

Introduction

Gao Xingjian: Autobiography and the Portrayal of the Female Psyche

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Gao Xingjian (b. 1940) was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000 on the strength of two autobiographical novels *Soul Mountain* (1990) and *One Man's Bible* (1999), a book of short stories *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather* (1989) and a very large number of highly innovative plays published from the early 1980s through to his large-scale opera *Snow in August* (2000). A significant part of his major works had been translated from the original Chinese and published in French, Swedish and English editions, and his plays had been staged in countries on five continents. His writings are based on a unique aesthetics that he has developed from the close interrogation of Chinese and European literary traditions, and to some extent accounts for their extraordinary ability to cross cultural borders. Another striking feature of his writings is the purity of language that he had consciously worked to achieve. He found that the modern written Chinese language had become corrupted by the language standardisation measures progressively introduced since the beginning of the 20th century, causing it to lose its auditory appeal, and unsuitable for what he wanted to write.

After extensive research on the dynamics of the language contained in the masterpieces of Chinese vernacular fiction, he was able to devise strategies to ensure that his own literary creations would embody the musicality inherent in the tonal nature of the spoken Chinese language. A direct result is that his fiction and plays resonate with poetry, and can in fact be read as poetry.

In the course of his linguistic investigations he also discovered the unique distancing properties of the pronouns “you” and “he”, and for him this resolved the problem of ego interference in the autobiographical novel that he wanted to write as a truthful testimony. The women with whom the male protagonist has sexual encounters would be designated “she”. He used changing pronouns to establish the conceptual framework of *Soul Mountain* that he began to write in 1982. His sustained and varied use of pronouns subsequently became a feature of his writings, including his plays.

His primary interest in writing is to track the human psyche in what he describes as “a flow of language”, and the primary thrust of his writing while clearly autobiographical, includes women. Portrayals of the female psyche predominate in a number of his plays, and in most cases these are concerned with exploring the dynamics and the conflicts involved in male–female sexual liaisons. To portray the female perspective on this issue depends on the powers of observation of the playwright, yet on the other hand it may be argued that while purportedly tracking the female psyche, the perspective of a gender-distanced pronoun “she” or “woman” in fact sheds much light on the male autobiographical subject or even on the author himself.

Presented in English for the first time in the present book are two plays by Gao Xingjian that fall into the above-mentioned category: *City of the Dead* is the translation of Gilbert C. F. Fong, and *Song of the Night* is the translation of Mabel Lee. While the paragraphs that follow offer a context for considering these two plays, the actual works bear testimony to Gao

Xingjian's ingenuity as a playwright. The stage words are brilliant, and can be fully enjoyed as literary texts. However actualised in the theatre space by actors, plays naturally assume different characteristics depending on the director, and the theatre space. Soon after Gao Xingjian had relocated to Paris, the Hong Kong Dance Company staged *City of the Dead* in 1988. More than a decade later, and after Gao Xingjian had won the Nobel Prize for Literature, based on the translation of Sookyung Oh, who has translated a large number of Gao Xingjian's plays into Korean, a superb small theatre production of the play held the audience enthralled in June of 2011 as part of the Gao Xingjian Theatre Festival in Seoul. This was followed by fourteen capacity performances of the play in February of 2012 in the 540-seat hall of the Daehangno Arts Theatre in Seoul. *Song of the Night* has not yet been fully actualised in a theatre space.

Excellent English-language productions of Gao Xingjian's plays are now being produced by theatre studies departments of universities, and high quality DVDs are being made to document these performances for archival purposes, study, and research. It is highly likely that the English translations of *City of the Dead* and *Song of the Night* in the present volume will lead to significant English-language productions of these plays, and concomitantly a greater understanding of Gao Xingjian's plays.



