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**Anatomy of Murder and Rape:
A Comparative Study of Crime Writing
by Chi Zijian, Alice Sebold, A Yi and Ian
McEwan**

Xiaowen Yang

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature, The University of Auckland, 2017.

Abstract

Using comparative critical analytical methods and drawing on literary and social history, this unprecedented author-based case study of work dealing with the themes of rape and murder by four authors, A Yi, Chi Zijian, Alice Sebold and Ian McEwan expands, recontextualises and reframes current scholarship on literary representations of murder and rape. The fact that rape and murder are recurrent literary themes, cross-cultural studies of works which engage with them are scarce. This study fills this gap by bringing together four writers from three cultural contexts (China, UK, USA) to conduct a cross-cultural examination of their work within the framework of crime writing, and more specifically, the problematics of writing about and reading about murder and rape.

In contrast to the extensive scholarship on crime writing in the west, there is very little academic work on crime writing or crime fiction in China, especially on contemporary writing. This is the first study of its kind to investigate two contemporary Chinese writers who represent the current state of Chinese crime writing. Studies of rape and murder remain taboo subjects in the contemporary Chinese academic world. This study breaks this taboo and brings Chinese crime writing into international comparison. It also offers the first critical analysis in English of the work of Chi Zijian, one of the most prominent female writers in contemporary China.

The cross-cultural approach counters the provinciality of Western scholarship and brings the Chinese writers' points of view into dialogue with it. For example, the connotations of feminism assume a greater degree of fluidity and heterogeneity when investigated in texts produced by authors from different cultural backgrounds. Against the trend of absorbing feminism into other social movements, this study reaffirms the currency and vitality of the second-wave feminism and its cross-cultural applicability.

This comparative analysis of the striking characters and complex narratives produced by the four writers speaks to some of today's most pressing social and moral issues and encourages the reader to contemplate and perhaps rethink the answers to some significant, time-honoured questions, such as how to understand the dark undercurrents of human nature human, or the role one's social position plays in the interpretation and commission of violent crime, or the extent to which one should sympathize and empathise with the criminals and victims , or what we can do as

individuals and as a society to respond to the perplexing moral conditions of the present time.

Keywords

Comparative literature, anatomy of murder and rape narratives, crime writing, contemporary China, UK, US culture

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journeys, possibilities, and adventures ahead.

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Introduction

This thesis brings together and comparatively examines four contemporary prose writers from three cultures (China, the United Kingdom, and the United States): A Yi (1976-), Chi Zijian (1964-), Ian McEwan (1948-) and Alice Sebold (1963-). I discuss their work within the framework of “crime fiction”, although they are not strictly speaking crime writers. My project aims to analyse how these four authors write about murder and rape and to glean new insights into common themes and local strategies by comparing their texts cross-textually and cross-culturally. This thesis makes an original contribution by comparing US and western European English-language texts with a Chinese literary perspective on murder and rape. Currently, rape and murder remain relatively taboo subjects in the Chinese literary world. Current scholarship on these topics in Chinese literature is scarce, especially when compared to the vast body of work on similar texts and issues in American and British texts. My thesis project aims to put comparative crime fiction criticism on a more global footing.

Violent crime reveals the darkest sides of human nature as well as the most dramatic conflicts between individuals and social order. It also directly challenges the notion of normalcy or consensus morality. Julia Kristeva’s concept of “abjection” astutely captures the meaning of violent crime:

It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the killer who claims he is a saviour. ... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but remediated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law—rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. ¹

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* translated by Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

As a disruptive and challenging force, crime and especially violent crimes like murder and rape change the position and identity of the criminals, and they disturb not only the social order but the legal system itself. Rape and murder— in particular—provoke the most overwhelming tensions between individual behaviour and social environments. Rape and murder, as social problems as well as individual acts, are also two effective indexes of the most pressing social, moral and cultural problems present in a society. As we shall see, the literary representations of rape and murder in the writings of the four authors studied here challenge the boundaries between criminal and victim, marginal and centre, us and others in ways which render crime writing spectacularly metacritical.

I will first offer a general review of the legal cultures and the moral landscapes these four authors write against. When studying literary texts cross-culturally, these legal and moral aspects often constitute the most straightforward aspects that come to mind when considering crime writing.

Crime, legal culture, and moral environments: UK, US, and China

The legal system McEwan and Sebald's texts write against are two systems that share the same provenance. The United Kingdom is the birthplace of the common law tradition. United States law has long been on a similar path including two distinctive ingredients: a single variety of federalism and a common law tradition.² For more than two centuries, a well-established and consistent legal system has existed such that it lends an impression that the system resists change.³ However, there is no question that, historically speaking,

² E. Allan Farnsworth, *An Introduction to the Legal System of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

³ Martin Partington, *Introduction to the English Legal System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-8.

the notion of criminality has changed in both the UK and US legal systems from the late 19th century to the present. For example, what had been a crime against civil order, such as vagrancy or public drunkenness, became in many places a status, and as such immunised the perpetrator from arrest or prosecution.⁴ However, in the present day, changes to the legal system generally only occur at a micro-level and in piecemeal manner. The fundamental principles shoring up the whole body of UK/US law alter very little. Jurisdiction is independent from government, and the presence of law has become a system that has been taken for granted. However, in spite of the confidence and comfort provided by the law, confusion and fatigue about its efficiency are also visible, especially with respect to whether people have equal status under the law.

In contrast, the legal system A Yi and Chi Zijian write against, like China itself, is undergoing rapid change. Looking back at history, prior to the 20th century, the Chinese legal system featured a mix of the Confucian philosophy of social control through moral education and a legalist emphasis on codified law and criminal sanction.⁵ In the 20th and 21st centuries, the legal system in China has been a complex mix of traditional Chinese approaches and external influences. Legal conceptions, terminology, institutions and processes which are Western in origin have been adopted. In the period 1979-2003, approximately 1,200 items of laws and regulations were enacted, including nearly 400 major codes, laws or law-related decisions made by the National People's Congress or its Standing Committee.⁶ What makes the Chinese legal system different from Anglo-American systems is that, given the lack of separation between the state and the party, jurisdiction is not independent from government. This means that political intervention

⁴ James Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 1-28.

⁵ Tongzu Qu, *Law and Society in Traditional China* (Paris: Mouton Press, 1979), 10-25; Qi Wanxue, and Tang Hanwei, "The social and cultural background of contemporary moral education in China," *Journal of Moral Education* 33, no.4 (2004): 465-70.

⁶ Albert HY Chen, *An Introduction to the Legal System of the People's Republic of China* (Hong Kong: LexisNexis, 2011), 178.

plays an important role in the legal process. The legal system is not only changing, but transforming on a large scale in China. More importantly, laws or law-related decisions are still made by the National People's Congress or its Standing Committee. So-called "socialist" law in China is issued from above through legislation, the courts or the party. Controversies over whether this system amounts to "rule of law" or "rule by law" continue.⁷ Insecurity and ambivalence still dominate people's perceptions of the law in China. Because of these changes and controversies, crime has been gaining an increasing (if not explicit) presence among Chinese authors in the post-socialist era since 1978. Crime and especially violent crimes such as rape and murder used to be taboo topics in socialist China due to social and literary controls.⁸

In the cases of the United Kingdom and the United States, the moral culture of contemporary society creates complex legal and pluralistic social landscapes. Traditional sources of moral authority and cultural boundaries are losing their traditional moorings and consensus. The weakening of moral authority has been compensated by a strengthening of the law, as areas previously left to people's individual and presumed conventional moral judgment are brought into legislation.⁹

In the wake of the reconfiguration of the Confucian worldview since the May Fourth Movement in 1919, and especially since its reentry into the world economy in early 1980s, China has been moving toward a global culture on its path to modernity, engaging with Western values while seeking to shape its own identity as a post-socialist dictatorship. Similar to trends in the United Kingdom and the United States, Chinese legislation

⁷ "Rule of Law in China: China with legal characteristics," *The Economist*, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21629383-xi-jinping-invoking-rule-law-thats-risky-him-and-good-china-china-legal>; Nancy Tang, Keith Hand, Eva Pils, Taisu Zhang, and Thomas Kellogg, "China's 'Rule by Law' Takes an Ugly Turn," *Foreign Policy*, accessed Nov 6, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/14/chinas-rule-by-law-takes-an-ugly-turn-rights-lawyers-crackdown-xi-jinping/>.

⁸ Perry Link. *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, 56-97.

⁹ John Hendry. *Between Enterprise and Ethics: Business and Management in a Bimoral Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 55-76.

reflects long-term shifts in people's moral attitudes. For example, cohabitation used to be illegal, but now it is recognised as a *de facto* marriage relationship, though only in terms of the rights of property and children. What differentiates China from the United Kingdom and the United States is that the state or the party plays an important role in imposing certain moral codes on individuals by legislation. For example, recently the requirement that "children should visit their parents often" was put into law, reflecting state authorities' promotion of filial duty (a traditional value).¹⁰

Rape and murder are the most heinous violent crimes in China, as they are in the UK and the US. Although a large body of scholarship tends to combine both sexual violence and the annihilation of the life of the victim,¹¹ in my thesis, rape is defined as a sexual violence whereas the murders in the chosen texts are non-sexual or lust murders.¹² The sole exception is Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, which features both rape and murder, but my thesis' comparisons centre on the rape.

Comparative and critical significance of the study

Despite their heinousness, rape and murder have always been popular literary themes from antiquity to today. As Joel Black maintains,

The founding texts of both Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman culture deal with violations of the law. The Old Testament begins with the stories of Adam and Eve [...], and of their sons who became the first murderer and murder victim. The Homeric epics weave together such legends associated with the Trojan War as the abduction of Helen, the occupation of Odysseus' home by the suitors, and the murder of Agamemnon by his wife.¹³

Nearly all the literary giants in history including William Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Dostoevsky, explore the theme of crime and/or crime-related themes in

¹⁰ Edward Wong, "A Chinese Virtue Is Now the Law." *The New York Times*. July 2, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/03/world/asia/filial-piety-once-a-virtue-in-china-is-now-the-law.html?_r=0 (accessed on 20 July, 2013).

¹¹ For example, Deborah Cameron, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder*. (Cambridge: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell, 1987); Jane Monckton Smith, *Relating Rape and Murder: Narratives of Sex, Death and Gender* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹² Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* features both rape and murder, but my thesis centres on the motif of rape

¹³ Joel Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 29.

their work.

A particular fiction genre—crime fiction—exclusively deals with various forms of violent crime. From Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories onwards, crime fiction as a genre started to gain tremendous popularity among readers, and Conan Doyle’s influence has travelled worldwide. Since then crime fiction has developed into various schools, including mystery and detective fiction, the hard-boiled mode, the police procedural, the crime thriller, and historical crime fiction.¹⁴ Within these various subgenres of crime writing, themes and acts of rape and murder have become very popular both in the West and in China.

However, reviewing existing scholarship and criticism on rape and murder in literature, we become aware just how extensive critical studies have been discussing crime and literature in the West. By contrast, scholarship and criticism on the increasingly number of Chinese crime fiction texts are scarce. Generally speaking, the two scholarly traditions share some similar characteristics, but there are a number of limitations and gaps which this thesis aspires to address and fill.

In this endeavour, cross-cultural comparative analysis plays a significant role. The brief review of the legal and moral landscapes in China, the UK, and the US, as depicted by these four authors helps us better grasp the dialogic dynamic between literary texts and culture. At present no comparative work has been done to bring Chinese writers and UK and US crime writers together. My thesis presents a different comparative analysis across literary and cultural boundaries with regard to law and crime.

Comparative analysis and understanding have relevance in nearly every aspect of life. As Christopher Bush observes, comparison is “an unavoidable, even vital mechanism of not only scholarly discourse but also language, thought, and even human experience.”¹⁵

¹⁴ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 1-30.

¹⁵ Christopher Bush, “Why Not Compare,” *English Language Notes* 49, no: 1(2011):169.

For two such long-standing literary themes as murder and rape, it is a pity that comparative cultural analysis has not taken place in scholarly discourse. More important, forging intellectual connections that have not existed before can potentially lead to the opening up of dialogues between literary texts and national cultures. Eugene Chen Eoyan's study of Chinese-Western literary relations is cogent and relevant here:

In languages with the same cultural heritage, what is "common" is often perceived (erroneously) as universal, and ethnocentricity inspires a neglect of other points of view, other persuasions, even on the most fundamental human questions. The study of Chinese-Western literary relations provides a healthy corrective to this provinciality.¹⁶

In the case of literary narratives of murder and rape, a comparative approach will be effective in countering some of the provinciality of western scholarship and bringing into the critical conversation the points of views expressed by Chinese crime writers. A comparative approach can help reframe and expand the current scholarship on crime fiction and open up more global frameworks and generate new insights into the complex literary representation of rape and murder. At the same time, comparative literary analysis can create a more micro-level and nuanced understanding of the legal, moral and cultural landscapes in the UK, US and China today.

