. " People in the middle " (*chung-chien jen-wu*). This was a platform argued most forcibly behind closed doors, notably by Shao Ch'üan-lin at the writers conference at Dairen in 1962. The " people in the middle " are those " neither good nor bad, or both good and bad," who were claimed to be in the majority. Shao contended that the " typical " (*tien-hsing*) need not be limited to the still embryonic socialist man, as orthodox theorists held, but could also be abstracted from this majority who carried the " spiritual burden " of the past and *internalized* the contradictions in society. Shao's case was thrown out on several counts: " people in the middle " were *not*, so it was said, a majority; he and his fellows sympathized with, rather than criticized, the " spiritual burdens "; and more fundamentally, because concentration on the " few " who did occupy the " middle position between progressiveness and backwardness " ignores and negates the fact that the progressive are all the time increasing in number, which fact can be recognized only by giving the decisive role to heroic characters who *resolve* contradictions: in-between characters have to commit themselves, otherwise society is implied to be in stasis.[15]

7. Spontaneity. Spontaneous resistance, such as that provoked by the

socialist literature and art in our country "), *Jen-min shou-ts'e* (*People's Handbook*), 1961.

10. *Ibid.* with reference to Pa Jen.

11. Merle Goldman's *Literary Dissent in Communist China*, Chapter 7, is devoted to Hu Feng. Both this book and Douwe Fokkema's *Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence 1956–60* are invaluable guides to controversies in this field.

12. Chou Yang, " The road for socialist literature and art."

13. See Tu Ai, " T'ung hsiu-cheng chu-i tou-cheng fa-chan te she-hui chu-i wen-hsüeh " (" Socialist literature developing in the struggle with revisionism "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1960), No. 9.

14. See articles on the story " Kui chia " (" Return home ") in *Wen-i pao* (1963), Nos. 1, 5, 7–8.

15. See editorials in *Wen-i pao* (1964), Nos. 8–9, " Chung-chien jen-wu shih tzu-ch'an chieh-chi te wen-hsüeh chu-chang " (" People in the middle is a literary argument of the bourgeoisie "), and " Kuan-yü ' hsieh chung-chien jen-wu ' te tzu-liao " (" Material on writing of the people in the middle ").

denial of rights or perpetration of injustice, was proper in the struggle against feudalism and capitalism, but in the period of socialist revolution can only be anti-social in tendency. Socialist heroes must be shown to be motivated not by blind courage or dogged determination, but by " reason " and " basic knowledge " supplied by the education of the Party and supported by the revolutionary traditions, otherwise " their heroic actions will appear to lack an ideological foundation." [16] This does not seem to have occasioned much discussion at the time, but is important for its relevance to post-Cultural Revolution literature.

Many of these errors were summed up in the denunciations of Chou Yang, who tried to save his bacon by himself abjuring them in his last public speech in November 1965.[17] Chou Yang's " crimes " are a separate subject in themselves, as they involve the liberties the bosses take with Party doctrine in closed sessions, while we have been dealing with published matter. However, we should note the reversal of the line taken in " Wei tsui kuang-ta-te jen-min ch'ün-chung fu-wu " (" Serve the broadest masses of the people "), master-minded by Chou and printed in the *People's Handbook* for 1962, which was that in the situation then in force of a united democratic front under the leadership of the Communist Party, literature should aim to serve *the whole of the people* (*ch'üan-t'i jen-min*), with workers, peasants and soldiers as their core; and that, apart from continuing to require from literature " revolutionary education " and " militant encouragement," the people also needed a multiplicity of literary works to " enrich their spiritual life " and " satisfy their demands for artistic enjoyment." [18] Over and over the article warned against compulsion to conform and stressed free competition and free discussion. In all these respects the article reinforced major strands in the leading literary contribution in the previous year's *Handbook*, signed by Chou Yang,[19] and also the special article in *Wen-i pao*, No. 3 (1961), which called for the lifting of all restrictions on subject matter.[20] Yao Wen-yüan later described this campaign led by Chou Yang as an attempt to substitute Khrushchev's revisionist " literature of the whole people " for proletarian literature.[21] In this Yao was percipient.

16. Yao Wen-yüan, " Some problems concerning reflection of the class struggle by literature and art workers during the period of socialist revolution," *Shang-hai wen-hsüeh* (1963), No. 10, in *Survey of China Mainland Magazines* (SCMM), No. 418.

17. " Kao chü Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang hung-ch'i tso yu hui lao-tung yu hui ch'uang-tso te wen-hsüeh chan-shih " (" Raise high the red flag of Mao Tse-tung thought, be a literary warrior who can both labour and create "), printed as a booklet by Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-par she, January 1966.

18. This article originally appeared in *Jen-min jih-pao* (*People's Daily*), 23 May 1962, and was translated in *Current Background* (*CB*), No. 685. It was attributed to Chou Yang by Yao Wen-yüan, " P'ing fan-ke-ming liang-mien-p'ai Chou Yang," *Hung-ch'i* (*Red flag*) (1967), No. 1, printed as a booklet by San-lien shu-tien, Hong Kong.

19. *Supra*, note 9.

20. " T'i-ts'ai wen-t'i " (" The question of subject matter "), *Wen-i pao* (1961), No. 3.

21. " P'ing fan ke-ming liang-mien-p'ai Chou Yang," *supra*, note 18.

The revisionist tide spent itself in 1962. The article on literature carried in the *People's Handbook* for 1963 contained no mention of united fronts or concessions to intellectuals; instead it talked ominously of " baleful capitalist influences and other unhealthy phenomena " and stated flatly that " in the face of the present fierce class struggle proceeding in the international arena " the choice was between wholeheartedly supporting socialism and opposing it.[22] In December 1963 came Mao Tse-tung's criticism about " a lot of deadheads " being in charge of literary affairs, and from then on the only way for Chou Yang and company to go was down.

Necessarily the new order for literature involved the strenuous avoidance of these heresies and, conversely, a reversion to pristine values. Yao Wen-yüan forecast in 1963 the shape of things to come.[23] He isolated three areas for the attention of writers: the class struggle, the production struggle, and scientific experimentation, the greatest of these being the class struggle. He emphasized the urgency of recognizing and portraying the bourgeois-rightist wolves in sheep's clothing then on the prowl. The contradictions with this enemy, he wrote, are interwoven with contradictions within the people, for the remnants of the exploiting class " must find among the people their agents, allies, accomplices under duress and victims of deception." In practical terms this looks forward to the portrayal in fiction of both out-and-out villains and deluded men of the people, who are to be won over. Always uppermost, Yao continued, should be the purpose of " singing the praise of the Party, the victory of socialism, the strength of the revolutionary people, the revolutionary traditions, and the bright future." What is more, this is to be done from the historical viewpoint, which means that neither heroes nor villains are to be " born in heaven," but are to be supplied with antecedents which would explain and validate their behaviour. Far from the subject matter making no difference, even farther from resorting to personal perceptions, literature must redound with the major issues of the day and the matter must be set in a network of class relationships. The repository of the clearest and soundest class sentiments is the poor and lower-middle peasantry and old workers from the same stratum.

