

A Modernist's Realist Fiction — On Three Realist Novellas by Ye Zhaoyan

by

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Abstract

Among contemporary Chinese modernist writers, Ye Zhaoyan is highly respected for the sincere and honest style that he has displayed in his modernist experimental fiction. His modernist experiments have been the focus of many previous studies. Ye has also been a realist from the very beginning of his literary career. His realist fiction, however, is still largely ignored by critics. Since there has been a surprising literary trend in recent years in which many modernist writers such as Yu Hua, Su Tong, Ge Fei, Hong Feng and Bei Chun have switched to write realist fiction, it is of interest and significance to study Ye's realist practice which proceeds the current trend.

In this thesis, the author will analyze the characteristics of Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction using as examples three of his novellas, "Hanging Green Apples," "Love Song" and "Faded Shadows." By comparing the characteristics of the three novellas with those of realist fiction in the immediate post-Mao era, traditional fiction and modernist fiction, the author suggests that Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction reflect his attempt to bridge the gap between realism and modernism, and to weave popular fiction elements into serious literature. Ye's writings represent the efforts of the Chinese modernists to adjust to the current change in the cultural trend by lessening rather than intensifying the contradiction between the old and the new, and between the Chinese tradition and the impact of Western culture.

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The author dedicates the thesis to her grandmother, Qiu Caizhang, who died on May 18, 1996, at the age of 93.

Introduction

Among contemporary Chinese modernist writers¹, Ye Zhaoyan is highly respected for his sincere and honest style that he has displayed in his

Please see Bibliography for abbreviations used in footnotes.

- ¹. In the West, modernism is conceptually different from postmodernism. As M. H. Abrams points out in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1993): "The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the present century, but especially after World War I (1914-1918). The specific features signified by 'modernism' vary with the user, but many critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture in general." "The catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in the continuity of Western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the postwar world." "The term postmodernism is sometimes applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939-45)." "Postmodernism involves not only a continuation, sometimes carried to an extreme, of the countertraditional experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist 'high art' by recourse to the models of 'mass culture.'" "Postmodernism in literature and the arts has parallels with the movement known as poststructuralism in linguistic and literary theory." Modernism was first introduced to China in the 1930s. However, it did not have much of an impact on Chinese literature then. During much of the subsequent years (1942-1976), Chinese literary circles were dominated by Mao's literary thoughts and isolated from Western literary ideas. It was not until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977 did modernism return to China. This latest modernist wave began to subside in 1985 (See Wang Ning, "Guifan yu bianti--guanyu zhongguo wenxue zhong de xiantai zhuyi and hou xiantai zhuyi" [The Original and its Derivatives--on Modernism and Postmodernism in Chinese

modernist experimental fiction. His works contain little playacting artificiality, show-off, and flattery, common problems that plague the modernistic fiction of many other writers.

In 1988, Ye Zhaoyan's modernist experimental novella "Story of a Date Tree"¹ drew a significant amount of attention from Chinese literary circles. He has since become a famous modernist experimental writer with

Literature], Nanjing, ZS, no. 6, 1989. p. 154-161. The quotation below in this note is from this article). The new modernist wave has had a strong influence on contemporary Chinese literature. However, the term modernism has a different meaning as it is used in China from that in the West. At the time when Western modernist and postmodernist literatures poured into China, Chinese critics and theorists did not appreciate the difference between postmodernism and modernism. They believed that modernism including postmodernism is a spirit of creative writing, "which challenges traditional rationalism and realist literature, emphasizes individual and self, and searches for new techniques and styles. It is different both from realism, which pursues external objectivity, and from romanticism, which intends to express exaggerated feelings. It explores deep feelings at the level of unconsciousness with chilly rhetoric in order to reach the truthfulness of the inner most being." So, Chinese critics refer to some Chinese writers as modernists, who are in fact influenced by both Western modernism and Western postmodernism. Since literature is often criticized with regard to its ideological implications in addition to literary styles in China, the name modernist has both artistic and ideological meanings. Chinese modernists thus are those who not only deliberately seek new literary styles, but also consciously fight against the official ideology. In order to produce literary and ideological shockers, they often write about politically-sensitive or forbidden subjects. Some Chinese modernists go as far as to subvert the conventional reading habit of Chinese readers. In this thesis, the word "modernist" is used in accordance to its Chinese meaning, as defined above, if not specified.

1. Ye Zhaoyan, "Zaoshu de gushi" (Story of a Date Tree), in his *Cai hongling* (Picking Red Water chestnuts), Beijing: Huayi Publishing House, 1991.

popularity rivaling that of Yu Hua and Su Tong, two of the best known modernist writers in China.

Ye Zhaoyan's artistic talent is shown not only in his modernist experiments but also in his realist writings. Unlike Yu Hua and Su Tong, who switched to realist writing only recently, Ye Zhaoyan has been both a realist and a modernist from the very beginning of his literary career. By applying modernist techniques to realist writing, Ye Zhaoyan has successfully injected life into this old artistic form.

In 1985, Chinese modernists, also known as New Wave fiction writers (Xinchao xiaoshuojia), Ma Yuan, Liu Sola and Mo Yan published their fiction "The Temptation of Gangdisi"¹, "You Have No Other Choice"² and "The Crystal Carrot"³, respectively. When the modernists took literary circles by surprise, Ye Zhaoyan was quietly working on his "Hanging Green Apples"⁴, a realist novella. When the novella was published, it was for the most part ignored by literary circles that were pretty much occupied with New Wave fiction. But, the novella won praise from well-known writers such as Ah Cheng and Wang Anyi and critics such as Chen Sihe.⁵

"Hanging Green Apples" is typical of Ye Zhaoyan's realistic fiction in style. Under a conservative appearance, the fiction contains a distinctive

1. Ma Yuan, "Gangdisi de youhuo" (The Temptation of Gangdisi), SHWX, no. 2 (1995).

2. Liu Sola, "Ni biewu xianze" (You Have No Choices), RMWX, no. 3 (1985).

3. Mo Yan, "Toumin de hong luobo" (The Crystal Carrot), ZGZJ, no. 2 (1985).

4. Ye Zhaoyan, "Hanging Green Apples" (Xuangua de lüpingguo), in his *Xuangua de lüpingguo* (Hanging Green Apples), Taipei, Taiwan: Yunliu Publishing Inc., 1993.

5. See Ye Zhaoyan's preface to *Hanging Green Apples*, in his *Hanging Green Apples*. Ibid.

structure and a refreshingly new outlook. The style is the man. A modest, shy, and inside person, Ye Zhaoyan is sophisticated and open-minded. When others discarded traditional realism as an outdated tool, Ye Zhaoyan picked it up and put a new face on it. So, although he appears to have returned to an old literary form, Ye Zhaoyan, in fact, improves it in an effective way.

Ye Zhaoyan's realist practice is significant also because it precedes a surprising realist trend in which many modernist writers such as Yu Hua, Su Tong, Ge Fei, Hong Feng and Bei Chun turn to write realist fiction. Helped by this group of writers including Ye Zhaoyan, the realistic trend is still gaining momentum today.

Ye Zhaoyan's modernist experiments have been the focus of several previous studies¹. But his realist fiction is still largely ignored by critics. In this thesis, I will show the characteristics of Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction by analyzing his three novellas: "Hanging Green Apples," "Love Song" and "Faded Shadows."² By studying Ye Zhaoyan and his realist fiction, I will also try to explore the intention of Chinese modernists in their switch to realistic writing and the meaning of this literary trend.

1. For examples, see Fei Zhenzhong, "1985-1990: Zuowei jishuxing xiaoshuo zuojia de Ye Zhaoyan" (Ye Zhaoyan, As a Technical Fictional Writer in 1985-1990), DZPL, no. 3 (1991). pp. 35-43; Wang Zheng, "Ye Zhaoyan chuanguo zhuti xunzong" (Searching for the Main Themes in Ye Zhaoyan's Creative Writing), DZPL, no. 3 (1990). pp. 26-32.

2. Ye Zhaoyan, "Yange" (Love Song), and "Quying" (Faded Shadows), in his *Yange* (Love Song), Taipei, Taiwan: Yuanliu Publishing Inc., 1991.

Chapter One

The Life and Fictional Writing of Ye Zhaoyan

Some suggest that a writer's works are his or her autobiography. Although this statement is somewhat exaggerated, the experiences of a writer play an undeniable role in his or her writing. Ye Zhaoyan is such an example: his experiences have clearly influenced not only what stories he chooses to write about but also how he writes them.

Ye Zhaoyan has been living in Nanjing for much of the time since he was born in 1957. The only major block of time that he lived outside Nanjing was during the Cultural Revolution, when his father, a "rightist", and his mother were attacked both physically and mentally by the Red Guards and thus were unable to take care of him. A then primary school student, Ye Zhaoyan went to live with his grandmother in a rural area about 100 miles east of Nanjing. He returned to Nanjing three years later. Naturally, Nanjing is the geographic background in many of Ye Zhaoyan's works.

At the age of ten, Ye Zhaoyan learned from the Red Guards that he was an adopted child. He later found by chance a small picture of himself. In the picture he was about one year of age. A name on the picture told him that his original name was Zheng Shengnan, which, he gathered, meant that he was born in Nanjing.

After graduation from high school in 1974, Ye Zhaoyan was exempted from going to the countryside to receive reeducation because he was the only child of his parents, and assigned to a small factory, where he worked

as a bench worker for four years. His experience in the factory apparently provided useful details for the plot of his novella "Faded Shadows."

In 1978, Ye Zhaoyan was admitted to Nanjing University. A literature major, Ye Zhaoyan began fiction writing in 1980. His early works were unskilled and did not make any waves. To improve his techniques, Ye Zhaoyan once modeled his work after the style of Hemingway¹. In 1985, his "Hanging Green Apples" first brought him to the attention of those in literary circles. The impact of this realist novella, however, was small at the time when the modernism drive was strong. Three years later, Ye Zhaoyan finally established himself as a prominent young star in literary circles in China with his modernist novella "Story of a Date Tree" (1988). Ye Zhaoyan has since become a very productive writer.

After graduation, Ye Zhaoyan taught at a college for one year. He then entered graduate school in Nanjing University in 1983, majoring in modern Chinese literature. As a graduate student, Ye Zhaoyan systematically studied his favorite modern writers such as Zhou Zuoren, Zhang Ailing and Qian Zhongshu. His master's thesis is on Qian Zhongshu.² In Ye Zhaoyan's fiction, the influence of these writers is visible: like Zhang Ailing, he uses both elegant and popular languages; like Zhou Zuoren, he adopts a plain writing style; and like Qian Zhongshu, he

¹. See Fei Zhenzhong, "1985-1990: Zuowei jishuxing xiaoshuo zuojia de Ye Zhaoyan" (Ye Zhaoyan, As a Technical Fictional Writer in 1985-1990).

². See Su Tong, "Ye Zhaoyan yinxiang" (An Impression of Ye Zhaoyan), WXJ, no.1 (1989). p. 16. Also see Li Chao, "Shangeng----Ye Zhaoyan Yinxiang" (Good Offspring----Impression of Ye Zhaoyan), WXJ, no. 2 (1989).

makes his stories humorous and clever. His studies of modern fiction have allowed him to perfect his writing techniques constantly. As one critic has suggested, Ye Zhaoyan is most impressive in his mastery of modern fictional techniques.¹

Life was hard when he was a graduate student. He had a family and a child. He also had to help his elderly parents with their daily life. The novella "Love Song" probably reflects his own experiences in that period.

After receiving his Master of Arts degree, he became an editor at the Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House. Now he is a professional writer of the Writer's Association of Jiangsu Province.

Besides his personal experience, Ye Zhaoyan's adopted family also has great influence on his writing. His father, Ye Zhishan, was initially a professional playwright and later the editor-in-chief of *Rain Flowers* (Yu Hua), a literary monthly in Jiangsu Province. His mother, Yao Cheng, was a famous actress of Wuxi opera, a local opera popular in southern Jiangsu and Shanghai. Because of the professions of his parents, Ye Zhaoyan is quite familiar with the life of an opera troupe. Understandably, two of his novellas, "Hanging Green Apples" and "Moonlight on the Sidewalks"² are stories set in opera troupes.

Growing up in such a family, Ye Zhaoyan was nurtured in literature and art. Famed for book collection, Ye Zhaoyan's father owned a huge number of books, almost all of which were foreign fiction. Ye Zhaoyan benefited greatly from his father's collection. Moreover, his father has always been his inspiration, as Ye Zhaoyan recollects in a commemorative

¹. See Fei Zhenzhong, "Ye Zhaoyan, As a Technical Fictional Writer in 1985-1990", Ibid.

². Ye Zhaoyan, "Moonlight on the Sidewalks" (Lubian de yueliang), in his *Hanging Green Apples*, Ibid.

article about his father: "Father and I were like brothers. We talked about anything and everything. We had surprisingly similar literary views. We helped each other's writing. We encouraged as well as criticized each other."¹

His grandfather, Ye Shengtao, was one of the founders of modern Chinese realist fiction, a famous writer and a great educator in China. When his grandfather was alive, Ye Zhaoyan often visited him. Old Ye loved young Ye and enjoyed having chats with him. Ye Zhaoyan once acknowledged: "My success as a writer is more or less helped by the fame of my grandfather and father. My grandfather and father were good at writing, and, more importantly, men of integrity. Their reputation for high moral quality helped me get accepted by readers."²

Carrying on the family tradition, Ye Zhaoyan adheres to high moral standards in his own literary pursuits. He has inherited his grandfather's attitude toward literary writing, i.e. sincerity.³ He writes not only with his skills but also with his heart. In contrast to some contemporary writers who view literary creation as "playing at literature" (wan wenxue), Ye Zhaoyan considers literary writing a serious and noble profession.