Gao Xingjian presents aesthetic portrayals of his life in the companion novels *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*, and the autobiographical is also present to varying degrees in his works for the theatre. On the evidence contained in these two novels there are ample grounds for asserting that his strong autobiographical impulse is largely the result of traumatic experiences in China, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) when social engineering on a grand scale was carried out on the population to eradicate all manifestations of individuality. The assertion

of trauma from such situations is corroborated by the trauma writings originating from various cultural contexts, as well as the studies carried out on them. Two studies are of relevance with regard to Chinese writers. Martin Huang's *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation: Autobiographical Sensibility and the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (1995) argues that repressive regimes can often result in the growth of ebullient individualism, and in fact gave rise to autobiographical writings as a genre in the late-Ming period. Dealing with Republican China in the 1920s in "Lu Xun's Wild Grass: Autobiographical Moments of the Creative Self" (2014), Mabel Lee argues that when Lu Xun decided to engage in politics he experienced trauma because he recognised that literature and politics were incompatible, and that he would have to allow his creative self to suicide.

Whereas Lu Xun had opted to engage in politics, Gao Xingjian's choice was resoundingly for literature, and it is maintained that this led to two decades of fear-induced trauma. The thoughts and feelings surging from his inner mind demanded articulation, forcing him to write in secret because what he wrote failed to conform to the guidelines for socialist cultural production. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution he burned a suitcase of his unpublished manuscripts—poems, short stories, plays, essays, and a novella—rather than risk having them found, and used as evidence to have him punished as a counterrevolutionary. Afterwards while working for five years in a remote mountain village, first as a peasant and then as the village teacher, he was again driven to write in secret. When the Cultural Revolution ended, at the age of forty, he saw his plays, poems, short stories, treatises on drama and narration published for the first time in literary magazines.

The publication of his first book *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* (1981; *Preliminary Explorations into the Art of Modern Fiction*) was a best seller and made him a celebrity in literary circles. The staging of his plays *Absolute Signal* in 1982 and *Bus Stop* in 1983 to wildly enthusiastic audiences

consolidated that celebrity status, and also accorded him international status as a playwright. However, *Bus Stop* was banned after the tenth performance, and he immediately fled for his life rather than confront the prospect of being sent to one of the infamous prison farms in Qinghai province. He was able to return to Beijing five months later, and while in 1985 he went on to stage his play *Wild Man*, his new play *The Other Shore* was stopped after a few rehearsals. It was clear that the authorities were intent on blocking his creative endeavours. In late 1987 he travelled on invitation to Germany and France, and by the end of the year had settled in Paris where he has since devoted himself to his creative activities on a number of fronts. In “Wilted Chrysanthemums” (1991) he wrote about his short career lasting little over half a decade as a writer in China, naming his supporters as well as his enemies, and attesting to his fragile mental state.

Gao Xingjian’s impulse for autobiography was meshed with a powerful intellectual curiosity and a determination to write works that would satisfy aesthetic tastes that had been nurtured by his reading of Chinese writings, as well as his study of French literature and French translations of European authors that he read voraciously a shelf at a time during his five-year course in French at the Foreign Languages Institute (1957–1962), Beijing. After graduating he worked as a translator and editor in the Foreign Languages Institute before being reassigned work in 1981 as a playwright at the People’s Art Theatre where his first three plays were staged. Aware of the intensity of his impulse for autobiography he was conscious of not allowing ego interference to contaminate his creations. To this end he conceived the notion of a “third eye” that would critically scrutinise his writing. In his novel *Soul Mountain* he developed his extraordinary innovation of variously naming the autobiographical subject as “I”, “you”, or “he” to present different facets of the autobiographical subject. By simply naming the protagonist “you”, he was distanced instantly from the subject, even if the subject was himself, thus allowing for a critical and truthful

autobiographical portrayal of his own psyche.