We can now turn, not without relief, to the actual writing. It is not of course as easy as commentators would like it to be, or pretend that it is, to discern very clear trends in creative literature. Specific campaigns were quickly enough reflected in fiction – such as intellectual youths settling in the countryside, or sexual equality – but the revision of an author's viewpoint – how he interprets human relationships, how he understands the springs of action – takes longer. A new development did however

22. " Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh i-shu chieh lien-he hui ti-san chieh ch'üan-kuo wei-yüan-hui k'uo-ta te ti-erh tz'u hui-i " (" The second enlarged session of the third national assembly of the Chinese literature and arts world ").

23. *Supra*, note 16.

become manifest in November 1965, when *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (*People's Literature*) began publishing a series of short stories which ran on to May 1966, when the magazine closed down. These were written in response to the call to " magnify the socialist hero," and were to illustrate " the class struggle, the production struggle, and the scientific struggle " in connection with the Third Five-Year Plan scheduled to begin in 1966. What is significant from our point of view is that they faithfully followed the prescription made out by Yao Wen-yüan.

The keynote for this brief series is set by the first story, " Ti-i-tz'u tang tui-chang " (" On first becoming team-leader "), by Liu Pai-sheng: it carries a special commendation from Liu Pai-yü for representing the standpoint of the poor and lower-middle peasants. It is in fact no more than a portrait of a poor peasant, who is diligent, selfless and enterprising, apparently all by virtue of being a poor peasant. In the remainder of the series the instincts of this class are shown to be infallible when issues are presented to mass meetings, which is frequently, as they centre on political strife. The contradictions are of an internal kind (as yet there are comparatively few class enemies) and are generally over parochialism, which places the well-being of the unit over that of the greater community, or over the attitude of resting on laurels and letting the revolution go hang. The emphasis is therefore on correction of thought, worked by the calm and deep politico on the tough and independent foreman or team-leader.[24] Production battles are there to be fought, and there may be a new technique or piece of equipment to be tested, but they are not, as in the past, the main focus of the drama; rather are they the occasion for the expression and eventual vindication of proper attitude and spirit. In short, politics is firmly in command. Chairman Mao has come out of the shadows to be liberally quoted, and all sentiments relate to political goals and social responsibilities. On a personal level there is expression of class love or comradely feeling, which is often instrumental in bringing round the benighted comrade (expressed in such gestures as a man doffing his coat to protect another from the night air). Heroes are provided with exemplary origins (one young man, having been orphaned, claims with almost literal truth that the Party is his father and mother [25]), and recall of the dreadful past is used to telling effect in returning the errant to the path of virtue. On the other hand, to set against all this earnestness, there is still in the rural stories much bonhomie, some crusty wit, and the odd good joke (urban, factory stories are here, as ever, notably lacking in humour).

In the stories that surface after the Cultural Revolution humour practically disappears, but in other respects they follow the pattern of the 1966 crop just described. Some themes are enlarged, roles are more

24. See especially " Chih-ch'i " (" Willpower ") by Wang I-p'ing (*Jen-min wen-hsüeh*, No. 1 [1966]) and " Ta-shan ke " (" Song of Ta-shan ") by Chang Chün (*Jen-min wen-hsüeh*, No. 3, [1966]).

25. In " Ch'u-kuo chih ch'ien " (" Before going abroad ") by Ch'ien Ch'ao, *Jen-min wen-hsüeh*, May 1966.

clearly delineated, and, the struggle over the Party line having been decided, writers have no hesitation about coming down hard on the technocrats and bureaucrats who think they have had their revolution, and too on those who rely on their own guts and initiative and dismiss the wisdom of the masses. Quotations from Chairman Mao are not only indispensable, but are distinguished by being printed in heavy black type. Vigilance against deviation is very high, and ears are keenly attuned to detect the slightest sign of incorrect thought; challenge is quick and bold. The hero – often from the rank and file – is " the brand new hero of the working class "; he is of a type to carry all before him (the actual phrase is " to command the wind and clouds," *ch'ih-cha feng-yün*), combining as he does the thinker and the man of action, and efforts are made for him to function in the midst of an incident of " great historical significance." [26] The general directive is stated as: " We must organize contradiction and conflict with a heroic character from the proletariat at its centre, and make this hero subject to tempering and testing in a sharp and complex struggle, so as to show how the revolutionary class which he represents gives a push to the progress of history through its unflinching struggle. This is determined by the class posture and historical mission of the proletariat." [27] Beyond that, there are characterological traits that the hero can hardly do without, as they figure in the *Mao chu-hsi yü-lu* (*Sayings of Chairman Mao*), which must have been got by heart in the intervening years; chief among them is the requirement that cadres should be " modest and prudent, and guard against arrogance and impetuosity." [28] Indeed, no heroes do deviate from that norm.

Clearly the new clothes are cut to the lines of a straitjacket. It is a sign of this that commentators go out of their way to anticipate the charge of *lei-t'ung* (similitude). They point out that for all stories backgrounds are different, precise situations are unique, and the light in which the hero and the struggle is seen varies from author to author. The unfailing antidote for uniformity, according to these commentators, is to plunge into the sea of national life and discover the inexhaustible richness and variety of life among the masses. To fail to do this is " to sit on a mountain of treasure and not know the treasure is there." [29]

With the qualification that not all the richness and variety is considered fit for view, it is the mining of this treasure that makes it possible to continue to read these stories. If the trend of the action has a certain inevitability about it, that is something the reader can live with: that popular fiction and television series in the west are based on as predictable formulas as the Chinese stories does not deter readers and viewers from coming back for more. But the Chinese author has a more

26. *Tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo ch'uang-tso t'an* (*On the Writing of Short Stories*) (hereafter *TPHSCTT*) (Shanghai) (1974), p. 2.

27. *Ibid.* p. 4.

28. *Mao chu-hsi yü lu*, Hsin hua shu-tien (1967), p. 241.

