

Mad People, Suiciders and Voyeurists: Literary Characters in Earlier 20th Century Chinese Literature

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1 Preliminary Considerations

Literary characters are artificial creations; they are fictitious and emerge from an artist's imagination. It is my firm belief that imagined humans, i.e. literary characters, are much more capable than any philosophical speculation or any reconstructed intellectual history or any analysis of empirical data to convey and develop what the Austrian writer Robert Musil (1881–1942) has labelled *Möglichkeitssinn* ('sense of potential').¹ In literary characters, human potential can be explored in a near-experimental way. They are, among other possible functions, always attempts at pointing out problems and exploring options to find solutions to them. As I am proposing to discuss texts written by Chinese, they may convey something about the image of humans in general in China.

If I am concentrating on so-called New Literature (*xin wenxue* 新文學), i.e. on works written between 1917 and 1937, there are two chief reasons for it: First, maybe with the exception of the assimilation of Buddhism up to the 5th century and the most incisive dynastic changes—there are few periods in the history of Chinese literature where a great range of experimentation took such a prominent position and where discussions were so controversial; and it is for sure that never before was the roughly two millenia old canon so radically questioned than during that period. Second, the issues, mostly resulting from the outcome of the Opium Wars (1839–62) and raised among and by literary characters and by and in them connected with possible solutions, are real to the present—which is certainly not the case with Buddhism. The sometimes cacophonic adaptation of European technology and techniques (also in literature) of European languages, of European ideas in general, has produced an interesting amalgamation of various concepts of diverse origin. Moreover, it is my belief that a

1 See *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, ch. 4, in *Klagenfurter Ausgabe*, 20 vols., ed. by Walter Fanta & al. (Klagenfurt: Robert-Musil-Institut der Universität Klagenfurt, 2009), 1: 20–23.

certain minimal distance in time allows for a more balanced and hence potentially more elucidated perspective on a number of phenomena that are, to say the least, of some complexity—it is an advantage not to be compelled to join a particular side. In my approach, I shall not take into consideration historical and biographical material even if they might provide evidence to which extent life experience can prove a source of literary inspiration. To give an example: I shall not talk about the murderer and suicide Gu Cheng 顧城 (1956–1993), who as a person certainly can claim some ‘madness’.²

Persons that are labelled as ‘mad’, who kill somebody else or themselves and who are voyeurists observing without anybody else noticing it, are not only known from dynastic histories and other historical records but are also testified to be literary characters from the earliest times. Why then concentrate on such a type of character? Characters who become ‘mad’ or otherwise fall out of social behavioural patterns suddenly become much more numerous in the 20th century than they had ever before. They frequently make their appearance as loners confronted with a social environment from which they are excluded—and which they are subsequently observing and commenting, voicing or displaying reflections about their conflicts. The sinologist Li Oufan 李歐梵 (b1939) has put it into the most general formula of the »The Loner and the Crowd«.³

The kind of character I propose to discuss here usually deviates from a norm which is articulated or represented socially, i.e. when literary characters are involved, in other characters. Their deviation makes them outcasts who find themselves in an extreme position that is literally at the fringes of society. In this respect, there is no doubt that such outsiders are at the focal point of the principles and rules of social and political organization, such as has been extensively discussed in China since the late 19th century—both in view of conflicts and of the (utopian) potential. It is not by mere chance that utopian science fiction marked the beginning of a new vernacular narrative literature in the early 20th century. The basically synthetic construction of ‘typical’ or ‘representative’ characters is not at play here, such as is discussed in the 1930s in particular, but the singular ‘loner’ who may serve to represent problems pushed to the extreme certainly is—in other words: the present discussion concerns characters who observe »things Chinese« from a liminal position.⁴

2 This has been done to excess already, not only in the collection *The Poetics of Death. Essays, Interviews, Recollections and Unpublished Material of Gu Cheng, 20th Century Chinese Poet*, ed. by Li Xia 李俠 (Lewiston, NY; Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

3 See Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House. A Study of Lu Xun* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 89–129.

4 Here and in the following, I shall only occasionally refer to the plethora of research literature on the topic, especially as far as Lu Xun is concerned. If I do not discuss it systematically or in detail, this just happens for the sake of space required to present a close reading of a number of works that have attracted little or in most cases no critical attention at all. However, I should like to mention, beyond Leo Ou-fan Lee, some studies to which I feel indebted: Hans Mayer, *Aussenseiter* (Frankfurt a.M.:

I shall now and in this order introduce mad, suicidal and voyeurist characters before coming to some conclusions.

2 Mad People

Before talking about ‘mad’ characters and their multiple appearances in literary works, a brief look at the history of Chinese terminology on ‘madness’ seems in place. Unlike the ‘suiciders’ and the ‘voyeurists’, it shows a great variety of bifurcations and semantic interferences. As the determinative may suggest, *kuang* 狂 denotes first of all a ‘rabid dog’ (*fenggou* 瘋狗), possibly at a time when the way of transmitting the disease was still unknown. In the *Shiji* 史記, the Records of the Historian from the first century before our era, it is used to describe an ‘irregular mental state’ which is ‘deviating from established norms’ (*fengdian* 瘋癲). In a modern compound, *zaokuang* 躁狂 denotes ‘mania’ but is also used for positively connoted obsessions, such as for ‘stubborn’ and ‘insistent’ in the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents) or ‘fascination’ in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs). Finally, during the rebellious Celestial Empire of Great Peace, the *Taiping tianguo* 太平天國 of the 19th century, *kuang* became taboo for its graphic reference to the ‘king’ or ‘ruler’ (*wang* 王).⁵

