

Xu Zhimo's Encounter with »A Jewish Nightmare«—How a Chinese Symbolist Viewed an Expressionist Yiddish Play

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In March 1925, the poet Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1896–1931) took the Trans-Siberian train, crossed Siberia and visited Russia on his second trip to Europe. He returned to China in August after his visit to Italy, France and England.¹ Around May, while traveling, he wrote a series of essays (*sanwen* 散文)² mainly on the Russian part of his journey.

These writings were serialized between June and August of the same year in a popular magazine, the Morning Post Supplement (*Chenbao fukan* 晨報副刊, Beijing).³ His essays are entitled Casual Notes on My European Tour (»Ouyou manlu« 歐遊漫錄) and more accurately subtitled Travelogue about Siberia (»Xiboliya youji« 西伯利亞遊記); they would later be included in a Xu Zhimo collection of essays, Auto-Section (*Zipou* 自剖, 1928).⁴

One of them is entitled A Jewish Nightmare (»Youtairen de bumeng« 猶太人的怖夢). It describes a performance Xu Zhimo had attended during his stay in Moscow. He said he had initially planned to attend two plays performed by the Moscow Art Theatre, namely, *Hamlet* and a play by Chesterton. However, their staging was put off because of the funeral of an official, »Mr Malimahu« (173).⁵ There was only a »newly established

1 Cf. Leo Lee Ou-fan [Li Oufan 李歐梵], *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 124–174.

2 According to *Xu Zhimo quanji* 徐志摩全集 [The Complete Works of Xu Zhimo], 5 vols. (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1991), 3: 3.

3 Xu Zhimo was the editor of the *Supplement* from October 1925 to October 1926, replacing Sun Fuyuan 孫伏園 (1894–1966) who edited it from 1924 to 1925.

4 In the Russian Journey, Section 3 (»You E ji di san« 遊俄輯第三) of the collection. I am using here a facsimile of the first edition of Auto-Section (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2004). Unless otherwise stated, the pages indicated hereafter refer to this edition.

5 »Mr. Malimahu« 媽里媽虎先生: This is the Azerbaijani writer and Gogol' translator Mahmud Aliyev (Nariman Karbalayi Narimanov Najaf, 1870–1925), party secretary of the Central Executive Committee when he died.—Editor's note.

Jewish Theater» that put on a performance. The theater was full; almost all the audience had been invited by the ‘Communist Party Club’. Xu Zhimo and his Russian-speaking guide managed with difficulty to find places (they seem to have been more or less invited).

Xu Zhimo did not provide the reader with the title of the drama or the name of the playwright. The only explicit information he gave was the following: the play was written in the »modern Jewish language« (*xiandai de Youtaiwen* 現代的猶太文, *sic*) that is »quite close to German« (174), *i.e.*, in Yiddish. According to him, this theater had adapted a poem that originally »was no longer than two pages«, written »about twenty years ago by a Jewish poet«, whose name Xu Zhimo could not remember (176). This poet supposedly had died ten years prior to this performance.

To my knowledge, no study tells us about the play Xu Zhimo attended in Moscow. The only elements we have at hand are the depiction he gave of the performance, and particularly of the *mise en scène*, the staging and the way the actors performed. The actors were dressed up as »ghosts« (gui 鬼), wearing frightening masks, acting in a strange way, with exaggerated moves and voices; the performance made a notable use of music. In other words, this play was obviously expressionist; for Xu Zhimo it was a »nightmarish« and »ghostly« performance which made him feel uneasy. In the information he gave, there is one description of the setting that helps us find a clue about the identity of the play:

This play aimed (I guess) at symbolizing modern life. A terrifying hand was suspended right in the middle of the stage’s setting; its bones and joints, as bluish as iron, were coming out of its skin. It was half hanging in the void, in a frightening way. I think that this hand was symbolizing destiny or the oppression caused by the capitalist class: under the powerful pressure of these iron-hands, modern life’s nightmare was revolving like a windmill.⁶