29. See for example Liu Ch'uan, " Wen-hua ta ke-ming tai-lai te ch'un-t'ien " (" The spring ushered in by the Cultural Revolution "), *Chao-hsia* (1975), No. 12.

difficult job than the western one. Let us suppose that the most basic forms of literature have two major ways of involving the reader, which are by engaging sympathy for those who " need our help," and by offering a spectacle of conflict in which we take sides, and two minor ones more often used to divert, namely creating amusement which the reader can join in, and puzzlement to temporarily perplex him. The new Chinese hero is so much master of the situation, such a man of steel, that he does not need our help, so sympathy is out of the question. For spectacles of conflict we can tolerate heroes who do not need our help, but the contest has to be an even one or else the spectator does not get the scent of danger.[30] Given that enemies are paper tigers, it is difficult to present them as even a passing menace (difficult, but not impossible). And, as has been remarked, humour survives only in vestigial form. Puzzlement remains, and it is exploited in particular ways which we shall come to shortly.

So let us consider what the craft of fiction consists of in the 1970s.[31] How does the writer of fiction distinguish his product from reports, equally drawn from the teeming life of the masses, which purport to be true? So that our discussion does not persist in abstractions, we will look at a comparatively good story which has been printed in several anthologies, Ch'ing Ming's " Ch'u-ch'un-te tsao-ch'en " (" A morning in early spring "),[32] in the process commenting on typical techniques.

It starts with plenty of bounce, as Hsiao Lan careers out of a packed meeting hall. Most stories do begin with a bang – a door crashes open, or a bicycle zips along a road; or if they start more quietly, it is still in the midst of some activity, so that the reader is intrigued to discover what exactly is going on. It is late on a snowy night, the meeting has decided to call tens of thousands to a mass meeting in the East Wind Square at eight o'clock the next morning to attack the reactionary capitalist line of Liu Shao-ch'i and rally the ranks to support the Cultural Revolution. Two persons detach themselves from the hive of activity, Hsiao Lan and the young man who catches the snowball she throws, Kuo Tzu-k'un. Now Kuo is described. Just a few physical traits are marked in in these descriptions, and these naturally vary, but reference to the eyes is indispensable; the eyes of heroes are windows on the soul, they glow and dart from the fire within. For preference, people are described dramatically as descried by another character (here Hsiao Lan), not as a still portrait executed by the author. Kuo has a mannerism, we are told, of brushing his hand over his hair before clapping his cap on his head. Mannerisms have done sterling service in the cause of salvaging individuality (though they have sometimes seemed more like placards hung round the neck), but are not over-used in recent fiction. On this

30. This was fully recognized by T'ang T'ao in *T'an hsiao-shuo ch'uang-tsao* (*The Writing of Fiction*) (Peking) (1962), p. 20.

31. That is, up to the fall of the " gang of four " in October 1976.

32. In *TPHSCTT, Shang-hai tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo hsüan 1971–1973* (Shanghai) (1974), and elsewhere.

occasion, as a nice touch, Kuo confounds Hsiao Lan's expectations by not indulging in his, not this time.

As they stroll together on this night in 1967 Kuo is in a dilemma. His hesitation provides the occasion for him to reflect on the temperament and upbringing of his companion, a female Red Guard (like physical appearance, these things are usually accounted for through the perception of another character). We learn that her father was killed in the Korean War (the best kind of parent is a revolutionary martyr), that she affects an old army tunic (her father's) as her dress, and that she is a gung-ho type. The hero's side-kick is often impetuous, which makes a useful foil to his collectedness, but the combination is also a " natural " one in literature. Kuo's thoughts stray back to their first meeting, and its setting, so more background is fed to the reader without obtrusively breaking into the narrative. He is afraid – we still follow his unspoken thoughts – that what he has to suggest will be seen as " nothing but . . . capitulation! " The horror of the thought stops the reader short. But Kuo is right. Three pages later she comes out with it: " It's nothing but, nothing but . . . capitulation! " The person he suggests they go to see is the old driver Ch'ang-pao who taught Kuo his trade but is now in the opposing camp which supports the existing Party representatives. She thinks in terms of red and white, he realizes the need to win over (*t'uan-chieh*). Three months previously, she remembers, Ch'ang-pao had instigated a " recollective contrast " (*hui-i tui-pi*) meeting to accuse Kuo of ingratitude to the Party. At this the reader's ears prick up: these meetings at which the cruel past is contrasted with the sweet present are one of the most effective ways of melting and turning the hearts of those who have gone off the rails; if the enemy know how to use it, then they promise to be formidable opponents. Ch'ang-pao, as an old worker, whatever Hsiao Lan thinks, cannot be an enemy, but he too is going to be a tough nut to crack.

An interesting technique employed at this point is the switch from transmission of the girl's thoughts in terms of " he " to taking on the tones of unspoken direct address – " Have *you* forgotten . . ." etc. It is surprising how common this technique has been. It is switched in at moments of high emotion, without the transition being marked by means of punctuation. In all it is used seven times in the 40 pages of this story, which is a rather high incidence when compared with only one occurrence (that I have noticed) in the 892 pages of Dicken's *Our Mutual Friend*, when Lizzie's prayer breaks through the narrative as she goes to rescue the drowning Rayburn.[33]

Hsiao Lan wants no part in Kuo's scheme, and she breaks away in high dudgeon, but at the last minute she jumps onto the truck Kuo has boarded, still on the track of Ch'ang-pao, when he calls to her, " Have you forgotten what meeting they are holding tonight at the office? " As the reader never knew, he is willing to read the next section to find out.

33. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 768.

This next meeting is being held by the deputy head of the transport office, for which Kuo works, to proclaim his (hypocritical) reversion to " Chairman Mao's revolutionary line." The fat deputy head appears a complete incompetent, but he is managed by his tricky head of secretariat, who has a pasty face and wears a false smile, silver-rimmed spectacles and a high Russian hat(!). Though it can be argued that the villains are no more caricatures in their appearance than the heroes, yet it seems unfortunate that they should be as repulsive as they all are. Probably the " model revolutionary plays " (*yang-pan hsi*) gave a lead which could not be ignored in this respect. It becomes clear as the meeting proceeds that the plan of the rascals is to buy off the workers by issuing masses of chits for extra allowances (they have a specially fat envelope ready for Kuo). Hsiao Lan is twice restrained from intervening by the cool-headed Kuo, who lolls in his seat. Then at the crucial moment a ringing challenge is heard and a young man makes for the platform on winged feet. It is our hero. This is a good example of how expert the contemporary story-teller can be in the sheer mechanics of drama. He knows as well as the masters of romance how to build up tension by successive tightening and relaxing (remember Wu Sung's progress up the ridge where he meets the tiger in *Shui-hu chuan*), and how to make the reader wait for that gauntlet to be thrown into the arena. In the manoeuvring which follows the class enemies are overcome by Kuo and friends, but not before they have tried some dirty tricks, so we are given a run for our money. Again the author demonstrates his quality by showing Kuo the victor in immediately contrasting light as he pursues his personal business, standing apologetically before the audience " like a child before his elders," asking if anyone has seen Ch'ang-pao. They haven't, so the quest goes on.

