

Observations on Rhetorical Art in Bi Feiyu's Fiction

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In 1996 Bi Feiyu's short story "The Lactating Woman" appeared in *Zuojia* (Writer) magazine, attracting broad notice and garnering a tide of positive responses. Thereupon Bi Feiyu became widely known as a fiction writer, and this story was seen as his trademark piece, even though he had published excellent pieces before that. The year 1993 had seen publication of "That Boy Was Me," likewise in *Zuojia* magazine, which was already an exquisite, evocative work. In a sense it belongs to the same type as "The Lactating Woman," for both stories deal with a child's private concerns which are not readily grasped by adults. They both tell of a child's loneliness and inner hurts, of a child's dignity being trampled on by adults, and of something sacred to a child's heart being misunderstood and defiled. These two short stories both tell of a child in a state of having no one to turn to. Yet compared to "The Lactating Woman," I feel that "That Boy Was Me" carries richer implications, and I would rather view it as Bi Feiyu's trademark piece,

even though it did not make his reputation. In 1994, *Qingnian Wenxue* (Youth Literature) published Bi's novella *Cotton Candy in the Rain*, a work which also showed a unique, full-fledged sensibility. The tense relation of an individual to social conventions is given heart-gripping expression in this novella. In 1995, *People's Literature* published Bi's short story "Who Is That Talking Late at Night?" which cleverly conveys the sense of mystery that is inevitably found in history. Through love affairs described the story, the mysteriousness of history is intriguingly juxtaposed with the mystery of an individual life. Any of the three early works mentioned above could have qualified as Bi Feiyu's "trademark piece," yet no critical response greeted their appearance. Not until the appearance of "The Lactating Woman" did people know that Bi Feiyu was a young man to be reckoned with among fiction writers.

Overall we can take *The Moon Opera* published in 2000, as the dividing point for two stages of Bi Feiyu's fiction writing so far. The difference in rhetorical means between earlier and later stages is quite obvious.

Narrative language in the early stage is quite refined and decorous, without sacrificing clear fluidity. The narrative tone maintains a level poise, and there is a strongly “bookish” coloring in his mode of discourse.

Before taking up fiction, Bi Feiyu was fascinated for a time with poetry. In his early-stage fiction, occasional sentences strike one as marking a “transition of identity” from poet to fiction writer. For instance, “I stood on the broad avenue, and a street light’s fist laid my shadow out across the pavement.” (*Narrative*) Such a sentence gives an impression of being lifted out of a poem during a daydream, to be plunked down in this story like a red bean in a bowl of mung bean porridge. When Bi Feiyu got his start in fiction writing, the group known as “Avant-Garde Writers” was making a big splash on the literary scene. Whether deliberate or not, Bi Feiyu imitated their approach to some extent. Even in his narrative language one can discern signs of influence from “avant-garde fiction.” Then, in the rhetorical approach of *The Moon Opera*, we see him striking out in a new direction. Compared to his earlier works, *The Moon Opera* clearly has a stronger

story line, and characters are depicted more three-dimensionally. The narrative language takes a turn toward rough exuberance, and orality is accentuated. What is more, there is a painstakingly achieved sense of vagary and heterogeneity. If we say that in early works the narrator sticks to a bookish tone, then beginning with *The Moon Opera* the narrator’s tone becomes more variable: at times it is seriously straightforward, but at times it is peppered with sly asides; at times it conveys mild gentility, but at times it is full of bravado and sassy raillery. If we say that the narrator in the early novels is like a strict teacher, speaking in standard, thoughtfully chosen phrases, then beginning with *The Moon Opera* the narrator becomes a teahouse tale-spinner whose language changes along with the objects being narrated: when he tells about the mercurial strategist Cao Cao, he sounds different from when telling about the trust-inspiring Liu Bei; when he speaks of the perfectly devoted Guan Gong, he sounds different from when speaking of impetuous Zhang Fei¹. These changes in rhetorical mode surely indicate a change in the author’s creative vision; they also indicate his rethinking of literature’s relation to reality. Of course this may make more sense when addressed from the other side: first of all the writer Bi Feiyu made major adjustments in his relation to reality, and then came major adjustments in rhetorical mode of his fiction, which in turn caused extensive adjustments in Bi Feiyu’s relation to readers.