Considering these formal elements, I propose the most probable candidate: *The Night in the Old Market* (*Baynakhht oyfn altn mark*), a play written around 1907 by the famous Yiddish writer Isaac Leib Peretz⁷ who was born in 1852 and died exactly in 1915, as Xu

6 “這戲的意思（我想）大致是象徵現代的生活，臺上佈景，正中挂著一隻多可怖的大手，鐵青色的筋骨全暴露在皮外，獐獐的在半空里宕著：這手想是象徵運命，或是象徵資本階級的壓迫，在這鐵手勢力的底下現代生活的怖夢風車似的轉著。”(177). All translations from Chinese in this paper are mine.

7 It seems that Peretz’s play was written in 1907 but was left unfinished at his death and was published for the first time only in 1922. I do not know whether it was really inspired by some other pre-existing »poem«, as Xu Zhimo tells us. For a French translation of Peretz’s play, see *La Nuit sur le vieux marché. Songe d’une nuit de fièvre* [The Night in the Old Market. A Feverish Night’s Vision], tr. by A. Domenico and A. Derczanski, in *Théâtre yiddish* [Yiddish Theater], 2 vols. (Paris: L’Arche, 1993), 2: 67–119. Peretz (whose name was transcribed as Bilaizhi 俾萊芝, among others) was presented to the Chinese reader as early as in 1921 by Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896–1981). Seven of his short stories were translated, from 1921 to 1924 and some were later included in books, such as *Youtai xiaoshuoji* 猶太小說集 [Jewish Short Stories,

Zhimo explicitly states. The play was adapted and staged in 1925 (it saw its *première* in February) by Alexei Granovski (1890–1937), the director of the Moscow Jewish State Theatre (GOSET) founded in 1922.⁸ These elements match the incomplete but otherwise accurate information given by Xu Zhimo.

Obviously, Xu Zhimo was unaware that he had attended one of the most successful plays of the GOSET repertoire, highly popular among the Russian audience. Later, it would also be well appreciated in foreign countries, namely during the GOSET European tour in 1928.

Without going into details, I shall provide some major features of Granovski's adapted version of *The Night in the Old Market*. The play does not have any distinctive plot. It is divided into two parts: »The Living« located in a market-place and »The Dead Ones« situated in a cemetery. The two major roles are 'jesters' (*bakshen*) who lead the performance.⁹ The most prominent themes are the carnivalesque display of grotesque characters (drunkards, prostitutes and merchants) and a *Totentanz*. The overall feeling produced by the spectacle would be that of hopeless collective

1926] or *Ruoguo xiaoshuo mingzhu* 弱國小說名著 [Famous Short Stories from Weak Countries, 1937]; see *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue zong shumu* 中國現代文學總書目 [General Index of Modern Chinese Literature], ed. by Jia Zhifang 賈植芳 & al. (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993); *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* 中國新文學大系 [Compendium of Chinese New Literature, 1936], 10 vols., ed. by Zhao Jiabi 趙家璧 [1935] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2003), vol. 10. In spite of that, Xu Zhimo could not remember his name: he was probably not known to him as a playwright, since Peretz had been presented in China as a »realist« writer. On the introduction of Yiddish literature and Peretz in particular to China, see Irene Eber, »Images of Oppressed Peoples and Modern Chinese Literature«, in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. by Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 133–134; »Yiddish Literature and the Literary Revolution in Modern China«, *Judaism. A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 16 (1967), 42–59.

