

BRIEF MENTIONS

JOSEPH S.M. LAU, C.T. HSIA,
AND LEO OU-FAN LEE, EDS.
Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas
1919-1949
New York: Columbia University
Press, 1981. PP. xxvii + 578.

The years 1919-1949 were crucial in the development of modern Chinese literature. During this time a revolution in the written language, which had its roots in the late Ch'ing Dynasty (1644-1911), came of age, and writers were quick to abandon the difficult literary writing, turning instead to the fresh vernacular of spoken Chinese. In the struggle to define modern Chinese literature, writers were reading and studying Western literature more than ever before, adapting both the form and content of the works of authors such as Chekov, Kipling, and Rolland to their own needs. This was a time, too, of great social unrest throughout the country, and this fact dramatically influenced the themes and concerns of modern Chinese literature. In *Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas 1919-1949* the editors Joseph S.M. Lau, C.T. Hsia, and Leo Ou-Fan Lee have provided an intelligent and much-needed anthology of the best of this literature. Particularly timely in light of the growing interest in not only the literature of modern China but also the culture and history of her people, this book will be a boon to scholars, students, and laymen. It will be especially useful in comparative literature and modern Chinese literature classes.

Of course, one may always quarrel with the choice of authors and stories represented in an anthology, but generally that is not the case here. Forty-four stories by twenty authors are included covering the important writers and samples of their work. On only two small counts may reservations be entertained.

First, despite Joseph S.M. Lau's explanation that a number of important works already available in English have been included because they are "essential to our understanding" of modern Chinese fiction (ix), clearly sixteen of these stories appear in other readily available publications. In the case of Lu Hsün this reduplication was unavoidable because his entire literary out-

put has already been translated, but perhaps Eileen Chang's overrated novella *The Golden Cangue* could have been excluded in favor of two of her more masterly, and not yet translated, short stories. Perhaps Yü Tafu could have been represented by his fine story "Silver-Grey Death" ("Yin-hui-se ti ssu"), which is still awaiting translation, instead of by the familiar "Sinking." And surely Mao Tun, a writer equally as famous for his works on young men and women during the chaotic years 1925-1930 as he is for his agrarian trilogy about the life of a peasant family in the early 1930s, has many fine stories other than the oft-anthologized "Spring Silkworms."

A second reservation is the exclusion of some other writers. Ping Hsin, Chiang Kuang-tzu, and Yeh Tzu are three who come readily to mind. Could Lu Hsün not have been represented by three works instead of six and Shen Ts'ung-wen's contribution trimmed from five stories to three; and better choices could have been made concerning the work of Lao She and Eileen Chang, replacing the novellas with short stories. In this manner a rough guess is that fifty or sixty pages could have been provided to other writers. In the case of the three above that would have been sufficient space for two short stories apiece. Yet these are minor shortcomings and on balance do not detract from this anthology in which the editors have been careful to include writers such as Tuan-mu Hung-liang, Yeh Shao-chun, Wu Tsu-hsiang, and Ling Shu-hua not previously known to Western readers.

Aside from this new material, which is an obvious attraction of the anthology, a second strength is the Selected Bibliography of Modern Chinese Fiction prepared by Howard Goldblatt and George Cheng. This discriminating selection of reference work draws on a broad variety of sources including studies of individual authors and their works, anthologies of translations, and periodicals to present a concise but valuable bibliography on modern Chinese literature.

Finally, while one cannot agree entirely with C.T. Hsia's Introduction, it is nevertheless a useful summary of the development and main currents of modern Chinese literature from 1919-1949. Hsia is quite right when he asserts that a major theme of modern Chinese literature is "the questing hero [who] . . . seeks nothing less than the sal-

vation of his suffering compatriots, or of the nation as a whole" (xiv). Contrary to the impression one receives from reading the Introduction, this theme often has a direct relationship to politics and is not always expressed in negative terms in stories about the failure of China's classical philosophies to provide guidance for the country as it enters the modern era or in stories of the alienation and loneliness of youth. Because of this, Hsia neglects the political significance of modern Chinese literature—the manner in which it reflects not only the struggle between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party for control of China, but also the struggle of a whole generation of young writers and intellectuals to enter into meaningful participation in a political process dominated by militarism and violence. Yet if Hsia is guilty of neglect in this area, he can conversely be credited with elevating the study of modern Chinese literature from an overconcern with political questions to a more proper respect for its literary qualities. This is his great achievement and is clearly evident when one reads the Introduction. He has a keen understanding and sensitivity to the literary aspects of this subject, and his comments on individual authors and stories are refreshing.

Certainly, *Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas 1919-1949* is an important addition to the growing body of literature on modern Chinese fiction. The anthology provides readers access to heretofore unavailable writers, to a concise but scholarly bibliography, and to an introduction sensitive to the artistic aspects of modern Chinese literature.

Jack Wills

DAVID BOND

The Temptation of Despair: A Study of the Quebec Novelist André Langevin

Fredericton: York Press, 1982.
Pp. 70. \$9.50.

David Bond's recent book, *The Temptation of Despair: A Study of the Quebec Novelist André Langevin*, is a fine piece of literary criticism,

an important scholarly work on one of Canada's major novelists. Lucid without being simplistic, analytical without being labored, it is a thought-provoking explanation of Langevin's development as a novelist and a thorough and intelligent critique of his five novels. Bond's statements are so logical and well substantiated, his wording so precise, that his arguments remain convincing from beginning to end. This is a book which any Langevin student should find well worth reading.

To write such a book is no easy task, since some of Langevin's novels—*Évadé de la nuit* (1951), *L'Élan d'Amérique* (1972), and to some extent *Une Chaîne dans le parc* (1974)—are generally considered complex. They are certainly more difficult than books by most of the other Quebec novelists who also became famous in the fifties—novelists such as Yves Thériault and Roger Lemelin, for instance. That Langevin's novels are, on the whole, less immediately comprehensible than, say, Thériault's, is hardly surprising when one realizes that Thériault's technique is straightforward and conventional, whereas Langevin's is experimental and (to quote Bond) "circular."

Moreover, although thematically Thériault and Langevin are occasionally on the same frequency (as, for instance, when they focus on the pollution and destruction of the wilderness and the alienation of wilderness-man by an uncaring and uncomprehending civilization) the absurdist, existential dimension so apparent in Langevin's work is not often visible in Thériault's. Langevin, as Bond frequently points out, is a literary heir of Camus, Sartre, and Malraux: "His vision of life is so close to theirs that comparisons are inevitable" (p. 42). Yet despite this similar view of life, Langevin, as Bond shows, stresses at the same time an independence from French literature: "All we share with French writers, and as poor relations, is the language . . . We will discover our resources only here, and not in Paris" (p. 43). This assertion reminds one a good deal of Emerson's historic declaration of American literary independence in "The American Scholar."

Part of the excellence of Bond's work comes from his ability to see Langevin as an evolving part of both the French and Quebec literary traditions. Bond clearly underlines an important part of Langevin's accomplishment when he remarks: "Not the least of Langevin's achievement is to have adapted themes which inspired such writers as Sartre, Camus, and Malraux to a Quebec