In this story the reconciliation between natural allies is more important than the struggle against class enemies. That so little basically separates Kuo and Ch'ang-pao is symbolized by the fact that the truck on which Kuo then hitches a lift to get to the mass meeting is driven by Ch'ang-pao (unknown to him), and they sit with only the wall of the driver's cab between them. The author does not let the irony escape us – but since he devised it, he is entitled to claim some credit. Ch'ang-pao is actually already disabused about the real motives of the capitalist roaders, but through a misunderstanding still believes Kuo has gone to the bad. The story will not be finished until the scales have fallen from his eyes, for, in contrast to the " character in the middle," this " character on the turn " (*chuan-pien jen-wu*) must in the end face right round. In this story, care is taken to place Ch'ang-pao in a sympathetic light (we follow his thoughts too, as he drives), so that the reader will join in willing him and his erstwhile apprentice to come together again. Before that can happen, though, the remaining lumps in the mixture must be made smooth. So Hsiao Lan is persuaded of the wisdom of *t'uan-chieh* through a proposition initiated by an arithmetical problem posed by Kuo, in the style of the philosopher instructing his pupil. Then old Ch'ang-pao

realizes he jumped to the wrong conclusions about Kuo from overhearing the voice of the masses on the subject. Incidentally, it is only at this late stage, as Ch'ang-pao sits on the roof of his driver's cab at the East Wind Square, that we get an idea of what he looks like: " Now we can clearly make out that he is about 47 or 48, has an honest face, bushy eyebrows . . ." Again the convention is theatrical, with the author commenting on things only when they come into the view of the imagined audience. The reconciliation theme is kept in the forefront even as Kuo delivers his address in the square before the massed red flags, for he takes as his text the case of " an old driver," who is Ch'ang-pao.

The two finally meet in the lorry park, the climax of the story. The author recognizes, as most authors do, that the demand on his powers is severe: " No words could express the feelings of this time." So neither tries to give utterance to them. In actions meant to be more expressive than words, Kuo hands over the arrears of his Party dues, Ch'ang-pao returns to him his washed and repaired driving gloves. Unfortunately, our author is not obliged to observe the same restraint as his characters; the " voice-over " sounds: " In the East Wind Square, amid this sea of people and flags, the two drivers, parted for more than a month, met again! That is to say, all the unholy intrigues of the class enemies who were absurdly deluded into thinking they could destroy the great unity of the working class, were reduced to bankruptcy! " And more besides to explain the tokens of class love just exhibited. (The proverbial coat around the shoulders is to come a little later.)

So this victory is won, but new causes of concern surface in Kuo's mind as he drives back, the first being a revolutionary comrade who shows signs of becoming alienated from the masses. The reminder that the struggle is by no means over is standard in these stories. For now, though, the clouds part and the sun peeps through in benediction, and indeed it is as celebrant that the author takes leave of us: " What a fine sky, what a fine early spring morning, what a fine city caught up in the high-tide of revolution, what a fine people advancing on the road to socialism! " The author has assumed the role of celebrant before, in his lyrical description of the scene at the mass meeting. Authors generally do enthuse as well as narrate. Besides finales and mass meetings, the typical occasion for jubilation is the spectacle of some impressive achievement of socialism.[34]

Very little analysis is conducted by our author on his own behalf, but he makes sure the rights and wrongs are fully debated and decided by the protagonists, whether in their speech or in their thoughts. He is also very thorough in satisfying all the criteria for casting his actors: as if to check off the last point on his list, he inserts at the end a note to forfend the thought that Kuo might be something special, as Hsiao Lan wonders how this *ordinary* worker could have such courage, firmness and wisdom.

34. Such as the erection of a giant drilling tower in " K'ai-t'o wei-lai te chan-tou " (" Battle to open up the future "), *Chao-hsia* (1975), No. 2.

The degree to which the authors of these stories show their hand varies greatly; sometimes they break into speech-making out of evident impatience with the medium's inadequacy to embody their message,[35] or at the worst use their story as a text to illustrate a lecture.[36]

Perhaps the most striking of artistic features common to the great majority of recent stories is the symbolic or emblematic motif running through them. Here, innumerable references are made to the " steering wheel," which stands for Kuo's trade, but also the guiding role of Chairman's Mao's thought. The immediate parentage of the symbolic motif is in the *yang-pan hsi*, the most obvious model being the red lamp in the *Hung-teng chi* (*The Red Lamp*) – the signalman's lamp used as a sign in the communist underground, and of course the symbol of the red light which will eventually warm the whole world. Possibly the story " Yen-an te chung-tzu " (" Yenan seed ") works this motif the hardest.[37] In the first instance the " seed " refers to the young woman whose parents had been in Yenan, but she also carries as her most treasured possession melon seeds derived from stock originally planted by Mao – these melons had nourished her mother while nursing her under siege. Mao's words in this connection are quoted too: " We Communists are like seeds, the people are like soil." Lastly, the homely parable of the seed needing proper care and conditions to grow and fruit is driven home.[38] Other titles, like " Submerged reef " (" An-chiao ") are similarly indicative.[39]

To look back on it now as a whole, " A morning in early spring " is a superior specimen of its kind, cunningly constructed to keep the reader's interest alive. All the action is packed into 12 hours, all the relationships converge like spokes to a hub on the central figure of Kuo Tzu-k'un, and the dramatic potential of that modern battleground, the political meeting, is fully exploited. There is sharp visualization of detail, like the focusing in on the smoke curling from Ch'ang-pao's cigarette as he gets absorbed in listening to the talk about Kuo, and the conception of character is mature, as in the case of Hsiao Lan, whose naîve ideas about revolution are treated with knowing but kindly indulgence. What is overdone is due to fulfilling the requirements.

The new authors appear to take a pride in fulfilling political requirements. Lu Hsün's defiant admission that his own stuff was written " to order " – the order of the advance guard of the revolution – is quoted with a righteous air, and with even greater sense

35. As in " T'e-pieh te kuan-chung " (" A special audience ") by Tuan Jui-hsia in *TPHSCTT*.

36. As in " Yung pu t'ing-pu " (" Never checking in his stride ") by Hu Wan-ch'un, *Chao-hsia* (1975), No. 10.

37. In *TPHSCTT*.

38. Note, though, that the author denies that this symbol was the product of inspiration – it was " dug up from the soil " (*TPHSCTT*, p. 145). This story, incidentally, is included in Part IV of the Peking *Chinese Reader* (*Han-yü tu-pen*).