8 The GOSET was formed from the former Jewish State Chamber Theatre (GOSEKT), established in 1920. For an English translation of Alexei Granovski's adaptation, see »Night in the Old Market. A Mystery in Two Parts after I. L. Peretz«, tr. by J. Gordon, *The Drama Review* 29,4 (1985), 96–122. On Granovski's staging, history and on this play, see Lois Adler, »Alexis Granovsky and the Jewish State Theatre of Moscow«, *The Drama Review* 24, 3 (1980), 27–42; Mel Gordon, »Granovsky's Tragic Carnival: "Night in the Old Market"«, *The Drama Review* 29,4 (1985), 91–94; Alexis Granovsky, »I. L. Peretz's "Night in the Old Market"« [translator not given], *The Drama Review* 29,4 (1985), 95; Béatrice Picon-Vallin, *Le Théâtre juif soviétique pendant les Années vingt* [Soviet Jewish Theater during the 1920's], (Lausanne: La Cité, 1973); Jeffrey Veidlinger, »Let's Perform a Miracle: The Soviet Yiddish State Theater in the 1920's«, *Slavic Review* 57,2 (1998), 372–397. For references to photographs, see for example *Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater*, ed. by Susan Tumarkin Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 148–153; Picon-Vallin, *Le Théâtre juif soviétique*, following pp. 96 and 112.

9 For a short abstract of the play, see Adler, »Alexis Granovsky«, 38; Gordon, »Granovsky's Tragic Carnival«, 93.

decadence. Clowns mock humans, the living as well as the falsely resurrected and their hope for the future. In that sense, the huge hand suspended on the stage could be that of the playwright or that of God.¹⁰

It would not be of any interest to proceed on a term-to-term comparison between Granovski's libretto and Xu Zhimo's review, since Xu did not understand Russian or Yiddish.¹¹ In fact, it seems that Xu Zhimo could only recognize a role or seize a word in a few situations (see also below); yet, he recognized the two places of the setting, the marketplace and the cemetery as well as the presence of the dead. Nevertheless, the fact that Xu Zhimo could neither understand the dialogues nor read the libretto is not of great importance, since Granovski's libretto does not exceed 1000 words for 90 minutes of performance. Moreover, the words were pronounced in a particular and unnatural way, making it necessary even for the local audience to consult the libretto. On the whole, the interest of the play lay in its performance, which made a permanent use of music, pantomime, stage decoration and bodily play. In one word, what was really at stake was the expressionist *mise en scène*.

Finally, Xu Zhimo revealed himself to have been particularly receptive to this *spectacle de la cruauté*, not without an obvious misunderstanding of the play's meaning. Yet, as we shall see, on a deeper level he caught the main *feelings, images* and *themes* of the performance.

Now, we can start reading Xu Zhimo's essay: first, we shall see how the May Fourth *intellectual* and traveller understood and explained the play, and secondly how the symbolist *poet* depicted it.

As the quotation above suggests, Xu Zhimo understood the play in a political manner and even from an informal 'Marxist' perspective. He deciphered in the performance a condemnation of 'capitalist' oppression and of social inequalities. He was inclined to interpret the characters and events of the plotless play in that way. For instance, he assumed that the play had represented some children's »parents who are workers« »acting as capitalists' slaves« (178)—but they were actually according to the libretto prostitutes looking for clients in a grotesque way in the marketplace. Elsewhere, Xu Zhimo believed that he had seen a »metal worker« »becoming aware« of his social alienation, thus wanting to »get even« with the capitalists. Xu Zhimo also delineated the theme of women's oppression in a hypocritical society (179). As a matter of fact, Granovski's libretto does not give any explicit indications of that sort.

Of course, today we can only read the libretto: these themes might well have been played out without the need of speech. Nevertheless, this understanding seems very likely to be opposite in meaning to Granovski's performance: the play was actually

10 The hand holds the Hebrew letter 'pe' for 'Peretz'. See also below, concerning the hand as a symbol.

11 According to J. Gordon, the audience in 1925 could follow a Russian synopsis-libretto, while a Yiddish text was published in Moscow the same year (see Alexey, »Night in the Old Market«, 122).

criticized in Russia on an ideological basis for »not opposing decadence with a more positive [...] view«.¹²

Why then did Xu Zhimo read the performance in such a political way? First of all, it seems that he was influenced by the introductory speech delivered before the play started by an actor dressed as a »living corpse« (174). According to Xu Zhimo, this speech explained the relationship between the play and the »trends of contemporary thought«: the only words Xu Zhimo could catch were »Karl Marx«, »Lenin«, »Internationalism«, and »other sonorous words that seemed to be uttered like bright stars in the sky filled with dark clouds« (175).¹³ After a while, the audience (all invited by the CP Club!) got impatient and began asking for the play to start.