In contrast to this usage, *feng* 瘋 carries many more developed physiological connotations. It is employed to denote a bodily disease located in the head and which from the 17th century during Qing times was more specifically described as a ‘nervous disorder’. Similarly to the denotation of ‘crazy’ or ‘wild’ and ‘brutal’ for *kuang*, *feng* is also used for any ‘behaviours lacking of discipline’ in humans. However, *feng* also appears with the meaning of ‘trance’ or ‘elation’. In turn, *chi* 痴 is rooted in physiological disorders as well; yet in Han times it also acquires the additional meaning of ‘lack of comprehension’ and is used for ‘affected consciousness’ in the *Han shu* 漢書. In the phrase *chi er ai nü* 癡兒呆女 (‘naïve children and dumb women’), it is unmistakably connected with a socially defined concept of education, i.e. the absence of rational knowledge.

If I am going into such detail here, this is because it is essential which motivation for their actions is attributed to outsiders as literary characters. Is there any pathological

Suhrkamp, 1975); Wang Hui 汪暉, *Fankang juewang: Lu Xun de jingshen jiegou yu »Nabang«, »Panghuang« yanjiu* 反抗絕望：魯迅的精神結構與《吶喊》、《彷徨》研究 [Resisting Despair: A Study on Lu Xun's Mental Structure and His Collections »Call to Arms« and »Hesitation«] (Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991), as *Fankang juewang: Lu Xun ji qi wenxue shijie* 魯迅及其文學世界 [... Lu Xun and His Literary World] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000; exp. ed. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008); Wu Jun 吳俊, *Lu Xun gexing xinli yanjiu* 魯迅個性心理研究 [A Study of the Individual Psychology of Lu Xun] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992); and Angelika Messner, *Medizinische Diskurse zu Irresein in China (1600–1930)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000).

5 *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, 5: 13a–b.

behaviour that can be attributed to a physiological disorder and which therefore has a medical etiology, or is the outsider in the possession of some extraordinary abilities that may otherwise justify his behaviour?

This is certainly the place to talk about probably the most famous text with an outsider as protagonist, the *Diary of a Madman* by Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936).⁶ Official and semi-official literary historians in the People's Republic of China, as well as—partly in their wake—non-Chinese scholars consider it the founding text of »modern literature« in China. This is the case to the detriment of the later historian of the European Renaissance, Chen Hengzhe 陳衡哲 (1893–1976), who in a poem from 1919 entitled »'People Say I'm Crazy'« (»'Renjia shuo wo fa le chi'« "人家說我發了癡") takes up Lu Xun's famous formula of *chi ren* 吃人 for 'cannibalism' and substitutes it with the homophone *chiren* 癡人 ('crazy person' or 'madman'), thus reverting it in an ironical paraphrase and giving it a semantically opposed meaning.⁷ The overwhelming majority of critics agree on the origin of the madman's disease in Lu Xun's story, which is about a society characterized as »cannibalistic« and advocating the so-called 'traditional ethical code of social behaviour', *lijiao* 禮教. A contemporary critic has even in a crude amalgamation of post-colonial studies approached this with the ideology of 'searching for one's own roots' (*xungen* 尋根), managing to identify the madman's 'madness' as a Western definition of genuinely Chinese wisdom.⁸

Yet I would like to direct attention to other details in the *Diary of a Madman*. It is not so much an allegory of 'traditional society' as an allegory of perspective, of apprehension and of the subsequent interpretation. The 'eye' as the organ of perception and the look of others plays a crucial role in the development of the diarist's fixed ideas. Above all, he finally suggests that he is about to be exposed to a look he himself is not

6 Lu Xun, »Kuangren riji« 狂人日記, *Xin qingnian* 新青年 4,5 (May 15, 1918), 414–424; in *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 [Complete Works], 18 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 1: 444–456; hereafter abbreviated as »C«. In the following, I base my translation on »A Madman's Diary« in Lu Xun, *Selected Works*, 4 vols., tr. by Yang Xianyi 楊憲益 and Gladys Yang [Dai Naidie 戴乃迭] (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press [1956]; 2nd ed. 1980), 1: 39–52; hereafter abbreviated as »E«. Cf. also Julia Lovell's recent translation in *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun* (London: Penguin Books, 2009) which, however, due to its technique is less adapted to demonstrate cross-references in wording inside the text.

7 Cf. Michel Hockx, »Mad Women and Mad Men: Intraliterary Contact in Early Republican Literature«, in *Autumn Floods. Essays in Honour of Marián Gálik*, ed. by Raoul David Findeisen and Robert H. Gassmann (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), 307–322; with a translation given on pp. 312–313. For a recent and more balanced appraisal of Chen Hengzhe as a creative writer, see Shi Jianguo 史建國, *Chen Hengzhe zhuan—»zuoming« renshe de gezhe* 陳衡哲傳——“造命”人生的歌者 [A Biography of Chen Hengzhe—Praise of »Creating One's Own Fate«] (Shanghai: Yuandong chubanshe, 2010), esp. 50–59.