Gao Xingjian's two autobiographical novels verify that the male subject had numerous—some imagined or dreamed—sex-based liaisons with women. The male subject is sexually promiscuous, but equally so is each of the women. Both the male and the female involved in the sexual encounters are depicted as responding to natural biological impulses. Also, either the male or the female may be the one to initiate or to propose engagement in sexual activity. The primary aim of these novels ostensibly is to track the male subject's psyche, yet the female characters do not appear to be mere ciphers serving to authenticate the portrayal of the male subject's psyche. As a male writer he recognises that in narrative fiction he cannot directly portray the female psyche, but he can legitimately write about the concrete manifestations of the female psyche through her words and actions. The male character and the female character generally articulate their respective views on the relationship in the form of extensive dialogues that are akin to dialogues found in plays for the theatre.

Being a playwright as well as a novelist, Gao Xingjian recognised the added advantage of being able to enlist female actors in theatre to reinforce the idea that it is a woman speaking. He experimented successfully with this idea in his play *Wild Man* that was staged in 1985. The play deals with other topics, nonetheless his treatment of the tensions between the ecologist and his wife is the most memorable part of the play. The play opens with the ecologist arriving in a mountain logging area. Flashbacks reveal that prior to his leaving home, his wife had informed him that she wanted a divorce. It is hard for her to articulate the reasons for her frustration, but she charges him with not being able to understand a woman's feelings. When pressed, she admits she has found someone else. In the logging village the ecologist tries to work out what had gone wrong, after all he did want her to produce his children. He develops feelings for a young village woman, and the two of them flirt when he finds her bathing naked in the river. Like everyone else

in this small community, she knows that his wife has abandoned him, and she takes the initiative of asking him to marry her. When he rejects her, she accuses him of cowardice and betrayal, and for deeply hurting her. The play later shows her marriage to a hardworking villager with good prospects for social success. However at the wedding scene female singers convey the message that the role of a woman is to serve her parents-in-law, care for her husband and to bear his children. Another strand in the play comments on sexual relationships between men and women. The old shaman singer is purportedly the only person who knows the words of *Record of Darkness*, that tells the creation myth of the Han Chinese people, in those remote times there were no rules for sexual engagement, and people only knew their mothers...

Wild Man introduces Gao Xingjian's notion of "total theatre" that incorporates a diverse range of performance strategies drawn from traditional Chinese theatre practice, and depending on the topic addressed, singing, dancing, acrobatics, walking on stilts, and martial arts could all be used on the stage. By interrogating Chinese and European theatre to their foundations, he developed his own brand of theatre aesthetics that emphasised theatricality, and argued against realistic portrayals of life. Regarding the performance of the actor as a crucial part of the actualisation of a play on the stage, he advanced his concept of the "neutral actor" whereby the actor retains the status of actor in a performance, and thus is able to critically observe the acting of the role. The stage words are of course also crucial in theatre, and even if the topic under consideration is of a serious nature, the words will resonate with irony, humour, contradiction and surprise to act as counterpoints that heighten the dramatic impact. Conflicts arising in and from male-female relationships have fascinated playwrights since the beginning of theatre, and the topic has allowed plays to be staged again and again over historical time in various languages in diverse cultural contexts. The dynamics of this conflict likewise fascinates

Gao Xingjian, but he is intrigued with exploring ways of effectively portraying the female psyche in such conflicts. He would do precisely this in various ways in the plays discussed below.

City of the Dead is the first of Gao Xingjian's plays to focus fully on the male–female relationship. He wrote the first draft in July of 1987, just months before leaving Beijing, and after settling in Paris he completed a second draft in 1990, and then a final draft in late 1991. In this work he transforms a well-known ancient morality tale that had been used to caution women against being unfaithful to their husband into a modern play that is in keeping with his own sympathetic stance towards women in male–female relationships. Zhuang Zhou (a.k.a. the philosopher Zhuangzi) has been away from home for many months, climbing mountains and fording streams to observe human affairs and the celestial phenomena in his search to understand the Heavenly Way. He fails to see that the Way that can be talked about is not the Way, and moreover cannot stop thinking about the beautiful wife he has left at home. He decides to play a trick on his wife by pretending to have died of an illness, and has his body carried home in a coffin. His young wife who had been pining for her husband day and night is distraught with grief when suddenly Zhuang Zhou appears in the disguise of a Chu prince and announces that he has been sent by the King of Chu to invite Zhuang Zhou to serve at court. The imposter then proceeds to seduce Zhuang Zhou's wife. He is able to steal a kiss, but she then coquettishly pushes him away. He collapses, and lying prostrate tells the distraught woman he suffers from a fatal illness that can only be cured if he is fed the brain of a fresh corpse. Intent on saving him, she goes off to find an axe to break open her husband's coffin.