Ye Zhaoyan is a productive writer, with more than 60 short stories, novellas and novels to his credit since he started writing in 1980. He has apparently learned a lesson from his father who died regretting that he never fulfilled his lifelong desire to write fiction. An ambitious and

1. Ye Zhaoyan, "Jinian" (Commemoration), in SH, no.1 (1993). pp. 97-107.

2. Ye Zhaoyan, "Commemoration". Ibid.

3. Marston Anderson, "Ye Shaojun: Pity, Sincerity, and the Divisive Power of Narrative", in his *The limits of Realism*, University of California Press, 1990.

talented man, Ye Zhaoyan's father made many serious attempts at writing fiction. For various reasons, he never saw any of his works to completion. "An inspiration will vanish if not fixed in writing, and a good fictional idea will disappear if not put into writing,"¹ the unfulfilled father taught his son. Wasting no time, Ye Zhaoyan has been working hard, even at the risk of losing his health.

Ye Zhaoyan's personal life appears to have a profound influence on how he perceives life and the world. There remain many questions about his adoption by the Ye's. Why did his biological parents abandon him? How did his adoption by the Ye's come about? Where are his biological parents now? Although he was adopted by and grew up in a loving family, Ye Zhaoyan would perhaps still feel painfully uneasy at the thought that he was abandoned by his biological parents. His childhood experience appears to have been reflected in the view that he tries to convey in his fiction, that is, life is a puzzle consisting of coincidences and surprises. In his writings, characters often find their lives changed as a result of an unexpected event or incidence. Therefore, Ye Zhaoyan seems to suggest that one can not always control one's life.

Despite his pessimistic view of one's ability to control one's own life, Ye Zhaoyan is not a pessimist because he, like most Chinese writers, is influenced by the Confucian world outlook. The Confucian conception of the unity of Heaven and Man (tian ren heyi) entails that transcendent meaning is immanent in human life and is to be found by human effort.²

¹. Ye Zhaoyan, "Commemoration", *Ibid.*

². See Lin Yü-sheng, "Lu Xun, the Intellectual", in Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Lu Xun and His Legacy*, University of California Press, 1985. pp. 115-116.

The belief that something positive and beautiful can be found in life was never shaken in the hearts of these writers. Ye Zhaoyan, a Confucianist in his soul of souls, maintains a sophisticated and open-minded attitude toward life: "life is neither as wonderful as one hopes it is, nor as bad as one says it is."¹

Su Tong has this impression of Ye Zhaoyan: "He is absolutely a Confucianist. He is a true scholar with knowledge, elegance and mild temper. He even sounds like an old-fashioned scholar. There are not many young writers who are like Ye Zhaoyan in China at the present time."²

¹. Ye Zhaoyan, the preface to *Ye Zhaoyan Wenji: Aiqing guize* (The Rule of Love--A Collection of literary Works by Ye Zhaoyan), Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 1994.

². Su Tong, "An Impression of Ye Zhaoyan", *Ibid.*

Chapter Two

Three Realist Novellas by Ye Zhaoyan

Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction differs distinctively from the realist fiction of the immediate post Mao-era in the relationship between stories and themes. In the previous realist fiction, e.g. "Reaching Middle Age", storytelling is not a goal but merely a means used to express a theme. Much of the appeal of the fiction comes from the power of themes rather than the artistry of stories, and stories and themes are largely two separable entities. The detachment of stories from themes, however, is replaced by the harmony between the two in the fiction of Ye Zhaoyan. In Ye Zhaoyan's works, themes are dissolved into the structure and language of stories, and, therefore, can be appreciated only through careful reading. In other words, unlike the realist works of the immediate post-Mao era, Ye Zhaoyan's realist novellas demand the intimate involvement of readers with stories in order to get the author's messages. Obviously, storytelling is not only a means but also a goal in Ye Zhaoyan's fiction. In this chapter, I will introduce three of Ye Zhaoyan realist novellas to prepare for analysis of their artistry in the next chapter.

(1) "Hanging Green Apples" (Xuangua de lü pingguo)

This novella was first published in *Zhong Mountain* (Zhong shan), one of the most prestigious bimonthly literary magazines, in 1985. It instantly drew attention from several insightful writers and critics. Ah Cheng, a

contemporary fiction writer, spoke very highly of the novella and even considered it to be the best fiction of the year. He apparently ranked the novella above modernist hits, such as "Temptation of Gangdisi" by Ma Yuan, "You Have No Other Choice" by Liu Sola, and "The Crystal Carrot" by Mo Yan, that caused quite an excitement at that time. Wang Anyi, another contemporary writer, wrote to the editors of *Zhong Mountain* to express her appreciation of the novella. Chen Sihe, a famous critic, wrote a positive critique of it. The novella later won a *Zhong Mountain* best fiction award (Zhongshan youxiu zuopin jiang) and nearly won a biannual national best fiction award (Quanguo youxiu xiaoshuo jiang).¹

The novella tells a story about a woman named Zhang Ying, who cooks for a dialectal opera troupe in Nanjing. It begins with a narrator's introduction: "Fiction almost always begins with something unimportant. Let us start from playing cards."² With such an opening, one may think that the narrator is going to participate in the subsequent narrative and arrange the story. But, surprisingly, the narrator soon cunningly disappears, leaving the narrative to proceed in an interesting mode, which can be characterized as letting one story lead to another.

The novella is divided into ten chapters. It begins with four men, who work in the troupe, playing cards for fun till late in the night under a street light between two troupe dormitory buildings. One of the men by the name of Wei Banxian (Lao Wei) suddenly finds a man on a ladder climbing through a window into Zhang Ying's room on the third floor of a nearby dormitory building. The other three men decide to go and catch the man

¹. See Ye Zhaoyan's preface to *Hanging Green Apples*, Ibid.

². See Ye Zhaoyan, "Hanging Green Apples", p. 11. Ibid.

after Lao Wei tells them what he has seen. Lao Wei is left alone. A little while later, he sees the man climbing down the ladder. Lao Wei is about to yell when he realizes that he may actually know the man. So Lao Wei changes his mind and keeps quiet. The man is then gone.

The story then revolves around how people in the troupe try to identify the man. The second day, word of the incident spreads quickly in the troupe. Everybody is excited about the incident and curious about the details. They first come to Zhang Ying for more information. Zhang Ying tells them that she was in her bed at the time. When she woke up, she saw a man standing by her bed. She wanted to turn on a light, but he did not let her. He took off his coat and wanted to get in her bed. But she said no. He then left. Trying to clear herself, Zhang Ying always ends her explanation in tears.

People can not get much information from Zhang Ying. But, since the man left a troupe sweater in Zhang Ying's room, they can tell that the man is a member of the troupe and Zhang Ying does not want to reveal his identity. So, they presume that it was an affair rather than an attempted rape. They then turn to Lao Wei for more clues. Although Lao Wei is unwilling to be involved in other people's business, they are able to coax him into telling them that the man is not tall.

By vividly describing the curiosity of the people about the incident, Ye Zhaoyan effectively reveals their vulgar tastes and provides a view of the bad side of human nature.

"There is a bad atmosphere in the troupe. Any incident will be talked about over and over again, and an incident involving a man and a woman will be more so: everybody will talk about it ten times on average. Sometimes,

when repeatedly passed from mouth to mouth, something trivial will evolve into a complete erotic story.¹

... ..

'Zhang Ying has a tough time for a while because she is asked the same questions by almost all the women in the troupe. Some old women ask intolerable and embarrassing questions which even judges in court would not ask. When the troupe goes to a hospital for routine health check-ups, some women ask doctors on the quiet about Zhang Ying. Women's curiosity can never be gratified.'²

With the available clues, the search has been narrowed down to just a few suspects. Interestingly, the novella gives up the man hunt at this point, and switches to a story about Zhang Ying's marriage and her married life. This new story is in fact a major one that the author intends to tell since it lasts for nine chapters.

At thirty-two, Zhang Ying remains single. She doesn't have a boyfriend because she is not pretty. She has been lonely and timid. After the above incident she believes that some people are trying to take advantage of her because of the fact that she is single at thirty-two. "She is most afraid of people's talk about her."³ So, she decides to get married as soon as possible.

Soon Zhang Ying's best friend Liu Jiejie introduces a man to her. The man, a native of Nanjing, was sent to Qinghai to receive reeducation during

¹. Ibid., p. 14.

². Ibid.

³. Ibid., p. 18.

the Cultural Revolution. He wants to marry a Nanjing woman so that he can register as a resident in Nanjing.

The man, refereed to as "the Qinghai man" in the novella, is handsome and manly. When they first meet, Zhang Ying feels that she may not be appropriate for him. But, she soon realizes why Liu Jiejie considers them a match when she knows that the man has an illegitimate son.

Zhang Ying feels humiliated. Surprisingly, the Qinghai man sounds like he knows that she will marry him. Burning in anger, Zhang Ying says to herself that he is dreaming.

But Zhang Ying is eventually married to the man. The author leaves out the process of psychological transition that Zhang Ying must have gone through, but mentions elsewhere that "Zhang Ying is not a strong-willed woman. ... Weakness, like an immunization shot, is injected into her body and makes her immune to any resistant or rebellious elements in her body."¹ Therefore, Zhang Ying's marriage with the Qinghai man is surprising but understandable.

The news of Zhang Ying's marriage causes another stir in the troupe. Ye Zhaoyan switches his focus back to the people around Zhang Ying.

'Zhang Ying has been forgotten by people in the troupe for some time now. They start to talk about her again as soon as they learn that she is going to get married.

Unexpected news always surprises as well as excites people. Zhang Ying's marriage seems to make everybody happy. They may be thinking that it is something worthy of celebration that a woman named Zhang Ying finds a

¹. Ibid., p. 29.

husband to depend on at the age of thirty-two; or, they may be thinking that her somewhat unusual marriage brings into their boring life something exciting, e.g. countless new topics and sources for imagination. All in all, a holiday atmosphere suddenly prevails in the troupe.

Some well-informed people are very confident that they know more about the bridegroom than the bride does. They have already learned where in Qinghai the bridegroom comes from when the new couple is still early in their honeymoon. They also know that he used to be a driver, salesman, and once herded horses on the highland there, that he lived with a woman and they had a boy named Chaochao when he was a herdsman, and that he has a lot of money.

All the news that an outsider can get becomes known to everybody in the troupe.¹

Zhang Ying is very happy about the marriage for a while. Although she knows that her husband does not love her, she loves her husband for his looks and masculinity. Her vanity is satisfied when he intentionally gives her "face": acting as if he was afraid of his wife, the Qinghai man takes some household chores such as buying groceries in the morning. The troupe people are fooled by the Qinghai man. In reality, however, Zhang Ying does everything to please her husband and is afraid of losing him. She tolerates his hot temper, and treats his son as her own. Giving in to his demand, she even has an abortion.

Peace between the couple ends when Zhang Ying discovers the Qinghai man having an affair with Chaochao's mother. It all starts when Zhang Ying travels with the troupe on a one-month tour to perform in

¹. Ibid., p. 31.

rural areas. Missing her husband, Zhang Ying takes a day off and returns to Nanjing midway through the tour. Intending to surprise her husband, she does not inform him of her return. However, she is the one who is surprised when she finds that her husband is sleeping with the woman in their home. The affair may have something to do with an anonymous letter which the Qinghai man received earlier. The letter, which he believes was sent by somebody in the troupe, suggests that Zhang Ying had sexual encounters before her marriage. The author, however, does not indicate any links between the two incidents.

Shocked and humiliated, Zhang Ying returns to her traveling troupe. Everybody in the troupe feels angry about what the Qinghai man has done to Zhang Ying, and suggests that Zhang Ying file for divorce. Unable to make her own judgment, Zhang Ying can not but act on their advice. She files for divorce on returning to Nanjing. Furthermore, she moves out of her home and stays in the troupe dormitory, a move intended to punish her husband. But, she soon realizes that she is the one who actually suffers: the Qinghai man has the apartment that her troupe assigned to her to himself while she ends up homeless. To her annoyance, the Qinghai man even dines in the troupe's cafeteria where she works. Though angry, she has no choice but to serve him.

When divorce seems imminent, the author again gives an unexpected twist to the story. While waiting for a court verdict, both Zhang Ying and the Qinghai man realize that they do not hate each other as much as they think they do and that they are not really ready for divorce. In the end, the Qinghai man and Zhang Ying remain married. They decide to leave the troupe, a place full of gossip and troubles, and start a new life in Qinghai.

The novella tells a simple story. Using his colorful storytelling techniques, Ye Zhaoyan is able to make an interesting and attractive story out of ordinary events in everyday life. The beginning of the novella has some features of a detective or suspense story and thus reads like popular fiction. As the novella progresses, however, it digs deep into the social psychology of ordinary people such as Zhang Ying and those around her, revealing the author's view of human nature.

The protagonist Zhang Ying belongs to the type of ruo nüzi (weak woman) in Chinese literature. A ruo rüzi is described as good-hearted, passive, indecisive and vulnerable, Zhang Ying is controlled by her environment, which exists in the form of danwei (work unit) in the novella.