Among Bi's works after *The Moon Opera* one noteworthy change is the use of humor, a quality which may be crucial for fiction. As Milan Kundera remarked, "The wisdom of philosophy and the wisdom of fiction are quite different. The mother of fiction is not exhaustive rationality but humor."² Kundera's fiction definitely shows a strong sense of humor, typically making sport at the vagaries of human nature under authoritarian rule. To express tragedy in a mode of humor is often more successful than by tearful recriminations. What makes Kundera Kundera is to a large extent his "Kundera-esque" humor. Humor was not totally lacking in Bi Feiyu's fiction before *The Moon Opera*, but can not be said to have been prevalent. If an example is called for, we can point to his 1998 work "What Is a Man Left with?" Parts of the narrative in this short story are fairly humorous: "There was nothing wrong with living in the office, but it was tough getting used to those physical stirrings. I think all newly divorced men have certain difficulties adjusting to single status. When evening comes you often feel those pale blue flames leaping up in your body, for no good reason, licking here and there like tongues. I considered 'taking the matter into my own hands,' but instead I endured those flames. I was determined to give up, just like quitting cigarettes. I denied myself that gratification. For someone who had made a mistake in life as I had, it would not be right to be lax with myself. I needed to be tough

on myself." Yet we know that the entirety of the narrator's "mistake" was a brief embrace with a female university classmate. Between what he really did and what he thought he did there was quite a distance, and humor is generated out of that gap. As we savor it, we end up sympathizing more deeply with what the character suffered. Achieving such an artistic effect of course has to do with the rhetoric of humor.

Beginning with *The Moon Opera*, there is a marked increase in this rhetoric of humor. With the writing of *Yumi* and *Yuxiu* in 2001, humor becomes the basic tone of narrative. The background to both stories is a rural village in the "Cultural Revolution" period. That was an era when politics was held sway over everything, and political discourse was all-engulfing. Bi Feiyu often adds humor to his narrative through parody and misappropriation of then-current political discourse. In *Yumi*, speaking of how Branch Party Secretary Wang Lianfang openly uses his power to have affairs with many married women in the village, the narrative goes as follows:

"As for Wang Lianfang's history of struggle, there was one external circumstance that must be touched upon. For the past ten-odd years his wife Shi Guifang had constantly been getting pregnant. When she got pregnant, Wang had to take 'No' for an answer. He could hardly remember a time when Shi Guifang was not standing under a tree, with one hand propped against the trunk

and one hand held over her belly, convulsed by mindless retching that could be heard through the whole village. Shi Guifang had been doing this for over ten years, and Wang Lianfang had gotten fed up with hearing it. Her retching was not just an ugly sound: who would think a sound could be so hollow and unthinking and position-less? Argh-gah argh-gah. She went on and on without restraint, doing it the same way each time, until her retching became a string of clichéd noises. This was what Wang Lianfang disliked more than anything. Her duty was to hurry up and bear him a son, but she couldn't do it. Fuck! Despite making such a fuss, she simply could not do it; it was all just a lot of bother for nothing. He abhorred the sound of her retching and the moment he heard it he would critique her: 'So, you're making your report again!'"

To call Wang's affairs with village

women a "history of struggle" and his wife's retching a string of "unthinking and positionless" "clichéd noises"; to call Wang's derision of his wife a "critique" and describe her retching as "making a report"—these are all examples of that era's earnest political discourse being distorted to describe physical matters such as morning sickness or revulsion toward one's wife, to risible effect. In *Yuxiu* we read this account of Guo Zuo, son of the commune's deputy-secretary Guo Jiaying: "As soon as Guo Jiaying and Yumi got off work, Guo Zuo grew silent. Like his father, his expression was marked by an excess of measures and policies, by organizational spirit, by discipline and group decisions." It is arrestingly laughable to describe Guo Zuo's expression with words like "measures," "policies" and "organizational spirit."

This appropriation of current political discourse produces humor, but at the same time gives a strong sense of temporal atmosphere. When Bi Feiyu uses these political expressions, he clearly does so in a joking tone. His adroit use of dated political expressions pokes fun at the top players of that era, as well as poking fun at the era itself.

