

**China's Proletarian Myth: The Revolutionary Narrative and
Model Theatre of the Cultural Revolution**

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Statement of Originality

This work has not been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Trevor Hay 14/7/2000

Dedication

To my friend and supporter of so many years, Dr. Ronald Price, who ushered me in to a cultural revolution of my own, and in memory of 'the White Peony', Xun Huisheng (1900-1968), one of China's 'four great dan', who also believed, in his own way, that theatres were 'places in which to educate people'.

Abstract

China's model works, the so-called 'eight great model works' are rarely thought of as 'literature', not only because they are of course, performance works, but because they are not thought of in the normative sense as a form of dramatic literature, but as a form of propaganda. This thesis investigates the relationship between propaganda and art by concentrating on the texts of these works and, in particular, by analysing the structure of a narrative type which is not just a blueprint for dramatic texts but a design for the Chinese revolutionary narrative, as embodied in Mao Zedong's key utterances on literature and art, and 'told' or enacted, by the campaign to reform Beijing opera undertaken by his wife, Jiang Qing.

In order to understand the precise *nature* of this narrative, and its relationship with theatre and the broader political arena of the Cultural Revolution, an analysis is undertaken of literary theory in both the Soviet Union and China, followed by an analysis of the aesthetic at work in the particular combinations of realism and romanticism which were discussed and implemented in each country. After a detailed examination of the way the

campaign to reform Beijing opera was conducted, including the promulgation and 'display' of key documents and speeches by Mao and Jiang Qing, sample texts are analysed according to a method which illustrates the design of the narrative. These texts, and the model works in general, are then considered in relation to some general observations about genres of mythology and their relationship with folklore.

Finally, a particular 'dramatic' relationship is suggested between the narrative design of the models, and the conduct of the Cultural Revolution itself. In the course of this, the notion of mythology is discussed in the context of its complex relationship with ideology and popular culture, as identified by Roland Barthes in particular, with his often enigmatic emphasis on the 'semiology' of myth. The complex blend of cultural theories which may be brought to bear on this discussion is re-visited, with a view to understanding the model works as a genre of 'proletarian' mythology which might yet survive the Cultural Revolution as a substantive dramatic genre.

In conclusion, the relationship between theatre, narrative and semiotics is pursued, in attempting to establish a key

difference between the aesthetic 'method' employed in the model works and that of socialist realism. This difference, it is argued, is the product of a basic approach to mythic romanticism which preserves the essential traditions of Beijing opera, and makes the models legitimate heir to this tradition, in spite of the bitter memories of the Cultural Revolution and its tragic campaigns.

By the shores of the bay there is a green oak tree; there is a golden chain on that oak; and day and night a learned cat walks ceaselessly round on the chain; as it moves to the right it strikes up a song, as it moves to the left it tells a story. (Alexander Pushkin, Prologue to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*).

Chapter 1: Revisiting the Site of a 'Major Disaster'

Assessing the Model Works

What should we make of the art and literature of the Cultural Revolution? Speaking at a symposium in Idaho in 1997, Chen Xiaomei spoke of the 'horror story' tendencies of many Cultural Revolution memoirs and included scholarly dismissal of the revolutionary modern theatre among the various manifestations of this phenomenon.¹ And back in 1975, about the time I was myself witnessing the works for the first time, through a haze of fatigue and boredom at the end of long days spent listening to revolutionary committees in tea communes and textile factories, Martin Ebon issued what seems to be a pertinent - and prescient - warning.

Westerners should avoid an air of patronizing forgiveness for the obvious zealotry and intolerance that has marked, and presumably still shapes, literature and the arts in contemporary China; we are not dealing with some primitive tribe that practises exotically charming rites, but with the heirs of a cultural tradition that is, or should be, part of mankind's total heritage.²

Seeing the revolutionary modern works of the Cultural Revolution as part of 'mankind's total heritage' is not easy, and the finer feelings of those who look for something of timeless value in the arts, something subtle and above all, human and humane, are frequently violated by the very memory of the Cultural Revolution, let alone by serious contemplation of its pampered and jealously guarded literary offspring. In 1983, Elizabeth Wichmann wrote:

The slow process of disengaging the category, 'contemporary play', from the personal politics of Jiang Qing and her comrades, as well as from its definition as a literary form synonymous with pure propaganda, is still underway. Until this process is completed, the question of subject matter for contemporary plays will remain highly problematic...³

The most famous of the 'contemporary plays' were known collectively as the 'eight great models' (*ba da yangbanxi*), although the 'revolutionary modern' genre (*geming xiandaixi*) included more than these, as we shall see. The 'eight great', which I refer to throughout as 'model works', actually consisted of five operas, two ballets and a symphony - *Zhiqu Weihushan* (Taking Tiger Mountain by strategy), *Hong deng ji* (The red lantern), *Hai gang* (On the Docks),

Qixi Baihutuan (Raid on the White Tiger Regiment) and *Shajiabang* (the operas); *Baimao nu* (The White-haired girl) and *Hongse niangzijun* (Red detachment of women) (the ballets), and *Shajiabang* (the symphony).⁴

At the time of writing, the disengagement of these works from personal politics remains a slow process, although some scholars, like Bell Yung, writing on *Shajiabang* in 1984, in *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979*, have emphatically asserted the value of particular aspects of the model theatre, such as musical innovation, which he describes as 'exceptional works of art in the history of Chinese music' which have their 'offspring' in many genres of contemporary Chinese music and drama.⁵

Liang Mingyue, in a very brief aside on the model works in 1985, in his *Music of the Billion*, speculates on the way the works might have led to a new dynamism in Chinese opera. But he too is discussing the works in the context of music and his two-page comment on the Cultural Revolution only serves to underline the fact that, while there is a certain incipient appreciation of the task which faced Chinese cultural strategists in the 1960s, there is little inclination to list the revolutionary modern narrative itself

among the achievements of the reformed national theatre.

With the fall from power of the 'gang of four' in October, 1976, the model plays, which were reminders of the injustice and irrational violence of the Cultural Revolution, were curtailed. Aside from its revolutionary themes and all political implications, the modern *Peking opera* offered a new creativity and preliminary synthesis of regional and Peking operatic styles, between Chinese and European instrumental music. Had this genre continued its development after the Cultural Revolution, it would have led to a national contemporary style of opera and certainly to a new height in Chinese operatic tradition. During its ten years, the *yangban* revolutionary *Peking opera* initiated a movement toward a national style beyond the regional and local vernacularism; a national music of this kind has long been absent, ever since the decline of the court music tradition in imperial China. For now, however, the model plays are recollections of bitter memories for the majority of Chinese.⁶

This also underlines a problem identified by Bonnie S. McDougall in her preface to *Popular Chinese*

Literature, namely that studies of the literature of modern China have frequently focused on the interpretation of literature as a reflection of politics, or as insight into the biographies of writers and artists. McDougall notes that there was strong agreement at the workshop which led to *Popular Chinese Literature* that the starting point for study of both written and oral literature should be the works themselves, and especially the texts.⁷ I will, in fact, focus on the texts, but sample texts of the models will be used as a means not only of identifying the nature of the genre but of illuminating the complex and fascinating relationship between narrative, theatre and politics in the Cultural Revolution.

My aim is not simply to provide a reappraisal of the overall theatrical merit of the revolutionary modern works, in order to redress the injustice of underestimation. Indeed, Chen Xiaomei's comments notwithstanding, it would be misleading, as we have seen, to imply that nobody has had a kind word for the models, since even the 'eight great' which suffered most opprobrium from over-exposure are acknowledged in some quarters for their merits. For example Constantine Tung, writing in 1987, observes:

In terms of the very polished use of language and bold yet imaginative theatrical innovations in acting, singing, stage scenes and music, these revolutionary model Beijing operas are good theatrical pieces and will have lasting influence in Chinese theater. They will not replace the traditional Beijing opera, but they have distinguished themselves as a new theater. Jiang Qing and her associates caused devastating damage to the theater not with their model plays nor with their drama theories (as no theory is perfectly good or completely wrong); they did it by banning all other dramas deemed ideologically counter-revolutionary and by ruthless persecution of writers, playwrights and theater professionals.⁸

Colin Mackerras makes a similar point in 1990, writing on the fortunes of Beijing opera between 1949 and 1976:

The models themselves were actually quite good theatre in some ways, they were exciting and had definite dramatic tension. But they were too contrived and there were far too few of them, so that they became utterly boring to the people. Jiang Qing treated the theatre as though it were her little empire in which what

mattered most was the allegiance it paid to her personally. So While Mao's *Talks* said much of value for all times, the way in which Jiang Qing and her supporters interpreted and used them during the period from 1963 on, and especially during the 'cultural revolution' decade of 1966 to 1976, was a major disaster and tragedy for the Chinese drama.⁹

There are acknowledgements too, albeit scarce, that the model works were at times quite successfully pitched to an unsophisticated audience who saw in the 'larger-than-life' characterisations of good and evil a reflection of their own very real experience and suffering. What seems sentimental, one-dimensional or even ridiculous to a literary expert may well be profoundly moving to people who identify with events depicted, who relate to the work at some level other than trained taste and judgement, or who are affected by the mythic and archetypal qualities of heroic tales. For example, Norman Webster, a corespondent for a Toronto daily newspaper, reporting on the opening of *Red Detachment* in November 1969, wrote that the audience, was 'with the show from the start' and totally absorbed not only by the dancing and special effects, but by the exaggerated evil of the landlord.¹⁰

Some of the model works have been re-staged both in China and overseas in recent years - for example *Red Detachment* was performed by Beijing's Central Ballet Troupe in 1987, there was a performance of model excerpts in Sydney in 1993, *The White-haired Girl* was performed in Melbourne in 1996 and excerpts from this work formed part of a Cantonese opera festival in Hong Kong in 1999.¹¹ *Dalu jianbao* (Mainland bulletin) reports that the China Beijing Opera Troupe staged *Hong deng ji* (The red lantern) in December 1990, and that 'the exciting scenes of twenty years ago appeared again, and performance after performance played to packed houses, with many young people expressing great interest and enthusiasm'.¹² The models are widely available in China as remastered audio and video cassettes, CDs and VCDs and there are other manifestations of their survival, including karaoke versions and rock songs featuring lyrics derived from the models. There has also been a new Chinese 'treasury' of texts, and a new work of history and critical commentary, both published in 1995, and a number of experimental, derivative works in Hong Kong and Australia.¹³

However, what is needed beyond these occasional acknowledgements of the model operas is a systematic appraisal of their significance as a genre of theatre in which narrative was effectively integrated with

China's theatrical and pedagogical traditions - a genre which might yet serve as a 'model' of some kind for innovation and development of Chinese theatre. While there is an implicit acknowledgment of the models and their contribution to the development of a national theatre in recent, uncertain and faltering attempts to revive the fortunes of Beijing opera, in the creation of a small number of new 'revolutionary' works,¹⁴ and in tentative official nods in the direction of the Cultural Revolution repertoire, the works appear to be regarded largely as 'period pieces', as Mackerras has said,¹⁵ or as a form of 1960s proletarian costume drama rather than as significant dramatic literature or as a stimulant to dramatic theory and creative thinking about suitable themes, motifs and protagonists for a contemporary, national, and popular Chinese theatre.

Because of their overwhelming association with the Cultural Revolution rather than the broader parameters of the Chinese or international revolutionary movements, the 'eight model works' in particular are not widely seen as part of a literary genre but as a manifestation of political struggle, and the texts are little more than a footnote to the kind of scholarly analysis which draws on perspectives from political science, history or education, in order to illuminate factional strife in the context of Chinese political

culture. Other than this the model works have been used largely as a tool for character analysis of Jiang Qing in memoirs, journalistic accounts or serious biography, both in English and Chinese.¹⁶ To the extent that they have been studied as theatre the emphasis has been on social history, aspects of performance or, to a limited degree, on the kind of semiotics which emphasises non-linguistic elements, as indicated in Chapter 5.

Nor, for that matter, is the genre of revolutionary modern works (that is, both the 'models' and other works inspired by them) widely seen in terms of comparative literature - for example, as a 'supranational' form,¹⁷ in which a particular literary movement (e.g. realism, romanticism) crosses geopolitical, cultural and linguistic boundaries in search of solutions to politico-aesthetic problems, such as the means of creating a 'people's theatre' of the kind Romain Rolland envisaged¹⁸ or a 'proletarian' art and literature. The need for a systematically critical and comparative literary response appears to have been obscured by the mass of documentation and memoirs dealing with domestic weariness with the use of the famous corpus of eight as models. As a result, they have not attracted the degree of serious literary study they merit as a contribution to either Chinese

national theatre, or the international history of revolutionary theatre.

It is the aim of this thesis to provide an interpretative framework based on the relationship between the narrative design of the models and the kind of revolutionary cosmology that David Apter and Tony Saich have styled, in discussing Yan'an, the 'master narrative' of the Chinese revolution.¹⁹ This addresses an omission in literary studies and acknowledges the revolutionary modern genre as a significant contribution to 'proletarian' literature and art, while maintaining the importance of political events as a means of understanding art. In short, this means that in addition to analysing the Cultural Revolution as an event with its own peculiar literary dynamic, I want to acknowledge the models as a form of theatre which reflected the general principles of the Chinese revolution, made reasonable reforms to the functions and characteristics of a problematic art form, had the potential at least to appeal to audiences drawn from the broad masses of workers and peasants and may well, fortuitously or otherwise, have avoided a crucial problem posed by socialist realism.

In order to judge the success or otherwise of the genre according to these criteria, the 'formula' for creation of the works will first be placed in an

international theoretical context in Chapters 2 and 3 in order to highlight the antecedents of the creative method, and then, in Chapter 4, the works will be placed in the context of the campaign which launched them. This will be followed, in Chapters 5 and 6 by analysis of their narrative structure and in Chapter 7 by a discussion of the relationship between theatre, ideology and semiotics in the Cultural Revolution.

Literature, Ideology and Propaganda

I will begin with discussion of a crude dichotomy commonly applied to the detriment of works designed as a 'proletarian' genre (especially those influenced by, or associated with, socialist realism) - namely that between literature and propaganda - and proceed, later in the thesis, towards a more precise consideration of the relationship between literature and ideology, in the sense employed in various ways by Marx and Engels, Foucault and Barthes. My aim is not to demonstrate the *falsity* of the dichotomy, which would take the argument down a well-worn path, but to explore it as a basis for understanding the relationship between the display and pageant of the Cultural Revolution, including the campaign to reform Beijing opera itself, and the literary genre which has come to represent its most 'political' excesses.

In order to do this, the introductory discussion and later argument will touch upon broad areas of critical and cultural theory which might provide a means of bringing the relationship between myth, semiotics and ideology into sharper focus. This is not to posit any one theoretical perspective which will provide the key to interpretation of the models, but to suggest ways in which a confusing blend of international theories, attitudes, fashions and perspectives of the latter half of the century, including structuralist, post-structuralist, postmodern and post-colonial may be brought to bear on the model works, illuminating their Chinese meanings. As Chen Xiaomei noted in 1995, in *Occidentalism. A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, the process of cross-fertilisation between China and the West is such that it would be misleading to look for pure 'Chineseness' in art and literature,²⁰ but there may be ways of seeing the Cultural Revolution as a collection of signs and symbols to be 'read' by a Chinese audience in the manner recently suggested by Bob Hodge and Kam Louie in *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture. The Art of Reading Dragons*.²¹

As we shall see, the models are essentially stories of a particular kind, stories designed to be told in the theatre, but interpreted and understood in the context of a theatrical campaign 'enacted' beyond the confines

of the theatre. Theatre itself provided the means of narration, or as I argue in Chapters 5 and 6, a forum for 'discourse' in the narratological sense, which depends upon narrative structure or design. This is frequently overlooked in the models because narrative is seen as a matter of dramatic literature, but narrative design is in fact a matter of semiotics, every bit as much as the use of colour or movement. While Kirk Denton²² has shown that the semiotics of theatre can provide insight into the performance merits of the models, semiotics - and, in Roland Barthes's terms, 'semiology'²³ - demands a much more comprehensive interpretation in order to cast light upon what I will call the 'general sign system' of the models, and especially their narrative design and relationship with occasion.

Even studies of the semiotics of theatre, which ought perhaps to be more inclusive of the variety of codes and languages employed by the theatre, tend to emphasise signs and symbols other than the narrative itself. Thus, while the *form* of the models - including the particular view of theatre semiotics emphasised by Denton, is frequently acknowledged as art of a high order - the *content*, in the sense of dramatic literature, is more problematic, and readily dismissed as 'ideology', that is, as a kind of 'propaganda' with largely historical, sociological or even nostalgic

interest. To the extent that there is a substantive literary interest in the works it tends to be of a certain decontextualised kind as I shall argue later.

We will return to the issue of ideology and semiotics in the conclusion, but, by way of introduction, it is worth exploring the way the term 'ideology' is used in a general pejorative sense to denote explicitly politicised literature, such as that of the Cultural Revolution. This usage lends itself to some contradictory consequences. For instance, students of the theatre will often accept the models as a genuine variety of Beijing opera, a successor to the national theatre, in which fundamental symbolism and stylised characterisation, reminiscent of China's theatrical traditions, frequently redeem dramatic texts which are redolent with the crude and intrusive ideology of the Cultural Revolution. But of course both the past and the present deal in ideologies. The greatest single difference between 'ideology' and 'art' in this case may simply be that the ideology of the proletarian myth is derived from contemporary events and plebeian protagonists while that of the traditional myth is derived from ancient historiography, aristocratic protagonists and supernatural cosmology. The view from the twenty-first century may yet make the ideology of the 1960s and 1970s look less like 'politics' or 'propaganda', and more like 'romance' or 'legend', or

even national 'culture' itself, in precisely the way time has transformed propaganda of the more distant past into traditional art.

In fact, there are some indications that the passing of time is now coming to the rescue of the models, as in the innovative works mentioned above, which incorporate motifs and even whole storylines from the model works to very interesting effect. However, as I will discuss further in Chapter 7, the more common treatment of the models appears to be either historical reproduction (a form of 'knowledge' about China) or a mimetic form of contemporary popular culture located around the cult of Mao and the paraphernalia of the Cultural Revolution. This appears to be a phenomenon which has something in common with the way Western screen idols of the 1950s, such as James Dean and John Wayne, or pop music stars of the 1960s, such as The Beatles, have been incorporated into a pantheon of contemporary 'mythological' images rather than an attempt to recreate or re-contextualise the revolutionary narrative. Modern artists and intellectuals, inside and outside China, frequently return to the symbols of the Cultural Revolution, and to the model works themselves, for contemporary inspiration, and they sometimes make a motif of the egregious catechisms of the era, exploring the

symbolic boundaries of language, but they seldom linger over the texts as a form of narrative.

It may be that theoretical analysis of narrative is unfashionable, having been overtaken by postmodern and post-structuralist distrust of heavily authorial narrative intended to convey, through its particular discourse, shared or collective meanings of the kind implicit in propaganda, mass education or ideology. Or it may be simply that contemporary fascination with the links between mass culture and art leads artists to explore meaning and effect in fragmentary and eclectic representations of ideology, propaganda and advertising. However, a reading of cultural theories in vogue since the 1960s indicates that it is possible to see the essence of mythology in a variety of sources, from religion and folklore to the movies. As Roland Barthes has shown us, on his own sometimes confusing journey from one theoretical pole to the other, mass-produced and ephemeral symbolism may tap into the same source of power and employs the same kind of 'second language' or 'metalanguage', as ancient mythology.²⁴ This will become a key point in my conclusion in analysing the special nature of the revolutionary modern narrative, and necessitates some discussion of folklore throughout this thesis, including the response of many theorists, including Gorky, Lukacs and Mao, to that kind of aesthetic which

encompasses a romantic and 'larger-than-life' characterisation.

Folklore and Contemporary Mythology

Despite the strenuously regulated process of their creation, the texts of the models adhere to the narrative structure and style of some of the anonymous creations of folklore (such as the myths and legends of the oral tradition)²⁵ and, although their genesis is quite different from that of folklore, they are better judged in this company than with 'literature' in the sense of more inventive and original authorial creations. In fact, as Sheila Egoff has pointed out, the literary embellishment of mythological themes, the 'quality' of the words, is not a crucial matter in preserving the essential quality of myth:

In myth, words do not count as much as the pattern of events, the concepts and the feelings they arouse - those sensations which are not readily describable. The stories of 'Baldur' or 'Prometheus' cannot be destroyed, no matter how poor the version, because the core of the story is itself a set of indelible images.²⁶

A formulaic approach to characterisation and language may actually contribute to the crucial discourse of

myth, whether the hero be Prometheus or Superman. My contention in this thesis is that, compared to other attempts at creation of a proletarian theatre, the method adopted in the models resulted in dramatic texts which constitute a form of contemporary myth incorporating 'indelible imagery' rather than a hapless literary dead-end produced by dogmatism, like much of the offspring of the Soviet 'no-conflict' theory associated with socialist realism. This is not to claim that the *quality of writing* in the models has been underestimated, but that their precise nature has been inadequately described and that, given their obvious impact as theatre, there has been limited inclination to understand them as a form of narrative, as myth and particularly as *proletarian* myth. The major obstacle appears to be the difficulty of reconciling the notion of 'proletarian' with the notion of 'myth' - that is, in reconciling myth not just with ideology, but with proletarian ideology - or 'history'.

A further example from contemporary popular culture may serve to illustrate contradictions inherent in failure to make this reconciliation. Despite the fact that a good deal of contemporary cultural theory and humanistic psychology²⁷ is sympathetic to the notion of history as a form of highly subjective storytelling (citing the way individuals and communities interpret,

remember, record and if necessary reconstruct or 'validate' their lives as stories), and despite the world-wide phenomenon of interest in popular, mythologised forms of history in which subaltern communities assert identity with 'alternative' histories (Celtic, Dreamtime and Native American mythology, for example), there has been little inclination to regard China's proletarian theatre sympathetically as a form of mythologised history. The models are still more likely to be regarded as one of those more grotesquely distorted attempts at realism which are regarded as 'pure' ideology or propaganda.

Despite the prevalence of a very diverse collection of mythologies in contemporary popular culture, it will remain difficult for audiences or readers to see the models as mythologised history, rather than distorted history, because, despite characterisation which bespeaks hero tales and superhuman romance, their protagonists are not easily perceived as 'romantic' - how can workers, soldiers and peasants be anything other than 'real'? - and, unlike the protagonists of fairy tales, they cannot be ordinary folk who are aided or transformed by supernatural (unreal) agencies. Furthermore, since the rule of totalitarian or authoritarian political regimes is usually inimical to the exercise of personal, subjective choice when it comes to worldview or ideology, the promulgation of

state ideologies appears to have little in common with that exercise of individual 'imagination' which feeds contemporary myth-making in consumer societies. No matter how mass-produced and mass-marketed the artefacts of popular contemporary mythology, they are still associated with some kind of *personal* fantasy, wish fulfilment or belief system.

As Joseph Campbell said, 'dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream'²⁸ and in some cases, like 'fairy tales', discussed in Chapter 6, much of contemporary popular culture is personalised myth. Michael Dutton, in *Streetlife China*, vividly describes the way shops of the Cultural Revolution era 'mimicked the dream of the proletarian revolution and created shopping space like factory space'. Since they were associated with proletarian consumption, such shops were characterised by the 'shabby makeshift display of items' while post-Cultural Revolution arcades and shopping centres create the illusion of 'entering a dream'.²⁹ But the Cultural Revolution, the 'dream of the proletarian revolution' was very much a depersonalised - or mass - dream. Myths, after all are not just Disney confections, or alluring fragments of imagination discarded by past civilisations and safely confined within children's readers and anthologies of folklore, or marketing devices for consumer dreaming. Historically, myths have had less

to do with the private imagination of a reader or audience safely distanced from the culture and time which produced them than with vital and committed, frequently non-rational, and frequently very authoritarian, highly directed, communal activity; with public ritual, festival, pageant and theatre of the kind discussed by Joseph Esherick and Jeffrey Wasserstrom in connection with the 'political theater' of 'China's Spring'.³⁰

Ellen R. Judd³¹ has been one of the few to look beyond the excesses of the Cultural Revolution leadership to explore the links between drama, myth and state ideology. In discussing the nature of heroism in the model works she notes 'one may easily forget, after all the intervening years, that the Cultural Revolution was not only a power struggle and an experiment in socioeconomic reform but also an intensely felt human drama full of hope and of pain'.³² In the Cultural Revolution itself Judd sees not only 'human drama', a phrase which I will return to in my conclusion, but the same kind of 'heroic enterprise of transformation and transcendence' which is performed in the models.³³ More frequently, however literature is used in a narrowly metaphorical sense to describe the Cultural Revolution, when what is called for is a more sophisticated and genuinely cross-disciplinary understanding of the relationship between

symbolism and political culture - the art of 'reading dragons' as Hodge and Louie put it.

There is, as will be discussed in the context of semiotics and postmodern cultural perspectives, a popular, journalistic tendency to regard some areas of popular culture as manifestations of modern, non-elite mythology (for example, the institution of Hollywood, or the 'cult' figures of sport, entertainment and politics) and there is a body of cultural theory which has installed modern, public and mass-produced (rather than mass-created) figures in the pantheon of contemporary mythology - as in approaches to cinema history, and in the critical theory of Barthes and Eco, who have elevated popular symbols and 'icons' to the status of myth. It may be that instruments of ideology such as Xi'er and Wu Qinghua (*White-haired Girl* and *Red Detachment*, respectively), will ultimately take their place as 'indelible images' alongside international comic-strip, pop music or movie heroes. Or perhaps they are still too close to their creators and the tyranny of their era, but the process which created these heroines in their ultimate guise³⁴ is at least analogous to that involved in another clear manifestation of mass culture and vehicle for modern 'mythology' of the kind identified by Barthes and Eco - advertising.

Advertising employs subliminal effects, is intended for a mass audience, seeks to control habits of mind, exploits repetition and draws on a universally recognisable index of tale-types and symbols. Above all, advertising is highly contrived and calculated 'text' with pedagogical and didactic intentions, aimed at influencing behaviour in the interests of its creators, rather than being a spontaneous or cumulative natural process, or the result of 'art for art's sake', or a manifestation of the deep psychological needs of humanity. If the products of popular culture, including the symbols and texts of advertising, have come to be regarded in this light, as manifestations of modern mythology or 'pop icons', it is no giant conceptual leap to acknowledge the possibility of a proletarian mythology, not *despite* the ideology, but *because* of it.³⁵

Mythology as a 'Device to Think With'

Mark Fortier, a scholar of contemporary cultural theory and theatre, noted in 1997 that we had experienced a half-century of 'intense activity' in cultural theory,³⁶ a period which, of course incorporates the momentous events of cultural revolution in the broadest sense, both in China and the West. Modern cultural theory provides the student of Beijing opera reforms with a confusing but

potentially illuminating basis for appreciating the nature of contemporary mythology. I will try to wrestle with this in order to suggest ways in which a variety of perspectives may contribute to understanding of the Cultural Revolution.

The legacy of 1960s structuralism and semiotics, especially that of Barthes and Eco, is the notion that protagonists of modern film, cartoons and advertising are indeed legitimate examples of modern mythology and as such they are, as Terry Eagleton has put it, 'devices to think with, ways of classifying and organizing reality'.³⁷ Superimposed on this is a post-structuralist and/or postmodernist position that the most ephemeral products of modern popular culture, such as television and pop video - the 'culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality'³⁸ - are also no more or less objectively significant than the products of 'high' culture. This sometimes - in theatre especially - leads to a playful, anarchic or ironic use of symbolism and inspires contemporary artists and writers to experiment with the symbols of modern social history, including the language and iconography of the Cultural Revolution itself. The problem appears to be however, that in the vague blend of late structuralist and postmodern attitudes which are frequently brought to bear on theatre, there is

little inclination to identify conventional artistic coherence in the works or to apply interpretative conventions to them, since they are more readily appreciated as an ephemeral creation, conjured up from living memory and given form by nostalgia and mimesis, than as traditional narrative or as 'a device to think with'.

While the kind of semiotics associated with Eco and Barthes has certainly contributed, with antecedent forms of structuralism,³⁹ to a superficial recognition of the legitimacy of certain modern, mass forms of literature, art and popular culture as mythology, (and while Brecht himself, Barthes's Marxist exemplar, offers early and promising insight in 1936 into the ritual and epic aspects of Beijing opera),⁴⁰ opinion of the revolutionary theatre as a form of story-theatre still tends to be very adversely affected by the pejorative notion of an ideological literature. Postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches on the other hand, while contributing to a comprehensive and non-elitist view of literature and art, tend to emphasise the instability of meaning in texts of all kinds, and lead to critical and philosophical distrust of the kind of logocentric and reductionist analysis of folklore to be found in the works of Propp, Levi-Strauss and Eco, with their algebraic formulations of story-types.

While arguing that the models are a kind of mythology, I would not wish to reject all other possible interpretations or classifications, some of which may now be derived from idiosyncratic contemporary associations. However, in their time the models were indeed a 'device' for interpreting events, and more to the point, for interpreting the Cultural Revolution and it is not enough to see them as 'icons', or as detached and multi-voiced symbols set adrift from their era and floating in a sea of twentieth-century commercial and political ephemera. They can perhaps be best understood, or at least most *inclusively* understood, as 'human drama' of a rather literal kind, in which the relationship between semiotics and ideology is demonstrated in the context of the works themselves and the process which brought them into being. Barthes provides a clue to this kind of interpretation in his treatment of 'discourse' but his evocative and elusive statements need to be pursued to some sort of conclusion which might fit Chinese political culture. I will do this in returning, in my conclusion, to some areas of contention surrounding folklore, socialist realism and the 'Zhdanov era' discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

The models need be considered no less legitimate a form of myth for being contrived rather than emerging as the product of genuine 'folk' processes. It is

however, much easier for the student of comparative literature to see myth as the result of a timeless, authorless process than as the product of a recent political phenomenon. It is also much easier to feel the force of mythology in the music, colour, movement and stagecraft of the models than in a form of narrative which is the conscious, didactic product of authors or, above all, of collective authorial teams such as those which polished the texts of the models under the tutelage of Jiang Qing.

Since the method of creation of these narratives, if not the style, is closer to the contrivance of the 'literary folktale' or more particularly of the 'literary myth'⁴¹ (that is, closer to conscious literary imitation of the key elements of folk romance, hero tale or epic, than to faithful reproduction of folktales) and since the narratives, for all their technical polish, do not contain anything like the sophistication and subtlety of the great literary folktales, or the vernacular fiction of the Ming and Qing,⁴² they fall between two stools and tend to be appreciated, if at all, as 'theatre'; that is, performance. The form of the model works is usually seen as an attempt to 'make the past serve the present', with the present very much in debt to the past for its resonance with traditional, subliminal

symbolism, but impoverished by its 'ideological' content.

However, the ideological content and purpose of the models might just as well be regarded as part of the very same debt to the past, to a tradition in which moral-political instruction - pedagogy - was integrated with entertainment. In short, it would seem inconsistent to dismiss the revolutionary modern genre as an inferior form of art because the works are heavily laden with a political message, while arguing the merits of newly written historical dramas. Both are, of course, ideological, and in this regard it is revealing to document, as I shall do in Chapter 4, the process by which a debate about these forms of Beijing opera became a 'struggle' - not so much a matter of literary merit, but a matter for taking sides, or even playing 'roles'.

This is not to say that there is no great break with tradition in the theatre of the Cultural Revolution, but rather that the nature of the revolutionary narrative displays a continuity between traditional opera and the model works while representing a form of artistic progress, the breaking of a certain 'aesthetic impasse' as will be argued in the conclusion. The models do experiment with the form of Beijing opera, sometimes boldly, as in the ballets,

but they never veer in the direction of avant-garde theatre of the kind practised by Soviet formalists and constructivists prior to the rule of socialist realism.⁴³ Ideological or historiographical content is never sacrificed to newness of form or technique, and any attempt to appreciate the models as the realisation of an aesthetic must acknowledge the centrality of narrative, of the proletarian myth, rather than treat it as a form of scaffolding for the more interesting facade of performance.

The revolutionary modern works were the product of Mao's worldview and Mao's 'storytelling' embedded in the key speeches and documents detailed in Chapter 4. In the whole of human history, few societies can have been as rigidly and pervasively dominated by text as Mao's China, and the process of authorship of the works truly reflected the rule of word. But it does not follow that the dramatic literature of the Cultural Revolution was merely a sterile manifestation of political ideology, lacking symbolic power in all but non-linguistic areas. In fact it is a key premise of this study that the models effectively located the 'semiological system'⁴⁴ of mythic narrative in the context of Mao's political philosophy (or more specifically, Mao's voluntaristic view of history and class struggle), in order to form a distinctive genre of proletarian romanticism which penetrated much

closer to the heart of folklore than Soviet socialist realism with its antecedent critical realism.

Revolution and National Theatre

Analysis and comparison of the dramatic literary texts will focus principally on the extent to which representative works embody a coherent integration of theory and practice, particularly in the reconciliation of those contending aspects of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. While an examination of themes, motifs and storylines is inherent in this approach, and is provided in chapter 6, especially in relation to *White-haired Girl*, this thesis will not constitute a theme or content analysis as in other works on Chinese literature such as that of Philip Cheng.⁴⁵ Rather, I will focus on the theoretical basis for reconciliation of 'revolutionary' and 'national' theatre in a form of proletarian myth. I will refer throughout to key documents and statements of Mao and Jiang Qing in particular, but in some ways the theoretical legitimation for the creation of the models is not a matter of explicit theory but of the dramatic 'display' of Mao's famous speeches at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942.⁴⁶ (And curiously, as David Holm points out, while this forum represents a crucial policy movement towards national

forms and popularisation of arts, the issue of national form itself is given no prominence.)⁴⁷

In arguing above that the revolutionary modern works are not afforded the kind of attention they merit I am conscious that they are not the only form of opera which has been relegated to largely nostalgic functions. The future of Beijing opera itself is the subject of current government concern in China and there has been a great deal of energy invested in attempting to breathe new life into the art. However, to the extent that it has been revived in the era of the 'Four Modernisations' it has been primarily as patriotic celebration of ancient Chinese culture, including 'traditional plays' (*chuantongju*) and 'newly written historical plays' (*xinbian lishiju*) rather than as a sustained attempt to portray modern society by means of contemporary protagonists and themes.

While this may fit the goals of rapid economic development in a motivational sense,⁴⁸ the call to patriotism tends to overshadow more sophisticated (and comparative-international) arguments linking 'popular' or 'mass' theatre and politico-aesthetic theory. Indeed, this patriotic view of Chinese theatre may well lend it a distinctly 'national' air, in the sense that it is a display of indigenous and unique Chinese culture, but, as far as innovation and democratisation

is concerned, it appears to take the art back to a point it had already reached in the 1940s and 1950s, when the four most celebrated exponents of traditional *dan* performance (Mei Lanfang, Xun Huisheng, Shang Xiaoyun and Cheng Yanqiu), had been associated with important reform and development.⁴⁹

It was always at least possible to create a theatre which served the interests of the proletariat, both in terms of popularity and thematic suitability, without actually creating modern proletarian protagonists, and world theatre abounds with examples of historic protagonists and settings enlivened with significance for contemporary, non-elite audiences. But the current approach seems to be that, by and large, any kind of revolutionary narrative is the stuff of the Cultural Revolution and not 'real' Beijing opera, which is to do with national, historical tradition. Yet revolutionary themes might be handled in a number of ways. I cannot help speculating, for instance, about the possibilities of creating Beijing opera which, unlike the models, actually depicts the Cultural Revolution itself.⁵⁰

One sense of the word 'national' in 'national theatre' is 'indigenous', as used above. The other is to do with 'nation' as a mass, democratic or popular theatre, a manifestation of the relationship between

mass politics and the arts, such as has occurred not only in the former Soviet Union and China as nominally socialist countries, but in 'bourgeois democratic' states such as France, Britain and the United States. Of course it is entirely possible for a state-endorsed 'national' theatre to be the very antithesis of theatre for the masses, to represent instead a form of centralised and authoritarian control over the arts in general as happened in Cultural Revolution China, or to represent ruling class interests, such as in the imperialist theatres of France, Britain or Russia at the turn of the century. Nevertheless there was, in the model theatre, a real possibility of wedding 'indigenous' to 'mass' in pursuit of the kind of democratic modern theatre, representative of modern social and political change, which has exercised many influential dramatic theorists outside China, such as Bertolt Brecht, George Lukacs, Romain Rolland and his admirer Erwin Piscator.

Beijing opera need not necessarily have stagnated, or been entirely out of step with prevailing social conditions, without the particular thrust of the post-1964 reforms. Furthermore, there is nothing to say that it cannot now be developed in interesting and popular ways even under the heavy-handed stimulus of patriotism, but the current political regime in China seems intent on confining drama within the bounds of a

limited, historiographical approach, designed to evoke the crystallised glory of Chinese civilisation, rather than to encourage experimentation with forms of popular, modern, mass-representative theatre. It is true that the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Beijing opera masters Mei Lanfang and Zhou Xinfang, held in China between December 1994 and January 1995, stressed the development of the art in recent years, including the creation of new operas, but it is noteworthy also that this same commemoration staged only one modern work, on the theme of a female teacher and her students in a poor mountain village.⁵¹

In this regard then, the Cultural Revolution was a watershed for the development of Chinese theatre and the revolutionary modern works remain the most concentrated and systematic form of dramatic response to the socio-political culture of contemporary 'revolutionary' China. Meanwhile, in the form of national cultural display, Beijing opera may well now be of more interest to foreigners than to Chinese themselves. This certainly seems apparent to me in attending recent performances in China and Australia⁵² and one may speculate on the degree to which the opera remains a living national art rather than a form of exhibition.

A Developing Myth

In order to see beyond the spectacular factional politics of the 1960s and 1970s and into substantive dramatic problems, it is instructive to return to the handful of literary scholars writing in English who saw the potential for development of Chinese theatre *before* the Cultural Revolution. For example, Patrick Hanan struck a prophetic note in 1964, the year in which Jiang Qing made a crucial speech at the Festival of Beijing Opera on Contemporary Themes, as documented in Chapter 4 :

The drama is as popular as ever; despite the competition of the cinema, it is still the most widely enjoyed kind of entertainment in China. (A modern, non-operatic drama of the sort we are familiar with is now well established, but is not anything like so popular.) So vigorous indeed is the drama that it is quite impossible to predict what course it may take, or to guess which variety may be confined for ever to the performance of a classical repertoire, and which may be successfully developed into a form in which future original creation is possible.⁵³

Allan Lewis, writing in 1962 on Gorky and his views on Socialist Realism, also made an interesting pre-

Cultural Revolution observation, although he was not thinking particularly of China:

Though the communist world has as yet contributed no major play, it does have a unified faith and a developing myth to bolster it, and out of this may come a ritualistic drama.⁵⁴

As these quotations suggest, a form of drama which maintained some essential elements of a popular Chinese art form, including its folklore-myth flavour, yet did so in the context of the new society, was not only possible but essential by the early 1960s, not so much because nothing new had been tried as because the problems of wedding the unique characteristics of an indigenous, traditional art to contemporary themes and a drastically changed political economy had not been solved. In view of the importance the Chinese Communist Party had always attached to the educational-ideological use of theatre,⁵⁵ it is not surprising that, by the 1960s, Jiang Qing, perceiving Mao himself to be under siege, had begun her counter-attack in the ideological sphere. That her conception of theatre was as much strategic as literary is readily illustrated by her frequent use of military metaphors for taking the crucial 'fortress' of Beijing opera,⁵⁶ but there is, as I shall argue in the

conclusion, a peculiar 'dramatic' relationship between her politics and her theatre.

Patrick Hanan's possibilities for 'future original creation', Allan Lewis's new 'ritual', Liang Mingyue's hint of a 'new height' in Chinese opera and Bell Yung's optimistic view of the impact of models must all be located within the context of understandable Chinese reaction, official and popular, against the extreme totalitarian use of art and literature in the Cultural Revolution. There is, of course, an obvious new ideological use for Beijing opera in countering the influence of the 'decadent' international popular youth culture which has accompanied modernisation. As *Beijing Review* put it in February 1995:

Only a decade ago, a young man would be ridiculed as old-fashioned if he confessed to being a Peking Opera fan. Now, this is considered trendy by young people. Although the decline has not been reversed totally in recent years, more people have begun to take an interest in the traditional arts and, tired of the frivolous pop culture, have rediscovered the long-neglected charm of Peking Opera.⁵⁷

However, as is evident in modern Western popular culture, and its apparent obsession with the 1960s,

nostalgia, no matter how widespread, is not progress, and the aesthetic questions posed by the Cultural Revolution need to be revisited in order not only to do justice to the revolutionary modern genre, but to provide some kind of comparative framework for further development of Chinese theatre. Yet, while Beijing opera is but a century and a half old, and the revolutionary modern genre represents a significant proportion of this period, both in impact and duration (comparable to say, the experimental theatre of the 1920s in the Soviet Union and Europe as a contribution to development of modern Western theatre) there is little inclination to study its real literary lessons. The reason is still largely as Wichmann described it in 1983, because there is an overwhelming tendency to visualise contemporary themes as the province of 'politicised' theatre, like the eight model works.

To make a remote historical parallel, this is rather like seeing morality plays of the Tudor period solely as religious-political propaganda without recognising them as an important phase in the development of Western theatre from liturgical drama to a form of secular, vernacular entertainment. While some literary historians may well see Tudor morality plays as 'uninspired moralizations',⁵⁸ there is at least recognition of the way in which they form part of a continuum from the mystery plays of the Middle Ages to

the beginnings of the great age of Elizabethan drama. I am not trying for a sustained analogy here, but the revolutionary modern genre tackled politico-literary questions which needed - and still need - resolution, in order to provide a creative boost to contemporary Chinese national theatre. For instance, there is a current scholarly debate about a different conceptualisation of 'national' theatre in which 'imagined communities'⁵⁹ replace the idea of a nation-state as a source of identity, and this might well be reflected in experiment with new revolutionary themes for Beijing opera (like some of the experiment with *Noh* theatre in Japan)⁶⁰ were it not for the current conservative approach to national theatre.

The genre of revolutionary modern works may be seen then, not simply as a theatrical manifestation of a peculiar social-historical phase which has now thankfully passed, comparable with say Restoration comedy, and its more blatant attempts to reflect the tastes and fashions of Charles II's court, but an art form which confronts fundamental and continuing issues for a Chinese national theatre; issues as fundamental as the depiction of Chinese history itself and whom that drama is 'about'. Yet the most common assessment of the works continues to be of the 'mind-numbing' boredom variety,⁶¹ a judgement usually based on limited repertoire and prohibitive, rigid characterisation, as

many others have pointed out. In this thesis I will try to indicate that there is, in the notion of 'myth', a way of looking at the models which emphasises their continuity with traditional and indigenous elements of Chinese theatre - those elements which, fortuitously or otherwise, break the impasse represented by socialist realism - while not denying the 'period' features associated with the Cultural Revolution.

Realism, Romanticism and Jiang Qing

As far as Chinese authoritative and official sources are concerned, while adverse criticism of the model works is measured, in deference to Mao's involvement in their creation,⁶² they do not dwell on the distinctive characteristics of the genre, but tend to emphasise their evolution from earlier forms, making it clear by implication that they were not the creation of Jiang Qing or the gang of Four. For example, the reference work *Zhongguo xiqu quyī cidian* (A dictionary of the opera and folk theatre of China) lists *Red Lantern* as 'a Peking Opera and modern play adapted from the local Shanghai Opera *Hong deng ji*, by Weng Ouhong and A Jia from the China Peking Opera Troupe. The story is basically similar to the Shanghai local opera'.⁶³

Leaving aside the occasional surge of fashionable interest, mass opinion of the revolutionary modern genre is unlikely to change - the more pervasive and exclusive a form of propaganda, the more it is likely to be thought of as *mere* propaganda. While a good many theatre workers and audience members of the Cultural Revolution period, including some I have interviewed myself,⁶⁴ appreciate them as *theatre*, especially as a distillation of technical, professional excellence in performance and production, the vast majority of their former audiences find it difficult to distinguish the works themselves from the machinations of a figure who is characterised, perhaps in the same 'larger-than-life' fashion she advocated in her own dramatic theory, as a vengeful and obscenely ambitious former actress. It might well be argued that many Chinese see the politics of the Cultural Revolution as a kind of fantasy or folk tale, in which the 'white-boned demon', the fox-fairy, the scheming concubine, the harlot actress, manipulates her way into the kind of 'female dragon' empress role, epitomised by the legendary cruelty and debauchery of Wu Zetian and Ci Xi. How ironic that in death Jiang Qing should demonstrate the truth of her own literary premise, that certain abstractions have much more power than 'realistic' characterisation.⁶⁵

For so many Chinese citizens with painful memories of the Cultural Revolution, the revolutionary modern works were indeed like the incantation of the golden hoop (*jinguzhou*) in the 'Monkey' stories of *Xi you ji* (Journey to the West). They formed an ever-tightening band around the intellect, and acted not as 'models', or sources of inspiration, but as a canon of sacred works, as a blueprint for the reproduction of received truth and not a framework for further design and experimentation. In this respect the models crushed their own best hope of success, by reducing the symbolic power of theatre, especially the kind of ritual and stylised theatre from which they had inherited crucial characteristics, to a form of social control. In the memoirs of Chinese who experienced the Cultural Revolution there is a common aphoristic appraisal that the Cultural Revolution produced one play per hundred million people and this thesis does not dispute the pathologies of the Maoist literary kingdom which spawned mass production rather than creativity or diversity.

However, in order to deal with the larger issue concerning the overall significance of the revolutionary modern genre, and the *potential* it had to advance the cause of a contemporary Chinese theatre, I will discuss, in Chapters 2 and 3, developments before the Cultural Revolution, including

the influence of foreign drama and literary theory from the May Fourth Movement to the early 1960s, during which indigenous traditions were confronted with influences from realism and naturalism to Epic Theatre. 'Modern' theatre, in China as in the West, is largely the product of a dialectic between realism/naturalism and various kinds of symbolism. It is enmeshed with broad political issues originating in the tension between 'bourgeois' and 'democratic' or 'popular' art forms and its progress is marked by experiment with dramatic method from Stanislavsky (drawing on the literary foundations of Tolstoy, Ibsen, Chekhov and Gorky in particular) to Brecht.

For Chinese of the May Fourth generation, who became the designers of Chinese cultural policy after Liberation, the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavsky, Chekhov and, before them, Russian reformist theoreticians, critics and writers of the mid-nineteenth century, (Chernychevsky, Belinsky, Dobrulyubov, Dostoevsky) were a major source of inspiration and experimentation, not in opera, but in realistic, issue-based literature, diverging sharply from the Chinese dramatic tradition of highly stylised supernatural, hagiographic and historical opera. Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the theoretical contributions of some major Russian and European literary figures in order to understand the

antecedents of Cultural Revolution debate over realism and the contribution made by the theory of 'revolutionary romanticism'. The many guises of realism - 'socialist', 'social', 'romantic', 'critical', 'bourgeois critical' - reflect a long-standing problem for all societies attempting to address class interest and class representation in a popular, 'democratic' form of theatre. The narrative principles embodied in the revolutionary modern genre (and in particular the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism) represent an important development in the creation of such a form.

The aim in Chapters 2 and 3 is neither to chart the complete course of the debate which led to this synthesis nor to provide a comprehensive account of literary identities and movements during the May Fourth or post-Liberation periods, as has been done elsewhere, notably in studies by McDougall, Goldman, Ragvald and Fokkema,⁶⁶ but to provide a background framework for appreciating the blend of realism and romanticism employed in the model works as a 'method' for creating a proletarian mythology. This blend seems to have emerged almost casually from Mao's utterances on folklore and classical poetry during the Great Leap Forward, as indicated in Chapter 3, to become a kind of schema for Chinese literature and art. The Cultural Revolution central leadership group then used it, and

other ostensibly literary formulae, as if it were itself, like the famous red lantern, a means of telling revolutionary from counter-revolutionary. In the process, items which lingered on the Maoist agenda two decades after 'The Talks at the Yan'an Forum' were pushed through on the back of a vastly simplified literary debate. From a substantive literary point of view, however, the key issue is the link between proletarian characterisation and the notion of 'typical', 'ideal' or 'representative' protagonists - above all whether realism, romanticism or some kind of compound was the motherlode from which the proletarian 'type' would be extracted.

One aspect of this problem which requires some conceptual clarification is the way 'realism' relates to an international theatre of revolution and to the Chinese revolution itself. As will be seen in Chapter 3, Stanislavsky was condemned in the Cultural Revolution, despite his unquestionable commitment to the masses and the 'first intelligent, moral, popular theatre'.⁶⁷ It may be that he was simply identified with the Soviet Union, and that alone was enough, but, even if this were true, there were genuine politico-literary problems associated with his celebrated work in the first Moscow Art Theatre. It is interesting to note the way the Chinese formula of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism appears to be at

odds with the approach of both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, despite the latter's identification with a form of theatre which went beyond the naturalism of Stanislavsky into a form of ritual or stylised theatre which, on the face of it at least, would appear to be more in tune with both the aims of a 'people's theatre' or 'theatre of revolution' and the traditions of Beijing opera.