A danwei is a relatively self-included mini-society, and provides many social functions in addition to a work place. It takes care of its members' political thoughts, promotion, income, child care, reproduction, etc., leaving one with reduced ability and need to make one's own decision. In a danwei one's public life and private life are interwoven: colleagues are also neighbors as they usually live in the same area and have frequent interactions in and out of the work place. People in a danwei have a great influence on one another's life. There are many ways in which the influence may be exerted. Gossip is one of them. Gossip reflects popular values that the majority of the people hold in a society or a danwei. Anybody who behaves in a manner incompatible with the values will get an unfavorable response from other people in the form of gossip. So, gossip has a role in constraining one to respect the values in a society. In "Hanging Green Apples," people in the troupe unknowingly play a major role in Zhang Ying's life by creating all kinds of gossip. Zhang Ying fears

the gossip so much that she has to make changes in her life from time to time in order to survive in her danwei. At the end of the novella, Zhang Ying and her husband decide to leave the troupe for Qinghai, hoping that "probably the people over there are better than the people here."¹

Zhang Ying suffers from gossip. What about the people who are fond of gossip? In the novella, these people appear to be impoverished in their spiritual lives: they do not have anything to enjoy in their own lives and have to find excitement and pleasure from other people's lives. Most of them are actors and actresses and perform for an audience on the stage. Ironically, in real life, they become the audience of other people's lives and have fun watching and talking about them but do not enjoy their own life. One can almost hear the author laugh at them: what a ridiculous and pitiful life are you leading?

Ye Zhaoyan's thorough analysis of the complicated interactions between people raises a question about living space both in the physical sense and in the spiritual sense. Interaction of people is high in a densely-populated area. Danwei culture will only increase the interaction. So, one can hardly find a place to stay isolated from others. Although human beings are social animals, they need to keep a certain distance from one another to protect their privacy and freedom. For this reason, Zhang Ying and her husband eventually move out of Nanjing, a populous city, where they have been living under the watchful eyes of those who know them. They start their new life in Qinghai, a vast livestock farming land with a sparse population. People in Qinghai are obviously not as intimately involved in one another's life as those in Nanjing. The relocation of the

¹. Ibid., p. 72.

protagonists thus underlines the unbearable tension in the lives of people living in crowded cities in China today.

(2) "Love Song" (Yange)

"Yan" means a love story between the sexes in modern Chinese, and usually has a touch of romantic color.

The novella describes the love story and marriage of Chi Qinting, the protagonist. The story takes place in a southern city in China right after the Cultural Revolution. The novella may be divided into two parts. The first part is about how Chi Qinting and his girl friend get to know each other and later marry. The second part is about their daily life after they are married.

The first part is relatively short but full of comic collisions. In his thirties, Chi Qinting is a senior history major in a college. He is one of those who were admitted to college immediately after the Cultural Revolution. Like many, he could not go to college at a younger age because higher education was essentially suspended during the Cultural Revolution. Many students of his age are married with children. Chi Qinting, however, is an exception: he is still single and does not even have a girlfriend.

In his dormitory room, which is shared by six students, Li Wenlin is the youngest but already has a girlfriend. Li's girlfriend offers to introduce to Chi Qinting one of her fellow students who majors in literature. At first, Chi Qinting is not interested because he does not want to get a girl friend through a matchmaker. But an incident changes his

mind. One day, when Chi Qinting is playing football in the field, Li's girl friend is playing volleyball with her friends nearby. She tells Chi Qinting with her eyes that the girl she was talking about is among them. Chi Qinting then notices a beautiful girl looking at him with soft eyes exuding tenderness. He suddenly feels an electric current going through his body. He is now eager to meet the girl, who he thinks is the one Li's girl friend will introduce to him.

When he is about to meet the girl, Chi Qinting becomes very nervous and has a strange feeling that something may go wrong. His feeling turns out to be right when Li's girl friend brings in a girl who is not the one that he saw the other day and has been thinking of since. Chi Qinting is so disappointed that he can not behave properly.

This girl is Mu Lan. Compared to the girl that Chi Qinting saw, Mu Lan is too ordinary. She is "neither tall nor short, neither fat nor thin, and everything about her is in between."¹ Obviously, Chi Qinting does not like Mu Lan. Realizing that Chi Qinting is not enthusiastic about the girl, Li Wenlin suggests that Chi Qinting get to know more about Mu Lan first and make a decision later. Chi Qinting takes his advice.

Mu Lan has some qualities of a poet and tends to view the relationship between the sexes romantically. She is under a wrong impression that Chi Qinting fell in love with her at first sight. Li Wenlin and his girl friend are, of course, partially responsible for creating this wrong impression. In order to bring Mu Lan and Chi Qinting together, they lavish praise on Chi Qinting in front of Mu Lan such that Chi Qinting sounds like he is infatuated with her.

¹. Ye Zhaoyan, "Love Song," pp. 16-17. Ibid.

In the first two weeks, Mu Lan behaves as if she did not decline to go out with Chi Qinting only because she did not want to hurt his feeling. Two weeks later, Chi Qinting receives a surprising letter from Mu Lan. In the letter, she expresses her gratitude for Chi Qinting's passionate love for her, but indicates that she wants to end their relationship.

"Chi Qinting is very confused and does not know how to react properly to the letter. He feels that he has been forced to taste the taste of being dumped by a beloved girl friend. ... Knowing each other for two weeks is not very long. Since they have been playing hide-and-seek in their conversation, they know less instead of more about each other now. Chi Qinting feels that he has been fooled."¹

A few days later, it suddenly occurs to him that he owes Mu Lan some money. He decides to send her as compensation several philosophy books which he bought when Mu Lan talked a lot about them on their dates.

But Mu Lan has misunderstood Chi Qinting's intention. She writes him another letter, in which she regrets to have tortured him, a man who she says loves her, tells him that she is in love with him, and proposes to meet him where they used to date. Chi Qinting, again, does not know whether to cry or laugh. He decides to go for the date and teach her a lesson.

When he sees her, Chi Qinting suddenly finds that Mu Lan is more charming than he thought. Beautifully dressed, she stands quietly in the dim light of dusk. Surprised, Chi Qinting, of course, does not want to proceed with his plan. After that date, their relationship enters a new phase. They become more and more attached to each other. When Mu

¹. Ibid. p. 20.

Lan is sick, Chi Qinting looks after her and even washes clothes for her; Mu Lan also helps Chi Qinting with his research papers.

Both career and personal life seem to be going well for Chi Qinting at this time. After graduation, he stays in his college as a teacher. Mu Lan will graduate in the following year. But the peaceful life is occasionally stirred by small incidents. One day, Chi Qinting runs into the glamorous girl, who he mistook as Mu Lan, on his way to Mu Lan's dorm. Wearing a shirt and briefs, the girl is walking to a rest room. Chi Qinting feels dizzy when he catches a glimpse of her shiny legs. Feeling a strong sexual urge, he pushes Mu Lan into her room and hugs her as soon as he sees her. Later Mu Lan gets pregnant, and has an abortion. They get married when Mu Lan is pregnant again.

The second part of the novella is about the awkward predicament that Chi Qinting and Mu Lan find themselves in after they are married. The tone of the story also changes to one that is relatively depressing.

The story goes that Chi Qinting and Mu Lan begin to argue frequently about almost everything in their daily life after they are married. They have to face many real-life problems such as low income, child care, inadequate housing, relationships with in-laws, and even bad moods. Among these problems, their poor economic situation bothers them most.

Mu Lan is assigned to work in a bank after graduation. Since their combined income is only enough to cover their own living expense, they begin to worry about the financial burden that their upcoming baby will bring to them. Chi Qinting comes from a poor family in a small town. He can not get any financial support from his parents. Mu Lan, on the other hand, is from a well-off family. Mu Lan's family supports the couple financially. Chi Qinting feels ashamed of himself for being unable to

support his family and baby and having to accept financial help from his in-laws. Therefore, Chi Qinting jumps at the suggestion from Li Wenlin, his college roommate and now an editor in a publishing house, that Chi Qinting help him translate foreign popular fiction. Chi Qinting is proficient in a foreign language, and considers translation an easy job. When he receives one thousand yuan for his translation work, Chi Qinting feels shaky because this amount of money equals his one-year salary. Chi Qinting is a history teacher and does not benefit academically from his job as a translator. He is enthusiastic about translation only because it brings him quick money.

Chi Qinting soon has a good reputation for the quality of his translations. Several publishing houses seek to sign contracts with him. He has also learned how to bargain with them. He has become a translation machine. As Mu Lan puts it, Chi Qinting has become money hungry (*zhaidao qianyanli*). A year after he started translation, Chi Qinting has greatly improved his economic situation. At the same time, Mu Lan's bank assigned an apartment to her. Their son is in a day-care center.

Everything that they dreamed of seems to have come true. But they do not feel as happy as they thought they would, and, instead, both of them have a sense of loss. They still frequently argue and hurt each other's feelings. One day, Mu Lan brings home two guests who want to get some help from Chi Qinting. One of them is that beautiful girl that Chi Qinting was so impressed with back when they were in college. Her name is Pang Jianqing. Knowing that Chi Qinting is familiar with editors, Pang wants Chi Qinting to help her publish her novel. Chi Qinting does not feel excited about her this time as he did in the past. Another is Li Yin, Mu Lan's colleague, who wants Chi Qinting to help improve his foreign

language skills. However, Chi Qinting soon finds that learning a foreign language is only a cover for his attempt to get close to Mu Lan.

Chi Qinting and Mu Lan begin to exchange verbal thrusts on each other's attitude toward his or her friend of the opposite sex. Mu Lan is jealous of Chi Qinting's close working relationship with his female student, and Chi Qinting also picks on Mu Lan's association with Li Yin. Sometimes a joke quickly develops into a quarrel. As time goes on, wars between them become more frequent and last longer. Finally, they both have had enough and decide to live in separate rooms.

One day, Chi Qinting runs into Pang Jianqing on his way home. Pang invites Chi Qinting to her home. In her home, "Chi Qinting wants to tell her that it was she who made it possible for him to marry Mu Lan. He wants to tell her that, if it were not for her, his story would have been different. He wants to tell her that she brought to him a beautiful moment as well as a permanent sense of loss. He is unsure how to express himself: implicitly or boldly, straightforwardly or indirectly. Many ideas collide, generating sparks in his mind. At last he tells her what he is thinking with a stutter. He does not know what he is saying."¹

When Chi Qinting gets home, Mu Lan seems to be ready to reconcile with him. The novella ends without giving any hints as to whether or not the two will get together again.

The novella, entitled "Yange", appears to have very little "yan" or romance. In light of the content of the novella, the title is full of irony. On the surface, the novella is about love and marriage. However, in depicting the love between Chi Qinting and Mu Lan before their marriage,

¹. Ibid., 72.

Ye Zhaoyan shows that things in the world can not always be explained logically. There are things that are reasonable; there are also things that occur by pure coincidence. Chi Qinting and Mu Lan are brought together because Chi Qinting mistakes Mu Lan, who he is not interested in, for Pang, who he wants to pursue, and thus agrees to an arranged meeting with Mu Lan. As a result of the efforts by the matchmakers, Mu Lan has a wrong impression that Chi Qinting loves her. But, in reality, Chi Qinting does not love or even like her. Chi Qinting wants to end his relationship with Mu Lan in a way that he thinks will constitute ridicule to her aloofness: he sends her some unfathomable philosophy books that she always talked about but he was never interested in during their conversations as compensation for the money that she spent on one of their dinners in a restaurant. Mu Lan does not get the message and, instead, considers it to be a sign of love. To some extent, the marriage of Chi Qinting and Mu Lan is arranged by a series of misunderstandings, or "yuan", a kind of fate.

Clearly, Ye Zhaoyan wants to tell more than a story about a marriage made by "yuan". He seeks to understand the meaning of love and marriage. There is no romantic love in the novella. Instead, love takes the form of tolerance, caring and sexual desire that exist in the relationship between Chi Qinting and Mu Lan. When Chi Qinting and Mu Lan are introduced to each other, they do not fall in love at first sight. They are put together to develop love. As time goes by, they begin to care for and tolerate each other. In addition, since they are young man and woman, chemistry also kicks in. Their marriage is based on the above elements.

By describing their marriage in which "bad days are almost as many as good days"¹, Ye Zhaoyan shows the fickle nature of human feelings. The married life of the couple in the second part of the novella reminds one of the theme of the famous novel *The Besieged City*² by Qian Zhongshu. In the novel, Qian suggests that marriage is analogous to a besieged city that people outside try to get in to and people inside want to get out of.

Despite the lack of romantic love in his married life, Chi Qinting still wants to maintain his marriage. He believes that the ultimate goal of a marriage is to get along (guo rizi): "to develop love after marriage is possible only on paper. If put into action, it would be impractical and ridiculous. ... To get along well is most important. Is there anything more difficult than getting along well?"³ Ye Zhaoyan, through the narrator, also indicates that "it is not easy that they (Chi Qinting and Mu Lan) have come this far. They both should treasure their past."⁴

The story of Chi Qinting's love and marriage also represents a metaphor of the relationship between one's ideal and reality. The beautiful girl Pang Jianqing represents an ideal, which Chi Qinting can only yearn for but can not reach; Mu Lan stands for the reality, with which Chi Qinting is not satisfied. Chi Qinting's attitude toward Pang and Mu Lan parallels his attitude toward his ideal and reality. Chi Qinting's marriage is the result of both reconciliation of Chi with the reality and abandonment by

¹. Ibid., p. 48.

². See Qian Zhongshu, *The Besieged City* (Weicheng), Shanghai, 1937.

³. "Love Song," Ibid., p. 54.

⁴. Ibid.

Chi of his ideal. Chi Qinting thus represents some intellectuals in contemporary society, who, realizing the distance between ideals and reality, compromise with reality rather than pursue the ideals.

In the novella, Mu Lan is a romantic girl. But her romantic qualities are incompatible with the environment in which she lives. Because of her romantic qualities, she is quite subjective. This is why she can not detect that the Chi Qinting that she falls in love with is not Chi Qinting in reality in the beginning of the story. But this does not seem to affect her love. For a romantic woman poet like her, love preexists and is, in some ways, independent of the object of love. Mu Lan simply creates a love illusion and lives in it. By depicting Mu Lan, Ye Zhaoyan adds some comic flavor to the novella, especially in the first part.