The humor in Bi Feiyu's rhetoric is not only found in choice of words but also in the plot line. One could even say that humor is built into the plot elements. In *Yumi* the character Wang Lianfang is expelled from the Party and removed from his post for "ruining a military marriage," and so he is reduced to being a "common nobody." He

decides to leave the village to learn lacquer-crafting. Before leaving, he fortifies himself with liquor and tries to make mischief, one last time, with Youqing's wife, but meets with refusal. Wang's response may not be what readers expect, but it will have them slapping their knees admiringly:

“Wang Lianfang heard no movement, so after a while he went into the main room, hitching up his pants, only to find that Youqing's wife was gone. Wang Lianfang could never have expected an outcome like this, and it made the effects of the liquor wear off. As he pulled at his belt, he felt a crushing sense of how people in this world are like a wind that blows hot and cold. He thought, ‘So, you want to set up a chastity plaque, all on my account. You didn't set it up any other time, but you insist on setting it up now. Well, aren't you something?’ With a cold laugh he muttered, ‘Damned dame!’ He went back into the side room, took off his clothes and crawled under the covers. Before long he unleashed his singing voice. Lying on the bed he sang the parts of three characters from Sha Jia Bang, one of the Eight Model Plays of modern Peking Opera popular during the Cultural Revolution: Miz Ah-Qing, Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi. With his powerful voice box he belted out the lyrics raucously. He had to constrict his throat to squeak out the high notes in Miz Ah-Qing's songs, but when he came to the highest soprano notes, which were too high for him to hit, he would revert to Hu Chuankui's low voice. Wang Lianfang's performance resounded through the whole village, into the ears of everyone there, but they went about their business as if they heard nothing. Wang Lianfang staged an entire performance of the scene ‘Wise Stratagem’ from Sha Jia Bang on Youqing's bed, not leaving out a single word, complete with a crescendo of drums and gongs made with his mouth. Then he pulled on his clothes and walked away.”

Wang Lianfang's actions are laugh-inducing but also infuriating. Perhaps one should say that they are infuriating because they are laugh-inducing. This plot-segment has strong expressive power due to its humorous touch. Through this impromptu opera performance, Wang's true character as a village bully comes across vividly. Bullies have been a timeless feature of the village scene down through history. Many renowned figures, from river pirates to rulers and top generals, got their start as village strongmen. The American scholar Arthur H. Smith, who was quite familiar with all things Chinese, wrote a special study of rural bullies in his book *China's Village Life*. In this book he observed: "No adequate understanding of the life of the Chinese is possible without some comprehension of the place therein of the bully, and conversely it might almost be said that a just apprehension of the character and functions of the Chinese bully is equivalent to a comprehension of Chinese society." "Those who are most frequently bullies are generally those who have no property to lose."³ In some of his fictional works Bi Feiyu has written of such local bullies. In his new novel *Plains*, there is a group of characters Peiquan, Dalu, Guoyue, Hongqi which is a continuation of the timeless bully breed found in the Cultural Revolution era. In Bi's story "White Nights," published in 1998, the characters Lihen, Zhangman, Wang Er are still fairly young and can only be called juvenile delinquents,

but in a few more years they will be like the group of bullies in *Plains*. From Wang Lianfang's unexpected behavior upon being refused by Youqing's wife, we can tell that he belongs to this same type. Bi Feiyu's depiction of Wang, who is secretary over a production brigade, makes me think of certain works written by Zhao Shuli.⁴ Zhao Shuli once made this insightful remark: "In my experience the hardest thing to guard against in the Land Reform Movement was infiltration by hooligans. Because hooligans were poor people, they could easily disguise their identity among poor farmers...Nothing could deter those hooligans: as long as there were takings within reach, they would seize an opening anywhere."⁵ Quite a few of Zhao Shuli's fiction works tell about hooligans and bullies who held authority in local rural governments. Looking back after the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Yang⁶ remarked in this respect: "Zhao Shuli's works describe serious impurities within the organization at the village level; they tell about bad elements who wormed their way into positions as local cadres in the Party—they were bullies and landlords who disguised themselves. This was a discovery that Comrade Zhao Shuli gained by embedding himself deeply on the scene, showing his discernment and courage as a writer."⁷ We can point to Bi Feiyu's novella *Yumi* in which the character Wang Lianfang had served for 20 years as secretary of a production brigade. Here was a man who had "wormed his way" into the

Party and who held authority in local village government. In a sense we can plausibly view *Yumi* as a sequel to the type of stories Zhao Shuli had written. Zhao Shuli wrote of hoodlums who “seized openings” during Land Reform. Well then what were those one-time hooligans up to in the decades following Land Reform? Bi Feiyu’s *Yumi* gives an answer from a particular angle: each bully became a local despot over a piece of

land, and many women on that land became his concubines.

Accuracy is a rhetorical quality which should be valued in Bi Feiyu’s fiction. When reading his works, especially from *The Moon Opera* on, I often write this marginal comment after some passages: “on-the-mark narrative.” By this I mean that the story’s treatment of an act or a scene or a mental process is especially accurate.