In 1972 Klaus Mehnert⁶⁸ observed that *Red Detachment* reminded him of performances in the Soviet Union in 1929 and 1930, by which time the avant-garde theatre of Meyerhold and Tairov was in decline and being replaced by 'heroic naturalism', a form of 'totally political' theatre with 'black and white' stories of civil war and revolution, pitched at a proletarian audience. On the other hand, Andre Van Gysegghem, writing on Soviet Theatre, which he observed closely between 1933 and 1938, maintains a strong and important distinction between the kind of audiences attracted by Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, asserting basically that Meyerhold had created a different theatre for a new Soviet audience:

In the Theatre of Meyerhold a very vital principle in the Soviet theatre becomes clear - the aim of drawing the majority into an active relationship with the art of the theatre where

they shall participate emotionally not in isolated instances but in unified co-operation. Such an aim is in absolute opposition to those theories which actuated the naturalistic school of the Moscow Art Theatre, where the performance was conceived as a complete whole, independent of the reaction of the audience who might as well not have been in the theatre at all. These two opposing methods cannot be abstracted from their social origin. The latter was designed for a highly cultured audience, composed of the aristocracy and intelligentsia who prided themselves upon their ability to disregard the mundane things of life; they disliked familiarity of any sort except with their own kind, and actors did not represent their own kind - the stage was a diversion which they paid to see and having seen, left without any personal obligation.⁶⁹

This thesis will contend that the revolutionary modern genre, being neither an avant-garde form of proletarian theatre, such as that of Meyerhold, in which the audience 'co-operates', nor a form of socialist-minded theatre of ideas performing 'critical realist' plays about the foibles and failings of a decadent old order, such as that of Stanislavsky, (it was not until 1926 that the Moscow Art Theatre

actually produced a 'Soviet' play), made its own distinctive contribution to Chinese - and world - theatre.

The Obstacle of Innovation

The notion of a 'revolutionary' form of theatre which remains both national and popular is, in some respects, an attempt to reconcile obvious contradictions. The more culture-specific the form of national theatre, the harder it is to borrow and adapt features from another tradition, regardless of their putative suitability, and, of course, the harder it is to introduce a whole new genre into the host culture. In the case of a 'revolutionary modern' theatre, this meant obvious difficulties for areas of reform involving plain spoken language, proletarian protagonists, realistic sets, augmented orchestration, including 'foreign' instruments, and contemporary-issue plots. Just as, in the West, interest in Chinese theatre, despite its links with oral and vernacular story-telling, is largely the result of an elite taste for the esoteric (and not just for linguistic reasons), so Western drama - 'spoken plays' - were largely an elite taste in China in the decades from 1920 to 1960. What was needed for the democratisation of theatre was not just a model of contemporary, spoken language drama (*huaju*) reflecting relevant

social issues or mass interests, but a form of theatre which remained truly national, satisfying those conventions of story and performance which a Chinese audience brought to the theatre as opposed to those of a Western audience.

The works created during the Cultural Revolution were not so much 'revolutionary', in the sense of a radical departure from aesthetic or creative traditions (as in the case of spoken plays), as they were a form of modified traditional art depicting the revolutionary narrative. As will be documented in the following chapters, Jiang Qing was intent on a comprehensive rejection of international theory and practice of the decades prior to the Cultural Revolution, for reasons of her own. But even if these reasons had not existed, it would have been necessary for any architect of even the most modern and revolutionary theatre to approach newness of *form* with caution. In attempting to create a form of theatre for a 'proletarian' or mass audience reformists would have had difficulty embracing innovative and apparently accessible forms such as the spoken play for the same reasons like-minded people in the Soviet Union (or the United States, for that matter) could not easily turn Agitprop, Documentary Theatre or Living Newspaper into a 'popular' or 'democratic' form of theatre, despite their highly desirable association with contemporary issues and its

proletarian protagonists. What was clearly required was a popular, contemporary and indigenous art form and for this purpose, Beijing opera was, in many respects, an ideal medium, although the question of subject matter was genuinely problematic.

In the 1930s there had in fact been considerable experiment with spoken plays and the attendant method acting. Jiang Qing herself had been involved in a celebrated production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Lu Xun had joined in the international social-political controversy over Nora's door-slamming departure by asking what happened to her after she left Helmer, and the Stanislavsky method was highly influential in the training of actors for the new Western-style roles⁷⁰ often associated with 'critical realism' and even 'socialist realism' (although this term is perhaps more properly associated, both in theoretical and historical terms, with Zhdanov and Gorky).

Russian and Soviet influence was abjured after the Sino-Soviet split and the Tenth Plenum of 1962, and there was vigorous reaffirmation of the ongoing nature of class struggle, a function of Mao's declining political fortunes. At a personal level it is also plain that Jiang Qing had a score to settle with the May Fourth generation of Russian-Soviet-influenced intellectuals who became China's cultural policy-

makers. Beijing opera then became a 'most stubborn fortress' to be taken by assault, ostensibly in order for China to secure a socialist superstructure, but also in order for Mao and Jiang Qing to wrest political-ideological control from the critics of Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward economic strategy. However, the essential problem with spoken plays was an irony produced by culture - what appeared to be a model for popular, vernacular, contemporary and didactic theatre in a Western context, was by its very culture-specific nature as exotic and elitist, from the point of view of workers and peasants, as Beijing opera or *Kabuki* theatre would be to a working class audience in the West.

Beijing opera, on the other hand, despite its feudal or Confucian subject matter, was not essentially 'aristocratic' or 'elitist' as a form of theatre, compared to say, the antecedent *kunqu* opera, or the court music tradition. Its historical themes and poetic language notwithstanding, the opera had the great advantage of familiarity and tradition over spoken plays, as a form of entertainment, inspiration and social ritual for frequently illiterate and semi-literate audiences - and, in fact, this very familiarity proved to be one of the great obstacles to establishing a modern, proletarian (and unfamiliar) theatre. But these very obstacles were themselves

personified and dramatised, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

Mao's political situation, Jiang Qing's personal ambition and resentment of 1930's intellectuals, and the rigid application of Cultural Revolution theory on arts and literature have all conspired to divert attention from genuine and substantive problems faced by the Chinese national theatre after the critical meeting of Chinese and Western literary traditions. In dealing with the problems of 'making foreign things serve China', in attacking 'bourgeois' critical realism, in attempting to find a means of 'critical assimilation' of old and new, foreign and Chinese, Jiang Qing transformed Mao's literary theory into 'highest directives', but she also managed to tackle some real literary issues, including the necessity not just for a change from feudal or bourgeois to proletarian protagonists but for a form of narrative which could act as a suitable vehicle for both a modern proletarian ideology and a traditional, national art form. I stress again that I do not ascribe to Jiang Qing a major concern with aesthetics or dramatic theory but it seems nevertheless that she 'found' some interesting responses to difficult problems almost as the natural consequence of managing her own very theatrical form of politics.

It may be that Jiang Qing's reforms focussed narrowly and excessively on the nature of the protagonists, on the change from scholars and beauties to workers and peasants documented in Chapter 4. There is, after all, for anyone interested in didactic theatre, a crucial distinction to be made between drama *about* workers peasants and soldiers and drama *for* workers, peasants and soldiers. And even when the problem of subjects, themes and motifs was resolved, there were still real and fundamental choices to be made between types of characterisation. For the architects of Cultural Revolution policy in literature and arts the models ranged from the 'black and white' contrasts of the traditional Chinese stage to the subtleties and complexities of Ibsen and Chekhov.

The Proletarian Myth as Text and Performance

The solution advocated by Jiang Qing was a combination of 'revolutionary realism' and 'revolutionary romanticism'. This, for her at least, was a form of 'critical assimilation', avoiding problems inherent in all the models available to her, including a 'foreign' yet apparently 'socialist' realism, the European experience of 'bourgeois' domination of the stage after shifting from classical and romantic traditions to a theatre of issues and ideas, and the 'elitist' predilections of the May Fourth-influenced

Chinese literati. In some ways it is a great irony that Soviet, European and American drama, which might well have provided a basis for intelligent discussion about a modern Chinese national and proletarian theatre, is precisely the kind of literature which was condemned in the Cultural Revolution as 'bourgeois'. This condemnation, which may well have owed more to foreign policy than literature itself, was not only for *representing* bourgeois society, as in Ibsen's work, but for its form of 'realistic' characterisation. The reasons for this will be explored throughout this thesis, as will the various manifestations of the notion of 'realism' and the particular kind of 'romanticism' employed to counter it in the revolutionary modern works.

In attempting to isolate the literary significance of the revolutionary modern genre from the ephemeral and factional in Chinese politics, I have highlighted a contradiction of Jiang Qing's making, a problem left unsolved by the Cultural Revolution, and perhaps one of the major reasons for the failure of the genre as a stimulus to dramatic creativity. As Kirk Denton has pointed out, Beijing opera has a dual purpose, since it is both lyrical and narrative.⁷¹ It is not a written form of course, and insofar as the librettos of the revolutionary modern plays were conceived as performance texts, subject to constant revision, they

followed the traditions of Beijing opera quite neatly. As Denton puts it:

What was surely not overlooked by Jiang Qing in her decision to appropriate Peking Opera for revolutionary purposes is precisely what the Peking Opera is not: it is not a written form, an immutable literary text designed for private, individual reading. The dramatic form is a public phenomena, (sic) shared communally by members of an audience.⁷²

In practice, however the eight model works, if not the entire revolutionary modern genre, became 'immutable literary texts', strangely at odds with any Marxist-Leninist-Maoist notion of dialectics, such as 'class struggle' or 'continuous revolution' as well as with the traditions of Chinese opera itself, which was inclined to treat its 'literature', in the words of the theatre historian Loren Kruger, as 'textual traces of the occasion of performance'.⁷³ Although the models certainly were produced by a *process* of revision and amendment, and a *method* at least superficially congruent with the 'mass line',⁷⁴ the *content* itself became an ultimate goal at the expense of process or participation. In this sense, as well as in the sense outlined above, of a very limited and therefore alienating repertoire, they may well have failed a

major test as 'revolutionary' theatre. Nevertheless, the texts of the revolutionary modern works represent a distillation of problems and principles at the heart of the Chinese revolution, and of many other international attempts at a revolutionary theatre, and indeed, revolutionary literature.

This thesis will emphasise the dramatic literature, rather than symbolism, movement, stagecraft or music, in order to analyse the significance of the attempt to combine revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism in a creative method. Theatre, of course, is a composite art form, but, as Lars Kleberg has pointed out, modern theories of theatre 'could be arranged on a scale with the notion of theatre as a combination of all factors at one pole, and the conception that some one factor is its *sine qua non* at the other'.⁷⁵ In taking a textual approach, the aim is not to argue the primacy of text, but rather to emphasise the 'narrative pattern' rather than the overall 'theatrical representation', according to the distinction made by Stephen Lacey in discussing British realist theatre of the 1960s.⁷⁶ The theoretical basis for a consistent form of proletarian myth is discerned in the dialogue, storyline, actions and stage directions set down in the dramatic literature, rather than in the more diffuse impact of

performance, although, as I point out, the 'discourse' which conveys myth is the discourse of theatre.

A 1993 article by Meng Yue, entitled 'Female Images and National Myth', in which she discusses *White-haired Girl* will help to explain the direction I have taken here, and my emphasis throughout on a 'literary' perspective. This has a great deal to do with the notion of 'discourse', the specific meaning of which I will explore in Chapters 5 and 6. It also has to do with a certain view of Chinese political culture, in which the relationship between literature and politics is complex and multi-layered, ultimately determining not only what is 'fictional' but what is 'real' or 'historical'. Meng Yue puts it this way:

Literary discourse occupied a unique position in the ordering of Chinese socialist society before the 1980s. As a singularly important type of writing, literature generated a mutually implicated dynamic between state discourses and civic, private, and cultural life. Not only did literature reproduce state politics and enter them into civic or private cultural contexts, it also shaped the national conception of what constituted Chinese social 'reality'.⁷⁷

I have touched on the idea of Chinese 'national' theatre, and Meng Yue's analysis of 'national myth' suggests that 'national' and 'proletarian' are sometimes synonymous in China in the 1960s and 1970s, but my major purpose in concentrating on mythology in this thesis is not so much to arrive at a conclusion about the precise nature of Chinese national theatre as to illuminate the interaction between narrative and occasion in the Cultural Revolution, making the question of 'performance' - or theatre itself - a much broader concept than 'that which occurs in the theatre'.

Despite an emphasis on textual analysis of narrative design, however, the aim of this study is not to provide a comprehensive, chronological account of the evolution of the dramatic literature of the revolutionary modern genre, but to indicate the way in which Cultural Revolution ideology was translated into dramatic theory - and then, in effect, dramatised. It appears there may well be a whole area for fruitful further research in illustrating the way these works evolved, script by script, in order to demonstrate the extent to which Jiang Qing and her Culture Minister Yu Huiyong in particular were or were not sincerely interested in, and conversant with, aesthetic and dramatic theory and practice, but the emphasis in this thesis is on McDougall's 'starting point', that is on

analysis of the finished works as text, rather than on the intentions or thought processes of their creators and custodians. The problem identified earlier, that scholarship is frequently diverted from 'literary' considerations into biography and political science might well be the result of paying too much attention to the author and not enough to the work - that is, because Jiang Qing herself is not taken seriously as a dramatist, the works themselves are not taken seriously as drama.

As suggested above, to the extent that the texts of the revolutionary modern genre have been analysed to date, the emphasis has most often been on the way they throw light on the factional politics of the Cultural Revolution - the struggle between Mao and his supporters and the Peng Zhen clique, or the crisis for Mao after the Lushan meeting, or the fall from grace of Lin Biao and his 'theory of genius'. In a way this approach confirms the 'period' nature of the works, but the major issues raised by the revolutionary modern genre are to do with the Chinese revolution in its broadest sense, and in particular the question of class and the representation of class interests in a modern, national theatre. This has its parallels outside China, and, in the history of English theatre for example, one need only recall the way the pendulum of class interest swung from say, J.M. Barrie and Noel

Coward to Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter, from drawing room to kitchen sink. In the context of the Cultural Revolution, however, the 'kitchen sink' would not suffice as a representation of working class life - it had to be 'romantic' as well as 'real'. The nature of, and at times the contradictions inherent in, this kind of realism will be explored throughout but it should be noted in passing that this approach is by no means inconsistent with the traditions of Beijing opera, in which, as Wichmann points out, everything, including 'ugly' blood stains or red, tearful eyes must be stylised and 'beautiful'.⁷⁸

I argue herein that the revolutionary modern genre is an example of the successful integration of form and content in Chinese national theatre, largely as a result of its approach to narrative design, and that the method of combining revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism was conducive to this integration of essential Beijing opera form with contemporary proletarian content. Some antecedent forms of realism, as in the stories of Balzac, the novels of Dostoevsky, or the plays of Chekhov, manifested themselves in a form which depended upon complex and subtle characterisation - such as the kind of 'critical realism' and 'revolutionary romanticism' described by Gorky in his 1934 address to Soviet writers.⁷⁹ Other genres, notably the theatre of Brecht

and Meyerhold, attempted an integration of revolutionary content with an 'epic', 'symbolist' or 'mythic' form or style, intended to suggest archetypal figures and fundamental emotions, but often remaining the preserve of an 'intellectual' audience. The revolutionary modern genre also appealed to myth and essence, to a sense of 'typical' and 'ideal' characterisation, as will be seen in Chapter 3, but it did so in a way that was accessible to its post-Liberation audience of workers and peasants. In fact the Chinese theatre moved, in the Cultural Revolution, from more 'realistic' forms of story-telling, such as the opera of *The White-Haired Girl*, and the novel *Ludang Huozhong* (Sparks among the reeds) which inspired *Shajiabang*, to a form closer to legend and ritual, more in tune with both traditional Beijing opera and the 'developing myth' of a proletarian state.

Living Myth or 'Cultural Death'?

As I have said, I do not wish to make a case for the conscious dramatic intent of the creators of the model works. In fact, they contributed massively to the undermining of their own credibility by relating broad issues of characterisation, plot and theme to explicit personal power struggles and by making the survival of troupes and performers dependent on their

unqualified support for the models and Jiang Qing herself. Below is an example of the way factional politics was used as a cipher for the arts, in this case, by members of the Shanghai School of Dance, in relation to *White-Haired Girl* :

The focal point was the question of political power. For a dozen or more years Liu Shao-chi had been dreaming of restoring capitalism. Banding together with a gang of renegades and enemy agents, he clamped down a counter-revolutionary dictatorship on the proletarians in the cultural field, and attempted to prepare public opinion for a capitalist restoration...We can't compel a reflection of present day life, he babbled. Ballet and foreign-style opera are not really suitable for it...When, thanks to the personal attention Comrade Chiang Ching was giving us, we decided to create a revolutionary ballet *The White-Haired Girl*, the counter-revolutionary revisionist clique in our school tried to switch us into producing a sickly story of frustrated love among aristocrats in days gone by. When proletarian headquarters urged us to study the ballet *Red Detachment of Women* put on in Peking, the clique flatly refused to let us. But they sent us to Hangchow to learn a foreign dance... 80

And as Martin Ebon notes, in 1975, discussing the evolution of *White-Haired Girl* from legend to ballet and model work:

The road towards (this) ultimate version of *The White-Haired Girl* covered numerous obstacles and detours. The revisions in the play itself, as well as its adaptation into ballet form, reflected the political-cultural tug-of-war between different factions within the Communist Party of China. That the characterizations, the music, and choreography of this modern legend should have been the subject of violent disagreement and personality clashes illustrates the role which the arts have played in the Peking power struggle. Subsequent explanations assert that the group around former Communist Party secretary Liu Shao-chi resisted revisions of the play advocated by others, notably Mao's wife, Chiang Ching. With Liu in disgrace, denounced as 'China's Krushchev' and advocate of the 'capitalist road', it is exceedingly difficult to trace these disagreements objectively. If recent explanations given in Peking are even partly valid, Liu preferred characterizations that permitted artistic reflections of internal personality struggles,

opposed blatant propagandistic polarization in plot, and favored subtlety in direction and acting.⁸¹

There is also a sense in which some works - for example *Dujuanshan* (Azalea Mountain) - lend themselves to obvious allegorical interpretation, with specific people and events clearly suggested by both characterisation and plot. In this case, parallels with Lin Biao and the alleged assassination attempt on Mao in 1971, the beacon-like leadership of a strong Party woman (Jiang Qing herself), and the re-assertion of Party authority over the army, make the work a blatant piece of 'propaganda', whatever its overall merits.

However, while there is no doubt that characterisation and plot were a reflection of personal and group factional struggles in the Cultural Revolution, the aim herein is to analyse the way the *finished product*, by whatever process of creation, not only addressed itself to the issues of the Chinese Revolution, but, in sense, 'narrated' the Cultural Revolution itself. My literary, or narrative emphasis, in an art form which is celebrated internationally as an integrated performance incorporating mime, music and movement, is, in a way, also a reflection of Jiang Qing's ostensibly counter-productive approach to theatre, in

creating definitive 'texts' for characterisation. These ultimately limited interpretation far more rigidly than other forms of literature, such as the novel, in which there was at least some scope for a private mental response. In her efforts to rid the stage of the authority of emperors, generals and scholars Jiang Qing may well have introduced Chinese theatre, which had traditionally been performance-based, to the authority of text - to the 'rules' of narrative design which dominated all other considerations. Meng Yue neatly identifies the process which ultimately led to sterility:

Socialist literature and culture had no other available avenue and thus began a process of self-copying; it used existing conventions, sometimes very beautifully, to repeat the same thing over and over. Such repetition became extreme during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), when all kinds of conventions, all kinds of media, all kinds of genres and styles were engaged in the mass production of a very few texts...Once creative production had become a simple duplication, to write was to copy and to be copied, and when the only literature we possessed consisted of copies of eight 'official' models, there existed no

difference separating cultural production from cultural death - dead, yet still self-copying.⁸²

But it was, nevertheless, as in many literary forms which are linked with theatre and ritual, rules for 'copying' which made the revolutionary modern works a form of myth.

In this thesis, the nature of narrative, and of storytelling, is a paramount consideration in describing the model theatre as a form of proletarian mythology. While political scientists and historians have clearly acknowledged, and contributed to, an understanding of the *closeness* of the relationship between literature and politics in the Cultural Revolution, I believe they may also have obscured the *nature* of this relationship. Treating the division between art and politics as a false dichotomy seems only to have had the effect of highlighting the way political culture dominates literary culture. Conversely, in this thesis, I want to highlight the dominance of a broadly conceived literary (or dramatic) strategy over the conduct of a political occasion (or 'product' perhaps) and to show, now that the occasion has passed, that the narrative retains some essential, enduring qualities as a form of myth. I will begin, in the next two chapters, by analysing the crucial

combination of realism and romanticism in the
revolutionary narrative.

Notes

¹ Chen Xiaomei 'The Marginality of the Study of Cultural Revolution: The Neglected and the Privileged in the Making of Imagined Communities,' a paper presented at a Symposium on Culture and Politics in 20th Century China Idaho, 1-2 Oct, 1997.

² Martin Ebon, ed., *Five Communist Plays* (New York: The John Day Company, 1975), xxi.

³ Elizabeth Wichmann, 'Traditional Theater in Contemporary China,' in Colin Mackerras, ed., *Chinese Theater from its Origins to the Present Day* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 196.

⁴ The names of the model works, and other frequently mentioned Chinese materials will be given first in Hanyu pinyin with an English translation in parenthesis and thereafter cited in English and italicised as an abbreviated title, e.g. *Red Detachment, White-haired Girl, Red Lantern*.

⁵ Bell Yung, 'Model Opera as Model: From *Shajiabang* to *Sagabaong*,' in Bonnie S. McDougall, ed., *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 163.

⁶ Liang Mingyue, *Music of the Billion* (New York: Heinrichshofen Edition, 1985), 158.

⁷ McDougall, *Popular Chinese Literature*, xii.

⁸ Constantine Tung, 'Tradition and Experience of the Drama of the People's Republic of China,' in Constantine Tung and Colin

Mackerras, eds., *Drama in the People's Republic of China* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 13.

⁹ Colin Mackerras, *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey* (Beijing: New World, 1990), 170-171.

¹⁰ See Ebon, *Five Communist Plays*, 122.

¹¹ 'The Best of Modern Chinese Operas ('40s-'60s),' performed at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Grand Theatre, 24 October, 1999, by the China Opera and Dance Drama Theatre as part of the 'Contemporary Masterpieces Series' at the Chinese Arts Festival, 22 October - 13 November, 1999. No mention is made of the Cultural Revolution in the programme notes for the series, but a reference is made to 'harvest song opera' (*yangge ju*) as a form with distinctive 'national colour' (*minzu seci*).

¹² *Dalu jianbao* (Mainland bulletin), No.6, February 1992, 51.

¹³ Li Hui, ed., *Ba da yangbanxi. Zhenzangben* (The eight great model works. A treasury), (Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1995) and Dai Jiafeng, *Yangbanxi de feng feng yu yu. Jiang Qing. Yangbanxi ji nei mu* (The trials and tribulations of the model works. Behind the scenes with Jiang Qing and the model works), (Zhishi chubanshe, 1995). David Pledger's *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, performed at Theatreworks, February 1995, is a most interesting example of a contemporary treatment of one of the models. There is also a scene from *Taking Tiger Mountain* in Sally Sussman's *Orientalia*, performed at The Performance Space, Sydney in March 1995 (see Trevor Hay, 'Tiger Mountain by Strategy: Take Two,' in *RealTime*, 6, April-May 1995, 16. Also interesting in this light is *Revolutionary Opera*, staged by the

Hong Kong performance company, Zuni Icosahedron, October 1991, as part of the inaugural Chinese Theatrical Arts Festival at the Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, (See Rozanna Lilley, 'The Absolute Stage - Hong Kong's Revolutionary Opera,' a paper given at the Conference of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia, Macquarie University, 1995).

¹⁴ See Colin Mackerras, 'Chinese Traditional Theatre: A revival in the 1990s?' in *Chinoperl Papers*, No. 18, 1996.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁶ For example, there are two famous biographies in English - Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao. The White-Boned Demon: A Biography of Madame Mao Zedong* (Toronto: Random Books, 1986), and Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977) - and, in Chinese, there is Ye Yonglie, *Jiang Qing zhuan* (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1993).

¹⁷ Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, trans. Cola Franzen (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

¹⁸ See 'Romain Rolland' in Eric Bentley ed., *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (Penguin, 1990), esp. 458-462.

¹⁹ See David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 69.

²⁰ Chen Xiaomei, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995) 112.

²¹ Bob Hodge and Kam Louie, *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture. The Art of Reading Dragons* (London: Routledge, 1998).

²² Kirk A. Denton, 'Model Drama as Myth: A Semiotic Analysis of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*,' in Tung and Mackerras, *Drama in the People's Republic of China*.

²³ Barthes uses the term 'semiology' in a particular sense, and I will use this from time to time in exploring the connotations of his remarks on mythology, (especially as in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* [London: Vintage, 1993]), but in a general sense when referring to this field of study I will use the more widely used term 'semiotics'.

²⁴ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 115.

²⁵ The 'creation myths' of the *Shan hai jing* are a good example. There is of course a 'classic' text, but the tales have an 'unfinished' quality, often, like the Grimms' collection of European folklore, needing some kind of literary intervention to make a suitably coherent anthology.

²⁶ Sheila A. Egoff, *Worlds Within. Children's Fantasy from the Middle Ages to Today* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988) 51.

²⁷ For example see Jean Houston, *The Search for the Beloved. Journeys in Mythology and Sacred Psychology* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc., 1987)

²⁸ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Fontana Press, 1993), 19.

²⁹ Michael Dutton, *Streetlife China* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 229-30.

³⁰ See Joseph W. Esherick and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, 'Acting Out Democracy; Political Theater in Modern China,' in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry, *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

³¹ See Ellen R. Judd, 'Dramas of Passion: Heroism in the Cultural Revolution's Model Operas' in William A. Joseph, Christine P. W. Wong and David Zweig, eds., *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University 1991).

³² *Ibid.*, 264.

³³ *Ibid.*, 280.

³⁴ Both characters appeared in earlier forms, such as opera and film.

³⁵ The David Pledger production mentioned in note 12 above deals with this, by alternating between commercial 'ideology' and the ideology of the Cultural Revolution.

³⁶ Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre. An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1.

³⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An Introduction* (Basil Blackwell, 1985), 104.

³⁸ Chris Baldick, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), see especially 'postmodernism' and 'post-structuralism', 174, 175, respectively.

³⁹ See 'Structuralism and Semiotics', Chapter 3 in Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, for an account of the way structuralism and semiotics are linked with the formalists. See also Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, eds., *Marxist Literary Theory. A Reader* (Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 137, for a discussion of Barthes in his structuralist stage.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of Brecht on theatre and the 'alienation' effect in Chinese acting, see John Wilett, trans. and ed., *Brecht on Theatre. The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964) 91-99.

⁴¹ See Anita Moss and Jon C. Scott, *The Family of Stories. An Anthology of Children's literature* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986), 2.

⁴² For example *Sanguo zhi yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) and *Shuihu zhuan* (Water margin), both of which bear the hallmark of the professional storyteller's art and contain some very famous episodes, one of which found its way into *Taking Tiger Mountain*. For an interesting discussion of the links between traditional fiction and drama and that of the Cultural Revolution, see Robert E. Hegel, 'Making the Past Serve the Present in Fiction and Drama: From the Yan'an Forum to the Cultural Revolution,' in McDougall, *Popular Chinese Literature*.

⁴³ For an interesting contemporary treatment of socialist realism see Thomas Lahusen 'Socialist Realism in Search of its Shores: Some Historical Remarks on the "Historically Open Aesthetic System of the Truthful Representation of Life" in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko eds., *Socialist Realism*

Without Shores (*The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Summer 1995, vol 94 No.3 [Duke University Press, 1995]), 661-685. In the same issue is Evgeny Dobrenko's thought-provoking 'The Disaster of Middlebrow Taste, or Who "invented" Socialist Realism?'

⁴⁴ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 111-117.

⁴⁵ See for example Philip Hui-ho Cheng, *The Function of Chinese Opera in Social Control and Change* (PhD) (Southern Illinois, Mass Communications, 1974), and Wolfram Eberhard ed., *Folktales of China* (The University of Chicago Press, 1965).

⁴⁶ 'Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhuishangde jianghua,' (Talks at the Yan'an forum on literature and art) May, 1942 in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Selected works of Mao Zedong), (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, December 1968), 804-835. For an English translation see *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol.III, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 69-98. I will refer to these speeches throughout as 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum').

⁴⁷ See David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 91-92.

⁴⁸ Tung and Mackerras, *Drama in the People's Republic*, 204.

⁴⁹ Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times From 1840 to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 167, 175.

⁵⁰ There are some interesting Western precedents for the depiction of the Cultural Revolution in theatre, such as the opera *Nixon in China* (Huston Grand Opera, 1987) and the drama *Madame Mao*, (Melbourne, Playbox Theatre, 1986).

⁵¹ Feng Jing, 'The Renaissance of Peking Opera,' in *Beijing Review*, Feb. 13-19 1995, 11.

⁵² For example, the performance at the Tenth Melbourne Festival (Oct. 27, 1995, Melbourne Concert Hall) of the Beijing Beijing Opera Troupe, featuring the solo performance by Liu Changyu, (the original Tiemei), of the aria 'I Want To Be That Kind of Person', from *Red Lantern*.

⁵³ Raymond Dawson, ed., *The Legacy of China* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 142-143.

⁵⁴ Allan Lewis, *The Contemporary Theatre. The Significant Playwrights of Our Time*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1962), 127.

⁵⁵ Tung and Mackerras, *Drama in the Peoples Republic of China*, 1.

⁵⁶ See Chiang Ch'ing, *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968), 11.

⁵⁷ Feng Jing, 'The Renaissance of Peking Opera,' 8.

⁵⁸ John Gassner, *Masters of the Drama* (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 155.

⁵⁹ See Chen Xiaomei, 'The Marginality of the Study of Cultural Revolution,' 5. The phrase is used by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) and is echoed in Meng Yue's use of 'imagined public' in an article on 'national myth' (see note 75 below). Apter and Saich also use this phrase in *Revolutionary Discourse*, in discussing Yan'an as a 'semiotic space' (see Chapter 2, 'Four Struggles', 37). In a general

sense what is intended in this usage is a sense of collective identity, real or 'imagined' in which members of that community are identified and collectivised in a particular way (e.g. as 'workers, peasants and soldiers'). In the case of authoritarian regimes which reinforce their authority via literature and the arts, the 'imagining' of community is not so much done by the people but for them.

⁶⁰ For example, Professor Tomio Tada has been sponsoring and performing plays in Tokyo's New National Theatre, in which contemporary themes - such as the use of Korean slave labourers - are incorporated into the form of classical *Noh* theatre. A report on this appeared in the Melbourne newspaper *The Age* in 1995 (Ben Hills, 'What Do you Mean, Noh?', *The Age*, 22/4/95).

⁶¹ Lilley, 'The Absolute Stage', 3.

⁶² Colin Mackerras, 'The Taming of the Shrew: Chinese Theatre and Social Change Since Mao,' in *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* No 1, Vol. 1, January 1979, 7.

⁶³ *Zhongguo xiqu quyī cidian*, (Shanghai: Bianshu chubanshe, 1981), 613.

⁶⁴ In Melbourne I spoke to a former Beijing opera teacher, Jane Yang, and in Sydney I spoke to Xu Fengshan, a former Beijing opera performer, who has recently appeared in *Orientalia* (see note 12, above).

⁶⁵ I have made this point in more detail in an article, 'Yellow Lady Meets Black Stump: An Obscene Postmodern Heroine in Australia,' in *RealTime*, December/January 1995-1996.

⁶⁶ Bonnie S. McDougall, *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China 1919-25* (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971); Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (Cambridge, Mass. 1967); Lars Ragvald, *Yao Wen Yuan as a Literary Critic and Theorist. The Emergence of Chinese Zhdanovism* (Stockholm: Department of Oriental Languages, 1978); D.W. Fokkema, *Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence 1956-1960* (The Hague: Mouton and Co, 1965).

⁶⁷ Edward Braun, *Meyerhold. A Revolution in Theatre* (Methuen, 1995), 9.

⁶⁸ Klaus Mehnert's *China Returns*, 1972, is quoted in Ebon, *Five Communist Plays*, 129-130.

⁶⁹ Andre Van Gysegheem, *Theatre in Soviet Russia* (London: Faber and Faber, no date of publication), 44-45.

⁷⁰ See Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ching*, 383.

⁷¹ Tung and Mackerras, *Drama in the People's Republic of China*, 120.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷³ Loren Kruger, *The National Stage. Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France and America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 29.

⁷⁴ See Bill Brugger, *Contemporary China* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 33-34 for discussion of the mass line.

⁷⁵ Lars Kleberg, trans. Charles Rogle, *Theatre as Action. Soviet Russian Avant-Garde Aesthetics* (Macmillan, 1993), 40.

⁷⁶ Stephen Lacey, *British Realist Theatre. The New Wave in its Context 1956-65* (London: Routledge, 1995), 67-68.

⁷⁷ Meng Yue, 'Female Images and National Myth,' in Tani E. Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China. Writing and Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 118.

⁷⁸ See Wichmann in Mackerras, ed., *Chinese Theater From its Origins*, 191.

⁷⁹ Maxim Gorky, *On Literature*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 24.

⁸⁰ Ebon, *Five Communist Plays*, 33-34.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸² Meng Yue, 'Female Images,' 131.

Chapter 2: The Protean Dichotomy: Realism, Romanticism and the Revolutionary Narrative

Heroes Created by Folklore

In his 1934 Speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, A.A. Zhdanov, the Marxist theoretician whose name would be forever identified with literary inquisition, including that of the Cultural Revolution itself,¹ eulogised Soviet writers as the pioneers of world proletarian literature:

There is not and never has been a literature making its basic subject-matter the life of the working class and the peasantry and their struggle for socialism. There does not exist in any country in the world a literature to defend and protect the equality of rights of the working people of all nations and the equality of rights of women. There is not, nor can there be in any bourgeois country, a literature to wage consistent war on all obscurantism, mysticism, hierarchic religious attitudes and threats of hell-fire, as our literature does.²

Despite this evangelical rhetoric, with its ironic 'threats of hell-fire', the idea of a 'proletarian' literature did not emerge without opposition even in

the Soviet Union, and eminent intellectuals such as Lunacharsky and Trotsky had expressed grave misgivings about it in the 1920s.³ However, while the Soviet Union may be regarded as the first systematic creator of proletarian genres, as opposed to an older, international 'socialist' literature, the literary theory of the 1930s was in fact an attempt to reconcile elements of diverse 'revolutionary' genres and theories which covered the literary spectrum from the nineteenth century Russian democratic liberals and the great realist tradition of Gogol, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy to the symbolists of 1900-1912 and the populist 'oral' and 'lyrical' literature of Mayakovsky in the 1920s.⁴

Outside the Soviet Union, and outside the claims of an institutional 'proletarian' literature, a number of writers - Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, Romain Rolland, Emile Zola and Anatole France - may claim a place in the history of kindred literature from social realism and naturalism to 'socialist' literature. All played a significant part in the movement away from early nineteenth century romanticism. With the death of Anatole France in 1924 forming a kind of post-war watershed, European literature entered a period of symbolist disillusionment with politics, and with the literature of ideas and social movements.⁵ However, by the late 1920s realism had re-asserted itself in the

Soviet Union and stood in stark ideological contrast to 'anti-realist' genres, whether classical, symbolist or romantic. This period constitutes what Robert Reid has called the 'nadir' for romanticism in the history of Soviet criticism, but by the early 1930s it was being rehabilitated and put to socially useful work. As Reid notes, in observing the softening of that attitude which held romanticism to be a form of 'anti-realism':

The shift in this view, which began in 1932 and culminated with the Writers' Congress two years later, was characterised chiefly by the concession that there was such a phenomenon as revolutionary romanticism which could and perhaps should become an active participant in the realistic method. Romanticism was accordingly resurrected only to be sliced in two by a new and more protean dichotomy.⁶

The blend of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism attributed to Mao and proclaimed as literary method by Jiang Qing was a variation on this Soviet theme, most vividly articulated by Maxim Gorky, principal speaker at the 1934 Congress.⁷ Gorky had isolated the positive element of romanticism as 'collective' romanticism in 1909, 'active social-revolutionary romanticism' in 1928, and 'revolutionary

romanticism' in 1934.⁸ This was part of the Soviet literary quest to find a form of realism (i.e. socialist realism) which was neither 'bourgeois' nor 'negative' and a form of romanticism which was neither 'passive' nor 'decadent'.

It is not hard to see how even the most mordant criticism of bourgeois society may wind up itself being characterised as the work of a 'bourgeois' critic (for example, the novels of Balzac were much admired by Marx, Engels, Gorky and Lukacs, despite the reactionary attitudes of the author) and the 'negative' appellation refers to a nagging problem with the heroes of Russian literature in the great nineteenth century tradition - an array of 'pathological' and individualistic protagonists one analyst of Marxist aesthetic theory has labelled 'madmen, idiots, fatalistic skeptics, or dreamy-eyed idlers'.⁹ For Gorky, the crucial thing for Soviet literature was to find its way beyond the technical artistry and liberal humanitarian ideals of the great critical realists, which often came at the price of a certain kind of negative objectivity:

This form of realism, however, has not served, and cannot serve, to educate socialist individuality, since while criticizing all things, it has established nothing, or, at

worst, has returned to an affirmation of all it has itself denied.¹⁰

On the other hand, certain kinds of romanticism were also anathema to socialist literary planners. Gorky begins his famous speech with a powerful criticism of the bourgeoisie's role in the history of culture and its preoccupations with idealism (that is, a non-materialist form of world understanding rooted in fear of the working masses):

Intellectual impoverishment has always resulted from any departure from a cognition of the basic phenomena of life - from escapism grounded in a fear of life or in a selfish urge towards repose, or social indifference born of vulgar and disgusting anarchy of the capitalist state.

There is good reason to hope that, when the history of culture is written by Marxists, we shall see that *the bourgeoisie's role in the process of cultural creativity has been grossly exaggerated*, particularly in literature...¹¹

Expanding on the theme of an ideological gulf between bourgeois thought and the culture of labour, Gorky postulates the existence of a 'profound type' of hero in folklore:

I would again, comrades, draw your attention to the fact, that most profound, striking and artistically perfect types of heroes have been created by folklore, the oral creation of the working people.¹²

Later in the same speech Gorky divides bourgeois Western writers into two groups, those who have 'lauded and amused' their class, such as Wilkie Collins, Trollope and Marryat, whom he characterises as 'typical "good bourgeois" poor talents'¹³ and those who are the 'most outstanding creators of critical realism and revolutionary romanticism'.¹⁴ He does not name the latter writers but describes them as 'apostates, who have wandered from the fold of their class, noblemen ruined by the bourgeoisie, or children of the petty bourgeoisie, who have escaped from the stifling atmosphere of their class'.¹⁵

Among these are Gogol and Chekhov, as exponents of 'critical realism', but Gorky seems more interested in the 'larger-than-life' offspring produced by the marriage of folklore and 'outstanding literary works' - *Faust, Gargantua and Pantagruel, Prometheus Unbound*¹⁶ - suggesting parallels with the Chinese situation, in which vernacular fiction, such as *Shuihu zhuan* (Water margin, or Outlaws of the marsh) and *Sanguo zhi yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms)

straddled 'popular' and 'elite' culture, particularly in the way they provided source material for the various traditional forms of opera.¹⁷ But Gorky also makes it plain that, while the 'true history of the toiling people' cannot be learnt without a knowledge of folklore,¹⁸ a mere mating of folkloric heroes and feudal conquerors in folk tales or in literary folk tales legitimised by the ruling culture does not constitute a literature of, or for, the people. In fact, although Gorky himself does not use the conjugal metaphor, in feudal terms this would appear to be a 'morganatic' marriage, in which the superior bloodstock of the nobility remains uncontaminated, since their partners and offspring can make no claim to a title, and must disguise their wit and courage in a kind of 'trickster' role:

When, by the side of the feudal conqueror, there arose the figure of the successful and rich rogue, our folk-lore produced Ivan the Simple as the rich man's companion, an ironical type who achieves wealth and even becomes tsar with the aid of a hump-backed horse, which has taken the place of the good fairy in magic tales of chivalry. The rich man purchased heroic glory by distributing alms among poor slaves, whose blind strength enabled both the conqueror and the rich man to plunder them.¹⁹

This has interesting parallels with the way Chinese folklore, philosophy and literature merge in the genre of hermit stories which gave rise to *Laozi*,²⁰ and the point about a subversive, deceptively unsophisticated protagonist representing the guile and wit of the masses is reminiscent of the characterisations of some great Beijing opera performers of the 1940s and 1950s, such as Xun Huisheng. For the moment the notable thing is the difficulty of creating a 'folk' yet 'proletarian' hero in forms of popular narrative that, in order to co-exist with ruling culture, had been peopled with the 'lords and ladies' that Mao mentioned in his speech to the company performing *Bishang Liangshan* (Driven to join the Liangshan rebels) in 1944.²¹ Traditionally this had been dealt with by means of a kind of 'cryptic' supporting character who was far more than he or she seemed, but the problem remained that a prominent or principal hero who was truly 'romantic' could only be fashioned in terms of myth, legend or the supernatural, which only seemed to legitimise ruling regimes and ideologies. Gorky even went so far as to condemn the kind of folklore which had become so habituated to 'ancient barbarism' that it could not resist elevating Lenin to 'the height of a mythical hero'.²²

What remained for theorists of both the Soviet Union and China was a means of distinguishing between the

`proletarian' myth and `ancient barbarism' and in effect this meant searching for a kind of essence extracted from `typical' proletarian qualities. This could not be `realistic' in the sense of being located in individualistic, ambivalent or morally flawed characters, but neither could it be `romantic' in the sense of `other-worldly'. As Gorky put it:

Any myth is a piece of imagining. Imagining means abstracting the fundamental idea underlying the sum of a given reality, and embodying it in an image; that gives us realism. But if the meaning of what has been abstracted from reality is amplified through the addition of the desired and the possible - if we supplement it through the logic of hypothesis - all this rounding off the image - then we have the kind of romanticism which underlies the myth, and is most beneficial in its promoting a revolutionary attitude toward reality, an attitude that in practice refashions the world.²³

The Search for the Typical

Gorky, like Mao, was seeking a kind of folkloric poetry of the masses, since it was folklore which had created prototypes for the great heroes of literature.

His view of myth is consistent with the much-quoted²⁴ view of Engels, who had said, in his famous letter to Margaret Harkness in 1888 that 'Realism...implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances'.²⁵ Lukacs also repeatedly stresses the need for a 'type' who is no mere statistical average, but an essence, representing the high point of development in given social and historical conditions. He raises this idea several times in his *Studies in European Realism*, a collection of essays originally written in the late 1930s, in which he writes of Gorky and Balzac in particular as great historical figures of literature and, like Gorky, stresses some kind of union between folklore and literature under socialism:

This intimate union of the deepest problems and highest perfection of form in literature with their folk origins can be realised consciously and without contradictions only in a Socialist society.²⁶

Cultural Revolution literary theory did not make the Soviet dichotomy between individualistic and passive romanticism and between collective and active romanticism any less 'protean' in principle. It merely invoked the protective power of Mao himself for a specific group of works and in so doing put a stop to

further examination of the 'academic question'²⁷ at the heart of this debate until the first post-Mao Congress in 1979. As a result it is the model works themselves, and their particular resolution of problems associated with proletarian characterisation which constitute the clearest indication that the reform of Beijing opera was in any sense a matter of literary and aesthetic theory and not just a manifestation of 'Chinese Zhdanovism'.

A brief comment on one particular aspect of characterisation may illustrate the way the Cultural Revolution so often forestalled and proscribed argument, making a factional struggle of cultural issues, when there was so much of a substantively literary nature that might have been said in support of the revolutionary modern genre. In the June 1966 issue of *Chinese Literature*, Tao Zhu, soon to become head of the Party Central Committee's Propaganda Department, defended the use of 'middle characters' (*zhongjian renwu*) in plays such as the Hunan flower-drum opera (*huagu*) *Mending the Pan*, on the grounds that such characters were necessary for dramatic variety and provided a useful foil for the extremes.²⁸ Some months earlier, at a key army forum on the arts convened by Jiang Qing, middle characters had been denounced along with a whole list of undesirable 'black line' literary ideas ('bourgeois',

`revisionist' and `1930s' tendencies), and, as an enemy of Jiang Qing, Tao Zhu's fate - and that of middle characters - was sealed.²⁹

Perhaps the outcome of this difference of opinion had little to do with any sort of theory; at best it appears to be a drastic curtailment of an important discussion; at worst an example of Jiang Qing taking revenge on one of her May Fourth generation enemies, but the final test of the suitability of `middle characters' is the works themselves, and in the models we have the actual result of excluding the middle ground, in a meeting of traditional and contemporary myth which squeezed out the subtleties of critical realism, naturalism and humanism.

Clearly the Cultural Revolution was not a time for middle ground, and in fact, as we shall see, it was conducted according to principles of `characterisation' which reflected that of the revolutionary modern genre. As a result, a great deal of important opinion, such as that of the `rightist' author Qin Zhaoyang concerning `the broad path of realism', and the dangers of formalism and dogmatism, was shouted down and condemned when it might have been countered with reasonable and productive argument about the nature of Beijing opera. Qin Zhaoyang made a most interesting point - and demonstrated the

possibility of considerable agreement with the Maoist position - when he referred to the link between realism and the use of imagination in an article in *Renmin wenxue* (People's literature) of September 1956:

Literary realism is a highly creative kind of work. It is realistic, but the writer may create absurd characters and stories in order to represent the profound content of reality. Sometimes it can be so real that it gives the impression of being fanciful. What a boundless arena realism offers the imagination! Imagination can concentrate, universalize, and exaggerate reality - and these can be developed to an astonishing level.³⁰

Realism and Romanticism

In contrast to the militant speech-making of Jiang Qing on the subject of 'bourgeois critical realism', any attempt to fashion a fair definition or historical assessment of 'realism' itself, or even to contrast it in some consistent theoretical way which convincingly excludes elements of 'romanticism', is likely to end in equivocation, since both these terms have developed a complex of associations more analogous to the cumulative subtleties of language itself than to a general 'theory' or 'aesthetic'. In the absence of

irresistible political directives, there may be as many interpretations of the differences between romanticism and realism as there are artists. As Oscar Wilde put it, in discussing the controversies of his own day:

The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.³¹

And Lu Xun himself, writing in 1928, with his customary ambiguous wit, provides us with both a plea for clarity and a caution against the proliferation of literary terminology:

The fearful thing about the Chinese literary scene is that everyone keeps introducing new terms without defining them. And everyone interprets these terms as he pleases. To write a good deal about yourself is expressionism. To write largely about others is realism. To write poems on a girl's leg is romanticism. To ban poems on a girl's leg is classicism.³²

If the leaders of the Cultural Revolution had busied themselves with facilitating the creation of a greater

repertoire of new works according to their own formulation, while permitting a more liberal climate of debate, they might well have produced better advocates than themselves for the revolutionary modern genre and a better platform for development of Beijing opera. Certainly the time was right for new fashions of realism. As Stephen Lacey has noted, in discussing British realist theatre of the period 1956-65, 'Realism usually becomes an issue in a culture when the representation, exploration and analysis of a society is on the agenda'³³ and few literary cultures can have been as intensely self-analytical as that of China during the two decades from the May Fourth Movement to Mao's speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and the Arts in 1942.³⁴ After the dominance of Western-influenced, cosmopolitan literati of the May Fourth era³⁵ and the heyday of Yan'an-style popular, non-urban and politically partisan literary movements, came what Guo Moruo called, in 1958, the 'era of revolutionary romanticism and revolutionary realism'.³⁶

In self-exploring societies, the issue is not only who or what is depicted in literature and the arts but the role of the arts in awakening consciousness of social problems and in addressing specific 'harsh' realities. That revolution should be identified with this kind of pedagogical realism is not surprising,

since realism is an obvious vehicle for portraying the actual living conditions of workers and peasants or the injustices done to the powerless. It is, however, only one of many approaches to the development of revolutionary genres, since social problems may well be portrayed in literature which appears to be utterly 'un-realistic', as in the various forms of symbolic or experimental theatre, including those of Brecht and Meyerhold. The term 'unrealistic' may be used in a pejorative sense to describe, for example, 'crude propaganda', (which Mao himself denounced in 'The Talks at the Yan'an Forum' as the 'poster and slogan style'³⁷) but it may well apply also to subtle and witty social issue plays such as those of George Bernard Shaw, which were unashamedly didactic, and frequently employed a highly contrived form of characterisation in support of a 'thesis' about very real social conditions and class division.³⁸

That revolution should be identified with romanticism is also perfectly understandable, although there is perhaps a more self-evident contradiction in the notion of a 'revolutionary' form of romanticism than in the corresponding form of realism, since romanticism has frequently acted as a vehicle for apparently 'counter-revolutionary' or 'un-realistic' (i.e illusory) ideologies and principles, such as nature worship, fantasy, religion, mysticism or

individualism. Both Chinese and Soviet literary debate of the 1920s and 1930s reflect dissatisfaction with those traditional forms and genres which appear to have an affinity with elements of romanticism. In China this manifested itself in a predilection among urban literati for new, Western-inspired literature and a rejection of Chinese traditional forms. Even after Liberation, when the pendulum swung away from May Fourth-style literature towards folktales and folk songs, this aversion took the form of attacks on the imaginary and mythical world of 'ghost' plays, and on the moral-political subversion implicit in the legendary content of 'historical' plays.