This introduction is not attested in Granovski's libretto: it might have been a way to circumvent the criticisms raised against the play. Anyhow, Xu Zhimo was thus prepared to understand the performance from that political perspective, as we have seen above. And he was prepared to think of it in that way, especially as he went to Russia with all kinds of ideas or expectations on the new situation in politics and the arts in the Soviet Union. All this made him believe he would attend some anti-capitalist drama.

During the 1920s, modern Chinese intellectuals were watching the Russian Revolution with interest, and particularly the intellectual life under the newly founded Soviet Union (1922). Some of them, like Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899–1935) or Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈 (1901–1931), for instance came back from Moscow with enthusiastic accounts. This is the intellectual framework in which Xu Zhimo traveled in Russia, and he implicitly addressed this question in his essay. In the last third of his essay, he declared that he could not stand the performance's »nightmare« any more; he started then describing the audience, which mainly consisted of »party members«. Xu Zhimo wanted explicitly to describe Bolsheviks (»Baoerxueweike« 鮑爾雪微克)¹⁴ to the general Chinese readership of the time, and he wanted to demonstrate that the common prejudices against them were false. The Bolsheviks did not happen to be »exec-

12 Cf. Adler, »Alexis Granovsky«, 40. But this did not prevent critics from appreciating at the same time the aesthetic and artistic values of the play.

13 “卡爾馬克思，達司開辟雜兒〔？〕，列寧，國際主義等，響亮的字眼像明星似的出現在滿是烏雲的天上。”I have not found anywhere else a reference to the existence of this introductory speech.

14 Cf. Su Ming 蘇明, »Zhiyi yu xiaojie: cong *Ou you man lu* kan Xu Zhimo Su'E guan zhi zhuanbian« 質疑與消解：從《歐洲漫錄》看徐志摩蘇俄觀之轉變 [Doubts and Assimilation: the Changes in Xu Zhimo's Attitude Towards the Soviet Union, seen from his »Casual Notes from a Tour Through Europe«], *Nanjing daxue xuebao* 南京大學學報 5/2008, 109. We will not here discuss Xu Zhimo's 'political thinking', 'liberalism' or his global understanding of the Russian Revolution.

tionners«, »bandits« or »cannibalistic savages« on the contrary, they proved to be »well-educated« and even »nice-looking« people (180–183).¹⁵

The second reason why Xu Zhimo thought of this performance in Marxist or revolutionary terms is also due to the fact that he obviously projected in it themes peculiar to Chinese May Fourth literature and ideas—such as the denunciation of women’s and workers’ social conditions or the call for revolution. This aspect leads us to consider the proximity existing in the poetic imaginations displayed in the play and those in Xu Zhimo’s poetry, since Xu Zhimo is above all a poet.

The performance had no linear and clear-cut plot that Xu Zhimo might have been able to follow, especially as someone who could neither understand the dialogues nor read the libretto. He could thus devote all his attention to the performance that he freely depicted later. His essay alternates between argumentative developments on the one hand and narrative or, more accurately, descriptive parts on the other hand. The narrative or descriptive parts are more interesting for our purposes: they were written in Xu Zhimo’s typical symbolist style and manner. See the following examples¹⁶:

Why did [the ghostly characters] get lost? Because they were oppressed by the capitalist class. Why did the dead souls dare so audaciously to lure [each other]? Because there was no brightness on life’s promise—it was naturally directing itself towards an eternal grave.¹⁷ [...]

