10-1-2004

Writing Sample

Xian Zhang

Includes excerpt from "The Raped Anti--."
The Raped Anti--

ZHANG XIAN

Translated by Li Guo

Playwright’s note

From beginning to the end only one male character is speaking in the play. He seems to be speaking to a woman and to himself as well. The naked woman, whose appearance is that of a stone statue, remains silent all through the play. She is making very slow, almost imperceptible movements. Throughout the man’s monologue, we come to gradually realize that she seems to be Antigone in Sophocles’ play, while the man seems to be Creon, King of Thebes.

In fact, however, this is not the story of Antigone and Creon, but an abstract fable about politics in the East. The man mutters under his breath, making his words highly suggestive. This is also one signal feature of Zhan Xian’s plays. Another one is that each monologue ends up with a fadeout into darkness, as an interval between the monologues.

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Translator’s Note

“The Raped A-N-T-I”---in translating this play, the title was the first problem I struggled with. The female character’s name, “A-N-T-I,” suggests that this play, partly derived from Sophocles’s story about Antigone and Creon, is rather independent from the original story. After discussing this with Zhang, we decided nonetheless to use the current title, which indicates its mythical connection, and more importantly, achieves an estranging effect.

As a political fable, the original version relies heavily on the official rhetoric of the authorities in China. (For example, “foreign reactionary forces” “international reputation of our country” etc). To translate these political terms into idiomatic American or British English expression would restrict the context of the play to certain countries. For example, “Separate Church from the State” indicates more of a Western cultural context than “Separate politics from religion”. For Zhang, the play is not specifically about China, but may apply to many nations under various cultural contexts. Considering this, I kept the translation as a deliberately “ambiguous” text with regard to its national, cultural and racial backdrop.

Iowa City, October 2004

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1. You have two minutes.

2. Put on your clothes.
   Hurry, put on your clothes.

3. You are deliberate.
   You want my guards and secretaries to see us.
   You want the cooks, the cleaning women and all the staff here see us.

4. This place is haunted by scopophiliacs.
   Peepers are hidden in each of the darker corners.
   They have seen what happened.
   Soon rumors will fly all over the country.

5. I am not afraid.
   I will not avoid them.
   The door of my bedroom is never closed.
   I fucked the daughter of the former king.
   For no reason, just to fuck you.

6. You should have noticed the changes in customs.
   In other words we gradually resumed the ancient tradition of respecting nature.
   Sexual life outside the bounds of the administrative system is not a problem for the voters.
   They would be greatly satisfied to see that the man they trust is still human.
   My wife, that is, your Queen does not care if I have one more lover.
   Likewise I don’t care if she will run for the first President of democratic elections after I resign.

7. To bury your brother’s body is asking for punishment by death; you knew, but would not listen
   If you do not obey the nation’s laws, I swore I would use private punishment; still you wouldn’t listen
   I had no choice but to fuck you; you asked for this.
   But on a sudden impulse I gave in to passion and saved your life.
   My body’s interference kept you safe in the palace; no one dared to execute you.
   Even though this was rape, it turned into a rescue; you should be grateful for that
   Rather than lingering on here naked wordless, making a fool of yourself.

8. I imprisoned you secretly because you abused my candidness
   After what happened I felt at ease but you lost your self-control
   I laid bare my heart, allowing you to make demands
In return you used silence to lay out your vicious scheme step by step
You deliberately insulted yourself, violated yourself
To insult me to humiliate me to hold me up to ridicule
The palace is troubled with the rumor that the king raped a whore
The king raped and imprisoned a filthy schizophrenic whore

9
My rendezvous with you spared your life.
People knew that you were the king’s woman.
No one will further pursue your violation of the law.
No one will raise a question about this matter.
This is not to say that I am the only person who overrides the law in this country.
But that people are afraid of slander of subversion of having their residences confiscated in the name of Law.
Remember before the legislation I was the master of Law after it I am the servant of Law.
Meanwhile don’t forget the king is also human
Don’t forget the king is the servant of the people in other words a common person
Because of the special conditions of the nation we took the lead in legislation
Each citizen has the legal right to deal with whatever has taken place between his body and others’.