When she returns Zhuang Zhou who has changed back to his philosopher's clothes, steps out of the coffin. He laughs at his wife, mocks her, and calls her a slut. She approaches wielding the axe, and he cringes in fear, thinking that he is about to die. However she uses the axe to kill herself. In

the second part of the play Zhuang Zhou's wife resolutely pleads her case against injustice to the obnoxious authorities in charge of various levels of Hell. Her efforts are all in vain, and she is subjected to immense torment and suffering.

In the play it is repeatedly stated that these events took place in ancient times, a very long time ago, but ironically conveys the subliminal message that women continue to suffer because of their relationships with men. The audience is also constantly reminded that this is theatre and not reality, and the fact that the scenes in Hell assume the atmosphere of carnival through the actors performing a range of traditional Chinese theatrical stunts temporarily distracts the audience, and serves to increase the dramatic impact of the suffering of Zhuang Zhou's wife. Her tormentors in Hell are presented as tyrannical, cruel, bullying, mendacious, foolish, ridiculous and knavish males, and they can also be seen as theatrical exaggerations of male behaviour towards females in real life. Watching aghast at the events unfolding, female singers on the stage voice their condemnation of the utterly despicable joke Zhuang Zhou plays on his wife. In a certain sense *City of the Dead* may be regarded as defining Gao Xingjian's fundamental view that men possess a flippant and cavalier attitude to their female sexual partner or partners, and that women who become involved in sexual relationships with men are therefore doomed to suffer.

As if offering a counterpoint to the events of *City of the Dead* that occurred a long time ago, after relocating to Paris Gao Xingjian wrote three plays one after the other in which he explores male and female attitudes towards sexual relationships in contemporary times: *Escape* (1990), *Between Life and Death* (1991), and *Dialogue and Rebuttal* (1992).

Written a few months after the military crackdown on student protesters, the setting of *Escape* is an unnamed square that is unmistakably Tiananmen Square in the early hours of 4 June 1989. A young male student leader and a female radio announcer escape from the square into a disused warehouse

after the tanks have rolled in. Realising that her dress is soaked in the blood of the girl who was shot dead right next to her, the woman becomes hysterical and is on the point of screaming. The student tries to pacify her otherwise her screams would lead to their immediate arrest. He tells her to get rid of her clothes, and to put on his T-shirt, and then comforts her by putting his arms around her. Feelings of lust are instantly awakened in both of them. Precisely at that moment the door opens, someone slips in, latches the door and proceeds to light a cigarette. The woman finds somewhere to hide, while the student goes forward to confront the intruder, designated “middle-aged man”, by telling him that smoking is not allowed on the premises. The middle-aged man, who is unmistakably the persona of the playwright, suggests that he joins him for a smoke, because the city is on fire, and that he is wasting his time being on fire duty. This is a reminder that the play is not reality but theatre, yet performance art involves the actualisation of a play by actors in the theatre space, and it is through subtle irony, surprise and humour in the stage words that in fact enhance reality.