In the Soviet Union the rejection of traditional forms led to the emergence of a formula for a 'revolutionary' romanticism. Zhdanov drew a sharp line between Soviet 'proletarian' literature and all the literature that had gone before in all cultures. In particular, during his 1934 speech, he condemned bourgeois literature for its association with a decadent and doomed culture which had given rise to 'a riot of mysticism, religious mania and pornography'.³⁹ He went on to declare that revolutionary romanticism should be an integral part of proletarian literature rather than the 'old-style romanticism' which depicted 'a non-existent life' and 'non-existent heroes'.⁴⁰

New Romanticism

In view of the obvious dangers of romanticism, why did both Soviet and Chinese revolutionary regimes choose to adopt a form of it as national literary method? Why did it not remain buried along with the other forms of 'anti-realism'? And why, in the case of China, which in the 1920s had chosen realism to 'carry the profoundest burden of hope for cultural transformation',⁴¹ did romanticism continue to be championed by some reformist literati of the left? Indeed, as Marston Anderson has argued, the battle between leftist realists and romanticists set the stage for the literary struggles of the 1930s and 1940s and provided a background to arts policy after 1949.⁴²

The problem is that, even after the broadest and most uncompromising ideological distinction is made between 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' works, usually on the grounds of the necessity to portray 'real life', there is still an obvious role for romanticism in proletarian art and literature. Herein lies an antinomy - romanticism appears to be both the most and the least 'revolutionary' of movements. If literature is to serve the proletariat it must be 'realistic' in the sense mentioned above, but it must also have the

uplifting effect, the 'positive' emotional impact of Romanticism.

In China in the early 1920s, a dominant form of positive, idealistic realism had been distilled from an unstable blend of realism and romanticism, sometimes tasting of bitter, ironic, moral objectivity and sometimes of morbidity and self-indulgence. This has been described by McDougall as a syncretic form of 'neo-romanticism'.⁴³ Such an approach is eminently reasonable from a literary point of view, since it removes arbitrary and untenable distinctions and allows that 'romantic' writers like Tian Han and Guo Moruo could be as committed to political struggle as any realist, and that certain realists might be as 'bourgeois' or 'reactionary' as any romantic. But conciliatory and inclusive terminology was, like 'middle characters', not part of the dramatic design for the Cultural Revolution, although it might have assisted the development of an enduring and credible proletarian literature.

Which forms of realism appear unsuitable as models and on the basis of what theory or terminology? For instance, the undesirable kinds of realism might fall into the categories of 'critical realism', (after say, Balzac), 'romantic realism', (De Maupassant), or 'naturalism' (Zola). In these cases both Cultural

Revolution and May Fourth critics might be on common ground in their distrust of 'bourgeois' or 'negative' tendencies, although one is immediately reminded that Balzac was one of Marx's favourite authors and Zola was one of Mao Dun's. Then we come to, for example, Romain Rolland⁴⁴ and Maxim Gorky, who demonstrate that even the most impressively credentialled proletarian writer-theorists do not provide clear cut examples of the difference between revolutionary and pre-revolutionary genres.

In a 1958 series of articles⁴⁵ in which he echoed some concerns of Yao Wenyuan on the limitations of the critical realists, Mao Dun, who has himself been called 'the leading champion in China of nineteenth-century European realism and naturalism during the early years of the May Fourth period',⁴⁶ argued that Romain Rolland was one of the few who had taken the step from critical realism to socialist realism. He did not make the difference between these entirely clear but it seems to be a matter of class stand and class prejudices.⁴⁷ In the case of Maxim Gorky, whose name has been linked with the birth of socialist realism, direct (albeit disowned) ancestor of the Maoist literary method, there is a similar difficulty. Gorky's *The Lower Depths* (1902) is sometimes cited in international literary dictionaries as a form of 'ultra-naturalism',⁴⁸ and yet the 1944 Chinese

adaptation *Ye Dian*, (The night inn) by Shi Tuo and Ke Ling, is regarded as one of the great successes of the reformist Chinese theatre, as a 'breakthrough' in representing the wretched conditions of the poor⁴⁹ and an example of realism in the service of the proletarian underclass.

Naturalism itself has continued to be problematic and even after his heartfelt denunciation of 'formulism-jargonism' at the first post-Cultural Revolution Congress in 1979, a rehabilitated Zhou Yang pointed the finger at 'scar literature', (*shanghen wenxue*), describing it as a form of 'naturalistic' writing containing 'negative, apathetic, and nihilistic thoughts and feelings'.⁵⁰ The fact that some kinds of realism continue to attract such strong disapprobation suggests that, while the leaders of the Cultural Revolution indulged in their own brand of dogmatism, they were not alone in their concerns that literature should be, above all, a positive 'model' for the people. This is not such a far cry from the traditional attitude that individual, subjective modes of narrative, such as those found in some vernacular fiction and drama of the nineteenth century, were not fit to be considered 'orthodox literature' or the literature of moral persuasion.⁵¹ The striking thing here is not the much documented disruptive effect of the Cultural Revolution but the very continuity of

Chinese literary attitudes which appear inimical to realism.

In fact, it may be that the persistence of these attitudes has had a greater influence in determining China's literary direction than the experimental, innovative and internationalist side of the May Fourth movement. As Goldman has pointed out, many Western scholars share the scepticism of current Chinese leaders concerning the relevance of May Fourth literature to China's literary-political problems:

They question whether a literature concerned with a small circle of middle-class, urban intellectuals and written in a Western-oriented language and style, totally divorced from the experience of the Chinese masses, could reflect a society in revolution. They suggest that the elite who monopolized Chinese literature were even more alienated than the traditional elite because they were immersed in a foreign culture and engaged in artificial, self-conscious experiments. In some ways, they had less contact with Chinese realities than the old literati.⁵²

At the Fourth Congress Zhou Yang struck a familiar feudal note when he spoke of the moral-political value of traditional operas which `impart historical

knowledge and teach people how to tell good from bad, right from wrong, beauty from ugliness'.⁵³ The direction of this speech was itself largely determined by the need to make a *political* assessment, which exonerated Mao of the charge of 'feudal-fascist cultural autocracy' and left blame at the doorstep of Lin Biao and The Gang of Four (Jiang Qing was not included by name) for misleading the people. When it comes to Chinese theatre, however, a major impediment to development has been not just the effect of 'ten years of disruption' but the effect of twenty years of reluctance to acknowledge the extent to which the model works addressed concerns that were common to writers and theorists before and after the Cultural Revolution.

In the case of romanticism the problems of separating the 'feudal' or 'bourgeois' elements from the 'revolutionary' elements in an actual repertoire or genre are no less complicated than in the case of realism. While both Soviet and Chinese regimes ostentatiously rejected the evils of traditional society, they also required, especially in wartime, the legitimacy of national, historical identity and the moral force of patriotism. These latter elements had been particularly strong in the military romances of the traditional Chinese theatre.

A 'national' literature is in itself a precarious achievement; not easily discarded and not easily conscripted in the service of a new master. Both the 'classic' Russian novel and the Beijing opera had been established as national, representative forms of culture during the nineteenth century; both contained elements which might become hopelessly tangled in any coarse net intended to separate realism from romanticism. In particular Beijing opera contained clearly 'un-realistic' and folk-ritual elements which formed an integral part of the long-standing Chinese preoccupation with drama as a form of moral-political nurture. The pervasiveness of such drama, and its association with legend, myth and romance is vividly described by V.M. Alekseev, in his account of travels in 1907:

I think that China can be called a 'theatre-land' without fear of over-statement. The huge number of theatre troupes in China, downright inconceivable by European standards, is evidence of an equally incredible popularity of the theatre...There is not the remotest backwoods imaginable which a theatre troupe would not visit a few times a year. Arguably, there is no other country in the world where fondness for theatrical performance is so organic to the whole life of the populace...A ragamuffin beggar

singing Chu-ko Liang's aria from the 'Empty Stronghold Stratagem' opera, and acting out his part right there in the street, is a normal sight.⁵⁴

In some ways, as Tao-Ching Hsu has pointed out, the more 'popular' as opposed to 'classical' the form of opera (that is, the more 'local' the variety as opposed to court or capital-style) the more likely it was to be regarded as a moral tale rather than as a demonstration of technical excellence and artistic skill.⁵⁵ The difficulty reformers faced in any attempt to dilute the 'un-realistic' style and content of traditional opera was not just a matter of its popularity with the real working masses - 'drivers, boatmen and itinerant peddlars',⁵⁶ as opposed to the urban leftist intellectuals who championed them - but a matter of ideological impact. This is the problem with romanticism itself.

Certain kinds of 'illusory' romanticism may be conducive to precisely that kind of *inspirational* effect required of literature and art in the service of revolution. As McDougall has noted, 'the concept of romanticism was associated with the cause of national liberation, individualism and democracy, as well as with subjectivism, primitivism and irrationality'.⁵⁷ During the May Fourth period the Chinese taste for

foreign works in translation had oscillated between realism, represented by writers like Dickens, Hugo, Balzac, Tolstoy, Ibsen and Chekhov towards romanticism, represented by, for example, Jack London, Walt Whitman, Goethe, Schiller (Johann), Pushkin, Blake and Shelley.⁵⁸ For all its diversity, it is not difficult to discern in this list a consistent theme of 'epic' times and 'heroic' deeds that might strike a chord with revolutionary regimes. A simple dichotomy between realism and romanticism was always likely therefore to impoverish proletarian literature, not to enrich it.

One needs only to consider a handful of literary figures associated with both romanticism and realism, from Belinsky himself⁵⁹ and Victor Hugo to Dostoevsky, Dumas *films* and Leon Schiller⁶⁰ to further appreciate the problems of nomenclature which gave rise to 'protean' dichotomies. When romanticism consists of idealism and positivism about the oppressed classes and their efforts to rise up against injustice, it may be seen as both desirable and 'realistic' by revolutionary regimes, but, as indicated above, the links between romanticism and the revolutionary aesthetic frequently become strained when there is a predilection for certain genres associated with escapism, fantasy, the supernatural or the 'decadent'. For Gorky and the advocates of socialist realism this

was the key to understanding the crucial difference between 'passive' and 'active' romanticism:

Passive romanticism endeavours to reconcile man with his life by embellishing that life, or to distract him from the things around him by means of a barren introspection into his inner world, into thoughts of 'life's insoluble problems,' such as love, death and other imponderables, problems that cannot be solved by speculation or contemplation, but only by science. Active romanticism strives to strengthen man's will to live and raise him up against the life around him, against any yoke it would impose.⁶¹

Thus, the major difficulty with romanticism is not simply its appeal to the emotions, but the *result* of that appeal. When romanticism lends itself not to the kind of inspiration which might be expressed in some form of militant action or emotion against the identified harsh reality, but to a form of spiritual solace which provides an *escape* from it, it is usually condemned as 'counter-revolutionary'. Such censure does not necessarily stop with attempts to wrest the more obvious forms of escapism and sensationalism, such as the Gothic novel or the Chinese supernatural love story,⁶² from the etiolated fingers of middle-class thrill-seekers. It is also levelled at

sophisticated humour, irony or various forms of subtlety of characterisation and style, associated with intellectual self-indulgence, 'art for art's sake', or 'bourgeois-dominated' literature and art - the kind which many May Fourth intellectuals appeared to savour far more than folk literature and drama. This criticism is not simply a convenient justification for censorship, but an important argument about the nature of 'bourgeois' art and literature which has been forcefully argued by a diverse group of intellectuals outside the Party-dominated intellectual atmosphere of China and the Soviet Union. As Umberto Eco said, in a 1971 article in justification of Chinese revolutionary pedagogy in the form of popular 'comic strips':⁶³

...even humour would be an injurious sophistication. When you are still teaching that A is A, doubting sarcasm has no place on the page. And besides it is well known that the humour of mass bourgeois culture is a surrogate for a happiness that is in fact denied.⁶⁴

Myth, Revolution and Romanticism

The idea of 'teaching' readers and audiences brings us back to the point about the epic or mythological ingredient in revolutionary romanticism. Lukacs, in

'The Sociology of Modern Drama'⁶⁵, argued that the preoccupation of bourgeois dramatists with theories of characterisation was a direct result of the lack of a 'mythology', and that 'pathology', that is character flaws, usurped the role of classical, larger-than-life forces which were the true essence of dramatic action.

In pathology and in it alone lies the possibility of rendering undramatic men dramatic. Nothing else is capable of lending them that concentration of action, that intensity of the senses, which will make the act and the situation symbolic and raise the figures above the ordinary, above the everyday.⁶⁶

Even *style*, as opposed to content, may be interpreted as a manifestation of bourgeois ideology, and not just because it depends on certain levels of formal schooling and a 'standard' kind of language and literacy, but because it is the uniform of 'Literature' as described by Roland Barthes in 'Writing and Revolution':

The conception of style as craftsmanship has produced a mode of sub-writing, derived from Flaubert, but adapted to the aims of the Naturalist school. This writing, which is that of Maupassant, Zola and Daudet and which could

be called the realist mode of writing, is a combination of the formal signs of Literature...and of the no less formal signs of realism (incongruous snippets of popular speech, strong language or dialect words, etc.), so that no mode of writing was more artificial than that which set out to give the most accurate description of Nature.

And:

Between a proletariat excluded from all culture, and an intelligentsia which has already begun to question Literature itself, the average public produced by primary and secondary schools, namely lower-middle class, roughly speaking, will therefore find in the artistic-realistic mode of writing - which is that of a good proportion of commercial novels - the image *par excellence* of a Literature which has all the striking and intelligible signs of its identity.⁶⁷

To sum up, it might be argued, somewhat paradoxically, and counter to the dominant trends of the May Fourth era, that non-realistic style, content and characterisation are more appropriate to the needs of a proletarian literature than naturalism or realism.

In the case of Chinese theatre, there was a ready-made form which also possessed the advantages of being indigenous, national and popular - even 'plebeian', despite its historical themes, aristocratic protagonists and poetic, allusive language. The Ibsen-Chekhov style of drama, preoccupied with 'everyday life', with below-the-surface motivation and naturalistic dialogue, had seduced Chinese drama of the May Fourth era away from the familiar depiction of 'type' or 'essence' towards complex forms of characterisation, and in so doing had provided a stimulating, but alien alternative to both the central motifs of traditional theatre and the sustaining myths of revolution. Tao-Ching Hsu notes, for example, the link between use of 'painted faces' (*lianpu*) and portrayal of 'extreme types' in traditional theatre:

The noble types are either resolute or impetuous or uncouth or dauntless, and the base characters are callous or savage or treacherous or knavish. They are never balanced or temperate, hence, to the Chinese they are baffling, and, in extreme cases, awe-inspiring; they are in fact freakish examples of men of singular virtues and unmitigated evils either more, or less than human...⁶⁸

He refers also to the distinction between 'character' and 'temperament', observed by theatre historian Wang Guowei. According to Wang, temperament is more evident than character in traditional Chinese theatre, with its symbolic qualities such as the immutable, immediately evident traits signified by painted faces.⁶⁹ This was an obvious obstacle to the popularisation of 'spoken drama' which attempted to introduce not just some form of foreign realism or naturalism, but, in some respects, the notion of characterisation itself.

To a large extent, in the model works of the Cultural Revolution, the characterisation *became* the myth, and elements of traditional storytelling and 'typical' characterisation were re-integrated with a form of realism quite different from that produced under the influence of European realism, naturalism and the May Fourth Movement. These works moved characterisation back in the direction of the 'types' of Chinese tradition, while adopting some Western elements, but foreign influence or hybrid form is far more noticeable in the more tangible aspects of instrumentation, sets, costume and stagecraft than in the essential Beijing opera elements of movement, gesture, or characterisation. This appears to be the result of the 'critical assimilation' of contemporary, and 'foreign' or 'international' elements into

traditional form. In this respect, Beijing opera proved to be a more suitable vehicle for some kinds of romanticism than, say, the Russian novel. Guo Moruo had wrestled with this problem in his article in *Hongqi* of July, 1958, the article in which he credits Mao with the 'finest example of a synthesis of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism':⁷⁰

To my way of thinking, romanticism and realism are both good so long as they are both revolutionary. Revolutionary romanticism takes romanticism as its keynote, but blends it with realism. Perhaps this style is especially suited to poetry. Revolutionary realism takes realism as its keynote and blends it with romanticism. Perhaps the development of this style is best suited to novels.⁷¹

The pattern of foreign influence on the Cultural Revolution formula for revolutionary characterisation can be traced in broad outline through points made in major speeches and 'militant documents' of Mao and Jiang Qing on literature and the arts, but, as suggested above, there is no acknowledgement that the Chinese 'solution' has a foreign pedigree - rather that it sprang fully formed from the loins of Mao himself during 'The Talks at the Yan'an Forum'.

However, it is the 'May Fourth' response to foreign influence, the persistent dichotomy identified between realism and romanticism, the influence of Soviet socialist realism and the culmination in Guo Moruo's 'era of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism', which provides the key to the literary shorthand employed by Jiang Qing in particular during the 1960s. Comparison between the Soviet view of socialist realism and the 'Maoist' formula will enable us to evaluate the extent to which the proletarian characterisation of the model works represents a distinct contribution to an international proletarian literature or a mere re-arrangement of terminology. In order to do this it will be necessary to furnish some background on the origins of the formula.

Mao and Revolutionary Realism and Romanticism

Mao's particular combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism did not arise from any thorough-going analysis of forms and genres, even of the discursive kind demonstrated above by Guo Moruo. In fact, its origins appear to lie in the fusion of Yan'an-style admiration of folk forms with Soviet literary theory of the 1930s. In a speech of 22 March 1958 at a conference in Chengdu, Mao raises the possibilities of combining 'two opposites' in search of a new poetry:

The future of Chinese poetry is folk songs first and the classics second. On this basis we can produce a new poetry. In form it should be in the folk-song style, while in content it should combine the two opposites, realism and romanticism. If you are too realistic you can't write poetry. The new poetry of today is formless. Nobody reads it. Anyway, I wouldn't read it, not unless you gave me a hundred dollars. In the field of collecting folk poetry, Peking University has done a lot of work. If we do this job it is possible that we may discover millions and millions of folk poems. This will not involve much work and they will be much easier to read than the poems of Du Fu and Li Po.⁷²

The first issue of *Hongqi*, June 1958, carries an article by Zhou Yang, in which he, like Guo Moruo a month later in the same journal, attributes the creation of the theory of combining revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism to Mao, and states that Mao has always used this method in his poems.⁷³ The principle embodied in this article was regarded by Joe C. Huang, writing in 1973, as the end of the era of doctrinaire Soviet socialist realism and the beginning of more 'imaginative' Chinese literature.⁷⁴ In the early 1950s Zhou Yang himself had

promoted the literary directives of Zhdanov and Stalin, and Chinese literature had turned away from the psychologically complex hero - the 'infantile idealist' or 'injured and contrite' hero in Mau-sang Ng's phrase⁷⁵ - towards less conflict-ridden protagonists. By 1958, and the launch of the folk song campaign, there appears to be a clear political distinction between the literature of socialist realism and 'socialist literature', although the literary distinction is less clear and Gorky, in particular, is still given credit in Zhou Yang's article for pointing out that 'In the history of literature revolutionary romanticism is the unextinguished flame of art'.⁷⁶

After Mao's Chengdu speech, the movement to collect and publish folk songs swelled to enormous proportions, reflecting a long-standing Party attitude that literature - poetry in particular - should reflect the language and feelings of the masses. The extent of this movement also reflects the hyperbolic language and style of the Great Leap Forward itself, including the anti-illiteracy campaigns,⁷⁷ and in 1958, according to Mao Dun, nearly one hundred million folk songs were collected.⁷⁸ It was around this time too - in fact a month or so before the Chengdu speech - that Yao Wenyan began to call for a kind of romanticism which would rescue Chinese writing from

`simplistic imitation of foreign countries', including especially the Soviet Union.⁷⁹ The ingredients for a formula linking mass movements in literature, popular mythic-legendary material, romanticism and a Chinese advancement on Soviet socialist realism were all present, although this combination did not amount to a coherent theory and it had not yet found its expression in a `model' form or genre.

By the time of the Cultural Revolution the combination had still not found a theory, as opposed to formulaic jargon, but it had found its model. As has been suggested above, vagueness of nomenclature or inadequate genre analysis are not in themselves reason for assuming that Cultural Revolution arts policy had little substantive literary significance, providing the works which embody that policy demonstrate an organic coherence. Politico-literary antecedents to the campaign to reform Beijing opera, such as the folklore movement of the Great Leap Forward, may also be seen, not just in Chinese terms, as a form of Great Leap voluntarism and Yan'an mass line politics, or as a foreign policy-driven reaction to `Soviet revisionism' after 1956, but as a form of cultural activity which was at least consistent with international proletarian aesthetics. It was in this climate that Mao's `Talks at the Yan'an Forum' were promoted, and his view that life, as reflected in

literature, should be 'on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than everyday life', assumed enormous significance as theory.⁸⁰ Ironically, as is well known, Jiang Qing herself disliked folklore intensely,⁸¹ illustrating one of the problems at the heart of nationalistic folk movements - namely that this kind of art and literature represents the masses of people (including women) whose voices are frequently excluded from any notion of a 'canon' but also includes forms of culture which may appear 'rough' or 'lewd'. The tension between these elements is clearly illustrated in the transformation of *Tiger Mountain* from folktale to Ming novel to twentieth century novel and finally model opera, especially in the characterisation of Yang Zirong.⁸²

The Models and the Masses

However, while Mao's inspiration for the combination of revolutionary romanticism and revolutionary realism appears to have arrived via folklore, the processes for creation of the models were certainly not a reflection of those which created that folklore in the first place. This combination may well have retained some aesthetic element of folkloric storying, but in folk tales, and in the kind of 'folk poems' referred

to so optimistically by Mao in his Chengdu speech, the outcome is an endproduct of 'negotiated oral language production'⁸³ in which the relationship between audience and teller/performer is crucial. The models, on the other hand, both in their form, as tightly scripted rather than improvised theatre, and in their method of creation (revised by collective, but rigidly constrained teams or troupes), are a very literary, authorial means of 'presenting storied information'⁸⁴ rather than a 'negotiated production' shaped by the time, location and circumstances of the telling.

Mao lent his endorsement to a method for mass literary production which appears to have more in common with his voluntarist approach to production in industry and agriculture than with the natural and mysterious process of creation of folklore, but this is not necessarily inconsistent with a mass or proletarian *political* stance or the attempt to create a proletarian mythology. The creations of folklore depend on something akin to an evolutionary process - arbitrary, fortuitous adaptations and survivals - rather than a systematic and democratic political process (such as, for example, having people write down all the folk poems they can think of for collection by cadres, or organising collective authorship of new works) but the appropriation of folkloric credentials by the state did not present any

special theoretical difficulty or inconsistency for the leaders of the Cultural Revolution, even if they were inclined to worry about such things. Despite their ordination and regulation from on high, the models could still be represented as a manifestation of the theory of the mass line, in which central leadership collected, refined and re-negotiated the suggestions of the masses.

In practice however, mass participation appears to have been restricted to participation in processes intended to enhance artists' understanding of the lives of workers and peasants and the contribution of details for improving physical realism or verisimilitude (such as information about crops, weather, local terrain or customs), rather than participation in the selection, creation or adaptation of material.⁸⁵ This contrasts markedly with the pedagogical approach of other forms of cultural action or revolution such as that organised by Paulo Freire in Brazil,⁸⁶ and, in the case of the models, led to the creation of technically excellent demonstration pieces in which class feeling was aroused and depicted *for* the oppressed masses, perhaps even 'learned' by a succeeding generation, but never truly *expressed* by them.

Whatever use was made of Mao's Chengdu statement as a form of inspiration for the models, there is no doubt that the Cultural Revolution approached the notion of folklore quite differently from the Great Leap Forward when it came to incorporating the 'essence' of folk art into a revolutionary genre. Richard Kraus has some interesting reflections on the differences apparent in arts policy of the two eras. He notes that, while the output of the Cultural Revolution was not, as is frequently claimed, confined to eight works, it nevertheless compares very poorly in quality and variety with the output of the Great Leap:

Some might be tempted to explain the arts shortage as the inevitable consequence of leftist cultural policies, but the CR arts famine stands in sharp contrast to the Great Leap Forward's vigorous profusion of amateur poems, songs, paintings, and dances. A major difference between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution was that the latter movement was much more obsessed with class struggle; the Leap, while leftist, never sought to homogenize China's culture according to a model of what workers, peasants and soldiers ought to like.⁸⁷

More importantly, he goes on to say that 'the leaders of the CR were ultimately *fearful of what mass*

participation in the creation of a new culture might unleash'.⁸⁸ The production of the book versions of the models provides an insight into the way 'participation' was translated into Chinese political culture and became 'mobilisation', not only in the sense that, like the model theatre itself and its film versions, they represented a 'final' version, but in that they came to be treated as part of a canon rather than as literature for private contemplation. The revolutionary modern genre was no longer simply a reformed *theatre*, but a genre of proletarian dramatic literature and a 'text' for the Cultural Revolution itself. The book versions contributed to a truly mass 'audience' for the works, but did not, any more than the theatrical works themselves, fashion mass line political theory and revolutionary dramaturgy into a means for effecting popular participation in the creation of a new culture.

It is ironic that this genre of proletarian theatre appears to be so distinctly at odds with Mao's epistemology in exalting 'text' above 'performance' (or in Mao's terms, theory above practice, above participation in the process of production) as to provide not only definitive dramatic texts, but indications for performance, such as costume, lighting, stagecraft and sets, in the printed versions of the models.⁸⁹ It might be argued of course, that

such indications do not in themselves constitute a barrier to adaptation and experimentation, and in fact they might well have assisted small regional groups of amateurs to stage their own adaptations in the absence of trained or experienced personnel. In general however, the printed versions appear to have been treated as the permanent, literary preservation of an ultimate, almost abstract level of dramatic perfection rather than an example of Kruger's 'textual traces of the occasion of performance'. This is essentially because the models are the crystallisation of a kind of truth, knowledge and revolutionary 'history' as sacred and immutable, and as much a matter of venerated written record, as 'The Talks at the Yan'an Forum', or the set of 'militant documents' and 'highest directives' which called them into being.

It may be that the contradiction apparent here is just an unsurprising example of the way Mao's view of the relationship between theory and practice was absorbed into the vast landscape of Chinese intellectual traditions, with its emphasis on textually encoded and legitimated moral-political philosophy. In any case, even if Mao's epistemology appears to have been 'subverted' in this way (just as his avowed anti-dogmatism was ostensibly subverted not only in the arts but in the general political culture of the Cultural Revolution) it does not mean that the model

works themselves became, in the hands of tyrannical ideologues, something they were never *intended* to be; rather that, in some pedagogical respects, they always were as much literature, script or text as they were theatre. Before I return to this point however, I will elaborate further on what kind of aesthetic is embodied in the models, and its relationship with mythology.

Notes

- ¹ See Ragvald, *Yao Wenyuan as a Literary Critic*, for discussion of 'Zhdanovism' in China.
- ² A.A. Zhdanov, *Zhdanov on Literature, Music and Philosophy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1950), 12.
- ³ Gleb Struve, *Russian Literature Under Lenin and Stalin 1917-1953* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 82.
- ⁴ Henri Arvon, trans. Helen Lane, *Marxist Aesthetics* (Cornell University Press, 1973), 59.
- ⁵ See Frederick Davies, Introduction to Anatole France, *The Gods Will Have Blood* (Penguin Books, 1979).
- ⁶ Robert Reid, 'Russian Theories of Romanticism,' in Robert Reid, ed., *Problems of Russian Romanticism* (Gower, 1986), 4.
- ⁷ Gorky *On Literature*, 228. Gorky was principal speaker at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, August 17, 1934.
- ⁸ The first term was formulated during Gorky's 'Capri lectures' of 1908-9, (see Reid, *Problems of Russian Romanticism*, n.16, 21). The second occurs in 1928 in 'How I Learnt to Write' (Gorky, *On Literature*, 32-37) and the third in the 1934 address (Ibid., 242).
- ⁹ Arvon, *Marxist Aesthetics*, 90.
- ¹⁰ Gorky, *On Literature*, 264.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 233.
- ¹² Ibid., 236.
- ¹³ Ibid., 241.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 242.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 243.

¹⁷ See Hegel, 'Making the Past Serve the Present'.

¹⁸ Gorky, *On Literature*, 243.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See D.C.Lau, Introduction to *Tao Te Ching* (Penguin Books, 1974), 12.

²¹ Mao Zedong, 'Kanle "Bishang Liangshan" yihou xiegei Yan'an pingjuyuan de xin,' (Letter to the Yan'an Beiping Opera Company on seeing Driven to Join the Liangshan Rebels), 9 January, 1944, in *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli wan sui*, (Long live the great victory of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (Beijing: 1969), 33. This is a collection of *neibu* (restricted) documents related to the Cultural Revolution.

²² Gorky, *On Literature*, 244.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For instance Guo Moruo alludes to it in discussing 'typical characters in typical circumstances' in 'Langmanzhuyi he xianshizhuyi,' (Romanticism and realism) in *Hongqi* No.3 (July) 1958, 2. For an English translation see Walter J. Meserve and Ruth I. Meserve, *Modern Literature from China*, (New York: New York University Press, 1974), 316.

²⁵ Eagleton, *Marxist Literary Theory*, 39

²⁶ George Lukacs, *Studies in European Realism* (London: The Merlin Press, 1972), 268.

²⁷ In the early phase of the Cultural Revolution, Peng Zhen, member of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, and Mayor of Beijing, used the phrase 'xueshu yanqiu' to distinguish the

genuine literary argument from factional politics. Interestingly, Zhou Yang, another literary theorist who became a target of Cultural Revolution cultural policy, alludes to the phrase again in 1979 in arguing that 'middle characters', 'the path of realism' and so on are all 'academic questions' which should be freely discussed. See Zhou Yang, 'Inherit the Past and Usher in the Future,' speech at the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists, October 30 - November 16, 1979, in Howard Goldblatt ed., *Chinese Literature for the 1980s. The Fourth Congress of Writers and Artists* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1982), 15-38.

²⁸ Tao Zhu, 'Some problems Concerning Dramas on Revolutionary Modern Themes,' *Chinese Literature*, No.6, 1966, 114-115.

²⁹ 'Summary of the Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Piao Entrusted Comrade Chiang Ch'ing,' in Chung Hua-Min and Arthur C. Miller, *Madame Mao. A Profile of Jiang Ch'ing* (Union Research Institute, 1968) 201-223. The original Chinese ('Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi gongzuo tanhui jiyao') may be found in *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 213-225.

³⁰ Ho Chih, (Ch'in Chao-yang) 'The Broad Road of Realism - a Reassessment of Realism,' in Hualing Nieh, ed., *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, Vol.1 (*Criticism and Polemics*) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 141.

³¹ See 'The Preface' to 'The Picture of Dorian Gray', in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, (Galley Press, 1987) 17.

³² Lu Xun, 'Bian,' (The tablet) *Yu si* 4, no 17, 23 April 1928; quoted in Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism. Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1.

³³ Lacey, *British Realist Theatre*, 63.

³⁴ Mao, 'Talks at the Yanan Forum', *Selected Works*, vol III, and *Mao Zedong xuanji*.

³⁵ The phrase 'May Fourth era' refers to the period 1915-42, as in Merle Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), vii.

³⁶ Guo Moruo, 'Langmanzhuyi he xianshizhuyi', *Hongqi* No 3, 1958, 7.

³⁷ *Selected Works*, Vol.III, 90.

³⁸ For example, in his preface to *Pygmalion* (Penguin 1957), 9, Shaw says the play is 'intensely and deliberately didactic' and 'great art can never be anything else'. Thus Liza Doolittle is a vehicle for his thesis rather than for the performance of a well-rounded, convincing and 'realistic' form of characterisation.

³⁹ *Zhdanov on Literature*, 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴³ Bonnie S. McDougall, *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into China* (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971), 260.

⁴⁴ Romain Rolland's *The Game of Love and Death* was produced in 1930 by the Shanghai Art Theatre, which formed a merger in 1931 with the League of Left Wing Dramatists. Jiang Qing herself joined the League in that year - see Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, 98.

⁴⁵ For example, Mao Dun 'Guanyu suowei xie zhenshi,' (On the Specious Concept of "Writing the Truth"), in *Renmin Wenxue* (People's Literature), No.2, 1958. For a translation see Hualing Nieh ed., *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, Vol. 1, 170-175.

⁴⁶ Merle Goldman, *Modern Chinese Literature*, 241.

⁴⁷ Mao Dun, in 'On "Writing the Truth"', refers to the need to avoid playing the 'detached spectator' while describing sordid circumstances. See *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, 172.

⁴⁸ J.A.Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Third Edition), (Penguin Books, 1991) 575-576.

⁴⁹ See Edward Gunn, 'Shanghai's "Orphan Island" and the Development of Modern Drama,' in McDougall, ed., *Popular Chinese Literature*, 51.

⁵⁰ Zhou Yang, in Goldblatt, ed., *Chinese Literature for the 1980s*, 24.

⁵¹ For discussion of the Confucian tradition of writing literature for the reinforcement of ethical principles - or, to put it another way 'propaganda' - see Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement. Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 269-270.

⁵² Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature*, 12.

⁵³ Zhou Yang in Goldblatt, ed., *Chinese Literature for the 1980s*, 31.

⁵⁴ Joseph Needham and Robin D.S. Yates, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol.5, *Chemistry and Chemical Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 81.

⁵⁵ Tao-Ching Hsu, *The Chinese Conception of the Theatre* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 16.

⁵⁶ Needham and Yates, *Science and Civilisation*, Vol. 5, 81.

⁵⁷ McDougall, *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories*, 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁹ See E.H.Carr's Introduction to N. Chernyshevsky, *What is to be Done?* (Virago, 1982), xiii-xxii.

⁶⁰ Leon Schiller (1887-1954) (not to be confused with Johann Schiller 1759-1805), a Polish director and designer strongly influenced by Craig and Stanislavsky. Schiller is a confusing figure sometimes associated with romantic and sometimes with realistic drama. His outstanding production was Sergey Tretyakov's *Roar, China!* Tretyakov himself (1892-1939) was an exponent of romantically heroic treatment of revolutionary themes and *Roar* appears to have been a propaganda play strongly influenced by Mayakovsky's conception of poster art (see Struve, *Russian Literature*, 203).

⁶¹ Gorky, *On Literature*, 62-63.

⁶² Tao-Ching Hsu lists Pu Songling's *Liao zhai* (Strange tales from a Chinese studio) as one of the major sources of Chinese operas (*The Chinese Conception of Theatre*, 71).

⁶³ Use of the term 'comic strip' may create confusion in the context of Eco's argument. However, this form of picture-narrative is not, in the Chinese context, necessarily humorous. Of course, a Western-language 'comic strip' is not necessarily funny either but it is popularly regarded as less 'serious' or instructive than other forms of literature or art. Chinese 'comics' on the other hand, seem to work on the principle that they are just as 'serious' and pedagogically significant as any other form of literature, perhaps more than most, precisely because they are intended to be for mass consumption rather than an elite readership. What Eco interprets as a conscious 'revolutionary' rejection of 'injurious sophistication' in this contemporary medium is more likely to be a continuation of the traditions of Chinese moral-political education. The Chinese Communist Party has not so much edited out humour and entertainment from the notion of 'comic strips', as ignored it.

⁶⁴ Umberto Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed* (Flamingo, 1995), 215.

⁶⁵ Bentley, ed., *The Theory of the Modern Stage*, 448.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1988), 67-73.

⁶⁸ Hsu, *The Chinese Conception of the Theatre*, 160-161.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁷⁰ Guo Moruo, 'Langmanzhuyi he xianshizhuyi,' 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

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- ⁷² Mao Zedong, 'Talks at the Chengtu conference,' March, 1958, in Stuart Schram, ed., *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed. Talks and Letters: 1956-71* (Penguin Books, 1974), 123-124.
- ⁷³ Zhou Yang, 'Xin mingge kaituoliao shige de xin daolu,' (The new folksongs have blazed a trail for poetry and song), *Hongqi*, June 1, 1958, 35.
- ⁷⁴ Joe C. Huang, *Heroes and Villains in Contemporary China. The Contemporary Chinese Novel as a Reflection of Life* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1973), 244.
- ⁷⁵ Mau-sang Ng, *The Russian Hero in Modern Chinese Fiction* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1988), 268.
- ⁷⁶ Zhou Yang, 'Xin mingge,' 36.
- ⁷⁷ See Trevor Hay, 'Satellites and Ladders. The Ancient Game of Chinese Literacy,' in D. Myers, ed., *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the Asia/Pacific* (Northern Territory University Press, 1995).
- ⁷⁸ Ragvald, *Yao Wenyuan as a Literary Critic*, 115.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.
- ⁸⁰ 'Talks at the Yen'an Forum', *Selected Works*, III, 82 and *Mao Zedong xuanji*, 818.
- ⁸¹ See David Holm, *Art and Ideology*, 332 and Richard Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China. Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle Over Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 137.
- ⁸² see Hegel, 'Making the Past Serve the Present'.
- ⁸³ Norma J. Livo and Sandra A. Rietz, *Storytelling. Process and Practice* (Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1986), 19.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁵ See Hua-yuan Li Mowry - Yang-pan Hsi. *New Theater in China* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973), 32-34.

⁸⁶ Paulo Freire, Myra Bergman, trans., *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin, 1972).

⁸⁷ Richard Kraus, 'Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution: The Rise and Fall of Culture Minister Yu Huiyong,' in Joseph, Wong and Zweig, eds., *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, 234.

⁸⁸ Ibid. (Author's emphasis).

⁸⁹ See for example, Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe, Collectively Written Script, (1970), *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, (Renmin chubanshe, 1971).

Chapter 3: Towards a Harmonious Display of Essences

Polarity and the Models

In the foregoing discussion of the Chinese step from socialist realism to a revolutionary literary formula, the 'negative' elements of realism, with their extremes in naturalism, were described as an ideological problem for both Soviet and Chinese theorists, to be countered in some way with elements of a positive or active variety of 'revolutionary' romanticism. However, just as Jiang Qing appears vague about what *revolutionary* realism is, Gorky, who is commonly credited with the most systematic distinction between positive and negative sides of both realism and romanticism, is in the end curiously vague about what 'revolutionary romanticism' actually is, although he is quite clear that a strong dose is necessary to arrest the nineteenth century decline from a progressive form of critical realism to a bourgeois-supporting, anti-democratic and nihilistic literature.¹ From his 1928 comments, it would appear that none of the predecessors of socialist realism, (including even the heroic revolutionary romanticism of the early 1920s), met the required standard for combining realism with 'the teaching of an active attitude towards life'.²

There will be further discussion below of the nature of revolutionary romanticism in the model works, but for the moment it is important to note that, in the Soviet case, although there is strong emphasis on the importance of revolutionary romanticism as a partner for realism, it is never in question that the issue of this union should be named after realism. Yet the relationship between the partners is described as if it were not so much a union as a form of aesthetic polarity, in which realism forms the negative and romanticism the positive. Critical realism, for example, in the words of Gorky 'has not served, and cannot serve, to educate socialist individuality, since while criticizing all things, it has established nothing' while socialist realism 'proclaims that life is action, creativity, whose aim is the unfettered development of man's most valuable individual abilities for his victory over the forces of Nature'.³

The imagery employed in this analysis of socialist realism suggests not so much that a dichotomy of realism has occurred (in the sense that mutually exclusive classes have branched from a common generic form, as in Gorky's 'passive' and 'active' romanticism) but that there is polarity, oppositeness at work, and the potential difference between 'negative' and 'positive' elements is the source of power for proletarian literature - the 'dynamic', in

more popular literary terminology. Revolutionary romanticism supplies the positive, it is the 'kind of romanticism which underlies the myth, and is most beneficial in its promoting a revolutionary attitude towards reality, an attitude that in practice re-fashions the world'.⁴

Schematic contrast between positive and negative is indeed apparent in some of the less Party-minded and eulogistic manifestations of Soviet socialist realism, with some kind of 'critical' realism providing honest, faithfully representative portrayals of life and 'revolutionary' romanticism lending idealistic and inspirational themes. However, in the case of the models, visualising them as the product of a discharge between realism and romanticism may actually obscure the true nature of the genre. The critical analysis undertaken below suggests that there is an aesthetic *wholeness* inherent in the models, despite the fact that, in theory, they appear to be the product of a dualistic or binary structure.

In fact, there appears to be no great potential difference between revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism, but to the extent that there is a polarity inherent in the Maoist formula, the literary charge is generated *within* romanticism rather than between realism and romanticism. The model

works represent a reversal of the 1930s Soviet tendency to see 'positive' or 'active' romanticism as a distant and barely respectable relative of realism; they afford realism a distinct but inferior status within a branch of the family of romanticism. But it is a branch without a title.

Paradoxically then, Soviet proletarian literature employs a unitary description for a binary aesthetic (or method), while the models employ a binary description for an essentially unitary aesthetic. In fact, the models are more easily conceptualised as a kind of *fusion* between a strictly limited form of realism - based on the depiction of class struggle through proletarian protagonists and contemporary events - and revolutionary romanticism, as in the kind of mythic, folk-poetic abstraction discussed in the last chapter, than as a *dynamic* created by the interplay between opposites or antithetical elements. There is a clear sense that some recognisable 'whole' has been created, rather than that opposite elements have been combined or contained, along the lines of socialist realism.

When it comes to the basic idea of a dichotomy between realism and romanticism, the texts of the models suggest that in certain kinds of narrative, and in certain kinds of 'discourse' as we shall see later,

the dichotomy may well be false. In remarkably consistent language, Gorky, Mao and Lukacs all drew attention to the way a certain romantic, idealised depiction of life might be construed as a higher and more concentrated form of reality, rather than a thing which is *different* from reality. Interestingly, Mao does not appear to concern himself much with the matter of whether the creative method for a revolutionary art and literature should be called realism or romanticism, and at one point in the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' refers to 'proletarian realism' (*wuchan jieji xianshizhuyi*) when discussing socialist realism.⁵

Neither Mao nor Jiang Qing pursued their interest in literature very far into the domain of Marxist literary theory, but it might have been possible to make out a plausible argument that the Chinese method for creation of a model and revolutionary theatre itself reflected the laws of historical materialism, and represented synthesis of contradictory elements in a 'higher' form of art. This synthesis has been achieved basically by removing certain elements of realism and leaving only those which are compatible with heroic, epic, mythological forms of characterisation and narrative. It might be argued that this is what socialist realism does,⁶ except that it preserves a negative 'pole' in the form of realism

intended 'to throw light upon survivals of the past, and wage a struggle for their eradication'.⁷ The models clearly threw a spotlight on the struggle for eradication of past evils but the more thorough-going depiction of 'survivals of the past' by such means as the newly-written historical dramas were regarded as revisionist, indicating that any kind of 'critical realism' was considered not as an aspect of polarity but as a hallmark of bourgeois art and literature.

On the face of it, Maoists had a better case for claiming an integrated art form based on a recognisable aesthetic than the Soviets, but neglected to articulate it. The Soviets, having created something essentially syncretic, clearly identified their creation as a form of realism, while the Chinese, having created an almost self-contained form of romanticism, relied upon the notion of combination. In both countries however, the combination has been treated principally as 'method' rather than theory. In the Chinese case, this obscures the real achievement. What had emerged from the Maoist response to literature and the arts might well be regarded not just as a genre, or creative method, but as a revolutionary aesthetic. However, it is difficult to establish the degree of conscious dramatic - or Marxist-Leninist - theory at work in the creation of the Chinese proletarian theatre and, as I indicate in

Chapter 4, it is much more revealing to document the dynamic *relationship* between major statements and activities in the campaign to reform Beijing opera and the rise of the genre itself.

The step from theoretical exposition to the triumphant announcement of a definitive 'method' was indeed a short one. A February 1966 forum on literature and art convened for members of the armed forces by Jiang Qing⁸ ('The February 1966 Forum'), called for rigorous critical analysis, but in 1967 proclamation of eight 'revolutionary modern model works' effectively brought exploration of the relationship between realism and romanticism to a close, substituting the announcement of a genre title - model works - for definition of a revolutionary aesthetic. 'Model works' is admittedly a more distinctive title than say, 'socialist literature', which Zhou Yang had used in 1958,⁹ but it gives no clue to the essential nature of the works.

Mao himself only referred to romanticism and realism loosely as 'two opposites',¹⁰ while Guo Moruo, Zhou Yang and Jiang Qing all spoke of 'combining' them.¹¹ Jiang Qing's key speeches and reforms appear to be, as we shall see, a negative reaction against bourgeois critical realism and bourgeois romanticism, coupled with an exhortation to exalt positive characters,¹² but in the process of her campaign, Mao's imprecise

blend, associated initially with poetry and folklore, assumes the status of a 'creative method' for producing a powerful ideological weapon. It is tempting, therefore, to dismiss the dramatic theory of the Cultural Revolution as a thin patchwork of superficial and opportunistic polemics. This impression can only be reinforced by perusal of Yao Wenyan's comments during 1958, when Mao's combination was first touted as a means of creating folk-inspired literature for the masses and he referred contemptuously to the student propensity for 'empty talks on abstract theory'.¹³ Yet if there was ever a solid basis for claiming a Maoist breakthrough in proletarian theatre it was the creation not just of a new 'combination' of opposites, but of an integrated romanticism in which contemporary ideology and traditional narrative were integrated.

It is difficult to focus sharply on the literary principles of the Cultural Revolution, in part because too much has been claimed for the 'method' which produced the models and not enough for the models themselves. A major task for revolutionaries, spelled out in Jiang Qing's 1964 speech, was the creation of new scripts (*juben*)¹⁴ and the February 1966 Forum emphasises that the 'method of creation' (*chuangzuo fangfa*) was to be the combination (*xiang jiehe*) of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism.

If the method is judged by the criterion of creative output, in terms of variety and number of works, it will be found sadly wanting, even counter-productive, as was pointed out in Chapter 1, but it did at least contribute a significant genre to the repertoire of Beijing opera, and had the potential to contribute to further development of modern Chinese theatre.

In his 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' and elsewhere, Mao had provided some crucial vocabulary for methodological debate, but his assorted pronouncements and observations were trumpeted as 'militant documents' and the vocabulary was never developed in a way which would illuminate the differences between socialist realism and the Chinese 'method'. In fact, 'The Talks at the Yan'an Forum', has been described by Lars Ragvald as the codification of Stalinist literary theory as official Chinese policy.¹⁵ That is not to say that the Soviets had thought much more deeply about theory than the Chinese. The boundaries between theory and method were blurred in the Soviet Union, just as in China, and, as Max Hayward has pointed out, theory was not widely canvassed in literary circles before emerging as method,¹⁶ but the continuities between Russian national literature and socialist realism are more visible as a conscious attempt at literary theory than the continuities between Chinese traditional theatre and the models.

There are numerous assertions of the importance of 'critical assimilation' (*pipan jicheng*) of old into new, and Jiang Qing makes an important reference to Beijing opera's 'exaggerated' (*kuazhangde*) artistic style in her 1964 speech,¹⁷ but there is little to identify the precise nature of the traditional aesthetic which was to be incorporated in the models. However, the revolutionary modern genre was linked with Chinese national theatre at least as strongly as the products of socialist realism were linked with nineteenth century Russian national literature. The difference is that while the Russian narrative tradition contributed a form of realism, the Chinese narrative tradition contributed a blend of historiography, myth and romance. This tradition in Beijing opera, the subject matter of which Mao regarded as a 'reversal of history' because of its neglect of the 'makers of history',¹⁸ supplied an essential ingredient of revolutionary romanticism - the emotional force of a mythologised history.

The Soviet Union and China

This view of history, as a form of 'truth', exerted a strong influence on the way realism and romanticism were combined. Factional political imperatives for the creation of a new history worked in tandem with the

broad literary design of the Cultural Revolution to create a newly dramatised history of the 'people' themselves, and there are some signs at least that this design included a genuine attempt to consider the essential nature of Beijing opera as an indigenous form. While a major impetus for the Maoist cultural regime appears to have been a response to the condemnation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union of 1956,¹⁹ to the eruption in October of that year of the Hungarian revolt, in which writers played a crucial role, and to criticisms of the Great Leap Forward, this reaction did not simply take the form of a blanket endorsement of Stalinist socialist realism.²⁰

The February 1966 Forum contains specific attacks on Sholokhov, Stanislavsky, and the nineteenth century critical realists. This is a significant break with Soviet literary theory because, while Sholokhov publicly derided the straitening and infertile dictates of socialist realism, he, along with Mayakovsky and Gorky, are frequently cited as the three 'foremost Russian practitioners' of socialist realism and Belinsky, Chernychevsky and Dobrulyubov, along with Lenin himself, are considered major theoreticians.²¹

The formulaic output of the Zhdanov era appears to have troubled even the policy-makers and literary bureaucrats themselves and by 1952 there was at least some official unease about the sterility of literature, culminating in a call for new satirical works from *Pravda*.²² There was also limited criticism of the stultifying 'no-conflict' theory of literature, in which no conflict could be portrayed in proletarian literature since no such thing was possible between citizen and citizen or between the citizen and the state under socialism.²³

From a Maoist point of view this criticism and the official Party endorsement of writers like Sholokhov, (who had eschewed the obligatory happy ending and indicated ambivalent sympathies in his novel *And Quiet Flows the Don*), might have been included among the manifestations of Soviet revisionism without attacking socialist realism itself. Alternatively, Maoists might have taken up the late Stalinist criticism of 'no-conflict' theory, and argued that socialist realism had degenerated into a false and reactionary representation of class struggle, which remained unfinished and required a process of continuous revolution. An 'orthodox' socialist realism might still have been refurbished and employed in the service of the Cultural Revolution in such a way as to underpin the very kind of 'Chinese Zhdanovism'

associated with Yao Wenyuan and the Cultural Revolution.