8 Lan Aiguo 藍愛國, »Cong xiandai kuangren dao houxiandai baishi« 從現代狂人到後現代白癡 [From the Modern Madman to the Postmodern Idiot], *Wenyi zhengming* 文藝爭鳴 (Changchun) 2/1996, 34a.

capable of noticing, in other words: to a voyeuristic look. In the beginning, people are all »staring at« him (sections 1–3; E 42 *passim*). Finally, when examined by Mr He, he notices the »the murderous gleam in his eyes [*manyang xiongguang* 滿眼凶光, 'evil eye'; C 447], and fearing that I would see it he lowered his head, stealing side-glances at me from behind the glasses« (section 4, E 43). In section 7, »The old man's eyes were cast down« (E 46), but the diarist cannot be deceived. The visitor responds by »staring at me« (section 8, E 47). When the diarist is consulting old books, his visual perception is transformed into written characters, namely »Humanity, Righteousness, Morality and Virtue« (section 3, *ren yi dao de* 仁義道德, C 447) and finally into *chi ren*. The graphematic connection between the title's *kuang* 狂, the draught in Wolf Cub Village (*Langzijicun* 狼子村) and then the 'monkeys' (*houzi* 猴子) before perfection in an evolutionary sequence modelled after Nietzsche (section 10) deserve also some attention as they share the same determinative (from *quan* 犬 'dog') used for 'wild animals'. The diarist's diagnosis of »cannibalism« (although it seems devaluated by the fictitious editor's opening statement that the diarist recovered) is elaborated with increasingly sophisticated visual observation and reflection and is accompanied by abandoning communication with the social environment altogether. In the end, he is just addressing the imaginary readership of his diary when putting down his famous call to »save the children...« (section 13); it is intended for the whole collection of the following generation, but pronounced when the diarist is in ultimate social isolation.

The character created four years later by Bing Xin 冰心 (1900–1999) in her Notes of a Lunatic (1922)⁹ is fairly different. This text is an obvious counterfeit of Lu Xun, as it employs several elements from his Diary of a Madman but comes to a diverse conclusion: As indicated by the title, we also have a record of writings by a person of indeterminate gender—possibly a woman—who is living in a closed world of images heavily loaded with symbolism. In this respect, the fictitious author of the Notes may not be labelled an outsider, insofar as there is no social environment that would grant the respective profile. Loosely connected episodes are dominated by the two extra-human antagonist characters of the White Other (»Baideta« 白的他) and the Black Other (»Heideta« 黑的他), which are depicted in a distinctively Manichean way. A Mother figure, well known from all writings by Bing Xin and in a slightly surrealist elaboration called Silk Clue (*yi tuan luansi* 一團亂絲), plays a key role and is hyperbolized as the origin of the World to the extent that it even stands for God. »In fact, God is also a silk clue« (405). There are also the Know-Alls or Smarts-Alecs (*zongmingren* 總名人), easily identifiable as May Fourth *literati*, as they »carry around the newest books while exchanging news about the Black Other and writing lyrical and epical poetry« (407). The supposedly female writer indicates that her motivation for

9 Bing Xin, »Fengren biji« 瘋人筆記, in *Bing Xin quanji* 冰心全集 [Complete Works], 8 vols., ed. by Zhuo Ru 桌如 (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1994), 1: 405–411.

putting down her Notes had been that the Know-Alls had persuaded her to do so,¹⁰ although they would never really understand. »This is why I am starting to describe the most secret and at the same time most obvious events« (405).

According to the world's division into essentialist cultural and intellectual spheres, as popularized by Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) at the time, the (deep) Strait of Gibraltar stands for the 'West', while the (high) Fuji-san 富士 in Japan represents the 'East' and the Mother (and as in the above analogy also God, hence the ultimate origin) is characterized as »Indian«. In an image that much reminds one of St John's Revelation, the White Order, on a »snow-cart« drawn by ten white horses, rushes by the writer's window—and finally kills the Black Other. The White Other is a prince, born by a woman from India who lives in the Northern Ice Sea, and who finally, in order to end the Black Other's existence, »descended down to earth« as if he was God's own son. He stops right at the entrance door of the writer's home who, however, still feels menaced by the crows sipping her blood. Here the Notes of a Lunatic abruptly end and its author is transformed into a statue of stone after she had previously identified herself as a tree. As in Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman*, Bing Xin also does not know of any salvation for the protagonist although there are unmistakably positive and negative characters, with the White Other remaining victorious.

Much closer to the everyday real world is a critical essay by Xu Dishan 許地山 (1893–1941), the *Mad Words in a Local Opera*, written in the same year 1922 as Bing Xin's *Notes of a Lunatic*.¹¹ Driven by his »nostalgia for home« (*xiangxiang* 想鄉), labelled as a disease by the narrator, he returns to his home village. The countryside appears pure and innocent, in contrast to the city 'indulging in loud and empty talk' (*gaotan dalun* 高談大論). When walking about together with friends and a farmer, suddenly somebody shows up saying: »I am a human, too.« (295). This man, first called an 'invalid' (*bingren* 病人) by the farmer, complains about how he is treated by the villagers, as they exclude and despise him and therefore he is aware of his status as an outcast. When asked about his profession, the group only receives contradictory responses. Finally, the farmer raises the following questions towards the visitors: »How comes a really good man [*haobao de ren* 好好的人] becoming insane [*fengren* 瘋人]? Are they becoming lunatics in the cities' madhouses?« (296) This question that could be pronounced by contemporary »anti-psychiatrists« leads to a conclusion by one of the narrator's fellows: »Are we not all insane? Why are we not living in a madhouse?« (296).

