

and pen a lengthy piece of writing, as demanded by a novel. Another factor against a novel is that poetry, music, and drama can be shared with many other people at the same time. But a novel can only be read alone. I suppose it's the black man's gregarious instinct to share the bitter and the sweet, or as one black sage once said, "A sorrow shared is a sorrow lessened, and a joy shared is a joy increased a hundredfold."

Now why do black poets in South Africa write in English if they are proud of their culture? I will quickly point out that I write in English and Zulu, as I have said before. But the answer to this question I have given already. I will only amplify it by saying that the English that we use in our poetry is not the Queen's language that you know as written by, say, Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is the language of urgency which we use because we have an urgent message to deliver to any one who cares to listen to it. We have not got the time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments like rhyme, iambic pentameter, abstract figures of speech, and an ornate and lofty style. We will indulge in these luxuries which we can ill afford at the moment when we are free people. Only then shall we write about bees, birds, and flowers. Not the harsh realities that are part and parcel of black man's life.

PAI HSIEN-YUNG / TAIWAN

The Wandering Chinese: The Theme of Exile in Taiwan Fiction

Traditionally during Chinese history, when severe social and political dislocations occurred, those intellectuals who wished to maintain their integrity often chose to retreat from society either as a gesture of protest or simply for the practical reason of survival. These exiles sought consolation in nature and philosophy, while finding their personal expression in art and literature. Their artistic creations, whose merits were rarely recognized at the time, would nevertheless become important testaments for posterity.

With the defeat of the Nationalists on the mainland in 1949, China once again witnessed a period of social and political upheaval whose magnitude is still too awesome for us to fathom. This cultural cataclysm could not fail to impinge upon the imagination of those writers whose works bear

testimony to our time. Unfortunately the writers in Communist China are either silent or produce a propaganda literature. To feel the temper of our time, therefore, we turn to the more serious writers from Taiwan, where a modicum of artistic freedom is still possible.

As soon as the Nationalists were exiled to Taiwan, they set up a government whose political ethos was "Recover the Mainland"—a ubiquitous slogan that made its appearance in train stations as well as on the labels of wine bottles. This official myth bespoke the exile's mentality: mainlanders who made Taiwan only a temporary base for their dream of eventual return to their homeland across the Straits. In the first years of the Nationalists' rule on Taiwan, this myth, reigning absolute in the political consciousness of the people, made itself felt also in the sphere of literature, its influence, notwithstanding, a stultifying one.

There were some established mainland writers who migrated to Taiwan with the government. Yet in the early fifties, these émigré writers failed to produce a literature of significance about their state of exile. Reasons for their failure were many, one being that the best talents like Lao She and Shen Tsung-wen were left on the mainland. Another had to do with the psychology of these writers. Still dizzy from the shattering blow they suffered on the mainland, and yet too timid to depart from the optimistic view of the official myth, they lacked the necessary perspective and courage to explore their new situation in all its complexity. To admit their banishment as permanent was beyond endurance. Their novels and stories were filled with unrealistic characters and pat solutions, the final pages invariably ending hopefully: no matter the suffering of exile, suffering will be redeemed once the protagonists rejoin their beloved ones on the mainland. Nostalgia was the ruling sentiment, but it was a sentiment which has sunk into bathos.

But with the appearance of the *Literary Review* in 1956, a new creative spirit began to emerge. This magazine, which upheld realism as the canon for fiction writing, initiated a new era in the history of Taiwan literature. Its editor being the late literary critic, Professor T. A. Hsia, under whose salutary influence a generation of new writers had come into being. The editorial guidelines set down in the inaugural issue pointed to the direction which these new writers were later to follow:

Though we live in a time of great chaos, we do not want our literature to be chaotic. . . . We do not intend to dodge reality. Our conviction is: a serious writer must be the one who can reflect for us the spirit of our time. . . . We are not after the beauty of language for its own sake, for we feel that it is more important for us to speak the truth.

If our new writers were to create a literature that could reflect the spirit of our time, the guidelines necessitated that they take a hard look at the

truth of Taiwan, no matter how unpleasant and forbidding that truth was. This was a great challenge indeed.