"Love Song" is skillfully written. The novella shows that the author is rich in experience, careful in observing life, sensitive to details, and accurate in description. The following are two examples in which Ye Zhaoyan describes the "cold war" between Chi Qinting and Mu Lan after they are married.

It is difficult for them to maintain peace in their living environment: a twelve-square-meter room facing north, without direct sunshine, cold and dark. When their son is back, there is not a moment of peace: he laughs when he is happy and cries when he is upset. The space is so small that, if someone breaks wind, there is not a place in the room where you can't smell it. Nobody can be in a bad mood: a bad mood spreads faster than the flu. For the first two years since they were married, they have quarreled for as much time as they have enjoyed their life. But they don't argue as loudly as ordinary couples do. Chi Qinting sometimes shouts loudly when he is angry,

but Mu Lan never does. Mu Lan quarrels in a civilized manner: she fights a cold war. Whenever she is really angry or pretends to be angry, Mu Lan stops speaking to her husband for three days. Other couples in the building have similar problems. A poor living environment makes them become feuding couples. Like crickets in a small pot, husbands and wives are arguing about commodity prices, children, careers and other problems in their life.¹

'Cold wars between a husband and a wife are meaningless. Living in the same room, both act like mad dogs. If this lasts for too long, they may appear to be playacting. Both of them are bored with it, but still keep doing it as if they were balls filled with angry air. Actually they are flat balls without air.'²

(3) "Faded Shadows" (Quying)

In "Faded Shadows", Ye Zhaoyan shows his maturity in realist fiction writing.

Ye Zhaoyan belongs to the generation that grew up during the Cultural Revolution, and, therefore, is always inspired by this historic movement. "Faded Shadows" is the best of his works³ that use the Cultural Revolution as a background.

¹. Ibid., p. 48.

². Ibid., p. 62.

³. Other works by Ye Zhaoyan which use the Cultural Revolution as a background are: short story "Xuedi chuanshuo" (Legend of a Snowy Land), in *Mengya* (sprouting), no. 7 (1992), and novella "Guanyu cesuo" (About Restrooms), in *Zuojia* (Writers), no. 3 (1992).

The male protagonist in "Faded Shadows" also goes by the name of Chi Qinting. In the novella, Ye Zhaoyan focuses on Chi Qinting's adolescent experiences, especially sexual awakening, in the Cultural Revolution era, revealing the power of human nature. Chi Qinting is slightly lame in one leg, and otherwise a lad with a look that fits the definition of handsomeness in classical literature: "He is inside, shy, reticent, and like a bashful girl. Quiet and good looking boys like him are very few."¹ "He often sits there quiet and pondering over something weighing on his mind, and remains still like a statue."² The novella begins with a story about Chi Qinting's unrequited love for Qingqing, a friend of his elder sister's. After graduation from middle school, Chi Qinting is assigned to work in a small factory. He buys a banned novel from his friend with his first-month wages, and sends the novel to Qingqing, whom he has been attracted to since he was little, in order to please her and get her attention. Chi Qinting knows that it is a pretty remote hope that Qingqing will love him or even take him seriously. But he is mentally prepared to be disappointed and willing to be a loser in his imaginary love affair with her. He fantasizes that Qingqing has met a prince on a white horse, who is better than Chi Qinting, but that their ideal marriage is filled with misfortunes. Chi Qinting keeps on making sacrifices for Qingqing's happiness, and feels perfectly satisfied and rewarded when he thinks that Qingqing will shed tears of gratitude for him.

Chi Qinting's love for Qingqing is spiritual in nature. When he first realizes the true meaning of sex, he "does not know if he and Qingqing

¹. Ye Zhaoyan, "Faded Shadows". p. 86.

². Ibid.

should perform that dirty act together. ... For a while he feels that he does not deserve Qingqing, not because he is lame but because he has had obscene ideas that he thinks he should not have."¹

The first part of the novella ends when Chi Qinting's overtures are ignored by Qingqing. Chi Qinting's yearning for transcendent romantic love also comes to an end. The author switches his focus to Chi Qinting's life in the factory.

Chi Qinting learns how to be an inspection worker in the factory at the age of seventeen. There, some of his co-workers often make fun of his lamed leg. Surrounded by these disgusting people as well as cold, lifeless measuring tools all day long, Chi Qinting, a teenage boy with a romantic imagination, feels very lonely in the factory. He is lonely at home, too. His mother and elder sister do not seem to understand him. His father, the only person that he can talk to, has been sent to the countryside to receive reeducation. Chi Qinting is ignored at an age when he needs the most attention and care. As he gets older, Chi Qinting becomes increasingly curious about sex and the female body. Since there is nothing else to enjoy in life, Chi Qinting spends all his energy on exploring sex.

Because sex education does not exist, Chi Qinting obtains his first knowledge about sex from the dirty words that fellow workers use when they quarrel. To solve the mystery of a woman's body, he carefully studies his father's book, *Bare-Foot Doctors' Manual*, the only available medical reference for the public at that time. To verify what he has learned from the book, he tries to take a look at his sister's naked body: he plans to walk

¹. Ibid., p. 130.

into the bathroom where his sister is taking a bath. But he has no luck because his sister unusually locks the door from inside.

Driven by his growing sexual desire, Chi Qinting, on the one hand, masturbates to get satisfaction and relief. On the other hand, running a great risk of being caught, he scratches off a small patch of paint on the window glass of a factory bathroom which is connected to a room for storing measuring tools and peeks at bathing female workers through the unpainted hole.

Chi Qinting's adventure is finally discovered by his female teacher Zhang Ying, who has the same name as the protagonist in "Hanging Green Apples". The relationship between the two is a little unusual: Chi Qinting does not obey Zhang Ying, and behaves like a spoiled kid, headstrong and stubborn; Zhang Ying is like a kind mother, accommodating and patient.

But, after that incident, Zhang Ying is determined to have Chi Qinting obey her so that he won't end up committing a crime. To save Chi Qinting's face, she does not talk to him about the incident directly but urges him to go to the night school in the factory in a hope that he will be drawn to other things. She also tries her best to prevent him from peeking at bathing women. To protect Chi Qinting, she never tells anybody about his secret adventure.

Chi Qinting feels both grateful to Zhang Ying for her kindness and angry with her because he thinks that she has gone too far in taking care of him. For a long time, they have been in a battle of wits. Zhang Ying has never given Chi Qinting a chance (to commit a crime): sometimes she shadows him; sometimes she shows up unexpectedly in the storage room. Gradually, Chi Qinting and Zhang Ying can read each other's minds. They try to avoid looking into each other's eyes. It appears that they get along

very nicely. Zhang Ying understands that Chi Qinting is tortured by his sexual curiosity and desire, but she would rather see him die from the torture than see him become dishonored for peeking at bathing women. She takes good care of him as if she was his mother. And, She does not want to take chances.

Chi Qinting never gives up. Finally, Zhang Ying satisfies Chi Qinting's desire and curiosity with her own body. As Chi Qinting's teacher, she teaches him not only job skills but also about the nature of relations between the sexes. She becomes her student's lover. A married woman, Zhang Ying knows that her relationship with Chi Qinting will not last long. So she later acts as a match-maker, and introduces Ya Hong, who works in the same factory, to Chi Qinting. As time goes by, Ya Hong realizes that Chi Qinting does not like her and detects the dubious relationship between Chi Qinting and Zhang Ying. Later, Ya Hong breaks off with Chi Qinting and is married to another worker in the factory.

In the end, Chi Qinting leaves the factory, which he does not really belong in, and goes to college after the Cultural Revolution. Zhang Ying is really happy for him and convinced that he is finally on the right track. Soon, Chi Qinting is forgotten by people in the factory.

Chi Qinting is an individualized character rather than a "type" often seen in socialist realist fiction. He is in a sense superfluous for the times he lives in. He belongs to neither side of the political movement, and is neither a winner nor loser in the Cultural Revolution. He can not be characterized as either a good guy or a bad guy. Therefore, in portraying this character, Ye Zhaoyan has gone beyond the confines of politics and morality and reached deep into human nature.

Chi Qinting's personality is different from that of many other youngsters of his age. Having little enthusiasm for life, he is inside, quiet and bored. At seventeen, he is rebellious and eager to gain control over his own life. His sexual curiosity and desire start to grow as well. Unfortunately, Chi Qinting lives in a chaotic era when personal freedom and desire are severely suppressed. Because it has elements of contradiction, discord, tension and rebellion, the story is interesting and thought-provoking.

In the novella, the story of the teenage Chi Qinting is told from the perspective of his older self by a narrator, the author. The narrator goes to great lengths to describe anxiety, confusion, dejection, stress and excitement that Chi Qinting experiences in his adolescent adventures. For example, the following paragraph vividly portrays a nervous and panic Chi Qinting who has just removed a patch of paint on the window glass of a female public bathroom. Because he is too nervous, the size of the patch is greatly enlarged in his imagination, but when he nervously looks for the scratch several days later, he can not find it. When he finally calms down, he is able to spot it again.

He stares at the area that he has been waiting to see while moving away the tool case. A piece of white painted glass looks like a complete and harmonious whole. To his surprise, the scratch has miraculously disappeared. It looks as if nothing had happened. The first scare that comes to his mind is that someone in the factory has found what he did and repainted the scratched area. But the scare soon proves to be unfounded. There is not a trace of new paint: because Chi Qinting is familiar with every line of the painted glass, even a minor change can not escape his eyes. He then begin to

doubt if he scratched the paint on the glass at all. He is not sure that his memory is reliable. Chi Qinting does not know if it is something worthy of celebration that the anxiety that he has had for several days appears to be unnecessary. It may simply be an illusion or a dream that he scratched the painted glass window with a piece of sand paper. Imagination has been exaggerated. He thought that he did something but actually he did nothing.

He realizes that the scratch is still there the following day when he goes there to rinse rice again. The scratch is more noticeable than he thought. It looks like a small dirty butterfly on the white painted glass. The scratched area appears unevenly transparent.¹

Looking back to his teenage years, the old Chi appears calm and relaxed. He, through the narrator, frequently makes fun of his past experiences, setting a ridiculing tone for the entire story. In this general tone, the absurdity of the Cultural Revolution becomes evident. In the following paragraph, he laughs at how he studied *Bare-Foot Doctor's Manual* in order to learn more about a woman's body.

He has almost memorized relevant pages in the manual. These few printed sheets are the only source from which he derives his knowledge about a woman's body. He repeatedly examines three or four figures of his interest in the book. But, the more he studies them, the more he is crazy about them; the more he looks at them, the more he gets confused. He studies them as hard as a commander studies his military maps in a battle field.²

¹. Ibid., pp. 116-117.

². Ibid., p. 113.

The mood in which the young Chi makes adolescent adventures contrasts markedly with that in which the old Chi recalls them. The author's message is clear: what appears to be important in a close view may not be so at a distance. One should thus have a relaxed attitude toward life which is after all a comedy.

Chi Qinting is the name conspicuously shared by the protagonists in two of Ye Zhaoyan's works, "Faded Shadows" and "Love Song." According to Ye Zhaoyan, the two Chi Qinting's are related only by name.¹ Indeed, one can not find enough evidence in the two novellas that would suggest that they are the same person, although they are both intelligent, sensitive, inside and both have senses of inferiority as well as self-respect. So, why does Ye Zhaoyan give the two characters the same name? The clue may be found in their life experiences. Each of the two characters seems to have similar life experience to that of Ye Zhaoyan at a particular stage. Like Chi Qinting in "Faded Shadows", Ye Zhaoyan was assigned to a factory late in the Cultural Revolution when he was seventeen and admitted to college a few years later. Like Chi Qinting in "Love Songs", Ye Zhaoyan was a college teacher and had to put up with poor living conditions. Therefore, Ye Zhaoyan may in fact create an image by giving the same name to people with life experiences similar to his.

The character Zhang Ying is a character rarely seen in modern Chinese fiction. In her relationship with Chi Qinting, Zhang Ying plays the roles of a teacher, mother, lover and matchmaker all at the same time. She has complex feelings about Chi Qinting. Ye Zhaoyan explains how Zhang Ying perceives her affair with her teenage student:

¹. Ibid., p. 76.

As a great lover who is as tender as a mother, she always believes that it is her brave self-sacrifice that effectively prevents Chi Qinting's further degeneration, although she sometimes is aroused by Chi Qinting's childish behavior and loses control of herself, just like a lost lamb wandering in the vast grassland and a frightened runaway horse unsure where to go. When Chi Qinting shyly takes off his pants and lets off his young man's fanaticism in a flurried, unbridled, quick and sentimental manner, Zhang Ying, like a large piece of kind and merciful sponge, draws bad elements from her student's body and detoxifies them. Due to her sacrifice, Zhang Ying becomes an easy target for criticism. But Zhang Ying feels that her behavior leaves nothing for criticism because she has a harmonious married life, and what she does is not to satisfy her own desires but to save a helpless young man who is on the brink of an abyss.¹

Zhang Ying is a name that is shared by the female protagonists in three of Ye Zhaoyan's novellas, "Faded Shadows", "Love Songs" and "Picking Red Water Chestnuts."² Again, although the three Zhang Ying's are not the same person, they share similarities. On the one hand, these women all possess traditional Chinese characters such as tenderness, kindness, generosity and tolerance. They are often found in a subordinate position in the relationship with their husbands or lovers. Their love for their husbands or lovers always contains elements of motherly passion. On

¹. Ibid., pp. 135-136.