10 This in turn is a counterfeit of Lu Xun's Preface to his collection *Nahan* 吶喊 [Call to Arms], published the very same year, where the imaginary »old friend Jin Xinyi« persuades the author »to write something [...]. So I finally agreed to write, and the result was my first story "Diary of a Madman"«. (Lu Xun, *Selected Works*, 1: 37 and 38).

11 Xu Dishan, »Xiangqu de kuangyan« 鄉曲的狂言 [1922], in *Xu Dishan*, ed. by Song Weijie 宋偉杰 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1997), 295–296.

In the end, the behaviour of the man who suddenly appeared and who is »a human, too« is shown to be spontaneous and direct. That he is 'insane' appears as a positive quality. Conversely, the narrator's fellow in his declaration just quoted above suggests that the permanent control of speech and action much more deserves to be considered 'insane' and, moreover, connects it to the 'empty talk' in the big cities. Hence, the categories of 'mad' and 'insane' represent a judgement merely based upon differing value systems in which spontaneity and immediacy are preferable; in other words: they are constructed. In this respect, Xu Dishan reaches a higher level of reflection than Lu Xun and Bing Xin, though it is reached by a Romanticist stereotype.

All three texts about mad people share the key role of the written word, sometimes pushed to magical dimensions. In the case of Lu Xun's diarist, the most important and also voluminous witness to the gradually emerging judgement about his social environment are the historical records, consulted when his perception is already modified by suspicion of being surrounded by cannibals. In Bing Xin, the texts written by the White Other do not only acquire the status of a revelation that cannot be surpassed, but they are also unrivalled in the appearance of their script:

Nobody in the world is capable of writing such characters full of vigour; and even if so, the person would be transformed into the White Other. Wherever his characters appear, I can immediately recognize them. [...]—his characters are written down in books, and with their curves and indentations they put the pages together. Even with my eyes closed, I am able to identify them as the White Other's handwriting.¹²

In Xu Dishan's text, the 'insane' man carries around with him an old account book both as a talisman and as a witness to his previous activity as a businessman. It turns out, however, that it originated in the Tongzhi 同治 era (1862–74) and hence is outdated. Both Lu Xun's and Bing Xin's mad people are represented as authors themselves. Therefore, their texts are conceived as testifying to their 'madness', with no 'sane' narrator elaborating their state of mind—with the exception, to a certain extent, of Lu Xun's fictitious editor.

As for the cause and origin of these characters' 'madness', in Lu Xun's text *lijiao* (i.e. the 'traditional' ethical code) is unmistakably held responsible. The fact that Lu Xun's madman identifies *lijiao* as a mere camouflage for cannibalism makes his environment declare him 'mad'—which means his 'madness' is a construction. Unlike in Xu Dishan, however, this construction is not reversible. Lu Xun's madman reaches his assessment on the basis of an increased (visual) perception which makes him stand out. In Bing Xin, we do not find any comparable process, yet the fictional female writer of the Notes of a Lunatic is also an outsider, thanks to her insight articulated in a number of prophetic gestures.

12 Bing Xin, »Fengren biji«, 410.

In Lu Xun, the issue of ‘madness’ seems to find a voluntarist solution originating in the mind and becoming manifest in action. The diarist develops the idea that humans should just decide to abandon their backward evolutionary stage as insects or monkeys in order to become »real men« (section 10)—yet this solution is never put into practice because the diarist recovers from his ‘madness’. Although in Bing Xin a possible solution—with strong Christian colours emphasized by »repentance« and »confession«—is proposed, it visibly comes from outside the human world. This finally fails, obstructed by the coalition of evil powers represented by the Black Other and the Know-Alls who may well be translated as ‘intellectuals’. The authoress of her *Notes of a Lunatic* remains in an inalterable state and is unable to intervene, despite her penetration into the nature of the conflict. To conclude with Xu Dishan, space for action as to the issue of ‘madness’ is developed discursively, not least thanks to the narrative technique, i.e. the outsider is not the narrator himself. To apprehend ‘madness’ as respectively constructed requires a discourse organized by a narrative authority.

3 *Suicides*

No doubt the most famous suicider in Chinese tradition is the legendary poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca 300 BCE). Up to the 20th century, he was repeatedly invoked for identification both by literary characters and by their authors; this was done possibly in the most elaborated way by Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) in his 1942 historical play carrying the poet’s name. In this perspective, Qu Yuan is an outsider only temporarily. His fame is based on the fact that his suicide is motivated by loyalty, and therefore acts according to a norm that was questioned by the poet’s contemporaries during his lifetime and is only reinstated by his suicide—as happens in Qu Yuan’s play as well.

It is therefore nothing but consistent if the writer Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896–1945) in an essay on Death, Suicide, Love-Death and the Like (1932)¹³ does not refer to Qu Yuan at all. He opens with some philosophical reflections on mortality and the fear of death and concludes that only the superiority of Mind avoids a physically mediated pessimist view of existence which would result in collective suicide. What he is most interested in, however, is the individual experience of a shared love-death. Yu Dafu mentions the Romanticist German novelist and playwright Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811) and his mistress Henriette Vogel (1780–1811) as examples—strictly speaking, a murder with subsequent suicide, by the way the same as in the case of the poet Gu Cheng 顧城 (1956–1993) and his wife Xie Ye 謝曄 (1958–1993); Yu Dafu posits this »serene suicide« in one row with the *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (ca 1597), where the protagonist Ximen Qing 西門慶 dances himself to death. Suicides from the history of

13 Yu Dafu, »Shuo si yi ji zisha qingsi zhi lei« 說死以及自殺情死之類 [Dec 22nd, 1932], in *Yu Dafu wenji* 郁達夫文集 [Works], 12 vols., ed. by Wang Zili 王自立 and Chen Zishan 陳子善 (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1983; 2nd ed. 1991), 8: 64–67.

literature shall not be the focus here, but rather literary characters; this sample is just cited in order to highlight the pervasive Chinese tradition of blurring writers' biographies and their fiction.