However, the February 1966 Forum did not confine its criticisms to areas in which a clear-cut political distinction might have been made between the cultural regimes of Stalin and Khrushchev. While criticism of Soviet influence is fragmentary, it is still too pointed to be interpreted only as a general attack on revisionism, propped up with bits of literary theory. All blame for the distortion of socialist realism might conveniently have been laid at the feet of post-Zhdanov literary authorities. Indeed, since the 'Zhdanov era'²⁴ closed in 1953 with the death of Stalin it would have made a most convenient political watershed between the era of socialist realism and the revisionist 'thaw' of Khrushchev. As it transpired, the Forum constituted an attack not just on a sharply demarcated political regime, but on specific and major theorists and models of authorship which had found their way into the canon of Soviet proletarian literature and aesthetic theory in the Stalinist period, and even criticised Stalin himself:

Stalin was a great Marxist-Leninist. His criticism of the modernist literature and art of the bourgeoisie was very sharp. But he uncritically took over what are known as the

classics of Russia and Europe and the consequences were very bad...We should draw a lesson from Stalin's experience. Old and foreign works should be studied too, and refusal to study them would be wrong; but we must study them critically, making the past serve the present and foreign works serve China.²⁵

Jiefangjun bao (Liberation Army post) of April 18, 1966, contains an almost word for word repeat of this forum - as an unattributed editorial, with no mention of Jiang Qing's involvement - but there is no reference to Stalin, or Stanislavsky, in this piece, suggesting some unease on the matter of political-literary demarcation.²⁶ As for Jiang Qing, she clearly intended that Chinese revolutionary literature was to be regarded not just as an echo of a more orthodox Soviet socialist realism but as a path-breaking 'Maoist' literary schema. In the process, she also achieved an important personal political objective in stranding her May Fourth enemies, such as Zhou Yang, who had greeted Mao's 'combination' as a breakthrough, but had also been strongly supportive of Soviet socialist realism.

Again, however, the differences between Maoist and Stalinist literary theory appear less conspicuous than the similarities if one relies only on statements and

directives. Mao and Gorky are saying much the same thing about a militantly sympathetic literature of, and for, the proletariat, and a positive romanticism which has its origins in folkloric forms. If these two methods of proletarian literature were analysed in terms of their theoretical components, they would appear to be extremely closely related. Indeed the opera, *The White-haired Girl*, was once applauded as a model for socialist realism.²⁷ It is only when the revolutionary modern genre is subjected to critical analysis, and its basic nature inferred from specific elements such as narrative structure and characterisation, that the genuine differences emerge, suggesting that the creators of the models have done a poor job in theorising their own achievement.

More to the point when it comes to Jiang Qing however, it seems apparent that she was not so much interested in theorising her drama as in dramatising her 'theory', not only in the sense of putting theory into practice, as one might expect, in view of 'Mao Thought,' but in the sense of turning debate about aspects of theory, such as the use of 'positive characters' into a 'struggle' between revolutionaries and revisionists.²⁸ I will return to this point in the chapters to come in discussing the Cultural Revolution as a peculiar blend of Chinese political culture and

Jiang Qing's own idiosyncratically 'theatrical' temperament.

The major point of agreement between Soviet and Chinese literatures may be the portrayal of 'truth' and the major point of departure the treatment of realism. The crucial idea of a higher 'truth', or 'typical' circumstances and qualities beyond factual representation is itself an ironic demonstration of the relationship between 'base' and 'superstructure' in both countries, or more simply, of the relationship between politics and art. Articulation of the theory of socialist realism and of the Maoist combination of realism and romanticism in China coincided with periods of appalling famine - 1932-33 and 1958-60 in the Soviet Union and China respectively. In these circumstances, the contrast between any objective depiction of truth and that of the Utopian Party literature could not have been more marked.

In China, with Mao in imminent danger of being called to account for the Great Leap Forward, some form of 'revolutionary' realism was sorely needed, in order to make the modern state recognisable on the national stage while portraying it as an ideal rather than a reality. Both states faced the same problems with realism - that is, it could not be the same thing as reality. As defined in the first statutes of 1934 of

the Union of Writers, socialist realism was the 'basic method of Soviet imaginative literature and literary criticism' and as such, demanded from the artist 'a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development'.²⁹ This is not realism, or some attempt at empirically verifiable fact, but rather a view of 'higher' truth. Faithful representation of the grime and poverty of peasant life was condemned as negativism in the Soviet Union during the Zhdanov era of 1946-53, when strict Party control was at its height, and as 'bourgeois critical realism' in the Cultural Revolution.

Realism, Romanticism and Class Struggle

Clearly, some elements of realism were desirable and some were not; the kind of realism associated with class struggle, and in particular the kind of realism which allowed workers, peasants and soldiers to *identify with class struggle*, and to experience *class feeling*, was positive, and the kind of naturalistic depiction which simply allowed them to *recognise themselves* was at least potentially negative. To this extent, as far as a dramatic principle is concerned, there is a strong issue of audience affect at work in the revolutionary modern aesthetic and as it happens this resonates with the Hegelian view of human consciousness and culture, which is more 'voluntarist'

or 'idealistic', more Maoist, than the Marxist view of dialectics:

...on the one side, we see man a prisoner in common reality and earthly temporality, oppressed by want and poverty, hard driven by nature, entangled in matter, in sensuous aims and their enjoyments; on the other side, he exalts himself to eternal ideas, to a realm of thought and freedom, imposes on himself as a will universal laws and prescriptions, strips the world of its living and flourishing reality and dissolves it into abstractions, inasmuch as the mind is set upon vindicating its rights and its dignity simply by denying the rights of nature and maltreating it, thereby retaliating the oppression and violence which itself has experienced from nature.³⁰

As for the portrayal of emotions, and the character changes wrought by emotions, the major difference between the realist and naturalist approach and that of the models is a kind of stability. In the models, the protagonists undergo character change as a result of *revelation* and *conversion* - they reach a critical state and undergo a positive change, a permanent and irreversible transformation, at that moment when the Party's revelation of truth coincides with intense

class feeling generated by the process of class struggle. This is an inevitable, perceptible and permanent transformation - otherwise, according to Jiang Qing's principles of heroic characterisation, the protagonist is not a revolutionary but a revisionist or counter-revolutionary. In the more naturalistic, subjective or 'psychological' forms of realism, however, as in the great nineteenth century novels and social drama, human beings are vulnerable to shifting, impermanent truth, external powers beyond their control or comprehension, and complex and unstable states of mind.

The contrast between a positive dynamic generated by class feeling and a negative dynamic generated by the mere recognition of reality is the contrast between the aesthetics of realism and the aesthetics of 'truth', a contrast which fuelled the great Russian debates of the nineteenth century, between radical critics and conservative artists,³¹ and which continued to have a pressing relevance in the Soviet period. The aesthetic of socialist realism rested upon a foundation of *narodnost* and *partynost*, 'patriotic devotion to the common people' and 'Party-mindedness', respectively, and in practice, *partynost* dictated the perception of historical truth. As Ronald Hingley points out, the peasants of the 1930s detested collectivisation, but depicting them thus would have

contravened the higher sense of truth enshrined in Party aspirations.

Indeed, any peasant fundamentally opposed to collectivization, like any worker lacking enthusiasm for the Five Year Plan, would automatically qualify as *untypical* (even though he might represent the overwhelming majority) and therefore as unsuitable for depiction in literature except in a context emphasizing the exceptional and deplorable nature of this outlook.³²

Realism, Reality and the Stage

As far as theatre is concerned, the Soviet and Chinese traditions led to different outcomes for their respective proletarian genres. The theatre was a place for people to be educated, as Jiang Qing had said,³³ and socialist realism was always intended to be a pedagogic tool, as Gorky had made clear, but the Russian and Soviet stages had been associated with the high point of European realism and naturalism, so it was a less hospitable medium for the sublimation of reality than its Chinese counterpart. As for Chinese theatre itself, there was a long-established tradition of the 'scorn of verisimilitude' as Thornton Wilder,

himself much influenced by Chinese dramatic practice, put it, in his notes for the director of *Our Town*.³⁴

There is a subtle distinction to be made here, however, between transcending verisimilitude and ignoring reality, a distinction which touches on the kind of life-like physical realism employed in the models, and stressed in the directions given for production in the books which accompanied the models. *Conceptual* realism, rather than an 'optical' kind of realism,³⁵ based on life-like sets, stage properties and costumes, is the Chinese tradition in theatre, but a kind of reality was always present. The performers - and the audience - were expected to observe mundane realities in quite a literal-minded and even pedantic way, and to monitor imagination by way of the memory. Tao-Ching Hsu puts it this way:

The uncanny memory of the Chinese audience in assumed localities is shown when the forgetful novice 'Walks through the wall' or 'gets downstairs without ladder', which is so unusual that it invariably causes involuntary, and often visibly unkind, merriment among the audience. The memory is not visual in nature, as at least one Chinese theatregoer can testify here, because the stage does not have and has never had any scenery, rather, it is akin to

children's ability to keep in mind all the details of a story and to question and correct inconsistencies which the story-teller's improvisation (*sic*), necessitated by defective memory, brings into the narrative...This precision of their imagination may also be called a sense of reality.³⁶

Another theatre-goer, L.C. Arlington, writing in 1930, said, 'The Chinese see the real thing, if only in imagination'.³⁷ As far as the models are concerned, they usurp some of these traditional functions of the imagination by means of Western-style sets and faithfully detailed costumes, but they attempt nevertheless to preserve something of the 'distance' of Beijing opera, which derives from idealisations.

Elizabeth Wichmann, a more recent participant, as observer and performer, describes the 'essence' of Beijing opera thus :

It is through the display of skills, externalizing the thoughts and feelings of major characters and elaborating upon their thoughts and interactions, that Beijing opera performance transcends a resemblance to life and builds an overall effect that conveys its essence.³⁸

In terms of the representation of characters on stage, Wichmann notes a 'basic aesthetic value' - that everything portrayed must have its own intrinsic beauty. Even things which are not in themselves beautiful must have a kind of representational perfection and a beggar's costume, instead of being dirty and ragged, will be a black silk robe, covered with multicoloured silk patches. She illustrates the point further in relation to stage weeping, which must not be indecorous or ugly to behold, but 'painfully beautiful'.³⁹ And William Dolby notes that the two ballets presented in 1964-5, *White-haired Girl* and *Red Detachment*, shared characteristics of representing untraditionally elaborate sets, but not becoming too closely naturalistic. He notes for example, that 'patches on the clothing of the poor were not ragged, but were neatly placed'.⁴⁰

It is not difficult to see how all kinds of ugliness might be dispensed with on both ideological and artistic grounds, and Jiang Qing herself denigrated graphic detail of violence in an early version of *Red Lantern*,⁴¹ but the traditions of the Chinese stage might have been at least as powerful an influence as any other in this respect. Despite some lurid story content,⁴² Chinese theatre audiences were more acclimatised to an idealised form of realism, akin to 'revolutionary realism', than the Russian-Soviet stage

or its literature, which had been linked with naturalistic depiction - especially, in the case of theatre, with Chekhov and Stanislavsky.

As far as Yao Wenyuan and Jiang Qing are concerned, however, the aesthetic theory of realism seems, once again, to be confused with method. At times it is clear that what is intended is idealised realism of a kind that is congruent with Chinese theatrical traditions, as when, via the February 1966 Forum, Jiang Qing says 'while depicting the cruelty of war, we must not exaggerate or glorify its horrors.'⁴³ At times it appears that she is after a kind of verisimilitude, or at least authenticity, as when details of costume, speech, local customs and geography are painstakingly sought out and refined by investigation and consultation. Most commonly, however, 'realism' manifests itself as an application of Maoist political theory of the Yan'an period, of mass line⁴⁴ and class consciousness, as an approach to the selection and treatment of subject matter, and to some very limited extent as acting/production method. For instance, the summary of the February 1966 Forum contains numerous references to 'plunging into the thick of life':

Regarding the selection of subject matter, only when we plunge into the thick of life and do a good job of investigation and study can we make the selection properly and correctly. Playwrights should unreservedly plunge into the heat of the struggle for a long period. Directors, actors and actresses, cameramen, painters and composers should also go into the thick of life and make serious investigations and studies...

We must plunge into the thick of life for a long period of time, integrate ourselves with the workers, peasants and soldiers to raise the level of our class consciousness...⁴⁵

As for Yao Wenyuan, he appears to take the same view of realism, as a process rather than as a literary theory. In an article, 'Is Realism Forever Changeless?', first written in 1957 and republished in September 1964, Yao takes issue with Qin Zhaoyang's 'broad road of realism', which allows for diverse and undogmatic approaches to creativity. For Yao Wenyuan the crucial element in revolutionary realism is a matter of 'involvement' with workers, peasants and soldiers:

Certain writers who had been influenced by European realism and who were critical of society converted, after the liberation, to revolutionary realism. The crucial factor of their conversion lies in the transformation of their world view and attitude towards literature, as well as in their shift in life style from an isolated existence apart from the masses to a life involved with the workers, peasants and soldiers. Only when a writer has progressive sensibilities will he be able to want and to realize truthfulness in life and art.⁴⁶

Interestingly, Yao Wenyuan goes on to claim that no reactionary writer has ever produced an immortal character, adopting a stance that is clearly at odds with Marx, Engels and Gorky, all of whom pay tribute to writers like Balzac, and those uses of realism which assist in understanding the historical development and world-view of classes.⁴⁷ Overall, there is little subtlety in the theoretical position adopted by Yao Wenyuan and Jiang Qing, and, as far as realism is concerned, the issue for them seems to be not a matter of literature itself but of identification with the proletariat - in a sense what they are both talking about is 'life' itself, rather

than art, and choosing a `role' to play in the Cultural Revolution.

The Simplicity of Essences

In spite of this, the model works themselves do manage to harness realism to the service of romanticism, or to confine it within the boundaries prescribed by the medium of Beijing opera, in a manner to be pursued in my conclusion, and might more easily be thought of as a kind of `proletarian romanticism' than as any dualistic combination of realism and romanticism. Indeed, `revolutionary romanticism' itself might have made a perfectly reasonable title, although Maoists might have wished to distinguish the models from the kind of French `social' romanticism sometimes attributed to Dostoevsky,⁴⁸ or from the form of Soviet `revolutionary romanticism' prevalent in early post-revolutionary prose fiction.⁴⁹ The aesthetic concentration and unilaterality of the models is much more akin to myth than Soviet socialist realism. Roland Barthes provides valuable insight into the relationship between the models and mythology, despite the obvious irony of employing a definition of myth derived from observation of bourgeois societies, in which he uses the term `de-politicized speech':

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact...In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.⁵⁰

The apparent contradiction here, between the dialectical pretensions of the models (that is, as works of art produced by a Maoist-Marxist-Leninist worldview) and their undialectical essence as myth (in Barthes's terms) is the result of Barthes's own particular view of the relationship between semiology and ideology, which I will explore in conclusion, after textual analysis of *White-haired Girl* and *Red Lantern*. As I shall argue, the models may be 'undialectical' in this sense, and full of romanticism, while making heavy use of themes, motifs

and characterisation which constitute a kind of realism derived from a dialectical, Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, political philosophy. The Maoist predilection for antagonistic or contending forces is obviously reflected in the theme of class struggle but, in Barthes's terms, this might still qualify as 'blissful clarity' rather than as a 'dialectic'. In this respect Barthes appears to be more in tune with the aesthetic theory of Hegel, Gorky, Mao and Lukacs than with the political philosophy of Marx and Engels as explicated in *The Communist Manifesto* or *The German Ideology*.⁵¹ What seems to be intended by this kind of 'clarity' is the emotional-aesthetic impact of a distillation of character, a portrait of 'type' and 'essence' which moves well beyond life-like realism to 'larger-than-life' romanticism in order to preserve an ancient source of power in contemporary story-telling. As near as one can tell from Barthes' intriguing and cryptic footnotes to the essays in *Mythologies*, his idea is that the source of clarity in mythology is 'euphoria', not just simplicity of storyline, or pointed morals, but an unambiguous - and positive - emotional response, which 'ideology' of the kind evident in socialist realism is unable to elicit.

Narrative, Semiotics and Theatre

Kirk A. Denton has analysed one of the models - *Zhiqu Weihushan* (Taking Tiger Mountain by strategy) - as a modern myth, after Barthes, but he does so in terms of a restricted semiotics, or symbolism, as mentioned above.⁵² The point is, however, that the essential quality of myth is not confined to 'non-verbal' semiotics⁵³ but to narrative structure, 'literary' devices, and characterisation. And of course Beijing opera, like Pushkin's cat, is a very versatile storyteller; it strikes up a song and tells a story, while it keeps on moving. Denton points out that the storyline of *Tiger Mountain* is drastically simplified from the 1956 novel *Linhai xueyuan* (Tracks in the snowy forest) and it is obvious that the storyline of *White-haired Girl* is also simplified in the transformation from opera to ballet, but it would be a mistake to assume that 'story' has been subordinated to theatre semiotics, or, to put it another way, that the quality of 'myth' is achieved by the transformation worked by theatre and not by the story itself. The symbolic quality of myth is maintained in the narrative as well as in 'dramatic' elements. Simplification is not merely the *reduction* of narrative, designed to enhance non-narrative elements, or the 'teaching' element emphasised by Gorky and Eco, but the *augmentation* of mythic narrative.

Narrative, in theatre, is conveyed not only by events portrayed on stage in actions, in associated dialogue, or in costume and scenery, but by song, poetry and commentary. In the case of Chinese theatre, it may be, as Hsu has pointed out, that the persistence of elements of traditional narrative entertainments have impeded the development of 'full' dramatisation.⁵⁴ Whatever the case, in both traditional theatre and the models there is a strong reliance on story-telling devices as well as on the semiotic elements specifically associated with the stage. Both have been incorporated into a performance which is, in the Barthesian sense, undialectical, in which real human acts are given 'the simplicity of essences'⁵⁵ and narrated as a form of mythology.

As far as 'reality' is concerned, or as Barthes would have it, 'the world', the models have squarely met his conditions for myth-making. Their romanticism has negated the humanistic and individualistic elements of realism-naturalism and turned history and reality into a 'harmonious display of essences'.⁵⁶

In the following chapter we shall see how this display was conducted in the campaign to reform Beijing opera.

Notes

¹ Gorky *On Literature*, 247.

² *Ibid.*, 40

³ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁵ See Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art'. A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (University of Michigan, 1980), 19.

⁶ See Gorky, *On Literature*, 230-231. (Gorky sees 'fairy tales and myths' as being derived from the 'facts of life').

⁷ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁸ See 'Summary of the Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces' in Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao and 'Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi'*) in *Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming shengli*. This will be referred to hereafter as the 'February 1966 Forum'.

⁹ Zhou Yang, 'Wenyi zhanxianshang de yichang da bianlun,' (A great debate on the literary front), in *Renmin ribao*, February 28, 1958.

¹⁰ Schram, ed., *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*, 123.

¹¹ For example, in the document 'Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi,' Jiang Qing uses the phrase *xiang jiehe de fangfa* (the method of combination). See *Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 223.

¹² Reforms to *Shajiabang*, for example, were characterised as a 'struggle' to highlight positive characters. For illustration of this, see The 'Shajiabang' Revolutionary Fighting Regiment

of the No.1 Peking Opera Company of Peking, 'Mao's Thought Illuminates the Road of Revolution in Peking Opera,' in Chiang Ching, *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 50-51.

¹³ Ragvald, *Yao Wenyuan as a Literary Critic*, 117.

¹⁴ 'Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi,' in *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 223.

¹⁵ Ragvald, *Yao Wenyuan as a Literary Critic*, 53.

¹⁶ See Max Hayward, *Writers in Russia: 1917-1978* (London: Harvill Press, 1983), 97. Hayward says the idea and the term 'socialist realism' itself were launched to the literary community in 1932 in a gazette, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, without public debate. (Hayward, *Writers in Russia*, 60).

¹⁷ Chiang Ching, 'On the Revolution of Peking Opera. Speech Made in July 1964 at the Forum of Theatrical Workers Participating in the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes' in Chiang Ching, *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 5. This speech is frequently included as a preface to the texts of the model operas, along with key quotations from Mao (for example, Jiang Qing, 'Tan jingju geming,' (On the revolution of Beijing opera), in Beijing Opera Troupe Collective Revision, *Shajiabang* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1967), 1-6. The speech also appears in an editorial of *Hongqi* (Red flag) No.6, 1967 as 'Huanhu jingju geming de weida shengli,' (Acclaim the great victory in the revolution of Beijing opera) reprinted in *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 627-629.

¹⁸ Mao Zedong, 'Kanle "Bishang Liangshan" yihou,' in *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 33.

¹⁹ Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' of February 25, 1956, in which he engaged in limited criticism of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, see *Russian Writers and Soviet Society, 1917-1978* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 47.

²⁰ Although it might be argued that Maoists were in favour of a 'purer' or more 'orthodox' form of socialist realism, in tune with the Soviet post-war preoccupation with contrasting positive and negative characters, see Hayward, *Writers in Russia*, 158.

²¹ See Hingley, *Russian Writers*, 201 and Hayward, *Writers in Russia*, 151. It may well be that some of these were not entirely convincing standard-bearers, and that writers of such eminence and quality had been appropriated primarily as showpieces for the theory, compensating, by lending international credibility to Stalinist literature, for the ideological headaches they caused.

²² Hingley, *Russian Writers*, 45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁴ Zhdanov died in 1948, but the period 1946-53 is often regarded as 'the Zhdanov era'. See Hingley, *Russian Writers*, 45.

²⁵ 'Summary of the Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces,' in Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 212-213.

²⁶ 'Gaoju Mao Zedong sixiang weida hongqi jiji canjia shehuizhuyi wenhua da geming,' (Hold high the great red banner of the thought of Mao Zedong and actively participate in the

Great Socialist Revolution), *Jiefangjun bao* (Liberation Army post), editorial, April 18, 1966.

²⁷ Zhou Yang, in an assessment of Chinese and Soviet literature since the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' at the Second Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists, September, 24, 1953, mentions the opera *The White-haired Girl* as one of the models for socialist realism. See Zhou Yang, 'Gengduode yu xiude wenxue, yishu zuopin er fengdou,' (Fight for more and better literary and artistic works), in *Wenyibao* (Literature and art news), No.19, October 15, 1953, 7-16. For discussion of the speech see Fokkema, *Literary Doctrine*, 37-42.

²⁸ See Note 12 above on *Shajiabang*.

²⁹ Hingley, *Russian Writers*, 198.

³⁰ Michael Inwood, ed., Trans. Bernard Bosanquet, *Hegel. Introductory Lectures in Aesthetics* (Penguin, 1993) 60.

³¹ Charles A. Moser, *Esthetics as Nightmare. Russian Literary Theory, 1855-1870* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press), 1989, xiv.

³² Hingley, *Russian Writers*, 199.

³³ Chiang Ching, *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 2.

³⁴ Thornton Wilder, *Our Town. A Play in Three Acts* (Coward McCann Inc., 1965) v. For comment on his interest in Chinese theatre see Gilbert A. Harrison, *The Enthusiast. A life of Thornton Wilder* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Company, 1986), and Chen Xiao-mei, *Occidentalism*.

³⁵ I am reminded here of the way Picasso, Braques and the Cubists considered their work 'realistic' but of a conceptual

rather than an optical kind - things were painted as they were known, rather than as they were seen.

³⁶ Hsu, *The Chinese Conception of the Theatre*, 648-649.

³⁷ L.C. Arlington, *The Chinese Drama. From the Earliest Times Until Today* (Benjamin Blom, 1966), 6.

³⁸ Elizabeth Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre. The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰ William Dolby, *A History of Chinese Drama* (London: Paul Elek, 1967), 253.

⁴¹ See 'Summary of the Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces,' in Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 218 and, for discussion of the way the portrayal of violence became a 'factional' issue see Hsieh Wen-ping, 'A Fierce Struggle for Control of the Peking Opera Stage. The Production and Staging of *On the Docks*, a Peking Opera on a Revolutionary Contemporary Theme,' in Chiang Ching *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 38-39.

⁴² Arlington in *Chinese Drama*, 6, provides a vivid description of this: 'camps stormed, towns besieged and taken, the frightful massacre of the inhabitants, the slicing up and eating of corpses; all these are depicted upon the stage'.

⁴³ 'Summary of the Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces,' in Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 218.

⁴⁴ Jiang Qing refers fleetingly to the mass line in her February 1966 Forum Speech, see 'Summary of the Forum on Literature and

Art in the Armed Forces,' in Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 214-215.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 218-220.

⁴⁶ Yao Wenyuan, 'Is Realism Forever Changeless,' in Hualing Nieh, ed., *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, Vol.1, 160.

⁴⁷ For discussion of Marx and Engels, their attitude to realism, 'tendency' writing and Balzac in particular, see Lee Baxendall and Stefan Morawski, eds., *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art. A Selection of Writings* (St. Louis, Telos Press, 1973), 30-35. For Engels's famous letter to Margaret Harkness in which he mentions Balzac, see 'Engels to Margaret Harkness in London, April 1888,' in Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, *Marxist Literary Theory, A Reader* (Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 39-41. Gorky pays a striking tribute to Balzac (*On Literature*, 48), in saying that he never understood his own grandfather until he had read *Eugénie Grandet*. The basis of these views is that 'reactionary' views do not necessarily prevent an artist from depicting 'real' life, but Yao Wenyuan, on the other hand, asserts with ominous conviction ('Is Realism Forever Changeless', 160), that 'a writer's mistaken, reactionary ideas always prevent him from arriving at a correct understanding and reflection of the realities of life. Such ideas also tend to ideas also tend to hamper the writer in making typical representations of life in his art. There has never been an instance of a reactionary writer producing an immortal character'.

⁴⁸ Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky. The Seeds of Revolt 1821-1849*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 101-112.

⁴⁹ Struve, *Russian Literature Under Lenin and Stalin*, 33-38.

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 143. See also Denton, 'Model Drama as Myth,' in Tung and Mackerras eds., *Drama in the People's Republic of China*, 133.

⁵¹ Admittedly, this is not quite so clear-cut when one considers the letter to Margaret Harkness, which was written roughly forty years after these works.

⁵² Denton, 'Model Drama as Myth,' in Tung and Mackerras, *Drama in the People's Republic of China*, 119-136.

⁵³ See Fortier, *Theatre/Theory*, 4, on the non-verbal languages of theatre.

⁵⁴ Tao-Ching Hsu, *The Chinese Conception of the Theatre*, 326.

⁵⁵ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 143.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

Chapter 4: Taking the Fortress of Beijing Opera: From Ghosts and Beauties to Workers and Peasants, 1964-67

The Festival of Operas on Contemporary Themes

As indicated above, the precise nature of the aesthetic or 'method' employed in the revolutionary modern genre is only to be discerned from a body of key speeches and statements of Mao and Jiang Qing, and more importantly, from the embodiment of consistent principles of composition evident in the genre itself. Narrative structure and related elements will be analysed and highlighted in the next chapter, but first it is necessary to chart the course of the model works to prominence through Jiang Qing's use of legitimating statements and key occasions such as The Festival of Beijing Operas on Contemporary Themes held in Beijing in the Great Hall of the People from June 5 to July 31 1964, (hereafter 'the Festival'). This chapter will document the way a 'revolutionary' line on literature and art and a model 'proletarian' repertoire of theatrical works emerged triumphant from the factional struggle which took place between the rectification movement of 1964 and celebration of the 'great victory of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line on literature and art' in 1967.

The Festival marked a sharp transition from post-Liberation performance and development of opera on traditional themes to the adoption of a revolutionary modern genre designed to define and depict class struggle, express the class feeling and standpoint of workers, peasants and soldiers and thereby mobilise the masses. While various powerful culture bureaucracy figures, such as Lu Dingyi, Director of the Central Propaganda Department, continued to uphold the importance of traditional themes during the Festival itself (as did Jiang Qing), the vast majority of plays from this point on were concerned with contemporary themes and protagonists, a situation which continued until the downfall of the 'Gang of Four' in 1976. In this sense the Festival represents a watershed for Chinese theatre and a prelude to the activism of the Cultural Revolution. Jiang Qing, who did not at this stage hold any special title which might lend her official credibility in the cultural sphere, gave an address to a gathering of theatrical workers, in which she described the Festival as 'the first campaign in the revolution of Beijing opera'.¹

It was not, however, her opening shot in this campaign, nor was it then much more than a continuation of her role as an unofficial, if highly vocal, spokesperson on literature and art, since the speech itself was not published until May 1967, when it appeared in *Hongqi* (Red flag), the Central

Committee's theoretical journal.² It was, none the less, a crucial stage in a sustained attack on historical drama culminating in Yao Wenyuan's critique of Wu Han's *Hai Rui ba guan* (Hai rui dismissed from office) in November 1965, often described as the curtain-raiser for the Cultural Revolution.³

The concern with traditional themes in Chinese theatre was, however, considerably older than the famous critique, which elevated its author to literary and political fame overnight. For more than two years before the 1964 Festival Jiang Qing had been agitating against 'ghost plays' in particular as a symbol of the most pernicious and backward elements of traditional drama. By her own account in 1966, one of the very first questions she had asked herself, when she undertook a systematic investigation of Chinese literature and art was 'why do we still have plays about ghosts on stage in socialist China?'⁴ In fact, by the winter of 1962 she had undertaken a review of over one thousand⁵ Beijing operas then being performed and concluded that it would be necessary to ban plays about ghosts, emperors, generals and concubines. This naturally meant an attack on *opera*, which constituted the overwhelming majority of Chinese theatrical performances, and Beijing opera in particular, as a key example to the other regional varieties.

Ghosts and Monsters on Stage

A year later Jiang Qing met with the company of the No 1 Beijing Opera Company⁶ to urge them to employ contemporary themes, and in May 1963, a series of articles was published in the Shanghai *Wenhuibao*, including one written by Jiang Qing and Shanghai mayor Ke Qingshi under the joint pen-name Liang Bihui, attacking the notion that ghost plays did no harm.⁷ By this stage the reform of Beijing opera had become a major political and ideological issue, with Jiang Qing rapidly emerging as a crucial activist. She had adopted a distinctive personal and political stance as interpreter and broadcaster of Mao's revolutionary line, and was vigorously supported in that stance by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), under Lin Biao's leadership, but was still struggling to establish her signature repertoire of proletarian theatre in the face of grudging and qualified endorsement from those who 'held the rotten corpse of traditional opera in their arms and refused to give it up'.⁸

On December 12 1963 Mao issued a statement destined to become one of the 'five militant documents on literature and art', in which he drew attention to the dominance of 'the dead' in the world of opera, film, literature, dance and music. He identified drama as an area in which there were particular problems, and lamented the lack of an arts superstructure

appropriate to a socialist economic base.⁹ There were, at this stage, numerous obstacles to the systematic development of the kind of theatre which might form part of such a superstructure, including a distaste for the hybrid nature of revolutionary operas among cultural bureaucrats and Jiang Qing's own lack of an unequivocal political or artistic legitimacy.

Jiang Qing's position, the legacy of her personal and political difficulties through the 1930s and 1940s, is mirrored in the Festival's debate on historical themes. Despite the criticisms of traditional and historical themes and the approval of suitably contemporary and proletarian subject matter, as indicated above, strong opposition to Jiang Qing was implicit in the continuing acceptance and endorsement of traditional or historically inspired operas by certain powerful Party figures, and Mao himself had after all provided support for the 'splendid old culture' of ancient times in the very speeches and documents which would soon be raised to the level of doctrine in the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰

It is sometimes asserted that in her role as Mao's 'general' in the cultural sphere Jiang Qing adopted a more militant and dogmatic approach to the arts than the Chairman himself, and that, for example, her speech at the Festival represented a reversal of Mao's position on the 'critical assimilation' of tradition

into a new theatre.¹¹ It is true enough, for example, that her preoccupation with ghosts does not seem to have been shared by Mao, who, in another much-quoted work ('Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work' March 12, 1957) had said:

Recently ghosts and monsters have been presented on the stage. Some comrades have become very worried by this spectacle. In my opinion a little of this doesn't matter much; within a few decades such ghosts and monsters will disappear from the stage altogether, and you won't be able to see them even if you want to. We must promote what is right and oppose what is wrong, but we need not be frightened if people come into contact with erroneous things. It will solve no problem simply to issue administrative orders forbidding people to have any contact with perverse and ugly phenomena, and with erroneous ideas, or forbidding them to see ghosts and monsters on the stage...It is not at all strange that erroneous things should exist, nor should this give any cause for fear; indeed it helps people learn to struggle against them better.¹²

In order to deal with the political threat to Mao after the Great Leap Forward, and perhaps for her own personal reasons, Jiang Qing was ready to abandon such

a liberal approach to educating the masses by the time of the Festival. She may well have been acting as 'pace-setter' (see below) for Mao, promoting views which would have appeared contradictory or inconsistent had he been too quick to utter them himself. But she trod carefully. For the moment at least she appeared reluctant to condemn traditional drama outright and approached the issue by means of a relatively uncontroversial strategy - a statistical analysis of the *proportion* of time devoted to drama which did not reflect and reinforce a socialist economic base.

This is a revealing example of the way a difficult but potentially instructive debate about the democratisation of art and literature, involving political philosophy and its relationship with, for example, aesthetics and dramaturgy, could be reduced to a simplistic, albeit compelling, argument - in this case ostensibly about statistical representation - in order to mark out political territory. If all literature and art were *for* the masses, should they not also be *about* the masses? But how could a national, traditional kind of drama represent the 'masses' in history without embedding them in the wrong kind of history?

Modern Operas on Revolutionary Themes

This difficulty appears to have been obviated, perhaps without great intellectual energy, and at the cost of a more experimental, varied and enduring repertoire, by the call for a distinctly original, *modern* and *revolutionary* genre, that is, essentially, a new 'history'. Provided the model theatre consisted of the story of revolution itself, rather than a revolutionary re-interpretation of traditional-historical themes, there was no likelihood of lending backhanded and unintended credibility to an unwholesome bevy of ghosts, concubines, emperors and scholars, or of renewing their hold on the minds of naive and susceptible audiences in a population whose capacity for enlightened response was undermined by high rates of illiteracy - nor was there any great danger of bourgeois intellectuals, bureaucrats and critics finding a comfortable seat in such a theatre.

Nevertheless, in the 1964 speech Jiang Qing opines that history is going forward on a 'zigzag course'¹³ and makes a conciliatory statement regarding the historical operas:

We stress operas on revolutionary contemporary themes which reflect real life in the fifteen years since the founding of the Chinese People's Republic and which create images of contemporary

revolutionary heroes on our operatic stage. This is our foremost task. Not that we don't want historical operas. Revolutionary historical operas have formed no small proportion of the programme of the present festival. Historical operas portraying the life and struggles of the people before our Party came into being are also needed. Moreover, we need to foster some pace-setters, to produce some historical operas which are really written from the standpoint of historical materialism and which can make the past serve the present.¹⁴

This stance appears consistent enough with Mao's own 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' in May 1942, in which he stressed the need to utilise the 'rich legacy' of both foreign and traditional literature, and articulated the principle of 'critical assimilation' in order to distinguish the good things of the past from their feudal trappings.¹⁵ However, by 1964, there was, in Jiang Qing's view at least, a pressing need for operas on modern themes, operas with contemporary characters and events, and a 'revolutionary feeling', in order to implement Mao's line on literature and art, enunciated in the various key speeches.

While, in some respects, Jiang Qing's remarks at the Festival may well appear more dogmatic and literal-minded, less theoretical, than Mao's own thinking,

there seems little doubt that she was acting as a 'roving sentinel'¹⁶ for Mao and focussing attention on his major ideological concerns, which had been developing apace with his political fortunes since the Lushan Forum. His slide from grace and the necessity for a counter-attack on Peng Dehuai in particular had culminated in an attack on intellectuals (that is, on writers who were making increasingly transparent criticism of his Great Leap Forward policies through the time-honoured medium of historical allusion) during the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, 24-27 September 1962.¹⁷

It is, of course, no accident that Beijing operas on 'historical themes' (ghosts, emperors, famous beauties, generals etc.) should have been at the forefront of politically sensitive works, since such plays had traditionally reflected contemporary political situations and allowed intellectuals to play the role of 'remonstrating with the Emperor'.¹⁸ It was such intellectuals and their bourgeois, educated audiences of lapsed revolutionaries and revisionists who were a real cause for fear among Mao and his supporters in the early sixties and it was they who were identified as 'ghosts and demons' in the *Renmin ribao* (People's daily) editorial of June 1, 1966 which marked official adoption of the name 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution'.¹⁹

Meanwhile, Mao himself was increasingly visible in theatrical circles. On June 27, during the Festival, he made another crucial statement, also destined to become one of the 'five militant documents'. This statement contained an ominous warning about the role of fractious intellectuals:

These associations and the majority of the publications under their control (they say there are a few good ones) have for fifteen years failed - not everyone, but basically, that is - to carry out Party policy. They have played the high and mighty bureaucrat and have failed to go to the workers, peasants and soldiers. They have not reflected the reconstruction and revolution of socialism. In recent years, they have slipped down to the margins of revisionism. Unless they make a sincere effort to reform, there will come a day when they end up in groups like the Hungarian Petofi Club.²⁰

The warning was loaded with significance for writers and artists, in view of the role of the 'Petofi Circle' in the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, when a group of students, writers and unionists in Budapest mounted an attack on the Party. In the context of Chinese politics, the reference to the Petofi Club indicates Mao's preoccupation with the power of intellectuals throughout the late 1950s and into the

early 1960s. A matter of days after this statement the Party Propaganda Department, at the behest of Zhou Yang, called a meeting of unions of the Federation of Literary and Art Circles, to prepare for a rectification campaign.²¹

Mao also visited a theatre in July 1964, during the Festival, and saw a performance of *Ludang Huozhong* (Sparks among the reeds, later to become *Shajiabang* at his suggestion),²² after which he mounted the stage, shook hands with the performers, and had a picture taken with them.²³ The company reported that Jiang Qing soon afterwards transmitted Mao's instructions on the opera, stressing that prominence should be given to armed struggle, the relationship between the army and the people and the heroic images of the positive characters.²⁴

In a further theatre appearance on August 10 1964, Mao saw a performance of *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* after which the company pledged to 'make a successful revision of the opera and repulse the unbridled attacks of the enemy by holding high the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung's thought and resolutely working under the leadership of Comrade Chiang Ching'.²⁵ Meanwhile, after her involvement in the Festival, Jiang Qing returned to Shanghai and embarked upon a role not only of promulgating Mao's theories but of reviewing and adapting five particular operas

which would become 'models' - *Shajiabang, Red Lantern, Raid on the White Tiger Regiment, Taking Tiger Mountain and On the Docks*.²⁶

As indicated above, the major thrust of Jiang Qing's July 1964 statement consisted not so much of exegesis of the emerging Maoist canon on literature and art as condemnation of the lack of representation of workers, peasants and soldiers. She refers in her speech to two groups of figures which she finds 'profoundly disturbing' (*jingxin dongpo*):²⁷

Here is the first group: according to a rough estimate, there are 3,000 theatrical companies in the country (not including amateur troupes and unlicensed companies). Of these, around 90 are professional modern drama companies, 80 or so are cultural troupes, and the rest, over 2,800, consist of companies staging various kinds of operas and ballads. Our opera stage is occupied by emperors, princes, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties, and, on top of these, ghosts and monsters. As for those 90 modern drama companies, they don't necessarily all depict the workers, peasants and soldiers either. They too, emphasise the production of full-length plays, foreign plays and plays on ancient themes. So we can say that the modern drama stage is also occupied by ancient Chinese

and foreign figures. Theatres are places in which to educate the people but at present the stage is dominated by emperors, princes, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties - feudal and bourgeois stuff. This state of affairs will undermine rather than protect our economic base.

And here is the second group of figures: there are well over 600 million workers, peasants and soldiers in our country, whereas there is only a handful of landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, rightists and bourgeois elements. Are we to serve this handful or the 600 million?²⁸

Theatres as Places in which to Educate People

According to an editorial in *Hongqi* no 6, 1967, this speech is 'an important document which uses Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought to solve problems in the revolution of Beijing opera'.²⁹ However, the speech does not actually 'solve problems' so much as declare allegiance, and, implicit in its unexplored allusion to theatres as places where the people are to be educated, there are great questions about what *kind* of education might take place or what might be learnt other than which social class is in the majority. In the criticism of modern plays there is little more

than strident repetition of the view that the most important task in devising a 'modern' and 'revolutionary' theatre is to replace traditional historical protagonists with contemporary, proletarian ones.

Thus, while Jiang Qing's speech in favour of contemporary themes was qualified with remarks about the value of historical dramas, she was apparently far less concerned with the possibility of using these plays to demonstrate the historical development of class struggle than with simply *depicting* workers, peasants and soldiers in proportion to their sheer numbers in society, and with rejecting emperors, scholars and generals as though they were indeed like 'ghosts' - things which unsophisticated people should be discouraged from believing in, whatever dramatic purpose they might serve in the hands of literary intellectuals.

A good deal has been said about Jiang Qing's ruthlessness and political ambition and it certainly appears that censorship and proscription came easily to her, but she was also an actor, experienced in roles of some notoriety and moral ambiguity, such as that of Nora in *A Doll's House*. Chinese theatre-goers often comment that 'bad' characters are more memorable and interesting than 'good' ones, and Jiang Qing may have drawn on professional experience as much as

political precedent in determining that proletarian audiences were not going to be 'educated' if this meant making complex or ambivalent judgements of character, or unreliable moral choices of the kind associated with the theatre of Ibsen, Chekhov or, for that matter, the German socialist realist³⁰ playwright Bertolt Brecht. The model works were not remotely educational in the sense intended by the revolutionary dramatic theorist Augusto Boal, with his 'theatre of the oppressed',³¹ nor did they, on the other hand, democratise the Chinese theatre in the sense sometimes associated with classic Greek drama, of being designed to edify all classes,³² transcending class itself in the search for universal truths.³³ The theatres of Jiang Qing were after all 'places in which to educate people' rather than places *for* educated people.

The model theatre did, however, in the literal sense, 'represent' workers, peasants and soldiers and, as a result of being divested of dramatic ambiguities and being given its own 'history' to portray, the genre became not only an ideal vehicle for the narrative of revolution but an agent for continuing revolution, for the re-enactment of class struggle in the broad theatre of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Jiang Qing's dramatic method had not only its positive romantic side, in the creation of new heroes and new deeds for a new world, but a negative side, a form of didactic and ritual condemnation, akin to the

destruction of effigies. Negative characterisation - a form of representation which, ironically, Jiang Qing herself would eventually be subjected to in various ways, including the deletion of her image from official photographs - demanded that emperors, ghosts and beauties should actually be *removed* from the stage, in order to teach a lesson which went well beyond belief in ghosts and well beyond the confines of the theatre, out into the streets, in ritualistic campaigns such as *po sijiu* (smash the four olds).³⁴ This, was essentially a means of 'dramatising' the Cultural Revolution, and portraying the 'negative' characters according to the same principles of characterisation employed in the models.

The imperative to teach such lessons, and launch militant campaigns against the revisionist foe, rather than raise moral-political dilemmas for the contemplation of theatre audiences, explains a good deal of Jiang Qing's impatience with Western-influenced drama, which permitted representation of undesirable elements on the stage in order to stimulate criticism of them, but was never 'positive' - that is, it did not provide the proletariat with its own superhuman heroes, inspirational deeds and iconoclastic symbols. This limitation was inherent also in the more subtle, 'literary' approaches to creation of a national genre of newly-written historical dramas, however sympathetically they

depicted working folk, whereas the models were built on Jiang Qing's basic principle of outstanding heroic characterisation - the 'three prominences' - in which 'positive' characters were arranged in a hierarchy, with 'principal' heroes at the top.³⁵ With their indomitable proletarian spirits bent on transforming the world through class struggle, the models became a reflection of the campaigns and offensives of the Cultural Revolution itself. In Northrop Frye's terms the revolutionary is often a 'bad critic' who 'naively misinterprets myths of freedom as historically realizable goals'.³⁶ It may be that the model works were indeed designed for masses of 'bad critics' who could be persuaded to mistake the ritual enactment of Mao's myth of Liberation for cultural revolution.

Whatever her design, Jiang Qing's major achievement at the Festival was to loosen the grip of a popular, national theatre with its traditional themes, which, according to the Marxist, and even Marxist-Leninist, view of literature were justifiable enough,³⁷ since even bourgeois intellectuals writing on historical themes could demonstrate sympathy for the oppressed working classes. Evidence for this proposition might well be found in, for example, the much-condemned *kunqu* 'ghost play' *Li Huiniang*³⁸ or the internationally influential Beijing opera *Dayu shajia* (The fisherman's revenge),³⁹ in which Jiang Qing herself had once played the role of Xiao Guiying, the

fisherman's daughter.⁴⁰ But after the Festival another view began to hold sway - a Maoist line⁴¹ - that works *about* workers, peasant and soldiers were the only ones which were truly *for* workers, peasants and soldiers. Conversely, those who advocated plays about emperors and concubines were *against* workers and peasants and thus, under the unequivocal rubric of 'class struggle' and 'class feeling', Jiang Qing laid the foundation for rigorous proscription of plays on historical themes. For some time after the Festival however, and on into early 1966, she continued to struggle against Zhou Yang and others, who managed to blunt the impact of the rectification movement's thrust against 'counter-revolutionary' elements.⁴²

Acting ostensibly as 'transmitter', Jiang Qing used the models to install Mao Thought not just as the theoretical legitimation for a proletarian art and literature, but as the *subject* of that art, a dramatised version of his explanation of the nature of the world - that is, a form of proletarian mythology derived not only from the story of revolution but the story as told by Mao. The revolutionary narrative was emerging as a new history, a new myth, which would expel the old from the stage. In this process literary debate about newly-written historical plays was supplanted by a ready formula for identifying reactionary writers and artists, that is those who were associated with the wrong history, the wrong

narrative, no matter how sympathetic to the ideals of revolution they or their works might seem.

The persecution of artists and intellectuals in the Cultural Revolution is a familiar enough theme, but Beijing opera had performers of humble origin and no particular intellectual pretensions (in some cases, near-illiterates) who suffered merely for their association with a traditional art. One need look no further than the tragic fate of Xun Huisheng, one of 'The Four Greats' (*si da ming dan*)⁴³ who played female roles in the halcyon days of Beijing opera, to find an example of a performer whose art was immensely popular with ordinary folk and who sought to play oppressed servant women in a sympathetic light, who brought fresh insight and innovative characterisation to his roles and yet was persecuted as a counter-revolutionary.⁴⁴ In fact, some of the most celebrated performers of traditional operas had long been associated with reform, although there was undoubtedly considerable resistance to the models among the ranks of the profession. During the Festival *Xinhua News Agency* reported that Xun Huisheng, Shang Xiaoyun (another of 'The Four Greats') and others supported the revolutionary theatre,⁴⁵ while Mei Lanfang, the most famous of the four, had for decades been associated with reforms inspired by both Western and Chinese theatre.⁴⁶

Controversy about one of the writers - Wu Han - had been simmering since early in 1965 but by the time his historical play was discussed in the party organs in November of that year the genre's position had become much more precarious. In fact, the 'opening act' of the Cultural Revolution began with criticism of three newly-written Beijing operas on historical themes - Tian Han's *Xie Yaohuan*, Wu Han's *Hai Rui baguan* and Meng Chao's *Li Huiniang*, all of which had been performed and published in 1961. Beijing opera had been divided into three categories by a Drama Reform Committee in July 1950, clearly allowing for a variety of traditional plays (*chuantongju*), contemporary plays (*xiandaixi*) and newly written historical plays (*xinbian lishiju*),⁴⁷ but in early 1965, *Li Huiniang* once more became the centre of attention, and attacks on the 'ghost play' genre intensified during the prelude to the Cultural Revolution.

Experimental Fields and Model Works

According to Rudolf Wagner, Meng Chao had the 'least political clout' of all the new historical dramatists and was therefore first to be attacked, before the much-documented attack on *Hai Rui baguan* in November 1965.⁴⁸ In fact, following his involvement in the 1963 *Wenhuibao* article criticising *Li Huiniang*, Kang Sheng, a leading figure in the Chinese national security system since Yan'an, (and incidentally a

connoisseur of *kunqu* opera, who had actually been involved in scripting the play),⁴⁹ condemned the work as 'counter-revolutionary' during the Festival in Beijing. But clearly what was needed, even after speakers at the Festival had denounced some of the newly-written historical plays, was an alternative genre, and as criticism of *Li Huiniang* escalated, Jiang Qing began to speak in terms of 'models' as opposed to 'revolutionary modern' plays, signalling the emergence of a new era in Beijing opera, in which there would be no room for the variety and experimentation of the past. According to *Wenhua da geming cidian* (A dictionary of the Cultural Revolution),⁵⁰ the use of the term 'model works' (*yangbanxi*) was originally used in relation to a play called *Hongyan* (Red rock) rather than in relation to the plays which she had been fostering since 1963 as 'revolutionary modern' operas. The entry on *yangbanxi* reads:

Around 1963, the theatre world had already created and performed contemporary drama, such as *The Red Lantern*, *Sparks Among the Reeds*, (later known as *Shajiabang*), *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *Morning on the Docks* (later known as *On the Docks*) etc. Jiang Qing, in order to realize her political ambitions, took control of these operas and, in ordering that they be adapted, insisted that the process

of adaptation itself was replete with the struggle between classes and the two lines. In April 1965 she called for a script and rehearsal of *Red Rock* and, after watching the rehearsal, declared it a 'model'. Thus began the term 'model opera'.⁵¹

While there is some slight variation in accounts of the timing and the venue for this coinage, there is a consensus of opinion that the terms *yangban* and *yangbanxi* were gaining currency in the first few months of 1965. Xu Chen, in an article entitled 'Yangbanxi qishilu' (Revelations concerning the model works) in the magazine *Dalu jianbao* (Mainland bulletin) quotes from *Guangming ribao* (Illumination daily) 23/3/65, the March issue of *Xiju bao* (Theatre magazine) and Shanghai's *Jiefang ribao* (Liberation daily) in drawing attention to widespread press adoption of the term 'yangban' around this time.⁵² Roxane Witke, in her biography *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, refers to the political etymology of the term 'yangban', that is, to its association with the demonstration fields of the Great Leap Forward, arguing that the Cultural Revolution usage represents a metaphorical extension from the realm of base (agriculture) to superstructure (theatre).⁵³

However, Jiang Qing's models were also styled 'experimental fields' (*shiyantian*) in the February

1966 Forum and this apparently insignificant diversity of terminology may highlight the difference between the Chinese pedagogical approach to a revolutionary theatre, and the heuristic or participatory approach adopted elsewhere. A 'model' field can be useful and productive simply by stimulating a copy somewhere, as long as it gets a similar result. Another field means more food, more food will always mean regeneration no matter how familiar the product or how regular its consumption, and the best method of production is the one which creates the most replicas of the model. But a model play, if taken too seriously as a model for copying, and not as a stimulant to some kind of variation or experiment, produces, finally, nothing that was not already there.