². Ye Zhaoyan, "Cai hongling" (Picking Red Water Chestnuts), in his *Cai hongling*, Beijing: Huayi Publishing House, 1993.

the other hand, in their lives, these women are all involved with "wrong" men as judged by the traditional standards of the Chinese society. These non-traditional relationships, therefore, contrast with the traditional image that these women have. They are all lower class women of little education. Ye Zhaoyan's attitude toward these women is rather ambiguous, in contrast to his somewhat negative view of educated women in his fiction¹. In describing their virtues of caring and willingness to sacrifice, Ye Zhaoyan appears to be sympathetic to the traditional roles that they play. In his view, these women do not seem to understand their husbands or lovers, and thus are no more than the sexual partners of their men.

In describing Chi Qinting's love affair with Zhang Ying, Ye Zhaoyan appears to be inspired by the 19th century French literature: "The relationship (between Chi Qinting and Zhang Ying) develops as described in early French literature. It is tortuous and romantic: male protagonists burn with lust and repent of it; and female protagonists have little desire but are extremely tolerant"².

The relationship between Chi Qinting and Zhang Ying reminds one of the similar relationship between Julien and M^{me} De Rênal in the French novel *The Red and The Black* by Stendhal. Julien and Chi Qinting appear to share many characteristics. They both look shy and weak, but, on the inside, are stubborn, strong-willed, and dare to take risks in their lives. M^{me} De Rênal and Zhang Ying also have things in common. Both of them are tender and soft-hearted. Both have an affair with a man who is much

¹. For examples, see Ye Zhaoyan's descriptions of Mu Lan in "Love Songs" and the woman criminologist, woman writer and woman reporter in "The End."

². "Faded Shadows," p. 115.

younger than themselves, and provide their men with a mixture of motherly and lover's love. In fact, some descriptions of the characters in the two works read very similar. In *The Red and The Black*, Julien is described as "a small, frail-looking young man of eighteen or nineteen, with irregular but delicate features, and a roman nose."¹ He has large dark eyes. His face is "as pale and gentle as a girl's,"² and it "would be difficult to imagine a more strikingly individual" face "among the countless varieties of human faces."³ Chi Qinting's appearance looks very much like Julien's: "his face is always pale as if he was sick. His wide eyes are beautiful and melancholy; his nose is most eye-catching for its classical shape."⁴ Both Julien and Chi Qinting have a wild personality which contrasts sharply with their delicate feminine appearances.

The list of similarities, however, is not a long one because the works, after all, tell stories that take place in totally different historical, social and cultural backgrounds. For example, the July Revolution in France and the Cultural Revolution in China are the backgrounds in *The Red and The Black* and "Faded Shadows", respectively. The life experiences of the characters are thus quite different: Julien struggles to gain a upper class status, whereas Chi Qinting has to live an irrelevant life which in essence is assigned to him. While Julien seeks fame and fortune, Chi Qinting explores women and sex. There is also a quite contrast between the two

¹. Henri Beyle Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, translation by Catherine Slater, Oxford University Press, 1991. p. 19.

². Ibid., p. 26.

³. Ibid., p. 20.

⁴. Ibid.

female protagonists: M^{me} De Rênal is an elegant mistress, whereas Zhang Ying is a factory worker of little education. Because of these differences, it would seem to be rather inappropriate and somewhat comical to compare the love story of Chi Qinting and Zhang Ying to those in the 19th century French literary works such as *The Red and The Black*. Therefore, the fact that "Faded Shadows" is more or less a parody of *The Red and The Black* in characterization is consistent with the intention of Ye Zhaoyan, which is to tell a funny and ridiculous love story as implied in the title of the novella.

In recent years, many Chinese writers feel that literature should serve the function of telling the truth about historical events when they are skewed in official accounts. These contemporary writers have written a large amount of fiction in which they provide their views of these events. Han Shaogong's "The Mute" (Ba ba ba)¹ and Mo Yan's *The Red Sorghum Clan* (Hong gaoliang jiazu)² are representative of this literary trend. Like Han Shaogong and Mo Yan, Ye Zhaoyan also has great interest in the recent history of China, as shown in "Faded Shadows." But, Ye Zhaoyan treats historical events differently from other writers such as Han Shaogong and Mo Yan. While Han Shaogong and Mo Yan directly challenge well-known official lines in their works such as those mentioned above, Ye Zhaoyan is not interested in rewriting history. While literature is forced to fulfill some roles of history in the works of Han Shaogong and Mo Yan, literary aesthetics is stressed in Ye Zhaoyan's writings.

¹. Han Shaogong: "Ba ba ba" (The Mute), in *Tansuo xiaoshuoji* (Exploratory Fiction: A Collection), Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1986.

². Mo Yan: *Hong gaoliang jiaau* (The Red Sorghum Clan), Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 1987.

Han's "The Mute" is a historic narrative about a mentally retarded man named Bing Zai, and his native Chicken Head village. The whole story is an allegory of the history of the Chinese traditional culture. Bing Zai appears to be a second Ah Q although he lives in the current society. Thus, by describing Bing Zai and his village, Han reveals the stagnation of the Chinese culture, thereby casting doubt on the official assertion that the Chinese people have made great progress in both material and spiritual lives over the last few decades.

The Red Sorghum Clan by Mo Yan is a story about narrator's three-generation family history. The participation of the narrator's grandparents in the anti-Japanese War is the most grandeur part of the story. In the official history, the victory of the anti-Japanese War has always been attributed to the resistance led by the Chinese Communist Party. Mo Yan challenges this view by describing the positive role of the narrator's grandparents, who are the owners of a wine store, and their bandit friends in the war.

In "Faded Shadows," Ye Zhaoyan deals with the trivial life experiences and psychology of his characters, which are beyond the reach of history. The novella provides a rather thought-provoking view of the Cultural Revolution, but does not constitute a direct challenge to the official lines.

The novella tells a story about the experience of a teenager, Chi Qinting, during the Cultural Revolution. Although the Cultural Revolution is generally considered as a terrible catastrophe, it is described as Chi Qinting's bittersweet memory in the novella. Because Chi Qinting had his precious adolescent experiences in those years, he is emotionally attached to the Cultural Revolution in a way different from that for those who suffered

a great deal during that period. In the novella, Ye Zhaoyan adopts a personalized view rather than a generalized view of the Cultural Revolution in the novella. The Cultural Revolution appears to be a personal souvenir for Chi Qinting.

The Cultural Revolution has been written about in a large number of literary works since it ended in 1976. Among them, the literary works known as the "literature of the wounded" appeared first. They include fiction published in 1977 and 1978. These works portray the Cultural Revolution as a nightmare and lash out at the Gang of Four. They are referred to as the "literature of the wounded" because they expose both physical and psychological scars left by the Cultural Revolution and one of the first of these stories was entitled "The Wound"¹.

The "literature of the wounded" meets the collective need of the society for purgation and purification at that time. It is dominated by tears, hatred, anguish and relief. Fresh memories of tortures and suffering are recounted in the form of fiction. Compared with horrifying stories vividly told in the "literature of the wounded," Chi Qinting's recollection of his experiences during the Cultural Revolution is somewhat obscure and ambiguous in "Faded Shadows", which was published in 1990. "The trace of the past has become a kind of fading memory, which, though blurred, will never disappear or become clear."² Time is powerful. It erodes one's emotional attachment with whatever one experienced in the past. Ye Zhaoyan reinforces this effect in the novella. The protagonist Chi Qinting

¹. Lu Xinhua, "The Wound," in *Wenhuibao* (Literary Daily), Shanghai, August, 11 (1978).

². Ye Zhaoyan, "Faded Shadows." p. 164.

sounds rather unemotional when he recalls his past as a mature man. He is calm, confident, relaxed and even self-mocking.

The "literature of the wounded" has inherited the mode of socialist realism. It still uses ideological labels and emphasizes confrontation among people in a political context. In contrast, in Ye Zhaoyan's treatment of the Cultural Revolution, the life of ordinary people does not have much ideological color. Ye Zhaoyan's effort to rid his characters of commonly used ideological labels is clearly shown in "Faded Shadows". In the following example, Ye Zhaoyan describes a politically sensitive incident in which Ya Hong informs against Chi Qinting.

When Ya Hong visits Chi Qinting's parents for the first time at Chi Qinting's home, Chi Qinting shows her some pictures taken at the scene of the April Fifth incident, which took place in 1976. In the incident, the Chinese government violently ended a spontaneous movement in which people commemorated late premier Zhou Enlai and protested the rise of the Gang of Four. It is considered a counterrevolutionary act to keep and distribute the unofficial pictures of the incident at that time. The Public Security Bureau is actively searching for things like these pictures. The pictures were originally confiscated by the Public Security Bureau. Erpang, a friend of Chi Qinting's, has a friend who works in the Public Security Bureau. Erpang's friend stole the pictures. As the Bureau tightened its search, he transferred these pictures to Erpang. Erpang couldn't find a safe place for the pictures, so he passed them on to Chi Qinting.

If the mode of thinking in the "literature of the wounded" was used, the above activities could well be described as a political incident. Chi Qinting, Erpang and Erpang's friend could be depicted as good fellows

who were opposed to the Gang of Four, whereas Ya Hong could be portrayed as a leftist who reported Chi Qinting to the Bureau. Chi Qinting would carry out his struggle with Ya Hong to a touching end. But, in "Faded Shadows", Ya Hong is a naive girl. She does eventually tell the Public Security Bureau what she saw at Chi Qinting's home. However, her intention is not political but simply to have Chi Qinting punished for his infidelity. At the end of the novella, the two are reconciled.

In Ye Zhaoyan's novella, hatred, an essential emotional component in the "literature of the wounded" as well as in the literature of the Cultural Revolution period, has dissipated. Instead, Ye Zhaoyan advocates reconciliation and compromise. He is different from the writers of the "literature of the wounded" in that he suggests that one should learn a lesson from the Cultural Revolution, but should not continue to bear the hatred.

'In terms of literary excellence, the literature of 1977-78 was indeed "wounded literature," in many respects indistinguishable from that of the Cultural Revolution era except that the roles assigned to "good guys" and "bad guys" had been reversed. As bad art these stories hold only historical interest for us today, and that primarily because they gave us our first officially approved picture of the Cultural Revolution nightmare.'¹ Compared with the "literature of the wounded", "Faded Shadows" is artistically superior. For example, using only a few detailed descriptions, Ye Zhaoyan successfully re-creates the atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution. These descriptions contain no tears and blood that one often find in the "literature of the wounded," and, instead, are full of satire,

¹. Michael Duke, *Blooming and Contending*, p. 64.

irony and humor. So, if the "wound" inflicted during the Cultural Revolution was still hurting and people needed to cry out through the "literature of the wounded" in the late 70s, it was healing about 10 years later as people became warm-tempered and good-humored in Ye Zhaoyan's novella.

A string of Chairman Mao badges is mentioned several times in the novella. It serves as a reminder of when the story took place. The author often refers to the string in a satirical tone to eliminate the symbolic ideological value that it used to carry. For example, when the badges appear for the first time in the novella, Ye Zhaoyan describes them in a ridiculing way, "Chi Qinting looks at the string of badges as if he was looking at a string of live crabs".¹

The most powerful irony in the story is an episode in which Chi Qinting is making sexual advances on Ya Hong at the very moment when Mao Zedong's death is announced.

September 9th of this year is an important day in Chinese history. Chi Qinting begins to fondle Ya Hong when a radio outside announces that an important news will be broadcast. Someone walks by in the hall way (outside of their room). They also hear someone asking people to turn on the radio immediately. Noises appear to suggest that something big is about to happen. Ya Hong gets up, turn on the radio and keeps on turning the knob. When Ya's hands are tied up, Chi Qinting seizes the opportunity to put his hands under her clothes, touching her. There is quite a period of silence. All of a sudden, funeral music is played. Ya Hong is scared: "Who is dead?" While

¹. Ye Zhaoyan, "Faded Shadows." p.84.

listening to the radio, Chi Qinting has quietly taken off Ya Hong's pants.

Surprised by what Chi Qinting has done, Ya Hong turns to Chi Qinting:

"What kind of a person are you!"¹

In this paragraph, Ye Zhaoyan puts a private act in the background of one of the most serious and important political events to produce a surprisingly absurd contrast.

¹. Ibid.

Chapter 3

The Artistry of Ye Zhaoyan's Realist Fiction

The political changes initiated in 1977 brought about limited relaxation of the control by the Chinese Communist Party over literature. Feeling less constrained by the Party's ideology than ever since 1957, Chinese writers were anxious to express their minds in their writings in this so-called immediate post-Mao era¹. Noticeably, however, the literature in this period still has the characteristics of Socialist Realism² and Revolutionary Romanticism³ since the writers, having been trained for

1. In the thesis, the literature of the immediate post-Mao era includes the literature published from 1977 to mid-1980s, most of which is different from both the literature before 1977 and the literature after 1985 in its content as well as in its style .

2. Socialist Realism was an official doctrine for creative writing in China, which was initially formulated by Mao in his *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* and maintained during the entire Maoist era (1942-1976). It abandoned the critical edge of realism, echoed the Chinese Communist Party's version of reality, and eulogized socialism. Characters in the literature of Socialist Realism are classified into so-called "types". Each "type" represents people of a certain class status which is determined according to Mao's methods. Socialist heroes are representative of revolutionary masses; middle characters have uncertain ideological commitments; and enemy characters are counterrevolutionary villains. Therefore, Socialist Realism is didactic and stereotyped in nature.