Among these new writers, several are native talents. Since the problem of exile has not been their primary concern, their writings deserve a separate study. My discussion will therefore concentrate on the émigré writers of the second generation who have spent their formative years in Taiwan. No matter how diversified their family backgrounds and geographical associations, the consciousness of these writers has been shaped by one overriding historical event: all have been dislocated, banished from their homeland and condemned, like their fathers, to live estranged on an unfamiliar shore. But what marks the difference between the two generations of the émigré writers is their attitudes toward their exiled existence. Whereas the older generation, incapacitated by nostalgia, has taken refuge in self-delusion, Taiwan's younger writers have attempted to explore with unflinching candor the reality of their historical situation. Refusing to assume the burden of their fathers' guilt for the loss of their homeland, they have no compunction in digging deep into the darker side of life on Taiwan. Certainly this is no easy task. Though the Nationalist authorities rarely bother to interfere with these new writers, the threat of censorship still exists. More importantly, completely cut off from the immediate, felt past of their literary heritage—the works of Lu Hsun, Mao Tun, and other leftist writers have been proscribed—they lack great literary models to emulate. Thus their writing career is a hard and lonely struggle. To circumvent possible government censorship, these new writers, unlike their May Fourth predecessors, have avoided frontal attacks on burning social and political issues. Instead, they turn to the study of the individual psyche: their problem of identity in Taiwan; their cultural deprivation; their sense of insecurity; their claustrophobic fears on a small island; and the bewilderment that comes with being used as hostages for the sins of their fathers. Turning inward is thus necessitated by circumstance as well as by a sense of intense self-consciousness.

For the literary giants of the West, like Kafka, Joyce, or Mann, a study of the self always means an attempt to universalize, by fable, the human condition; for our new writers, on the other hand, the individual fate is inevitably bound up with the national destiny of China. In this sense, their "obsession with China," to borrow a phrase from Professor C. T. Hsia, has made them spiritual heirs to their May Fourth predecessors in spite of the fact they have been denied access to their writings. If they lack the vitality and scope of the May fourth writers, they excel in psychological depth and stylistic subtlety.

There is little doubt that Miss Yu Li-hua is one of the most popular and influential writers of the younger generation. A graduate of National Taiwan University, Miss Yu came to the United States in 1953 to take up her graduate studies at UCLA. She has chosen to stay in the U.S.A., and teaches

Chinese literature at the State University of New York, Albany. She is a prolific writer. Her early stories and novels are primarily studies of the lives of the young intellectuals from Taiwan who, like the author herself, have come abroad to become voluntary exiles. Although her works have stirred up literary controversy in Taiwan, with the publication of *Again the Palm Trees* she has established herself as a spokesman for the "Rootless Generation," a phrase she aptly coined in that novel. No other writer from Taiwan has yet been able to draw a panoramic picture of the Chinese intellectual in exile on the American continent. Her works have since been termed "The Songs of the Exile."

Again the Palm Trees is generally recognized as Yu Li-hua's best novel. It is the story of Mou Tien-lei, a young professor who teaches elementary Chinese at some obscure American college. Disenchanted with the impersonal society of America and its acquisitive culture, Tien-lei, the lonely expatriate, makes a pilgrimage back to Taiwan, where he hopes to find a haven to anchor his wandering spirit. To his great despair, Tien-lei feels even more estranged among his own people; for our Ulysses, there is no Penelope who waits faithfully for him at home. His former lover is married to another man, and a new relationship gives no solace; all his new lover expects is to be taken to the New World, her dreamland of Hollywood movie stars. And Tien-lei is shocked to find Americophilia rampant on the island. Taipei is inundated with American jazz and G.I. bars. Only once in a shabby roadside restaurant is he relieved of his hunger for cultural identification; so at least in the field of gastronomy, the last citadel of Chinese civilization, American aggression still proves futile. The truth is that he cannot go home again. Even Taiwan, supposedly the only bulwark of Confucian tradition, cannot offer him protection for his cultural vulnerability. At the conclusion of the novel, a former professor has asked Tien-lei to stay in Taiwan and begin a literary magazine. But his fiancée stands firm in her condition for their marriage: they must go to America. Our hero, this Chinese Hamlet, who hesitates at every turn of action, is left wavering between the coasts of the Pacific, brooding over the question: To stay, or not to stay?

At its publication, *Again the Palm Trees* was received with enormous popularity by young students in Taiwan as well as abroad, and Yu Li-hua was given the Chia Hsin Literary Award. The reason for this novel's popularity is not hard to find: youthful readers could readily identify with its hero. The term "Rootless Generation" has come to mean the young intellectuals who, like Mou Tien-lei, are burdened with guilt at the desertion of Taiwan and who live an exiled life in some foreign land.

Mou Tien-lei is a Rootless Man because, cut off and unfulfilled, he has been transplanted from his motherland before his cultural heritage could come to full personal fruition. This physical uprooting means also, then, spiritual dislocation. Deprived of his cultural heritage, the Wandering

Chinese has become a spiritual exile: Taiwan and the motherland are incommensurable. He has to move on. Like Ulysses, he sets out on a journey across the ocean, but it is an endless journey, dark and without hope. The Rootless Man, therefore, is destined to become a perpetual wanderer.