My thesis expands the conventional definition of "crime fiction" by looking into various kinds of crime narratives in the work of prose fiction writers. Instead of investigating "whodunit?" genre novels, which conventionally centre around solving a crime by a detective figure, the focus in my thesis will be "why they do it?" and more. My chosen authors locate criminal behaviours in the context of the tensions and issues of contemporary social life in Chinese and Anglo-American societies. They engage with wide and broad social and cultural contexts and represent crime in a non-formulaic way. My analysis will not limit itself to the framework of the psychothriller per se. The chosen

¹⁶ Eugene Chen Eoyan, *Two-Way Mirrors: Cross-Cultural Studies in Gloacalization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2007), 11.

texts portray the minds of both criminal and victim. They interpret criminality and experiences of criminality in psychological terms, and also encompass the psychic trauma of this experience and its social and affective effects on ordinary people (both the characters in the texts as well as the reader). My aim is thus to develop an ethics of writing and reading about crime writing. This comparative approach will potentially counter the dominant trend of cultural criticism, which is to give massive academic attention to popular crime fiction. By popular crime fiction, I mean a series of novels created by the same author and featuring a particular character and often similar scenarios. More importantly, for critical and comparative significance it is necessary to go beyond the discussion of “detection” and “suspense” and explore more explicitly literary themes that crime fiction has always featured: the complexity of the human mind and behaviour, moral choices, the interaction between the individual and social institutions such as the law, and self-identification or growth. To date, it seems that the conventional generic approach to crime fiction has come to appear too constrained. For example, *Constructing Crime: Discourse and Cultural Representations of Crime and Deviance* (2012) edited by Christina Gregoriou mainly deals with crime fiction as popular genre. The focus of studies such as this tends to be on the central narrative element, that is, the detection of the perpetrator, which normally involves the deductive or investigatory process. As Stephen Knight remarks in his *Crime Fiction since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity* (2010), detection became—whether in its explicit form of the detective novel or in more general fiction—a central characteristic of post-Enlightenment literature.¹⁷ Critical texts such as Heta Pyrhönen’s *Mayhem and Murder: Narrative and Moral Problems in the Detective Story* (1999), fixate on the detective “technology” and the rational process it entails. Mary Evans maintains in her *The Imagination of Evil: Detective Fiction and the Modern World*

¹⁷ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10.

(2009) that the daily round, the ordinary event, domestic and local social relations, can all be transformed by a single event or action into something extraordinary.¹⁸ What is extraordinary in crime fiction, then, may not be the detection of crime but deeper, complex questions of social or personal motivation or subjectivity.

My project also focuses specifically on the “literary” analysis of murder and rape narratives rather than finding evidence in the texts to prove sociological facts. Literary texts are the authors’ creative responses to social and legal realities. In many previous studies, literary texts have seemed to be reduced to being passive or static evidence for sociological and legal empiricism. For example, *Rough Justice: Essays on Crime in Literature* (1991) edited by Martin L. Friedland deals with criminality in literature, but only to use literary texts to prove the evolution of juristic terms. *Crime in Literature: Sociology of Deviance and Fiction* (2003) by Vincenzo Ruggiero uses literary texts to test the meanings of sociological category terms such as gender, race, and economy. In the case of China, critics who approach crime fiction are mostly legalists. Su Li’s *Law and Literature: A Study of Dramas of the Yuan Dynasty* (法律与文学：以中国传统戏剧为材料) (2006) aims to uncover the ideological function of traditional Chinese dramas, and the general pattern of social control exerted through literature and the law in traditional China. Zhang Liqing’s *Law and Literature: the Literary Vision for Legal Justice* (法律与文学：文学视野中的法律正义) (2010) compares classical Chinese literary texts and modern western classics only as evidence to reveal the technicalities of law. Without doubt, fiction focused on crime can offer certain evidence for sociologists and legalists.

These critical and scholarly tendencies and limitations are important in that they attest to the intimate relationship between the representation of rape and murder and the relevant social, political and historical discourses. They also show how literary discourse can

¹⁸ Mary Evans, *The Imagination of Evil: Detective Fiction and the Modern World* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 6.

engage actively in social critique rather than be taken as passive evidence to document social, moral and cultural changes. The conventional belief that crime fiction simply reflects the contemporary notions of crime is no longer adequate, the recognition of the role of the crime fiction in shaping notions of criminality, subjectivity, and social change is called for.

I maintain that Chi Zijian, A Yi, McEwan and Sebald's works demonstrate various kinds of dialogic relationships between literature and its cultural contexts. The project of my thesis is, then, to discover, when the chosen authors assume the task of offering literary representations of murder and rape, what in their texts are their deeper and ingenious perspectives and responses to dominant conceptions of rape and retributive violence. In bringing out these perspectives, I aim to develop an ethics of crime writing which will enrich our understandings the interrelationships between crime, human nature, morality, and society.

It is common knowledge that rape and murder are social phenomena that affect people in the real world. Literary texts featuring murder and rape do not exist in a vacuum. Consciously or unconsciously, literature, together with other media, are cultural productions and have always been shaping our understanding of these problems. For example, the narrator in Paul Auster's *The Trilogy of New York* ruminates:

Like most people, Quinn knew almost nothing about crime. He had never murdered anyone, [...], and he did not know anyone who had. He had never been inside a police station, had never met a private detective, had never spoken to a criminal. Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films, and newspapers. He did not, however, consider this to be a handicap.¹⁹

The relationship between crime and culture is more complex than the latter simply acting as a recorder of the former—as if crime were enacted against an otherwise neutral background of existence. Literary texts, as one form of cultural production, cannot be reduced to the role of passive recorder or mere explicit response to “social reality.” Rather,

¹⁹ Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Faber & Faber,) 7.

literary texts take up rape and murder as the site to engage with existing social reality and sometimes even to intervene in and help shape everyday reality. In other words, the literary texts comparatively analysed here act as creative responses to murder and rape, not only as discrete acts but as interpersonal experiences for perpetrators, victims, and others. My thesis will address the way in which these creative responses help us gain a richer understanding of rape and murder as violence and a deeper understanding of the complex relations between crime, subjectivity, equality, justice, and social cohesion.

What is more, my thesis offers an up-to-date study of how murder and rape are represented in literature in three contemporary contexts. The majority of previous scholarship has focused on murder and rape in a particular historical period, normally texts from the far past, or on the relationship between murder and rape and a certain intellectual or artistic movement in history. For example, Joel Black's *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (1991) examines murder directly in order to associate the act with an historical and an intellectual and artistic movement, Romanticism. Stephanie Barbe Hammer's *The Sublime Crime: Fascination, Failure, and Form in Literature of the Enlightenment* (1994) targets texts written within the Enlightenment era. *Surrealism and the Art of Crime* (2008) by Jonathan P. Eburne is an examination of the role of violent crime in the writing, art and political thought of the Surrealist movement.

Jeffrey C. Kinkley in his seminal *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China* (2000) claims that his corpus includes all literary genres, but in fact most of the texts he examines fall into what I am calling the popular category, such as "legal system literature" (法制文学) and "public security literature" (公安文学). Kinkley's important work analyses texts published between 1984 and the mid-1990s. In my thesis, by discussing the recent writing of Chi Zijian and A Yi, I will provide a more up-to-date discussion and comparative analysis of literary representations of rape and murder in the

work of both mainstream and more unconventional Chinese writers.

Rather than making sweeping claims about overall literary production in contemporary Chinese and UK-US literatures, my thesis is a case study of literary texts foregrounding rape, murder and criminality. The task for me is to bring out each writer's distinctive features and striking perspectives to enrich our understanding of the repertoire of literary representations of violent crime.

My chosen authors guarantee a variety of different types of writers. Chi Zijian and Ian McEwan are both prose fiction writers. Although their works contain literary explorations of rape and murder, it is surprising how little scholarship has examined their texts within the framework of rape and murder. Alice Sebold is a best-selling author who cannot be categorised as a crime fiction writer in a conventional sense but whose writing exists in dialogue with conventional crime fiction. A Yi is not a popular genre fiction writer either, but a large number of his works feature crime directly.

In choosing the authors to be compared, I move away from the distinction between genre/popular novels and highbrow ones. None of these writers write in a formulaic way in the representation of murder and rape. Ian McEwan and Alice Sebold are best-selling authors, thus in a certain way "popular", yet no one could deny the fact that their work does not follow the formulaic structures of detective fiction. Both Chi Zijian and A Yi would dismiss the label of "popular writer", but one can find that their texts suggest interest and conscious appreciation of the elements of the popular genre.

In this context, the dichotomy of genre (popular and high-brow) is not useful in my thesis because it is not conducive to a wider and more sophisticated discussion of global crime writing. Ideally, the author, the critic and the reader should all strive to bridge the gaps between the highbrow and the popular. It is significant to recognise that A Yi and Chi Zijian's work offers fascinating and unique China stories of rape and murder and that could enrich the repertoire of global crime writing. On the other hand, as will be seen,

Sebold and McEwan's texts, similar to A Yi's and Chi Zijian's, intellectualise the ethical position of readers and challenge them to engage with profound aesthetical, intellectual and ethical processes.

Ian McEwan is one of Britain's most prolific, established and controversial writers. The texts I will focus on include *Amsterdam* (1998), *Atonement* (2001) and *Saturday* (2005). Since the very beginning of his career in the mid-1970s, McEwan has been "highly conscious of the state of the world."²⁰ His writing often revolves around specific current social issues, such as violence, climate change and academic plagiarism. His work has always been characterised by actions and behaviours which break social taboos, yet no academic work has examined his work within the framework of rape and murder. He is not conventionally considered to be a crime fiction writer, although some scholars mention that the elements of crime fiction conventions, motifs and themes have slipped into his work.²¹ I think the relation is more than accidental. *Amsterdam* will be compared to A Yi's *A Perfect Crime* and "An Accidental Killing" within the framework of murder narratives. *Atonement* will be used to illustrate the author's consciousness of engaging with the ethics of literature in Chapter Three. Focussing on the surrogate role the supporter figures/sympathisers play in invoking sympathy in readers, *Saturday* will be compared to Chi Zijian's "Ducks are Like Flowers."

Alice Sebold, an American writer, has published two novels, *The Lovely Bones* (2002) and *The Almost Moon* (2007). She has also published a memoir *Lucky* (1999), relating her personal story as a rape victim. *The Lovely Bones* is a fictionalised rendering of the author's rape experience. In spite of, or perhaps because of, her success as a best-selling

²⁰ Sebastian Groes, ed, *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 2.

²¹ Bran Nicol, Patricia Pulham and Eugene McNulty, *Crime Culture: Figuring Criminality in Fiction and Film* (London: Continuum, 2011), 4.

writer, her work has attracted very little academic comment. Her two texts will be analysed comparatively in relation to Chi Zijian's novel *The Morning Bell Resounded through the Dusk* (晨钟响彻黄昏) (1997), and her novella *Goodnight Rose* (晚安玫瑰) (2013). Although *The Almost Moon* is concerned with the theme of murder, the daughter kills her mother who suffers from dementia, which is one of the two literary themes discussed in this thesis, the comparative discussion of Sebald's and Chi's work will focus on the theme of rape.

Known as a writer of the quotidian, Chi Zijian is one of China's most prominent female writers and the recipient of nearly all the prestigious literary prizes in China. She won the Lu Xun Literary Prize three times for her short stories and novella, "Fog, Moon and the Cattle Pen" (雾月牛栏), "Innocence Washes away Sin" (清水洗尘) and "All the Nights in the World" (世界上所有的夜晚). Her novel *Last Quarter of the Moon* (额尔古纳河右岸) won the Mao Dun Literary Prize —the highest honour for Chinese novel writers.

A prolific writer, Chi's writing encompasses a wide range of topics. But rape and murder as literary themes in her work have never attracted close academic analysis. Her work features the most ordinary and even down-trodden figures who live on the margins in contemporary China. Conventionally, Chi Zijian is described by literary critics as a writer who celebrates the beauty of human nature. For example, another pre-eminent Chinese writer Su Tong (苏童) comments that "her consistent exploration of human warmth has become a narrative motif."²² However, according to interviews, the author believes that her humanistic and compassionate tenor does not mask or run in conflict with her critique of reality.²³ In particular, when it comes to the relationship between

²² Su Tong (苏童), "On Chi Zijian," (关于迟子建), *Review of Contemporary Writer* (当代作家评论), no.1 (2005): 55-6.

²³ Chi Zijian and Zhou Jinglei, (迟子建, 周景雷), "A Third Place for Literature" (文学的第三地), *Review of Contemporary Writers* (当代作家评论), no:4 (2006): 44.

“good and evil”—two terms closely related to crime, “there is no clear-cut line between good and evil; the two are glued together.”(善和恶在这里并没有明确的分野，它们是胶合在一起的。)²⁴ In respect to her stance as a writer towards humanity and the law, she says “the power of warmth is equal to the power of critique, and the law can never be superior to the ethical power of a person’s morality.” (我信奉温情的力量的同事也就是批判的力量，法律永远战胜不了一个人内心道德的约束力。)²⁵ She also embraces the ethical function literature can perform by saying that “literary writing equates to a spiritual activity, and its goal is to achieve compassion for our fellow human beings.” (我认为文学本身是一种具有宗教情怀的精神活动，而宗教的最终目的也就是到达真正的悲天悯人之境。)²⁶ All of her texts discussed in this thesis demonstrate her critique of the power of the law. The human relationship between the escaped murderer and the old lady in “Ducks are Like Flowers” showcases the blurred boundaries of good and evil, and the possibility of compassion and humanistic understanding. When reading through a feminist lens, based on close reading and comparative analysis, her texts, especially the ones concerning rape—the feminist issue, reveal themselves to be more ambiguous and radical than they might at first appear. It remains unclear whether Chi Zijian's radical literary politics are the result of conscious effort or whether they derive more indirectly from the inherent incompatibility between a feminist politics and a warm aesthetics.