39. " An-chiao " is in *TPHSCTT*.

of justification, for the orders now come from " the revolutionary line on art and literature " of the " great leader, Chairman Mao." [40] In their various contributions to the collection *Tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo ch'uang-tso t'an* (*The Writing of Short Stories*), though authors and critics agree that real life should be the starting point, they are also unanimous that the theme is the " soul " of the work (the theme being the political axiom they are to demonstrate). This deliberately denies the revisionist doctrine of staying with life all the way through.[41] In the extreme case an author would admit to contradicting his conception of his own character in order to " follow orders ": a factory chief, an experienced cadre and an old soldier, is required by the " theme " to pass on secret plans to a Russian adviser, but the author's instincts rebel at making him do it; consultation of the Party line persuades him his instincts are wrong.[42]

To attempt now a description of the generality of short stories, the change in authorship from professional writers, however peripatetic, to amateurs operating from their places of work up and down the country and drawing on their own local experience, resulted, as was foretold, in an enormous diversity of settings and situations – in factory and on farm, of course, but also in mines and oilfields, college and commerce, and even on the high seas; in short, from every walk of life. Consistent with the unit-based authorship, but also no doubt in order to embody an issue of public importance, people in the stories are shown at work or on the political stage, not at home (unless the issue spills over into the home). Leisure interests are with negligible exceptions limited to studying the texts of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, if such a necessary adjunct to work can be called a leisure interest: dust collecting on these volumes is a sure sign that a person has lost his edge. Incidents arise from an ordinary worker, technician or peasant proposing an innovation in technique, or from a revolutionary cadre seeking to eliminate a malpractice. Resistance comes from those in authority who are complacent, wrong-headed or corrupt. Complications often flow from the co-existence in the bureaucracy of revolutionary and bourgeois-rightist structures, each with its lines of communication stretching back to Peking. Some problems, however, have purely local settings, and have to do with skulduggery like moonlighting and profiteering, or with social relationships like those between cadre and masses and old and young, when the resolution is harmonious. The time is the present; the past only figures in recollections.

Deficient though this summary inevitably is, it allows us to go on to look at how the stories were conceived and moulded into shape. We are fortunate to have in the *Tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo ch'uang-tso t'an* collection some accounts of gestation which are frank to the point of

40. *TPHSCTT*, p. 59.

41. The revisionists opposed the approach of " first the subject, then the life " (*hsien yu t'i-ts'ai, hou yu sheng-huo*). See " T'i-ts'ai wen-t'i."

42. Liu Ch'uan, *supra*, note 29.

naïvety. The author of " Hsiao chiang " (" Young commander "), for instance, a story about a young girl who solved a production problem in her electrical factory by trying a new method, tells how she had to look around for an adversary for her heroine, as " the thought and character of the hero can only be expressed in contradiction and struggle." [43] She picked on the old craftsman who was her teacher, but the craftsmen in the author's own factory objected that he was made " too backward." When apprentice and teacher were evenly balanced, the criticism was that the girl's " angles had been smoothed down." So back to the contradiction, fortified now by Mao's words that youth was the most positive and lively element in society (the wave behind pushing on the wave in front). The author goes on to claim that the process of " refining the theme " had been " a process of ever deeper recognition, understanding and reflection of life," [44] but the stages of revision as described had all been ruled by ideology, with no further reference to life. Another story with an opposite slant, set in a textile factory, tells how the teacher inspires the apprentice.[45] In its first draft the teacher (*shih-fu*) opened the young worker's eyes to her " responsibility " (the title of the work) through a simple admonishment. But that was considered too drab. So the author added four new elements: the teacher studies Marx, Lenin and Mao; she puts her own stamp on cloth she was actually not responsible for; she recalls her awful experiences before Liberation; and she does voluntary overtime although crippled by rheumatism.[46] None of these things in fact happened, but they are designed to add to the heroine's stature and lend significance to her actions. In the process reality has been submerged under formulaic matter. It is all very like the way Hollywood studios used to transform their material into what the public liked.

So we see, " life " need only provide a starting point, after which the logic of life takes over. It is a far cry from the point of view put forward in 1962 by Wang Wen-shih (an author in good standing during the Cultural Revolution), which envisaged the eventuality of a character, once come to life, contending with his author – in which case the author had to fathom his nature, conform to his temperament, and lead him to the conclusion along the invisible line of the logical theme.[47] According to the new practice, characters seem to get no further than the embryo stage before they are pulled into orbit around the theme. What is possible, however, is to build up a composite character, as Tuan Jui-hsia says he did with his hero in " T'e-pieh-te kuan-chung " (" A special audience "). He contrived the heroic image by reviewing in his mind all the stirring and inspiring people and incidents he had encountered in his years in his factory, a process western authors would find familiar, but

43. *TPHSCTT*, p. 188.
44. *Ibid.* p. 191.
45. Yeh Mien, " Tse-jen " (" Responsibility "), *TPHSCTT*, pp. 220–30.
46. *Ibid.* p. 212.
47. *T'an hsiao-shuo ch'uang-tsao*, p. 65.

his yardstick for adoption was whether the pieces fitted in with the behaviour of Yang Tzu-jung, the hero of *Chih-ch'ü Wei-hu-shan* (*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*).[48] Ultimately, therefore, the character is fashioned in the likeness of another fictional character.

It was in any case not intended that an author should cling to his own vision. The " three-in-one " (*san chieh-he*) method made it practically impossible. " Three-in-one " was a slogan of the Cultural Revolution, and was applied to all forms of human endeavour. Whatever its demerits in the field of literature, it was still necessary, for there was no other way to meet the alleged – and once alleged, irresistible – demands of the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers to be " masters of spiritual production " as they were already masters of material construction.[49] The masses were said to have more knowledge and deeper understanding of life than professional writers, but the professional writers were needed to help with technique; completing the trinity were the cadres, who had the theory to enable them to grasp the essence of a situation. In simplified form, the masses supplied the life, the writers the technique, the cadres the thought. These were the lines on which collective works were produced, but few pieces signed by individuals did not benefit from the same attentions, drafts being submitted and resubmitted for criticism by the masses and cadres. " T'e-pieh-te kuan-chung," for instance, went through five major revisions and took eight months to complete; justifiably its author called it a " thousand-man cake " (*ch'ien-jen kao*).