In *The Diary of a Suicider* (1928) by Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–1986), such a suicidal literary character is the protagonist.¹⁴ The title is misleading insofar as the text does not just give the diary proper but also presents and comments extensively on the diary passages, while narrative passages introduce the woman diarist. The difference between diarist and narrator, however, sometimes is not strictly followed, such as in an instance when the diarist Isa (伊薩) is writing about herself in the third person. Isa's state of mind is characterized as confused: The diary entries happen to end abruptly, are undated or carry vague date indications.¹⁵ Isa herself writes: »And I just want to write on and on, until the day of my death. To tell myself [i.e. to write them down] a number of crazinesses [fengfengdiandian 瘋瘋癲癲] and to laugh about it is still better than to lay stretched out on the bed and just imagine them.« (182). There is no indication whatsoever about the suicider's motivation to kill herself. Rather, we are just referred to some vague existential considerations tainted by pessimism:

I have decided now that one day I shall by my own accord [ziji si qu 自己死去]. Death, after all, death is something quite natural. I am well aware that nobody will be surprised about that. Have I not lived long enough so far? And though I have not experienced the slightest portion of joy, at no time yet. (183)

Suicide, or rather death, is imagined as a purely voluntarist act to the extent that it is concluded without any physical intervention whatsoever: »Now it has become true. I am not capable any longer of postponing the moment of my death.« (189) It is well conceivable that by the very title of the story, the narrator wishes to convey that the protagonist's death is in fact a suicide. If so, it could be attributed to Isa's state of mind for which the diary provides a witness among others. It becomes evident that the diarist has nobody to talk to, even though in her last diary entry she claims that good friends are taking care of her—hence, her death is depicted as a sort of 'portion-wise suicide'.

It is certainly also due to the genre if in Hu Yepin's 胡也頻 (1903–1931) short play *The Madwoman* (1927), murder is followed by suicide—quite unlike the situation in Ding Ling's story—and appears fully externalized and does not leave any questions open as to

14 Collected as the title story in *Zisha riji* 自殺日記 (1929); in *Ding Ling wenji* 丁玲文集, 12 vols., ed. by Zhang Jiong 張炯 & al. (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2001), 3: 181–190.

15 Cf. the fact that the fictitious editor of Lu Xun's *Diary of Madman* comments: »The writing was most confused and incoherent, [...]; moreover he had omitted to give any dates« (quoted from Lu Xun, *Selected Works*, 1: 39). See also Raoul David Findeisen, »Kairos or the Due Time: On Date and Dates in Modern Chinese Literature«, in Findeisen & al., *Autumn Floods*, 240–241.

their motivation.¹⁶ The play deals with the triangular relationship between the two sisters Lina 梨娜 and Manli 曼麗, and the musician Danlai 丹萊.¹⁷

In Act 1, Manli stands on a lakeshore and holds a long monologue addressed to the moon, with a verbose complaint that Danlai is not responding to her love but instead loving her sister Lina. She experiences her unrequited love as her unescapable fate and wishes to possess it: »If it is not possible to possess him, then at least I also want him not to... Yes, I shall kill him, and die together with him!« (969). It is in this scene that her sister Lina appears. Manli seems to talk in a state of dreaming or of trance, as she does not respond before awakening. Lina diagnoses her with »madness to death«. In Act 2 Manli suddenly finds herself in a hospital, not so much for an injury to her head caused by her falling into the lake as for the 'heart disease' (*xinzhuangbing* 心裝病) identified on this occasion—which is evidently metaphorical, given that Manli concedes that there is no cure for it and this is why she leaves the hospital together with Lina. In Act 3, Lina and the musician Danlai meet in a forest. She declares to live in ultimate symbiosis with her sister: »If she is going to die, I cannot live on any longer« (981). Again, she is offering her »sacrifice«, namely leaving the musician in favour of her sister Manli, which is refused. Suddenly Manli shows up, trying hard to receive a kiss from the musician. While he is defending himself and his violin falls to the ground, she covers the instrument with »mad kisses«. The apotheosis sets in when she learns that Danlai considers Lina superior to her in every respect. Manli stabs the musician to death before killing herself with the same dagger. Her last words are: »I want to know it [...], why his heart is so cold and hard.« (986–987).

Well in accordance with the classical principles of tragedy, all characters involved experience love as fateful, both while being loved and while being incapable to requite it. The desire of Manli to attain it at all cost leads her into a state of elation which is clearly distinct from her full consciousness. Beyond the burst of violence, marked as an act out of reach for free will, there is just her sister Lina, disposed in a free decision to sacrifice Danlai in favour of Manli—an aspect elaborated as solidarity between women.

16 »Kuangren« 狂人 [first published in instalments in *Chenbao fukan* 晨報副刊 nos 2008, 2009, 2011–2015 (July 22nd–29, 1927)]; with other plays in *Gui yu renxin* 鬼與人心 [Ghosts and the Human Heart; 1928; 3rd ed. 1931]; in *Hu Yepin xuanji* 胡也頻選集 [Selected Works], 2 vols. (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1981), 2: 965–987.