A Yi is a representative of China’s emerging writers. He used to work as a police officer before starting his literary career. His stories focus on the ignorance and desperation that trap the exploited rural poor, and on the violent rage lurking behind the complaisant façade of the downtrodden and humiliated (a social and political trend we

²⁴ Ibid., 45.

²⁵ Chi Zijian, A Cheng, Zhang Ying, (迟子建, 阿成, 张英), “The Power of Warmth,” (温情的力量) *Writers* (作家), no.3 (1999):45.

²⁶ Ibid., 50.

are witnessing at the time of writing is the rise of populist political figures worldwide). In this thesis I will discuss his short story “An Accidental Killing”(意外杀人事件) from one of his short story collections *The Bird Saw Me* (鸟,看见我了), first published in 2010, and a novel *A Perfect Crime* (in Chinese, *What Shall I Do Next?* [下面, 我该干些什么]) (2011), which was translated into English by Anna Holmwood. It won the 2014 PEN Promotes award and was published in 2015. His short story “Two Lives” (两生) (2010) will also be mentioned to illustrate the gravity and dynamics of the perceived "moral crisis" in contemporary China. A member of the 1970s generation,²⁷ A Yi has won tremendous critical acclaim as an emerging writer in China. After five years as a police officer, he became editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Chutzpah*. In 2010 A Yi was shortlisted for the People's Literature Top 20 Literary Giants of the Future Award.

A Yi belongs to an ambitious literary generation sandwiched between the grand narrative-preoccupied novelists born in the 1950s-60s (which include Chi Zijian) and the more commercialised “post-1980” Chinese authors. This “new generation” is believed to have concentrated much more on what is going on in contemporary China.²⁸

Domestic critics and overseas sinologists and literary scholars have acknowledged his skill and dedication to literary writing whilst remaining discreet about his future work due to internal political factors that might restrain him. For example, in the recommendation for his *The Bird Saw Me*, Beidao (北岛), one of China’s most renowned literary figures, comments:

According to what I’ve been reading, A Yi is one of the most gifted novelists in recent years who writes in Chinese. He treats writing with loyalty and passion as he does life, so much so that most established writers should feel ashamed of their inferiority. I don’t know how far A Yi can go, because that depends on multiple factors. But I believe he and his kindred spirits are bound to produce works that resist the commercializing and entertaining tendencies in contemporary Chinese-language literary writing.

²⁷ It is conventional to categorise Chinese writers according to the decade in which they were born. A Yi was born in 1976, so he is considered as a member of the generation of the 1970s despite the fact that he came of age in the 1990s.

²⁸ Julia Lovell, “Finding A Place: Mainland Chinese Fiction in the 2000s,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no.1 (2012): 16.

(就我阅读范围所及，阿乙是近年来最优秀的汉语小说家之一。他对写作有着对生命同样的忠实与热情，就这一点而言，大多数成名作家应感到脸红。我不知道阿乙到底能走多远，这取决于诸多因素，但我相信，他和其他志同道合者，必将走出当今汉语写作中商业化、娱乐化的怪圈。) ²⁹

Similarly, Julia Lovell observes that it is unclear whether A Yi can produce work to rival more mature Chinese writers, but the creativity and discipline he has displayed mark him out as a talented writer to watch. ³⁰

A Yi the author himself has repeatedly spoken of his preoccupation with crime in his work. He believes that

[c]riminal events are a natural stage for theatrical conflicts. Think about the major tragedies. They all have killing, betrayal, insanity and so on, they have corpses.... A crime story is like a chemical laboratory, from where the sharpest, most insoluble and unevaporated elements of human nature can be tempered.

(犯罪事件是戏剧冲突的天然舞台。你看戏剧里的大悲剧，都有杀人、背叛、疯癫等等，都有尸体，都有命。。。。。。犯罪故事就像是一个化学实验室，能将人性里的东西，最尖锐的东西，最不可溶解的东西和最容易蒸发的东西，都清晰地淬炼出来。) ³¹

So far, the scholarship on A Yi's work is mainly review-like articles. No thorough or systematic work has been produced to examine his texts, not to mention a discussion of his murder narratives exclusively.

Theoretical framework: anatomizing murder and rape

Dana Heller in her article "Anatomies of Rape" contends that "sexual violence, for everything that it is, is definitely not a problem of psychological recovery, narrative transaction, social hierarchy, patriarchal oppression, or cultural rhetoric. It is a problem of understanding the lived relations among all of these complex horizons." ³² I will use her notion of anatomizing and the emphasis on "lived relations" to examine rape in Chi and Sebold's texts as well as to discuss murder in A Yi and McEwan's work.

²⁹ Beidao's words on the back cover of *The Bird Saw Me*.

³⁰ Lovell, "Finding A Place: Mainland Chinese Fiction in the 2000s," 23.

³¹ A Yi (阿乙), "A New Novel Completed" (新的长篇已经写好), *Xinghuo* (星火), no.1 (2005): 27.

³² Dana Heller, "Anatomies of Rape," *American Literary History* 16, no.2 (2004): 348.

However, in my thesis I will adjust the aspects she mentions because, as I said before, my task is to find out how the psychological, narrative, sociological and ethical aspects of representing rape and murder are interrelated in the chosen fiction from the US, UK, and China.

The victim, criminal and supporter figure's mind and behaviour

The psychological dimensions of the chosen texts, and in particular, the inner life and the psyche of the characters in the texts will receive ample treatment in my thesis. This first of all is determined by the fact that the chosen texts are all strong character-based narratives. Psychological portrayal constitutes an indispensable part of characterization. In the chosen authors' work, the act of violence or the graphic violence per se is not central; what is central is how rape and murder affect the characters psychologically and/or how the murder motives come into being. In the case of rape, the psyche of the rape victims and survivors serves as the essential platform to exhibit trauma and victimization, as well as feminist agency in Chi and Sebold's work. In A Yi and McEwan's texts, it interweaves with the social positions and moral dilemmas of the characters.

Narrative techniques

In all three chapters, I examine narrative technique in relation to the characterization of the characters and its interrelations with the individual elements of the anatomies of the representation of rape, murder and the sympathizing process. The centrality of certain perspectives serves its own purposes. In Chapter One, I argue that the female first-person narrative points of view, presenting themselves in various forms, in Chi and Sebold's texts, are effective in both revealing their identity as rape victims/survivors and their victimization both from a personal subjective angle and introducing the wider social and cultural fabrics and operations surrounding the issue of rape. In Chapter Two, different narrative techniques achieve different outcomes. In *A Perfect Crime* the killer's first-person narration effectively guarantees the interpretive validity of the narrative, especially

the motive for his killing. But it also invokes ethical ambiguity. In Chapter Three, Chi and McEwan use a similar technique, that is, the focalisation of the supporter figures' thoughts and actions. This literary strategy foregrounds the process of either the realization of a human relationship with the escaped murderer or the formation of a sense of responsibility for the attempted rapist, although the latter is criticised by class-based scholars for its limitation.

The sociological aspects

My thesis endorses Eleanor Bell's observation that "good crime fiction encourages an active sociological reading."³³ The sociological aspects of the representation of rape and murder in the chosen authors' texts are multiple and they manifest themselves in different forms. However, as I have noted, the literary texts are not simply sociological documents to be mined for evidence. They are dialogic representations of complex experiences and subjectivities.

Because the focus in some of the texts here is on the rape victim/survivor/feminist revenger's mind and experiences, what is under attack are the rape cultures stubbornly permeating in contemporary China, UK and US. Chapter one examines the tensions between a feminist politics, enacted by feminist agency and solidarity and the two rape cultures represented in the chosen texts, which are the dominant social discourses. In Sebold's texts, through the autobiographical account in *Lucky* or the construction of a literary heaven and a posthumous narrative voice in *The Lovely Bones*, the transformation from victimhood to survivorship is achieved; Chi's texts however, featuring feminist revenge as the solution to rape victimhood, blur the boundary between the victim and the criminal. They both demonstrate a (gradual) distrust and defiance against the law—one of the essential social institutions supposedly to bring justice.

In terms of murder, in A Yi's text *A Perfect Crime*, the killer embraces the identity of

³³ Eleanor Bell, "Ian Rankin and the Ethics of Crime Fiction," *Clues - Bowling Green Ohio* 26, no.2 (2008):58.

a brutal murderer to resolve his existential crisis—an unusual motive seemingly devoid of any connection to the social discourses. Yet his observations and perceptions of the dominant discourses, along with his social background as a socially alienated individual exposes the character's victimised status. The legal and social critique embedded in the narrative dilutes the purity of his metaphysical motive. The killer and the victims in an allegorical text like "Accidental Killing" personify contemporary China. Collectively, they are disturbed and displaced by deepening social and economic changes. Their moral dilemmas suggest a critique of the perplexities and inadequacies of such social-economic transformations. My thesis will address the way in which the legal system is ridiculed and criticised in A Yi's texts. By contrast, through the depiction of two major characters who belong to the social elite and of mutual murder as the solution to clashing moral values, *Amsterdam* is a truly pioneering narrative in its sharp parody of the unbridled pursuit of self-interest and personal advantage in an increasingly neo-liberal society. The murderers, once friends, are symptomatic of society. In all these texts, the murder narratives replicate or represent society at large, even though some of the killers are marginal figures.

In the discussion of the ethical complexities of the writing and reading literature of violent crime, I discuss the nuanced similarities and differences of social inequality and "moral crisis" in contemporary Chinese, American and British cultures. I argue that the chosen authors all deal with the issues of "social inequality" and "moral crisis." In doing so, they demonstrate their different forms of responsibility to the society and recognise the role of literature as a social voice. In bringing out the way in which they take advantage of the socially transformative potential of literature, my thesis confirms the rape and murder narratives' role in demanding social change. In the discussion of outsiders becoming sympathisers and the Other becoming Us, I recognise the social solidarity the texts intend to create among fellow human beings across society.

Ethical aspects of crime writing

Historically, crime narratives, by offering sensational accounts of the deeds of the murderers or the bloody spectacle of public execution, imply a moral tone.³⁴ But in present times, the emphasis on right conduct and the cautionary nature of crime writing are no longer central either in literary representation or in critical studies.

Mark Ledbetter in his *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative, or Doing Violence to the Body* (1996) provides the insight that “in addition to delving into the individual’s ethical encounters in the texts, the authors’ narrative is another creative place to locate ethical discourse.”³⁵ Drawing on this point, my thesis aims to discover the ways in which the four authors’ texts depict a variety of moral agonies, ambiguities and dilemmas, or in some cases even a sense of amorality the individuals experience in the wake of and prior to the occurrence of rape and murder. The representation of these ethical encounters cannot be sustained without the involvement of the previous three aspects discussed above. The psyche, the social structure/discourse and the narrative techniques work together to contextualise the characters’ ethical situations. The different outlooks of ethical encounters suggest different responses to the social and psychological effects on the characters.

Lynn Wells raises a significant question in her book *Ian McEwan* (2010): “when one’s own understanding and morality are the only touchstones, without God, how can the individual find atonement?”³⁶ This is not only the motif of McEwan’s *Atonement*. Wells asks an essential question with respect to the ethics of literature. Therefore, in addition to the representation of the moral conditions of the characters in the text, what is more important, I argue, is that the chosen texts function as creative places where the

³⁴ Joel Black, “Murder: the State of Art,” *American Literary History* 12, no.4 (2000): 781.

³⁵ Mark Ledbetter, *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative, or Doing Violence to the Body* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 9.

³⁶ Lynn Wells, *Ian McEwan* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10.

writers locate their ethical discourses surrounding rape and murder. These rape and murder narratives are a testing ground of moral positions, visions, and choices. They raise ethical questions in a variety of ways. My thesis will look at what specific questions in this regard are raised in the chosen texts. For example, the moral agony presented in Chi's *Goodnight Rose* and the supporter figure's religious stance showcase an attempt to explore the moral ambiguity and contradictions between a feminist politics and the interdiction of killing; it also explores the ethical and redemptive role religion can play in solving the conundrum of seeking justice in an individualistic way and suffering a guilty conscience even if the law does not intervene.

The ethical aspects also involve the moral complexities in writing and reading rape and murder texts like the chosen ones in my text. Comparatively speaking, the long-standing separation between the state and the judiciary in Anglo-American societies suggests that, at least on the level of material reality, the sense of right and wrong is more absolute. In the Chinese situation, the ground for the reader to make ethical judgements is more ambiguous. Due to the shifting and constant changes to which the legal system has been subject, and the powerful influence of the party, it seems that ambiguous ethical positioning has become a new kind of reality. It is taken for granted and runs the risk of being internalised as the new norm. Thus the boundary between the right and wrong is further blurred, compared to the Anglo-American situation. Because the law is manipulated and justice cannot be done effectively for ordinary and marginal people, in combination with the prevalent social inequality and alienation, it is not surprising that the revenger and even a senseless murderer may attract more sympathy from the reader in that, as victims of injustice, they illuminate the reader's own moral situation and his or her limited options in the face of injustice and inequality.