3. Revolutionary Romanticism is an official doctrine for creative writing during the Maoist era (1942-1976). It passionately extols revolutionary heroes, socialist ideals and victories. It breaks away from May Fourth Romanticism, an analogue of European Romanticism, and the Chinese literary tradition of

years to think along the lines of the old ideology, were not yet mentally prepared to embark on free literary writing. The real breakup of Chinese literature with the old style came only after 1985. Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction represents one of the trends in the new literary era. In the following, I will discuss the major achievements of Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction in four aspects: characters, plot and structure, narrative effects and modes of narration.

(1) Characters

A distinctive feature of literary works in the immediate post-Mao era is their emphasis on human dignity and values which were long ignored under Mao's rule in China. Protagonists were portrayed as strong-willed heroes or heroines of idealism, or "human beings written in big characters" (*daxie de ren*). By contrast, Ye Zhaoyan, in his realist fiction, pays close attention to people who are down to earth, morally and spiritually unspectacular, and often confused about their lives. "Human beings written in big characters" often found in the immediate post-Mao era fiction are thus replaced by "human beings written in small characters" (*xiaoxie de ren*) in Ye Zhaoyan's writings. For example, in "Reaching Middle Age" by Shen Rong in 1980¹, the female protagonist Lu Wenting is an idealist who

romanticism by eliminating personal vision of life, subjectivity of personal emotion, spontaneous expression of personal feelings, and longing for romantic love. (For a more detailed description of the history of romanticism in modern China, see Michael Duke's *Blooming and Contending*, p. 182-185.)

¹. Shen Rong, "Ren dao zhongnian" (Reaching Middle Age), SH, no.1 (1980).

places spiritual satisfaction far above material interests. Inspired by the ideal instilled in her throughout her education, Lu Wenting unyieldingly endures great hardship in her life. She works exceedingly hard, lives in poor conditions, and has to face criticisms from a "Marxist old lady", the wife of a Party official. In Ye Zhaoyan's "Love Song", the protagonist Chi Qinting, by contrast, has no spiritual pursuits and is keen on material gains. Both Lu Wenting and Chi Qinting are middle-aged intellectuals: the former is a doctor and the latter a college teacher. Both have to face similar difficulties in housing, child care, income, etc. But, their attitudes and approaches to the problems are different. While Chi Qinting is buried in the trivial matters of everyday life, busy making extra money in his spare time in order to improve his economic situation, Lu Wenting seeks recourse to her spiritual strength and dissipates her anxieties about life in her own world of idealism. The appearance of characters who lack spiritual or moral sheen reflects social changes that have taken place in the last twenty years or so in China. In Ye Zhaoyan's fiction, Chi Qinting cares about nothing except his own well-being, and, like most ordinary people, struggles for a better material life instead of a noble ideal.

In Mao's era, revolutionary heroes and heroines, who embodied the Party's ideology, were paraded in literature. In contrast to the ordinary masses, these spiritual giants showed little human desire, passion, anxiety or pain. Under a more relaxed post-Mao policy, the rise of neo-realist fiction in the immediate post-Mao era¹ represents an attempt by Chinese

¹. For a more in-depth discussion of neo-realist fiction in the immediate post-Mao era, see Michael Duke, "The Neo-Realist Critique of the Maoist Era", in his *Blooming and Contending*, Indiana University Press, 1985. pp. 59-97.

writers to restore long-denied humanity in literature. In their fiction, they created characters with less ideological flavor and gave them blood and flesh. But the neo-realist fiction is still influenced to a certain extent by Socialist Realism. The characters are morally and spiritually enriched, and larger than life. So, although the characters were created out of ordinary people, they nevertheless have heroic and idealistic traits. These traits are removed in Ye Zhaoyan's fiction.

Ye Zhaoyan's characters are neither flawless nor evil. In "Reaching Middle Age," Shen Rong portrays Dr. Lu Wenting as a heroine-like figure who strives for her romantic ideals and neglects her own material life, a quality uncommon among ordinary people. She is a politically correct "type" created using the Socialist Realism methods. Moreover, she has the qualities of an ideal Chinese intellectual, i.e. loyalty to the nation and unselfish devotion to a noble cause. In "Love Song", the moral standard of Chi Qinting is shared by so many ordinary people that a prototype of Chi Qinting can be easily found in real life. As M. H. Abrams has pointed out, "realistic fiction is written so as to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen." To achieve such effects, realist writers "may or may not be selective in subject matter--although most of them prefer the commonplace and the everyday over rarer aspects of life-- but they must render their materials in ways that make them seem to their readers the very stuff of ordinary experience."¹ "Love Song" is an example of Ye Zhaoyan's realist writings.

¹. M. H. Abrams, "Realism and Naturalism", *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, P. 174.

In order to create the effect that his characters do exist in real life and his stories do happen in the real world, Ye Zhaoyan always shows his characters in life size and goes to great lengths to describe the details of an ordinary life experience that are often ignored by other writers. For example, street gossip and hearsay in "Hanging Green Apples", the boring everyday life of the Chi Qinting's in "Love Song", and a forgotten teenager in a dark corner of a factory during the Cultural Revolution in "Faded Shadows". His seemingly careless and unfocused style appears to serve not only to create the effect of realism but also to attract the attention of readers who are familiar with stories containing tortuous plots. Several writers have commented on Ye Zhaoyan's style. Su Tong, a famous young writer, notes, "Ye Zhaoyan is fascinated with trivial matters which are not what other writers would write about. His stories appear to be very loose in structure and uneventful. But these features help attract readers' attention. All these show his talent for creative writing."¹ Su Tong also cites Gao Xiaosheng, another contemporary writer, as saying that Ye Zhaoyan is keen on exploring scenes that appear meaningless and tend to evade attention.²

Ye Zhaoyan is not only a good observer of the trivial matters in ordinary life, but also a master in weaving them into an interesting theme in his story. This ability is clearly shown in the three novellas in discussion. For example, the following is a scene from "Hanging Green Apples". This scene describes how people in the opera troupe try to get some information from Lao Wei about the man that he saw climbing

¹. Su Tong, "An Impression of Ye Shaoyan."

². Ibid.

through a window into Zhang Ying's room on the night he was playing cards with his friends. Before the conversation, these people already knew that the man entering Zhang Ying's room was a member of the troupe because he left a troupe sweater there.

Lao Wei gives out another clue unintentionally.

Lao Wei is viewed as a strange man by people in the troupe. He is strange because he never intends to find out other people's secrets. He is half human since he eats, drinks, plays and likes to have fun, and half celestial since he never pokes his nose into other people's business. Once someone saw a married man kissing a married woman on the back stage and asked Lao Wei to take a look. But he was embarrassed by Lao Wei: "I am blind and can't see things like that. Don't bother me anymore."

Knowing Lao Wei's personality, someone still tries to test him: "Banxian (half celestial), did you say last time the man was tall. Who could that be then?"

Lao Wei's face is turning red again: "Nonsense. Who deliberately made this rumor? When did I say things like that?"

The man who is talking to Lao Wei pretends to be uninterested in arguing with Lao Wei about this as if Lao Wei was trying to deny what he had said. Lao Wei becomes agitated and cannot but try to clear himself: "How could you imagine that was what I said. Well, I wouldn't argue with you if the man was tall. But, as a matter of fact, he is not tall at all ..." A clue is thus obtained.¹

¹. Ye Zhaoyan, "Hanging Green Apples," p. 15-16.

This is an unspectacular scene in which two ordinary people are engaged in a common conversation. This scene exemplifies how people are often driven by a grotesque curiosity to know about others and, thus, sheds light on their social behavior and psychology, a part of the theme in the novella. Although there are no surprises in the scene, the conversation is humorous and sophisticated. The contrast between Lao Wei's honesty and the other's cunning is especially interesting. Scenes like this are interwoven throughout the novella giving it great appeal to readers.

(2) Plot and Structure

Ye Zhaoyan has been experimenting with plot and structure in his realist writings. Staying away from the old realist treatment of plot and structure, he has developed a unique style of his own, which is arguably his most important contribution to the storytelling techniques in realist fiction.

In previous realist fiction, there is only one narrative goal. A plot develops in a direction determined by the narrative goal, and proceeds sequentially through the following stages: beginning, build-up, climax and ending. The plot and structure in the novella "Reaching Middle Age" is an example. The narrative goal in the story is to describe the career and life of Lu Wenting. To reach the goal, the plot starts with a scene when Lu Wenting just graduated from medical school and became a doctor. The story then develops as Lu Wenting faces a heavy work load, political discrimination and poor living conditions. In the climax scene, Lu Wenting has a heart attack after performing a successful operation. The story ends in an allegoric way as a recovering Lu Wenting, leaning on her

husband's shoulder, walks slowly to the gate to welcome "the sunlight and the cold wind."¹

In some of Ye Zhaoyan's realist works, more than one, usually two, narrative goals exist. Two goals are introduced in sequence, but the second goal often appears before the completion of the first one. In fact, the first narrative goal is dissolved as the second one comes in. Since each narrative goal is pursued in a story, there are usually two stories in his fiction. Therefore, Ye Zhaoyan structures his fiction in such a manner that one story leads to another.

In "Hanging Green Apples", the first narrative goal is to find out who climbed into Zhang Ying's room that night. The story unfolds in this direction, leading to the appearance of Zhang Ying, in the beginning part of the novella. But, with Zhang Ying's appearance comes a new narrative goal which is to know more about Zhang Ying's marriage and life. The old narrative goal disappears as the new one sets in. The suspense surrounding the identity of the man who entered Zhang Ying's room remains till the end of the novella.

One can thus consider this novella as one that contains two interconnected stories. It starts with a suspense story in which the goal is to find the man who got very close to committing a rape. Once Zhang Ying, the victim in the opening story, comes on the scene, the novella switches to Zhang Ying's story. Zhang Ying serves to bridge the two stories.

Though not as obvious as in "Hanging Green Apples", a similar plotting structure can also be found in "Love Song" and "Faded Shadows".

¹. See Shen Rong, "Reaching Middle Age." Ibid.

In "Love Song", the opening story tells how Chi Qinting marries Mu Lan through a chain of coincidences, whereas the later story focuses on their lack of spiritual life after they are married. Their marriage provides the link between the two stories. In "Faded Shadows", the first story describes Chi Qinting's spiritual love with Qingqing, where the second story is about the affair between Chi Qinting and his female teacher. The switch from the first to the second story occurs when Chi Qinting is assigned to work in a factory after his graduation from middle school during the Cultural Revolution.

A plot pattern can be found in Ye Zhaoyan's novellas: the first part of novella appears to be superficial and full of description of unexpected interactions among people. Once these people are brought together, the author starts to pursue his second narrative goal, that is, an in-depth description of the psychology of the characters.

In "Hanging Green Apples", Lao Wei accidentally sees a man climb into Zhang Ying's room through a window. As an eye witness, Lao Wei becomes related to both Zhang Ying and the mysterious man. But, after Zhang Ying enters the spotlight, the second story takes over, which revolves around the inner world of Zhang Ying and the mentality of the people in her opera troupe. In "Love Song", because of mistaken identity, Chi Qinting is acquainted with and eventually married to Mu Lan instead of Pang Jianqing, with whom he falls in love. Ye Zhaoyan does not confine the novella to the description of the coincidental nature of the marriage, but develops another story out of the first one. In the second story, Ye Zhaoyan seeks to show the emptiness of their spiritual lives after they are married. In the beginning of the novella "Faded Shadows", Chi Qinting is assigned to a factory. He buys Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*, a book then

banned, with his first-month's wages and sends it to Chi Qingqing as a show of his love for her. But, Chi Qingqing does not accept his love and ignores him. His assignment to the factory brings him and his teacher Zhang Ying together, a coincidence which allows a new story to start. In the second story, Ye Zhaoyan portrays the bizarre relationship between Chi Qinting and Zhang Ying and reveals the innermost being of Chi Qinting.

The method of letting one story lead to another is not a new one. The use of similar methods can be found in classical Chinese novels as well as in the modern fiction of James Joyce. Ye Zhaoyan's realist works, however, are different from the others in the way in which stories are connected. In classical Chinese novels, like *Journey to the West* (Xiyou ji), many stories are connected and arranged in sequence in accordance with the journey of the protagonists to their destinations. In James Joyce's fiction stories are often connected by stream of consciousness. In Ye Zhaoyan's fiction, by contrast, the first and second stories are not causally related. The author switches from one story to another simply by changing the narrative direction. Since the transition occurs abruptly, it often takes readers by surprise. In "Hanging Green Apples", when readers are eager to find out who that mysterious man is, Ye Zhaoyan starts Zhang Ying's story. In "Love Song", Ye Zhaoyan does not stop at describing how a coincidence brings about a marriage, but unexpectedly digs into the details of the everyday life of Chi Qinting after his marriage. In "Faded Shadows", the spiritual love of Chi Qinting for Qingqing in the first story contrasts sharply with the pure sexual desire of the protagonist for Zhang Ying in the second story.

Ye Zhaoyan also uses the same technique in some of his other short stories, such as "Children's Songs"¹ and "Green Coffee Shop"². It appears, therefore, that Ye Zhaoyan has developed his own artistic style for realist fiction writing. His style may reflect his view of the world. He seems to believe that things are not always related in a rational and causal manner. However, there may exist an intrinsic order in this chaotic world. One can feel the presence of the order by human instinct and not by logic.