They [the dead ones] started moving, walking on a never-ending way. There were all kind of extraordinary ugly corpses: entirely rotten, half-rotten [...] The dead spirits were gladly leading the way ahead, while they were followed by life’s shadows that were giving them a send-off. The light was extinguished, and so was the light of the darkness; the light of the grave, the light of destiny and the lightening green glow of the death were all extinguished—this huge colourful crowd of corpses was dancing and chanting in the darkness of darkness, [...] the victory of death.¹⁸

The descriptive parts focus mainly on the elements that seemed to have struck Xu Zhimo: the masks, the huge hand, the resurrected corpses’ scaring appearance and particularly the ghosts and the tension between life and death, light and »darkness«. Even if Xu Zhimo’s political interpretation did not match the original play, his sensibility

15 In a way, Xu Zhimo paid the club back for having invited him. His positive description also gave credit to the Moscow cultural politics of the time: The GOSET’s high artistic quality contributed, as a matter of fact, to demonstrate the intellectual liberalism and modernism in Soviet society.

16 See also pp. 174–175, and the quotation above on the character pronouncing the opening speech.

17 “為甚麼生命走入了迷路，因為上面有資本階級的壓迫。為甚麼死的鬼魂敢這樣大膽的引誘，因為生命前途沒有光亮，牠的自然的趨向是永久墳墓。” (177).

18 “他們行動了，在空虛無際的道上走著，各樣奇丑的屍體；全燻的，半籃的 [...], 死的精魂欣欣的在前面引路，生的影子根在後背送行，光也死了，黑暗的光也死了，墳墓的光，命運的光，死的青光也全死了——那大群色彩斑斕的屍體在黑暗的黑暗中舞著唱著， [...] 死的勝利。” (179–180).

let him grasp the most important poetic images, motives and significance of the performance.

For Xu Zhimo, the performance displayed a struggle between life and death, calling for a revolutionary liberation or a new rebirth. These themes can be found in Xu Zhimo's own poetry, for example in poems published in 1924 and 1925, before and after his journey: See for instance *The Grey Human Life* (»Huise de rensheng« 灰色的人生), published in the collection *Zhimo's Poems* (*Zhimo de shi* 志摩的詩, September 1925). Written in a symbolist and romantic manner, the poem incites the reader to »go amidst the people« listening to their sufferings—the implicit meaning being that revolt against the »gray human life«¹⁹ is necessary. However, already in 1924 before his journey he had published a cycle of three poems, one of which is called *The Infant* (»Ying'er« 嬰兒).²⁰ This poem was as a matter of fact written in an expressionist mode, since it depicts a woman whose body was disfigured by her labor. Nevertheless, this woman can bear her sufferings because a hope symbolized by the infant will be born.

According to its Chinese reviewer, Granovski's performance resembled then pretty much Xu Zhimo's own dramatic poem peculiar to the May Fourth movement.

Nonetheless, Xu Zhimo remained faithful to his feelings and could not neglect and completely conceal the performance's original meaning: the voice of the other could not be completely recovered. This is the reason why he still felt uneasy, despite the revolutionary and optimist interpretation he had built at first. When he indeed came to the uncertain conclusion that at the end of the play the light had really disappeared (see the quotation above), he then writes: »Enough! Even nightmares have to come to an end. I could not have stood it any more, if it had continued that way.«²¹

Xu Zhimo could not stand the dark meaning the play implied: The »dead ones« were not really resurrected, because they disappeared at the end of the play.²² The last quotation above demonstrates that Xu Zhimo had 'felt' this ending, but since it did not match his revolutionary expectation of rebirth, he seems to reject this »nightmare«. He then turns to describe the more pleasant »Bolshevik« public in the theater.