Apart from discussing their creative method, the authors included in this collection attest to the influence of the *yang-pan hsi*, without however being too specific. Although the model operas were a different medium, they were so emphatically endorsed by the leadership that writers of fiction could not but take their example seriously. In our analysis of " A morning in early spring " we have already remarked upon likely areas of influence. Overall the main change worked by them seems to have been to inspire the generality of authors to face up squarely to the socialist hero and describe him or her directly and frontally. The standard perspective before the Cultural Revolution was to show the hero through the eyes of the " I " narrator (usually a stranger on the scene), or through his relationship with a secondary character who had some trouble making him out. In the *yang-pan hsi* the hero is not only in plain view, he or she shares his or her inmost thoughts and feelings with the audience in the song sequences. So in the short stories which followed the *yang-pan hsi* the hero similarly speaks for himself (though not invariably). One author in fact says she changed from the first person (the " stranger ") to the third person (omniscient) narrative viewpoint precisely to give prominence to the heroic

48. *TPHSCTT*, p. 137.

49. See Chou T'ien, " Wen-i chan-hsien shang te i ke hsin-sheng shih-wu—san chieh-he ch'uang-tsao " (" A new-born thing on the literary front—three-in-one creation "), *Chao-hsia* (1975), No. 12.

character.[50] We may not altogether share her satisfaction. Though the indirect perspective may have been employed partly to disguise the author's unsureness in handling the socialist hero, its general abandonment may be deplored by the common reader. Its advantages were that it left room for adjustment on the part of the reader, who was not presented with the stark choice of " believe it or not "; it enriched the emotional content through the interplay between the hero and his solicitous friend; and it added interest to the development of the story, in that the interpretation of the narrator or secondary character was often fallible and so would shift and tack before coming on course. The point is easily proved by the way the Sherlock Holmes stories go to pot when Holmes himself takes over the narrative from Watson.

Contemporary writers may also have become more conscious of the instructive virtues of simple analogy from the example of the *yang-pan hsi*. Ch'u Lan, one of the principal spokesmen for the new culture, pointed out how these could " express profound implications,"[51] taking as her (?) text the song of Mother Tu from Act IV of *Tu-chüan shan* (*Azalea Mountain*):

> Look,
> The wild camellias that cover these slopes
> Did not drop their leaves in the bitter cold of winter,
> Even less will they now, now that spring has come again.

This of course " profoundly implies " the endurance and resilience of poor peasants like herself. *Some* explanation is needed to account for the high incidence in the short story of analogies like " Look at those fir trees: if they were bereft of their soil, what would become of them?",[52] and demonstrations like throwing a handful of stones into a pool to show they make more noise and cause more ripples than a single projectile.[53]

What the model operas taught of Revolutionary Romanticism it is harder to say. I have not read any case studies of Revolutionary Romanticism with reference to either the opera or works of fiction. Perhaps it does not admit of close definition, but its broad lines have been indicated in the requirement that the writer should be " imbued with elevated revolutionary ideals and filled with revolutionary fervour " when he " observes and treats of revolutionary reality."[54] It clearly fits this high key that the hero should exemplify the derring-do of the true Communist, that the concrete achievements and spiritual greatness of socialism should be described in grandiloquent language, and that the atmosphere should be highly charged. All this is inherent in

50. Yeh Mien, *TPHSCTT*, p. 213.

51. *Ch'uang-tso p'ing-lun chi* (*Articles on Creative Writing*) (Shanghai, 1974), p. 56.

52. *TPHSCTT*, p. 137.

53. Huang Chiang-chien, " Tsai ta-feng ta-lang chung " (" In the hurricane "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1976), No. 5.

54. *Shih nien lai te hsin Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh* (*The New Chinese Literature in the Last Ten Years*) (Peking, 1963), p. 15.

the flamboyant style of the operas. In the short stories the heroes likewise often take as their byword the sentiment that " what was unimaginable in the past can now be taken by storm,"[55] and they are of course paragons of virtue and tireless endeavour. So, too, are the elements frequently called on in melodramatic fashion to assist the build-up of tension. But the demands of the plot normally relegate lyricism to certain occasions. It is only occasionally that an author, perhaps worried about lagging behind, comes up with a passage that qualifies beyond all doubt as Revolutionary Romanticism. For instance, in " A day in the life of the head of the Machinery and Electricity Bureau " (" Chi-tien-chü-chang te i t'ien "),[56] an ancient worker warrior battles through a snap flood, clutching his heart (he suffers from angina) and driven on by will alone; finally the elements cringe before him:

> The merciless whip of the rain trembled and sagged!
> The vindictive flood stopped in its tracks, turned tail and ran![57]

Let us now turn from these things that have been grafted on to the stock of fiction, and consider in general terms the means that are used to distinguish fiction from rapportage, given that the former is to favour " realism " and that the latter disfavours prosaic facts. Structuring is one possibility. The most straightforward kind of structuring is to follow a steadily rising gradient to a climax which tests the mettle of a team or individual. This is known as placing the central character(s) " in the eye of the storm " (*feng-t'ou lang-chien*). The pre-Cultural Revolution practice of making the test a physical one (a hazard to be overcome or a target to be met) was repudiated in favour of a showdown between opposing lines of thought, but authors were not above settling for both. A refinement on this structure is to have staging posts on the way up to the summit for taking stock and regrouping, as in " A morning in early spring " (this is also described as a " wave-motion "). Another kind of structure is reversal followed by recovery: the central character suffers a setback and then redeems himself (unlikely after the Cultural Revolution as they do not make many mistakes), or a secondary character loses faith in the hero but then comes to admire him more than ever (also rare nowadays). More contrived than any of these is the deliberate patterning of events, reminiscent of Liu Lao-lao's three visits to the Ta-kuan Yuan in the *Hung-lou meng*. A recent example is the series of three " blastings " (*san hung*) which a scriptwriter gathering material with an artillery unit suffers at the hands of " Number one bombadier."[58] But a discernible structure is not by itself defining. What is clearly distinctive, in the Chinese context, is the employment of the traditional language of story-telling. I refer to such phrases as " If he hadn't looked, it would have passed off without incident, but this glance caused . . ." (*pu k'an yu*

55. *TPHSCTT*, p. 193.
56. *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1976), No. 1.
57. *Ibid.* p. 59.
58. " I p'ao-huo," in *TPHSCTT*.

k'e, che i k'an tao chiao . . .), " in less time than it takes to tell " (*shuo shih ch'ih, na shih k'uai*), " when he looked closely, he found it was none other than . . ." (*tzu-hsi i ch'iao, pu shih pieh-jen, yüan-lai shih* . . .), " there's no story without coincidence " (*wu ch'iao pu ch'eng shu*), and so on. The use of these phrases is approved because of the general commendation of " national characteristics and popular style," [59] but one cannot pretend they are universal.