10
If you will not put on your clothes at least mind your manners
Your demeanor is inappropriate and even disgraceful
Do you know how despicable you are now
Even an undressed hooker will be decent enough to put on her clothes
You disappoint me with your filthy nature
The fact that you were born tainted made me sick
I remember your father killed his father and married his mother before he was enthroned
Your birth to the world is filthier than my treatment of you
Your mother who is my elder sister killed herself because of this unprecedented shame
She did not drown you in a stool because she knew the way of life
We are all filthy
Otherwise there will be no us

11
I should hold your hand tightly
Hold your hair
Kick your ass
Seize your throat
I know what you want
You want to blackmail me
Your want your “status”
Like many rotten bitches who could not wait to blackmail me right after they got out of my bed
I don’t have to tell my people about this they will jeer at your daydream and scorn your shamelessness
You don’t have to usurp the Queen’s position by risking so much
You don’t need to follow the example of my Queen who organized her own party without permission to campaign for presidency
Take your time you could marry my son I will manage to make a king of him
As the future queen you could hold court from behind the curtain and give orders to your impotent husband. If you are still unsatisfied when you rig the national election and ascend the throne you will have done nothing but follow my example.

12
Marriage as a formality has little importance
Marriage is not more than a piece of paper
You are my lover
My beloved
This is the status that I raised you to
If you want it publicized it will be nothing more than this
Not an emperor’s concubine not an adulteress
Not a secret lover not a mistress
Anyway what is the point in having a formal marriage with you
Have you schemed for long to usurp the Queen’s position of my country?
If every ejaculation ejects a queen this city would have been teemed with queens in streets
I agree on marriage
Agree to marry you even though you wish to become the queen
So long as you put on your clothes
And stop this rascal behavior and revolting prank
But divorce takes some complicated process
It involves Emergency Congress Legislation Debates Final Veto Power

13
If you would not put on your clothes, or at least mind your manners
Your demeanor is inappropriate, even disgraceful
Do you know how despicable you are now
Even an undressed hooker has decency enough to put on her clothes
You disappoint me with your filthy nature
The fact that you were born tainted made me sick
I remember your father who killed his father and married his mother before he was enthroned
Your birth to the world is filthier than my way of treating you
Your mother, my elder sister, killed herself because of this unprecedented shame
She did not drown you in a commode because she knew the way life is
We are all filthy
Otherwise there wouldn’t be

14
You are becoming the most lascivious woman among those in the pornographic profession in this city
You have degenerated into a prostitute whom no one cares to purchase even for a dollar
How dare you violate yourself make yourself a free public lavatory
How dare you change this secluded cave into a den of obscenity crowded with frequent visitors spreading rumors from mouth to mouth
I cannot understand why you have so much hatred for me
I tainted you once merely out of habit
I operate the state machine I am the state machine
Day after day after year after year I have lost human feelings
If I do not exercise the lower part of my body a little I can not prove myself a human being
In fact the lower part of my body never belongs to myself
It is dedicated to the country just like the upper part
I took possession of you but do not really have you
I returned all the women to themselves
I only touched you once
Yes I touched all people as I wanted to
But I have never met anyone like you
What you have done takes extreme hatred and vicious belief
What is your hatred for what is your belief
Nothing can hinder you
You have already succeeded in destroying me by destroying yourself.

15
You want to restore yourself by revolting against me?
You restore yourself so what
For me to restore oneself is least meaningful
I have been learning to become others.
I have become others
Become everyone except myself
I am a tyrant and liberalist
A conservative and reformist
I am even a revolutionist
I achieved the separation of religion from politics
I promoted the constitutional monarchy
I called off royal interference of administration
I abolished royal throne succession
I transplanted multi-party political systems
I joined the election personally.
I myself became the expert on state administration.
I reduced the ideological character of the party
I cultivated a generation of non-moralized technicians to govern the country
I resolved the philosophical dilemma of choosing between morality and intelligence
I will further apoliticize private affairs in office
For example the trainees could have oral sex with others in governmental offices like having oral sex with others at home
So long as the state is well-run everything else is insignificant.