19 See *Xinbian Xu Zhimo quan shi* 新編徐志摩全詩 [New Edition of the Complete Poems by Xu Zhimo] (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2006), 127–128.

20 The three poems, *Poison* (»Duyao« 毒藥), *The White Flag* (»Baiqi« 白旗) and *The Infant* were included in the essay entitled *Fallen Leaves* (»Luoye« 落葉), first published in the *Morning Post Annual Special Supplement* (*Chenbao mei nian jinian zengkanhao* 晨報每年紀念增刊號, Dec 1924), which was a collection of literary texts of the year. These poems were probably written around March/April 1924. They were hereafter included in *Zhimo de shi*.

21 “夠了！怖夢也有醒的時候，再要做下去，我就收不住。” (180).

22 If he had been able to understand the play's last dialogue, he would even have heard »The Last Dead: God! / Badkhen: Dead, your God! / Second Badkhen: He is... / Badkhen: HE IS BANKRUPT!« (»Night in the Old Markets«, tr. Gordon, 122).

But if Xu Zhimo has written an account of this play, it happened most likely because it moved or impressed him to some considerable extent despite the fact he had misunderstood it or pretended that he had not been able to stand this hopeless nightmare. I would suggest that Xu Zhimo was impressed because he found a connection between the *images* embodied by the *mise en scène*, expressing something that differed essentially from his political interpretation.

This ‘something’ would be principally the theme of the universal decadence of the world, symbolized by the decaying body and the expressionist setting of the huge and ‘frightening’ (*kebu* 可怖) hanging hand, to which Xu Zhimo paid particular attention.²³ Granovski’s libretto displays other themes related to the hand²⁴ thought of as a symbol of the literary creator: in the libretto, there are some indications of *mise en abyme*.²⁵ Some characters try to compose a poem, or ask about someone writing, while some others want to decipher an unidentifiable meaning of a »tombstone« too »corroded« to be read (112). In addition to this, a dead one complains: »I am rotting. I have no heart.« (117) We shall see below how this is of some interest.

Xu Zhimo probably did not understand the details of these dialogues, and so I am not trying to prove any direct ‘influence’. But the logic of the imagination at work in the play conveyed by the two pregnant figures of the hand and the estranged and torn body of the actor would present many resemblances to the key themes displayed in some modern Chinese poems.

The dead body as an allegory of decaying and rotten tradition, for example, can be found in Xu Zhimo’s *Poison* (1924), the first of the three poems in a series mentioned above.²⁶ The animated corpse that comes back to haunt the poet appears in Lu Xun’s 魯迅 (1881–1936) *Epitaph* (»Mujiewen« 墓碣文, June 1925) in which the modern poet is confronted with the problem of deciphering a text and seeks his own soul and identity: This is symbolized by an eviscerated corpse that looks for its own heart’s taste.²⁷ And with regard to the hand, a poem from Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905–1950), *The Cut Finger* (»Duan zhi« 斷指, April 1929), would propose a symbol of the past of the Chinese and the poet as well as its rupture.²⁸

To conclude, this particular encounter most likely did not have any direct influence on Xu Zhimo’s creative work, but it did reveal a *correspondance* between *The Night in the Old*

23 The hand is indirectly hinted to in the essay’s beginning (175).

24 In the first quotation given above, Xu Zhimo thinks that the hand might represent ‘destiny’.

25 The *badkehen* of the play seem to ape the playwright as well as the world’s creator.

26 Cf. “在人道惡濁的澗水裡流著，浮符似的，五具殘缺的屍體，它們是仁義禮智信，向著時間無盡的海瀾裡流去。”(*Xinbian Xu Zhimo quan shi*, 137).

27 See *Yecao* 野草 [Weeds, 1927], in *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 [Complete Works of Lu Xun], 18 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2005), 2: 207–208.