We fall back then on the way of spinning out the story thread, and recourse to the tricks of the trade. As in all fiction, the author has total control over what is revealed and what is concealed. He can disclose what is going through a character's mind, or he can pretend he knows no more than is shown on the surface. He can also draw a veil over what he chooses. Those new authors who write in the vein of adventure stories make great use of the potential for mystification. A telephone call is made, the villain takes someone aside for a confidential chat, the good guys gather for a council of war – all to bear fruit later.[60] Or a " plant " may be made: a letter and photograph are pocketed early in the story, and only towards the end does the reader learn what is in the letter and whom the photograph is of.[61] Or the author can hold back the revelation of identity: a stranger seeking a person is turned away by someone to whom they address their enquiry; it turns out later that that was the very person they were seeking.[62] (This is related to, but different from, the simple device inherited from earlier fiction of " someone " intervening who is inexplicably not recognized by the other party, though they know them well.) At the lowest level, coincidence is called in: the craftsman thought an old woman by the young apprentice turns out to be the fabled hero on whom he modelled himself.[63] These are all means of manufacturing interest through the control of information fed to the reader. There are also ways of creating surprise and suspense that the reporter does not normally resort to. Of these I will mention only one which is relatively uncommon elsewhere, being thrown up by the ideological nature of the drama; I call it " upping the ante " or " raising the stakes." Here the ordinary worker, or whatever, breaks through one thought-barrier to accept a proposition he had thought inimical to his interests, only to be told to his astonishment that that game is off and they are now playing for higher stakes. For instance, having boldly (as he thinks) accepted one mammoth task, the deputy Party secretary for a

59. See Mao Tun, " Tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo te feng-shou he ch'uang-tso shang te chi ke wen-t'i " (" Some questions relating to the harvest and creation of short stories "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1959), No. 2, and his speech at the Third Assembly of Chinese literature and art workers, 1960, reported in *CB*, No. 632.

60. As in " Ta-feng ta-lang chung."

61. As in " Ti-i k'e " (" First lesson ") by Ku Yü, in *Shang-hai tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo hsüan 1971–73*.

62. As in " Chao-hsia " (" Morning clouds ") in *TPHSCTT*.

63. As in " Shan-kuang " (" Flash of light ") in *Shang-hai tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo hsüan 1971–73*.

mining machinery factory is calmly handed another one, because one has " constantly to set oneself new problems, invent new scenarios (*ch'u hsin-te wen-chang*) " [64]; or, having persuaded the team-leader of the virtues of a new drill, the hero demands that it be manned at a testing time by a young crew instead of old and trusted hands.[65] This trick is latent in any partnership where one partner is clever and the other dim (Holmes and Watson come to mind again), but in the Chinese case it has a central place in the scheme.

Final Thoughts

Writing to a formula has always been, and still is, a bad word in Communist China, but the difficulties of avoiding it were compounded after the Cultural Revolution. On the one hand the exacerbation of contradictions and the dominance of conflict reduced the range of feeling the author was allowed to express or convey to " class hatred " and " class love " (deliberately, as we have seen). This took away the most valuable element in previous fiction, the way the author would enter into the feelings of his characters, and espouse their point of view. Particularly sympathetic, formerly, on this personal level was the treatment of relationships within the family,[66] and the kindly view of children's innocent anxieties.[67] Given that this character-centred, presenting-the-people-to-the-people type of story was a major mode, the loss was considerable.

At the same time, the effacement of experienced writers who could cope with formulas left most of the writing to be done by apprentice authors or writing teams. Corporate productions were, perhaps inevitably, prone to throw clichés together, while individual authors, though often keen to put their own mark on their work, still tended to follow their rescript with excessive zeal. Concomitantly there was a decline in the competent use of language, one of the saving graces of communist fiction. That is not to say that some stories did not continue to give pleasure in this respect, but too many showed evident signs of reliance on the popular dictionary of set phrases (*ch'eng-yü*) [68] for colourful descriptive terms; at high points they came thick and fast.[69] The predilection for *ch'eng-yü*, incidentally, was not confined to fiction at this time.

We have already considered some of the means by which recent fiction identified itself as fiction. We should not leave un-noted a minor trend in

64. " Chi-tien chü-chang te i-t'ien," *supra*, note 56.

65. " K'ai-t'o wei-lai te chan-tou," *supra*, note 34.

66. E.g. Ch'en Ts'an-chia, " Tui-chang chih chia " (" The team-leader's family "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1962), No. 8.

67. E.g. K'e Yen, " Kang-wei " (" Sentry-post "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1962), No. 8.

68. I refer to *Han-yü ch'eng-yü hsiao tz'u-tien* (*Short Dictionary of Chinese Set Phrases*), Peking, 1958, 1962 and 1973.

69. In " Tsai ta-feng ta-lang chung," seven ch'eng-yü included in the dictionary occur in eight narrow column inches, *Jen-min wen-hsüeh*, No. 5 (1976), p. 42.

the opposite direction, a rather cavalier disregard for creating and sustaining illusion. The splicing in of philosophical and political disquisitions does that, of course, but beyond that there is the manner of telling the story. To take my examples from one story, " Yung pu t'ing pu " (" Never checking in his stride "),[70] the author can be brisk about his business: " This is how the affair came about "; he breaks in to heartily endorse a view: " Well said! ", or to issue a warning: " But, Li Cheng-p'ing, oh Li Cheng-p'ing, don't crow too soon! "; and he shows himself frankly uninterested in technicalities: " In this story of ours there is no need to describe the process by which three catties of fine stainless steel wire were engineered and manufactured. Of course. . . ." If the personality of the narrator were established, such interventions and remarks might be forgivable, but carried by a disembodied voice they are unsettling and destructive of atmosphere. By the same token, it is rather a hard shock to recover from to be told in another story: " As to Li-ch'un's character and inclinations, what the author can introduce amounts merely to this. Let the reader now follow her footsteps and come to his own conclusions "[71] – not that the conclusions are genuinely open to doubt.