Ye Zhaoyan's world view is clearly shaped by his personal experience, as discussed in Chapter 1. In addition, it may be influenced by modern Western ideas. Since the early decades of this century, the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by scientific and technological advances and industrial revolution have caused a wide range of serious social problems that human beings had never before encounter. People began to ponder and doubt the power of human reason. The birth of Western modernism and postmodernism reflects this trend of thoughts. Since China opened its door to the Western world in 1978, modern Western thoughts flushed into the country along with advanced management methods, modern technology and commercial goods. Literature of the absurd which reflects existential philosophy such as *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, etc., was quickly found on the top of the reading lists of many intellectuals, especially college students. Literature of the Absurd such as Beckett's play "projects the irrationalism, helplessness, and absurdity of life, in dramatic forms that reject realistic

¹. Ye Zhaoyan, "Erge" (Children's Songs), YH, no.12 (1988).

². Ye Zhaoyan, "Lüse kafeiguan" (Green Coffee Shop), STWX, no. 1 (1989).

settings, logical reasoning, or a coherently evolving plot."¹ By the time Ye Zhaoyan entered graduate school, the newly imported Western literature had begun to take a hold on the minds of many young writers. The omnipresent modern Western moods in literary circles presumably have influenced the world view of Ye Zhaoyan.

As discussed above, a rigid, stereotyped mode in plot structure and development can be found in the literature of the Cultural Revolution era and the immediate post-Mao period. A story always unfolds through a fixed sequence of the following stages: beginning, build-up, climax and ending. The plot development in these stories is governed by the law of causality. Therefore, everything is predictable and under control. This mode of plot structure and development reflects the communist world view which suggests that human beings can not only learn about but also change the world. This officially sanctioned world view under Mao's rule shows overtly optimistic trust in human reason, intelligence and ability.

By contrast, Ye Zhaoyan is skeptical of the ability of human beings to understand the world. His attitude is manifested in his own plotting style. In his realist fiction, an ongoing story is always interrupted by another story. The narrator thus appears to abandon his original narrative goal, and pursue another one. Despite its seemingly irrational appearance, Ye Zhaoyan's plotting style is in fact rational because it reflects objective reality and the limitation of human reason.

¹. Abrams, p. 1.

(3) Narrative Effects

Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction has a comic effect. Ye Zhaoyan appears to believe that life is full of puzzles. A sense of mystery is always maintained in his stories. In "Green Apples", why does Zhang Ying change her mind and decide to marry the Qinghai man? No answer is given. As a writer who combs the details of every scene, he clearly intends to give his readers a puzzle by leaving this question unanswered. At the end of the novella, when Zhang Ying is reconciled with her husband, the author again avoids giving any hints about the future of the couple: "Things in the future are too far down the road to be known now."¹ In "Love Song", coincidences bring Chi Qinting and Mu Lan together and they eventually become a couple, a story that implies the existence of mysterious "yuanfen" (fate), a supernatural force. In "Faded Shadows", Chi Qinting's experience in the factory also seems to be arranged by an invisible hand of fate. His life would take a different path if the social order was not broken during that period of time.

What is Ye Zhaoyan's philosophy about life in his realist writings? As discussed above, Ye Zhaoyan appears to think that life is sometimes a puzzle or a mystery. One can not always control one's own fate by sheer human effort. In his stories, the characters try to live a good life but often find themselves tricked by fate. Pictures with a comic flavor thus emerge: everybody walks along their somewhat awkward life paths that are often defined or altered by coincidences and surprises.

¹. See Ye Zhaoyan, "Hanging Green Apples". p. 76. Ibid.

In order to achieve comic effects, Ye Zhaoyan relies heavily on irony in his narration. Irony "refers to every possible disjunction between what is said and what is meant, every slippage between the out-of-context and the in-context import at a wide range of figures of speech, literary allusions, lines of dialogues, and even narrative situations."¹

The ironic effect is produced by the disjunction between a narrative surface and the meaning underlying it in Ye Zhaoyan's fiction. In "Hanging Green Apples", Ye Zhaoyan shows how Zhang Ying tries her best to save her marriage: she constantly gives in to her hot-tempered husband, provides his son with loving care, and even has an abortion because her husband does not want to have another child. However, underlying the description is the intention of the author to show that what Zhang Ying actually gets is contrary to her wishes. The more Zhang Ying gives in, the farther apart she gets from her husband. To Zhang Ying, marriage, just like green apples, looks good but tastes sour and puckery. This probably is the hidden meaning of the title of the novella. In "Faded Shadows", Ye Zhaoyan vividly describes how nervous and scary Chi Qinting is in his sexual adventures. Hidden under the serious tone is the author's ridicule of Chi Qinting's behavior. In "Love Song", Chi Qinting is not interested in Mu Lan at the beginning. On the narrative surface, Ye Zhaoyan details the steps that Chi Qinting takes to stay away from Mu Lan. But the hidden message is that Chi Qinting's attempts only brings Mu Lan ever closer to him. They finally get married. Chi Qinting can not escape the arrangement of fate.

¹. Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, Princeton University Press, 1987. p. 123.

In his preface to the novella "Love Song" (Yange), Ye Zhaoyan indicates that the word "yan" means "ridiculous and funny" in ancient Chu dialect.¹ In modern Chinese, "yange" means "love song". Therefore, the title "yange" is ironic in that its old and new meanings describe the appearance and the essence of the story, respectively. In this sense, all the stories that are discussed here are, in fact, "yange" because they convey the same message, that is, life is but a comedy.

(4) Modes of Narration

Ye Zhaoyan employs two modes of narration in his fiction: a mode used in popular fiction and a mode in serious literature.

Ye Zhaoyan borrows techniques from traditional popular fiction in the three novellas discussed in this thesis. The technique of letting one story lead to another that he uses in the fiction bears significant resemblance to the structural design in Chinese vernacular stories (huaben xianshuo) of the Ming and Qing dynasties in addition to classical Chinese novels and James Joyce's fiction. In a vernacular story, the main story is preceded by a prologue. Almost all the vernacular stories have prologues, which may vary in format: a short poem, a complex series of poems, an introductory prose, a prologue story, etc., all of which serve as an anticipatory comment. In some of the stories, the storytellers place a strong lively

¹. Chu: today's Hubei Province. See Ye Zhaoyan, the preface to *Yange*, in *Yange*, p. 7.

scene at the beginning, where it will command attention.¹ For example, in the famous story "Encounter in Yanshan" (Yang Siwen Yanshan feng guren)², the prologue is a story referring to holidays in the capital city in times of peace, with people straining their eyes to catch a glimpse of the Emperor as he comes out to join the festivities. The prologue of this type is only loosely related to the main story which, in this case, is about a man who betrays his vows and is eventually punished by Heaven. The function of a prologue is to gather an audience. Storytellers will switch to the main story as soon as there is large enough an audience around. People who come later will not miss anything important, since, in the most cases, the main stories are unrelated to the prologues.

Like the prologues in vernacular stories, the opening stories in Ye Zhaoyan's three novellas are relatively simple, as compared to the latter stories. Like the prologues, the opening stories are very appealing to readers. Among the three novellas, "Hanging Green Apples" is the best example in this regard. The novella begins with Lao Wei playing cards with his three friends, "Lao Wei says carelessly 'a man has just climbed to Zhang Ying's room on the third floor using the ladder over there' as he deals out his cards. ... (Lao Wei) hasn't walked very far when he hears the ladder creaking. He turns his head back, seeing the man climbing down the ladder with his back arched."³ With the suspense who is that man, the

1. See Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981. p. 32.

2. Feng Menglong, "Yang Siwen Yanshan feng guren" (Encounter in Yanshan), in his *Stories Old and New*, Taipei, 1958.

3. "Hanging Green Apples," p. 12-13.

beginning succeeds in arousing readers' curiosity. But, the function of the opening stories goes beyond attracting readers in Ye Zhaoyan's fiction. The opening stories provide a launching pad for the main stories, and are also designed to structure the entire stories. As discussed above, the way in which leading and subsequent stories are connected reflects a view of life that Ye Zhaoyan intends to convey in his fiction.

In addition to this traditional structural technique, Ye Zhaoyan also uses conventional plots of popular fiction. For example, in "Hanging Green Apples", the following plot designs are often seen in popular fiction:

1. Marriage between Zhang Ying, an ugly woman, and the Qinghai man, a good-looking man, and the infidelity of the latter.

Zhang Ying is an ugly woman, "she is fat and short, and has short legs. Her feet are like those of a child. Looking from the front, her shoulders are so bulgy that her two arms always seem to be away from her body; looking from the side, her bosom is too thick, breasts are too big, and buttocks are bulgy. She looks just like an inflated ball from every angle."¹ On the other hand, the Qinghai man is good-looking, "he is big and tall, has a handsome face and an imposing appearance."² He later has an affair with another woman. A similar design can be found in *Jin Ping Mei* except that the sexes are reversed. In the novel, Pang Jinlian and Wu the elder are a couple. Pang Jinlian is a beauty with

Cheeks like peach blossoms, and
Eyebrows like the crescent moon,³

1. "Hanging Green Apples," p. 19.

2. Ibid., p. 21.

3. *Jin Ping Mei*, p. 27.

whereas Wu the elder has "the nickname Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin, in vulgar allusion to his coarse exterior and cramped features."¹ Pang Jinlian later has an affair with Ximen Qing.

2. Discovery of the Qinghai man's affair.

The Qinghai Man has an affair when Zhang Ying is away from home. But, Zhang Ying returns home unexpectedly and finds what has happened. She "sticks the key into the key hole and turns it gently. The door opens: it is not locked from inside. In the mirror on the wardrobe Zhang Ying sees what is going on in the room."² In *Jin Ping Mei*, with the help of Yunge, Wu the elder rushes to the scene where Pang Jinlian is having an affair with Ximen Qing. "Wu the elder charged up to the door and gave it a shove, but he was unable to push it open and could only call out, 'That's a fine thing you're up to!'"³

Some conventional plots are also used in "Love Song" and "Faded Shadows". In "Love Song", the plot that Chi Qinting falls in love with Pang Jianqing at the first glance (Yijian zhongqing) is a rather stereotyped one. In "Faded Shadows", the story about the secret love of Chi Qinting for Qingqing is one, which fits well with a popular literary formula for love stories: "an ugly duckling falls in love with an elegant swan".

Why does Ye Zhaoyan adopt so many conventional plot designs in his fiction? In his answer to a similar question about the use of conventional designs in *Jin Ping Mei*, David Roy suggests that the author of the novel probably wants "to lull his readers into thinking that they were reading a

¹. Ibid., p. 24.

². "Hanging Green Apples," p. 47.

³. *Jin Ping Mei*, p. 100.

type of fiction with which they were already familiar, and to lure them only gradually into another level of fictional world that his techniques create as the narrative unfolds."¹ Presumably, Ye Zhaoyan also wants to attract readers by using the conventional plots of popular fiction. However, Ye Zhaoyan does not follow the conventional plots through to the end, and, instead, leads his readers into a new fictional world, where human nature and the nature of life are explored.

In "Hanging Green Apples", Ye Zhaoyan starts with a suspense story. But, when his readers are attracted by the story and anxious to find out who the mysterious man is, Ye Zhaoyan switches his focus to the story about Zhang Ying, the victim, leaving the suspense story unfinished. Ye Zhaoyan thus abandons the conventional formula for a suspense story, that is, to pursue and identify the suspect. As the narrative continues, Ye Zhaoyan portrays in great detail the personality of Zhang Ying and the psychology of the people around her. So, although it begins like a popular story, "Hanging Green Apples" has the characteristics of serious literature.

In "Love Song", Ye Zhaoyan also uses a common plot to start the story. Chi Qinting falls in love with Pang Jianqing at first sight (yijian zhongqing). But, this story line is soon discontinued. They do not develop their love. Chi Qinting is later married to Mu Lan, who he does not like at the beginning. By comparison, in a conventional love story, lovers who fall in love at first sight will further develop their love.

Similarly, "Faded Shadows" begins with a brief, stereotyped story about Chi Qinting's spiritual love with Qingqing. The author then goes to

¹. David Roy, Introduction to *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, in his *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, xlv.

Ibid.

great lengths to describe the awakening of Chi Qinting's sexual consciousness and his sexual adventures in the background of the Cultural Revolution.

Clearly, in his three realist novellas, Ye Zhaoyan combines the characteristics of serious literature with those of popular literature. Blending of the two modes of narration appears to be essential to Ye Zhaoyan's rhetorical strategy. But, does this approach affect the unity of the fictional style? When commenting on the heteroglossia of novels, Russian critic M. M. Bakhtin suggests: "The author participates in the novel (he is omnipresent in it) with almost no direct language of his own. The language of the novel is a system that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. Therefore, there is no unitary language (a verbal-ideologic center) for the novel. The author (as creator of the novelistic whole) can not be found at any one of the novel's language levels: he is to be found at the center of organization where all levels intersect."¹ The presence of the two modes of narration in Ye Zhaoyan's fiction is a manifestation of heteroglossia. The two modes appear to function dialogically in the fiction: while the popular fiction side entertains readers, the serious fiction side interrupts the entertainment by revealing the true meaning of life. On the other hand, the flavor of popular fiction makes reading of the serious side of the fiction a more enjoyable or less stressful experience. Moreover, the author's view that life is full of coincidences is most effectively conveyed at the intersection between the two levels of narration.

¹. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press, 1981. pp. 47-49.

Having the two modes of narration, Ye Zhaoyan's novellas are appealing to both simple and sophisticated readers. Simple readers may be attracted to Ye Zhaoyan's fiction because of its opening stories which they are familiar with and interested in. Sophisticated readers will enjoy looking at life from perspectives that Ye Zhaoyan provides in his fiction.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Since the May Fourth, realist literature has long been the mainstream of Chinese literature. Although it has taken different forms in different times in the history of modern Chinese literature, realism before 1985, in general, is "didactic, moralistic, reformist. Without always realizing the conflict between description and prescription, it tries to reconcile the two in the concept of 'type'. In some writers, but not all, realism becomes historic: it grasps social reality as dynamic evolution."¹

During the May Fourth period, realist literature exposed the dark sides of reality using Western humanitarianism and individualism as its weapons. It fought against "feudalist" consciousness. Since the 1930s, literature in China, however, lost its critical edge. In the literary writings produced in the areas controlled by the Communist Party, realist writers tried to stay away from problems in reality. Socialist Realism was installed in the 1950s. As a method of writing, Socialist Realism matured in the 1960s and reached its peak of perfection in the 1970s. Socialist Realism describes characters and events that embody or reflect official Communist ideology, which itself has been changing all the time.