16
Put on your clothes
It’s gloomy and cold in the cave
You will be sick
No one will take care of you if you are sick
Now except me the whole state system is longing for your death
I wish you alive because you are one of the two living beings in this country under my administration
One is me the other is you
To be frank I still wish you could live on and resolve this national crisis
In other words the crisis of my image and the crisis of the people’s trust in me
You know one person tells ten ten tell hundreds rumor flies throughout the country
People trudged over long distances to this place helping the aged leading the young just to bid farewell to you
My Party has carried a resolution that this was an unprecedented massive immoral scopophilic movement
Moral police enclosed all roads to the mountain
Your influence has surpassed that of the Oppositional Party
Are you from the Oppositional Party
Do you know any of them
You were used by foreign reactionary forces
The international reputation of our country has declined to the lowest point in history
If you still have some elementary common sense of responsibility or conscience or sympathy for your motherland
Put on your clothes

17
I should squeeze your hand
Grab your hair
Kick your ass
Seize your throat
I know what you want
You want to blackmail me
Your want your “position”
Like so many rotten bitches who could not wait to blackmail me right after they got out of my bed
I don’t have to tell my people about this; they will jeer at your daydream and scorn your shamelessness
You don’t have to usurp the Queen’s position by risking so much
You don’t need to follow the example of my Queen who organized her own party without permission to run for the presidency
Take your time you could marry my son I will manage to make a king of him
As the future queen you could hold court from behind the curtain and give orders to your impotent husband
If you are still unsatisfied when you rig the national election and ascend the throne you would have done nothing but follow my example

18
Your death will bring no change to this world
Except that my son killed himself for love
Except that my wife killed herself for the suicide of her son
Nothing changed
Seems that everything has changed
When I am walking in the streets the state is not the same as before in my heart
What has changed
Perhaps you taught the state a lesson
The raped made herself filthier than the rapist
The rapist becomes the raped at last
In fact it is you who has raped me.

[...]

24
Is self-violation a punishment for your failure
Is self-punishment atonement for your sin
Is self-atonement a sacrifice of your ideal
Is self-sacrifice a tyranny over your life
If so.
Your self-violation is nothing but contempt for God
To show contempt for God is nothing but to oppose humankind
I gave you a chance, you made me lose face
I wanted to save you, you refused to save yourself
You are addicted to revenge and accusation
By doing so you attempted to make an emotional appeal to people
You seemed to have drawn benefits from this and enjoyed doing it
You seemed to have gained moral energy and exercised it like power
You saw that moral power could yoke my politics with gossip
Now the people of the city have begun to shake the foundation of my legal administration
I wish you’d die, so that the trouble could calm down
But you also seem to wish an early death to cause even more slander
You have spun a fairy tale of my hatred and revenge on my people
I was dragged into a dilemma by you and could not find a way out
I will send you to an secret cave in the wilderness
Others will know that you are alive but won’t be able find your whereabouts.
Meanwhile I will spread the word that you have converted at last, and are kept in one of my palaces abroad
Every now and then you will show up before my people to testify to my infinite royal graciousness
[...]

30
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No one will take care of you if you are sick
Now except for me the entire state system is longing for your death
I wish you alive because you are one of the two still alive in this country under my administration
One is me the other is you
To be frank I still wish you could live on, and resolve this national crisis
In other words the crisis of my image and the crisis of the people’s trust in me
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My party has carried a resolution that this was an unprecedented massive immoral scopophiliac movement
The morals squad barred all the roads to the mountain
Your influence has surpassed that of the opposition party
Are you from the opposition party
Do you know anyone of them
You were used by the reactionary forces abroad
The international reputation of our country has plummeted to the lowest point in history
If you still have some basic sense of responsibility or conscience or sympathy for your country
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The raped made herself filthier than the one who committed the rape
The one who committed the rape becomes the raped at last
In fact it is you who raped me.

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