On the credit side, the intensifying of the political struggle restored the double-dyed villain to his niche (double-dyed because he invariably had a bad history), and, since real conflict was admitted, provided the possibility of creating a credible and concrete social context for the villainy. To qualify this, the villains usually depicted, bad as they are, are no more than front-men; they have enough substance for the author to get his teeth into, but as we have noted, they then tend to collapse as readily as the proverbial paper tigers. The big spider at the centre of the web stays an anonymous silhouette. Occasionally though we meet a villain who is of some stature. Such a one is the city boss in " Tsung-kung fa-ch'i ch'ien " (" Before the general offensive "),[72] who keeps out of the public eye and pulls his strings from a remote villa. He exercises considerable cunning, but it is his personal portrait that is memorable: a man past 50, with bushy eyebrows, given to tapping his amber cigarette holder and freezing his subordinates with a look from his, yes, *inscrutable* (*shen pu k'e ts'e*) eyes. The difficulty of actually visualizing a " capitalist roader " has given birth to the delightfully wicked Oriental of the western imagination. This story also illustrates the other virtue of locating its plot in the tangible setting of the city bank, the plot being to issue excess credits to workers, which will cause a run on the bank and lead to economic chaos. The plot is foiled, naturally, but the manipulation of the mechanisms of economic life does pose a more real threat than the simple contest for power between opposing factions or the pursuit of private profit. The scent of danger comes through too in a

70. *Chao-hsia* (1975), No. 10.
71. " Li Ch'un " (personal name), *Chao-hsia* (1975), No. 12.
72. By Chou Lin-fa, in *Chao-hsia* (1976), No. 3.

story about a " worker propaganda team " moving in to sort out troubles on the campus of a textiles university; the analysis and description of the viewpoints and tactics of the contending parties is intricate and sophisticated, and the situation seems only too real.[73] The plot has its crudities, but the story is remarkably engrossing and tugs strangely at the emotions, partly due to the propaganda team being presented as a little band of heroes marching into the lion's den, partly because the crime of the rotters is a crime against humanity as well as being political.

This last comment illustrates how difficult it is for the outsider to respond to these stories as their authors presumably hoped: wrong tradition (Daniel), wrong outlook (humanism). To the extent that literature, either imaginative or in the form of fictionalized biography, creates moulds which flesh-and-blood people then inform, it is quite possible that in China today the reader can quite easily recognize the originals of the characters we have described, can appreciate the motivation of the heroes, and, though having been subject to the same influences, accept their ideals as valid and sufficient – and so not need to steal energy from extraneous sources. That does not mean positively that Chinese readers must like these stories, only that they might be able to respond where the western reader cannot. The best preparation the latter can make is to recall the books he enjoyed in his nonage, before the intellect became such a burdensome thing: he will then be in some degree attuned to the conventions of this phase of communist fiction. And even though there may be few ways by which he may be drawn in, he may still feel himself pushed along, for there is no denying that these stories have a dash and confidence, in common with the dramatic productions of the time, that those of previous phases, in general terms, can hardly match.

Postcript

It appears on current evidence (the latest magazine I have at my disposal is *Jen-min wen-hsüeh*, No. 8 [1977]) that the line on literature has fallen back to the safe positions arrived at before the Cultural Revolution, as represented by the orthodox but reasonably broad-minded views expressed in the 1962 collection *T'an hsiao-shuo ch'uang-tsao*. " Good " (as opposed to " correct ") fiction from old China and abroad is once again recommended to writers for its technical excellence.[74] Mao's Yenan talks are interpreted in a more moderate fashion, being read as a whole, and in their context. For instance, the " six ' mores ' " accentuated by the " gang of four " (Mao's precept that the life reflected in works of art should be " more elevated, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, more ideal, hence more

73. " Ti-i k'e," *supra*, note 61.

74. Sun Li, " Kuan-yü tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo " (" On the short story "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1977), No. 8.

universal ") are qualified by reference to the more basic tenet that real life is " the only source of literature and art " [75]: the classic type (*tien-hsing*) must be derived from the prototype (*yüan-hsing*), being built up accretively through long observation. On the question of the hero, the pyramid structure insisted on by the " gang," known as *san t'u-ch'u* (" three prominences "), which has the principal hero sitting on top of plain heroes, who are in turn raised above " positive characters," has now been demolished, on the ground that these stages of elevation make the principal hero unbelievably perfect – always more " correct " than the Party, more " enlightened " than the masses.[76] While the formula for the hero remains very much the same, and retains mention of " commanding the wind and clouds," [77] he should still be shown maturing and receptive to advice, not appear on the scene fully endowed.

Political charges relating to using literature to attack Party veterans do not concern us here. Nor need we pronounce on the claim that in sponsoring the infallible, *arriviste* hero, the " gang of four " were fostering an image favourable to themselves. Neither of these contingencies would invalidate the concept of socialist literature as realized in the short stories we have been discussing. Admitted, their zest and dedication betoken a certain youthfulness, sometimes callowness, but that has not led them into opposition to established Party doctrine, rather into too literal interpretation of it. With regard to the socialist hero, again it is true that they are raised so far above their comrades that no solution seems possible without them. But if charismatic qualities can be ascribed to leaders of the Party, why not to " ordinary " heroes too? It could be argued that our writers were only learning from state propaganda. Furthermore, it is genuinely difficult to reconcile the various requirements long laid down for heroes. If they are to be wholly admirable and also " ideal," in the sense of embodying qualities as yet only embryonic in actuality, how can they remain " ordinary " and credible? If they are to be of a stature to tame the elements, how can they not overshadow their comrades? And how does Revolutionary Romanticism harmonize with real life? Every author must strike a balance between these opposing demands. In accord with the mood of the time (not simply at the behest of political taskmasters), the literature of the Cultural Revolution shifted towards the red end of the spectrum, where the " six ' mores ' " are located. In the present atmosphere, with the restored leadership still feeling somewhat battered and bruised, the

75. Hsieh Sheng-wen, " ' San t'u-ch'u ' shih hsiu-cheng chu-i wen-i te ch'uang-tso yüan-tse " (" ' Three prominences ' is a creative principle for revisionist literature "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1977), No. 3.

76. Chu Sui, " E-sha ke-ming wen-i te chiao-so " (" A noose to strangle revolutionary literature "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1977), No. 3.

77. *Ibid*. The full definition given here of the worker, peasant and soldier hero is: " a strapping, full-blown proletarian heroic type who encapsulates and sums up the outstanding qualities of the proletariat, has high awareness of the class struggle and the struggle over the Party line, and who ' commands the wind and clouds ' " (p. 87).

literary imagination is chastened, and pain and frustration make themselves felt in the writing [78]; when this pair comes in, elevation goes out – except in the form of hero-worship for Chou En-lai and Mao Tse-tung. Out too seem to have gone most of the specific formal conventions and special effects highlighted in this paper, though it is too early to be definite. It will be interesting to look at the typical short story again in a few years' time to test how dependent technique is on theme.

78. E.g. in Tu Pin, " Chin-t'ien " (" Today "), *Jen-min wen-hsüeh* (1977), No. 8.