17 In the context of the fashion of Western names—also in the works of Hu Yepin's then-wife Ding Ling—it is probably not too farfetched to read the three protagonists' names simply as »Lina«, »Mary«, and »Daniel«, respectively.

It is just a preliminary attempt at circumscribing what happens to the protagonist of Yu Dafu's story *Sinking* (1921)¹⁸ if I call it an »open suicide«. After having visited a brothel, the nameless protagonist, a Chinese student in Japan, goes to the seashore driven by remorse and self-pity. »Suddenly, he had an inexplicable urge to drown himself in the sea.« In a monologue, he discloses the motivation by saying: »I may really end my life here, since I'll probably never get the kind of love I want. And what would life be without love? Isn't it dead as ashes? Ah, this dreary life, how dull and dry!« (C 52, E 68). Nowhere is it pronounced whether he actually commits suicide. The ending is therefore »open«, and it also remains open whether the protagonist's word at the end of the story are really his last: »O China, my China [*zuguó* 祖國], you are the cause of my death!... I wish you could become rich and strong!« (C 53, E 69).

Exactly like Ding Ling's diarist, Yu Dafu's protagonist had increasingly lived in an inner world dominated by obsessive ideas, had reduced his social contacts and finally cut them. In one monologue, he labels himself as 'mentally deranged' (*shenjingbing* 神經病, C 35) and is, as well as the narrator's voice, quite generous with medical terms in Latin, such as *hypochondria*, *megomania*, etc.¹⁹ At no point in the narration does the protagonist consider suicide as a possible escape from his indeed numerous problems; the ending appears to be born from the moment. His profile is, all in all, much more psychologically elaborated than Ding Ling's diarist. It should be finally noted that the story was written more than a decade earlier than Yu Dafu's abovementioned apology of suicide.

All actual, imagined or supposed suiciders in the texts discussed suffer from a deranged perception that usually emerges after the decline of social communication and of which they are partly aware themselves. This is at least true for the woman «madly» in love in Hu Yepin's play. Accordingly, the spheres of unaffected and deranged state of mind are sharply distinct in her portrayal. By murder and suicide, she is trying to escape a love experienced as fatal, while the two other protagonists display a kind of summarizing assessment of their whole existence in which individual space for action is gradually decreasing. Their retiring from the world happens only in part by their free will.

18 »Chenlun« 沉淪, first published as the title story in *Chenlun* (1921); in *Yu Dafu wenji*, 1: 16–53; as »Sinking«, tr. 1981 by Joseph S. M. Lau [Liu Shaoming 劉紹銘] and C. T. Hsia [Xia Zhiqing 夏志清], in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 44–69.

19 The editors of *Yu Dafu wenji* render these terms as *kuadawangxiangkuang* 誇大妄想狂 and *yonyuzheng* 憂鬱症, respectively (1: 21).

4 *Voyeurists*

For the purpose of the present study, I define »voyeurism« in a literal translation from the Chinese *toukan* 偷看 as the ‘stolen glance’: to find pleasure in observing somebody who believes they are unobserved, or to see something intended to be hidden. In most cases, this pleasure is erotically grounded, or the voyeuristic look is used as an erotic stimulus. To believe in remaining unobserved presupposes a demarcation line as well as the trust it will not be crossed. The (modern) separation of the private and public sphere is closely connected to how reliable this line actually is. Generally speaking, trust in others’ respect of the demarcation is nourished by convention and social experience—nothing else than what was called *nómos* in ancient Greece. Hence, the line of division may well be regulated in legal terms, such as in the »privacy of letters« or the »inviolability of the home«. In many cases, the line is also marked by constructions such as walls. The woodcuts from the Ming dynasty where the refused lover climbs a wall to observe his object of desire in her boudoir are commonly known. The voyeurist needs some distance, insofar as he is necessarily an »outsider« in order to pursue his activity.²⁰

It is certain that the most frequently discussed voyeurist among 20th century literary characters from China is, again, the protagonist from *Sinking* by Yu Dafu. Sitting on the toilet, he observes how the daughter of the boarding house is taking a bath:

At first he thought he would be content with just a glance. But what he saw in the next room kept him completely nailed down.

Those snow-white breasts! Those voluptuous thighs! And that curvaceous figure!

Holding his breath, he took another close look at the girl and a muscle in his face began to twitch. Finally he became so overwrought that his forehead hit the windowpane. The naked Eve then asked through the steam, »Who is it?« Without making a sound, he hurriedly left the toilet and rushed upstairs. (C 37, E 57–58)

Even when arriving at the brothel, he does not dare to look directly at the woman assigned to him: »And so, like a mute, all he did was look furtively at her delicate, white hands resting upon her knees and that portion of a pink petticoat not covered by her kimono« (C 48, E 64–65). Voyeurism, according to the working definition proposed above, does not need to be visual but may also be directed to sounds: The protagonist happens to listen to two lovers who are enjoying each other in some meadow. Yu Dafu’s protagonist can be said to have a voyeurist disposition that works both ways. Not only does he ‘steal glances’, but even more frequently he assumes being observed

20 In some of her studies, Rey Chow has devoted extensive attention to ‘voyeurism’, namely in *Primitive Passions. Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Yet as her interest obviously lies in ‘doing theory’, and her examples from literature are at times manipulated and at others linked to historically untenable assumptions, her considerations do not appear to be a solid point of departure.

without knowing up to »wherever he went, he just couldn't shake off that uncomfortable suspicion that their malevolent gazes were still fixed on him« (C 21, E 47). The counterpart to his voyeurism—or what I dubbed a voyeurist disposition—is becoming, henceforth, the basis of his mania of persecution.