By the time the term *yangbanxi* had passed into wide general usage in the press, and more particularly by the time the models had been narrowed down to eight, with a few other stablemates such as *Dujuanshan* (Azalea Mountain) and *Longjiang song* (Ode to Dragon River),⁵⁴ the notion of experiment had been contained to almost constant revisions of these few works, under the unrelenting supervision of Jiang Qing. While the theory of base and superstructure provides a coherent framework for arguing the necessity for a proletarian culture to reflect a socialist economy, the creation of a proletarian literature and art is only superficially analogous to production in industry and

agriculture. But Jiang Qing was content to blur all such distinctions in the interests of unleashing an irresistible ideological force - the moral equivalent of Liberation.

Two Lines in Literature and Art

After the Festival, Jiang Qing stepped up her direct involvement in literature and art, supported and legitimised in her role as 'sentinel' and 'transmitter' for Mao's pronouncements on literature and art. Four of these, detailed below, were highlighted in an editorial in *Jiefangjun bao* (Liberation Army post) on April 18 1966, several months before the landmark 11th Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee and its programme of 'sixteen points' for conduct of the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁵ This editorial was entitled 'Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Ze-dong Thought and Actively Join in the Great Socialist Cultural Revolution'⁵⁶ and identifies the elements of a continuing struggle, since Liberation, between 'two lines' in literature and art - the 'black line', consisting of an alliance of the bourgeoisie, revisionists and supporters of the 'art and literature of the 1930s', and the revolutionary line. According to this analysis the 'black line' used various literary-aesthetic schools such as structuralism, realism and modernism to justify itself, but was, in

reality, a counter-revolutionary line identified and condemned by Mao at the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum'.⁵⁷

This editorial, appearing as it does in a military rather than a Party organ, indicates the crucial role of the PLA as a vanguard in propaganda work during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, and suggests the 'revolutionary' link between Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and Mao himself, in which Beijing opera in particular and the arts in general were conceived of as a military target to be taken by campaigns and offensives. The editorial turns to the theme of Beijing opera in a paragraph headed 'The Great Cultural Revolution Breaks New Ground':⁵⁸

From September 1962, Chairman Mao, at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, urged the whole Party and nation never to forget class and class struggle....These last three years, socialist cultural revolution has broken new ground. The rise of revolutionary modern Beijing opera is the most outstanding example of this. Those engaged in the reform of Beijing opera under the leadership of the Central Committee and Chairman Mao, using the weapons of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought against the literature and arts of the feudal classes, bourgeoisie and modern revisionists, have embarked on a glorious and heroic initiative and

formed a cutting edge against this most stubborn fortress of Beijing opera....The revolutionary modern Beijing operas *The Red Lantern*, *Shajiabang*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *Raid on White Tiger Regiment* and the ballet *Red Detachment of Women*, symphony *Shajiabang*, sculpture *Rent Collection Courtyard* etc. have already received the approval of the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers and have been acclaimed from the perspectives of the masses inside and outside the country.⁵⁹

On May 16, 1966 the Central Committee distributed a circular⁶⁰ attacking Peng Zhen, head of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and leader of a 'group of five' at that point in charge of directing the Cultural Revolution.⁶¹ Peng Zhen was a strong opponent of Mao and authorship of the 'Outline Report on the Current Academic Discussion' issued by the General Office of the Central Committee on February 13, 1966, was attributed to him.⁶² Its chief offence was its support for 'bourgeois' culture, and its view that controversies in art and literature, and in particular the question of Wu Han's *Hai rui*, should be regarded as 'academic' matters. At the very time of the 'Outline Report' Jiang Qing was convening the February 1966 Forum at the behest of Marshal Lin Biao, indicating that battle lines were by now drawn for a spring offensive in which Mao and his supporters would

finally wrest control from a group which included Peng Zhen, Lu Dingyi and Zhou Yang. By the end of May, Mao, Lin Biao and Jiang Qing had triumphed over their adversaries.

The May 16 circular revoked the 'Outline Report', rejected its 'bourgeois world outlook', accused its author(s) of trying to channel political struggle in the cultural sphere into academic debate, 'preparing public opinion for the restoration of capitalism' and called for replacement of the 'group of five' by a new group set up directly under the Standing Committee of the Politburo. It referred to Mao's great speeches on literature and art and enjoined the whole Party to follow his instruction to repudiate reactionary bourgeois ideas in the cultural sphere. Jiang Qing became first deputy head of the new Cultural Revolution Leadership Group, and in fact, as Mao's wife, became its most powerful member. She had finally triumphed over those who held her views of literature and art in contempt and risen to a position of power beyond anything she might have dreamed of in Yan'an days, when she was cloistered away from political affairs.

Following the May 16 circular, *Red Flag* no 9, 1967, carried an editorial 'Two Diametrically Opposed Documents'⁶³ in which Jiang Qing's speech at the February forum was sharply contrasted with the

`Outline Report', and extolled as `an important document aimed to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat and frustrate the restoration of capitalism'. The editorial states that `under the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is necessary to carry out many great proletarian cultural revolutions in order to prevent the restoration of capitalism'. It concludes by exhorting revolutionaries to study the February 1966 Forum summary along with other great historic documents, including Chairman Mao's `Talks at the Yan'an Forum' and the May 16 circular. Jiang Qing's own words had become part of the textual pageant of the Cultural Revolution.

In her new capacity as first deputy leader of the Cultural Revolution Leadership Group and adviser on cultural work to the PLA, Jiang Qing was keynote speaker at a rally of more than 20,000 literature and art workers in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on November 28, 1966.⁶⁴ Greeted by a `thunderous ovation',⁶⁵ she gave an account of her arduous battle to reform Beijing opera, ballet, film and symphonic music. For the first time in the Cultural Revolution, her speech was reported in immediate entirety in the Chinese press, and the meeting was treated as a tribute to Jiang Qing and her tireless efforts for the reform of literature and arts. Some key extracts from the speech are provided below:

After I came into fairly systematic contact with certain areas of literature and the arts, I began to think straight off: Why do we still have ghost plays on stage in socialist China? Also, I found it peculiar how insensitive Peking Opera is to reality. Then out came *Hai Rui baguan*, *Li Huiniang* and other seriously subversive plays and under the noble pretext of 'rediscovering tradition', many works were written about emperors, generals, scholars and beauties. There was great talk and show in the arts about 'famous' 'foreign' and 'ancient' works and the air was thick with exalting the ancient over the modern, the foreign over the Chinese and the dead over the living. I began to feel that if our literature and art could not be made to conform to a socialist base, they would inevitably destroy it.... New literature and art have emerged, in opposition to the old works, and new things have been created, even in Beijing opera, formerly considered the most difficult to reform...As you all know, more than thirty years ago, Lu Xun was the great standard-bearer leading cultural revolution. More than twenty years ago Chairman Mao pointed in the direction of literature and art in the service of the workers, peasants and soldiers and posed the question of 'weeding through the old to allow the new to emerge'. This means finding new

content which satisfies the masses and their love of the popular national forms of art. But if the content is all kinds of things which make it very difficult to 'weed through the old to let the new emerge', what can we do? How can we critically assimilate ghosts, gods and religion? ...To sweep away all remnants of the system of exploitation and the old ideas, culture, customs and habits of the exploiting classes is an important aspect of our Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.⁶⁶

Jiang Qing went on, in this speech, to address the No. 1 Beijing Opera Company, praising them as the first unit in Beijing to undertake the 'glorious task' of reforming Beijing opera and creating works on contemporary revolutionary themes. She referred to the many discussions they had participated in together in order to stage, on National Day, October 1, *Shajiabang*, *The Red Lantern*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *On the Docks*, *Raid on White Tiger Regiment*, the ballets *White-Haired Girl*, (in origin at least a sort of 'ghost story') and *Red Detachment* and the symphony *Shajiabang* - 'the eight model works'. She pointed out however, that this company still contained some recidivist elements under the influence of the former Beijing Municipal Communist Party Committee, the old Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee and the old Ministry of Culture, and that

these elements might well prevent the company from conducting the cultural revolution into the future. ⁶⁷

Mao's Militant Statements

By May 1967, and the 25th anniversary of the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum', the Party organs had distilled Mao's major commentary on literature and art, as identified in the June 1, 1966 editorial in *People's Daily* (above) into a commemorative canon consisting of 'On New Democracy' (January 1940), the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum (May 2 and May 23 1942), 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People', (February 27, 1957) and 'Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work', (March 12, 1957).⁶⁸ Other statements which provided a basis for revolutionary orthodoxy in art and literature, and which were often included in anthologies as 'Highest Directives' or described as 'Chairman Mao's five militant documents on literature and art',⁶⁹ were 'Letter to the Yan'an Beiping Opera Company After Seeing *Driven up Mount Liang*', (January 1, 1944), 'Pay Serious Attention to Discussion of the Film *The Life of Wu Xun*' (May 20, 1951), 'Letter Concerning the Study of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*' (October 16, 1954), 'Instruction of 12 December 1963', and the 'Instruction of June 27 1964' mentioned above.⁷⁰

The Models Take the Stage

On May 22 1967, on the eve of the anniversary of Mao's concluding speech at the Yan'an Forum, in which he declared that `in the first place, all literature and art is created for workers, peasants and soldiers and is for the use of workers, peasants and soldiers'⁷¹ *Renmin ribao* published an editorial in which Jiang Qing was praised for her leadership of the struggle to promote model works:

Under the guidance of Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line in literature and art, a group of revolutionary Beijing operas, revolutionary ballets and a revolutionary symphony have resulted from the determined struggle of Jiang Qing and revolutionary literature and art workers to break down the obstacles, one after another. These works are full of fighting spirit and proletarian revolutionary heroism. They are model works⁷² in the service of workers, peasants and soldiers and the dictatorship of the proletariat. They are shining pearls in the treasure chest of proletarian literature and art. They are gems in humanity's history of literature and art.⁷³

On May 23 1967, Jiang Qing presided over a rally to celebrate the twenty fifth anniversary of the `Talks

at the Yan'an Forum'. Publication of the statements made by Mao on May 20, 1951, December 12, 1963 and June 27, 1964 followed in the press and on May 28, the minutes of the February 1966 Forum, (February 2-20), were released by *Xinhua News Agency*.⁷⁴

According to the minutes, Lin Biao had advised those who were to attend the forum that Jiang Qing was very sharp politically on questions of literature and art and that the army's documents on literature and art should, from that point on, be sent to her.⁷⁵ The minutes go on to describe how Jiang Qing spent her time at the forum:

Jiang Qing advised us to read Chairman Mao's relevant writings, had eight private discussions with a comrade from the army and attended four group discussions, 13 film shows and three theatrical performances with us. She also exchanged opinions with us while watching the films and the theatrical performances. And she advised us to see twenty-one other films. During this period, Comrade Jiang Qing saw a take of the film *The Great Wall Along the South China Sea*, received the directors, cameramen and part of the cast and talked with them three times, which was a great education and inspiration to them. From our contacts with Comrade Jiang Qing we realize that her understanding of Chairman

Mao's thought is quite profound and that she has made a prolonged and almost exhaustive investigation and study of current problems in the field of literature and art and gained rich practical experience through her personal efforts in cultivating experimental plots of land.⁷⁶

According to this, the participants saw more than thirty films and two operas on contemporary revolutionary themes - *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* and *Taking Tiger Mountain*. The summary also contains the familiar corpus of Maoist teachings on literature and art, which are described as 'the most complete, the most comprehensive and the most systematic summaries of struggle between the two lines on the cultural front'. They are described thus:

...these are the most recent summaries of the historical experience of the movements for a revolutionary ideology and a revolutionary literature and art in China and other countries. They represent a new development of the Marxist-Leninist outlook and of the Marxist-Leninist theory on literature and art. These five writings by Chairman Mao are enough to satisfy the needs of the proletariat for a long time to come.⁷⁷

Once more there is mention of a group of works which constitute pioneering efforts at reform, and at this stage there are in fact eight such works, but the sculptural work *Shouzuyuan* (Rent collection courtyard) is included while the ballet *White-Haired Girl* is not.⁷⁸ There is also further mention of the role of traditional Beijing operas, this time in relation to 'traditions' and 'basic skills':

Some people say that Beijing operas with contemporary revolutionary themes have discarded the traditions and basic skills of Beijing opera. On the contrary, the fact is that Beijing opera with contemporary revolutionary themes have inherited the Beijing opera traditions in a critical way and have really weeded out the old to let the new emerge. The fact is not that the basic skills of Beijing opera have been discarded but that they are no longer adequate. Those which cannot be used to reflect present-day life should and must be discarded.⁷⁹

By late 1967 the repertoire of model works had been re-constituted to comprise the operas *Red Lantern*, *Shajiabang*, *Taking Tiger Mountain* (at this juncture translated as *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold*), *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* and *On the Docks*; the revolutionary ballets *Red Detachment* and *White-Haired Girl*, and the revolutionary symphony *Shajiabang*.⁸⁰

Xinhua News Agency reported that on National Day, October first 1967, there was a massive parade containing a tribute to these works. Jiang Qing's 1968 biographers Chung Hua-min and Arthur C. Miller described the scene thus:

Chiang Ch'ing, of course, mounted the rostrum with the other leaders. From there, looking down into the sun-filled square at the massive parade passing in review, she saw the literary and art fighters of the People's Liberation Army carrying a model of 'Main Points of Forum on Literature and Art in Armed Forces Convened by Comrade Chiang Ch'ing under the Instruction of Lin Biao'. Following them in eight cars were performers involved in the 'eight exemplary works' that had appeared during the Cultural Revolution.⁸¹

For its twenty fifth anniversary celebrations in May 1967 the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' was reprinted in all newspapers and magazines, as were the 'five militant documents'; the eight models were staged concurrently in Beijing, the texts of the models were published in *Guangming Ribao* (Illumination daily) and *Renmin Ribao* and the PLA organised small troupes to perform the works in factories, streets and villages.⁸²

This victory parade signalled not only that a dramatic genre had emerged triumphant from a crucial ideological struggle as 'models' but, more importantly, that this genre had 'taken the fortress of Beijing opera' that, in a sense, the works themselves had become protagonists in the revolutionary narrative, as we shall see in the following chapters. First, however, it is necessary to consider the precise nature of the revolutionary narrative.

Notes

¹ 'On the Revolution of Peking Opera. Speech made in July 1964,' in Chiang Ching, *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 1.

² See Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 165.

³ As Rudolf G. Wagner has pointed out, [*The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama. Four Studies* (University of California Press, 1990), 80], more attention has been given to Wu Han's play than other historical and 'ghost' plays which were condemned at the time, such as Tian Han's *Xie Yaohuan* and Meng Chao's *Li Huiniang*. Yao Wenyuan's article 'Ping xinbian lishiju "Hai Rui ba guan",' (*Wenhuibao*, 10 November, 1965), is frequently anthologised in collections of materials of the Cultural Revolution, as in Wen-shun Chi ed., *Readings in the Chinese Communist Cultural Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 1-16, in which it is described as 'the article which is regarded as having commenced the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution', (1).

⁴ 'Jiang Qing tongzhi zai wenyi shi dahuishang de jianghua,' (Comrade Jiang Qing's speech at a rally of workers in the sphere of literature and arts), 28 November, 1966, in *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 226-234. She begins her speech (226) with an attack on old opera in which she uses the expression *guixi* (literally 'ghost plays'), which is sometimes used in a generic sense to refer to a broad genre of traditional Beijing opera, but it seems more pointed here. An English translation of this speech may be found in Chung and Miller *Madame Mao*, 224-233.

⁵ Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 90.

⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁷ See Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 95. The famous article referred to here is Liang Bihui, ' "Yougui wuhai" lun,' (On the 'So what if there are ghosts' theory), *Wenhuibao*, May 6 and 7, 1963.

⁸ Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 107. This passage appears in an article in *Hongqi* (Red flag), No. 9, 1967.

⁹ Mao Zedong, 'Guanyu wenxue yishu de liangge pishi,' (Two directives on literature and art), Directive 1, 12 December, 1963, in *Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 38.

¹⁰ Mao Zedong, 'On New Democracy' *Selected Works*, Vol.II, 381.

¹¹ See for example, Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung* (Penguin Books, 1972), 329.

¹² *Selected Works*, Vol. V, 434.

¹³ 'On the Revolution of Peking Opera. Speech Made in July 1964,' in Chiang Ching, *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 3.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mao, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, 76 & 81.

¹⁶ See Goldman, *China's Intellectuals*, 76.

¹⁷ Brugger, *Contemporary China*, 241.

¹⁸ Wagner, *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama*, 82.

¹⁹ 'Hengsao yiqie niugui sheshen,' (Sweep away all ox-demons and snake spirits), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), June 1, 1966.

²⁰ Mao, 'Two Directives,' Directive 2, 27 June, 1963, in *Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 38.

²¹ Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 117.

²² Ibid., 118.

²³ Chiang Ching, *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 49.

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- ²⁴ Ibid.,
- ²⁵ Ibid., 59.
- ²⁶ Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 118.
- ²⁷ Jiang Qing, 'Tan jingju geming,' (On the revolution of Peking opera), in *Shajiabang*, 1-2.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 2.
- ²⁹ 'Huanhu jingju geming de weida shengli,' (Hail the great victory of the revolution of Beijing opera), in *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 627.
- ³⁰ There is of course a great deal of debate about the nature of Brecht's socialist realism - see for example Arvon, *Marxist Esthetics*, 100-112, and David Pike, *Lukacs and Brecht* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985).
- ³¹ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985).
- ³² See Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 158.
- ³³ Mao makes his view of the class-related nature of literature abundantly clear in the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum', in *Selected Works*, Vol.III, 86.
- ³⁴ See Brugger, *Contemporary China*, Chapter 7 'The Cultural Revolution is Launched,' esp. 285; and Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade. A History of the Cultural Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1996), 65-84.
- ³⁵ In her speech at the Festival and again at the February 1966 Forum, Jiang Qing stressed the need for prominent proletarian heroes. Towards the end of the Cultural Revolution this basic idea was elevated to the status of a dramatic theory - *santuchu*

(three prominences) - by the musician Yu Huiyong, ultimately Minister for Culture in 1975 and 1976 and 'chief creative talent behind the model works' [Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (Gosford: Bushbooks, 1997), 347]. The 'theory' boils down to a familiarly tripartite Chinese slogan - 'Of all characters give first place to the positive characters; of the positive characters give first place to heroes and of the heroes give first place to the principal hero'. See *To Find Men Truly Great and Noble-hearted We Must Look Here in the Present. In Praise of the Modern Revolutionary Peking Opera Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), 13-19. See also Ellen R. Judd 'Prescriptive Dramatic Theory of the Cultural Revolution,' in Tung and Mackerras, *Drama in the People's Republic of China*, 96, and Kraus 'Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution'.

³⁶ See Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, Chapter 3, 'Structuralism and Semiotics,' esp. 93-94, in which he discusses Northrop Frye's *The Critical Path. An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971).

³⁷ See Baxendal and Morawski, *Marx and Engels on Literature*, 35. In his letter to Margaret Harkness on 'tendency' writing, Engels expressed the view that literature should demonstrate sympathy for the point of view of the working class, but he did not argue for a Party-directed literature. Lenin on the other hand believes in a Party 'discipline' in creating art and literature, but not necessarily in proscribing other forms, while Marx has little to offer on the matter of a 'proletarian'

art and literature. See also E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, Vol.1, *A History of Soviet Russia* (Penguin Books, 1970), 57-59.

³⁸ Goldman, *China's Intellectuals*, 43.

³⁹ This is the work which Brecht and Stanislavsky saw in Moscow in 1934, and which Mei Lanfang performed, inspiring Bertolt Brecht to consider the 'alienation effects of Chinese acting'. See Willett, *Brecht on Theatre*, 91-99.

⁴⁰ Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade*, 397.

⁴¹ For convenience I am using the term 'Maoist' throughout, while conscious that it is not a term that was used in Chinese, and indeed Jiang Qing apparently told Red Guard groups that Mao was opposed to it. See 'Red Guard' in Zhang Xinxin and Sang Ye, (W.J.F. Jenner and Delia Davin, eds.), *Chinese Lives* (London: MacMillan, 1986), 281. See also Franz Schurmann *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 33.

⁴² A Cultural Revolution leadership 'group of five', (Peng Zhen, Lu Dingyi, Zhou Yang, Wu Lengxi and Kang Sheng) were ultimately branded as a 'clique' who tried to deflect the Cultural Revolution from its true course by means of an argument about academic and intellectual freedoms. See 'The Peking Group Attempts to Deflect the Maoist Effort,' in Jurgen Domes, James T. Myers and Erik von Groeling, eds., *Cultural Revolution in China. Documents and Analysis* (Centre D'etude du Sud-est Asiatique et de L'extreme Orient, 1974), 146-151.

⁴³ Shang Xiaoyun, Cheng Yanqiu, Mei Lanfang and Xun Huisheng.

⁴⁴ See Trevor Hay, *Tartar City Woman* (Melbourne University Press, 1990), 144-148.

⁴⁵ See Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times*, 167 and 175.

⁴⁶ See McDougall and Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*, 160-161.

⁴⁷ Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre*, 14.

⁴⁸ Wagner, *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama*, 136.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁵⁰ Chao Feng, ed., *Wenhua da geming cidian* (A dictionary of the Cultural Revolution) (Hong Kong: Gang long chubanshe, 1993), 86.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Xu Chen, 'Yangbanxi qishi lu,' in *Dalu jianbao* (Mainland bulletin), November/December, 1991, 47.

⁵³ Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, 391. Witke's group of eight models which had emerged by 1968 omits *On the Docks* and the symphony of *Shajiabang* and includes the symphony *Yellow River Piano Concerto* and the sculptural tableaux *Rent Collection Courtyard*. (see 392).

⁵⁴ The final texts of the five operas and two ballets styled 'models' appeared between 1969 and 1971. Others of the revolutionary modern genre included the opera *Pingyuan zouzhan* (Fighting on the plain) and the ballet *Yimeng song* (Ode to Yimeng), the symphonic suite based on *Taking Tiger Mountain*, the piano concerto *The Yellow River*, piano accompaniment to arias from *The Red Lantern* (1972) and another opera, *Panshiwan*

(Boulder Bay) (1976). See McDougall and Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*, 346.

⁵⁵ 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,' August 8, 1966, see Wen-shun Chi, ed., *Readings in the Chinese Communist Cultural Revolution*, 223-230.

⁵⁶ 'Gaoju Mao Zedong sixiang weida hongqi,' *Jiefangjun bao*, April 18, 1966. See Wen-shun Chi, ed., *Readings in the Chinese Communist Cultural Revolution*, 151, for a summary in English.

⁵⁷ Wen-shun Chi, ed., *Readings in the Chinese Communist Cultural Revolution*, 153, lines 20-25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 154. In this document the Cultural Revolution is referred to as the 'Great Socialist Cultural Revolution'.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ 'Circular of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, May 16, 1966', in Domes, Myers and Goeling, *Cultural Revolution in China*, 174-179.

⁶¹ The term 'cultural revolution' had long been used by Mao, and was used throughout the first half of 1966 in various quarters as a general term, along with 'Great Socialist Cultural Revolution', as we have seen, but the official designation 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution', was first used in the *People's Daily* editorial of June 1, 1966. For the sake of clarity the term 'Cultural Revolution' is used here to include the movements preceding declaration of an 'official' title.

⁶² "Outline Report on the Current Academic Discussion", Made by the Chinese Communist Group of Five in Charge of the

Cultural Revolution,' (February 13, 1966), in Domes, Myers and Groeling, *Cultural Revolution in China*, 149-151.

⁶³ 'Liangge genben duili de wenjian,' *Hongqi*, No 9, 1967, in *Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 665-671. There is a translation in *Chinese Literature*, No. 9, 1967, 39-47.

⁶⁴ 'Jiang Qing tongzhi zai wenyijie dahuishang,' in *Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming shengli*.

⁶⁵ See 'Chiang Ch'ing Speaks at Peking Cultural Revolution Rally of Literary and Art Workers', Hsin-hua News Agency-English, Peking, December 3, 1966, in Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 224.

⁶⁶ 'Jiang Qing tongzhi zai wenyijie dahuishang,' 226.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁶⁸ See note 19 above for the editorial. The Mao speeches can be found as follows: 'On New Democracy,' *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 339-384; 'The Talks at the Yan'an Forum,' Vol. III, 69-98; 'The Correct Handling of Contradictions,' Vol IV, 384-421; and 'Propaganda Work', Vol V, 422-435.

⁶⁹ See 'Celebrations of the 25th Anniversary of the "Talks", Special Number Commemorating 25th Anniversary Yanan Forum', in *Chinese Literature*, 8, 1967, 195.

⁷⁰ These are all included among 'Zuigao zhishi' (highest directives), in *Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 33-38 and were published in English in *Chinese Literature*, No. 10, 1967, 3-12.

⁷¹ *Mao Zedong xuanji*, 820.

⁷² In this case the phrase used is *yangban zuopin* (model works or products).

⁷³ `Wei tiwei wuchanjieji zhuanzheng er dou zheng - jinian "Zai yan'an wenyi zuo tanhuishang de jianghua",` (Struggle to uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat - commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of `The Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art,`) Editorial in *Hongqi* (Red flag), No.8, 1967, reprinted from *Remin ribao* (People's daily), 22 May, 1967. See *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 639-645, especially 644.

⁷⁴ *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 213. See also Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 202.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Although the term commonly used here is `minutes' this is more like a reproduction of the speech with editorial commentary than `minutes' in the normal sense.

⁷⁶ *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 214. The expression here translated as `experimental plots of land' is *shiyan tian*. For further discussion of the etymological links between `experimental fields' and `model works' see Mowry, *Yang-pan Hsi*, 10-24.

⁷⁷ *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 215. The five mentioned here are `On New Democracy', `The Talks at the Yan'an Forum', `Letter to the Beiping Opera Company', `The Correct Handling of Contradictions' and `Propaganda Work'. These are also the five mentioned in a commemorative reprint of the `Circular of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party', May 16, 1966, reprinted in *China Reconstructs* in June 1967.

⁷⁸ *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 216.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁸⁰ Chung and Miller, *Madame Mao*, 170.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² 'Celebrations of the 25th Anniversary of the "Talks",' *Chinese Literature*, No. 8, 1967, 194-200.

Chapter 5: The Model Works as a Discourse

The final scripts of the model works were arrived at after intensive and minute revision under the direction of Jiang Qing, representing an enormous and perhaps unparalleled enterprise in twentieth century theatrical - and literary - reform.¹ Representations of four of these are attached to the thesis as appendices A-D. A and B represent what I refer to below as *composition*, while C and D are synopses. A and B are not meant to represent the full complexity of performance in the manner of a playscript, but rather to complement discussion on the essential arrangement and presentation of the works. A and B might perhaps be regarded as very detailed summary scenarios,² with the crucial difference that they do not represent an observer's critical perspective or re-organisation of the sequence of events in the narrative but instead highlight elements of authorial design or 'discourse', which is the major concern of the following two chapters. After consideration in this chapter of the way this discourse was embodied not only in theatre but in literature and visual form, key elements of the revolutionary narrative, such as tale type and associated principal motifs³ are discussed in detail in Chapter 6, with *The White-haired Girl* acting as a reference point.

The Models as Literature, Imagery and Theatre

William Dolby has drawn our attention to the 'astonishing variety' of forms in which the models have appeared - as film, television, printed editions, stamps, picture-storybooks, postcards, posters, records, sculptures and so on.⁴ It is the 'printed editions' which concern us for the moment, and their relationship with theatre and other forms of print and imagery he has mentioned in passing, including picture storybooks. The final texts published in illustrated book form in the 1970s were in a sense models of the models themselves, appearing after the 'high tide of spontaneity had ebbed' in the Cultural Revolution.⁵

Ellen Judd, in evoking memories of the era, draws attention to the striking dramatic poses contained in the works, referring to them as the 'central dramatic images of the Cultural Revolution as it moved from critique of revisionist drama to an affirmation of its particular vision of proletarian culture'.⁶ I will return to this telling description in the final chapter, but for now it is interesting to note that many Chinese do in fact recall this kind of imagery both as the crystallisation of highly charged moments which took place *within the theatre* and as 'icons' in the sense often associated with contemporary film and

advertising, that is, as a series of poster-like⁷ images reinforcing the narrative, not just of the model works, but of their era, of the Cultural Revolution itself and the campaign to reform Beijing opera. In the final versions of the models we see, despite their removal from the heat of the battle for the reform of Beijing opera, the clearest indication of how people were supposed to 'read' events at the critical point of the Cultural Revolution. But what kind of 'audience' or 'reader' were they intended for? Or is it more to the point to ask what kind of audience they were intended to *create*?

As Apter and Saich have pointed out, in discussing Mao's function as 'storyteller', there had always been a great gap in Chinese culture, between the masses of the illiterate and powerless and the elite minority of bureaucrats and literati. As they put it, 'the body of myths, legends and stories, while they represented a common cultural inheritance, were also part of the great divide between illiteracy - that is, orality and storytelling in the classic sense - and literacy, which of course meant written texts'.⁸ Although the Chinese theatre represents traditions of narrative which closed this literacy gap in some crucial respects, the traditional stage nevertheless reinforced the legitimacy of a feudal cosmology and

the place of the scholar-bureaucrat within its hierarchy. The new stories, myths and legends, conveyed by a new dramatic genre, took advantage of the plebeian traditions of theatre oracy and substituted a new myth and a new cosmology for the old but, as befits a 'logocentric'⁹ society, retained a role for text as a kind of proletarian dramatic literature closely related to both traditional storytelling and Confucian pedagogy. To put it in the current terminology of socio-cultural studies of literacy, the models called for 'multiple literacies' which were necessary for functional competence as a 'revolutionary'.¹⁰

In some ways the *books* of the models, both in their Chinese and Foreign Language Press formats,¹¹ provide not only the most evocative 'souvenir' of their era but the most succinctly revealing indication of narrative design at work in the creation of the genre - and they are linked with theatre in a most interesting way. Sometimes, as in *Red Detachment*, these contain not only photographs depicting memorable scenes from the works but a very significant text which goes well beyond the function of captioning,¹² or even explaining, the pictures. In effect these constitute a syncretic form of imagery, and provide a fascinating example of the pedagogical style of the

Cultural Revolution, in which the power of slogan, poster and stage were frequently combined in the sign system of political demonstrations and rallies to be 'decoded' by mass audiences.

It may be that the model theatre, like other 'central imagery' of the Cultural Revolution, was intended to have something of the effect of the picture-book, impressing a series of indelible visual images on minds not conditioned by high levels of literacy, but attuned to narrative techniques associated with traditional oracy, including the structured repetition of key motifs. It is interesting to note the way the text for the pictures, like the dramatic text itself, not only describes the visual or performative aspect of the scenes but sometimes *narrates*, as when, in *White-haired Girl* (Appendix A: Scene Eight) we are 'told' that the peasants, 'burning with hatred, tell their stories one at a time' in the presence of Xi'er,¹³ or when, in Scene One of *Red Detachment*, (Appendix C) Hong Changqing points out the road to revolution 'with deep proletarian feeling'.¹⁴ A striking example of this kind of literary augmentation occurs in Scene Two of this text, where we read that the coconut milk is 'infused with deep class feeling'.¹⁵ In effect, detailed 'literary' texts, such as those of *Red Detachment* and *White-haired Girl*

encourage us to 'read' performance, suggesting that the overall imagery or sign system of the models was always conceptualised as a matter of language, or narrative, or even as a kind of dramatic literature, as much as anything else.

Theatre is by no means the same thing as dramatic literature, and the models have much in common with another performance art, an 'oral' form of narration which relies on a complex association with both literature and drama - storytelling. In the case of the models, the script is less 'literary' than other forms of drama, more like a full set of cues for telling a traditional tale-type than literature in the sense associated with high levels of literacy or literary 'taste' as in the *kunqu* plays. As will become apparent in the final chapter, the models constituted a special kind of story-theatre which may be best understood as part of the 'sign system', 'central imagery' or 'semiological system'¹⁶ of the Cultural Revolution itself.

Discourse and the Models

'Discourse' may mean a great number of things, depending on its context in linguistics, literature, sociology or philosophy,¹⁷ but in many studies of

Chinese political culture, such as Apter and Saich's *Revolutionary Discourse*, it has strong Foucauldian, post-structuralist associations with power and ideology. For the purposes of this chapter however, and the final discussion of the Cultural Revolution, the term is used as Barthes used it in *Mythologies*; that is, in the narratological¹⁸ sense, in that phase of his work which has been described by Terry Eagleton as a 'Marxist form of structuralist semiotics'.¹⁹

In order to clarify the literary, and narratological, rather than linguistic or sociological, connotations of the term 'discourse', and in order to avoid highly specialised terminology, I will briefly pursue a clear, plain-language distinction made by Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova in her analysis of the Lu Xun short story *Medicine*.²⁰ Dolezevola-Velingerova uses the term 'composition' to denote the outcome of authorial intent and strategy, (as in 'plot', or 'discourse') and distinguishes this from 'disposition' which denotes the chronological sequence of events, that is, unprocessed 'story', which, in narratological terms, is the order in which a reader or audience might rearrange these events, or for that matter, in which they might be rearranged for the reader of a synopsis.²¹ This distinction, however expressed, is vital not only to understanding authorial intent

evident in the model genre, but in a sense the authorial intent - the 'literary' strategy - which directed the Cultural Revolution itself.

I will illustrate the distinction with reference to a recent synopsis of *Red Lantern*, in order to provide a specific, unambiguous example of the difference between story and discourse. Above all, what I am seeking to show in contrasting this with the appended 'composition' of *Red Lantern* (Appendix B) and in my description (Chapter 4) and analysis (Chapter 7) of the revolutionary display surrounding the emergence of the models, is not just story but *discourse*, the design or presentation, which ultimately determines what kind of story is being told and how its creators mean it to be interpreted. Post-structuralist cultural theory would lead us to believe that meaning is essentially unstable and that interpretation is a form of negotiation between 'reader' and 'text', but my point here is that for Chinese of the Cultural Revolution, whatever private reaction they may have had to the models, their discourse constituted a collective 'device to think with' rather than a form of negotiation.

The following lines are from an English-language synopsis provided, along with full script in English

and Chinese, for a 1992 digital remastering of a 1968
`historical' recording of *The Legend of Red Lantern*.²²

The story of the Red Lantern happened in an enemy-occupied area during the War of Resistance against Japan. Li Yu-he, a Chinese Communist Party member working as a railway switchman, was a veteran underground worker. *The three generations of Granny Li, Li Yu-he and Tie-mei were actually no blood relations. They became one family after their own people were killed in the February 7 strike.*

In the appended script there is no mention of the nature of the relationships until well into Scene 5, and indeed it is crucial to the impact of the work that this is not revealed until the `family' bonds are well-established and are seen to have been forged in the kind of class struggle and suffering that transcends mere kinship. Similarly, Ellen Judd, in a summary scenario of *Red Lantern*, signals the nature of the family relationships with quotation marks, thus, in her second paragraph - `The center of action then shifts to Li Yuhe's home. He tells his "mother" that the code is safely hidden and departs, leaving her alone with his teenage "daughter", Tiemei'. This is

`story' in the narratological sense, which is to be contrasted with `plot', `discourse' or `presentation'.

If the nature of the family were to be revealed at the outset, or at some other point, such as a climactic revelation in the final scene, *Red Lantern*, while remaining the same `story' would yield quite a different `discourse'. The models do not in general represent that use of plot in which a natural or chronological order of events is re-arranged for suspense or surprise, rather their sequence of events is determined by the nature of the discourse and `revelation' has a very specific function within that discourse, as we shall see.

A further difference between text which represents `story' and text which represents `discourse', also illustrated by the difference between the synopsis above and the appended version of *Red Lantern*, is evident in my deliberate attempt to indicate the deployment of repetition. Discourse, which in terms of both traditional Chinese theatre and the models is as much a form of pedagogy as of dramaturgy,²³ is a means of blazing a permanent trail into the mind of an audience, strategically deploying repetition much as traditional storytelling (or traditional education) does. Any attempt to represent that discourse

necessitates inclusion of certain apparently redundant directions ('strong class feeling makes her forget her painful injuries and rush to her cellmates')²⁴ and literary asides ('her hatred is like an endless ocean and an uncontrollable fire'),²⁵ which are not only indicators for performance but elements of narrative design - powerful elements which, in the case of the models, impose themselves irresistibly on form and medium. These 'literary' features of narrative are strongly maintained even in the ballets. The dance-drama form provides limited opportunities for lyrical or descriptive elements to be conveyed by dialogue, but on the other hand it does provide stagecraft and performance directions which, in the form of the books, are not just interpreted by performers but read by their audiences.

Narrative and Theatre in the Models

In many ways the ballets, especially *White-haired Girl*, constitute a problematic but illustrative example of the revolutionary modern genre, not least in being derived from a highly mannered form of foreign courtly dance, rather than directly from the Beijing opera tradition of multi-faceted, popular theatre related to traditional storytelling and literature. Nevertheless, as suggested above, they

provide a striking example of the maintenance of mythic-romantic tale type in those models which make the least use of 'narrative' in its most basic sense as 'a set of events...recounted in a process of narration'.²⁶

The term 'narrative' sometimes lends itself to complex discussion - as in the narrative theory of the Russian formalists or French narratologists - but it will suffice to say here that it is possible to envision a variety of processes of narration, from the performance art of the market storyteller to the invisible 'omniscient' authorial voice in a novel, which orders 'story' into 'plot'. In drama and dance those elements which are performed or enacted are commonly regarded as non-narrative elements, along with the more descriptive or lyrical aspects of dramatic literature,²⁷ but it would be a mistake to make too much of such distinctions. For example, there are many examples of oral performance which do not convey a narrative - not least in Chinese tradition,²⁸ while, on the other hand, it is possible to detect elements of narrative in works in which the stories do not depend chiefly upon a 'telling' but are dramatised or performed.²⁹

Structured story, rather than the process of narration, is the aspect of narrative we are concerned with in examining these texts. Without seeking to locate the works in a systematic typology of the kind associated with European structuralism, or to reduce their stories to a 'morphology' or 'grammar',³⁰ one may regard the models as a distinct genre of narrative with common themes, motifs and approaches to characterisation, organised in a pattern recognisable to a mass Chinese audience. Indeed Mao's preoccupation, discussed in the previous chapter, with a clearly defined class of protagonists and a distinct set of events - workers, peasants and soldiers rather than emperors, beauties and ghosts; revolutionary rather than dynastic history - fits quite comfortably into Chinese literary tradition, in which stories (that is, 'talks'³¹ or 'a form of speech' embodying a certain content and structure) were classified according to characteristic subjects and types (for example, 'beauties and spirits', 'combat and warfare', and 'histories').³²

It was, after all, these narratives which gave rise, in the Song Dynasty, to the novel and the drama. Religion, history, legend and folklore contributed popular tales which found their way between marketplace, novel and stage, never straying

permanently beyond the reach of an audience who could not read literature and depended for entertainment on strong storytelling. Lin Yutang described the traditional theatre thus in 1961, underlining the continuities between past and present and the common, popular sources of narrative:

The opera incorporates themes from many of the most famous incidents of history, wars, separations and reunion, true friendship and marital fidelity. The theme of *Lady Precious Stream* for instance basically resembles that of Ulysses and Penelope: a great warrior returning after years of absence, tests the fidelity of his wife. It also absorbed popular comedies from folklore.³³

The model works are legitimate heirs to this tradition and might well be visualised as part of the history of Chinese storytelling not so much as 'myth', which can be a confusing term in both English and Chinese, as 'revolutionary modern talks' or 'worker-peasant-soldier talks' - essentially as a genre of narrative about modern proletarian heroes, wedded to a form of historiographical, hagiographic and mythological national theatre. However, for the purposes of convenient international terminology, all the

theatrical models, including the ballets, might be regarded as a genre of narrative which fits the title 'proletarian myth'.

The model scripts demonstrate consistency of theme, characterisation and motif across the considerable diversity of form represented by opera and ballet. Almost all of the eight best-known works are embedded in 'actual' historical events (during war) but while the Anti-Japanese and Civil War periods seem to me to be the natural and most successful setting for the model works, *On the Docks* and *Song of the Dragon River* are not confined to a different category in having fictional-contemporary, rather than 'historical', settings. On the contrary, all the works may be considered proletarian myths, which, as I argue in the final chapter, represent history of a kind - and all of them, including those which are not listed among the 'eight greats',³⁴ depict a certain kind of 'history' or 'truth' in various artistic forms along a continuum from 'historicity' to 'fictionality'.³⁵ But before turning to detailed consideration of the relationship between history, myth and characterisation in the models I will make some further comment on aspects of narrative related to theatre and semiotics in order to provide a foundation

for final discussion of the relationship between theatre and politics in the Cultural Revolution.

Semiotics, Narrative and Theatre

The approach adopted in this thesis, with its emphasis on the semiotics of narrative, differs from that of studies which emphasise the semiotics of the Chinese stage, that is the comprehensive system of theatre signs and symbols, including aural and gestural elements.³⁶ This distinction, and its implications for semiotics, is explored by Keir Elam in the process of defining the terms 'theatre' and 'drama':

'Theatre' is taken to refer...to the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it. By 'drama', on the other hand, is meant that mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular ('dramatic') conventions. The epithet 'theatrical', then is limited to what takes place between and among performers and spectators, while the epithet 'dramatic' indicates the network of factors relating to the represented fiction.³⁷

As has already been illustrated by the conduct of the campaign to reform Beijing opera, this 'theatrical' or 'performance' transaction may well take place in a far broader social context than the theatre itself, and we will return to a notion of 'social semiotics' in the final chapter. In the meantime, Elam identifies two areas of concern for semioticians of drama and theatre arising from the distinction between drama and theatre; one in which the focus is on 'performance text' and one in which the focus is on 'dramatic text'.³⁸ Dramatic text, 'dramatic literary text',³⁹ or as it is more frequently termed, 'dramatic literature', defined by Raymond Williams as 'the controlled product of an author' and 'the finalized organization of words',⁴⁰ is the primary focus of this study, rather than performance text, which is more akin to the traditional performers' prompt books in that, while it is written, it is essentially the result of practice, and of knowledge produced *in* the theatre, not just *for* the theatre.⁴¹

The elements of myth referred to, in various sections of this thesis, as 'semiology' (after Barthes) consist of 'signs' that are derived from both semantic and non-semantic kinds of symbolism - from both text and performance. Dialogue, (or, as in the case of *White-*

haired Girl, the song lyrics) may act as a vehicle for 'intelligence'⁴² essential to narrative, while other symbols may convey information of a non-semantic nature which contributes just as surely to tale type. For example, Denton's article provides penetrating insight into the way semiotics - colours, cosmological symbolism, movement and music - are assimilated from tradition into the performance of *Taking Tiger Mountain*⁴³ and contribute to its impact as myth of the kind suggested by Barthes.

When it comes to consideration of the semiotics of narrative however, some elaboration is necessary. That part of narrative which is frequently thought of in lay terms as 'the story' consists largely of intelligence conveyed by language, but the pattern of the narrative which contains that language, including its deployment of certain themes or motifs, may be a symbol in itself (or, as Barthes says, a 'mode of signification', a 'form') as well as a storytelling style or device. In other words, what might appear to be no more than the remnants of traditional storytelling conventions (such as mnemonic devices, tri-episodic organisation,⁴⁴ recurrent motifs and 'linear' or 'circular' narrative pattern in European folk tales)⁴⁵ may themselves convey levels of meaning in the semiological sense, and these may well be

preserved or even enhanced in some way when these tales are transferred to the stage.

In some ways the mythic-romantic representation of history provides the most 'linear' of all narrative structures, as will be demonstrated below in the very simple temporal organisation of the models, and this becomes an integral part of the 'second-order semiological system' which Barthes describes not simply as language but as 'metalanguage', part of a sign system which is not, strictly speaking, confined to semantic elements, but which derives from the pattern or organisation of a story.⁴⁶

As Martin Esslin has written in his study of drama and symbolism:

...the stage provides us with the most complex interaction of the maximum number of semiotic systems: a concurrence of all possible codes of meaning; the ideogrammatic representation of human beings by human beings; the system of index signs represented by gesture and facial expression, movement and stillness; a multitude of symptomatic signs; the whole complicated semiotic code of costume; the sign system of painting (representational as well as abstract,

in the shape of light and colour coding); the rich semiotic system of musical sound as well as natural sound effects; the consciously or unconsciously perceived symbolic system of mythical and dream symbolism; and, to crown it all, the full impact of the most highly developed semiotic system of all, that of language in its fullest and most complex form, richer than merely read or printed texts by the addition of the full panoply of voice timbre, pitch, rhythm and expressive nuance; and language, to boot, not only of a factual discursive type, but also charged with all the emotional overtones of poetic form, rhythm, imagery and expressive force.⁴⁷

Esslin is quoted here at some length because he has provided an impressively exhaustive list of the variety of symbols that may be contained on the stage, while making it perfectly clear that language - and by implication narrative - is a crucial part of the repertoire of theatre symbolism. When it comes to narrative, which includes both a text and a structure, language is symbolic in both form and content. Anna Tavis, writing on fairy tales from a semiotic perspective, notes that Vladimir Propp, in *Morphology of the Folktale*, inspired semioticians to search for a

`grammar' of plots and their functions in myths and folktales, principles of organisation of traditional texts which are analogous to the rules of natural languages.⁴⁸

It is precisely this kind of narrative structure, or system of rules, which relieves the models of the need to be creative, in the sense of literary originality, and places them in the arena of traditional sign and symbol. Located thus they do not need to contain any information unfamiliar to the members of a particular culture, in the view of the Soviet semiotician Juri Lotman.⁴⁹ The model works, no matter how innovative, and no matter how much they dealt with the *subject* of revolution, were not part of a radical experimental theatre. They were, on the contrary, as narrative at least, perfectly familiar to the members of this particular culture since they were conveyed by a very familiar discourse.

Discourse and Myth

What *kind* of discourse was this? What kind of narrative? It may be that what we are looking at, despite the campaign to elevate simple reforms to the level of an aesthetic or creative method, is no more than a variable mixture of folklore, tradition and

innovation. What is there about the revolutionary modern genre that might warrant a generic title such as 'proletarian mythology'? As Barthes would have it:

It can be seen that to purport to discriminate between mythical objects according to their substance would be entirely illusory: since myth is a type of speech everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse.⁵⁰

One should add however, that not all that is conveyed by a discourse is myth. There does need to be a certain kind of 'substance', although this may vary from the religious beliefs of ancient civilisations to the demise of twentieth century pop stars and princesses. The discussion in the next chapter may serve to demonstrate that the models are conveyed by a very particular discourse and as such are indeed that 'type of speech' which might reasonably be termed myth. It is not my intention however, to argue that the models ought to be known by the title of myth primarily because of their 'substance' or even their structure, which might be described in a variety of ways, as we shall see in the next chapter. It is their *function* as a discourse which is most important here, and this operates on several levels. The narrative design inherent in the model texts is only part of a

multi-layered discourse which conveys the story of China's revolution and transforms it into myth. I stress this point before going on to detailed consideration of narrative design because the models, if considered only as the product of a certain integration of realism and romanticism, and as a combination of tale-type, motifs and characterisation embodied in the distinctive form of a reformed Beijing opera, might well warrant the title of 'proletarian myth', but they would appear to be different from 'bourgeois' or 'non-proletarian' or 'non-revolutionary' myths in a limited way - principally as a result of their subject matter or intended audience. They do however, take on a quite distinctive identity as a form of *proletarian* myth when one considers the relationship between the genre and the Chinese revolutionary narrative embodied in the conduct and display of the Cultural Revolution. I will pursue the idea of myth further in the next chapter in order to clarify this relationship.

Notes

¹ For instance, Roger Howard, [*Contemporary Chinese Theatre* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 84], says there were 148 alterations to the printed English translation between the 1967 version and the model 1969 script of *Taking Tiger Mountain*. As for the whole enterprise of creating and perfecting the model genre it was truly an enormous investment of resources and energy - perhaps the most pervasive, controlled and thorough-going attempt at theatrical reform of the twentieth century. See Elizabeth Wichmann, 'Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Beijing Opera Performance,' *The Drama Review*, Vol.34, No.1, Spring 1990, 146-178.