When the woman emerges, the middle-aged man comments that the couple really know how to enjoy themselves, but that this might not be the ideal time and place. The two men begin discussing the events in the square, and the woman occasionally comments, but all three are acutely aware that the police will be rounding up protesters at the crack of dawn in just over an hour, and they could be arrested, tortured, or even executed. The student proposes that they find somewhere safer, and takes the lead. As soon as he goes out the door there is the sound of gunshots, and the middle-aged man and the woman retreat inside. Believing that the student has been killed, they are gripped by terror. The woman clings to the middle-aged man, desperately needing the warmth of his body. She suggests that they engage in sex, and although the middle-aged man’s sex drive is not as strong as the woman’s, soon they are projected into a timeless, fuzzy world. The student suddenly returns, and is furious to see what has transpired in his absence.

The woman reacts spontaneously and rushes to embrace the student, while the middle-aged man meekly retreats from centre stage. The men remain hostile to one another but the woman caresses and comforts them in turn.

As dawn fast approaches, all three demonstrate varying degrees of hysteria. Suddenly the woman takes centre stage to voice her dissatisfaction with men in general: men cannot endure loneliness, but demand this of women; men are able to prove their male identity in front of women, but refuse to allow women to prove herself equally as a person possessing integrity, dignity and sexual desires. Men claim to love the woman they sexually possess, but expect the woman to sexually desire only him. She declares men to be selfish and egotistical, and that they are only real before a woman, a naked woman, while he himself is naked too.

Gao Xingjian's interest in portraying the female perspective on male–female relationships is explored further in *Between Life and Death*. Borrowing from traditional Chinese theatre performance methods, in the play the female actor who plays Woman, moves in and out of the role, and throughout maintains the status of actor. Performance and theatricality is emphasised, and there is no attempt to portray reality. The roles are the female actor who plays Woman, and the only person to speak; a clown who plays the three roles of Man, Ghost and Old Man without speaking, and performs only with facial expressions, gestures, and body movements; and a female dancer who performs Woman's imagination. The stage props include a clothes rack with a man's suit hanging on it. The female actor who performs Woman narrates Woman's thoughts by referring to her in the third person "she". In other words, as playwright, Gao Xingjian assumes the position of the female actor in narrating Woman's thoughts.

The play opens with Man standing behind Woman. From what the female actor playing Woman says about "she", it is clear that the couple have been living together for some time, but that Woman can no longer bear their total failure to communicate. The relationship is in a state of limbo, i.e.

“between life and death”. That Man is seen as the cause of the breakdown in communication is emphasised by his being relegated to silence, but his silence and his actions serve as an effective foil that heightens the dramatic impact of Woman’s thoughts as articulated by the female actor who plays Woman. The stage words may be read as a long soliloquy or a poem. Nonetheless the work has been created as a play, and written for actualisation on the stage. All elements of the play, including the silence, facial expressions, gestures, and body movements of Man, Clown, Old Man, as well as the dance of the female performer, all contribute to reinforcing the dramatic impact of Woman’s thoughts as narrated by the female actor.

What hurts Woman most of all is that Man is unfaithful, and this has led to her resolving to end the relationship. However she continues to profess that she loves Man, and hopes he can revert to how he was when they first fell in love. She even says she can understand his having flings with other women, because these are temporary affairs. Conceding that she has been talking a lot, she asks if he could have the decency to make some sort of response. At this juncture she grabs Man’s shoulders and discovers that he has turned into the man’s suit hanging on the clothing rack. She thinks she has killed Man, and proceeds to hate herself, to hate herself because she is a woman, and to hate herself for her tantrums, possessiveness, irrational jealousy, her groundless anxieties, and her nagging. Afterwards she turns to pitying herself because she is getting old. In any case her thoughts begin to indicate some form of hysteria. In the remainder of the play Woman recalls her childhood, but here too the focus also concerns sexual relationships. Her mother suspected her father of having an affair with a female student, and her mother herself had a lover. As a child her mother’s lover had raped her, and with her mother’s consent. Woman’s nightmarish past suggests that her fragile emotional state is the result of her traumatic experience of childhood rape, and the experience of betrayal by her mother.