There is a heightened moment in the novel when Tien-lei pays a visit to Quemoy, where he has a glimpse of a coastal city on the mainland. A highly evocative passage of childhood memory follows. But significantly, China is seen through a telescope, and motherland is recreated only through memory. Unlike the "Lost Generation," who turned their backs on their own culture and tradition, and who lived only for the present moment through wine and sex, the Chinese Wanderer yearns for the "lost kingdom," for the cultural inheritance that has been denied him. Tien-lei is moved to tears when, once in America, he listens to an ancient Chinese folk song. A sentimentalist he surely is, in the characteristically Chinese fashion for thinking too much of the past. In fact, a great part of the novel is told in flashbacks. Past, therefore, becomes an operative force to keep his sanity—and memory, a sedative that relieves him, at least for a moment, of his unredeemed loneliness. Unlike Camus' Stranger, who is incapable of human relationship, the Rootless Man, a wandering stranger in his own way, still cherishes a faint hope that somewhere in the wilderness the call of love can be heard, precisely because the possibility of love once existed in the past. He is not even an Angry Young Man, because there is so little left for him to be angry about. He is a sad man. He is sad because he has been driven out of Eden, dispossessed, disinherited, a spiritual orphan, burdened with a memory that carries the weight of 5,000 years. The whole novel is permeated with a quiet sadness. It is a sadness that borders on the elegiac.

It is a disquieting phenomenon that the youths of Taiwan should identify with a figure like Mou Tien-lei, a drifter without definite purpose in life, a confused man who doesn't belong anywhere, a prude who, trapped in the past, is incapable of immediate action for the present. This pathos becomes the more poignant when we contrast this novel's popularity with that of Pa Chin's works. In the thirties and forties, Chinese youths emulated Pa Chin's noble-minded heroes. Many a young man rebelled against the traditional family system and plunged into revolution. Pa Chin's novels had indeed fulfilled their author's purpose for social reform. But of course noble ideals in a novel do not necessarily guarantee its artistic excellence. If the "Rootless Generation" suffers by comparison with Pa Chin's revolutionaries in their social usefulness, as a work of art, *Again the Palm Trees* is superior to many of his one-dimensional, cliché-ridden, romantic novels. Perhaps someday the term "Rootless Generation" may outgrow its historical meaning, but the vivid description of scene and the psychological subtlety of character in that novel will outlive its historical context. As for the trilogy, *The Turbulent Stream*, most of us today would wince at its length.

If *Again the Palm Trees* has met commercial as well as critical success, *Mulberry Green and Peach Pink*, a novel by Miss Nieh Hua-ling, did not have the fortune to reach readers in Taiwan in its full length. It was suspended halfway during its serialization in the *United Daily News* in 1971, allegedly for its political overtones and sexual boldness. At the same time, however, a complete version did appear in *Ming Pao* in Hong Kong.

As the literary editor of the outspoken journal of democratic opinion, *The Free China Fortnightly*, Nieh Hua-ling had early established herself as a short story writer. She came to the States in 1964 and later became Associate Director of the International Writing Program at The University of Iowa. Although her stories are mostly ironic studies of the frustrations of the mainlanders in Taiwan, it is her novel, *Mulberry Green and Peach Pink*, that has elaborated the theme of exile to its fullest extent. By employing personal dissolution as a paradigm for political disintegration, this novel achieves remarkable power and range of vision; indeed, it must be counted as one of the most ambitious works to have come out of Taiwan.

This is the tragic story of the fragmentation of a personality set against the background of the turbulent history of contemporary China. *Mulberry Green and Peach Pink* represent actually two names—or rather two identities—of the heroine, whose schizophrenic transformation is the subject of the novel. The heroine starts as *Mulberry Green*, an innocent girl from inland China, and ends as *Peach Pink*, a sexual monster who sleeps her way from the Midwest to New York. Of course Nieh Hua-ling was not merely content to dramatize a nymphomaniac whose personal history would be of only clinical interest. She has the further ambition to design this novel as a fable of the tragic state of modern China, whose political schizophrenia is analogous to the chaotic world of the insane.

In New York, in *Peach Pink's* apartment, scribbled on the wall appears a slogan:

Who is afraid of Chiang Kai-shek?
Who is afraid of Mao Tse-tung?
Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Along with it is an obscene picture in the surrealist fashion of an enormous phallus that serves as a tombstone for *Mulberry Green's* symbolic death. Facetious as this may sound, these lines contain the truth of the novel. These two leaders represent, of course, the two opposing ideologies that have been fighting for the soul of the Chinese people. This ideological battle, raging for half a century, has left the individual's mind divided, his psyche splintered, his vitality exhausted. There is no way for him to escape except into the world of the absurd where ideological dogmas will lose their meaning.

