

by the writer, but also a landmark in the history of modern Chinese fiction. Using the indirect method and powerful prose, the author through the acute sensibilities of a madman exposes the human cruelties and abuses of the old, patriarchal family system. The somewhat disjointed narrative is a record of the madman's haunted fear and vulnerability in a bestial society: "Pitch dark. I don't know whether it is day or night. The Chao family dog has started barking again. The fierceness of a lion, the timidity of a rabbit, the craftiness of a fox . . ." (p. 13). The images of darkness and animals are the predominant motifs of the story which, while depicting a man-eating society, is essentially a plea for human love and for a new way of treating fellow men. The story ends with a vehement cry: "Save the children . . ." (p. 18).

"The True Story of Ah Q" (1921), a novelette, is the most important work of Lu Hsun. Using the 1911 Revolution in China as the background, the story depicts the ills and pathos of rural life, and touches on the meaning of peasant protest. It focuses on the humiliating life of Ah Q, an ignorant and well-meaning farm laborer who typifies two traditional thoughts generally found with the Chinese people: a tendency to take pride in the glorious past, and a self-complacent way of enjoying moral victories when facing defeat. These two perverted attitudes are closely related. They both have their roots in the crippled will of men who dare not face the painful realities of life. By portraying Ah Q as a comic and backward peasant, and yet as one who in his confused way "wanted to revolt" (p. 107), the story is at once entertaining and thought provoking. It is a remarkable literary achievement for its fusion of romanticism and realism.

The other pieces are of equal interest. Told with economy and vigor which are characteristics of Lu Hsun's writing, some stories display the author's warm compassion for the painful life of the common folk, especially women, as revealed in "The New Year's Sacrifice," "Medicine," and "Tomorrow"; some show his genuine concern for the warped life of lonely intellectuals, as seen in "The Misanthrope," "In the Wine Shop," and "Kung I-chi"; and still some indicate his subtle scorn at the hypocrisy and small-mindedness of the town people and pseudo-writers, as shown in "Soap" and "A Happy Family." Most of

the stories are told with the intimate informality of the first person in retrospection. And in general there is something gloomy and somber about them. They are mainly set in the country, but the landscape is drab and barren. The recurring theme is one of human suffering caused by the oppressing old forces. Lu Hsun, however, is not a pessimist. As a realist and humanist, he foresees a better time for his fellow men and firmly believes in the creative power of the masses: ". . . the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made" (p. 64).

All in all, students of Chinese literature will find this volume of value, and it will prove useful for those who have an interest in the intellectual and social history of modern China.

Swan P. Chong

JAMES E. FALEN  
*Isaac Babel: Russian Master of the Short Story*  
Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974. Pp. 270. \$9.75.

Of all Soviet writers who fell victim to Stalin's reign of terror, Isaac Babel, a shortstory teller and playwright, was perhaps the most talented and accomplished. Although he had a slim output to his credit—two collections of short stories and two plays, plus a few uncollected stories and screenplays—he was recognized as a master storyteller already in the twenties. Today he is considered to be one of the best craftsmen in that genre in world literature. That he has not exerted the influence commensurate with his accomplishments is undoubtedly due to a relative obscurity into which he was forced in the latter part of his life and which he endured for more than two decades after his death. He found himself at odds with a new regime in Soviet cultural politics toward the end of the twenties. Unable to conform to the "social command" issued by the cultural czars, by which an artist had to put on a uniform, as

it were, and help along in the fulfillment of social and political goals, he faded away into publishing oblivion although he continued to write "for the drawer." During the purges in the late thirties he was sent to a concentration camp, where he was liquidated in 1941. For a long time he remained an "unperson" and his work was not published again until after Stalin's death. But during the sixties interest in him grew in volume, both at home and abroad—predictably, more abroad than at home. In the last few years his works have been published again in the Soviet Union and there have been many articles and a few books on him.

Of all the critical material on Babel, James E. Falen's *Isaac Babel, Russian Master of the Short Story* is the most extensive and scholarly work to date. It is a combination of a biography and literary analysis, because, as the author says, he has "found it both impossible and undesirable to separate the account of Babel's life from that of his works." By tracing the stages in Babel's life Falen shows how much they have influenced him, especially the childhood experiences in the Jewish community in Odessa and his participation in the Russian Civil War. These are the two main sources from which he drew throughout his career. However, Falen does not limit his examination to the autobiographical element in Babel's writings, and rightly so, for Babel was able to transmute his personal experiences into artistic expressions. The author was particularly interested in examining the depth and the interaction of the two sources of cultural influence upon Babel—his Jewishness and the surrounding Christianity—which, although not exactly vying for his allegiance, nevertheless made him move constantly between those two poles.

Perhaps even more significant is Falen's fine analysis of some of Babel's most important stories, especially those from *Red Cavalry*, his masterpiece. For, no discussion of the cultural background alone, no matter how thorough, is adequate to explain the mastery of Babel's art. It is in the middle five chapters that Falen's book attains its sharpest edge and makes its most important contribution to the growing Babeliana.

This book is not a definitive work on Babel because it leaves out, by design, a detailed discussion of the other important

component of his writing—his plays. In addition, no writer of Babel's stature can be exhausted in one book. But restricted as this study is, it definitely represents the most serious and successful attempt at analyzing and appreciating the beauties of Babel's art and at unravelling some of the mysteries that have accompanied this fascinating writer for decades.

Vasa D. Mihailovich

TERESINHA ALVES PEREIRA  
*Peligro: los ángeles se caen*  
México: Editorial Samo, 1973. Pp. 102.

*Peligro: los ángeles se caen* is a collection of thirteen short stories which represents the latest effort of the young Brazilian writer Teresinha Alves Pereira. All these stories, with the possible exception of "La dulce Europa," which is a loose adaptation of the classical rape of Europa by Jupiter, deal with human relationships and behavior.

Thematically, they can be placed in seven categories. In the first category is "Hetaira," which reveals the sexual problems and fantasies of a man so completely dominated by his mother that she accompanies him to his appointment with a prostitute, in the same way she did when, as a child, he visited the dentist. This prostitute, at the end of the story, becomes the symbol of his freedom from his mother.

Four stories make up the next group, which explores interpersonal sexual involvement. "Heroína del poema," the only story written in verse, exposes the tortured mind of a woman caught in a love triangle, who finds solace in the fact that the man she desires excuses the love she feels for the other man. In "G. amaba en silencio como planta fértil" and its epilogue, "Epilogo," the possibility of a meaningful physical relationship is discussed. The victim of a modern-day don Juan seeks to warn his future victims in "Hombre pequeño." As indicated before, perhaps "La dulce Europa" should be included in this group since it tells of the ability of Europa, the rancher's wife, to persuade Jupiter, the bull, to return to his heifers.