In the play *Dialogue and Rebuttal* a young woman and a middle-aged

man have just engaged in sex, and both agree that it was quite good. Afterwards they can find nothing to talk about. When the man says that he loves the woman, the woman laughs in his face. Afterwards they begin to analyse what had just taken place, and their views are remarkably different. In relating their reflections, the woman refers to herself in the third person “she”. While it is possible for Gao Xingjian to track a male character’s psychological processes with precision by resorting to the distance provided by employing the second person pronoun “you”, as a male writer tracking a female character’s psychological processes, this level of closeness is impossible. He can only resort to the gender-specific third person “she” to provide authorial objectivity in portraying what he understands of female psychology and behaviour. The woman considers why she had gone with the man, when she could easily have rejected his advances. On the other hand the man thinks that she knew very well what was happening, and it could have happened any place any time. They both had the urge, and so why not? It was bound to happen sooner or later, so why was she putting on such an act? She admits to knowing that it would happen, but had not thought that it would begin so suddenly, and end so quickly.

There is a third character in the play, a monk. He does not speak throughout the play, but from time to time performs certain actions that critique the dialogue between the couple. The woman is constantly aggressive, and on the attack: virtually everything she says is barbed and sarcastic. She treats the man as representing all men, and she berates him relentlessly, despite his repeated protestations that he loves her. She charges him with thinking only about a woman’s body, and understanding nothing about women. She even calls him a pig and a thorough bastard. His response is always good-natured. Afterwards, she begins to talk about herself. He listens, and only politely asks questions from time to time. The man does not talk about himself, and it is clear that Gao Xingjian is much more interested in exploring the woman’s thinking. The woman talks about

the time she was travelling in India somewhere near the Tibetan border, and went with a man to his home to buy marijuana. Two women brought her wine and after drinking it she became drowsy and lethargic, and for about a week remained like that sleeping in the man's bed. When he asks if she was raped, she says she is uncertain, but in all likelihood she had consented and enjoyed herself. Suddenly turning hostile again, she charges that it was the same with him. She accuses him of thinking that she is promiscuous, and scoffs as male fantasy his assertion that all women are promiscuous. He responds that men are also promiscuous, and in fact men and women are exactly the same in this respect. Speaking through the male character, Gao Xingjian is making the simple statement that sexual lust is common to human beings, regardless of gender. Of course people may for various reasons choose to, or be forced to, repress the biological urge for sex. There are also extraordinary individuals such as the Sixth Patriarch Huineng (633–713) of Chan Buddhism in whom all material lust is absent.

Snow in August, Gao Xingjian's grand-scale Peking Opera, portrays the life of Sixth Patriarch Huineng. This work is "total theatre", or as Gao Xingjian came to call it, "omnipotent theatre". The author-directed premiere production of *Snow in August* at the National Theatre in Taipei in 2002 included a large team of Peking Opera performers, a choir and a symphony orchestra, and implemented all of the theatrical innovations that he had developed over the years. Unlike Huineng, the hapless nun Boundless Treasure who appears in the opening scene of the play is like other human beings, and it is a struggle for her to repress her sexual desires. The youthful woodcutter Huineng arrives with firewood late at night while Boundless Treasure is chanting her sutras. He asks to stay to listen. Without turning, she says that she is a nun, and that it is improper for him to be there. However, it crosses her mind that she could easily become involved, yet it was precisely to avoid such liaisons with men that had led her to live in seclusion in the temple. Huineng fails to understand that his staying is

a problem, and he goes on pestering her to let him stay. In exasperation Boundless Treasure removes her head cloth and with shaven head turns to confront him in song. She proclaims that her name is Boundless Treasure, and that she has boundless anxieties, and complains about her loneliness on long nights with only a solitary lamp as her companion. However her boundless anxieties and loneliness are totally incomprehensible to Huineng whose pure mind transcends human concerns and carnal lust.