The story is told in the intricate epistolary form of diaries and letters. The novel opens with Mulberry Green as a young girl, fleeing from the Japanese in a boat on the precarious torrents of the Yangtze Gorges. The image of the Wandering Chinese is thus established at the story's inception. The impending entrance of the Communists into the besieged city of Peking in 1949 is the setting for a second part of the novel. Here Nieh Hua-ling has created the memorable character of Mrs. Shen, Mulberry Green's mother-in-law. This old woman, feudal-minded, paralyzed, lying on her deathbed, feverishly mumbling about the fall of the Nine Dragon Wall, a monument of Imperial China, seems to embody the old order in its dying throes. Mulberry Green runs away again, this time from the Communists.

The third part is entitled "An Attic in Taipei." This attic, rickety, dust-covered, infested with mice, where the time-clock has ceased to function, is, of course, highly symbolic of the island itself, with its claustrophobia and temporal disjunction. Mulberry Green and her husband, Shen Chia-kang, hide themselves in the attic because they are wanted by the police for having defrauded the government. Whereas the first two sections of the novel are as yet the recognizable and familiar world with which we can all identify, the third portion moves us into an unreal, dream-like world more appropriate to the surrealists or writers of the absurd. A rumor circulates: in the southern part of the island, there appears a vampire that has eaten many people. The meaning of this episode may defy rational interpretation, but if some critic, hair-splitting, should point out that this vampire coming alive from the tomb, sucking the blood of the living, is intended to insinuate nothing other than the *ancien régime*, this novel could get into real trouble, as indeed was the case.

As the story progresses, it sinks deeper into a Kafkaesque nightmare. Mulberry Green has made her way to America, where she is hunted down by the immigration bureaucrats with a ferocity even worse than the Communists and the Nationalists. Like K in *The Trial*, a marathon battle to fight the bureaucracy begins. When an immigration official asks her where she will go if she gets deported, characteristically Mulberry Green replies "I don't know!" That statement underlines poignantly the tragedy of the Wandering Chinese who has nowhere to turn, not even his own country. The journey from Peking via Taipei to New York is a tortuous one. To survive, Mulberry Green changes her identity to Peach Pink, a spiritual suicide. With all her traditional values and ethics shattered, Peach Pink plunges into moral and sexual anarchy, soon sinking to her spiritual nadir and becoming half-mad. At the end we still see her, fleeing from the immigration authorities, hitchhiking along the American freeways, getting picked up by whatever man comes her way.

In creating the fragmented world of the schizophrenic, Nieh Hua-ling has allegorized the fate of modern China in all its tragic complexity. The

strength of this novel lies in its manipulation of symbol. Nieh Hua-ling has made the psychic and the social correlatives mutually informing. A microcosmic, diseased personality has, by a series of projections and displacements, become representative of the macrocosmic disorder of an entire nation.

The two novels discussed above are by no means isolated. It is no accident that the three stories by Taiwan writers chosen by Professor C. T. Hsia in his anthology *Twentieth Century Chinese Stories* all register the same sense of desperation among the Chinese who live precarious lives abroad. Whether it is set in the sophisticated metropolis of New York, as in "Li Tung," by Pai Hsien-Yung, or on a primitive island of a British protectorate in the South Seas, as in "Hi Lili Hi Li," the central image of these stories remains the same: the Wandering Chinese, eternally terrified, eternally uncertain, eternally on the run. "Hi Lili Hi Li," by Shui Ching, starts with a certain Y, who, awakening one Monday morning into an unrecognizable world of violent change, sets out on a nightmarish wandering. After successive failures to establish human contact, he finally succumbs to the primitivism of the tropical jungle. In a few pages Shui Ching succeeds in translating the helpless condition of the Wandering Chinese into a moral parable.

If these writers from Taiwan have invariably taken a dark view of life, it is because they have truthfully reflected their social and political disillusionment. Given the uncertainty of the political future of Taiwan, and the terror of the anti-intellectual campaigns on mainland China, during which creative minds have suffered the heaviest toll, there is nothing left for these writers to be optimistic about. During the fourth century B.C., our first great poet Chü Yuan, in his political exile, wrote "Li Sao," an elegiac poem, as a lamentation for his dark time. And that great tradition has perhaps found unconscious echoes in the works of these modern writers, who are also profoundly moved by the tragic history of their nation.

A passage from "A Blind Hunt," a Kafkaesque parable by Tsung Su, another writer of this group, seems to me to recapitulate the ethos of the Wandering Chinese:

The night was cold, and it was dark. We could not see ourselves, not even our shadows. We had not said anything to each other, but we all knew what was in each other's mind. Yes, we all knew, even in the dark, in pitch darkness . . . but we simply had to go, we simply had to go, and we did not know why.