 It gives one the feeling that not a word needs to be tinkered with, and no imaginable way of re-writing the passage could be more vivid or exhilarating. Indeed, upon reading such a passage one first of all feels exhilarated, like drinking a glass of cold water on a day when sweat pours down, or like sipping a glass of fine wine after a long weary trek. Reading such a passage, one may feel that a screw is slowly turning, going into threaded bolt until it seats itself, as if created to become one with that bolt. Reading such a narrative passage, you may feel that an adept hand is reaching unerringly toward an itchy patch of skin, then scratching and kneading it with just the right pressure. Reading such a passage, you may visualize a rivulet of pure spring water flowing onto cracked, dry soil.



 An example is the story *The Moon Opera*, which tells of Xiao Yanqiu’s weight-loss efforts in order to resume her stage career: “Xiao Yanqiu was not just losing

weight. To put it more accurately, she was scraping it off. Ounce by ounce she was scraping the weight from her body, as if with her fingernails. This was a battle—

a hidden battle without gunpowder, yet she could feel the carnage.”“In this period of weight reduction Xiao Yanqiu was not just on a bombing mission: her determination was a deadly sniper, with weapon leveled intently at her body and her glance never turning aside. Her body had become her ultimate target, and she was ready to pull the trigger at any stirring of appetite. Each evening she stood on the bathroom scale and held herself to a strict criterion—reduce devotedly and make downward progress each day.” Accurate narrative is often powerfully expressive: it pares away useless words and delivers twice the impact with half the fuss. Although this passage tells about Xiao Yanqiu’s weight loss plan, it also lets the reader feel her eagerness to go back on stage. This eagerness leaps up within her like a blazing fire, driving her to make those masochistic efforts at “scraping” and “digging” the weight from her body. We see another example in how Yuxiu relates to the men who gang raped her in the story *Yuxiu*: “What Yuxiu found hardest to face, as ever, were those men. As they walked past her they would stare at her and grin obscenely, as if recalling a moment of blissful oblivion. They pretended to share a secret understanding, as if she were bound to them by a thousand invisible threads.” “Because of fear she dared not let the secret out, and of course they were not about to



let the secret out. Thus Yuxiu found herself bound with them in a perverse pact to keep their shared secret, making her practically one of them.” This passage truly conveys the feeling of this tricky, exasperating matter; it gives us a sense of her awkward position and the way her heart feels tied in knots. Narrative of such accuracy is often charged with a poetic feel. Although one cannot claim that accuracy is sufficient to generate a poetic quality, it seems plausible to say that accuracy is a necessary condition for that quality. In his *Renjian Cihua (Remarks on Poetry)*, when Wang Guowei⁸ wrote on the issue of “obstructed” versus “unobstructed” verse, in fact he was addressing the question of accuracy versus inaccuracy. “Spring grass rims the pond,” and “Swallows carry their earth to deserted rafters”—the reason Wang Guowei describes these lines as “unobstructed” is its accuracy in representing a scene. “Over the pond of the Xie household/ Along the swollen river’s margin”—the reason Wang Guowei thinks this is “obstructed” is its indefiniteness, which is due to lack of accuracy. Here is what Wang says about accuracy in representing a scene. “When each word calls up an image, this is unobstructed.” Only in an accurate treatment does “each line call up an image.” Accuracy implies deep-seated truthfulness, and it takes such truthfulness to generate accuracy. In speaking of poetic

qualities in drama, Li Jianwu (李健吾) had this to say: “This is a poetic quality which is born not of fantasy but of truthfulness. It is achieved by digging into the depths of life; it is an advanced fruition of the spirit of realism.”⁹ Truthfulness in drama can generate a poetic feel, and of course this is also true in fiction. Bi Feiyu’s consistent accuracy of narrative lends a richly poetic quality to works such as *The Moon Opera*, *Yumi* and *Yuxiu*. When reading novellas in the series *Three Sisters* (*Yumi*, *Yuxiu*, and *Yuyang*), I often write this comment next to a passage: “character-oriented narration.” What I mean is that in this passage one sees the point of view shifting from the writer’s external perspective to that of a character. The overall point of view adopted in these novellas is external and omniscient, but in the course of narrative the point of view at times shifts to that of a character. At times the narrative proceeds in that character’s tone of voice, perhaps only for a sentence or even for a few dozen sentences. This rhetorical mode of inserting a character’s point of view into an omniscient point of view adds vividness to these novellas. Here is a passage close to the opening lines of *Yumi*:

“Shi Guifang was holding sunflower seeds in one cupped hand as she picked through them and lifted them to her mouth one at a time, between thumb and forefinger, letting her other three fingers stuck out cumbrously as her hand paused beneath her chin, giving her an amazingly lazy look.