My thesis will dissect the wide spectrum of readers' possible moral engagement with the texts. These responses may complicate the writers' social critique and some of the

responses may go beyond the writers' expectations or intentions. But I single out "sympathy" as the central emotion and argue that the texts intend to invoke and acknowledge an ethics of literature in Chi and McEwan's texts.

Thesis structure

Chapter One compares the way in which the two female authors Chi and Sebold represent women's experience of rape and their responses to it. The approach will be an intersectional one, which explores how a wide range of factors present in the texts, including women's victimization, their feminist agency and patriarchal oppression, and the law interrelate with and affect each other. Taking rape as an act of sexual violence, a multicultural social phenomenon and an important feminist issue, this chapter employs a feminist critical and literary critical approach. It does not only bring out the feminist critiques Chi and Sebold's texts offer, but also sympathetically and rigorously critiques them.

Chapter Two compares A Yi and McEwan's murder narratives as psychological texts, social allegories and moral fables. In contrast to the focus on the "victim/survivor" perspective in the previous chapter, this chapter places more focus on the murderer criminal perspective, although the homicide victims in "An Accidental Killing" are under examination too. By scrutinizing the murder motive and its tensions with the dominant or opposing social discourses and moral values, this chapter acknowledges the symptomatic role the murderers play in eliciting ethical concerns about justice, equality and moral choices.

Chapter Three focuses on the ethics of writing and reading literature of rape and murder. Instead of the focus on victim/criminal, this chapter places more attention and conducts textual analysis on supporter figures and their potential role as surrogates for the reader. It also offers a detailed analysis of the writers' sense of responsibility to society and the prevalence or varying prevalence of crime in contemporary China, the UK, and

the US, which reiterate the cultural background the writers write against and share with the reader. While foregrounding readers' possible complex moral engagement with the texts, sympathy is singled out in the discussion and the writers' conscious effort to take advantage of the socially transformative role of literature is also highlighted.

Chapter One: a comparative reading of Chi Zijian's and Alice Sebold's rape narratives

Rape is an act of sexual violence. Rape is also a multicultural social phenomenon and an important feminist issue. This chapter explores contemporary writings in English and Chinese on rape in the US (by Alice Sebold) and China (by Chi Zijian) from a specifically feminist critical and literary critical perspective. Comparative analysis is used to investigate Chi Zijian and Alice Sebold's provocative texts, three of them fictional, one autobiographical to sympathetically but rigorously critique the critiques these writings offer.

I argue that Chi and Sebold's texts offer sustained and extended feminist critiques of not only rape and violence perpetrated on women, but also the order of patriarchy that supports or even sometimes encourages rape culture. This feminist critique is realised through detailed depictions of the major female characters in the texts and the writers' inscription of female first-person narrative voices. The writers' presentations of broad victimization, not restricted to the main female characters, signify an attempt to represent the order of patriarchy and its consequences for everyone in society, while maintaining strong female narrative perspectives. The narrative strategies deployed in these texts constitute an indispensable part of the feminist critique and represent the rationale behind the construction of women's victimhood and the establishment of their agency.

In this chapter, I will set out the critical framework and address rape and its intimate relationship with feminism in Chinese and American cultures. Then I will present the imbalance of scholarship on rape narratives in these two cultures, and single out three major components that constitute a feminist study of rape in literature.

In the second half of the chapter I will comparatively analyse Chi Zijian's

Goodnight Rose and Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, using two other earlier texts by the same authors, *Morning Bell Resounded through the Dusk* by Chi Zijian and *Lucky* by Alice Sebold as secondary texts, to look into the way in which patriarchy, women's victimization and feminist agency play out individually and how they intersect in the texts by Sebold and Chi.

Critical framework: mapping out a cross-textual, cross-cultural and feminist analysis of rape narratives

Feminism and the two cultures of rape

Can rape be understood differently in different cultural contexts? Or is sexual violence against women universal in its social situation and manifestations? Feminism has provided an essential and much needed countervoice to dominant social paradigms. The impact of feminist intervention in rape and rape culture in the American context has been significant. In the American context, feminist movements, the second-wave in particular, have directly and deeply influenced the general social, political and legal understandings of rape as a crime against women. In the US, rape is permanently on the public agenda, closely associated with the political pursuits of feminist movements on behalf of women's safety and agency which has involved extensive public debate, activism and organizational support.

Nonetheless, rape culture persists, and the controversies and debates around feminism and rape in the US continue to evolve, expand and complicate. In recent years, along with the growing media interest in renewed feminist activism (for example, the emergence of media sites such as Jezebel, Ultraviolet, and Everyday Feminism), the resurgence of attention and discussion of rape is difficult to ignore. A number of high-profile rape cases have attracted widespread media attention.¹ In the

¹ For example, the Steubenville High School rape case, in which a high-school girl, incapacitated by alcohol, was publicly and repeatedly sexually assaulted by her peers, several of whom documented

meantime, the efforts to reclaim the necessity of feminism and celebrate its continued vibrancy and necessity in contemporary society, rebut the mantra of “post-feminism.” Rejecting the idea that feminism is in decline and we are in a post-feminist era, many believe that “there is a thriving movement active today and a large number of people are reclaiming feminism.”² Within the project of reclaiming feminism, sexual violence against women is considered to be the most important issue and one of the essential fields contemporary feminists must actively engage with.

Within the global framework, the word "feminism" is by no means monolithic but connotes various meanings and different politics in different cultures. The idea of the heterogeneous nature of feminism in various cultures has been well recognised in academia. For example, Gayatri Spivak criticises the self-centredness and privileged status embedded within Western feminism, and she challenges first-world feminists to appreciate the heterogeneity of third-world women's experiences.³ Rey Chow shares a similar view. While acknowledging the materiality of Westernization in the modern Asian self-consciousness, she points out that the "error" of Western liberal feminism lies in its attempt to speak on behalf of all women and universalize their experiences. By doing so, it “imposes its own interests and methodologies on those who do not inhabit the same socio-historical spaces, thus reducing the latter to a state of reified silence and otherness.”⁴

In the case of China, western feminist theories have recently been introduced to

their acts on social media. Juliet, Macur and Nate Schweber, “Rape Case Unfolds on Web and Splits City,” *The New York Times*, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/17/sports/high-school-football-rape-case-unfolds-online-and-divides-steubenville-ohio.html>.

² Catherine Redfern, and Kristin Aune, *Reclaiming the F Word: Feminism Today* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2013), 10.

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “French Feminism in an international Frame” in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Routledge: New York & London, 1987), 136.

⁴ Rey Chow, “Violence in the Other Country: China as Crisis, Spectacle, and Woman”, in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 93.

China and studied by academics, yet feminist movements and the meaning of feminism are different in an Asian context. Scholars such as Tani E. Barlow believe that Chinese feminism is autonomous by default and has only a relation to the state.⁵ Others argue that while embracing feminism as a global concept, Chinese feminists should endeavour to practise a local feminism by strategically and skilfully adopting the terms “gender equality” (性别平等) and “gender theory” (性别研究) instead of the word “feminism”(女性主义).⁶ To date in China, there has never been any political or social movement initiated by state feminists to confront rape.⁷ Small-scale feminist actions by grassroots feminist groups against the sexual abuse of women and children have been organised, but their national impact remains negligible. At present, the cultural and political situations Chinese women face are complex. Lingering Confucianism is resilient, and this is compounded by the resurgence of older Asian forms of discrimination against and objectification of women in the worlds of business and government.⁸ Ideological and political control of social protest movements in China is tight, and the law consistently fails to protect women in need. Nonetheless, rape cases have been gaining more and more attention in the Chinese media.⁹

⁵ Tani E. Barlow, “Globalization, China, and the International Feminism” *Signs* 26, no. 4 *Globalization and Gender* (2001), 1287.

⁶ Wang Zheng and Ying Zhang, “Global Concepts, Local Practices: Chinese Feminism since the Fourth UN Conference on Women”, *Feminist Studies* 36, no.1 (2010): 45. The same term “feminism” has two Chinese translations: “women’s rights-ism” (女权主义) and “feminine-ism” (女性主义). Interestingly, the latter is more acceptable than the former. One can see that even a term representing a desire for more rights and benefits for women receives hostility, not to mention putting such a radical and bold topic as rape under public debate.

⁷ The discussion of feminist issues was unprecedented in the New Culture Movement starting from the mid-1910s to 1920s spearheaded by Chen Duxiu, Lu Xun, et al. The central concerns were free choice of marriage and divorce, educational rights for women and the end of polygamy.

⁸ For example, the group of “grey women”, including prostitutes, mistresses, and massage girls represent women who are consumed by wealthy and powerful men. John Osburg, *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality among China's New Rich* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2013), 144.

⁹ For example, the case of Li Tianyi, the son of two famous singers in China, who participated in the gang-rape of a woman, has attracted ample coverage and public outrage. However, it should be noted that the sympathy with the victim of rape is largely driven by the dissatisfaction with the corruption of the officials and the privilege they enjoy rather than out of any conscious desire to

In some respects, feminism has shifted from a political to a social movement in the Anglo-American context, as radicalism has subsided, but Chinese feminism is still at the phase where small groups of feminists are just starting to emerge. These groups seek to raise awareness of the importance of directly addressing the issue of rape, and they encourage rape victims who are silent about their sufferings, and who take the undeserved blame, to wake up and take action, however difficult that might be to do.

Previous scholarship of rape narratives: an imbalance between the US and China

Susan Brownmiller's ground-breaking book *Against our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* published in 1975 represents one of the first attempts to bring attention to the fact that rape is a serious and violent crime and it provided a major impetus for raising social and political consciousness about sexual violence during the second-wave phase of feminism. From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, non-fictional writings, such as academic works, rose to prominence in promoting anti-rape movements and ideas. In addition to Brownmiller's work, other texts such as Diana E.H Russell's *Rape in Marriage* (1982), and Robin Warshaw's *I Never Called It Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape* (1994) all contributed to redefine rape by defining marriage, date and acquaintance rape as sexual violence.

Literary representations of rape have existed in Western and Eastern writing for many centuries. To date, "rape in literature" has become a well-studied subject in

protect women's rights. See Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Li Tianyi Sentencing Is Small Step for Chinese Women," *The New York Times*, accessed May 18, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/09/world/asia/li-tianyi-sentencing-is-small-step-for-chinese-women.html?_r=0.

academic criticism in the US. Rape as a literary theme is under scrutiny in all historical periods, from antiquity to the present. *Rape and Representation* edited by Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (1991) was one of the first volumes to examine the literary representation of rape. Other significant monographs and collections include *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature* edited by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: the Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912* by Sandra Gunning, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* by Laura E. Tanner, and *Dangerous Desire: Sexual Freedom and Sexual Violence since the Sixties* by Pamela E. Barnett. These works generally situate rape in a specific historical context, and focus on the relationship between how rape is conceptualised within the particular cultural and social variables and how conceptions of rape underpin social and cultural values and norms at a particular historical period. The tendency for writers to use rape as a rhetorical device to examine other social, economic and political issues is on the rise, as exemplified by Sabine Sielke's *Reading Rape: the Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990* and Sharon Stockton's *The Economics of Fantasy: Rape in Twentieth-Century Literature*.

Compared to the large body of scholarship in US literature, studies of rape narratives in Chinese literature are scarce. Most studies, either published in mainland China or by overseas sinologists, tend to investigate male writers' work. For example, Liu Huiying (刘慧英)'s *Out of the Bondage of Patriarchy: A Critique of Patriarchal Consciousness in Literature* (走出男权传统的藩篱：文学中男权意识的批判) (1995) marks one of the first efforts to critique the underlying patriarchal oppression of women. Unfortunately, her analysis only focuses on an array of classical male writers such as Thomas Hardy and Cao Yu. No contemporary Chinese authors or texts are discussed. Lu Tonglin in *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism & Oppositional Politics:*

Contemporary Chinese Experimental Fiction (1995) examines the misogynistic discourse common among male contemporary Chinese experimental fiction writers, including Su Tong, Mo Yan and Yu Hua. Raped women or their raped bodies signify these writers' projection of their self-images and their subversive intent against the dominant ideology. The critical analysis focuses on women's bodies as an ideological signifier rather than on the female point of view or women's agency. It is safe to say that in mainland China rape remains a sensitive and to some extent unspeakable subject in the field of literary criticism.¹⁰

Previous literary studies on rape and other subjects in English-language and Chinese contexts tend to confine themselves to one single cultural dimension. This narrow contextualisation, together with the trend of historicising and rhetoricising rape in academia, has been critiqued by some scholars. For example, Dana Heller points out the limitations of historicizing rape in a single context, such as American literature, emphasising instead the importance for comparative criticism of paying attention to conceptions of rape in other nations and contexts:

What if the anointment of culture turned out to be a withdrawal from the more vexing problems of our material lives, problems of which rhetoric is only a part? ...what if the definition of American rape imagery as a guiding force of our cultural rhetorical evolution were to close down the possibility of compassionately linking our rhetoric to the rhetoric of other cultures and our historical destiny to the destinies of other nations?¹¹

My thesis takes up Heller's challenge from the point of view of contemporary US, UK, and Chinese men's and women's writings on rape.

¹⁰ The only article I have found by a mainland Chinese scholar to directly address the theme of rape in literature is Xie Qiong's (谢琼), "Writing about Rape: Transposed Speech—the literary representation of rape" in Eileen Chang's *Eighteen Springs* (书写强奸: 被转移的言说—张爱玲《半生缘》中强奸故事的文学表现), *Nanfang Wentan* (南方文坛), no.6 (2010):67-72.