Socialist Realism was the official doctrine governing literary writing in mainland China for nearly 30 years (1949 - 1976). During this period, Chinese writers were deprived of freedom of creation. How to write, what

¹. René Wellek, "Concepts of Realism in Literary Scholarship", In his *Concepts of Criticism*, Yale University Press, Edited by Stephen G. Nichols, Jr., 1963. pp. 252-253.

to write, what should and what should not be written were all controlled. Therefore, writers had no choice but to portray socialist heroes and heroines, and to produce socialist myths.

Toward the end of the 1970s, China gradually opened its door to the West. Western modern and contemporary literature flooded into China, and took Chinese writers by surprise. The writers were shocked to see a new artistic world. What attracted Chinese writers most at that time was Western modernism and postmodernism, which include the thoughts and theories of Friedrich Nietzsche, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, etc., which are the philosophical foundation of modernism; modernist literary works by James Joyce, Franz Kafka, etc.; the thoughts and theories of existential philosophers Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, etc., which are the philosophical foundation of Western postmodernism; postmodernist literary works by Donald Barthelme, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Gabriel García Márquez, Samuel Beckett, Roland Barthes, Thomas Pynchon, etc.; and the theory of poststructuralism.

Under the strong influence of Western modernism and postmodernism, the first New Wave fiction (*xinchao xiaoshuo*) was born in the mid 1980s, when Ma Yun, Liu Sola and Mo Yan published "The Temptation of Gangdisi", "You Have No Other Choice" and "The Crystal Carrot", respectively. Many acclaimed the arrival in China of its own writings which they thought comparable to Western modernist and postmodernist works. Some Chinese critics then considered Ma Yuan to be China's Robbe-Grillet, Mo Yan China's Faulkner and Márquez, and Liu Sola China's black humor writer. The writers of New Wave fiction are generally referred to as "modernists" (*xiandai pai*) by some Chinese critics.

But the first New Wave fiction was criticized by others as "counterfeit modernist fiction" (wei xiandai pai) for its imitation of some famous Western works. One can easily identify the Western writers that the New Wave fiction writers were trying to mimic. Toward the end of 1986, the second New Wave fiction emerged. Yu Hua, Su Tong and Ye Zhaoyan are representatives of the second New Wave fiction. These writers are more mature than their predecessors. The second New Wave fiction has surpassed the primary stage of merely imitating Western modernist and/or postmodernist works. The writers of the second New Wave fiction not only borrow foreign techniques but also transform them into their own styles.

But, surprisingly, the second New Wave fiction did not draw as much attention from literary circles or the public as the first one did. The reasons are complicated: (1) since it is detached from ideology, the second New Wave fiction has lost touch with the immediate reality that readers are most concerned about, and (2) the daring language experiments in the second New Wave fiction pose a formidable challenge to the conventional reading habits of the majority of readers. This cool reception for the second New Wave fiction may also be due to the fact that much of the public interest in literature that existed earlier has disappeared in the wake of a nationwide drive to get rich economically. Many fine artistic achievements prove to be a commercial failure.

Therefore, after conducting "modernist" experiments for several years, almost all the major Chinese "modernist" writers have switched to writing realist fiction in order to lull their readers back. They have changed their fictional language so that, instead of deviating from reader's

reading habits, it yields to them. For example, from "Human Affairs Like Smoke" to *To Live*, Yu Hua made such a transition.

Unlike most Chinese modernists who began to write realist fiction only recently, Ye Zhaoyan has practiced both realist and modernist writing from the very beginning of his literary career. However, his persistence in pursuing realist writing is based on the same concern as that of others: "If we can not defend the last territory of fiction by getting readers back, fiction will eventually die."¹

Have these writers really returned to the old realist style? No. These writers are so creative and sophisticated that they have applied various new techniques to the writing of realist fiction in a seemingly conservative mode. As a modernist, Ye Zhaoyan brings modernist techniques into his realist fiction. Thus, Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction contrast sharply with the previous realist fiction.

About thirty years ago, C. T. Hsia in his famous essay "Obsession with China" discussed the difference between modern Chinese literature and modern Western literature.² He believed that "the concern of modern Western literature with the individual psyche has betrayed its rebellious stance against the modern environment."³ "It is precisely the impersonal environment of modern man that has made possible this modern literature of nihilism and irrationality."⁴

1. Ye Zhaoyan, "Zuihou xiaoshuo" (Last Fiction), in ZPXS, no. 4 (1988).

2. C. T. Hsia, "Obsession with China," in his *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, Appendix 1, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.

3. Ibid., p. 536.

4. Ibid., p. 537.

Since the beginning of this century, the catastrophe of world wars, the threats of nuclear bombs, environmental pollution and explosion of population, and many other social problems have shaken the faith in the doctrine of progress, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, the belief in human reason, and the ideal of freedom defined within the framework of an abstract humanism. Modern men and women discover that they are cut off from their religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, and lost in confusion. Their actions become senseless, absurd, useless, as vividly described in *Chairs*,¹ a play by Eugene Ionesco. Modernist and postmodernist literatures are vehicles that carry these feelings of modern men and women.

Hsia suggested in his article that modern Chinese literature had "little in common with modern Western literature,"² as evidenced by the fact that there had been no modern Chinese writer to "probe the illness of modern civilization"³ by the time of his writing. "It would seem that he (meaning a modern Chinese writer) is equally concerned with spiritual sickness, but whereas very modern writer of England, America, France, and Germany (and the rule also applies to a few exceptional writers of Soviet Russia) automatically identifies the sick state of his country with the state of man in the modern world, the Chinese writer sees the conditions of China as peculiarly Chinese and not applicable elsewhere."⁴ Hsia indicated that, "If

1. Eugène Ionesco, *The Chair*, in *Four Plays*, translated by Donald M. Allen, New York: Grove Press, 1952.

2. Hsia, *Ibid.*, p. 536.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

he had the courage or insight to equate the Chinese scene with the condition of modern man, he would have been in the mainstream of modern literature."¹

Decades later, some Chinese writers have begun to express similar views to those in modern Western literature. Ye Zhaoyan is one of them. His three novellas discussed in this thesis are similar to modern Western literature in the following aspects.

1. Like modern Western writers, Ye Zhaoyan describes the awkward situations that a modern man or woman finds himself or herself in. For example, Chi Qinting in "Love Song" is a typical modern man who has lost control of his life: he loves Pang Jianqing, but eventually marries Mu Lan instead because of a series of coincidences. His life appears to be controlled by an invisible hand of fate. Chi Qinting appears to be indifferent to everything in life. For a period of time, he is crazy about making money because he wants to improve his family's living conditions. However, once he has money and gets what he has dreamed of, he feels lost and disappointed rather than satisfied. As a modern man, Chi Qinting experiences the following dilemma: when he wants something, he can not get it; when he gets something, he does not want it. The absurdity of the life of Chi Qinting is thus well revealed.

2. Like modern Western writers, Ye Zhaoyan uses cold and passionless narrative language and irony in his fiction. In most of the previous realist fiction, the language style is impassioned, extremely sentimental and fiercely satiric. Seeing "the conditions of China as

¹. Ibid.

peculiarly Chinese and not applicable elsewhere,"¹ they are consumed with patriotic passion and neglect the universality of the nature of the modern world. Their anxiety is exhibited in their language style, which affects the objectivity of their realist works. By contrast, some contemporary Chinese writers, such as Ye Zhaoyan, try to free themselves from national, social and cultural confines, and equate the Chinese scene with the condition of modern men and women in the world. They seem to have realized that the experience of an individual is paltry and even ridiculous in the absurd modern world. By using cold, passionless and ridiculing language, they distance themselves from what they write about in terms of emotion and morality such that they are able to present an objective view of life. In Ye Zhaoyan's fiction, the technique of irony is extensively used as discussed in the previous chapters. In "Love Songs", the title itself is ironic. In "Faded Shadows," Ye Zhaoyan describes Chi Qinting's sexual adventure in the background of the Cultural Revolution in irony.

3. As Abrams points out "many of the works of postmodern literature - by Jorge Luis Borges, Thomas Pynchon, Roland Barthes, and many others - so blend literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, the serious and the playful, that they resist classification according to traditional literary rubrics."² Like these Western works, Ye Zhaoyan's fiction also blends different styles. Ye Zhaoyan introduces some of the characteristics of suspense stories into his novella "Hanging Green Apples," which is not a suspense story. He weaves satire into his serious exploration of young Chi Qinting's psychology in "Faded Shadows." His narrative technique of

¹. Ibid.

². Abrams, Ibid., p. 120.

letting one story lead to another may have been inspired by the storytelling method of the Western modernist James Joyce as well as the traditional Chinese storytelling techniques.

Despite the presence of Western modernist and postmodernist elements in his three novellas, Ye Zhaoyan is by no means a modernist or postmodernist as defined in the West. The three novellas should be categorized as realist fiction. Ye Zhaoyan has clearly inherited many features from the previous realist fiction as he emphasizes the stories of protagonists, faces reality and pursues objectivity and detailed description. In addition, he appears to have a rational attitude toward the world. Although he expresses some of the nihilistic and pessimistic sentiments in his fiction, Ye Zhaoyan refuses to be a nihilist or pessimist in the Western sense because he always give hope to his characters and, thus, his readers. At the end of "Hanging Green Apples," Zhang Ying and her husband leave Nanjing for Qinghai to start a new life. In "Love Songs," although their love and marriage turn out to be disappointing, Chi Qinting and Mu Lan go on with their life (*guo rizi*) together. In "Faded Shadows," Chi Qinting eventually goes to college for a promising change in his life. Ye Zhaoyan, a Confucianist at heart, maintains a sophisticated and open-minded attitude to life: "Life is neither as wonderful as one hopes it is, nor as bad as one says it is."¹

In conclusion, Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction, like that of other Chinese modernists, arose as an attempt to win back readers that they drove away with their modernist writings. The switch to realist writing represents a change in attitude of these writers toward the cultural market. In the

¹. Hsia, p. 536.

realist fiction, the writers return to narrative and language styles that are familiar to readers. Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction, however, differs drastically from the previous realist fiction in that it presents a new artistic world using a combination of techniques borrowed from traditional Chinese popular fiction and from Western modernism and postmodernism. To this end, Ye Zhaoyan's realist fiction appears to represent his attempt to bridge the gap between realism and modernism, and to weave popular fiction elements into serious literature. It reflects the efforts of the Chinese modernists to adjust to the current change in the cultural trend by lessening rather than intensifying the contradiction between the old and the new, and between the Chinese tradition and the impact of Western culture.

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The bibliography includes (1) Ye Zhaoyan's major creative works and (2) works mentioned in the text.

Abbreviations

BHZ	Baihua zhou (One Hundred Flowers Island)
BJWX	Beijing wenxue (Beijing Literature)
CC	Changcheng (Great Wall)
CF	Chunfeng (Spring Breeze)
CJWY	Changjiang wenyi (Yangzi River Literature and Art)
DJ	Dajia (Great Masters)
DZPL	Dangdai zuojia pinglun (Critique on Contemporary Writers)
FC	Fangcao (Fragrant Grass)
FR	Furong (Lotus)
GZWY	Guangzhou wenyi (Guangzhou Literature and Art)
HC	Huacheng (Flower City)
HSWT	Haishang wentan (Marine Literary Circles)
HX	Haixia (Straits)
JF	Jingfang (Police Department)
JTFY	Jingtian fengyun (Wind and Cloud above Police Department)
LJ	Lijiang (Li River)
MY	Mengyia (Sprouting)
QC	Qingchun (Youth)
QDWX	Qingtao wenxue (Qingtao Literature)
QNWX	Qingnian wenxue (Youth Literature)
RMWX	Renmin wenxue (People's Literature)

SAH	Shanhua (Mountain Flower)
SDWX	Shidai wenxue (Literature of the Time)
SH	Shouhuo (Harvest)
SHWX	Shanghai wenxue (Shanghai Literature)
SY	Shiyue (October)
TH	Taihu (Lake Tai)
TY	Tianya (The Remotest Corner of the Earth)
WXJ	Wenxue jiao (Literary Corner)
XDF	Xiandai feng (Modern Wind)
XSJA	Xiaoshou jia (Fiction Writers)
XSJI	Xiaoshou jie (Fiction Circles)
XSL	Xiaoshou lin (Forest of Fiction)
XSYB	Xiaoshuo yuebao (Fiction Monthly)
XY	Xinyuan (New Garden)
YH	Yuhua (Rain Flower)
ZGZJ	Zhongguo zuojia (Chinese Writers)
ZJ	Zuojia (Writers)
ZMN	Zhuomu niao (Woodpecker)
ZP	Zuopin (Literary Works)
ZPXS	Zhongpian xiaoshuo xuankan (Selected Novellas)
ZS	Zhongshan (Zhong Mountain)

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- "Jieju huo kaishi" (Ending or Beginning), TH, no. 1 (1993).
- "Kuqi de xiaomao" (Crying Little Cat), TY, no. 1 (1996).
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- "Miyue yinying" (Shadows in Honey Moon), QTWX, no. 1 (1992).
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