Her laziness was mainly embodied in her posture, the way she used only one leg to stand and propped the other leg against the door frame, changing legs from time to time. People would not have minded her laziness so much, but a person who idles about often gives an impression of arrogance, and what really bothered people about Shi Guifang was this arrogance on her part. What right did she have to eat sunflower seeds that way, cracking them between her teeth in that defiant way?”

Shi Guifang’s eventual producing of a son caused changes in her attitude and demeanor. Through vivid details Shi Guifang’s attitude and demeanor are depicted with great immediacy. Of this passage it can truly be said that “each word calls up an image”: it is an example of narrative possessing accuracy and rich poetic feeling. The first few sentences all take an omniscient point of view. When we come to the sentence beginning “what right did she have to eat sun flower seeds that way...,” the point of view shifts to that of a character. Of course this character is not any certain person, but it could be anyone among the villagers. This sentence is uttered in the tone of villagers in the aggregate. The story then goes back to the author’s external, omniscient point of view, but soon afterward comes this sentence: “Her man was Branch Secretary of the village, but she wasn’t, so what right did she have to loaf about and pretend to be so approachable?” Again this is the tone of the aggregate

villager. When Shi Guifang first appears in the novella, the omniscient narrator's tone is interspersed with remarks made by this aggregate villager directly to the reader. This is much richer and more intriguing than a mono-focal narrative would be. Fitting use of a character's tone of voice in narration can highlight that character and show his/her true colors. For instance, there is this passage in *Yuxiu*: "A few years ago Caiguang's wife had been involved in an affair with Wang Lianfang. After the affair was exposed Caiguang's wife drank insecticide once and tried throwing herself in the river; she went about with her hair hanging loose. What she did was bad for village morale." Most of this passage is told by the omniscient narrator, but "what she did was bad for village morale" imitates Wang Lianfang's tone of voice, or one could say that it is observed from his point of view. This gives Wang Lianfang's evaluation of the woman's suicide attempts; more than that it exposes his baseness and shamelessness. To give another example, in *Yuxiu*, there is this passage about Guo Jiaxing, deputy director of the commune's Revolutionary Committee: "'There are three things which set a middle-aged man afire—being promoted, getting rich and burying his wife'—Director Guo chanced to encounter all three of them. This is an old saying handed down from the old society, and it expresses a crass outlook. When word of this got back to Director Guo, he was not happy about it." At the beginning and end, this passage

is narrated from an omniscient point of view, but the sentence in the middle—"it expresses a crass outlook"—imitates Guo Jiaxing's tone of voice, or it adopts his point of view. Yet when Guo Jiaxing asserts sexual possession over Yumi, his approach is vulgar and crude. The remark about crassness made earlier, in his tone of voice, is an unsparing way to expose his inner hypocrisy. These apt insertions of a character's point of view within omniscient narrative, handled with just the right touch, are one reason that the *Three Sisters* series received critical acclaim.

While reading Bi Feiyu's fiction, there is another marginal comment I write at certain places—"analytical narrative." By this I mean that as the narrative focuses on a certain topic it takes on analytical significance, or one could say that the narrative employs analytical language. Take for instance this description of Yumi's so-called "love affair" in *Yumi*:

"The person in Yumi's thoughts was hundreds of miles away, and so Yumi's 'love' was something extraordinary, because it contained all those vast intervening mountains and rivers. This was something about Yumi's love that could touch a person to the core. They began to exchange letters. Correspondence was different from face-to-face contact: it was a deep sharing of confidences, yet it was prim and proper. As letters went back and forth, their relationship took on a refined, cultured coloring.

Whatever was said, their love was black words on white paper, distilled into cross-stroke, down-stroke, left slash and right slash: this too was cause for wonderment.

This passage is neither simple “telling” nor simple “showing.” Each statement has clear analytical significance, yet it is unlike our usual idea of narrative with an expository component.

Here analysis and telling blend like passion fruit pulp in water, to make a narrative that holds up after long savoring. We cannot say Bi Feiyu is the sole master of such a rhetorical mode, but there are few who can equal him.