¹¹ Dana Heller, "Anatomies of Rape," *American Literary History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 349.

Patriarchy, victimization, and feminist agency

Patriarchy has long been considered as the major mechanism leading to women's oppression. Patriarchy is intimately linked with rape, and so rape has become one of the major concerns of feminist literary critics. Rape is understood not only as an individual act perpetrated by one individual on another individual but also a product of a patriarchal system which supports and accepts violence against women. Feminist scholars introduced the term "rape culture" to define a culture in which "sexual violence is a normalised phenomenon, in which male-dominant environments encourage and sometimes depend on violence against women."¹² Just as the meanings of feminism are heterogeneous in different cultures, patriarchal oppression comes in many shapes and forms. Scholars such as Judith Butler have questioned the tendency towards both a universalised notion of patriarchy and a superimposition of "western notions of oppression" on all people's experiences worldwide.¹³

The victimization women suffer from rape is one of the central concerns among feminists, especially since the second-wave anti-rape feminist movements. Breaking the silence and discovering women's victimization have been central goals of talk and writing in their consciousness-raising activities. It is highly necessary to maintain the political legacy of second-wave feminist critiques when it comes to the issue of rape in order to resist an inclination to depoliticize rape or treat it only as a personal experience. Highlighting victimization forcefully challenges the claim that taking on the role of victim helps reify women's image as vulnerable and powerless and thus reinscribes patriarchal constructions of femininity as victimhood rather than agency.

On the other side, other theorists never cease to highlight the value of feminist

¹² Sarah Projansky, *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 9.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 147-150.

agency, either by putting forward theories of resisting rape or bringing to our attention feminist and female agency in previous social and cultural representations. For example, Sharon Marcus' essay "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention" defines rape as a "scripted interaction that takes place in language and can be understood in terms of conventional masculinity and femininity as well as other gender inequalities inscribed before an individual instance of rape."¹⁴ In other words, according to Marcus, rape is always already inscribed in patriarchal culture. Marcus proposes possibilities for disrupting the occurrences of rape and thus highlighting women's agency. Some scholars have summarised the social scene from the 1970s onwards as an era of "eros and anger."¹⁵ Revenge seems to have become one of the most recurrent manifestations of feminist agency. In terms of "eros," it means that female sexuality is often used as a weapon of revenge. Even female violence is eroticised and made into an object of voyeurism, producing vicarious thrills for male readers: "representations of rape after the event are almost always framed by a masculine perspective premised on men's fantasies about female sexuality... as well as their codified access to and possession of women's bodies."¹⁶ The creation of the "angry woman," presumably, is the mainstream representation of the feminist movement's contribution to society.¹⁷ Accordingly, popular representations such as films, in order to highlight female anger and passion, offer bloody or graphic descriptions of female violence.

Another essential aspect of agency in feminist discussions of rape is women's

¹⁴ Sharon Marcus, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention," in Constance L. Mui and Julien S. Murphy, eds, *Gender Struggles: Practical Approaches to Contemporary Feminism* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2002), 173.

¹⁵ Elaine Showalter, "Rethinking the Seventies: Women Writers and Violence," *The Antioch Review* 39, no. 2 (1981):157.

¹⁶ Lynn A Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, eds, *Rape and Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 2.

¹⁷ Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI, 1992), 17.

power to speak out against rape. This is the very distinctive feature of the anti-rape movement since the very beginning. And the emphasis on women's voices against rape is especially pertinent to an analysis of writing about rape. The way in which first-person narratives from female characters' points of view actively and agentively depict and critique rape and rape culture from the perspective of the victims should be examined carefully in literary analysis because, as Higgins and Silver argue, "maybe all that matters...[is] who gets to tell the story and whose story counts as 'truth' determines the definition of what rape is."¹⁸ Making the victims' voices heard and enabling them to speak out, some of the texts discussed in this thesis reflect a similar strategy to those adopted by feminist activists.¹⁹ The real-life rape victims who speak out about their experiences rather than remain silent or invisible offer readers direct windows into victims' experiences and form the most trenchant indictment of the dire consequences of a culture that supports rape and women's victimhood. We can say the same for fictional female representations.

The opposition between victimization and agency within feminist cultural discourse is one that developed in response to the radicalism of the late 1960s and has since shaped and refashioned both mainstream and academic configurations of feminism.²⁰ There is now a large body of feminist work that critiques the theme of victimhood in feminist theory²¹ and believes that the notion of 'victim' connotes reductive feminist identifications of women with woundedness, passivity, and

¹⁸ Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver *Rape and Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1.

¹⁹ The anti-rape movement emerged in America in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It began with "consciousness raising" groups encouraging rape victims to speak about their experiences, as exemplified by the New York Radical Feminists' 1971 "speak out" on rape, which defined talking openly about rape as part of politicized consciousness raising and drew attention to rape as a widespread problem.

²⁰ Carine M. Mardorossian, "Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape," *Signs* 27, no.3 (2002), 767.

²¹ Rachel Hall, "It Can Happen to You': Rape Prevention in the Age of Risk Management", *Hypatia* 19, no.3 (2004): 15; Aya Gruber, "The Feminist War on Crime," *Iowa Law Review*, 607; Ratna Kapur, "Pink Chaddis and SlutWalk Couture: The Postcolonial Politics of Feminism Lite," *Feminist Legal Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012): 10.

oppression.²² I agree with Mardorossian and Stringer's stance that there is no facile opposition between agency and victimhood. Both of them are essential elements for a feminist study to examine. Honing and defending the language of victimhood²³ helps address the psychological and individual effects of victimization and its working relationship with the social, institutional and cultural practices that give rise to women's victimization and agentic behaviours. Literary narratives are one way in which writers mediate the polarities of agency and victimhood in terms of feminist aesthetics and feminist critique.

Because my chosen texts for this chapter are not likely to be familiar to all readers, I will briefly summarise their plots and main characters before launching into the comparative analysis.

Morning Bell Resounded through the Dusk (晨钟响彻黄昏) (1997): Song Jiawen, a university Chinese language lecturer, falls for Liu Fengli (刘凤梨) (Fengli in Chinese means Pineapple), a woman who used to be a university student but gets expelled and makes a living by stealing. Song's female student Liu Tianyuan (刘天园), a newspaper reporter, gets raped by a neighbour Dr Hu (胡博士). Her suicide attempt fails. Though physically recovered, she suffers a mental break-down and is referred to a mental hospital where she again gets raped by Dr Li Qicai (李其才) (who has raped a number of patients there). After she regains her mental capabilities briefly during the second rape, she commits suicide successfully. Overcoming a series of obstacles, Liu Tianyuan's male boss Wang Xilin (王喜林), together with a morally upright doctor Liu Shengqiu (刘胜秋), manages to put Li Qicai on trial and into prison.

²² Rebecca Stringer, *Knowing Victims: Feminism, Agency and Victim Politics in Neoliberal Times* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 5.

²³ Ibid., 8.

In Chi Zijian's *Goodnight Rose* (2013), the main character Zhao Xiao'e (赵小娥) works as a proof-reader for a newspaper. Her mother was raped by a stranger, and Zhao grows up forever tainted as the bastard child of a rapist. The shame forced on her motivates her to avenge her mother by plotting the murder of the rapist—her biological father—Mr Mu (穆师傅). She develops a special relationship with her landlady, an aged Jewish woman Jelena (吉莲娜) who becomes a mentor to Zhao. She later confides in Zhao that she herself had murdered her stepfather, who was an accomplice of the man who raped her.

Lucky is Sebold's memoir (1999) about her own rape. On May 7, 1981, Alice Sebold, a first-year university student, was raped by a man in a tunnel which used to be an underground entry to an amphitheater. The text relates the narrator's experiences following her rape, including her interaction with her friends, family, community and the legal system.

Sebold's novel *The Lovely Bones* (2002) is narrated by Susie Salmon, a teenager girl who is raped and murdered at the age of 14 by her neighbour George Harvey. She then watches from her personal heaven as her family tries to come to terms with her disappearance and death over the span of eight years. Her rapist and murderer is eventually killed by a fallen icicle. In the end, Susie's spirit returns to earth, swapping bodies with another young woman, Ruth, and making love with Ray, her sweetheart when she was alive. She then moves on into another, larger part of heaven, occasionally watching earthbound events.

Chi Zijian and Alice Sebold as feminist writers

Chi Zijian and Alice Sebold's texts represent the pervasiveness of rape as a female experience as well as the patriarchal culture exerted on women's victimization

in various forms, involving both the direct or primary victims as well as other relevant parties. In doing so, their texts also offer feminist critiques of the different ways in which patriarchal cultures impose and perpetrate violence on women. The various forms of agency the female characters enact demonstrate the writers' conscious effort to explore ways to destabilise and challenge the social and cultural norms surrounding the issue of rape.

Though Chi rejects the definition that she is a feminist author, women's experiences in contemporary China have always been one of her central concerns. Portraying women as both victims and patricides, Chi's texts reveal a sustained critique of the disastrous effects a stubborn patriarchal culture continues to produce on both women and men. Chi Zijian's texts exemplify a common feminist stance taken by contemporary Chinese female writers. Against hostile cultural contexts, Chinese writers, especially female writers, are reluctant to declare themselves straightforwardly as feminist writers, yet they never cease to convey feminist messages in their work. As Xueping Zhong observes, the reluctance to "identify with the label of feminism or to claim to be a feminist does not necessarily indicate that a woman is or is not a feminist."²⁴ One of the values of Chi's texts lies in the fact that they actively engage with the issue of rape and explicitly construct strong representations of women's experiences of rape and as survivors. Bringing out the feminist critique in Chi's texts through a feminist reading is necessary and urgent. It is high time that we recognised and commended the pioneering efforts of Chinese authors like Chi to publicly and critically show rape as violence against women on the global literary stage.

It is important to note that, as Sarah Whitney observes regarding *The Lovely*

²⁴ Xueping Zhong, "Who Is a Feminist? Understanding the Ambivalence towards Shanghai Baby, 'Body Writing' and Feminism in Post-Women's Liberation China", *Gender & History*, 18:3 (2006), 637.

Bones, “lacerating rage is not present...it has been replaced by melancholy.”²⁵ I argue that melancholy serves as another form of feminist critique. The task of an updated feminist reading of Sebold's novel or of any rape text calls for the recognition of the need for deeper and wider exposure of gendered violence. Anger and determination aside, more forms of feminist critique are being explored today. One essential aspect of a feminist critique, as I will discuss in more detail, is to represent clearly the pervasiveness of gendered violence, something which is obviously the case in both *The Lovely Bones* and *Goodnight Rose*.

Rape: a common female experience

One essential part of the texts' feminist critique is the presentation of the pervasiveness of sexual violence against women. Similar to the strategy in the consciousness-raising movements of bringing together women's personal stories of being raped, Chi and Sebold's texts highlight the female characters' shared experiences of rape and their common identity as rape victims, suggesting that the prevalence of rape cultures affect women and men from all social backgrounds and globally, although not always in exactly the same ways.

By foregrounding Zhao Xiao'e's background in *Goodnight Rose* as an ordinary woman, the narrative highlights the commonality of Chinese women who experience sexual violence in their everyday lives. The presence of other rape victims besides the protagonists in the narrative expands the representation of rape from singular events to a prevalent culture, rape culture that affects women (and men) from all kinds of backgrounds. Chi's text constructs women, or to be more specific, rape victims, from a range of social strata instead of focusing only on white-collar beauties in the city.²⁶ Zhao Xiao'e's mother is from the rural area, without much education.

²⁵ Sarah Whitney, “Uneasy Lie the Bones: Alice Sebold's Postfeminist Gothic,” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 29, no.2 (2010): 356.

²⁶ Dai Jinhua, “Class and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Women's Literature” in Tao Jie, Bijun

Through education, Zhao Xiao'e attains the mobility to study and live in the city but only just manages to make ends meet. Jelena, a Jewish immigrant living in China, lives a comfortable life in the city. All three are rape survivors.

Though evading being raped, the narrative highlights that sexual threat or crimes are for a young woman by no means rare and isolated incidents. Zhao Xiao'e, plain-looking, slender and 25, is portrayed as a country bumpkin from a rural background living in Harbin (哈尔滨). After graduating from university, she is living a meagre life in the city and only manages to rent cheap apartments. Her first landlord attempts to rape her. The 60-odd year old man promises that he will provide economic support if Zhao Xiao'e agrees to sleep with him on a regular basis. When she refuses, he tries to force her. The representation of her mother and Jelena as rape victims further demonstrates that rape is a common experience for women across generations and across time. Jelena's rape took place during the Japanese occupation period. Her Japanophile Jewish stepfather colludes with her pursuer—a Japanese official—to drug her and rape her in order to force her to marry him. The three women are linked in their victimhood. Fathers, stepfathers, men in powerful positions—patriarchy—allows or encourages rape and women's vulnerability. The three women's experiences encompass various types of rape. For Zhao Xiao'e's mother, her rapist is a stranger from a nearby village. In the cases of Zhao Xiao'e and Jelena, the (attempted) rapists are acquaintances.