The voyeurist is in a permanent state of alarm, in the fear of being discovered. This unrest of the protagonist who is characterized as a *litteratus* also becomes manifest in his reading habits. When the prostitute whom he did not dare to watch calls him a »poet« and finally brings him paper and writing brush, he relaxes and writes down a poem abundant with potential figures of identification—without any exception poets, young geniuses who rebelled and were either exiled or beheaded.

By far the most prolific in using the voyeurist glance in his fiction is the almost unknown writer Zhang Yiping 章衣萍 (1902–1946).²¹ However, he gained some fame with his compulsory pleasure in provocation by frivolities. His Letters to Luzi (or to »Tamako«, if it happened to be a 'Nipponicized' name)²² are compiled from 30 items written almost daily by the fictional publishing house editor and occasionally in his spare time by the writer Yimin 逸民 to his former girlfriend after he had met her again by accident on a street in Shanghai. In the course of his correspondence, he does not only relate to her his colourful erotic life but also comments extensively about atrocities committed by the Japanese occupation army in Manchuria as well as chatting and offering rumours from the Shanghai literary scene.

Among other reports, he tells his addressee Luzi about the abandoned project of a novel that was intended to deal with the love story of an artist couple. He sketches the plot as follows: When a skinny painter had married a roly-poly woman musician, the

21 The first monograph ever published on the writer is Andrea Stock, *Der chinesische Schriftsteller Zhang Yiping: Resignation, Rückzug oder Sendungsbewusstsein?* (München: Herbert Utz, 2004), yet the author does not take any particular interest in his narrative prose writings, although they brought him at the time remarkable sales of more than 25,000 copies. The author is rather interested in his early poems, his connections to May Fourth luminaries (namely his fellow-countryman Hu Shi 胡適, 1891–1962) and his late activities as an author of children's literature.

22 »Gei Luzi de xin« 給璐子的信, in *Qingshu er shu* 情書二束 [Second Bundle of Love-Letters;], ed. by Liu Fuchun 劉福春 (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1996), 125–162. It should not go unmentioned that this very collection of stories includes a »Chilian riji« 癡戀日記 [Diary of a Mad Love]—which would have deserved to be discussed at length, but which has been abandoned for reasons of space—actually written by his wife Wu Shutian 吳曙天 (1903–1942), also very active in literary endeavours even though the piece is not visibly acknowledged as her contribution. See also my »Un couple de "littérateurs": Wu Shutian et Zhang Yiping« [A Literary Couple], in *Ouvrages en langue chinoise de l'Institut franco-chinois de Lyon 1921–1946 / Faguo Li'ang shili tushuguan guancang Li'ang Zhong-Fa daxue 1921 nian zhi 1946 nian Zhongwen shumu* 法國里昂市立圖書館館藏里昂中法大學1921年至1946年中文書目 [Chinese Language Holdings of the Lyons Sino-French University Held in Lyons Municipal Library], ed. by Jean-Louis Bouilly (Lyon: Bibliothèque municipale, 1995), xliii–xl.

two were discussed as Shanghai's dream-couple by the tabloid press. Suddenly, she starts to lose weight and becomes all the more skinnier. One night, she is unable to sleep and steps to the window. In the house opposite she saw a man standing in the brightly lit bathroom:

»Those healthy vigorous limbs, those well-proportioned and swelling muscles on his upper arm, this big *xx*^[23]! She almost fainted and was unable to sleep the whole night long.«²⁴ It happens that this neighbour is a riksha kuli. Seeking a pretext, the musician leaves her husband, has her little dog killed by a rushing car and henceforth lives happily in the mountains with her riksha kuli. The connotations are unambiguously sexual. It is not very surprising that contemporary writers at the time who had elected the riksha driver as their prototype of suppression and sufferance²⁵ were not amused—to see the ideal victim transformed into an object of sexual desire was too much for them, even more so as it was articulated by a woman.

In Letters to Luzi, another mode of voyeurism, however, takes up much more space. To give an example, the letters' author narrates that his affair with a certain *Flora*—working with him at the same desk in the publishing house—is setting in at the moment when she notices that he is writing *cí* 詞 poems to a woman, while he was noticing that she was engaged in writing love letters: a perfectly mutual 'literary' voyeurism. It is a 'stolen glance' referring to texts and yet has erotic consequences. The texts even seem to become the tools of seduction and appear to take the place of the seductive body. In another passage, Yimin as a letter writer even seems to compel the voyeurist glance; he becomes an exhibitionist by copying—with a seductive intention—the farewell letter to his lover *Flora* into a letter addressed to Luzi.

It is almost impossible to consider the epistolarist as a genuine outsider. He is, no doubt, beyond conventions by his sexual behaviour. In fact, he is just putting into practice what others before him had postulated in nihilist phantasies and as a consequence considers promiscuity as »just a problem of social organization and medical hygiene«.²⁶

In a story by Zhou Quanping 周全平 (1902–1983)—a writer usually grouped with the Creation Society (*Chuangzao she* 創造社)—we witness how the privacy of letters is breached in an almost ceremonial act.²⁷ There is again a publishing house's employee

23 Asterisks * enclose non-Chinese writing, here and in the following.

24 Zhang Yiping, »Gei Luzi de xin«, letter no 10, in *Qingshu er shu*, 139–140.

25 The tradition does not start with Hu Shi's »Renli chefu« 人力車夫 [Riksha Kuli; 1918] and does not end with Lao She's 老舍 (1899–1966) famed novel *Luotuo Xiangzi* 駱駝祥子 [1936/39], some time almost excessively popular in its English version as *Rikshaw Boy* (1940).