The linguistic brilliance and the spirit of Chan Buddhism is replicated in *Snow in August*, and although the work covers Huineng's life as well as 250 years of the rise and fall of Chan Buddhism in China, Gao Xingjian's treatment of Boundless Treasure's boundless anxieties remains one of the most memorable scenes of the play. *Snow in August*, like his plays *Wild Man*, *City of the Dead*, *Escape*, *Between Life and Death* and *Dialogue and Rebuttal* all testify to Gao Xingjian's abiding interest in portraying the female perspective on women's sexual relationships with men.

In 1999, as the 21st century approached, Gao Xingjian drafted in French a work for the theatre titled *Ballade Nocturne*. Claire Conceison's English translation from the revised 2007 French manuscript was published in 2010, and retains the French title *Ballade Nocturne*. This was the fifth play that he had first written in French, and then rewritten in Chinese. In 2009 he wrote a Chinese version that I have translated in the present volume as *Song of the Night*. Both the translation and the following discussion are based on the Chinese version included in his poetry collection *Wandering Spirit and Metaphysical Thoughts* (2014).

In *Song of the Night* the character "She" is portrayed by one female actor who both addresses the audience and performs the role of "She". There are also two female dancers: the melancholy dancer and the vivacious dancer represent the fluctuating moods of "She", and all three women together form a composite image of contemporary woman: "She". A male musician does not speak throughout, but plays a saxophone or some instrument from

time to time: his expressions and actions comment on the events that take place, as well as to present comic relief. “She” talks about her observations of male behaviour towards women, and how sex leaves a woman like a butterfly pinned alive to the wall with its wings flapping but its body no longer its own. “She” asserts that women always live for the present and that if men could be women for a time, they would become more intelligent, and worthy of a woman’s love. However “She” doubts that such men exist. Men think they possess a woman, and fail to understand her loneliness, and while assigning to the women they possess the no-cost virtues of being a chaste daughter and a kind mother, they also assign to their mistresses wild abandonment for their personal pleasure. However suddenly adopting a militant stance, “She” calls upon women to awaken from their ignorance and to embrace the new century by waging war against men. It is men who engage in filthy wars and destroy lives, while women offer love, and become pregnant yet again. Women should no longer submit to preordained destiny, and no longer be sacrifices. However “She” foresees that women will betray one another in the holy war against men. In the final analysis, sexual lust between men and women will continue to be the reality, and continue to cause conflicts, even for the busy working women of contemporary times.

Of all Gao Xingjian’s theatrical portrayals of the female psyche, *Song of the Night* is his most ambitious, and most detailed. The single image of “She” is performed by a female actor who also addresses the audience: berating the men for their failure to treat women as equals, and at the same time urging women not to allow fate to control their lives, but to trust their own bodies. Women have the right to sexual fulfilment, and the right to initiate and to seek after sex, even if they have to pay cash for it. However, after considering the option of women rebelling in a holy war against men, “She” concedes that the biologically programmed mutual desire for sex between men and women in nature’s grand plan for procreation of the species will prevail, and that tensions would continue precisely because of this. Women

feature prominently, and are an integral part of Gao Xingjian's literary endeavours. Women also dominate his visual art creations: in his ink paintings and films the female naked form may be said to exude the quality of the sacrosanct.

Gao Xingjian's articulation in language of the female psyche is embedded in a solid substratum-bedrock of his autobiographical impulses. It is through female actors, and his range of ingenious theatrical innovations that he succeeds in convincingly portraying his personal view of the power dynamics generated in male–female sexual relationships, and how these are played out. He is a male writer who is intensely sympathetic to women, as the plays considered above demonstrate. Nonetheless these portrayals of the female psyche serve to reinforce his autobiographical impulse to project his own gender-neutral perspectives on the issue of male–female sexual liaisons. In fact in *Song of the Night* the penultimate sentence spoken by the female performer reminds the reader that it is Gao Xingjian the playwright who has “dreamed” all of this. “She” being a woman of today has had her breakfast coffee, and disappeared amongst the crowds off to work, and “In the glare of the bright sunlight / There remains only the shadow of someone who is dreaming.”