

WORDS WITHOUT MUSIC

Renditions No. 2, a Special Fiction Issue, appeared to be a "tough act to follow". Certainly not with another special issue, this time devoted entirely to drama. The narrative tradition reached back further among the Chinese people and yielded a richer source of literary materials for the translator than anything emanating from the stage. Where the classic Chinese novel evolved in many cases from the storyteller's art, drama by definition is all oral. The Yuan and Ming periods handed down to us bodies of dramatic literature as readable as they must have been effective theatre. Yet others of what passed as stage entertainment through the millennia have vanished into thin air for want of recording or, if recorded, could probably no more be considered literature than the scenarios and libretti of the Peking opera.

Another notable thing is that traditional Chinese theatre, again down to and including the Peking opera, was nothing if not musical. Songs and arias made the play, and these are reduced to mere words in translation, the fanciful tune-names meaningless to all but a handful of musicologists. Still, we have managed to assemble here a complete Yuan play, a couple of one acts, and snippets from all the important dramatic forms—the *tša chü* (雜劇), the *ch'uan ch'i* (傳奇), the *ching hsi* (京戲) and the modern-day, non-musical *hua chü* (話劇). All, that is, except the "model revolutionary theatrical works" (革命樣板戲) that have been the prescribed fare in mainland China since the Cultural Revolution. This is not because the *yang-p'an hsi* is considered unimportant. Anything that represents the sole source of dramatic entertainment for hundreds of millions over a period of time must have a far-reaching social significance. But for now it is not within our ken, and we trust that ample opportunities exist elsewhere for the Western playgoer to sample this new theatre, in print and perhaps even from an aisle seat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks go to the following for permission to translate their respective works, as noted: Prof. Liang Shih-ch'iu, for his article on his experience translating Shakespeare; Prof. Liu Ts'un-yan, for his one-act play "Ying Niang"; and Prof. Josephine

Huang Hung, for an excerpt from her adaptation of a Peking opera. The same goes to Stephen Soong, though he is one of us. His dispassionate analysis of Somerset Maugham's sketch of his late father, an early advocate of modern drama in China, is more than a literary footnote but carries implications for today in East-West understanding, in terms of national aspirations and on a person-to-person level as well. There is a poignancy, too, in reading this essay, when one thinks of this popular English writer who had no illusions about his own literary standing and the fact that, in this centenary year of Maugham's birth, his plays that packed the theatres in their day form the least remembered part of his life's work.

Special appreciation must be recorded for two distinguished translators who started from the ends of the earth and now both reside in California: Prof. Yao Hsin-nung, himself a prominent dramatist; and Prof. Cyril Birch, whose anthologies of Chinese literature have given us excellent English versions of a number of famous plays.

Thanks are due Mr. Ting Yin-yung of New Asia College, CUHK, for permission to reproduce his painting on the frontispiece to the Chinese-text section. To Prof. Liu Wu-chi and the Indiana University Press, for permission to use an excerpt from his book *An Introduction to Chinese Literature*.

Two younger scholars—Joseph S. M. Lau and Daniel S. P. Yang—have given generously to enrich the contents of this issue, not only with their own contributions but also in the form of helpful leads and advice. Prof. Lau translated the sprightly comedy "Oppression" and has made available to us his insightful studies on the playwrights, Ting Hsi-lin and Ts'ao Yu. Prof. Yang has taken us behind the scenes of his unique experiment staging Chinese operas in English. His production notes on *Black Dragon Residence* (烏龍院), the first Chinese play to have been performed at the Kennedy Centre in Washington, D.C., represent valuable firsthand documentation on the art of translating drama, not just language-to-language in linear fashion, but from stage to stage, involving dialogue and singing and mime, in what might be called "total theatre".

Enough said. Let the curtain go up!

—G. K.