26 Letter no 5, in *Qingshu er shu*, 130.

27 »Shengdan zhi ye« 聖誕之夜, in *Chuangzao she congshu* 創造社叢書 [A Collection of Writings by the Creation Society], 8 vols., ed. by Huang Houxing 黃侯興 & al. (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1991), 4: 40–55.

who on Christmas Eve (whence the title) can no longer stand staying alone in his single room and thus walks about the deserted streets to reach his office in the publishing house. Having arrived there, he is casually searching through papers and letters he finds there until he discovers a letter addressed to one of his colleagues. The letter is from his colleague's wife and is fully integrated into the story. She writes from Berlin, and tells her husband about the difficulties to pay the hospital charges after just having escaped death.

Voyeurism, in all instances discussed so far, deals with transgressions, no matter whether the voyeurist glance is directed at a body or at a text—transgressing the invisible border by which, in varying radiuses, privately and individually shaped spheres are surrounded. By transgressing the border (or the line of division), the voyeurist is making himself an outsider simply because he does not accept the norm of drawing the border.

5 Some Conclusions

The issues raised here by a number of Chinese writers may be reduced to the question: How is it possible to act as a human in society?

The literary characters presented here have almost exclusively been *literati*, i.e. persons somehow involved in creative writing. Lu Xun's madman, in the search of evidence of cannibalism, devotes himself to source studies that finally take up the longest section in *A Madman's Diary*. Bing Xin's lunatic, in turn, seems to stay in close connection to the Know-Alls, who are evidently despised by the narrator but who are also writing poems during night time. Yu Dafu's protagonist is translating, reading and writing poetry. The letter writer in Zhang Yiping's story repeatedly calls himself a *wenren* 文人, while the illegitimate reader of the love letter in Christmas Eve by Zhou Quanping is working in a publishing house. Even Ding Ling's suicider seems to be professionally involved with literature: she offers her tenant the chance to sell some of her diary's pages in order to pay her rent. Also the protagonists in Hu Yepin's triangular love drama appear to convey the actual state of their feelings in elaborate love letters. It is only in Xu Dishan that the 'mad' or deviant person clearly belongs to another social group—this is at least his claim: he is a business person. Is this possibly due to the fact that Xu Dishan was most eager to penetrate 'madness' as a socially induced construction?

Even mad writers produce a literary heritage, no matter whether they are real or fictitious. It is due to this fact that most of the texts discussed here have a distinctive narrative frame: Whoever is writing in an elated or 'mad' state of mind is in need of an editor who frequently happens to become (or to take up) the narrative voice. In any instance, the narrator represents given norms, no matter whether they are real, fictitious or virtual and which almost throughout the text serve as markers to indicate the degree of deviation from a given norm.

To put it in another way: Somebody is quoted, i.e. the authority articulating norms. A remarkable exception from this pattern is Bing Xin. Might this be due to the fact her Lunatic (the assumed author of the »Notes«) is searching for a metaphysical solution beyond the human world (*renjianshi* 人間世) and in any case not connected to her (the protagonist's) real world and therefore not in need of any contrastive model?

The outsiders sketched above are articulating modes of dissent. They are, however, well capable of evading this by practising pre-existing patterns of behaviour, as practiced by generations of hermits, exiles, suiciders and beheaded people before them. Even Lu Xun's madman follows this model of behaviour, including during his recovery. It is only Xu Dishan who makes the step to proceed and demonstrate that the pattern is a paradox, leading *ad absurdum*. The great number of examples that may not be connected to such extreme positions nonetheless testify to varying forms of restricted space of action. Yet all literary characters presented here are ascribed some mode of deviant behaviour.

To the very same extent as responses to social sanction or oppression may be experienced—and this always implies the opportunity to imagine an alternative to what is given—the range of aesthetic modes of expression is also becoming broader. We encounter allegoric, symbolist, realist and naturalist techniques along with first-person narrators, anonymous protagonists, etc. It is highly significant that many of the text genre conventions, no matter whether traditional and Chinese or attributable to some foreign literary 'influence', are systematically blurred to the extent that it is hard to determine whether we are now reading letters, diaries, stories, essayist prose (*samen* 散文) or a piece of writing that at the same time belongs to all genres mentioned at the same time.

It is evident that literature in China at that time started to become 'specialized' and therefore found itself under pressure to master more—intellectually and aesthetically—than ever before. Is it surprising that several authors at times did not manage to carry the burden and in fact collapsed? While it was quite natural for Lu Xun (and all of his generation) to be familiar with the pharmacopœia *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (16th c.), it is unlikely that a present day best-selling author, such as Wang Shuo 王朔 (b1958) or Zhou Weihui 周偉慧 (b1973) would have ever seen or read this work. Conversely, psychiatrists and sociologists are henceforth just discussing among themselves.

This is why I would vividly advocate not just an exchange but a gradual merging of European and Chinese discourses, as this was quite naturally practised by most of the authors who wrote about 'outsiders' earlier during the last century. They are still unchallenged models in their openness of mind—not least in their aesthetic procedures—and deserve attention for the simple fact that somebody has to be there to write about it, in case the world would fall apart before they are superseded.

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