² See for example, Judd, 'Dramas of Passion,' 'Summary Scenario: *The Red Lantern*,' 280-282.

³ 'Tale type' is intended in the sense employed by Antii Arne and Stith Thompson, trans. and revised Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folk Tale* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum, Fennica, 1961), which is essentially the combination of certain themes, symbols, devices or motifs in a recognisable story pattern or design. 'Motif' is as defined by Baldick, *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 142, that is 'a situation, incident, idea, image, or character-type that is found in many different literary works, folktales, or myths; or any element of a work that is elaborated into a more general theme...'

⁴ Dolby, *History of Chinese Drama*, 255-256.

⁵ Judd, 279.

⁶ Ibid., 266.

⁷ I am reminded of many very famous movie posters which represent the 'revolutionary' ethos of an era, and find their way into millions of bedrooms, such as the 'Captain America' poster for the film *Easy Rider*.

⁸ Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse*. 79.

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ See for example *Literacies and Learners. Current Perspectives*, Rod Campbell and David Green eds., (Prentice Hall, 2000), viii.

¹¹ For example, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, July 1970 script, has a 'domestic' version published in September 1970 by Renmin chubanshe and a Foreign Languages Press (English) version published in 1971. These are very similar, apart from the 'glossy' nature of the FLP version, but the essential features, including photographs and score are included in both. In fact, if anything there is more picture-story material included with the Chinese version.

¹² Only one of the texts beneath the final picture plates in *The China Ballet Troupe's Red Detachment of Women*, May 1970 Script (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), could be seen as performing solely the function of caption ('Soldiers of the Women's Company perform rifle drill'), suggesting that they are intended as reinforcement of the narrative rather than a souvenir of performance. On the other hand, some of the

published versions, e.g. *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. (July 1970 script), Revised Collectively by the 'Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy' Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), do not feature this kind of integrated text-pictorial but contain only sequential scenes with brief captions. In one way or another however, these publications have gathered a range of book-like features which take them beyond the realm of 'textual traces of the occasion of performance'.

¹³ Scene 8 in the Shanghai Dance School's *Baimao nu*, (1971), *Ba da yangbanxi*, 411-431.

¹⁴ This 'book' version of the May 1970 script for *Red Detachment* (above), contains an expansive 'literary' embellishment of the dance scenes, and both the main text (page 11) and the text for the final colour plates contain the information about 'deep proletarian feeling' (plate 4). The Chinese text for *Hongse niangzijun* may be found in *Ba da yangbanxi*, (197-226). This phrase appears on page 203.

¹⁵ *Red Detachment*, 22; *Ba da yangbanxi*, 207.

¹⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 135. This page contains a most stimulating discussion of discourse, semiology and myth, and their relationship with literature.

¹⁷ See for example Baldick, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* Oxford, 59, under the entries 'discours' and 'discourse', for a brief discussion of its various connotations.

¹⁸ There are a number of related cultural theories which bear on this discussion and my use of 'discourse' here, but I will illustrate my meaning as far as possible with reference to the texts of the models themselves. The following may be useful for further exploration: For a useful, brief introductory definition of narratology see Baldick, *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 146; for discussion of Barthes's relationship with 'intellectual fashions' from the 1950s to the 1970s, and particularly with structuralism and post-structuralism, see Stuart Sim, ed., *The A-Z Guide to Modern Literary and Cultural Theorists* (London: Prentice Hall, 1995), 25-30. For discussion of antecedent narrative theory of the Russian Formalists, especially on 'story' and 'plot' see Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 351-352; and for further discussion of key elements of narratology and structuralism, including definitions of 'story' and 'plot' as 'discourse' see Michael Payne, ed., *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* (Blackwell Publishers, 1997) 359-361 and 510-512. For links between structuralism, semiotics and narratology, see *Ibid.*, 513-517 and for succinct background on the narratologists (including Barthes) and structuralism, see also 'Structuralism and Semiotics,' in Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 91-126, esp. 103-106. For some interesting general discussion of theories of narrative see Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83-94.

¹⁹ See Roland Barthes, 'The Tasks of Brechtian Criticism,' in Eagleton and Milne, eds., *Marxist Literary Theory*, 136-140.

²⁰ Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova, 'Lu Xun's "Medicine"' in Merle Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1977), 222. It is interesting to note that Lu Xun's stories, despite his modernity, and well-known dislike of Beijing opera, have been described as 'story-theatre' (William Lyell, 'The Short Story Theater of Lu Hsun,' [Ph.D dissertation, University of Chicago, 1971], quoted in Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Lu Xun and His Legacy* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985]), 11. This story was actually performed as opera by the Chamber Made Opera at Melbourne's Theatreworks, November/December 1997 (see Trevor Hay, 'Sympathetic Magic from the Chamber Made Opera, *RealTime* 23, Feb-March 1998, 40).

²¹ See Payne, *Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, note 17 (above).

²² *The Legend of Red Lantern* (2 discs), a Digitally Remastered Historical Recording (1968) Zhongguo jingjutuan (China Beijing Opera Troupe), Hugo Productions (HK) Ltd. 1992, sleeve notes p14. (My emphasis.)

²³ The moral-political nature of traditional Chinese theatre is oft-remarked but I am thinking here of Jiang Qing's own striking statement, 'theatres are places in which to educate people'.

²⁴ *Red Detachment*, Prologue.

²⁵ *Baimao nu*, Scene 3.

²⁶ Baldick, *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 145-146.

²⁷ Ibid. Baldick puts it this way: 'Narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions of qualities, states, or situations and also from dramatic enactments of events (although a dramatic work may also include narrative speeches)'.

²⁸ See Tao-Ching Hsu, *The Chinese Conception of Theatre*, 229, on 'humorous talks' and 'improvisations', i.e. deliberate misreadings of well-known books and improvisations of poems, jokes etc., on subjects chosen by the audience.

²⁹ Hsu (Ibid., 230), provides an illuminating description of the way storytellers actually enacted roles and, from ancient times, blurred distinctions between drama and storytelling, as in the story of Wu Song and the tiger.

³⁰ Vladimir Propp, often thought of as a founder of structuralism, devised a 'morphology' of the folktale, (see Sim, ed., *The A-Z Guide*, 327-330). His best-known work is *The Morphology of the Folktale*, trans Laurence Scott (University of Texas Press, American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series Vol. 9, 1958). Umberto Eco is also described as having a 'Propp-like approach', (see Sim, *The A-Z Guide*, 118).

³¹ See Tao-Ching Hsu, *The Chinese Conception of Theatre*, Note 8, 228 for the use of 'shuo'.

³² Ibid., 229.

³³ Lin Yutang, *Imperial Peking. Seven Centuries of China* (London: Elek Books Limited, 1961), 155.

³⁴ Membership of the 'eight great' is still a little problematic it seems, in that the 1995 treasury *Ba da yangbanxi* installs *Longjiang song* in place of the symphony of *Shajiabang* in order to make up the numbers.

³⁵ See Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality. The Chinese Poetics of Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). The author draws attention to the long tradition in which Chinese theories of narrative were essentially theories associated with models of *historical* narrative.

³⁶ Notably Denton, in 'Model Drama as Myth,' and, in a more descriptive sense, Pan Xiaofeng, *The Stagecraft of Peking Opera* (Beijing: New World Press, 1995).

³⁷ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2,3.

³⁹ Kruger *The National Stage*, 29.

⁴⁰ Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, (Penguin, 1964), 16.

⁴¹ Elam uses this distinction. See *The Semiotics of Theatre*, 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴³ Denton, 'Model Drama as Myth'.

⁴⁴ See Richard M. Dorson, ed., *Folklore and Folklife. An Introduction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 61.

⁴⁵ For description of linear and circular narrative patterns, see Moss and Scott, *The Family of Stories*, 1-5.

⁴⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 114-115.

⁴⁷ Martin Esslin, 'The stage. Reality, symbol, metaphor,' in James Redmond, ed., *Drama and Symbolism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 10.

⁴⁸ Anna Tavis, 'Fairy Tales from a Semiotic Perspective,' in Ruth B. Bottigheimer, ed., *Fairy Tales and Society. Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 195-202.

⁴⁹ Tavis, in the article cited above, refers to the work of Juri Lotman on semiotic concepts in literature. In particular she is referring to *The Structure of Artistic Text*, Ronald Vroon and Gail Vroon, trans. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977).

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 109.

Chapter 6: Naming the Discourse: Realism, Romanticism and the Strange Case of the White-haired Girl

What is a Myth?

G.S.Kirk asked this question in 1974, in his lucid and eminently sensible study of Greek myths. He ventured the opinion that no 'monolithic' theory of the nature of myth, no 'quasi-scientific', psychological or anthropological approach to mythology is likely to succeed in establishing an exclusive category which separates myths from all other kinds of stories. As he put it:

Myths are a vague and uncertain category, and one man's myth is another man's legend, or saga, or folktale, or oral tradition. What we need to decide is the sort of thing to which the term 'a myth' can be applied by general consent; and that will entail separating off instances for which those other terms are preferable descriptions. What remains may turn out to be a class of phenomena grouped rather formally, for

example by the possession of a particular narrative quality or a tendency to be expressed on special kinds of occasion, rather than by something essential to the concept of myth itself.¹

A quick example will serve to illustrate the reasonableness of this and highlight the fact that two terms used in this chapter - 'hero tale' and 'myth' - defy attempts at clear and consistent distinctions. One attempt I have encountered is based on the idea that 'unlike myths, which deal with an entire world from its creation to its destruction, hero tales are limited to the lifetimes of specific heroes and the areas they influence'.² Oddly enough this distinction is made during a discussion of hero tales which begins with a reference to the work of Joseph Campbell, but it seems clear that Campbell's usage of the term in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* encompasses not just a life-story but a 'mythological adventure' or 'rite of passage' ('separation-initiation-return') and that this tale of adventure can hardly be separated out from myth itself.³ The authors of this distinction have succeeded only in describing a particular *kind* of myth or hero tale, or, to put it another way, that

portion of a myth which relates to the hero's life-story. Campbell himself describes the 'path' of the hero's adventure, making it perfectly clear that a hero's tale (for example that of Prometheus, Jason or Sakyamuni) is in fact his people's myth:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder, fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons upon his fellow man.⁴

And of course, as might be expected after such a description of 'supernatural wonder' and 'fabulous forces', the hero tale is also a folktale. Kirk provides some interesting comment on the overlap between folktale and myth:

'Folktale' qualities are found in some myths, 'mythic' qualities in some folktales. Greek myths like those about Perseus are replete with folktale elements: the dangerous quest for the Gorgon's head, the villainous king who promotes it, the magical instruments that help the hero,

the tricks by which he deceives the old women and avoids Medusa's fatal glance. Even the Oedipus story is developed around incidents that are redolent of folktale: the child's discovery by the herdsman, his growing up in ignorance of his true parents, the tensions over kinship and marriage.⁵

There is an obvious resonance here between the models and traditional tales which in the European tradition are usually described as myths: Xi'er as the wild woman of the woods discovered by the PLA (see Appendix A) and Tiemei as the child in ignorance of her true parents, for whom the red lantern is the mark of destiny and of true kinship (see Appendix B). However, as suggested in the last chapter, I am not treating the model works as mythology⁶ entirely by dint of their subject matter, their particular approach to realism and romanticism, their form of heroic characterisation, or even the overall impact of their composition.

In the final analysis it is as a result of the *combination* of the 'particular narrative quality' of the models and the fact that they were 'expressed on a

special kind of occasion', namely the campaign to reform Beijing opera itself, that I have chosen to describe them as a form of proletarian myth. The discourse which conveyed the revolutionary narrative embodied in the models did not consist entirely of what was created for or performed as *theatre*, and indeed, there are some model works in which the composition seems ill-designed to achieve the impact of myth, despite the obvious presence of major elements of the revolutionary narrative.

I freely acknowledge that some works, such as *White-haired Girl*, *Red Lantern* and *Red Detachment* demonstrate the kind of structure I have associated with myth better than others, such as *On the Docks*. I also acknowledge that some of the works might possibly be categorised in a variety of ways, (even, in the case of *White-haired Girl*, as a kind of fairy tale),⁷ and that they do not all conform to a precise and exclusive blueprint. *On the Docks*,⁸ for example, contains the same major ingredients as the other models, including references to the bitter suffering of the past - and the resultant proletarian purity and steadfastness of those who remember it, compared to the vacillation of a young docker who is a senior

secondary graduate - and the transformational power of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party in pointing the way to a new world order, in which Chinese dockers and African peasants are united in proletarian solidarity. In spite of this, the end result does not seem as convincing as a form of myth as the others.

There are a number of reasons for this, including the subject matter itself, which is hard to take as seriously as the others (a spilled sack of wheat is contaminated with fibreglass and loaded for Africa as the result of sabotage perpetrated by a revisionist dispatcher - See Appendix D). For the purpose of this analysis of proletarian myth however, I would simply argue that while *On the Docks* is conveyed by a weaker discourse than any of the other 'greats', this is less important than the fact that it is included within that body of works which contributed to the greater discourse of the Cultural Revolution.

In the next chapter I will concentrate on 'occasion' and on the continuum of myth-like qualities evident in various manifestations of the models from the Cultural Revolution to the present day, but for the moment I will stay with the idea of 'narrative quality' and try

to highlight its unmistakable presence among the rich idiosyncracies of *White-haired Girl*, which, more than any other model work, (even *Taking Tiger Mountain*), is like a great block of folklore from which the proletarian myth has been roughly hewn.

White-haired Girl: Motif and Tale Type

With its antecedent forms in *yangge*⁹ and opera¹⁰ the ballet *White-haired Girl* has evolved from a strong concoction of legend, history and folklore and provides us, as a result, with the most fertile ground of all for discussion of the models as mythology. Given Jiang Qing's views on folklore in general, and her attitudes to 'ghost stories' in particular¹¹ it is ironic that one of the models - in fact arguably the most successful of them all - had such a long and distinguished pedigree as a folktale. One cannot even argue that the element of superstition had been neutralised to Jiang Qing's satisfaction by the 1945 opera, with its explicit message that the old society changed men into ghosts while the new society changes ghosts into men, since this very line was eradicated in the ballet version while the opera, once regarded

as a classic of socialist realism, was denounced as a 'poisonous weed'.¹² But what is it about the ballet's treatment of an old theme that makes it a model rather than a menace?

There is after all, as Martin Ebon has noted, a nagging link between Xi'er, the white-haired wraith of the modern story, and 'the hungry ghost', a figure of popular ritual and belief.¹³ Xi'er's brush with the numinous does present an obvious problem for the genre, and there is little doubt that much of her appeal is derived from sources which are neither revolutionary nor modern, but nevertheless she provides a key to understanding the fine distinctions between 'truth' and 'reality' (and between 'history' and fantasy) inherent in the models' particular combination of realism and romanticism.

As already noted, Jiang Qing regarded the depiction of supernatural beings as irreconcilable even with the critical assimilation of past into present, almost as if their appearance on stage might lead to continued belief in their existence as 'real' entities - despite a strong tendency in traditional Chinese theatre to remind audiences of the distinction between the stage

and life itself.¹⁴ Indeed the supernatural content of some modern plays appears to be the 'first thing that struck her' after her investigations into literature and art.¹⁵ The psychic ambiguity of Xi'er, flitting as she does between temporal and supernatural abodes, makes her seem an unlikely choice as a model for the transformation of 'real' proletarian lives, but Jiang Qing herself may have been irresistibly drawn to this story for reasons which can only be inferred from biography and which are themselves becoming part of a certain kind of 'folklore'.¹⁶

On the one hand, Xi'er is clearly a product of feudal superstition, and more particularly of the ignorance, helplessness and deluded fatalism of the masses in the old society. She, or her ghostly persona, must therefore be exposed in some way as 'not real', that is a product of ignorance and fear. On the other hand, she is a symbol of the two most 'real' fears in Chinese culture - starvation and rootlessness - and the force of these realities is conveyed by the irresistible metaphor of the Chinese ghost, stranded from the world of humanity.¹⁷ These two conditions are also principal sources of class hatred, and the burning desire for revenge, which together form the

major dynamic for the ballet. She, as representative of all who know these fears, must grapple with them through a three-stage linear journey to maturation as a revolutionary - intense, but blind suffering during the unfolding of class struggle; the revelation of truth via Chairman Mao and the Party, and the transformation of individual hatred into communal action and a new life.

This journey is also undertaken by Wu Qinghua in *Red Detachment* (see Appendix C) and, in a collective sense by Granny Li, Li Yuhe and Tiemei, three generations of the great proletarian family in *Red Lantern*. Granny and Li Yuhe have suffered in the past, while Tiemei is herself the survivor of a great wrong who experiences revelation through the medium of the red lantern, a symbol of communist consanguinity and a talisman which, at crucial moments, can be used to tell true from false revolutionaries. The sequence of the 'journey' is not always exactly the same in the models,¹⁸ but the process of suffering-revelation-transformation is a principal motif in the model narrative and is strongly reminiscent of traditional tales, although in some, such as *Taking Tiger Mountain* or *Shajiabang*, 'transformation' consists of a

spectacular and complete military victory and might perhaps be conceptualised as 'triumph against overwhelming odds'.

In the non-wartime, 'non-historical' work *Song of the Dragon River*, the transformation is effected over the physical environment and a good harvest is won in a drought year as a result of the application of Mao Thought - the battle is against nature.¹⁹ *Song of the Dragon River* and *On the Docks* adopt an approach to heroism and hardship that is different from the others; suffering is more generalised as part of class struggle and the heroes are not themselves exposed to a personal ordeal. In fact, while both of these contain essential ingredients of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism, their particular combination results in rather bland fare by comparison with the more traditional tale-telling - not because the protagonists are more contemporary, but because they are less 'revolutionary' in the heroic sense.

Mao Thought and Motif in the Cultural Revolution

One might describe the three-stage journey to revolutionary enlightenment as a recurring motif for

the conduct of the Cultural Revolution itself. For example, the slogan 'struggle - criticism - transformation',²⁰ might well be regarded as a Marxist-Maoist philosophical schema, or a reflection of Mao's epistemology, in which knowledge results from active participation in the experience of production, and in the experience of changing the relations of production through class struggle.²¹ But in the context of both the campaign to reform Beijing opera and the reformed works themselves it mimics this schema in serving as a motif for a certain narrative, for Mao's own kind of 'storytelling'.²² As Roger Howard has noted, the rejection of the old opera and the triumphant emergence of the eight famous models at the celebrations for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' was itself described as an example of 'struggle-criticism-transformation', in which revolutionaries had struggled against and overthrown bourgeois academic opera authorities, criticised and repudiated their thinking and transformed Beijing opera to correspond with a socialist economic base.²³

The three-part slogan is frequently employed in critical commentary of the Cultural Revolution in

eulogising such works as *Taking Tiger Mountain* ²⁴ but in a more directly 'dramatic' or dramaturgical sense, Mao Thought is itself often the 'device' which carries the day in the struggle between revolutionaries and revisionists - the 'intense struggle against the counter-revolutionary revisionist black line on literature and art'.²⁵ It is revealing to look at the kind of language (or 'script', perhaps), employed by the "Shachiapang" Revolutionary Fighting Regiment of the No. 1 Peking Opera Company of Peking', in describing this struggle:

At the crucial moment of the fierce struggle Comrade Chiang Ching brought to the theatrical workers the golden treasury of revolution, the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*... Workers, peasants and soldiers can never co-exist on the socialist stage with emperors, princes, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties. It is either one or the other, for this is a life and death struggle. Such fallacies as 'walking on two legs', and 'staging all three kinds of opera at the same time' must be exploded. Emperors, princes and their cohorts must be driven off the stage and replaced by workers,

peasants and soldiers... In order to smash the schemes of capitalist restoration, we must foster the fearless spirit of 'pulling out the tiger's teeth', and open fire on the grim fortress.²⁶

There is a similar kind of 'script' employed in relation to the revision of *Taking Tiger Mountain*:

At a critical moment in the struggle, on July 17, 1964, Chairman Mao, the red sun that shines most brightly in our hearts, saw a performance of *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold*. This gave the revolutionary comrades of the Peking Opera Theatre of Shanghai great encouragement and strength - so much so that they could not sleep the whole night. Stimulated by the great leader's profound solicitude for the revolution of Peking opera, they read the *Talks* again and again. They pledged to Chairman Mao that they would go forward in the direction in literature and art pointed out by him and would fight all the difficulties and obstacles in carrying the revolution of Peking opera through to the end.

They were acutely aware that the struggle between the two lines on literature and art around the presentation of *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold* was a struggle between supporting and opposing Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, between the restoration of capitalism and the proletariat's opposition to it.²⁷

The 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' is described elsewhere as a 'monster-detector'²⁸ (in the same sense as the red lantern is a counter-revolutionary 'monster-detector' perhaps) and the instructions of December 1963 and June 1964 are described as 'kindling the torch of revolution in literature and art'.²⁹ The theatrical-pedagogical use of such key speeches and statements evident in Jiang Qing's campaign may be seen as a further manifestation of the Maoist narrative habit of mind, in which political philosophy and literary 'creative method' are integrated - in which ideas (the 'script') can determine events ('history') in real life much as they do on the stage or in fictional representation. This essentially authorial mentality is usually described as a 'voluntarist' interpretation of dialectical materialism, in which ideas are regarded not just as

the product of social practice in a Marxist sense but as an irresistible force in *transforming* material circumstances. In this sense then, the model theatre was not just the dramatic depiction of a kind of Maoist 'reality' or 'history', it was part of a political and ideological movement to *make* history.

Wichmann has made the point that in traditional Chinese theatre the script is primarily a 'vehicle for performance'³⁰ and, despite the emphasis placed on the perfection of texts, the models are faithful to this tradition in a certain fundamental respect. In the Cultural Revolution we see Mao Thought, embodied in the models, becoming a kind of script, and vehicle, for the 'performance' of revolution. In this sense, the proletarian myth was intended not only to 'explain' the history of the world, but to help create it. In the language of Barthes, myth is 'a type of speech chosen by history',³¹ and in the Cultural Revolution, myth was the form of narrative chosen by revolutionary 'history'. To put it another way, as John Fitzgerald has done in the context of the Nationalist revolutionary movement, the world of facts can always be transformed when it 'awakes' to the

world of ideas³² - to the world of art and literature, and in this case to the world of drama.

White-haired Girl and the Proletarian Tale Type

However, to return to *White-haired Girl*, for Mao's worldview to be properly implemented without being contaminated by the undesirable side of folklore, the element of superstition had to be absorbed into revolutionary realism, permitting the emergence of a new, materialist, proletarian myth. Xi'er is reminiscent of 'vagabond spirits' - restless, unclaimed and potentially dangerous spirits who must be propitiated in order to allow homage to respectable ancestors to proceed undisturbed - but these spirits are often wronged and neglected; 'unrelated' as Francis Hsu puts it.³³

Rootlessness, an unclaimed, unenlightened and outcast state, rather than an evil or corrupt nature, is often the source of the spirits' dissatisfaction and it is this circumstance which makes the transition from folk superstition and historically-based legend to communist myth much smoother than it might otherwise have been in *White-Haired Girl*. The mischief-making

ghost is not an erratic supernatural menace, but a wronged outcast from an evil class-based society - she can be transformed from a wayward individual spirit consumed by the unharnessed energy of her hatred into a potential revolutionary. But the nature of the wrong done to Xi'er poses another problem. In the opera her father commits suicide and she is raped, made pregnant and abandoned to the prospect of prostitution. These are commonplace wrongs, taken straight out of the harsh reality of feudal peasant life, but they are at odds with the genre's approach to romantic characterisation, which must tread a careful path between reclamation of a vagabond, injured outcast and maintenance of a whole, unviolated heroine.

Heroic Characterisation and the Models

The composite of heroic figures in the models, that is of 'positive characters' who range from merely positive to 'principal heroic' figures, as in the theory of the 'three prominences', provides at least some flexibility of characterisation, by permitting imperfections (such as Wu Qinghua's lack of discipline) without creating undesirable 'middle characters' of the kind denounced by Jiang Qing or

straying into the kind of psychological complexity associated with bourgeois realism.³⁴

The models' calibrated approach to heroism (in particular the obligatory necessity to leave room for a 'principal' and inviolate hero who represents an abstract perfection), sometimes lends itself to confusion about who is in fact, if not in theory, the principal hero of the piece. In the case of Xi'er, this may actually distract us from the triumph of her personal journey to reclamation. What remains is still a powerful discourse but a great deal of its power is derived not from Wang Dachun's role as saviour and righter of wrongs but from the structured opposites³⁵ of ordinary and extraordinary in the heroine, a dualism which has so much in common with both traditional story and contemporary popular mythology, fictional and non-fictional. Xi'er's appeal is that she is 'wild', 'natural', that she has reverted to an animal state, and is temporarily inhuman, but she must ultimately be reclaimed by the society of proletarians.

In her uncivilised state she is also reminiscent of the elemental goodness of those folk figures who are

not corrupted by worldly sophistication and are in fact attuned to the kingdom of nature. It is interesting to note the way ordinariness, naturalness, or sometimes 'the common touch', in great heroes and legendary idols sometimes manifests itself in a lack of intellectual sophistication. Sporting 'legends' are frequently 'ordinary' almost to the point of being incompetent in their daily lives, but are elevated to greatness by a gift, a great strength or skill, and a kind of innate goodness which enables them to triumph in hopelessly uneven contests against brute force or evil, or diabolical cunning, and to win a place forever in the hearts of the people.³⁶

Other heroic figures in the models, such as Wu Qinghua, rely for their ordinariness or naturalness upon a combination of proletarian status and imperfect discipline or understanding - or their incomplete 'tempering' as communists, as in the case of Lei Kang, leader of the self-defence force in *Azalea Mountain*, who, in his burning desire for revenge, fails to heed the Party representative, whose own grievances are subordinated to iron discipline in order to achieve ultimate collective victory.³⁷

Wu Qinghua's proletarian status is never in doubt but she must first make a mistake, stray from the path and then find her way to the truth through discipline, commitment and emulation of the principal heroic figure, who goes to his martyrdom in the flames without a backward glance. Tiemie, on the other hand, does not make any particular mistake or betray any particular flaw, and she is certainly the right raw material (from birth), but she is untried and can only become truly heroic after the revelation of the truth about her family - not that they are not her 'real' family, but that they are *real* communists. Only then can she truly know what it means, in the words of the opera's most popular aria, to 'be like them' a status she achieves in a manner reminiscent of the use of magic in folklore, (that is through the talisman of the red lantern, the significance of which can only be seen by true revolutionaries).

It is notable that the intensity of the emotional bond assumed between members of a 'real' biological family is not so much rejected in *Red Lantern* as reversed - the bond is now produced by suffering, a common hatred and a burning desire for revenge, rather than by love. And of course this is perfectly consistent with Mao's

view of the social limitations not just of family love, but of the 'love of humanity' which he criticised during the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum'.³⁸ As Richard Strassberg has noted, 'personal conversion' is a primary motif in the revolutionary modern works, and that conversion is effected by 'a comprehensive sense of hostility' engendered in a proletariat which has 'a vivid memory of the injustices inflicted by its class enemies, and a consuming passion to gain total revenge against them'.³⁹

In Mao's view, love of humanity had never been possible since the division of society into classes, and revolutionaries had to suffer and struggle to eradicate these divisions before any such love might emerge in the future. As Tiemei says, in what might be an allusion to either her environment or her destiny, 'only now do I realise that I was born and bred in wind and rain.' In fact, this particular strife motif, reminiscent of both folklore and the familiar socialist metaphor for character-building, (that is, the development of character as a process akin to being 'tempered' in the furnace of class struggle), is, in the case of *Red Lantern*, rather suggestive of the 'blood-line theory'⁴⁰ which gained prominence in

the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. The lantern motif in this work is curiously ambiguous in that while it is the hallmark of pure proletarian quality, acquired after a long process of suffering in the furnace of class struggle, the suffering is not done principally by Tiemei herself, who is merely the offspring of those who have. We are told as soon as Tiemei makes her entrance in Scene One that she is the fruit of a 'different tree' and the flower of a 'different seed',⁴¹ suggesting that she has almost *inherited* her proletarian qualities and is, as in the title of an antecedent work, a 'successor'⁴² to the revolution, born with the sign of the red lantern upon her.

The principal heroic figures like Yang Zirong in *Taking Tiger Mountain* or Hong Changqing in *Red Detachment* are not particularly interesting in themselves, but their combination with other figures creates the composite heroic effect which ranges from the completely larger-than-life superhuman proletarian hero, who represents a collective destiny, to the more human figure who is making the journey to communist beatitude and is often associated in some way with the symbolism of a special individual destiny or fate,

such as white hair, or red lantern. In this way the models, while seriously weakened in some respects by the rigidity of 'the three prominences', manage to preserve a kind of proletarian romanticism that is consistent with myth.

The Models and Bourgeois Entertainment

The dualism of male and female heroism in *Red Detachment* and *White-haired Girl* - in which positive female characters often have the 'best parts'⁴³ regardless of their actual position on the three-part hero scale - poses another problem for proletarian romanticism. The female protagonists are sometimes rather like 'leading ladies' in the Hollywood sense, in that they complement male heroes who effect rescue from oppression or point the way to revolution. *White-haired Girl* comes perilously close to being 'romantic' in the popular Western sense of an anticipated amorous relationship, or 'unresolved sexual tension' between her and Wang Dachun.⁴⁴ Indeed, to borrow from Barthes once again, there is a hint of 'jouissance''⁴⁵ in the tale, an irrepressible sexual power, reminiscent of classical Western mythology and its popular contemporary heirs, not only in the latent

relationship between Xi'er and Dachun, but in the lithe animal movement, Peter Pan-like costume and mysterious atavism of the cave-dwelling 'goddess'.⁴⁶

Chinese who experienced the Cultural Revolution sometimes report that it was very common for young men to keep a picture of Xi'er, torn from a magazine, in their wallets⁴⁷ and it may be that she had taken such a hold in the public mind, and in Jiang Qing's own imagination, that she could not easily be excluded from the Cultural Revolution repertoire whatever 'private' emotions she engendered. And whatever bourgeois romantic associations *White-haired Girl* triggered in the minds of its audiences, Jiang Qing did not relent with her authoritative - if not entirely convincing - distinctions between bourgeois and proletarian art and symbolism. For example, she denounced fauvism (*yeshoupai* - 'the wild animal school') in a sweeping condemnation of Western art and literature, suggesting that instinctive or naturalistic art was, in her mind, an obsession of turn-of-the-century European decadents. The diverse assortment of arts associated with 'moribund capitalism' suggests that she saw little to choose between elite forms of art based on spontaneous-

subjective expression, primitivism, and wild, uncivilised, or 'obscene' forms of popular entertainment:

Capitalism has already had several centuries, but its output of so-called 'classics' is negligible. The capitalists have produced a few works modelled on these 'classics', but they are stereotyped, unappealing and therefore in total decline. On the other hand, there is a great torrent of mind-numbing poison, like rock-and-roll, jazz, strip-tease, impressionism, symbolism, abstract art, fauvism, modernism, and so on, endlessly. In a word, there is enough corruption and obscenity to poison and paralyse the people.⁴⁸

One suspects, however, that the very appeal of *White-haired Girl* is enhanced not only by bourgeois and 'private' forms of romanticism but by the age-old fascination with reversion and atavism, with themes drawn from lycanthropy, transmigration and the dark animistic side of folklore - a fascination which manifests itself in popular modern hero tales and in the cave-dwelling protagonists of comic strips and

movies.⁴⁹ Such symbolism might easily have been attributed to unsavoury social and psychological sources had Jiang Qing been inclined to condemn it but the story of Xi'er obviously had redeeming ideological merit as well as durable popularity and so emerged from Jiang Qing's custody as a form of dance drama in which 'proletarian myth' and 'revolutionary realism' are merged. Indeed, both *White-haired Girl* and *Taking Tiger Mountain* managed to retain some of the physical vigour and emotional appeal of the folktale despite censorship, as in the case of Yang Zirong, whose rough folkloric edges were systematically smoothed out.⁵⁰ One suspects that the works might actually have been more entertaining, and no less proletarian, although slightly less mythic, had the censor's hand been stayed.

Myth and Legend

While contemporary life and class struggle is depicted and the ballet itself is a 'modern' form in China, *White-haired Girl* borrows more heavily than the others from a legendary theme. In fact, in this mixture of familiar tale and strange form, there is a hybrid traditional-modern effect reminiscent of such

experiments as that of Guo Moruo in *Qu Yuan*, in which a modern form (*huaaju*), is combined with history and legend.⁵¹ However, the overall impact of the revolutionary modern ballet appears to be closer to myth-history, in the sense intended by Barthes, than legend.

Interestingly, a distinction is often made between myth and legend on precisely these grounds - that myths are not based on historical events or personages while legends (for example, the Arthurian legends or the tales of Zhuge Liang) appear to have some historical basis.⁵² However, in transforming the girl-ghost of legend into an 'ordinary', mortal, and contemporary figure whose story explains the nature of the past itself and demonstrates the process of historical development, the authors have elevated the tale to the realm of myth, although the source of the very special appeal of *White-haired Girl* may well lie in legend.

The notion of 'legend', while absorbed, with 'myth', into the generic Chinese title of 'traditional tales' (*chuanshuo*), provides us, in English at least, with an interesting half-way point between romance and myth.

There is no great evidence that subtleties of nomenclature bothered the creators of the models, but a little speculation about what the models might have been called may serve to underline their essential nature. For example, *White-Haired Girl* is, as discussed below, the product of both legend and myth. The figure of Xi'er is legendary in that she is 'traditional', 'handed-down' and has her origins in temporal reality, but she is 'larger-than-life', and symbolic of cosmic forces in a manner that is suggestive of myth. To which category of literature does her tale belong if we disregard the convenient catch-all title of a 'revolutionary modern work'? In fact, she is the embodiment of that particular kind of contemporary 'history' which Barthes characterises as mythology, in that she is 'real' (that is, she or someone like her 'existed') but not so linked with the past that her actual identity as an individual is ever an issue of contention or importance.

She is a tragic and heroic figure, temporarily isolated somewhere between the hostile elements of the world and the community of suffering humanity, and in this role she leads us to the more conventional descriptions of mythology, since her story, and those

of others in the revolutionary pantheon, remind us of 'pre-literate humanity's philosophy, religion, history, and class structure'.⁵³ It is unlikely that Jiang Qing or Yao Wenyuan, or any one else who wanted to stress the essential reality of the stories as a depiction of class struggle, would have been content with a term like 'myth', which in Chinese (*shenhua*) as well as in English, has connotations of fantasy and the supernatural. As Robert Graves once archly observed, 'mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true',⁵⁴ but Chinese audiences were not accorded the privilege of public disbelief.

Sadly, while an open critical exploration of the concept of world mythology - not to mention folklore - might have produced a clearer idea of the contribution of the revolutionary modern works to proletarian dramatic literature, the very forces which created the communist myth would, like their religious counterparts elsewhere, have prohibited its definition as such. This may be one reason why the architects of the models were content to live with an under-theorised approach to literary method. It may well be

that they actually conceived the works specifically as a form of myth, as the descendant of a popular kind of folklore, legend or mythologised history that had long held sway in the Beijing opera, but were simply unable to say so - and did not really need to. Instead, the standard revolutionary appraisal of both authorship teams and performance troupes emphasised the principal dynamic of the works - the role of class feeling in the process of transformation from spontaneous resistance generated by hatred to conscious, organised struggle.⁵⁵

In standard definitions of folklore, it is customary to place those tales which 'do not include magical forces or supernatural beings' or which 'present characters in a world operating according to the laws of nature and science' as a form of realism and those which suspend these laws as a form of fantasy.⁵⁶ The problem presented by fantasy as an ingredient in proletarian literature has been discussed in an earlier chapter, and it is important to stress here that the 'laws' enshrined in the models, as opposed to some aspects of characterisation, are essentially a form of realism rather than of fantasy. No matter how 'unrealistic' they may be in their use of superhuman

heroes and typical characterisation, they do not combine fantasy with realism; rather they underpin romance with contemporary history and political philosophy in their narrative structure, that is, in their depiction of a linear journey toward the maturation of society through class struggle.⁵⁷

Despite its link with legendary, supernatural themes *White-haired Girl* may well be the most powerful of all the models in its climactic representation of the heroic journey alluded to above, that is, in its depiction of transformation, not from ghost to human (as in the opera) but from isolated victim of injustice to empowered member of the proletariat. In this context it is important that she is 'discovered' by Marxist-Leninist historical materialists, who are not frightened and do not for a moment believe she is a ghost, and that her white hair is seen to be the result of a lack of salt and sunshine. And of course her emergence into dazzling sunlight represents the revelation of Mao and of the improvement of peasant life under his leadership of the Communist Party - 'We see the sun and the sun is Mao Zedong'.

The links between myth, legend and history in *White-haired Girl* are reinforced by the claim that such a woman did exist in the Border Region in 1940. In fact, the historical side of the myth is reinforced not only by the reputed existence of an actual white-haired girl, but by the common experience of peasants in North China in the 1940s. William Hinton, in his documentary *Fanshen*, describes a modern opera called *Red Leaf River*, a performance of which he witnessed in a Shanxi village in 1948. The opera has striking parallels with *White-haired Girl* and it is extremely interesting to note the impact it has on the audience, and the essential fidelity to peasant life of the circumstances it depicts:

Red Leaf River, the name of a village as well as a stream, told the story of Old Wang and his neighbours, poor peasants who had gone to the mountains to reclaim waste land...After years of root grubbing and terrace building, they created a habitable settlement only to learn that their wild mountain was now claimed by a landlord. He demanded heavy rents and feudal exactions but very cleverly allowed his agent to pressure the tenants for payment...Old Wang, deperately in

debt, thought if he could only get past the agent and speak to the landlord, he might win some relief. He shed these illusions quickly enough when the landlord raped his daughter-in-law, outlawed his son for throwing a rock through the mansion window, and destroyed Wang's hut. The grief-stricken daughter-in-law committed suicide. Wang's son ran further into the mountains to join the Red partisans.⁵⁸

Before going on to the content of the next act, in which the PLA comes to the village and helps to organise the Peasant's League around a poor peasant county cadre, and in which the landlord is finally dragged before a mass meeting of villagers, Hinton gives a profoundly moving description of the audience reaction:

As the tragedy of this poor peasant's family unfolded, the women around me wept openly and unashamedly. On every side, as I turned to look, tears were coursing down their faces. No one sobbed, no one cried out, but all wept together in silence. The agony on the stage seemed to have unlocked a thousand painful memories, a

bottomless reservoir of suffering that no one could control...It was as if the attention of the whole universe were focused on that small space. And, in the very centre, a young girl, her song more a wail, more a sob than a song, spread her arms wide in despair and asked, 'Why? Why? Why?'...The girl flung herself into the Red Leaf River. Abruptly the music stopped. The silence on the stage was broken only by the chirping of a cricket. At that moment I became aware of a new quality in the reaction of the audience. Men were weeping, and I along with them.

It is most interesting to note however, that in spite of the dramatic power of this performance, the peasants actually preferred the second act. They did not enjoy the depiction of suffering in the first act because it was too close to the reality of their own lives, but they certainly liked the happy ending. This seems to be much the kind of response elicited from peasant audiences by *White-haired Girl*, and in fact, Hinton's observation that his villagers were disappointed at the way the landlord escaped being beaten to death by being handed over to the People's

Court, is also reminiscent of reactions to the finale of *White-haired Girl*, according to accounts I have heard myself. It seems that, in this respect at least, Jiang Qing was concerned about the spectacle of violence, and went out of her way to avoid even that kind of grisly, poetic justice meted out so satisfyingly to evil-doers in fairy tales.⁵⁹

White-haired Girl as 'Fairy Tale'.

In the use of magic/supernatural motifs, in the relationship between Xi'er and Dachun, and in the 'happy ending' of her return to the village, *White-haired Girl* has much in common with universal folk tales of the 'fairy tale' variety, and, indeed, there have been Marxist aestheticians who eagerly awaited the creation of a proletarian fairy tale - and in the combination of folk origin and pedagogic thrust, fairy tales meet the essential requirements of revolutionary romanticism from Gorky to Mao, as noted above. Some analysis of this kind, such as that quoted in the article 'Marxists and the Illumination of Folk and Fairy Tales', by Jack Zipes,⁶⁰ is worth including here, along with other perspectives, as a precursor to

discussion of the relationship between myth, legend and fairy tale in *White-haired Girl*.

The German Marxist Edwin Hoernle, writing in 1923, about the same time as Gorky was rehearsing his views on revolutionary romanticism and mythic-folkloric themes, said:

The proletariat will create the new fairy tales in which workers' struggles, their lives, and their ideas are reflected and correspond to the degree which (*sic*) they demonstrate how they can continually become human, and how they can build up new educational societies in place of the old decrepit ones.⁶¹

It may be worth subjecting the models, and *White-haired Girl* in particular, to a brief test as 'fairy tales', in order to clarify whether the models are better described thus, or at least as a kind of folktale, than as 'myth'. In happy endings (of a collective and unfinished kind as will be suggested below), in mnemonic predictability, linear narrative, typified characterisation and recurring themes and motifs, the models have much in common with the oral

tradition of storytelling - in particular the kind of folk tales usually described in popular terminology as 'fairy tales'.⁶²

It is not difficult to think of a traditional Chinese equivalent, and, indeed, there have been major studies on the subject - notably by Wolfram Eberhard - employing an index of tale types and motifs after Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson.⁶³ Northrop Frye, who wrote entertainingly on the relationship between folklore and literature,⁶⁴ postulates a kind of 'wish fulfilment dream' in romances of the happy-ending variety, and it is notable that, in the models, the happy ending is not predominantly personal or individual, as in the triumph of a hero, or the rescue of a heroine, with the aid of some magic or supernatural agency from the Aarne-Thompson typology, but a collective kind of wish-fulfilment based on knowledge of class struggle and a superhuman (but not supernatural) form of temporal, political and communal action. Thus, in *Red Lantern*, both Li Yuhe and Granny are executed by the villains, blunting any personalised sense of rescue, preservation or triumph over the villains, and in *Red Detachment* Hong Changqing is allowed to perish in the flames without a

satisfying personal resolution to his incipient relationship with Wu Qinghua.

As Roger Sale notes, 'the triumph of our deepest wishes over our deepest fears is the great traditional motive of fairy tales'.⁶⁵ But these fears, however universal, are essentially personal, a matter of individual emotional development of the kind suggested by Bruno Bettelheim in his celebrated psychoanalytical work *The Uses of Enchantment*.⁶⁶ Myth on the other hand, is a kind of collective, symbolic history of humanity which works in a rather more realistic way in leaving our fears unvanquished. Like the plagues let loose by Pandora, they must be confronted with hope alone and they must be confronted continually. The evils of the old society as identified in the models are also left abroad - in the sense that there is a need for continuous revolution - and they are to be kept at bay only by means of sharply focused and effectively harnessed class hatred.

Another German Marxist, Walter Benjamin, put the distinction between myth and fairy tale this way:

'And they lived happily ever after,' says the fairy tale. The fairy tale which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller, and will continue to be, is the teller of fairy tales. Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. The need was the need created by the myth. The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which the myth had placed upon its chest.⁶⁷

That nightmare is to some extent, history itself, and *White-Haired Girl* does shake it off, steering a course somewhere between myth and fairy tale towards a glorious future for the proletariat. However, while there is a kind of 'happy ending' in the models, the genre has more in common with the universal, expository and explanatory character of myth than with the sometimes perverse, cruel, irrational and even 'immoral' world of fairy tales with their intensely personal responses to human wishes and fears.⁶⁸

Constantine Georgiou, in an attempt to define fairy tales, makes this distinction:

They are unlike most other folk literature in that they neither explain natural phenomena, as do the myths, nor present exaggerations of what human beings would like to be, as do many hero and superhero tales; nor do they show social behaviour through story characters, as do many 'earthy' folk tales.⁶⁹

One might always quarrel with the exclusiveness of this sort of view, and the diverse varieties of heroic characterisation and 'exaggeration' to be found in those folktales which are commonly referred to as fairy tales tends to militate against definition. There is a more interesting argument about the distinction between fairy tale and myth however, and this is vividly expressed by Marie-Louise von Franz, in her Jungian interpretation of fairy tales.⁷⁰ She notes that many folklorists regard fairy tales as a 'degenerate' form of myth, the 'remnants' of more profound mythology, while she herself regards fairy tales as basic to myth, the 'sea' from which the 'waves' of saga and myth arise. More interestingly,

she argues that mythology is a polished and refined product of this great folk source, and that in the form of mythology the raw psychic material of folk tales takes on a national, historical form.⁷¹ Many of the models, *White-Haired Girl* in particular, appear to fit this notion of powerful, primitive symbolism moulded into an explanatory, revelatory and historical-national tale.

Overall, it is perhaps Joseph Campbell's psychoanalytical insight which gives the clearest pointer to the essential difference between fairy tale and myth for the purposes of this critique, a difference which turns on characterisation - and on politics:

Typically, the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph, and the hero of the myth a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph. Whereas the former - the youngest or despised child who becomes the master of extraordinary powers - prevails over his personal oppressors, the latter brings back from his adventure the means for the regeneration of his society as a whole.⁷²

The Proletarian Hero

Xi'er has something in common with the 'despised child' who develops extraordinary powers (and it is in her numinous aspect, striking fear into the hearts of Huang Shiren and Mu Renzhi, that she appears to me to achieve the greatest psychic impact) but she does not, like many of the protagonists in hero tales, have an extraordinary childhood, nor is she marked in some way by the hand of fate with the signs and portents of superhuman or supernatural greatness. She does however, have a good deal in common with the hero so beloved of modern popular culture, the warrior or champion who is at one point 'down and out' and has to achieve his or her ultimate glory from a position which seems hopeless, usually by drawing on a great inner strength (often fuelled by hatred) and harnessing it to discipline and skill acquired in some testing and hostile environment.⁷³ In her case, the strength is her burning hatred and the discipline and skill are imparted by the Party, but she must remain *ordinary*, in the sense of proletarian, a member of the masses, and, whatever towering strength she achieves in her wrath, she must remain (like any other

proletarian) an ordinary person tempered in the fires of class struggle.

Indeed, as Qin Zhaoyang said of the operatic Xi'er in 1956, she is 'an ordinary girl with an unusual destiny'⁷⁴ and it is this form of characterisation, somewhere between folktale and myth, that of the 'ordinary' or proletarian revolutionary hero triumphing over her oppressors during the unfolding of class struggle (a 'world-historical' rather than merely a personal triumph) which is reminiscent of mythic narrative. She does not so much bring 'the means of regeneration' to her people in the sense of Prometheus bringing fire to humanity - or Fushi in the case of Chinese mythology⁷⁵ - as provide a heroic, inspirational example of an ordinary person's suffering, revelation and regeneration, and of reclamation from the wilderness of political ignorance and reinstatement in a new family of militant, proletarian humanity. Or, one might simply say that the *means* of regeneration is revealed through her. As the villagers sing, before Zhang Ershen moves them to bitter hatred with the cherished memory of Xi'er, 'The Army and the people are one family. We must unite, for only then can we transform our lives'.

What is evident then, regardless of how we conceptualise the model works, or ultimately what name we give them, is that Kirk's 'narrative quality' of myth is imparted by a form of heroic characterisation that is perhaps less emotionally satisfying than many folktales, including the popular antecedents of *White-haired Girl* and *Red Lantern*, and less mysterious, more temporal, than much of what is normally regarded as 'mythology' but is nevertheless 'larger-than-life' and conveyed by a discourse that is essentially romantic rather than realistic, despite its proletarian protagonists and contained verisimilitude. All that remains is to consider that other aspect which Kirk identified as essential to myth - its relationship with 'occasion'. It is this relationship which informs both the campaign to reform Beijing opera as chronicled in Chapter 4 and the particular genre of theatre which emerged from that campaign, as discussed in these last two chapters. And in focusing, in the final chapter, on the Cultural Revolution as a kind of performance, as a 'sign system', we will be looking at an occasion in which the 'form of speech chosen by history' was indeed the proletarian myth.

Notes

¹ G.S.Kirk *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Penguin, 1974), 21. (My emphasis.)

² Moss and Scott, *The Family of Stories*, 166.

³ Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 30.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 24.

⁶ Kirk, (13-29), discusses the various ways the term 'mythology' is used, from 'the study of myths' to a particular kind of story called a myth. In describing the models interchangeably as 'myth' and 'mythology' I am in general referring to a body, or genre, of myths, rather than the field of study.

⁷ There may be some difficulty about using the term 'fairy tale' rather than 'folktale', but it does help to clarify some elements of tale type, and, as we shall see later, some theorists actually refer to the 'proletarian fairy tale'.

⁸ The 'On the Docks' Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai (January 1972 Script), *On the Docks* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1973).

⁹ See Holm, *Art and Ideology*, 320-323.

¹⁰ Li Mowry, *Yang-pan Hsi*, 45-50.

¹¹ 'Jiang Qing tongzhi zai wenyijie dahuishang,' in *Wuchan jieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 226.

¹² For discussion of this in the context of revolutionary realism see Li Mowry, *Yang-pan Hsi*, 42-59.

¹³ Ebon, ed., *Five Communist Plays*, 29.

¹⁴ See Tao-ching Hsu, *The Chinese Conception of the Theatre*, 99.

¹⁵ See note 10 above.