Here I wish to say a few things about metaphors in Bi Feiyu’s fiction. Among modern and contemporary writers in China, Qian Zhongshu¹⁰ is perhaps the one who prizes metaphors most. In an essay titled “Reading Laocoön,” Qian made this pronouncement: “Metaphor is the root of literary language.”¹¹ This statement sounds like a sweeping generalization, but it was written while discussing the distinction between language art and visual art. What is expressed in a literary metaphor cannot be expressed by painting or sculpture. Thus it is the special strength of language art—one that cannot be supplanted by painting and sculpture. Doubtless because he felt the word “root”

to be inappropriate, Qian changed the word to “special characteristic” when he included this essay in a later collection *Qi Zhui Ji (A Collection of Seven Pieces)*.¹² Whether he calls it the “root” or a “special characteristic,” at any rate this shows that he placed high value on metaphor. Putting other writers aside, if we remove all the witty metaphors from Qian’s *Fortress Besieged*, that novel would be a lackluster piece of work. Bi Feiyu is also a master of metaphor. A few examples here will suffice. In *Yumi* when Guo Jiaying and Yumi get together for the first time in a hotel room, Guo Jiaying tries to act upright and proper at first: “He didn’t say or do anything. The look on his face was like a room set up for a committee meeting.” This metaphor for Guo Jiaying’s facial expression tallies with his professional identity, and it conveys the self-righteous air he adopts before he shows his true colors as a whoremonger. To give another example, *Yuxiu*, begins with a scene of Yumi riding the commune’s speedboat as it takes her to become Guo Jiaying’s wife: “The speedboat churned up a fearsome wake along the canal, making a ‘人’ shape resembling the ideogram for person. The wake surged against both banks with splashing sounds. Those waves were like a pack of dogs, emboldened by their master’s prestige, lunging toward the calves of the women who stood at the landing.” To liken the commune’s speedboat to a dog flaunting its borrowed power is a highly compelling metaphor. Apt use of metaphor is truly a sterling attribute of

Bi Feiyu's fiction. From this example we can see that a successful novelist needs to cultivate the skillful use of metaphor. Translated by Denis Mair

Notes:

1. Editor's note: Cao Cao(曹操), Liu Bei(刘备), Guan Gong(关公) and Zhang Fei(张飞) are four major characters from one of China's four greatest classical fictions *Three Kingdoms* by Luo Guanzhong (罗贯中) of early Ming Dynasty, the other three being *A Dream of Red Mansions* (*The Story of the Stone*), *Journey to the West*, and *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*All Men Are Brothers*).

2. Translator's note: Milan Kundera, "When Man Thinks, God Laughs," in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Appendix to Chinese Edition), Zuoja Chubanshe, 1991.

3. Translator's note: Arthur Smith, *China's Village Life*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899, p. 211.

4. Editor's note: Zhao Shuli (赵树理, 1906–1970) was one of the most popular writers in 1940s–1950s whose works mainly reflected the rural life and the Land Reform Campaign of the time.

5. Translator's note: Zhao Shuli, "Lun 'Xie Bu Ya Zheng'" (On 'Evil Cannot Outdo Goodness') in *The Complete Works of Zhao Shuli*, Vol. 4, Beiyue Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990.

6. Editor's note: Zhou Yang (周扬, 1908–1989), a literary critic, was China's Vice Minister of Culture in 1950s and the chief spokesman of CPC literary and artistic policies.

7. Translator's note: "Preface to *Collected Writings of Zhao Shuli*," in Gongren Ribao (*Workers Daily*), Sept. 22, 1980.

8. Editor's note: Wang Guowei (王国维, 1877–1927), a literary critic, poet, archeologist, historian, and aesthetician, was one of the greatest and most influential scholars of early 20th century China.

9. Translator's note: Li Jianwu, *Xiju Xintian* (*Drama's New Day*), Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1980, p. 95.

10. Editor's note: Qian Zhongshu (钱钟书, 1910–1998), known for his erudition, acrimony, rigorous scholarship, and reclusive way of life, is looked up to as a cultural giant of 20th China. His major works include *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters* and *On Arts and Letters*, both written in archaic Chinese, and *Fortress Besieged*, a satirical fiction targeted at academia and a world of mediocre and hypocritical teaching fellows of pre–1949. It became a household word after it was successfully made into a 10–episode TV series in 1990.

11. Translator's note: Qian Zhongshu, "Reading Laocoön," in *Jiuwen Sipian* (*Four Early Essays*), Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1979.

12. Translator's note: Qian Zhongshu, *Qi Zhui Ji*, Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1985.