Similarly, *Lucky*, Alice Sebold's memoir of her own rape, foregrounds rape as endemic and describes how women's common experience of rape creates

Zheng, and Shirley L Mow eds, *Holding Up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present and Future* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York 2004), 289-302. Dai foregrounds the significance of representing women experiences in contemporary China from the lower strata of society and notes that urban intellectual females' sexuality and material desire is only part of the cultural landscape.

communities of trauma. She is not the only rape victim in the world she lives in. Her friend's mother, her classmate from the poetry workshop, her best friend, all are victims of rape. In the text *The Lovely Bones*, Susie meets still other rape victims in her heaven, and the stories of women being raped and killed are related constantly throughout the narrative.

Like the victims, the rapists themselves are from disparate social strata. Before the scene of direct confrontation between Zhao Xiao'e and her biological father about Zhao Xiao'e's mother's rape, the reader learns from Zhao Xiao'e's perspective that the rapist Mu used to work as a coal miner. Because his boss deliberately delays paying the arrears of his wages, he does not have enough funds to take care of his daughter who suffers from leukaemia. He attacked his employer when demanding his wages, resulting in a prison term of 7 years. His daughter later dies, and his wife deserts him. When Zhao Xiao'e confronts him on the boat, he attributes his crime to his background, believing that destitution contributed greatly to his transgressions. Here the rapist believes that "illness and poverty are two demons." (贫穷和疾病, 是两大害人精。) ²⁷ He becomes an orphan after Keshan disease (克山病) ²⁸ takes his parents' lives. Later he is raised by a shepherd. A destitute life leads him to collect tribute articles from the graveyard and his foster father even fears that he might commit bestiality. This unsettling connection between poverty and possibilities of bestiality may engender both sympathy and disgust in the reader. Poverty and illness cause Mu's lack of contact with women, and his rape of Zhao Xiao'e's mother suggests that however morally wrong, he acted partly to fulfil both his physical and emotional desires.

²⁷ Chi Zijian (迟子建), *Goodnight Rose* (晚安玫瑰) (Beijing (北京): People's Literature Press (人民文学出版社), 2013), 127.

²⁸ Keshan disease is a fatal disease named after Keshan County of Heilongjiang province, northeast China.

A wide range of types of rapists are depicted in Chi and Sebold's texts. In Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, George Harvey is depicted as serial rapist and killer who is psychologically aberrant. Pathologically deviant, he also lacks a good, positive socializing upbringing. In *Morning Bell*, one of the rapists, Dr Li Qicai, develops a hatred towards all women due to the fact that his wife had an affair and divorced him. The narrator tells us that "he hates all women, convinced that women are born inferior....The sense of revenge deriving from his divorce drives him to target the most vulnerable female patients in the mental hospital." (他痛恨女人, 认为女人天生低贱离异带给他的强烈报复心理使他把目光放到了最无辜最无抵抗力的一群女患者身上.)²⁹ In other words, every rape is payback for his wife's rejection of him.

Horrible victimization: the second, third, fourth assaults

In addition to rape's pervasiveness, Sebold and Chi's texts demonstrate the various forms and levels of victimization the rape victims suffer, thereby creating powerful critiques of the way in which patriarchal culture denies the existence (occurrence) of rape while imposing enormous amounts of stigma and psychological trauma on the victims and even innocent third parties as the result of rape – the illegitimate child of rape embodied by Zhao Xiao'e in *Goodnight Rose*; Susie's family and friends in *The Lovely Bones*.

Sebold's *Lucky* exhibits three layers of victimisation, illustrating Cathy Winkler's argument that the rape victim is raped three times: physically, socially, and legally. While *Lucky* offers a detailed account of the rape scene and the physical pain the

²⁹ Chi Zijian (迟子建), *Morning Bell Resounded Through the Dusk* (Nanjing (南京): Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe (江苏文艺出版社, 1997), 179.

narrator as a rape victim suffers, *Goodnight Rose* focuses on the psychological turmoil Zhao Xiao'e endures as a result of the repercussions of her mother's rape. With regard to the social level of victimization, *Lucky* features the narrator's observation and reflection on the ignorance and stereotypes of people around her with regard to rape and rape victims. She also questions the generalities used by the staff at the rape crisis centre she contacted and the sensationalisation she experiences as a high-profile rape victim. *Goodnight Rose* uses the word "village people" to cover the prevalent negative attitude in the community where her mother's rape takes place. In her involvement with the legal process, the narrator in *Lucky* faces a host of situations in which both the defendant and the defence attorney mobilise all the means possible to stigmatise her, leading to tremendous psychological fear and pain. Before the identity of the rapist is accidentally discovered by Zhao Xiao'e, the trauma brought on by her mother's rape continues to shape her life.

The rapists depicted in Chi and Sebold's texts display a wide range of strategies to justify their criminality. These texts creatively try to reconstruct experience from the inside the "mind of the rapist." For example, in *Morning Bell*, Liu Tianyuan's rapist Dr Hu uses a personal narrative to downplay his criminality, saying "Please do not understand it to be rape" (请别把它理解成强奸)³⁰ as he seeks to escape from prosecution and punishment. In his patriarchally-supported narrative, he is the one who has the power to justify his behaviour while Liu Tianyuan can be blamed by society at large as sexually desirable because of her "irresistible" beauty. When confronted by Wang Xilin, Dr Hu attributes his crime to Liu Tianyuan's beauty, saying "she encouraged me. She is very sexy...I could not control myself." (是她鼓励了我。她很性感。。。。。。我控制不住自己。)³¹ That is, he attributes agency to

³⁰ Ibid., 148.

³¹ Ibid., 156.

Liu Tianyuan only in terms of her sexual power over men. Dr. Hu's attempt to explain away his crime by insisting on his inability to resist his sexual desire towards Liu Tianyuan reveals the exploitative nature of his crime and his patriarchal attitudes towards women.

In terms of the patriarchal outsider's doubt that rape even exists, *Lucky* and *Goodnight Rose* offer two different attitudes influenced by two different patriarchal cultures. In *Goodnight Rose*, the groundless allegation of the victim's disloyalty and the stigmatisation of women's moral integrity are used as weapons against the woman assaulted. In *Lucky*, the narrator's father stereotypically thinks that strong resistance will surely prevent rape. His thinking reflects the prevalent discourse of individual achievement inflecting rape culture, where "individual agency is glorified and we applaud those who achieve success by avoiding, or effectively navigating their way through, risk or challenge."³² Therefore, by regarding his daughter as unrapable the father implies that by failing to avoid being raped, she has not exerted the required control or agency and therefore is to some degree "responsible" for the rape.³³ The detective, governed by his patriarchal prejudice, also believes that victims tend to lie about being raped. In *Goodnight Rose*, the victims suffer from more direct verbal abuse from those they expect to help them, while in *Lucky*, the victimization of women is presented more structurally and as deriving more from misconceptions and stereotypical thinking within the community.

Zhao Xiao'e's mother in *Goodnight Rose* is vilified by her husband and the people in her village after she is raped in the village graveyard on Ghost festival day.

³² Suzanne McKenzie-Mohr "Counter-Storying Rape: Women's Efforts Towards Liberatory Meaning Making," in *Women Voicing Resistance: Discursive and Narrative Explorations*, edited by Suzanne McKenzie-Mohr and Michelle N. Lafrance (Routledge: London & New York, 2014), 67.

³³ Old Testament (Judaism, Deuteronomy) law uses similar criteria. If a woman claims rape but no one hears her cry out or sees the rape happening, she is presumed to be at least equally guilty. See Cynthia, Edenbur's "Ideology and Social Context of the Deuteronomic Women's Sex Laws (Deuteronomy 22:13-29)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009): 44.

Zhao Xiao'e herself has to endure malicious comments and rumours from the village people and verbal and physical abuse from her father. The father and the village people represent a cold, hostile and uncaring patriarchal system that discounts the victim's welfare, furthers her victimization and attempts to defend itself by questioning the very existence of rape as a criminal act against women. No trace of sympathy and support for the victim can be found from the father or the villagers. "When he [Zhao Xiao'e's stepfather] reports the matter to the police and the police undertake an investigation, my mother was very uncooperative [so the villagers] believe that the rape was a cover for an extra-marital affair." (据说派出所的人来我家向母亲了解案发情况时, 母亲极不配合, 这使很多人认为母亲有相好的, 强奸只是她的借口而已.)³⁴ Patriarchal discourse displaces rape as the central act, thereby deftly shifting the shame associated with the crime to the victim and labelling the woman as unfaithful.

What makes it worse, in *Goodnight, Rose*, Zhao Xiao'e's mother has to bear insults from her husband: "why did the rapist particularly pick you, isn't it because you are a seductive slut?" (村里这么多女人, 强奸犯怎么单单遇上你了? 还不是你身上有股骚气!)³⁵ The father and the villagers reinforce the myth that women invite or provoke their own rapes. The discursive overemphasis on women's 'power' over men and men's failure to resist seduction suggest a deep-seated patriarchal ideology that regards women as sex objects to be exploited even as they are depicted nervously as dangerous and powerful. At the same time, while rape is trivialised as a crime against women.

More than reducing women to being accessories to power, wealth and strength

³⁴ Chi, *Goodnight Rose*, 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

and responsible for their own victimization, the text also shows not only that men benefit from a misogynistic patriarchal system but that they are well aware of how it functions. The father suspects his wife of having an affair and speculates that there are three possible suspects in the village: the party secretary and the rich and strong vet Zhang and Blacksmith Mu (他锁定了三个嫌疑人: 村支书/张兽医/和牟铁匠. 他们三个人, 一个有权, 一个有钱, 一个有力气。在他眼里, 女人出轨, 逃不出这<三劫>”。)³⁶

What is distinctive about *Goodnight Rose* is that it extends its critique to an aspect that has been seldom represented in literature, that is, the victimization the illegitimate child of rape experiences. As one of the most terrifying experiences for women, rape weighs heavily on women's lives. In *Goodnight Rose* the unbearable burden of rape as a nightmarish experience continues to generate agony for the innocent woman Zhao Xiao'e in the next generation. She is stigmatised as a bastard child and rejected by her father. The father even seeks to give her up for adoption when she is young. Similarly to her mother, Zhao Xiao'e cannot break away from the shame forced upon her by the village and the cultural system. Rape is her birthmark. The obstinate and diabolical patriarchal system obliges Zhao Xiao'e and her mother to deal with shame beyond social ostracism. Zhao Xiao'e's mother's deathbed injunction is to "forget about your shameful background and study hard. Life is short, try to be happy." (母亲病危时把我唤到跟前, 嘱咐我好好学习, 忘掉身世, 说是人生苦短, 一定要快乐。)³⁷

Instead of happiness, though, Zhao Xiao'e is burdened with the ignominy of rape which is transferred to her: "How can I be happy? Especially when I entered

³⁶ Ibid.,55-6.

³⁷ Ibid,57.

adulthood, I always feel the dirty blood flowing in my body. What I cannot bear most are the rumours spreading in the village that I am a child of my mother and a ghost and that I'm not even a human being.” (可我怎么快乐得起来呢, 尤其是成年以后, 总觉得身上流着肮脏的血! 最让我不能忍受的, 是村子里流传的一种说法, 说我是母亲与鬼生的孩子, 我压根就不是人。)³⁸ Her mother's rape dominates her way of thinking about herself as a woman, and it forecloses the possibility of achieving happiness in her life. The internalisation of the demonisation and dehumanisation in Zhao Xiao'e's psyche suggests the innocent girl's continuing trauma and shows how rape imposes an identity even on the innocent:

When I am unable to sleep, I would indulge in flights of fantasy and conjectures. If what the village people say about me is true, that is, I am a child of my mother and a ghost, then I should be half-human, half ghost. When I am asleep, will my ghostly side appear? What shape do I take? A fox? A snake? Or a monster that preys on humans? I associate myself with anything to do with demons and ghosts.

有时夜里睡不着, 我便胡思乱想, 如果我真像村人说的那样, 是母亲与鬼生的孩子, 我便是半人半鬼了。我睡熟时, “鬼”的那一面会不会隐现? 我会变成什么? 一只火狐狸? 一条青蛇? 一个吃人的妖怪? 凡是跟妖魔鬼怪搭得上边的, 我都会联想到自己身上。³⁹

The narrative here critiques the ignorance, backwardness and malignity of the people ruled by patriarchal culture and the popular culture which supports that dominant cultural ideology. They would believe that a ghost rather than a real man raped Zhao Xiao'e's mother. The traditional custom of celebrating the Ghost Festival in the village provides ideal excuse for the village people to associate a rape case with the appearance of ghosts. The traditional cultural belief mystifies and masks the very real social truth that women are being raped. To read more deeply, the image of “ghost” symbolises the demonic and haunting nature of a persistent patriarchal culture.

The father's and villagers' responses to Zhao Xiao'e's mother's rape—verbal abuse, rumours, gossip, folk tale motifs—form a language that haunts her and her

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 61.

mother's lives. This language can be understood as the manifestation of a rape culture that stigmatises the victim, allocates shame on women and demonises the innocent to ensure that rape remains an unspeakable secret. Uninterested to find out the truth and bring justice to the victim, this social language functions by stigmatising the woman and denigrating her moral integrity and her motives. The patriarchal community has to keep this secret because rape itself is an act which carries the most ignominious message a male-dominated society can create. Plagued and trapped in an unbending patriarchal culture, Zhao Xiao'e and her mother have no way out. Painted as morally inferior, the trauma and agony they suffer remains unresolved and unattended. Moreover, Zhao Xiao'e's mother's advice that her daughter try to be happy does not provide a progressive view for her growth as a woman. As a mother, not standing up for herself, she suffers silently and misses an opportunity to set an example and offer her daughter a better, more just, more humane way to deal with her received family history and her role as a woman in a patriarchal culture.