¹⁶ Witke's biography mentions a diverse collection of what might be termed 'motifs' in the story of Jiang Qing's life, including her mother's shadowy and tragic fate, her quest for personal emancipation, and her hatred of dogs. All of these and more are reflected in Anchee Min's intriguing autobiographical novel, *Red Azalea. Life and Love in China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993), in which the protagonist (ostensibly Anchee Min herself) has an affair with 'one of Madame Mao's leading emissaries, a man known only as the Supervisor', a person who shares a stunning array of Jiang Qing's own characteristics, including perhaps an attraction to the theme, not unknown in Chinese literary tradition, as well as in her beloved 1933 MGM film *Queen Christina*, of a woman disguising herself as a man. Among the revelations about 'the Supervisor' in *Red Azalea* there is a story about 'his' abused mother whose body is gnawed by wolves after being interred outside the city walls, in accordance with the custom for disposing of the remains of prostitutes. See Trevor Hay, 'Playing up with Madame Mao,' *RealTime*, No 1, 1994, 16. It is fascinating, in the context of

this present study, to read the opening sentence of *Red Azalea* - 'I was raised on the teachings of Mao and the operas of Madam Mao, Comrade Jiang Ching'.

¹⁷ The Chinese stage marks its ghosts with unmistakably alien features or attributes, such as disordered make-up or the ability to breathe fire. Whatever happens during the play they remain outcasts from the world of human beings. See Siu Wang-ngai with Peter Lovrick, *Chinese Opera. Images and Stories* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 189.

¹⁸ For example, in *Red Lantern*, the depiction of suffering is combined with revelation of the past.

¹⁹ See notes at the beginning of Scenes 5 and 7 of the January 1972 script for *Song of the Dragon River* by the 'Song of the Dragon River' Group of Shanghai, (Peking: FLP, 1972), 20, ('man's will conquers heaven'); and 28, ('a tense battle against nature is in progress').

²⁰ As explained in the editorial in *Hongqi* No. 9, 1967, this is an abbreviation of a statement of the 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' ('The Sixteen Points', adopted August 8, 1966) and means 'to struggle against and overthrow those persons in authority taking the capitalist road, to criticise and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic 'authorities' and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other

exploiting classes, and to transform education, literature and art and all other parts of the superstructure which do not correspond with the socialist economic base. (See *Chinese Literature*, 10, 1967, 20).

²¹ See R.F. Price, *Education in Modern China* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 12-16.

²² Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse*, 69.

²³ Roger Howard, *Contemporary Chinese Theatre* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 92.

²⁴ See Hung Ping, 'A Fine Peking Opera on a Revolutionary Modern Theme' in *Chinese Literature*, No. 8, 1967, 193.

²⁵ The 'Shachiabang' Revolutionary Fighting Regiment of the No. 1 Peking Opera Company of Peking, 'Mao Tse-tung's Thought Illuminates the Road of Revolution of Peking Opera,' in Chiang Ching, *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 46.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

²⁷ Kuang Hsin, 'Mao Tse-tung's Thought Guides us in the Great Revolution of Peking Opera. A discussion on the Experience in Script-writing and Rehearsing by the Opera Group of *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold* of the Peking Opera Theatre of Shanghai,' in *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁹ The Revolutionary Committee of the China Peking Opera Theatre, 'Let Heroic Images of the Proletariat Shine on the Peking Opera Stage!' in *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, 37.

³⁰ Wichmann, 'Traditional Theater in Contemporary China,' 188.

³¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 110.

³² John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 339.

³³ See Francis L.K. Hsu, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality and Personal Mobility in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 195-196.

³⁴ The 'broad path of realism', 'middle characters', and 'truthful writing' were among a number of literary theories and viewpoints attacked by Jiang Qing in her February 1966 speech. She cites the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' as a refutation of most of these ideas, although in his speeches Mao spoke not so much of the role of 'middle characters' as of the need to counter a tendency in bourgeois writers to favour the 'dark' side and neglect the 'bright' side of life. A comprehensive note on 'middle characters' is attached to the text of Jiang Qing's speech as reprinted in *Renmin Ribao* of May 29, 1967, in which the theory is characterised as an attempt, in the early 1960s, by Zhou Yang's deputy, Shao Quanlin, to 'slander' peasants as people vacillating between socialism and capitalism. Culture Minister Yu Huiyong seized upon the 'middle characters' debate to represent it as a metaphor for China's class system, in which 'middle characters' were the middle class. See Richard Kraus, 'Arts Policies of the Cultural

Revolution: The Rise and Fall of Culture Minister Yu Huiyong,' in Joseph, Wong and Zweig, eds., *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, 219-241.

³⁵ The dualism in folk tales is remarked upon by Claude Lévi-Strauss in 'The structural study of myth,' *Structural Anthropology* (Garden City: Basic Books, 1957). This is often to do with a home-wilderness dichotomy and is perfectly consistent with the principal motif of *White-haired Girl*.

³⁶ I am reminded of the characterisation of many heroes, who have a kind of inspirational 'simplicity' and 'goodness'. It is interesting to note the way this works in the current Barthes-like popular 'mythology' concerning Muhamad Ali, who has been described as 'an unambiguous hero' (see Jake Niall, 'Sport 6', *The Age*, 30 December 1999). One might also see strong echoes of myth, legend and fairy tale in the ingenuous and unsophisticated good nature of popular 'icons' and hero-figures, fictional and otherwise, from Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana to Forrest Gump and John Coffey.

³⁷ Peking Opera Troupe of Peking, *Azalea Mountain*, September 1973 script (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976)

³⁸ Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, Vol.III, 91.

³⁹ Richard E. Strassberg, Introduction to John D. Mitchell, ed., *The Red Pear Garden. Three Great Dramas of Revolutionary China*, (Boston: David R. Godine, 1973), 33.

⁴⁰ For some description of this at work in the factional fighting among Red Guard units see Trevor Hay, *Tartar City Woman* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990), 74 and 111-112.

⁴¹ See Li's song in Scene One of my attached Text Two.

⁴² *The Red Lantern* originated in a screenplay (*Zi you houlai ren* - Certainly there will be successors), and an earlier Beijing opera version called *Geming zi you houlai ren* (The revolution certainly has successors) performed at the 1964 Festival. See Li Mowry, *Yang-Pan Hsi*, 60 and Note 1, Chapter 5, 113.

⁴³ It is interesting to note that the main heroic figure is a woman in *Shajiabang*, *Ode to Dragon River*, *On the Docks*, and *Azalea Mountain* (see Ellen Judd, 'Dramas of passion,' 271).

⁴⁴ This phrase ('U.R.S.T.') is much used at present to describe the element of anticipation exploited in television series - the relationship must not be brought to fruition, for the sake of an ongoing story, but if the incipient courtship is too prolonged the 'tension' is destroyed.

⁴⁵ Barthes meant that aesthetics could be analogous to physical pleasure, and that heightened pleasure in text occurred when something unexpected happens, just as when 'a garment gapes' to reveal naked flesh. (See Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 714.)

⁴⁶ See Ebon, 'Ghost, Goddess, Revolutionary,' in *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, 29-35.

⁴⁷ For example Fang Xiangshu, my co-author for *East Wind, West Wind* (Penguin Books: 1992) and *Black Ice* (Indra Publishing, 1997).

⁴⁸ *Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming shengli*, 228.

⁴⁹ For example, *Batman*, *The Phantom*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, etc.

⁵⁰ *Taking Tiger Mountain* contains a scene reminiscent of the passage in the popular Ming novel *Water Margin*, in which the drunken hero Wu Song, who is prone to singing obscene ditties, single-handedly kills a tiger on a mountainside. See McDougall and Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*, 352-354.

⁵¹ See Wagner, *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama*, 7,14.

⁵² See Baldick, *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 121.

⁵³ Egoff, *Worlds Within*, 3.

⁵⁴ Robert Graves, Introduction to *The Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (London: Chancellor Press, 1994), v.

⁵⁵ See for example the Shanghai School of Dance, in *Chinese Literature* No. 4 1969, quoted in Ebon, *Five Chinese Communist Plays*, 32-35. This commentary on *White-haired Girl* emphasises class feeling and the transformation of Xi'er's behaviour from spontaneous resistance to conscious struggle.

⁵⁶ Moss and Scott, *The Family of Stories*, 2.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 18. This is really the Joseph Campbell hypothesis, as explicated in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

⁵⁸ William Hinton, *Fanshen. A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (Penguin, 1972), 371-372.

⁵⁹ Notable examples are the Grimms' version of Cinderella, ('Ashiepattle') in which the two false sisters have their eyes pecked out by pigeons, and 'Snowwhite', in which the wicked stepmother has to dance herself to death in red hot slippers. See Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Selected Tales* (Penguin Books, 1982).

⁶⁰ Jack Zipes, 'Marxists and the Illumination of Folk and Fairy Tales,' in Bottigheimer, ed., *Fairy Tales and Society*, 237-243. Zipes also writes of the relationship between fairy tale and myth in *Fairytales as Myth/Myth as Fairytales* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994).

⁶¹ 'Die Arbeit in den kommunistischen Kindergruppen,' in Dieter Richter, ed., *Das politische Kinderbuch* (Darmstadt:Luchterhand, 1973), 220, quoted in Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales and Society*, 237.

⁶² There is some confusion here in the use of the term 'shenhua' in Chinese, since this sometimes refers to a collection of mythology derived from the *Shan hai jing*, in which the creation of the world is described. Other tales, such as those collected by Wolfram Eberhard, [*Fairy Tales of China* (University of Chicago Press, 1965)], have more in common with

European fairy tales that are concerned with wish fulfilment rather than cosmological explanation. For the purposes of this discussion 'fairy tales' is used in the popular Western sense, bearing in mind that such tales are also part of the Chinese folk tradition.

⁶³ The work of Antii Aarne and Stith Thompson, (*The Types of the Folktale*), is drawn upon in Eberhard's study (see note 58 above).

⁶⁴ Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto: CBC, 1963).

⁶⁵ Roger Sale, *Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E.B. White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 51.

⁶⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). Bettelheim discusses the significance of fairy tales in addressing the emotional needs of children, helping them to adjust to the 'reality' of the world, including the existence of evil.

⁶⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (Harcourt, Brace and World 1968), 102, quoted by Zipes in Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales and Society*, 238.

⁶⁸ Many writers have commented on the violence and basic injustice of fairy tales in which people are sometimes rewarded for insensitive and selfish behaviour - for example Rumpelstiltskin is treated very badly, as is the frog in 'The Frog King' (see Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Selected Tales*).

⁶⁹ Constantine Georgiou, *Children and their Literature*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 187.

⁷⁰ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1996).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁷² Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 37-38.

⁷³ One could go on at length here to name a variety of such movie heroes as Ben-Hur and Rambo, who acquire their great strength, and ultimate triumph, from banishment and persecution.

⁷⁴ See Ho Chih (Qin Zhaoyang), 'The Broad Road of Realism,' in Hualing Nieh, ed., *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, 137.

⁷⁵ Fushi, companion of Nuwa, (the *Shan hai jing* tales), a great benefactor of humanity in bestowing knowledge about how to produce and use fire, and also about music, making nets and ropes and divination.

Chapter 7: The Models as Ideology, Theatre and Semiotics

The Red Sun in Our Hearts: Re-stating the problem

In November 1999, during a brief trip in search of remnants of the model works in China, I took a walk through the Forbidden City, accompanied almost every step of the way by importunate souvenir sellers, many of whom wanted to sell paraphernalia relating not to the Imperial Palace, but to Mao Zedong - a fascinating process of association in itself. I was taken with one item, which might richly merit the description 'high kitsch', but still, quite literally, emitted an interesting aura - a cigarette lighter emblazoned with the face of Mao, radiating spokes of sunlight from a red background, just as it used to on the jacket of 'The Little Red Book', (also on sale, at high prices, in markets). I mentioned this to colleagues in the arts, who were captivated by the image and the idea, although I think we were looking at different things.

What they saw was the immediate irony of a god-like figure reduced to commercial object; what I saw, as an integral part of the irony, was the preservation of the essential idea of Mao. This was not just the usual souvenir reproduction, with image unrelated to medium (like pictures of the British royal family stamped

incongruously on tea towels and other domestic items unlikely to figure large in their daily lives), but a reproduction of *meaning*, Mao still giving us a light, Mao the red sun in our pockets, if not in our hearts, and ready to break into a bar or two of *The East is Red* at the flick of a thumb.

The face of Mao is also a source of power and protection, a talisman for taxi-drivers, who hang his image over their rear vision mirrors, and in the markets you can buy plasticised magazine pictures of the young Mao among the clouds at Anyuan, or the aging Mao at the zenith of his power saluting the Red Guards in Tian'anmen in 1966. He is not yet, like the Great Wall or the giant panda, reproduced indiscriminately, or reduced to coffee mugs or teaspoons or cloisonné thermometers. His image is still connected with symbol and sign, although there are some who see his portrait above the Tian'anmen of today, minus the mention of his name, as an indication, not that he holds an unassailable place among the symbols of revolutionary history, but that the Party does not quite know where else they might safely put him for the moment.¹

I carried the thought of the cigarette-lighter with me in Beijing, Tianjin and Hong Kong, where I found a considerable amount of official image-peddling going

on, the kind that attempts to limit history to a Foucauldian discourse - a kind of public education, or ideological advertising devised by those in power in order to legitimise that power. The fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China has provided an opportunity for another 'verdict' on the past and the launch of a re-affirming but strikingly 'atavistic'² historiography and iconography, by means of exhibitions, displays, events and publications. The Cultural Revolution, to the extent that it figures in this at all (and it is evident that the display is intended to celebrate the halcyon days of the Party before the onset of Mao's radicalism) is clearly reduced to the role of an ill-conceived and faction-driven attack on revisionism, in which Mao loses control and the motherland is plunged into ten years of disaster. China is still using the Cultural Revolution to tell a story.

There is nothing surprising about that of course, but it is interesting to note the model works, stripped of their association with Jiang Qing, among the commemorative paraphernalia. In fact, they have survived in 'historic' garb as special commemorative, re-mastered collections of audio cassettes, CDs of Shanghai radio productions and now VCDs of film versions.³ All the major works seem to have been

reproduced in this medium, including some of the lesser known ones, such as *Azalea Mountain*, and there are even composites, containing a selection of the works - not to mention bizarre karaoke versions, in which, for example, an enthusiastic Xi'er performs her song to disco dance movements.

Major music shops in the cities I visited had good stocks and they were also very well represented at a fiftieth anniversary historical exhibition in Hong Kong - although my attempts to discuss them with the young sales assistants met with little more success than I might have expected had I been talking to their Australian counterparts about Glen Miller and the big band music of the Second World War.⁴ Perhaps more interestingly, excerpts from one of the works, *White-haired Girl*, had been performed in October in Hong Kong as part of a Cantonese opera festival. On the other hand, Judie Christie, of the Centre for Performance Research (Wales), who visited China also in late 1999, reports that what she saw of current theatre production in Shanghai suggests a continuing state of confusion over the way West End/Broadway production values, including realistic large sets and big lighting design, instead of traditional symbolism, is to be combined with traditional stories for both Chinese and Western audiences.⁵

All of this leads me to ask again the questions which prompted me to undertake this work in the first place - are the model works only significant as theatre (as opposed to history or politics) if we think of them as a phase in the development of Chinese theatre, in which certain reforms and experiments were undertaken?⁶ Are they likely to have contemporary meaning only if we think of them in some vaguely postmodern sense as 'classics' of nostalgia,⁷ ephemera, part of an eclectic assortment of floating, disembodied icons, like the ethereal face of Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina*,⁸ or as a kind of flotsam thrown up by the past and put to new use, like the karaoke models? Will they survive only for the moment, as a kind of cryptic souvenir peddled by victims (including beggars, real and phoney, who tell their stories of shocking injury and no compensation) who remember the Cultural Revolution and are finally taking some ironic profit from it? Or will they be converted into curious fragments of their era and made 'collectable' like posters and advertisements, in order to salvage contemporary artistic significance and diversion from the remains of impossibly crude ideology or impossibly complex politics? Perhaps there is yet another way of looking at 'history' - the kind of thing Barthes had in mind when he said, with his characteristic Delphic ambiguity, 'ancient or not,

mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history'?⁹

In order to answer these questions, I will return later in this chapter to the links between history and mythology and to Barthes's notion of myth as 'depoliticized speech'. In the process, I will attempt to reconcile, in a general view of mythology, two ways of looking at the models as works of 'politicised' art and culture once fashioned 'for' the masses and now left for the private contemplation of proletarian or *petit-bourgeois* alike. The first way, identified with postmodernism, treats them as a kind of iconography, as symbols illuminated by the powerful aura of a period of social and cultural change, but invests them with the possibilities of alternative, contemporary meanings, which may differ for each viewer. The second treats them as substantive myths; narratives which, when read, or more importantly when experienced as a particular form of story-theatre, provide something of Barthes's 'intelligible spectacle'¹⁰ long after the unique atmosphere and significance of their peculiar era have ceased to dominate audience reaction. I believe it is possible, with the passage of time, to regard the models as that form of 'spectacle' which, like the wrestling matches Barthes had in mind in *Mythologies*, allow us, regardless of our scepticism

about its relationship with reality, not only to 'see that the man suffers, but also and above all understand why he suffers'.¹¹

These two views are implicit in one or another of the broad strands of cultural theory discussed in Chapter 1; theory which has by now been translated into a reciprocating Chinese-Western cultural debate along the lines suggested by Chen Xiaomei's 'occidentalism' and is well represented in contemporary Chinese discussion of postmodernism.¹² Accordingly, when it comes to the theatre of the Cultural Revolution, it is possible for both Chinese and Western observers to see the model works within a comparable range of critical viewpoints, as either the progeny of a distinctive era of factional politics, an essentially 'ephemeral' cultural product, with all the aesthetic possibilities that word implies, or as a substantive proletarian mythology.

In order to emphasise the latter view, which may well depend as much upon the passing of time as any theoretical framework, this thesis will conclude with the argument that the model theatre achieved, perhaps fortuitously, a durable integration of romanticism (the revolutionary narrative) and realism (the proletarian worldview or 'history') which satisfies

the conditions for a mythology which need not be either preserved as knowledge of the past or disembodied and recontextualised in the manner of ephemera derived from fashion, nostalgia, advertising, ideology or propaganda.

In order to substantiate this view of mythology, there will be a final comparison between the models and the products of Soviet socialist realism, exploring the relationships between ideology and socialist realism, and between the kind of semiological effect envisaged by Barthes and the proletarian romanticism of the models. First, however, we must return to the notion of a politicised theatre and certain recurrent themes implicit not only in the revolutionary modern repertoire but in the conduct of the Cultural Revolution itself.

Theatre and Politics

As indicated earlier, the perception that the models were a political phenomenon, the product of ideological demands inimical to the autonomy of art (a literature/propaganda dichotomy) has hindered attempts to understand the precise nature of the relationship between literature and politics in the Cultural Revolution. This view is not always confined to a value-conscious judgement of good or bad literature,

but may produce certain stereotyped descriptions and analyses of the Cultural Revolution in which theatre is linked with politics in a superficial sense. This kind of analysis is perhaps exemplified by Ross Terrill, in his popular biography of Jiang Qing, in which the models are described as a form of 'politicized theatre',¹³ the product not only of revolutionary ideology but of ideology tightly harnessed to their chief steward's own personal style and ambition.

Terrill, in describing the poverty of Jiang Qing's political philosophy, her personal need for power and revenge and her essentially theatrical nature, himself typifies a certain 'theatrical' approach to the telling of history, in which literature (especially drama), is made to feed on itself rather than 'real life' for metaphors. In the context of Chinese political culture this approach to the description of events, much beloved of both Chinese and Western political commentators, can actually obscure the mutuality of political and literary discourses, as we shall see below. Ellen Judd has already provided an unobtrusive example of the way literature itself becomes the source of metaphor in her description of the Cultural Revolution as '*human* drama' (my emphasis) - a combination of real ('human') and heightened,

storied experience ('drama'), but Terrill provides a more striking example, embellished with journalistic *panache*:

If Jiang in her army fatigues was less like a real People's Liberation Army general than a model of one dressed up for display in a boutique window, it was not that Jiang was a 'rightist' bureaucrat at heart rather than one of Lin Biao's 'leftist' warriors. She was neither. The garments she put on for that crazy show, the Cultural Revolution, may have been absurd; she did not care, for she more than anyone knew they were only garments. The lights would go off, the greasepaint would be wiped off, and what mattered most then was not Jiang Qing's art but her life.¹⁴

A much more sophisticated, but perhaps equally figurative interpretation is to be found in Apter and Saich's *Revolutionary Discourse* in which the authors rely not on metaphor, but 'metonymy' to identify the nature of the revolutionary narrative in drawing attention to Mao as a 'storyteller'. In this case, significant historical events and stages provide metonymies for the 'master narrative'¹⁵ of revolution.

It is necessary to delve briefly into the connotations of some of these terms, in order to clarify the direction taken in this thesis. Metonymy, in the linguistic theory of Roman Jakobson, derives from the process of association (the crown for the queen, the bottle for alcohol) while metaphor is derived by substituting one idea for another via the process of similarity (tongues of flame, rivers of blood).¹⁶ The notion was absorbed from studies of mental processes into structural linguistics and provided a basis for that kind of narratological analysis in which Barthes and others sought to find narrative structure,¹⁷ giving rise to a particular view of 'discourse', which may be distinguished from the Foucauldian use of the term, which was associated with ideology, knowledge and power.¹⁸

Some scholars writing on Chinese political culture have employed the term 'metonymy' in a broad sense, to refer to the process of association (e.g. Apter and Saich) and of course, many more¹⁹ use the term 'discourse' in ways that are influenced not only by Foucault himself but by Edward Said's *Orientalism*.²⁰ However, for the purposes of this study, it is necessary to revive the narratological view of these terms, and in particular to understand 'discourse' primarily as a means of presenting, structuring and

organising a story - the plot as opposed to the story itself as explained in Chapter 5.

Mao's storytelling may well be seen as a process of metonymy, in which, for example Yan'an is the 'moral moment' of the Chinese revolution, and in which other historical stages of revolution are framed within a master narrative, but this is itself all too metaphorical. The link between literature and politics in the Cultural Revolution was much more explicit, and the dramatic genre of modern revolutionary works was part of a much larger 'script' in which the struggle between right and wrong - that is between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries - was greatly simplified for a mass audience. What began with *Hai Rui ba guan* as a complex debate over the characterisation of historical and contemporary personalities and events ended as a simple and unequivocal struggle between revolutionaries and reactionaries - and a simple and unequivocal choice of sympathies for those watching.

In a sense the works were scenes in a much greater 'drama' than each represented in itself. It was as though the campaign to wrest power from those opposed to Mao, embodied in the struggle over Beijing opera from *Hai Rui ba guan* to *On the Docks*, was itself a revolutionary modern opera, in which the subtleties of

debate were, like the protagonists of 'feudal' opera themselves, eradicated by revolutionary dramaturgy.²¹ One might argue that the works were simply a kind of allegory, but that would make for a very limited use of allegory indeed, with almost no 'disguise' involved. It is not just that the protagonists of the models personify or represent revolutionaries locked in mortal combat with revisionists, it is more like the works themselves came to 'personify' continuous revolution.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, the 'eight model works' were like a heroic vanguard rising up in the heat of battle to take the fortress of Beijing opera. And Jiang Qing, in her presentation at the Festival in July 1964, which she described as the 'first campaign in the revolution of Beijing opera', actually turns the process of dramaturgy into part of the drama, urging theatre workers and artists to choose a role either for or against what, ostensibly, is no more than a principle of heroic characterisation. She invites her audience to choose a role among those who 'stand on the side of the positive characters or on the side of the negative characters'.²² Another example of this phenomenon is the 'middle character debate' and the related issue of whether the reform of Beijing opera and associated literary theory should be

seen as an 'academic debate'. Again, one could not simply choose an *argument*, but a *role*, since support for a 'middle character' implied that one was oneself such a character. We need only think back to the last chapter for another example - the way the campaign to reform Beijing opera, and the very process of creating new works, was consistently portrayed in terms which came to be reflected in the structure of the works themselves. 'Struggle-criticism-transformation' became not only a method for revolution, but a method - and a motif - for literature and art.

Of all those who have used literature as metaphor, Ellen Judd is most revealing in her view of 'central dramatic imagery' and in drawing attention to the way the Cultural Revolution 'moved from critique of revisionist drama to an affirmation of its particular vision of proletarian culture'. But in fact, the Cultural Revolution did not simply 'move' from one pole to the other - it performed a much more intricate, self-reflexive and almost circular theatrical manoeuvre. It dramatised factional struggle, and did so not just in the form of a struggle on the stage but in the form of a struggle *for* it, in which 'real' workers, peasants and soldiers (the proletariat) were exhorted to contend with 'emperors, ghosts and beauties' ('real' bourgeois

revisionists) during the enactment of a dramatic *campaign* to reform Beijing opera.

Jiang Qing as Dramaturg

Jiang Qing did not just create or develop metonymies in the sense intended by Apter and Saich, (miniatures of the revolutionary epic) or shape the terminology and conceptual apparatus of ideology in the Foucauldian sense of discourse. In narratological terms she *presented* a story, transforming it into a plot, and ultimately a 'performance text', for the Cultural Revolution itself. Thus, it would seem misleading to employ either the journalistic notion of drama as a metaphor for 'real life' or the more sophisticated sociological notions of metonymy and discourse in describing the literary qualities of Chinese political culture. The models were clearly not just a 'politicised theatre' but an integral part of the dramatisation of politics.

The dramatisation of politics and the commonly-used term 'political theatre' are related ideas, but not exactly the same thing. 'Political theatre' is used increasingly, and with varying degrees of precision, to describe the drama-like qualities of political events, or as a kind of metaphor, in which, as discussed above, the boundaries between actual and

representational events is blurred. For example, Esherick and Wasserstrom use the term very precisely, to describe the Chinese protests and demonstrations of 1989. But this movement is seen as political theatre because it uses the techniques of theatre, and works from 'scripts' to provide 'symbol-laden performances', for a particular audience.²³ The relationship between the models and the dramatic performance of the Cultural Revolution is akin to this but there is simply a more 'literal' and holistic connection between the drama and the politics.

The rallies and demonstrations *about* the reform of art and literature represent a different order of theatre from the model works which *demonstrate* that reform and might well qualify in some ways for the description of 'political theatre' in the sense described by Esherick and Wasserstrom. But there is such an integrated relationship between both forms of theatre - their central motifs, their protagonists, mode of characterisation, and, above all, their shared narrative of revolution - that it becomes difficult to distinguish between them. Political theatre is perhaps easier to think of as politics which borrows or mimics some of the characteristics of theatre, and encourages its audiences to see events through the lens of a shared history and common interpretative conventions,

but the process which Jiang Qing presided over is more like a thorough and sustained dramatisation of politics than a process of borrowing, or an occasional interchange between art and politics.

Taking the Fortress of Beijing Opera: A Revolutionary Modern Meta-drama

The association between the public, iconoclastic display of the Cultural Revolution - its campaigns, parades and rallies; its branding and tearing down of 'bourgeois', 'feudal' and 'revisionist' figures and replacement with stylised workers, peasants and soldiers - and the revolutionary narrative of the models, is such that the works, and their emergence, as documented in Chapter 4, may be considered a manifestation of ideology, theatre, and ritual.²⁴ As ritual or ceremony this display affirmed for its audience the message that true revolutionary status resided in those who would passionately - dramatically - rekindle the flame of class feeling and summon the spirit of Mao's revolutionary triumph for the continuation of class struggle, after a decade and a half in which intellectuals, unchecked by the salutary restraints of war, had slipped to the 'margins of revisionism'.

Yan'an has been described elsewhere as the 'moral moment of the Chinese revolution'²⁵ but this is essentially the moment of war, and, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, the model works appear in their most comfortable, integrated guise in the setting of war. This may of course have a great deal to do with Jiang Qing herself. Her resentment at being assigned a limited role in the sacred history of Yan'an - her quarrel with the intellectual luminaries of the May Fourth era and consequent need to cast herself as a 'real' grassroots revolutionary fighter - may well have been the spur for her adoption of a military persona. She is frequently caricatured for this, as we have seen above, but there is more to the preoccupation with military metaphor than personal style and affectation, or to put it another way, the military style is subsumed by a much more significant - and more broadly Chinese - preoccupation with theatrical and pedagogical style.

The 'campaign' surrounding the reform of Beijing opera was not just metaphor, metonym or mimesis, in which the model works were decked out in revolutionary apparel, in the manner of Red Guard units, with their sometimes incongruous nomenclature and paraphernalia, but part of a meta-theatre, in which the protagonists of the traditional stage, whatever qualities they

actually displayed in individual performance, assumed the collective role of custodians of China's corrupt and decadent feudal past, to be swept aside by its revolutionary future in the guise of new protagonists - workers, peasants and soldiers. The distinction between life and art disappear bewilderingly at this point; the Cultural Revolution was not just a matter of politics dominating the stage, or of the stage being *about* politics, but of politics being staged and theatricalised, re-organised from a sequence of events into a 'plot'. As an example of the extraordinary, symbiotic relationship between the politics and theatre of the Cultural Revolution we need only recall the event which concludes Chapter 4, the tableau scene linking anniversary celebrations of the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' and the triumphal procession of the model genre.

Mao as Truth and Talisman

In a sense, the Cultural Revolution was designed to be enacted around the utterances of Mao, not only as the legitimating authority or text of his political philosophy and cosmology, but as a kind of talisman for effecting the transformation performed both on stage and out in the streets. In the campaign to reform Beijing opera, Mao's speeches on literature and art, especially the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum',

became not only the putative source of a creative method for the creation of a model proletarian genre, but a crucial motif for the 'master narrative' of the Cultural Revolution and its iconoclastic display. To put it another way, if Yan'an was the 'moral moment' of revolution, the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum' constituted the moral of the story of revolution as re-enacted in the campaign to reform Beijing opera.

The complex revisionist thinking of May Fourth-influenced artists and intellectuals was to be swept aside by the revelation of a sublime Truth, which held that 'all our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for workers, peasants and soldiers'.²⁶ And the 'militant documents' identified above became, in the course of the Cultural Revolution, part of a 'discourse' designed to make the confusing, and for that matter, uninspiring, 'plot' of the Cultural Revolution intelligible to a vast audience, mobilising it to play its own role in the re-enactment of class struggle. Viewed this way, the actual content of even the major document, the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum', is less important than the use to which it was put, or the role it played as a motif or talisman in the meta-theatre of the Cultural Revolution - a literary device comparable with, for example, the tablet in *The Story of the Stone*, or Sun

Wukong's invincible staff in *Journey to the West*.²⁷

In fact, the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum', stripped of discursive elements, boils down to some characteristically succinct points about *class stand*, *class feeling*, the creation of art and literature *for the proletariat* and a view of characterisation based on 'larger than life' and 'typical' figures not unlike the kind Gorky and others had in mind, but less a matter of theoretical precision. If proof were needed that Mao did not spend much time worrying about subtleties of aesthetic and cultural theory, it might be found in his use of the term 'proletarian realism' when referring to socialist realism in the original version.²⁸ The key issue for Mao was whom art was for, rather than what it was called. But what kind of art was it and what conventions did its 'proletarian' audience rely upon in order to interpret it?

The Models, Traditional Pedagogy and History

Just as the creators of the revolutionary modern works were not interested in 'art for art's sake', they appear to have been much less concerned than Gorky with stimulating the autonomous psychic regions of their audiences, preferring to fashion a limited repertoire of works, tightly controlled by text and

author, which might produce at least the outward signs of a collective political 'transformation' such as was happening on stage. This group experience of political identification and commitment (which for many in the Cultural Revolution would take the form of an intensely-felt 'conversion') has an element of conformity akin to ritual or, for that matter, traditional education. Exclusiveness, dogmatism, censorship and repetition in the revolutionary modern genre may well be perceived, not just as a reflection of the much-documented intellectual tyranny and theoretical poverty of the Cultural Revolution, nor as a side-effect of its factional politics, but as a reflection of traditional Chinese pedagogy. The models' most-maligned features as a form of ideology may be a modern manifestation of the traditions of Chinese literary culture, in which moral-political instruction was integrated with the telling of history.

As such the works may be considered both 'history' (or 'a type of speech chosen by history,'²⁹ to employ Barthes's own very apposite and narrative-centred description of mythology) and a form of mass culture, part of that general semiotic system which Barthes and Eco invoked in discussing a sometimes bewildering array of contemporary 'bourgeois' symbols, including

Greta Garbo, Einstein, Superman, James Bond and soap powder advertisements; symbols which are both 'signs' (like flags, signals, clothing) and 'messages' (like slogans).³⁰ The major difference between the proletarian signs or 'icons' of the Cultural Revolution and those mentioned above is the nominal difference between Western, popular ('bourgeois') and Chinese revolutionary 'mass' ('proletarian') culture. The models clearly belong to a category of didactic, pedagogic or ritual theatre, a form of literature and art *for* the masses, a proletarian literature of the kind envisaged not by Marx and Engels themselves but by Lenin, Stalin and Mao,³¹ an art intended to *transform* the masses, rather than a form of entertainment or identity adopted *by* them.³² But both rely on powerful - and essentially traditional - sources of symbol and story.

Symbol and Story in the Proletarian Myth

The revolutionary modern works were the product of Mao's worldview and the kind of prescriptive 'storytelling' embedded in the key speeches and documents detailed in Chapter 4. In the whole of human history, few societies can have been as rigidly and pervasively dominated by text as Mao's China, and the process of authorship of the works truly reflected the

rule of word. That the authors of the revolutionary modern works should have been so concerned to produce highly contrived 'models' for imitation and study, while employing a form of narrative usually associated with the authorless and haphazard creative processes of folk tales and folk drama is an irony of world literature. More importantly, it indicates that Beijing opera, unlike other modern forms, such as novels, spoken drama and feature films, provided the creators of the models with a form that was happily compatible with both conscious, collectively written 'propaganda' and the uncontrived symbolism of folklore, which has been described as an 'avalanche' gathering 'all that lies in its path of the natural mental products of the human race'.³³

But there is a point to be made here regarding the sources of symbolism, a point which touches on the nature of the relationship between semiotics and romanticism evident in the models. As mentioned above, analyses of symbolism in theatre frequently stress not only movement, colour, sound and costume, but also the kind of archetypes and motifs associated with the psychology of the unconscious - such as *yin* and *yang*.³⁴ Such an approach might well place the models in the category of modern communist mystery or morality plays or even proletarian 'fairy tales' which

unconsciously tap into the wellspring of a 'collective unconscious'. There is no doubt that even the creators of the models might have been influenced by forces whose very existence they would strenuously deny, and, as outlined in previous chapters, the 'emerging myth' of proletarian societies has been predicated upon a clear appreciation of this universal folkloric imagery, symbolism and characterisation among socialist literary theorists from Gorky and Lukacs to Mao.

What sometimes obscures the common ground here is the vast difference among theorists concerning the *source* of mythic symbolism. For example, a Jungian interpretation would make much of certain archetypal figures and motifs - a hungry ghost, for example, or white-hair, or red butterflies and ribbons, or the use of sun and moon, or wolves and tigers - and locate the impact of such symbols in the mysterious reserves of the unconscious. A dramatic critic might see this use of symbolism in a form of historical materialist 'propaganda' - whose creators stridently reject the notion of an unfathomable unconscious or spiritual source - as quite contradictory, or as evidence that powerful storytelling derives from symbolism that is inimical to the very ideology which underpins the tale, as in *White-haired Girl*. Yet it is clearly possible for two quite different or even antagonistic ideologies to

exploit the power of the very same symbols and the models are a very good example of the way 'unconscious' use of traditional symbolism is crucial in making the models work as theatre. It is interesting to speculate about what changes Jiang Qing may have made had she been aware of the kind of thing that is regarded now as the semiotics of theatre.

However, in the case of the proletarian myth, while symbolism is not actually theorised at all, but rather assimilated from tradition into 'method', it is organised around principles of class struggle and the tangible 'reality' of the historical development of classes. Such a temporal, materialist and historical approach to framing the symbolism does not in any way weaken the impact of the symbols themselves. That is, while the conscious aesthetic of the model works does not acknowledge any source of symbolism in a collective human psyche other than that which is produced by the history of class struggle, the essential narrative structure of myth, as employed in folkloric forms, is preserved and wedded to time-honoured symbolism of the non-verbal kind identified by Kirk Denton. This is an important distinction between the revolutionary realism of the models and the kind employed in socialist realism, as we shall see later, and allows for the preservation of a crucial element of Chinese theatrical tradition.

That is not to say that innovation is not significant in itself in the theatre of the Cultural Revolution, but rather that there is an important continuity between traditional opera (traditional symbolism and narrative structure) and the model works - and as a result the genre avoids some of the pitfalls of employing a certain approach to realism, as will be argued finally below. The models obviously do experiment with the form of Beijing opera, sometimes boldly, as in the ballets, but they do not veer in the direction of avant-garde theatre of the kind practised by Soviet formalists and constructivists prior to the rule of socialist realism, in which ideological content is subordinated to novelty of form or technique. On the contrary, the innovation, that is the contemporary events and proletarian protagonists, which might otherwise have seemed incongruous in Beijing opera, (and of course, did appear this way to the models' detractors) is, unlike socialist realism under Zhdanov, largely confined within the boundaries of physical realism,³⁵ while the force of emotional and psychological impact - broadly speaking the semiotic effect of myth - is generated by a recognisable, traditional tale-type, in which narrative content (suffering, revelation, transformation) is paramount.

As indicated previously, the use of traditional symbolism in the models is not lost upon scholars of the semiotics of the stage, but there is scant acknowledgement of the way this is incorporated into the general sign system of the works, including especially the narrative itself. Narrative is not just a kind of scaffolding for performance but a foundation for symbolism of all kinds, and to see the meritorious parts of the genre largely as aspects of performance is to obscure the essential dynamic identified above - the power to *explain* the world and human nature in terms of explicit political theory focused on class struggle (realism), and to *arouse* transformational emotion through the depiction of class feeling (romanticism). In fact, neglect of the dramatic text amounts to a dismissal of the logic underlying the creation of the works, a misunderstanding of the singular approach to realism and romanticism which informed them, and a failure to acknowledge the progress made by the models in fashioning a new genre of authentic Beijing opera which pressed elements of realism and romanticism into the service of a proletarian theatre far more effectively than had been managed in the Soviet Union.

History, Myth and the Revolutionary Narrative

Whatever unacknowledged debt the creators of the models may have owed to an ancient repertoire of symbols, the major dynamic for the new genre was the substitution of a mythologised contemporary history and worldview for themes which, however popular, were remote from the lives of the great majority of people, from 'the masses'. These ranged from the luridly macabre and supernatural to a solemn Confucian hagiography containing, in Joseph Campbell's rather jaundiced terms, 'a clutter of anecdotes about the sons and daughters of provincial officials, who, for serving their community in one way or another, were elevated by their grateful beneficiaries to the dignity of local gods'.³⁶ To echo Campbell once more, the revolutionary modern genre constituted a new 'superhuman romance'³⁷ which, unlike the old Chinese mythology, was neither supernatural nor mysterious in tone, but temporal and explicit. The much-sought-after essence of folklore and myth is retained by means of this 'superhuman' quality in its heroes, and in the veneration of Party history as 'sacred world history',³⁸ but while this makes the narratives seem implausible and unsophisticated on one level, they remain firmly anchored to a kind of realism which

could at least pose as the antithesis of feudal superstition.

Like other myths, the revolutionary modern genre contained an explanation or interpretation of both the world and the broadly typified types of beings to be found within it. A reformed, modern Beijing opera with its foundation in ancient sign and symbol was an ideal medium for lending the psychic force of myth to this historical-materialist (hence 'realistic', rather than supernatural, magic or religious) explanation. In fact, the match between realism and folklore, which had so concerned Gorky at the 1934 Congress, appears to be much more harmonious in the revolutionary modern genre than in most forms of Soviet socialist realism, principally because this realism is not of the 'critical' kind, but of that kind which enables recognisable, contemporary history to be transformed into the myth, romance and legend of revolution.

Super-humans and Sub-humans: Dramatising Revisionism

While the metonymies identified by Apter and Saich are derived from episodes in Mao's grand narrative of China's history, and are essentially 'realistic', the models constitute a more recognisably 'fictive' or even fabulous, narrative - a proletarian myth, incorporating Mao himself as the source of an

irresistible transformational power. It is revelation of the power of Mao and the Communist Party, rather than of the political philosophy which they represent, which provides the key motif for both the models themselves and the enactment of class struggle beyond the confines of the stage. Despite ultimate legitimation in a rational, materialistic cosmology, Mao and the Party need the force of magic, like that of the talisman in the old tales, to break through the barrier of physical limitation and normal psychological restraint into the realm of indomitable, all-conquering - and irrational - revolutionary will.

But while revisionists were readily 'demonised' in the broad social arena, (and the speeches of Mao became part of the dramatic text for demonstrations, editorials and speeches condemning them), the politicisation of drama presented more specific literary and dramaturgical problems. It is very difficult to lend dramatic personality or force to demons whose malice or waywardness is rooted in something as nebulous and 'rational' as revisionism.

There were still, of course, profoundly wicked characters, such as landlords and Japanese invaders, capable of arousing hatred, but they could not be permitted to arouse fear or awe without defeating the very purpose for which the works had been created.

Thus, with the stage stripped of ghosts, the weight of extra-ordinary or 'larger-than-life' characterisation fell primarily on the shoulders of proletarian heroes, who were elemental in their asceticism, courage, and incorruptibility. Workers, peasants and soldiers were now expected to generate the moral and aesthetic force of myth, history and truth - and in order to do so they had to become the *new* super-humans. Revisionists, on the other hand, became the new in-humans and sub-humans - 'ox-demons and snake-spirits'. In the process the supernatural was ousted from the stage and relocated in the streets, where irrational fears and hatreds could be displaced to maximum political advantage and brought to bear on flesh and blood targets. As the course of the Cultural Revolution after the *Hai Rui* controversy indicates, Beijing opera proved a perfectly satisfactory vehicle for conveying mythology into the streets.³⁹

In myths and other kinds of folktales the plot may well be improbable and the characterisation thin and 'unrealistic', virtually unrecognisable as 'ordinary' human behaviour, without detracting from their essential power. This is, after all, a form derived from storytelling traditions in which behaviour and motivation are subordinated to the message of the narrative in order to influence public behaviour and

motivation. Genres which draw on this tradition make an ideal vehicle for what might variously be termed 'history' or 'propaganda', and nearly always draw on a form of characterisation which is deliberately 'larger-than-life'. This has been pointed out by a number of scholars of Beijing opera, including Wichmann, and there is a recent Chinese work which does so in terms which are very reminiscent of Mao:

In Peking Opera the artistic means of expression, such as singing, dialogue, acting, combat and acrobatic performance, all follow conventionalized patterns taken from real life and refined by generations of operatic artists, which become symbols of human intent and sentiment. This symbolic performance should not become life as it is, but life as extracted, concentrated and typified.⁴⁰

But the major point which Mao contributed in his utterances on the subject which had engaged many more painstaking literary theorists than himself was simply that the depiction of 'life' itself rested upon certain choices - it could represent one class or another, one view of history or another, one mythology or another. In the 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum', Mao stressed that the form of characterisation employed in

revolutionary literature should be derived from the depiction of a 'concentrated', 'higher plane' of life, but in so doing he was implying that characterisation should always be derived from a particular larger-than-life narrative - by the story of revolution itself. In this sense, characterisation had little room to move, it would always be dominated by revolutionary protagonists and their revolutionary struggle - by the myth of revolution itself.

The Models as 'Copied Text'

In fact, the models had become not only a characteristic historical genre, a theatre produced by the Cultural Revolution or for it, but part of the 'sign system' of the Cultural Revolution itself; part of its pageant, ritual and liturgy - and part of its dramatic text. With this kind of public homage to truth and authority, and in compelling attention to literary edict and decree, the protagonists of the Cultural Revolution had, for all their avowed distaste of tradition, reinforced an ancient link between drama and moral-political instruction, emphasising the crucial difference between Western or May Fourth-style works designed for the private reflection of their audiences and those which were *models*, that is works which were meant to be 'copied' and to 'command the soul' rather than merely to be seen or read. As

Walter Benjamin, admittedly himself the victim of an ideology or discourse which might well be branded 'orientalist', said of Chinese literary culture:

Only the copied text...commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text...because the reader follows the movement of his mind in the free flight of daydreaming, whereas the copier submits it to command. The Chinese practice of copying books was thus an incomparable guarantee of literary culture, and the transcript a key to China's enigmas.⁴¹

In this sense, as mass-produced copies of text and as models for copying performance, the model works had much in common with the large-format poster art of the Cultural Revolution,⁴² which snuffed out the graphic experimentation of the early 1960s and replaced it with source-book blueprints for heroic representations of workers, peasants and soldiers and the limitless transformative power of Mao's thinking.⁴³ Such an approach to the 'production' of proletarian art and literature may be highly effective as a means of maintaining an established social order through cohesive ritual and symbolism, in the manner of

traditional Chinese education, but, as an instrument of agitation, of 'continuous revolution' (*buduan geming*), or any kind of democratic regeneration of society, it has a limited lifespan, since it must eventually blunt the very 'revolutionary' emotions it is supposed to arouse, harness and exploit.

It may very well be, of course, that the leaders of the Cultural Revolution set out to achieve precisely this effect - a sudden, iconoclastic shock of war-like revolutionary fervour in the interests of defeating a 'class enemy', followed by rituals and symbols intended to induce conformity and unquestioning allegiance to the newly confirmed custodians of moral-political authority. In this situation a 'copy' may assume the power of ritual more successfully than any kind of creativity or originality, but it can only generate that power beyond the confines of the stage or meeting-hall as long as there is no crisis of faith such as that which took hold in China in the later stages of the Cultural Revolution, allowing the corrosive force of cynicism to turn 'intelligible spectacle' into a form of oppression. By that time, the models had become not so much a form of discourse, that is 'a device to think with', but a device for determining what might safely be thought. As Wasserstrom says of the 'official tales' ('mythic stories') of Tian'anmen, they may well contain a 'big

lie' and 'patently false slogans' but they 'can still tell Chinese citizens how it is safest to act'.⁴⁴ When one considers the 'atavistic' display staged for the fiftieth anniversary of the PRC, it appears this kind of cipher is still indicating how it is safest to act.

Conclusion: Semiotics, Semiology and Ideology

It is interesting to note, in making the previous comment on the interpretation of signs, that social semiotics has emerged as a new perspective on Chinese culture. For example Hodge and Louie, in *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture*, have argued the necessity for techniques of discourse analysis and social semiotics in order to extend ways of 'reading' a wide range of Chinese texts and cultural artefacts in the 'global world of postmodern culture' in which China enthusiastically participates, while struggling simultaneously to assert traditional Chinese values.⁴⁵ These techniques may provide useful insight into the continuities of Chinese political culture, resonating as they do with the work of Esherick and Wasserstrom on political theatre in the late 1980s.

While it is important to remember that there will always be a distinction between theatre as a trope, (that is, as a means of *describing* politics), and

theatre as actual politics, there may be a need to visualise political events which occur in self-consciously literary societies not just in terms of literary metaphor but in terms of a certain narrative habit of mind which determines the nature of both art and politics. In the case of China, an appreciation of both Barthes's view of semiology and the recent discussion of social semiotics may contribute to what Hodge and Louie have called 'the dialogue between Chinese Studies and Cultural Studies'⁴⁶ and provide a richer context for understanding and describing both actual historical movements such as the Cultural Revolution or 'China's Spring', and the theatrical manifestations of those events.

If this dialogue is to take place, it will be based on recognition of the ways participants in social movements themselves read (or create) a *discourse*. For example, just as one may 'read' dragons and other forms of symbolism in both Chinese and Western ways, Chinese once read the models and the meta-theatre surrounding their emergence and triumph according to interpretative conventions that were the product of Chinese tradition, pedagogy and political culture. These conventions allowed them to interpret not only 'textual traces of the occasion of performance' (that is of the performance of the models) but textual

traces of the occasion of the Cultural Revolution itself.

But how are we to interpret the present traces of the Cultural Revolution, a mixture of official discourse - including patriotic exaltation of Chinese history and culture - and irreverent, ironic treatment of 'icons'? The contemporary artistic response to the Cultural Revolution seems to be triggered by an elusive combination of nostalgia, mimesis and postmodern playfulness, sometimes enlivened by a positive distaste for history and an appetite for incongruity.⁴⁷ The particular occasion of the Cultural Revolution may be imperfectly understood, or simply ignored, by those who currently exploit and manipulate its symbolism, but something of the quality of myth remains in even these shadows, because it is precisely this 'narrative quality' which inspires mimesis and reproduction. What is left a quarter of a century after the 'ten disastrous years' may be only the disembodied and ironic effect so beloved of postmodernism, but there would be no such effect if the events and characters depicted in contemporary art and popular culture had not been located within a myth to begin with.