28 See *Dai Wangshu shi* 戴望舒詩 [Poems of Dai Wangshu] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 2007), 39–40.

Market and Xu Zhimo's poetic sensibility: the latter is suddenly confronted with those strange Jewish »dead ones« that might have reminded him of the 'ghosts' (*gui* 鬼) haunting modern Chinese authors.²⁹ As a modern Chinese intellectual, to see the victory of the »darkness« over the »light« would have been equal to a »nightmare«³⁰: but Xu Zhimo surely was moved on a deep level by the themes of the Moscovite play.

Beyond this likely correspondance, Xu Zhimo's review suggests that we could examine many modern Chinese poems from the perspective of the decaying, ghostly and torn body by recognizing also its expressionist nature³¹ in order to examine to what extent it was imported to China by Chinese poets either deliberately or accidentally.³²

Besides, Xu Zhimo's »Jewish Nightmare« could also be considered an original work and not only a secondary production. In that sense, Granovski's »hand« might have

29 On this theme, see Hsia Tsi-an, *The Gate of Darkness, Studies in the Leftist Literary Movement in China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1968); Tsuneki Maruo 丸尾常喜, »Ren« *yu* »gui« *de jing*. *Lu Xun xiaoshuo lunxi* “人”與“鬼”的糾葛——魯迅小說論析 [Entanglements between »Man« and »Ghosts«. An Analysis of Lu Xun's Fiction], tr. by Qin Gong 秦弓 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2006), 7–40; David Wang Der-wei [Wang Dewei 王德威], *The Monster that is History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 262–291, and his earlier *Xiandai Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi jiang* 現代中國小說十講 [Ten Conferences on Modern Chinese Fiction] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2003), 350–393. By writing his essay, Xu Zhimo might have had in mind Lu Xun's text on Chinese theater, Village Opera (»Shexi« 社戲, 1922); or Lu Xun himself might have responded to the former with his *Wuchang* (»Wuchang« 無常, 1926) and *The Hanged Woman* (»Diaonü« 吊女, 1936)? Other literatures present the same interest in describing ghosts appearing on stages from Asia: see for instance in French literature, Victor Segalen (1878–1919), Paul Claudel (1868–1955), Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) or Marguerite Yourcenar (1903–1987). But here Xu Zhimo reverses the exoticism: He is Chinese and describing a modern Russian drama.

30 Note that an author like Lu Xun would probably have responded in a different way.

31 The formalist, symbolist or romantic dimensions of Xu Zhimo's poetry have already been studied: see for example Chen Taisheng 陳太勝, *Xiangzhuangzhuanyi yu Zhongguo xiandai shixue* 象徵主義與中國現代詩學 [Symbolism and Modern Chinese Poetry] (Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 53, 56, *passim*; Michelle Loi, *Roseaux sur le mur* [Reeds on the Walls] (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 125, 296–297, 337, 498–499; Sun Yushi 孫玉石, *Zhongguo xiandai shi daodu (1917–1937)* 中國現代詩導讀 [Readings in Modern Chinese Poetry] (Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008), 26–28.

32 Such an inquiry has been done by the author of the present article in his unpublished PhD thesis »L'Écriture du corps déchiré dans la littérature chinoise moderne (1917–1949)« [The Writing of the Torn Body in Modern Chinese Literature], University of Geneva, Faculty of Humanities, thesis N° 695, 2010; see also the note below. This is of course not completely by chance that we find similar themes: Xu Zhimo knew Western literature and modern Chinese authors, and as is well known he made a huge work of translation.

appealed to Xu Zhimo as a symbol of the modern artistic work that the latter could recognize.³³

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33 This is not the place here to go more into details on that subject, but as many examples show, modern Chinese literature from the Republican era did use body metaphors, in particular that of a dead body, in order to problematize the modern literary project, and the search for meanings from the legacy of the past.



Plate 1

*Scene from »Night at the Market«
by Alexei Granovski (1890–1937)
as Staged by the Moscow GOSET Theatre in Moscow
since February 1925
(Goodman, Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater, 149)*