In contrast to the centrality of victimisation forced on women in *Lucky* and *Goodnight Rose*, part of the representation of victimization in *The Lovely Bones* has shifted to the account of the emotional journey taken by her family members and friends. Susie's parents, Jack and Abigail, her sister Lindsey, and friends such as Ruth and Ray strive to come to terms with her death and the fact that the chances of the criminal being caught are slim. Although Lindsey and Grandma Lynn join the father and agree that George Harvey is the culprit, Jack the father is the character who suffers the largest amount of frustration and anguish in his engagement with the legal system. He sees a suspicious light in the cornfield and seeks to track down the criminal but accidentally is mistaken himself for attacking a teenage girl. The police eventually understand him to be "crazy with grief" and the neighbours believe him to be "nuts". Jack becomes a victim of the fallout from the rape. From this moment on,

heavily injured and confined to his house, Jack gives up his investigation and pursuit of justice for his daughter.

For the reader, Susie's identity as a rape and murder victim is unquestionable. But what devastates her family and friends is Susie's death, since neither her family nor the police have knowledge of her rape. Susie is the only one who bears witness and has knowledge of her rape. By constructing a heaven and a personal ongoing narrative of Susie, the text foregrounds Susie's status as a rape victim rather than a murder victim.

The novel's depiction of victimisation on the part of the rape victim presents itself on a more implicit level, compared to the direct account of the physical, social and legal damage the narrator endured in *Lucky*. The rape scene at the beginning of the novel depicts a crafty rapist who lures Susie to his lair and commits an egregious crime. The setting of an underground lair enables the rapist to enact his atrocity without being heard. When Susie pleads with George Harvey, he shoves her knitted hat in her mouth to quiet her. She is later dismembered by the criminal and her body parts distributed in a garbage dump.

Along with the seemingly detached serenity she enjoys after she flies into heaven, the narrative constructs a further distance between narrator and action in that watching from heaven does not lead to any effectual intervention in the events on earth. First of all, Susie is rendered ineffective as a literal witness because she cannot point out her rapist and murderer: "All this made me crazy. Watching but not being able to steer the police toward the green house so close to my parents."⁴⁰ When she does reveal herself, she is presented as a silent shape. The image conveys the powerlessness of the rape victim. Watching her family's anguish over her disappearance and death and seeing the criminal go scot-free are heart-breaking and

⁴⁰ Sebold, *The Lovely Bones*, 26.

agonizing rather than comforting and healing, so Susie's victimization continues even after death. For example, in heaven, when she sees her own father mistakenly accused as an attacker and then assaulted, she “pushed and pushed against the unyielding borders of my heaven. I wanted to reach out and lift my father up, away, to me. But I had to turn my back in my heaven. I could do nothing.”⁴¹

Another level of Susie's victimization occurs in the way her rape and murder disrupt her development as a fully sexual adult. The account of her interaction with Ray Singh, her first sweetheart, reminds the reader of how the rape has ruptured her growth as a girl on the threshold of adulthood. The only sexual encounter in Susie's life, violent rape, in no way contributes to her development as a sexually mature woman. Therefore, as time marches forwards, she remains in heaven a sexually naive, inexperienced fourteen-year old. When her brother Buckley sees her on the occasion of Lindsey's engagement with Samuel, the description provides significant clues for the reader to understand her interrupted development: “[h]e saw my shape and face, which had not changed –the hair still parted down the middle, the chest still flat and hips undeveloped.”⁴² Watching her sister Lindsey growing up to be a mature woman and starting her own family does not provide vicarious fulfilment for Susie. It only brings pain. For example, when relating Lindsey's first-time sex, the narrator comments: “At fourteen, my sister sailed away from me into a place I'd never been. In the walls of my sex there was horror and blood, in the walls of hers there were windows.”⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 139.

⁴² Ibid., 245.

⁴³ Ibid., 125.

Speak it out: female first-person narrative voices

Sebold and Chi's texts feature consistent or well-developed first-person narrative voices by the rape victims. Creating such intimate, complex narrating voices adds much to the narratives' critique of rape culture, especially but not only in China. Sebold in her article "Hers" states that "The voices of rape victims and their families can be powerful... Outrage and clear thinking and political action can work together to dispel the shame and ignorance that surround the crime of rape."⁴⁴ Speaking it out defines a clear feminist stance. Jane Kilby observes that "women remain silent because there was a taboo on speaking about sexual violence, not because they had lost the capacity to talk per se. It was an externally imposed silence."⁴⁵ The act of speaking out counters the social censorship imposed on victims.

As a narrative strategy, first-person narration refuses the vulnerable and silent position traditionally assigned to female victims of rape. Wendy S. Hesford points out that "before the 1970s, when women began to talk publicly about rape in consciousness-raising groups, the story of rape remained the province of men."⁴⁶ Constructing female first-person narratives endows the narrators with a distinctive participant authority in terms of their accounts of rape experiences. As a speaking subject speaking or supposed to be speaking directly from her own experiences, this inner perspective provides powerful linguistic tools to expose the psychological effects rape exerts on women.

The first person narrative voice not only enjoys authority in relating the psychological effects but also has the interpretive capacity to expose the social and

⁴⁴ Alice Sebold, "Hers; Speaking of the Unspeakable," *The New York Times*, accessed November 12, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/02/26/magazine/hers-speaking-of-the-unspeakable.html>.

⁴⁵ Jane Kilby, *Violence and the cultural politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 3.

⁴⁶ Wendy S. Hesford, "Reading Rape Stories: Material Rhetoric and the Trauma of Representation," *College English* 62, No. 2 (1999): 203.

cultural factors that victimise rape victims. I discussed this aspect of narrative critique in the previous section on the levels of and forms of victimization.

In *Morning Bell*, Chi Zijian complicates the first-person point of view by experimenting with narrative points of views in terms of rape victim's voices. The rape experiences are placed in multiple personal narratives, including diaries, letters or private communications with those whom the speakers most trust. As Lorna Martens notes, "a diary in fiction is a 'framed' communicative situation that brings a second narrative triangle of author/novel/reader to bear on the situation,"⁴⁷ a form "suited to sympathetic presentation of the narrator" while "the periodic time scheme makes possible an immediate and vivid presentation of the narrator's sentiments."⁴⁸ Liu Tianyuan's experience of rape is related in the form of her diary. For example, one of her journals relates the details of how she gets raped in flashback. Though the form of diary is private, personal and authentic in delivering Liu Tianyuan's psychology, the employment of this narrative form might also betray the caution of using a direct first-person narrative voice to engage with the issue of rape.

By employing the first-person narrative point-of-view more singularly, Chi Zijian's *Goodnight Rose* takes a different approach to breaking away from the social taboo in Chinese literature surrounding rape, suggesting a seditious and provocative gesture. The narrative presents Zhao Xiao'e's life and inner thoughts as the result of her mother's rape. The narrative brings forward the female victim's perspective, something extremely unusual in literary representations of rape in contemporary Chinese literature. The narrative authority allocated to the protagonist endows her with the power to speak about her victimization and the psychological struggles she endures. Having direct access to Zhao Xiao'e's daily life and inner thoughts, the

⁴⁷ Lorna Martens, *The Diary Novel* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

reader learns everything from her perspective and is invited to sympathise with her in her traumatic encounters. The psychological trauma and the social and cultural victimisation are all narrated from her perspective. As will be discussed later, her psychological and ethical states as a feminist revenger are also presented by this narrative point of view.

Lucky, Sebold's memoir, also presents a more singular account of the narrator's experience in the wake of her rape. As discussed earlier, the first-person narrative offers a compelling and convincing account of the way in which the rapists, the legal system and society all exert psychological pain and trauma on the narrator as a rape victim. It also effectively foregrounds the recovery process of the narrator from victim to survivor, including her relentless efforts to tell her rape story to other people and actively seek understanding.

Previous scholarship on *The Lovely Bones* mostly notes its posthumous narrative point of view. However, it is also highly significant that this narrative voice is a first-person one, especially given the traumatic rape narrative it unfolds. What is distinctive about this first-person posthumous narrative voice is that it not only transcends life and death, but also transcends space and time, reading the minds of the characters and having access to their present and past as an omniscient narrator would, but also representing a particular and intimate point of view, often associated with first-person narration.

As discussed before, Susie, as a character within a fictive homogeneous natural world, is supposed to be dead and therefore silent. Realistically, she could not narrate her own death. Yet when she observes and speaks from heaven and tells her story to the reader, the narrator breaches the usually impenetrable barrier between life and death. Despite being in a non-natural setting, the narrative otherwise maintains the

mimetic.⁴⁹ In the global paralepsis of the novel, we have naturalness contained within the non-natural frame. The narrator sustains a distancing which means the narrator speaking from heaven speaks to the reader rather than the characters in the novel, thus making possible the juxtaposition of the unrealistic and the real in the text. In his *Divine Comedy* Dante created a similar interaction but embedded it as the principal journey plot featuring Dante the pilgrim and Virgil. However, *Lovely Bones* adopts the disembodied, seemingly omniscient narrative point of view of third person realist fiction. The reader needs to accept the unrealistic and unnatural narrative voice first.

Aware of and accepting this narrative voice, one can see that as a compensation or contrast to the powerlessness or victimhood of the character Susie Salmon, the narrator Susie seems extra powerful, even omnipotent, and exhibits a heightened sense of survivorship. As a character, her intervention is limited and her victimization continues, but as a narrative voice, she is powerful. All the parties involved in her rape and murder, including the criminal, the victim, the victim's family and friends, the police, are known and narrated from this after-life voice. Not only does the narrative travel freely between Heaven and Earth, but it also is capable of recounting both the past and the ongoing present. The first-person narrative transcends time and space.

The narrative's extrawordly setting enables the narrator to gain full access to all the characters' actions. The act of "following" grants the narrator the power to transcend the narrative limits of space and knowledge. When Susie's mother leaves her family behind and travels across states, and when Ruth moves to New York city, the narrator is able to offer close-up accounts of their experiences. Susie's narration

⁴⁹ Ruediger Heinze, "Violations of Mimetic Epistemology in First-Person Narrative Fiction," *Narrative* 16, no.3 (2008):293.

is not just an act of witnessing, but a way the narrator penetrates into other minds and transcends time and thus increases Susie's narrative authority. Susie the narrator informs the reader of the inner struggles in her family and friends' minds as well as the criminal psychology and personal history of George Harvey. Rather than being only a rape victim, Susie is the vehicle for all knowledge in the novel. Susie's first-person narrative ushers in and intertwines with the major characters' perspectives. For example, when Lindsey follows George Harvey to observe him and then breaks into Harvey's house to search for leads, the reader gets the sense that the narrative perspective provided is a mixture of Susie's and Lindsey's.

Whereas Lindsey can only see Harvey's actual and external actions, and hence have only a limited knowledge, Susie's narrative vision sees into Harvey's inner mental and emotional life, such as how he imagines women to be his victims when he plunges into the crowd to gaze at them. By placing Harvey's psychological activities within Susie's narrative point of view, the novel renders Harvey's perverse personality an object of Susie's gaze and interpretation, not the other way around. Alice Bennett argues that Susie is "the one who gets to arrange the telling of the story's events to ensure that the murderer is not the creative force shaping the plot's dynamic: his actions are motivated by his own psychological damage and fear, not by a compelling and clever murder plot."⁵⁰ For example, when Harvey brings Susie's bones home, the narrator says:

His movements were slow, not anxious. He felt a calm flood him. He kept the lights out in the bathroom and felt the warm water wash me away and he felt thoughts of me then. My muffled scream in his ear. My delicious death moan. The glorious white flesh that had never seen the sun, like an infant's, and then split, so perfectly, with the blade of his knife. He shivered under the heat, a prickling pleasure creating goose bumps up and down his arms and legs.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Alice Bennett, "Unquiet Spirits: Death Writing in Contemporary Fiction," *Textual Practice* 23, no. 3 (2009): 465.

⁵¹ Sebold, *The Lovely Bones*, 50.

The first-person narrator's power and authority not only enable her to watch Harvey's present but also establish her access to his past, his family background and childhood experiences. George Harvey is born into a poor family: "[They] were scavengers at best and made their money by collecting scrap metal and old bottles and hauling them into town on the back of the elder Harvey's ancient flatbed truck."

⁵² His mother is a thief: "she began handing him the stolen items to hide on his body, and he did it because she wanted him to. If they got outside and away in the truck, she would smile and bang the steering wheel with the flat of her hand and call him her little accomplice."⁵³ Ubiquitous gendered violence also runs throughout the depiction of Harvey's childhood experiences. Harvey's mother escapes an attack by three drunken men. The looming threat of violence is expressed by Harvey's thoughts: "He had had a moment of clarity about how life should be lived: not as a child or as woman. They were the two worst things to be."⁵⁴ In this way, the authority of interpretation of the narrative voice achieves its maximum effect.