Obviously it is now possible for younger Chinese and foreigners alike to interpret the works out of their historical context and without personal nostalgia or direct association with the Cultural Revolution, and that may well weaken their impact. But distance, temporal and geographical, is part of the process by which the works will become gradually more de-politicised (or de-historicised) and will, perhaps re-emerge as a substantive story-theatre mythology, as an 'intelligible spectacle', or a 'form of speech chosen by history', rather than as history itself. The fading link with the occasion of the Cultural Revolution may restore emphasis to the basic occasion of performance itself and allow the works to be seen as a less complex, less ritualistic and communal form of theatre or social semiotics, but as a more recognisable and enduring heir to the traditions of Chinese national theatre. The legacy of a reformed Beijing opera, and the legacy of the traditional opera which was assimilated into the models, is a form of storytelling which makes this at least possible, unlike the products of socialist realism in the period 1946-53, which has come to be regarded - indeed was regarded even before Stalin's death - as a period of sterility.⁴⁸

The association made throughout, between Barthes's view of mythology and the narrative of the models contains the obvious contradiction, not addressed in Denton's treatment of semiotics, that the most overtly 'political' theatre of the twentieth century should be associated with 'depoliticised' narrative, and, while this has been touched upon earlier in the thesis, it is worth elaborating further here in order to pursue a crucial distinction between semiology and ideology Barthes once raised - and left dangling - in his famous 1956 essay 'The Tasks of Brechtian Criticism':

For what Brechtian dramaturgy postulates is that today at least, *the responsibility of a dramatic art is not so much to express reality as to signify it*. Hence there must be a certain distance between signified and signifier; revolutionary art must admit a certain arbitrary nature of signs, it must acknowledge a certain 'formalism', in the sense that it must treat form according to an appropriate method, which is the semiological method. *All Brechtian art protests against the Zhdanovian confusion between ideology and semiology which has led to such an aesthetic impasse.*⁴⁹

'Ideology' is usually associated with a 'politicised theatre' as we have seen, theatre which ranges from those forms which demonstrate the use of some ideology or other in a dramatic genre to those which incorporate a precise, coded dramatisation of actual political events (as in allegory, such as *Hai rui*). But for the leadership of the Cultural Revolution this kind of 'politicised theatre' was not really adequate as a means of signifying the meaning of their occasion; what was needed was a genre conveyed by a special kind of discourse - that is, a genre of mythology, a form of 'depoliticised speech'. In this respect the models were most suitable. Despite their obvious ideological content the models do not depend for audience affect on the presentation of a rational/realistic worldview nor do they rely for meaning on the attempt to encode actual contemporary events in a historical cipher. In fact, it is a striking fact that, while a work such as *Azalea Mountain* may well be interpreted with Jiang Qing's self-idealisation in mind, and while it may be possible to interpret the works as a very 'literal' kind of allegory, there is no portrayal in the models, direct or otherwise, of actual events or personalities associated with the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁰

Had this kind of 'realism' been employed, it might well have politicised the works in a narrow sense and linked them inextricably to the factional struggles of their era, but the genre's general narrative of revolution transforms what might otherwise be termed 'politicised theatre' into 'de-politicised' myth. All realistic complexity is reduced (or elevated) to the kind of 'blissful clarity' which Barthes associates with the semiological system of myth and which he contrasts with ideology. What remains after the 'complexity of human acts' is removed in the model theatre is not only a way of presenting events on stage, but a discourse for the Cultural Revolution. Paradoxically then, the narrative of revolution had to be 'de-politicised' in this way in order to transform it from politicised theatre to a form of dramatised politics, in which citizens might interpret the campaign to reform Beijing opera not just as a power struggle, but according to the same interpretative conventions they might bring to a play about the struggle between revolutionaries and revisionists - a play entitled 'Taking the Fortress of Beijing Opera'.

It has not been my intention to treat Roland Barthes as the one theorist whose work will unlock the mysteries of the model theatre, and his own literary career is more than sufficient to remind us of the ever-present danger of using one's own reading

practices and conventions to create structure when one is supposed to be searching for it. Furthermore, despite Brecht's fascination with what he perceived, perhaps erroneously, as an 'alienation effect' in Chinese theatre, the models are not exactly what Barthes has called 'Brechtian art', since they do not seek to distance the audience from the stage - quite the contrary in fact. Nevertheless, some of Barthes's cryptic utterances suggest a way of appreciating the models for what they do best as art, and the implicit distinction between semiology and ideology is perhaps the key to this. Unfortunately, although he returns to the theme in 1957 in *Mythologies*,⁵¹ he does not go on to explain exactly what he means by the 'confusion' between semiology and ideology.

Realism appears to be the crux of the issue which he is inclined to treat in such an epigrammatic, Benjamin-like fashion. He says for example, that 'any semiological system is a system of values' but, on the other hand, 'myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system'.⁵² For myth to be 'read' as fact - but yet remain a form of signification rather than an expression of reality - it must, one assumes, be conveyed by a powerful *discourse* (indeed, as we have seen, Barthes says that 'everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a

discourse'). In the particular discourse of the models, despite incorporation of realism into the creative method, romanticism is never allowed to play second fiddle to any form of nineteenth century European, May Fourth Chinese or Soviet socialist realism - principally because *the models always remain very recognisably a form of Beijing opera*. By contrast, as Max Hayward said in 1962, echoing some of Jiang Qing's contemporaneous pre-occupations, if not her politics:

The greatest difficulty for the writers about socialist realism was that they were expected to employ the realist style of the nineteenth-century classics in a spirit which was quite alien to its creators. The new doctrine drew a sharp distinction between 'socialist realism' and the 'critical realism' of the classics. The latter it was said, had used the realist method to *negate* the society in which they lived, whereas the Soviet writer was required by the same method to *affirm* the new Socialist order which was *ex-hypothesi* the most benevolent and the most nearly perfect ever established on earth.⁵³

The models demonstrate no such confusion over negation and affirmation, as the works are always, as Beijing

opera, (and ironically because of their traditional 'formalism'), semiology rather than ideology. The narrative of the models, while clearly 'political' may be distinguished from 'ideology' and may be thought of, paradoxically, as 'de-politicised speech'. Their realism is the product of an ideology based explicitly upon class struggle but, in spite of its basis in political philosophy, the proletarian myth as a genre remains a form of 'de-politicized speech' (an ideology devoid of realistic political complexity, a kind of distorted, euphoric history written by the winners) conveyed by traditional symbol and story as a 'higher truth' which transcends the physical and temporal reality of history.

It is the romanticism of myth which carries this burden of affirmation and triumph, not some form of realism stripped of its 'critical' role and forced to depict an 'ex-hypothesi' paradise. As a result, while the models do not *break* Barthes's impasse, in the sense of a Brechtian moral theatre, they at least *avoid* the 'confusion between semiology and ideology' and in so doing keep alive the possibility they might yet be recognised, not just as the manifestation of Jiang Qing's personal dream of power but as one of the many and universal forms of Campbell's 'depersonalised dream'.

Notes

¹ The slogan to the right of the portrait commemorates the PRC itself, and the one to the right, which used to salute Mao Thought, now refers to the great unity of the peoples of the world. Orville Schell, on a recent Australian (ABC) television current affairs program, made the point that the portrait is now significant chiefly for the fact that the Party is not ready to show that it is prepared to take it down.

² Professor Da Li Yang of Chicago University, in the same ABC interview, referred to the 'atavistic' display of Party iconography during the 50th anniversary celebrations.

³ For example I have recently watched a 1970 production of *The Red Lantern* which forms one of a series (*Geming yangbanx1 huiguzhan* - Commemorative exhibition of revolutionary model works), a 1972 filmed version of *White-haired Girl* and the 1950s film of *Red Detachment* which forms part of a collection of a hundred 'patriotic, educational films'.

⁴ One young woman painstakingly pronounced the individual characters for *Shajiabang* but professed herself at a complete loss as to its meaning.

⁵ Christie, a theatre producer herself, although not a Chinese theatre specialist, notes, among other things, that there is an attempt under way to 'educate' Chinese audiences in Western symphony/ballet forms, while 'modern spoken drama' is rejected as unsuitable for Chinese audiences. This information was conveyed to me by Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter of Open City Inc., a Sydney based performance company, who have

themselves collaborated with former Beijing opera performers now living in Sydney in the production of works incorporating elements of both traditional Chinese opera and the model works.

⁶ The model works were not, of course, the only form to experiment with modernisation or westernisation. Bell Yung notes for example, in 'Model Opera as Model: From *Shajiabang* to *Sagabong*', (McDougall, *Popular Chinese Literature*, 145) that, in the 1930s and 1940s, Western theatrical techniques and music were widely employed in Cantonese opera.

⁷ It is interesting to note that some scholars, for example Miriam Lang and Geremie Barmé, of the Australian National University, Canberra, have recently speculated, respectively, that they might be thought of as 'classics of camp' or 'a mixture of Jiang Qing Shanghai high camp and Yan'an reform literature'.

⁸ Curiously enough, Garbo's role in this film was a source of fascination for both Roland Barthes and Jiang Qing (see Witke *Madame Chiang Ch'ing* and Barthes 'The Face of Garbo' in *Mythologies*).

⁹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 110.

¹⁰ See Barthes on wrestling, *Mythologies*, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹² See for example Xiaobing Tang 'The Function of New Theory: What Does it Mean to Talk about Postmodernism in China?' in Liu Kang and Xiaobing Tang eds. *Politics, Ideology and Literary Discourse in Modern China. Theoretic Interventions and Cultural Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), in which

various Chinese journals [*Dushu* (Reading) and *Wenxue pinglun* (Literary Review)] are featured in order to give a view of some trends in this discussion.

¹³ Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao. The White-Boned Demon. A Biography of Madame Mao Zedong* (Hale and Iremonger, 1995) 251.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁵ Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse*, 69.

¹⁶ Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 542-543.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 570-572.

¹⁸ See Sim, ed., *The A-Z Guide*, 136-141.

¹⁹ For example, Michael Dutton, *Policing and Punishment in China. From Patriarchy to 'the People'* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); Chen Xiaomei, *Occidentalism*; Apter and Saich *Revolutionary Discourse* ; Hodge and Louie, *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture* ; Frank Dikotter *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Hong Kong University Press, 1992).

²⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

²¹ In this context it is interesting to note that the newly-written historical dramas, and in particular the well-known *Hai Rui ba guan*, now depend chiefly upon scholarly explanation of their historical and allegorical significance for continuing interest while the models at least have some kind of self-evident meaning and are still more accessible, both as politics and art.

²² Chiang Ching, 'On the revolution of Peking Opera', 6.

²³ Esherick and Wasserstrom, 'Acting out Democracy,' in Wasserstrom and Perry, eds., *Popular Protest and Popular Culture in Modern China*, 36.

²⁴ For an interesting discussion of the distinctions between ritual and theatre see Esherick and Wasserstrom, 'Acting out Democracy.'

²⁵ Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse*, 7.

²⁶ And of course, all power belongs to those who speak for them.

²⁷ I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer who pointed out this example after reading a chapter I have submitted for a forthcoming publication based on a conference at the Australian National University, on 'Reading in the Chinese-speaking World', in October 1998.

²⁸ McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks"*, 19, 76. Holm also draws attention to this in *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 96. In fact, as I have argued, there is a good case for calling the models the opposite - that is, 'proletarian romanticism'.

²⁹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 111 (my emphasis).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Note 2, 112.

³¹ See Baxandall and Morawski, eds., *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*, 35.

³² Jiang Qing's contemptuous dismissal of a variety of foreign art forms (see previous chapter) makes it abundantly clear that 'popular' and working class culture (such as jazz) can be every bit as inimical to the revolutionary as elitist forms (such as symbolism).

³³ Frances Jenkins Olcott, *Children's Reading* (The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), quoted in Georgiou, *Children and Their Literature*, 153.

³⁴ For example, Denton, in 'Model Drama as Myth'.

³⁵ For a discussion of the way realism was employed in the models see Li Mowry, *Yang-ban Hsi*, 42-59. Mowry treats realism as a strong element of both acting and stage decor.

³⁶ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 249.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

³⁸ See Moss and Scott, *The Family of Stories*, 252.

³⁹ It is interesting to note the way the Nazis rejected modernity in their opera and general mythology, seeking inspirational effect in past glories of the Wagnerian kind. It may be that the 'irrational' myth of blood and race could not sit comfortably with a realistic modernity. The Chinese proletarian myth by contrast wedded a rational political philosophy to the emotional force of traditional story and symbol.

⁴⁰ Pan Xiaofeng, *The Stagecraft of Beijing Opera. From its Origins to the Present Day* (Beijing: New World Press 1995), 20.

⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 66.

⁴² See Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, eds., *Picturing Power in the Peoples Republic of China. Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

⁴³ See Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990),

especially Chapter 8, 'The Turbulent Years'; and Stefan Landsberger, *Chinese Propaganda Posters from Revolution to Modernization*, (Amsterdam: The Pepin Press, 1995), 40-56. According to Landsberger the 'conceptual dogmas' provided by the model operas, including 'the three prominences', were obligatory in the visual arts.

⁴⁴ See 'History, Myth and the Tales of Tiananmen,' in Wasserstrom and Perry, *Popular Protest and Popular Culture in Modern China*, 281.

⁴⁵ Hodge and Louie, *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture*, 1. This is interesting in the light of what Judie Christie had to say about Chinese attempts to promote a contemporary but Chinese theatre.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ I am thinking here of such phenomena as the 'House of Mao' restaurant in Singapore, various international Mao-inspired art exhibitions and recently, 'Maoist' designer dresses. There is an interesting article about this kind of thing by journalist Matthew Sweet in *Weekend Australian Review* ('One for the Comrades,' February 19-20, 2000, 8-9).

⁴⁸ *Literature and Revolution in Soviet Russia 1917-62. A Symposium Edited by Max Hayward and Leopold Labedz* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), Introduction by Max Hayward, xvii.

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, 'The Tasks of Brechtian Criticism,' in Eagleton and Milne eds., *Marxist Literary Theory*, 136-140. (My emphasis).

⁵⁰ See Edward M. Gunn, ed., *Twentieth Century Chinese Drama. An Anthology*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), xviii.

⁵¹ See Barthes, *Mythologies*, especially 'Reading and Deciphering Myth' and 'Myth as Stolen Language,' 127-137.

⁵² Barthes, *Mythologies*, 131.

⁵³ Hayward, *Literature and Revolution*, xv.

APPENDICES

Appendices A and B represent 'composition', as discussed in the thesis, and are intended to give the effect of 'discourse', in the narratological sense, which includes the arrangement of scenes, song lyrics, 'literary' elements of narrative, and stage directions, without reproducing the whole text.

Appendices C and D on the other hand are more conventional synopses, intended only to give the reader a basic knowledge of the story and provide a basis for comparison of its subject matter and major themes with that of A and B.

The sources for all of these are as indicated in endnotes for Chapter 5 and 6. (Appendix C has also borrowed from an existing synopsis as indicated below.)

Appendix A: *The White-haired Girl* ('composition')

Prelude

Outside the gate of the landlord Huang Shiren. (Before Liberation peasants suffered but never surrendered to the oppression of landlords, imperialists and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie.) Peasants line up, carrying heavy bags of grain to pay rent, under the whips of landlord lackeys. The farmers want to resist, but they are threatened with pistols as Japanese troops present their oppressors with a sign saying 'Support Law and Order!'

Song:

Look at humanity, for thousands of years people
everywhere have suffered exploitation and floggings.

How many farm hands have become slaves and how many Xiers have become victimised, year after year? Look at the world - which stretch of wasteland was not reclaimed by us, which house not built by us? Yet those dogs and wolves and jackals have robbed us of our land, and taken our crops. They have leased their land and extorted rent at crippling rates. How many farm hands have become slaves and how many Xi'ers have become victims? But poor people can only take the ground for a bed, or the sky for a quilt while their endless tears turn into a great downpour and their boundless hatred becomes a surging sea.

At this point one of the girls - Xi'er - falls to the ground and Wang Shiren strokes his chin lasciviously.

Scene One

Hebei Province, Yangge village, at the home of Yang Bailao. Xi'er is preparing for the New Year, dancing.

Song:

The north wind is blowing, the snowflakes are drifting,
snowflakes are drifting, the New Year is coming, the
wind blows the door open. I hope Dad can come back
early, then we'll have a happy New Year's Day.

Yang enters.

Song:

The whole sky is full of wind and snow, completely white. I am back from seven days of dodging the rent. Landlords are just like tigers and wolves when they collect the rent. I have a bosom full of hatred.

He takes out a red ribbon for Xi'er.

Song:

Other people's daughters have flowers to wear, my Dad can't afford that, but he brings me two feet of red ribbon and helps me tie it in my plaits.

Other people's daughters have flowers to wear, your Dad just can't afford it, but I bought two feet of red ribbon and helped my Xi'er tie it in her hair.

Huang Shiren and Mu Renzhi appear, intending to use the old man's debt as a pretext for taking Xi'er. Mu Renzhi is calculating on an abacus, he gives a book to Yang Bailao who is shocked to see how much he owes. They take out a yellow cloth contract but the old man refuses to sign. Wang Shiren hits Yang with a stick, kills him and presses his

thumb into the red ink of the contract. Wang Dajun and the villagers come, and Xi'er dances solo.

Song:

Suddenly the sky is dim, the earth is dark. Daddy, Daddy, you died a cruel death, murdered in cold blood. Fellow villagers, fellow villagers, the Huangs have extorted rent from my father and killed him. Fellow villagers! I must take revenge.

The villagers gather round the landlord, who takes out a pistol and shoots into the air. He grabs Xi'er and takes her away. Wang Dajun and the others want to fight their enemy and are willing to die, but an underground Communist, Zhao Dashu, persuades them not to do it here. He shows them a red Eighth Route Army armband and tells them they should join the army to wage revolution.

Scene Two

At the home of Huang Shiren. Xi'er dances solo. She has suffered all manner of insults and abuse since being forced into the household.

Song:

Whip me, beat me, stab me, I'm not afraid of your beatings. I will leave your house, break through your door and escape from this den of tigers and wolves. My grievances are measured in blood and my tears are beyond words. I will expose the crimes of the Huang family, both old and new.

Mu Renzhi beats Xi'er, and Huang Shiren attempts to attack her as she lies on the floor. Zhang Ershen, a Huang family servant, enters to prepare tea and Huang leaves.

Scene Three

Near the reeds of a riverbank. Xi'er enters, fleeing, seeking refuge in the reeds. Mu Renzhi and others enter, find one of her shoes and conclude that she has committed suicide. Xi'er watches from the reeds and is consumed with rage; her hatred is like an endless ocean and an uncontrollable fire.

Song:

You want to kill me, you want me to die, but you are blind. This is a river that can never run dry, this is a fire that can never go out. I won't die, I must live, I want revenge.

Scene Four

Wild Mountain, during a storm. Xi'er struggles to survive against storms and wild animals and passes many seasons. Her black hair has turned white and she has become even more brave and resolute, waiting for her opportunity for revenge. She looks to the east, to the direction of the sun, whence will come the transformation of peasant life

Song:

The sky is full of wind and snow, I struggle in the depths of Wild Mountain. I miss my fellow villagers, who suffer under the lash. My hatred will not abate, my grievances are like infinite waves in my heart, swelling and swelling. Spring and autumn and winter come by turns, and still my determination grows stronger. The howling of the wolves and the roar of the tiger are nothing to fear. Xi'er's heart will never rest until she destroys the jackals. I long for revenge as I look to the sun rising in the east.

Scene Five

The Eighth Route Army has liberated Yangge Village, the villagers welcome the soldiers, there is dancing and singing to celebrate Liberation, girls are giving baskets of fruit to the soldiers.

Song:

Big red dates both sweet and fragrant, for our loved ones to taste. One date for each heart that longs for the Communist Party, one date, one heart. The army is united as with one heart, to smash the enemy and protect the village, their revolutionary will is as strong as steel. Follow the Communist Party forever, their revolutionary will is as strong as steel, follow the Communist Party forever.

Wang Dachun returns to the village as an Eighth Route Army officer and remains behind with a small detachment to mobilise the villagers.

Song:

The army and the common people, we are one family, we are one family, destroying the enemy, protecting the village, we are of one mind, and only in this way can we achieve victory. The army and the common people, we

are one family, smashing despots and traitors. We must unite for only then can we transform our lives, unite to transform our lives.

Zhang Ershen enters and tells the story of Xi'er, her cherished memory moving everyone to wrath. Zhao Dashu and Wang Dachun call on the masses to unite with the army and struggle against the traitor despot landlord Huang Shiren. A servant comes from Huang's house to report that Huang Shiren and Mu Renzhi have escaped. Wang Dachun and Zhao Dashu move downstage, leading the masses in pursuit of Huang Shiren.

Scene Six

The Temple of the Goddess in a thunderstorm. Xi'er enters, sings, seething with hatred.

Song:

The roar of the wind fills the sky and the storm shakes the earth. I, Xi'er ride the wind and grasp the thunder, I am myself turning into wind and storm and thunder and I will shake the entire nine levels of Heaven.

Huang Shiren and Mu Renzhi, still on the run, take shelter from the storm in the temple. Xi'er sees the enemy, and she is so full of hatred for this enemy with whom she cannot share the same earth and sky that she chases and beats them, and throws things at them.

Song:

When I see my enemies a fire burns within me; I hate, I hate, I hate so much I could stamp the temple to pieces; I want, I want to tear you into a million pieces!

Wang Dachun and Zhao Dashu enter the temple, find the umbrella left behind by Huang; the company gives chase but Wang Dachun remains behind and discovers the 'white-haired girl'. He pursues her.

Scene Seven

In a cave. Xi'er runs in, followed by Wang Dachun. A chorus of female voices sing 'Xi'er, Xi'er, where are you? Class hatred will never let us forget' and a combined male and female voice chorus sings 'Today we will traverse every inch of Wild Mountain, we will trample through every thorn and briar, we will rescue Xi'er!'

Song: (Xi'er)

Who is this before me? His face is familiar but still there is something strange. Who is it? Who is it? He looks like a relative, it looks like...him...it looks like him... yes, it is Wang Dachun!

(Wang Dachun)

Meeting Xi'er, here in this cave, grievance as deep as a sea of blood descends on my heart. Xi'er, Xi'er, this evil old society must be overthrown!

They dance together, to a chorus:

The sun has come out, the sun has come out, emitting thousands of shining rays. After thousands of years of suffering upon suffering, today at last we see the sun and the sun is Mao Zedong, it is the Communist Party!

Wang Dachun, Xi'er and the other villagers walk out of the cave towards the sunlight.

Scene Eight

The village square. Xi'er and the others enter and dance. Xi'er has returned to her liberated home town and seen her relatives. She is extremely emotional as the scores of a

thousand years will be settled and justice done for wrongs of even ten thousand years ago. Xi'er, seething with hatred, tells the villagers of Huang Shiren's evil crimes.

Song:

The scores of a thousand years must be settled, justice must be done for the wrongs of ten thousand years.

Xi'er, the victim of yesterday will be the victor of today; iron chains of a thousand jin will be shattered into pieces and people who have suffered all their lives will turn their lives around.

The villagers, burning with hatred, tell their stories one at a time. The song from the Prelude, 'Which piece of land?' is reprised, and Huang and Mu are led away. The peasants shout their liberation and transformation to the high heavens and sing solemnly and movingly:

Song:

Beloved Chairman Mao, people's saviour, look at the world! Millions of workers and peasants have stood up and burnt their titles and contracts, wiped out their high interest loans. How many Xi'er's have turned their lives around? The land is like a piece of embroidery, shining with rivers and mountains. Look at the world! Workers and peasants have become masters of the nation.

We will follow Chairman Mao and the Communist Party forever, to carry on the revolution.

Finale

In the square. Wang Dachun leads the Eighth Route Army to the front. Xi'er and other villagers join the ranks of fighters determined to wage revolution to the end.

Appendix B: *The Red Lantern* ('composition')

Scene One: Contacting the Liaison Man

Longtan railway station, North China, an early winter night during the War of Resistance Against Japan.

Four Japanese gendarmes march on patrol. A signal lantern in hand, Li Yuhe enters, calm and composed.

Song:

Red Lantern in hand, I look around;
The leadership is sending a man here to Longtan;
The scheduled arrival is half past seven.
The next train should bring him.

Tiemei enters and greets her Dad, he tells her to go and tell Granny that an uncle is coming. She is puzzled about the 'uncle' and, when he refuses to tell her more, says she will go and ask Granny.

Song (Li):

She peddles goods, collects cinders,
Carries water and chops wood.
A poor man's child can handle anything
And manage the whole household.
Different trees bear different fruits,

Different seeds grow different flowers.

Wang Lianju, puppet police officer and underground Communist, enters, Li warns him the Japanese have posted a tighter guard today; tells him he will contact him when necessary. A train whistle sounds, shots are heard, the Liaison Man somersaults down the railway embankment and passes out. Li recognises the sign of his identity, a glove on the left hand. Wang re-enters, Li tells him the man is one of theirs, carries him off on his back. The Japanese return, Wang, quaking with fear, shoots himself in the arm to fool the gendarmes and fires two shots in the opposite direction to that taken by Li. He is asked if he has seen a man who jumped off a train, points in the direction of his shots and they all drop to the ground to protect themselves.

Scene Two: Accepting the Task

Li's house, door opening on to a small lane. Table and chairs, red paper butterfly pasted on a window pane. Towards the rear an inner room, with a curtain over the doorway.

North wind roaring. It is dim in the room, Granny turns up the lamp and the room becomes brighter.

Song (Granny):

Fishermen brave the wind and waves,
Hunters fear neither tigers nor wolves;
The darkest night must end at last
In the bright blaze of revolution.

Tiemei enters with a basket, asks Granny who is the uncle that is coming, and how come she has so many uncles? She is told her father has many cousins and sings:

Song:

I've more uncles than I can count;
They only come when there's important business.
Though we call them relatives, we never met before,
Yet they are closer to us than our own relatives.
Both dad and you call them our own folk;
I can guess part of the reason why;
They're all like my dad,
Men with red, loyal hearts.

Li hurries in, carrying the Liaison Man on his back, the man asks for the switchman Li Yuhe; they exchange passwords, Li motions to Granny to use the lamp test, granny picks up a kerosene lamp and the man realises this is the wrong signal. Li holds the red lantern aloft and the man recognises him. Tiemei takes the lantern, realising

its significance. The Liaison Man takes a secret code from his shoe, tells Li to take it to the guerillas in the Cypress Mountains, a knife-grinder will contact him tomorrow afternoon at the gruel stall in the junk market, using their password. Li expresses concern for his comrade and tells him to take care on his journey back:

Song: (Li).

Comrade...

Be on guard as you go-

Mountains are high, torrents swift.

Follow little lanes and short bridges,

The quiet and safe paths.

To the revolution we offer our loyal hearts.

Shouldering my heavy task I'll stand up to any ordeal
by fire

Bursting with strength, I'll be worthy of the Party's
trust.

No difficulty in the world can daunt a Communist.

A police siren wails. With the secret code in his hand Li motions to Granny to blow out the lamp.

Scene Three: Narrow Escape at the Gruel Stall

Li enters with the red lantern in one hand and his lunch box in the other. He sings that he has hidden the code in

his lunchbox and is determined to get it to the Cypress Mountains. He sits down to a bowl of gruel with two workmen and they discuss the suffering of the past.

Li sings:

So many compatriots are suffering and fuming with
discontent,

Struggling under iron heels they seethe with wrath.

Spring thunder will rumble when the time comes,

The brave Chinese people will never bow before the
butcher's knife.

May our comrades come soon from the Cypress Mountains!

A knife-grinder enters, but before Li can try the signal on him, the Japanese gendarmes charge in and the knife-grinder overturns a bench to divert the enemy's attention. Li asks for another helping of gruel and empties the gruel into his lunchbox, then holds the smelly gruel out for the Japanese to search. They push it away, search him and wave him away. Li takes his lunchbox and the lantern and strides off.

Scene Four: Wang Turns Traitor

Hatoyama's office.

Hou, an auxiliary gendarme, and Wang enter. Hatoyama presents Wang with a medal then begins to question him about how the Liaison Man could have escaped him. He

accuses Wang of shooting himself and then offers him more medals if he will come clean and tell him the whereabouts of the secret code and the names of those in the underground Communist Party. Wang appears confused, so Hatoyama orders him to be taken away and beaten. Wang is tortured and confesses that his accomplice is Li Yuhe, the switchman.

Scene Five: Recounting the Family's Revolutionary History

Dusk. Li's house.

Li, Red Lantern in hand, returns to Granny and Tiemei, who are worried about him. He tells them he still has not made contact with the Liaison Man, and describes how the knife-grinder diverted the 'wolves', allowing him to conceal the code in his lunch-box. He stresses that the code is more important than their lives and goes out again, with Tiemei, wrapping a scarf around his neck.

Granny tells Tiemei the story of the red lantern.

For many years this lantern has lighted the way for us poor people, for us workers. Your grandfather used to carry this lantern, and now your dad carries it. You saw what happened last night, child. We can't do without it at crucial moments. Remember, this red lantern is our family treasure.

Granny goes into the inner room, leaving Tiemei to pick up the red lantern and ponder over it.

Sings:

Granny has told me the story of the red lantern,
The words are few, but the meaning is deep.
Why are my father and uncle not afraid of danger?
Because they want to save China,
Save the poor, defeat the Japanese invaders.
I realise I should act like them
And be the kind of people they are.

I am seventeen, no longer a child,
I should share my father's worries.
If he's carrying a thousand-pound load,
I should carry eight hundred.

A neighbour enters, tells them of her sick child, there is no grain left, they cannot afford to see a doctor. Teimei give her some corn meal. Neighbour Huilian is greatly moved, but Granny tells her they are two families separated only by one wall and Tiemei says they are but one family, even with the wall. When Huilian leaves Granny tells Tiemei how Huilian's father-in-law, a railway transport worker, was killed by a train and the Japanese refused compensation and seized her husband to work as a coolie. Granny says

that they are two worker families who endure the same suffering and feel the same hatred for the enemy.

A bogus liaison man enters and gives the password. Tiemei moves to pick up the red lantern but Granny stops her and picks up a kerosene lamp instead. The Bogus Liaison Man is fooled by this and betrays himself as a fake. Tiemei, burning with indignation, pushes him out the door. Granny realises someone has turned traitor and tells Tiemei to tear the sign of the red butterfly off the window pane. Li returns and tells Granny that he will soon be arrested but he has put the code under the stone tablet beside an old locust tree on the west bank of the river. He tells her she must deliver it to the knife-grinder. The password is the same. Hou enters and tells Li that Hatoyama has invited him for a drink. Granny offers Li a bowl of wine, a hero's parting drink, and he takes a fond farewell of Tiemei, exhorting her to share Granny's burdens and cares. Li leaves, and two spies enter the room. They search the house, finding only an old almanac, which they toss aside. They leave.

Granny tells Tiemei it is time to tell her the family's revolutionary history. Revolutionary memories float before her eyes as she looks at the red scarf; hatred, old and new, for the enemy, passes through her mind. She tells Tiemei she is not her granny and Li is not her father.

We three generations are from different families. Your surname is Chen, mine is Li and your dad's is Zhang.

Sings:

For seventeen storm-tossed years I've kept quiet,
Several times I wanted to speak,
But I was afraid you were too young for the truth.

It's most likely your father will not return,
And Granny may be jailed too,
Then the heavy burden of revolution will fall on you.
When I tell you the truth, Tiemei,
Don't cry, don't break down, be brave and staunch,
Learn from your father his loyalty, courage and iron
will.

Granny tells Tiemei that her grandfather was a railway maintenance man in the Jiangan Depot near Hankou. He had two apprentices, one of whom was her father, Chen Zhixin. The other was her present dad, Zhang Yuhe. At that time, the country was torn by strife among warlords. Then, Chairman Mao and the Communist Party led the Chinese people in waging revolution. In February 1923, workers of the Beijing-Hankou Railway set up a federation of trade unions in Zhenzhou, but Wu Peifu, a lackey of foreign stooges and capitalists, tried to ban it. The line workers went on strike, more than ten thousand took to the streets and

demonstrated in Jiangan. Granny was mending clothes by lamplight when some one knocked at the door. It was Zhang Yuhe, covered in wounds and carrying a signal lantern in his left hand. In his right arm he held a baby, less than one year old. He told Granny that his master and his brother had been murdered, that this child was his brother's child, a successor to the revolution who must be brought up to carry on the revolution. He told Granny 'Auntie, from now on I am your own son and this child is your own granddaughter'.

Granny sings:

In the strike those devils murdered your father and
mother,
Li Yuhe worked tirelessly for the revolution;
He swore to follow in the martyr's steps, to keep the
red lantern burning;
He staunched his wounds, buried the dead and went on
with the fight.
Now the Japanese brigands are burning, killing and
looting,
Before our eyes your dad was taken away to prison;
Remember this debt of blood and tears,
Be brave and determined to settle accounts with the
enemy,
A debt of blood must be paid in blood.

Tiemei sings:

Granny tells a heroic and stirring episode of the
revolution,
Now I know I was raised in wind and rain.
Dear Granny, for all those seventeen years,
Your kindness to me has been as vast as the sea.
Now with lofty vision I see my way clear.
Blood must pay for our blood,
Successors must carry forward the cause of our
martyrs.
Here I raise the red lantern, may its light shine
afar.
Dad!
My father is as steadfast as the pine,
A Communist who fears nothing under the sun.
Following in your footsteps I shall never waver.
The red lantern we hold aloft shines
Upon my father as he fights those wild beasts.
Generation after generation we shall fight on,
And never leave the field till all the wolves are
slain.

Tiemei and Granny hold the red lantern aloft as it casts a
radiant red light.

Scene Six: Struggling Against Hatoyama at the Feast

Hatoyama's reception room. A feast is laid. Hou enters, and invites Li in. Li sings of his determination to face the enemy with composure, with revolutionary righteousness in his heart.

Hatoyama enters, and reminds Li that he once treated him in the railway hospital. Li responds that they were like trains passing on different tracks, since he was a poor Chinese worker and Hatoyama a rich Japanese doctor. They engage in a dialogue, in which Hatoyama tries to persuade Li that every man must look after himself. Li responds with contempt and sarcasm until Hatoyama loses patience and demands the secret code, threatening him.

Wang Lianju enters, cringing and trembling before Li's piercing gaze. Li denounces him as a coward and tells him the day will come when the people bring him to trial for his unpardonable crime of betrayal. Wang is terrified by Li's revolutionary integrity. Hatoyama threatens Li with terrible torture but Li sings:

The Japanese militarists are wolves
Hiding their savagery behind a smile.
You kill our people and invade our land
In the name of 'Co-prosperity in Asia'.
The Communist Party and Chairman Mao are leading the
people's revolution;
We have hundreds of millions of heroes
Fighting against Japan to save our country.
Your reliance on traitors is of no more use
Than fishing for the moon in the lake.

Hatoyama calls for Li to be taken away and tortured, but Li brushes the gendarmes aside, buttons his coat, flicks the dust from his cap and strides off in an intimidating manner. Hatoyama is taken aback by this display of the steely resolve of a Communist.

Later a sergeant reports that Li Yuhe would rather die than speak. He is dragged in, bloodstained and wounded, but advances militantly on Hatoyama. Hatoyama demands the code, but Li sings:

No matter how cruel your tortures,
Pure gold fears not tempering in fierce fire.
No matter what I'll never bow my head.

The enemies are terrified by his heroic spirit.

Scene 7: Help from the Masses

Several days later, Li's house. Cobbler, a spy in disguise, is watching the house. Knife-grinder enters warily, sees the red butterfly on the window pane and notices the spy. He leaves. Granny and Tiemei look out the window. Tiemei offers to contact the knife-grinder by crawling through into Huilian's room via a secret gap in the wall. She is to contact the knife-grinder and utter the password. If he gives the right reply she is to go to the west bank of the river and get the code from under a stone-tablet beside an old locust tree. She takes the red lantern with her. The cobbler and two spies come to the house looking for Tiemei, but Granny tells them she is ill. Huilian calls out to Granny, pretending to be Tiemei. The spies leave. Tiemei returns with the lantern and tells Granny that she has been unable to locate the knife-grinder. Hou enters to tell Granny that Hatoyama is coming for her. Hatoyama enters, tells Granny that he is looking for a code contained in a book.

Granny sings:

My family has always suffered from hunger and cold,
None of us three knows how to read.

What would we want with a book in our home?

Hatoyama promises that he will release Li Yuhe, make him a vice-section chief and make the whole family rich if he is given the book. Granny tells Tiemei to fetch it, and she brings him an almanac. Hatoyama takes Granny and Tiemei away.

Granny sings:

Revolutionaries can stand the collapse of heaven and earth!

Scene Eight: Struggle on the Execution Ground

A prison in the HQ of the Japanese gendarmerie. Hou has installed a secret microphone so that Granny and Li Yuhe will be overheard when they meet. They meet in a corner of the execution ground.

Li sings:

That villain Hatoyama used every torture to get the code,

My bones are broken, my flesh is torn,

But my will is as firm as steel.

Walking boldly to the execution ground, I look afar:

The red flag of revolution is raised on high.
The flames of resistance spread far and wide.
Japanese bandits, let's see how much longer you can
rage!
Once the storm is past flowers will bloom,
New China will shine like the morning sun,
Red flags will fly all over the country.
This thought heightens my confidence
And my resolve is strengthened.
I have done very little for the Party,
I'm worried that the code hasn't got to the mountains.
Wang's only contact was with me,
The wretch can betray no one else;
My mother and daughter are as firm as steel.
Hatoyama, try and get the secret code!
You may ransack heaven and earth
But you will never find it.
Revolutionaries fear nothing on earth,
They will for ever march forward.

Granny enters, sings:

Again I live through that day seventeen years ago,
And burn with hate for the foe of my class and
country.
These...Japanese devils cruel and treacherous,
Have beaten you black and blue,
My son, my son!

Li urges her not to grieve, sings:

Brought up by the Party to be a man of steel,
I fight the foe and never give ground.
I'm not afraid
To have every bone in my body broken,
I'm not afraid
To be locked up until I wear through the floor of my
cell,
It makes my heart bleed to see our country ravaged,
I burn with anger for my people's suffering.
However hard the road of revolution,
We must press on in the steps of the glorious dead.
My only regret if I die today
Is the 'account' I have not settled.
I long to soar like an eagle to the sky,
Borne on the wind above the mountain passes
To rescue our millions of suffering countrymen -
Then how gladly would I die for the revolution!

Tiemei enters, is distressed at Li's bloody appearance, but he Li tells her to be brave. He begins to tell her of the secret he has kept for seventeen years but she stops him, tells him that she knows the bitter tale and that he is her own father.

Li sings:

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

Tiemei sings:

Dad has given me a priceless treasure
To light my path forward for ever.
You have given me your integrity
To help me stand firm as a rock;
You have given me your wisdom
To help me see through the enemy's wiles;
You have given me your courage
To help me fight those brutes.
The red lantern is our heirloom.
Oh Dad, the treasure you leave me is so vast,
That a thousand carts and ten thousand boats
Cannot hold it all.
I give your my word I will keep the lantern always
safe.

Li sings:

As wave follows wave in the great Yangtse River,
Our red lantern will be passed from hand to hand.

The Sergeant enters and tells them that Hatoyama has given them five more minutes to think it over, if they do not reveal the secret code they will be shot. They refuse, then Granny Tiemei and Li Yuhe link arms and three revolutionaries of three generations walk up the slope to the execution place. They are heard off-stage shouting `Down with Japanese imperialism!', `Long live the Chinese Communist Party!' and `Long live Chairman Mao!' as a volley of shots is fired.

Tiemei, still alive, is dragged before Hatoyama and ordered to give up the code. She refuses but Hatoyama lets her go. Hou asks why he has done this and he replies that this method is known as `using a long line to catch a big fish'.

Scene Nine: Advancing Wave Upon Wave

Dawn at Li's house.

Tiemei enters, swearing that she will avenge Li and Granny, that she will be the successor to the red lantern and deliver the code to the Cypress Mountains.

She sings:

I burst with anger when I think of the foe!
Repressing my rage I grind my teeth.
Using every trick to get the code,
Hatoyama has killed my Granny and my Dad!
Biting my hate, chewing my rage,
I force them down my throat,
Let them sprout in my heart.
I'll never yield, I'll never retreat,
No tears shall wet my cheeks,
Let them flow into my heart
To nourish the burning seeds of hatred.
Flames of rage, ten leagues high,
Will burn away this reign of the forces of darkness.
I'm prepared: arrest me, release me,
Use your whips and lash, your locks and chains.
Break my bones you will never get the code.
Just wait, you villain Hatoyama,
This is Tiemei's answer!
I go now.

She picks up the red lantern. Huilian enters, and Aunt Tian. Aunt Tian tells her they will help her, and let her slip through past the spies, by using their house,

disguised as Huilian. Tiemei fears for their safety, but Aunt Tian sings:

None but the poor help the poor,
We are two bitter gourds on the same vine;
We must save you from the tiger's jaws,
So that you can go forward on your course.

When Tiemei continues to express anxiety, Aunt Tian tells her: 'We are both working-class families. We have shared bitterness and hatred for many years. No matter how risky it is, I must see you away safely.' Tiemei is greatly moved, picks up the red lantern and goes into the inner room. Huilian leaves the house with Tiemei's scarf around her face. The spies trail her.

Scene Ten: Ambushing and Annihilating the Enemy

On the road leading to the Cypress Mountains. Tiemei meets the knife-grinder with two guerrillas dressed as peasants. Tiemei takes up the red lantern and holds it aloft. The knife-grinder recognises her. She starts to tell him what has happened but he stops her, he knows everything. He tells her to turn her sorrow into strength in order to be avenged. She gives him the code and tells him that Huilian is in great danger because she has disguised herself as Tiemei and led the spies away. The knife-grinder tells one of the guerrillas to help Huilian and Aunt Tian get away,

and the other to take Tiemei up into the mountain. The traitor Wang enters with Japanese gendarmes and Hatoyama. The knife-grinder blocks their way, other guerrillas leap out of the undergrowth, Hatoyama and Wang run off and are pursued by the guerrillas. The knife-grinder engages with Wang. During close quarter fighting the guerrillas wipe out all the gendarmes, shoot down the traitor Wang and run Hatoyama through.

The guerrillas form a tableau of heroes in a valiant pose.

Scene Eleven: Forward in Victory

The Cypress Mountains. Red flags flutter against a clear blue sky. The Guerrilla leader, Tiemei, the knife-grinder and all the guerrillas enter. Tiemei hands the code to the guerrilla leader. They brandish their rifles and swords. Tiemei holds the red lantern aloft.

Appendix C: *Red Detachment of Women* (synopsis)

(Adapted from HUGO Productions 1992 CD, a digital remastering of a 1971 recording, and the May 1970 script of the China Ballet Troupe published by Foreign Languages Press, 1972.)

Hainan Island, during the Second Revolutionary Civil War, 1927-37. The Red Detachment of Women, a unit of the Red Army led by Hong Changqing, is waging armed revolutionary struggle against local tyrants and despotic landlords and establishing its own base. Wu Qinghua, a poor peasant's daughter, is chained to a pillar in the dungeon of the despotic landlord, Nan Batian, along with many others unable to pay his exorbitant taxes and levies. Nan's lackey, Lao Si, has been ordered to sell her, but catching him off guard Wu Qinghua kicks him to the ground and escapes with the assistance of her fellow prisoners.

No sooner has she run away than she is recaptured and viciously beaten by Nan's stooges. She loses consciousness. A sudden rainstorm hits the place and Nan and his followers leave her for dead.

The sun comes out after the rain and its rays penetrate into the coconut grove. Hong Changqing and a messenger boy, disguised for reconnaissance work, pass by. They rescue her and point out the way to refuge in the liberated area.

Wu Qinghua is warmly welcomed by soldiers and civilians in the revolutionary base. She passionately denounces Nan's monstrous crimes and is accepted as a member of the newly-founded Red Detachment of Women.

In order to destroy his gang, Hong Changqing ventures into Nan's den during his birthday celebrations, disguised as a wealthy merchant from overseas. By a pre-arranged signal, the firing of his gun at midnight, his comrades will break in and wipe out the gang, but Wu Qinghua becomes so infuriated on seeing Nan that she opens fire without permission, prematurely giving the signal. The army smashes Nan's den but he himself escapes through a secret tunnel. Wu Qinghua is criticised for breaching discipline and upsetting the battle plan.

At the army camp by the Wanchuan River, Hong Changqing gives the soldiers of the Red Detachment of Women a lesson in revolution which inspires and enlightens Wu Qinghua. At

last she understands that revolution is not a matter of personal vengeance and that revolutionaries must unite under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party. She bitterly regrets her breach of discipline and vows to follow Chairman Mao and the Communist Party as a proletarian vanguard soldier.

During a clear day in the base area the local people are busy collecting lichees and making bamboo hats to show their concern for the Red Army. Suddenly the sound of cannons is heard. Nan has assembled a large troop to attack the base area. The fighters bid farewell to their friends and depart confidently for the battlefield. Gunpowder, smoke and fire can be seen coming from the mountain pass, where Hong Changqing is leading an army unit in a heroic rearguard action against the enemy. Hong Changqing is wounded and loses consciousness. His platoon reaches safety but he falls into the hands of the enemy. The main force of the Red Army presses forward at full speed to pursue and eliminate the enemy.

At Nan's hideout there is panic and confusion as they try to put up a last-ditch struggle. His efforts to force Hong Changqing to surrender is in vain. Hong denounces the enemy

and goes calmly and majestically to a martyr's death in the pyre which has been prepared in order to force him to deny the revolution.

A myriad rays of sunlight disperse the dark clouds as the Red Army liberate the coconut grove and execute the fleeing Nan Batian.

Hong is dead and his comrades are grief-stricken. Clenching their fists they call on the fighters to convert their sorrow into strength and carry on the cause of the fallen hero. Hong has given his life but tens of thousands will rise in his place. Wu Qinghua becomes Hong's replacement as commander of the Red Detachment of Women and the ranks of fighters swell like a torrent with newly liberated women and recruits for the people's army.

Appendix D: *On the Docks* (synopsis)

(Adapted from the January 1972 script by the 'On the Docks' Group of the Beijing Opera Troupe of Shanghai, published in English by the Foreign Languages Press in 1973).

Shanghai Docks, summer 1963. A typhoon is imminent and the dispatcher Qian Shouwei is attempting to delay a shipment of seed-rice bound for Africa until the arrival of the typhoon, thus preventing the freighter's departure. He has also contrived to leave two thousand sacks of wheat out in the open. Under the leadership of Fang Haizhen and Gao Zhiyang, the dockers are busy loading the rice and moving the sacks of wheat to the warehouse.

Han Xiaoqiang, a secondary school graduate who is discontented to be a mere docker, and anxious to come off shift, drops a sack of wheat, causing it to spill open. Seeing this, Qian Shouwei concocts a plan. He sweeps most of the spilled wheat into a dustpan containing scrap fibreglass and pours the whole mixture back into the wheat sack. He tells Han that he will take care of the spilled sack and directs the young man to go and pick up a sack of rice which he has pointed out. Han, in his haste to go and see a film, carries it into the warehouse, not noticing

that it is not wheat and does not belong with this load. Qian then attempts to load the contaminated wheat on to the rice truck but is surprised by the woman truck-driver Hong and another woman worker. Qian skulks off, but the two women lift the sack on to the truck. Gao enters and notices the wheat still lying on the ground. He becomes extremely agitated about the fact that a spilled sack has been cleared for export and calls for an urgent after-shift meeting.

Gao confronts Han about why he was not at the after-shift meeting. He tries to remind him of the importance of his work and of maintaining the quality of exports in the collective interest. Han is unhappy with his 'menial' work. Gao responds to this passionately and pours forth the hatred he and his fellow dockers feel for the American imperialists who lorded it over China's harbours in the past, recalling the bitter suffering endured by dock workers before liberation by the PLA. Fang enters and tells Gao that there is a serious and suspicious incident in which fibreglass has been found close to the spilled wheat. Fang decides to lock the warehouse and investigate the incident. The storm breaks.

Fang has been reading the works of Mao and reminds Zhao, a Party branch committee member, of his great teaching never to forget class struggle. She declares that class struggle is behind the spilled wheat incident and that she suspects Qian to be a class enemy responsible for sabotage. She reminds Zhao how they suffered before Liberation and how millions of people are still suffering throughout the world. To beat the typhoon the wheat has to be loaded ahead of schedule to meet a morning shipment, so Fang and the dockers resolve to search the warehouse all night long looking for the spilled sack.

While the search goes on Qian frightens Han by telling him that he is responsible for the contaminated sack, that he is suspected of sabotage and must never reveal the secret. In the meantime Fang sends for Han to ask him if he knows anything about the sack. Han says he wants a transfer and becomes very emotional when he is told it will not be granted. He runs out of the meeting in tears. Qian is interviewed and behaves very suspiciously. The women workers are then interviewed and tell Han they remember seeing what they took to be a fallen sack near the truck, and that they had loaded it with the rice. Fang suddenly realises that the fibreglass and wheat must have been

loaded from the truck on to a small boat for transport to the freighter. Gao decides to go out in a steam launch in the fierce storm to retrieve the sack. Fang reminds Gao that at a time like this they must all bear in mind the Party's instructions and hold fast to their internationalist goals. Gao boldly sets forth for the steam launch.

Just before dawn in the class education hall, Ma Hongliang, a retired docker tells Han about the bitterness of the past, and of Han's own father's terrible suffering as a 'coolie'. He reminds him how they have all been liberated by Chairman Mao and the Party and asks how he could have forgotten his roots. Fang enters and exhorts Han to stand firm with the Party. Han is stricken with remorse and reveals the truth about the spilled sack. He resolves that from now on he will endure every trial and test and battle on the docks to become 'tempered steel'. Qian's crime is exposed.

Gao returns with the sack of wheat. A docker relates how Qian attempted to escape but was captured by Zhao, the Party branch committee member. Fang observes that Chairman Mao has enjoined them all never to forget class struggle

and that they will thoroughly transform the world with the power of the people.

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