On the surface, the female first-person narrative point of view is a subjective, singular and personal perspective. But the way it is intertwined with the revelation of the pervasiveness of rape and the relating of the social and cultural victimization produces an effect that successfully highlights the severe psychological suffering of the victims. Although related from a single perspective, the narrator's recognition of trauma communities and her first-hand perceptions and observations of the various forms and levels of victimisation guarantee the text's capacity to encompass the social and cultural operations surrounding the issue of rape.

The narrator as speaking subject is by no means a singular entity. As will be examined later, the construction of feminist community and solidarity, especially in

⁵² Ibid.,187.

⁵³ Ibid.,188.

⁵⁴ Ibid.,190.

the construction of supporter characters, makes sure that other perspectives “counteract, modify, refuse”⁵⁵ or go beyond her own limitations. In this way, her position does not enjoy unquestionable authority or singularity, because it is designed to be in contact and coexistent with the positions of others.

Finding a way out in their own way (united) — feminist agency and solidarity

Chi and Sebold’s texts construct a wide spectrum of feminist agency as performed and represented by the various actions women take in response to their being sexually and (or) psychologically victimised. Instead of suffering silently as passive victims, the female characters strive to be agents to undo their victimisation while also challenging the prevalent patriarchal culture. Their actions in the texts contain a combination of feminist agency and solidarity. In *Goodnight Rose*, the avenger figure exhibits an individualistic feminist agency through her execution of revenge. However, in terms of addressing the ethical consequences of her vengeful action, she is in need of feminist solidarity from another female protagonist, although it is ambiguous whether the character successfully achieves that solidarity. In the case of *The Lovely Bones*, Susie is able to recover her sexual agency and perhaps recover somewhat from rape trauma with the help of Ruth, who symbolises a healing feminist community in heaven and feminist solidarity between heaven and the real world.

⁵⁵ Bronwyn Davies, “The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructuralist Analysis,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, no.30 (1991): 48.

Doing it her way quietly and smartly: feminist revenge in *Goodnight Rose*

Faced with the cold Chinese patriarchal culture and the stigmatisation and trauma that culture imposes on women, the female protagonists in *Goodnight Rose* opt for outright revenge. The revenge does not take place in the heat of passion nor is it driven by rash and random impulses. Rather, the women's revenge is premeditated and carefully designed, not to mention justified within an eye-for-an-eye morality. What is more, these acts are not intended as public or open, but clever ruses that leave no evidence which would make the women suspects.

Zhao Xiao'e's patricide epitomises a feminist impulse to take itself to the endpoint. Women's power and agency take centre stage in the execution to readdress the wrongdoings of the rapists in *Goodnight Rose*. The novel abandons the ambiguous idealism of *Morning Bell*, in which after the rape victim Liu Tianyuan takes her own life, a pro-feminist male, Wang Xilin, endeavours to seek justice for her. In *Goodnight Rose*, an ordinary woman single-handedly plots and executes her scheme successfully without any male cooperation or assistance. The narrative's strong sense of female rage derived from women's deep suffering and trauma means that no compromises will be made. In *Goodnight Rose*, outright revenge seems to be the only available and effective strategy to achieve healing and comfort for the victims. Too often, Chinese culture resists recognition and redressing its wrongdoings and their disastrous effects on women, resulting in increased animosity between the criminal and the victim and leaving women no choice but revenge.

But the fact that Zhao Xiao'e chooses to confide in Jelena her responsibility for the death of the rapist, her biological father, Mr. Mu, shows how, when facing the ethical consequences of her revenge, Zhao Xiao'e uses storytelling as way to embrace female solidarity and find strength by being with women with shared experiences, although it is ambiguous whether the solidarity is established between the two.

It is not surprising that the women's revenge should first be directed against the rapist. The victimisation Zhao suffers from her mistreatment by her step father, the villagers and her step-mother, as well as her brother's warning against divulging her secret, generates and kindles her resentment towards her biological father—the rapist.

Zhao Xiao'e shows her agency and power not only by fighting back vehemently against her landlord but in a larger sense when she aspires to avenge her mother—the older generation—and solve problems that have been left unsolved. The motivation for her sleuthing act is mainly the perception that the crux of her mother's and her own victimisation is the occurrence of the rape of her mother, and the man who raped her mother serves as the provenance of all this suffering: "it was he who drove my mother and me into the abyss of suffering." (是他把我和母亲推进深渊的。)⁵⁶

Zhao Xiao'e is depicted as an avenger who takes advantage of her investigatory and deductive capabilities. The detection of the rapist occupies an important place in Zhao Xiao'e's life. As she goes about her daily routines, she never gives up investigating and searching for the criminal. Because her mother's rape case remains unsolved and the rapist is never identified, she assumes the role of an amateur sleuth. Besides carrying out her personal investigation by looking up wanted criminals on police websites, she often looks at herself in the mirror and compares her appearance with those of the possible suspects – her genetic relationship to the rapist, further traumatising her— trying to infer if the rapist is in the vicinity of her village. She copies names from tombstones and visits three nearby villages to investigate whether those places have produced a rapist.

This amateur female sleuth is resourceful in that she fully capitalises on all the possible means to confirm the identity of the rapist. When she accidentally discovers

⁵⁶ Chi, *Goodnight Rose*, 60.

that an old man who works for her boyfriend's father might be her biological father, she does not jump to conclusions. She does not hesitate to make use of the kinship sentiments he feels towards her. In fact, pretending that she welcomes and enjoys the father-daughter-like relationship, she lures the man (who unbeknown to her, does his own investigation and is certain that she is his daughter) into her scheme of getting his blood sample for a DNA test. By this means she is able to confirm the identity of her mother's rapist and her biological father as one and the same.

Moreover, after she confirms that Mu is the rapist, she aims to shrewdly commit murder and escape any punishment. In her carefully designed plan to murder her biological father, the absence of forensic evidence is vital.

I mull over different ways of killing Mu: making dumplings injected with rat poison; drugging his drink, and then slitting his wrist to drain his blood, thus making it appear as a suicide; removing a sewer lid in the dark of night to dupe him into falling to his death. A filthy soul belongs in the sewer. But all these methods would lead to me. I don't want to be the primary suspect.

(我想着干掉穆师傅的种种方法。用耗子药包顿饺子让他吃掉，毒死他；在饮料里给他下安眠药，将他迷昏，然后割他的手腕，让那些肮脏的血流尽，造成自杀的假象；搬开路灯昏黄路段的一个破损的马葫芦盖，深夜将他引入那里，让他坠井，一颗污秽的灵魂，正该由污水井收留。可这些方法容易将我暴露，我不想被当作杀人犯处死。)⁵⁷

A perfect plan is finally formulated: when river boating with her biological father, she will surreptitiously push him from the boat and afterwards inform the police that he carelessly slipped and fell. To make sure that she herself does not suffer the same fate as Mu, she diligently practices controlling the boat before the event. Skill, training, detective work, and event planning are all part of the female victim's newfound agency.

In the process of carrying out her scheme, Zhao Xiao'e also is endowed with enormous courage and outspokenness. Single-minded in pursuing justice for her mother and herself, Zhao Xiao'e does not show any sympathy toward her biological

⁵⁷ Ibid.,122-3.

father. Moreover, she remakes her act as representative of a collective. When she condemns her biological father, she does so not only on behalf of her mother and herself but on behalf of all rape victims: “I was crying and blurted out that ‘you concealed a crime you committed.’” (我抽泣着, 冲口而出, “你隐瞒了一宗罪!”)⁵⁸ Likewise, Mu becomes representative of all men who violate women: “‘You raped my mum’ I cried out, ‘all men that rape women are assholes. They deserve to die.’” (“你强奸了我妈妈!” 我哭喊着, “强奸女人的男人都是混蛋! 该死!”)⁵⁹

This section of the novel dramatises how an individual experience can generate the political recognition of an underlying or collective social situation. The antagonism between the rapist and Zhao Xiao’e becomes the representative of all victims. Mu’s death stands for the demise of all rapists. Zhao Xiao’e’s determination to kill Mu cannot be altered because it is a gesture of solidarity. Although fully aware of Mu’s fatherly feelings and tenderness towards her, Zhao Xiao’e does not budge when Mu beseeches her to spare his life. In fact, she consciously takes advantage of his remaining humanity to lure him into her scheme. In this way, Zhao Xiao’e manages to implement a radical, revenging feminist politics without bowing to kinship or sentiment. Personal payback, not reconciliation, is her goal. Zhao Xiao’e rejects Mu’s proposal that he turn himself in to the police. She refuses, claiming she would be implicated and further stigmatised: “Do you think I’d want everyone to know I am a rapist’s daughter?” (“你以为我想让人知道我是一个强奸犯的女儿?!”)⁶⁰ Here, Zhao Xiao’e uses the patriarchal code stigmatising the victim against the rapist. When Mu realises this, he jumps into the river and drowns himself, saving Zhao Xiao’e from becoming a murderer. We might read Mu’s action as

⁵⁸ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 129.

displaying a spark of humanity. It also indicates how he understands and sympathises with Zhao Xiao'e's predicament, one of course which he has created.

One curious feature of the narrative is how the text constructs a Jewish woman, Jelena, as a fascinating contrast with the character of Zhao Xiao'e. As her mentor and benefactor, Zhao Xiao'e almost venerates Jelena. Apart from mentoring Zhao Xiao'e on urban hairstyles and fashion sense, Jelena's life experiences are a mystery to Zhao Xiao'e. She seems to be a spinster and lives an exquisite and stylish life.

In addition to her urban lifestyle, the most distinctive characteristic of this woman is her Jewish ethnic and religious identity. She is said to have moved to Harbin, China when she was young. Compared to their conflicts over trivial matters such as drying underwear on the balcony, what sets the two apart is the contrast between Jelena's religious piety and Zhao Xiao'e's secularism. In one of their squabbles, Zhao Xiao'e rants against the inequality omnipresent in society, contrasting her life experiences with those born into powerful and rich families and saying that she does not believe in the existence of God. (不相信有上帝, 不相信有神)⁶¹ However, Zhao Xiao'e comes to believe that religion contributes greatly to Jelena's outlook. From her point of view,

Those who live a long life on their own are people of courage. Where does Jelena gain her courage from? I think about this question countless times. Is it her unreciprocated love? Or is it religious consolation? I would rather believe it is the latter. The former is too vague to understand; I feel it deeply from her pious daily Torah reading. (孑然一身而高寿的人, 一定是有勇气的人. 我无数次地想, 吉莲娜的生存勇气来自哪里呢? 是永难忘怀的爱恋, 还是宗教的抚慰? 我更相信是后者. 因为前者如雾似烟, 我看不清; 后者我从她每日虔诚的诵经声中, 深切感受到了。)⁶²

The text differentiates the two women who form a mini-collective not only in terms of fashion and age but also in terms of religious beliefs. Zhao Xiao'e sticks to her atheist views yet at the same time admires Jelena's religious piety and its positive role

⁶¹ Ibid.,14-5.

⁶² Ibid.,96.

in her life.

Rape and hatred of the rapist unite them and solidify their connection. Jelena reveals that she too is a victim of rape and a patricide. This is the crucial link between them from the perspective of Zhao Xiao'e. When Zhao Xiao'e confesses that she is responsible for her biological father's death and that she is a rapist's daughter, Jelena shares her own secret with her. Jelena's Japanophile Jewish stepfather colludes with her pursuer—a Japanese official—to drug her and rape her in order to force her to marry him. Jelena never bows to the two men's conspiracy. By placing arsenic in her stepfather's opium pipe, she cleverly murders him without being suspected. Jelena's seemingly remorseful reply, "I killed him. I should atone for my crime." ("我杀了他, 我要洗清的是自己的罪")⁶³ is countered by Zhao Xiao'e's question: "is it a crime to kill a demon?" (我激动地问: "杀了魔鬼, 也有罪吗?")⁶⁴ Their conversation here touches on the ethical problem of the relation between the ends and means when seeking justice. Jelena believes it is sinful to commit murder even it was for a just end and it is mandatory to atone for her crime. What underlies Zhao Xiao'e's retort is the logic that as long as the end is just, the means to achieve justice do not need to be confined to legal doctrines.

However, Jelena's revelation of her status as a victim of rape and a patricide does not cause Zhao Xiao'e to reconsider her own crime planning. Rather, realizing their similar identities helps her mitigate her sense of guilt: "I felt I have found an accomplice. I was less frightened, having fewer nightmares and feeling more relaxed." (我仿佛是找到了同谋, 内心不那么惊恐了, 噩梦也少做了, 轻松了许多。)⁶⁵

Her lack of atonement nevertheless deeply affects Jelena: "She said she didn't

⁶³ Ibid.,140.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.,142.

see my repentance in my eyes. She said if one does not know how to expiate, one cannot see the light of the other world.” (她说一个人不懂得忏悔, 就看不到另一世界的曙光).⁶⁶ Faced with Jelena’s mentoring, Zhao Xiao’e resists with her more cynical and secularist views, claiming that this world itself is hellish and filled with darkness and that she does not believe there is another world and hence no final moral judgment for her acts. When Jelena explains to her that what her biological father did to her mother is not unforgivable, Zhao Xiao’e is insistent: “I’m not guilty. Don’t reprimand me. I was conceived in the graveyard. I am an incarnation of demons.”

(“我没罪!” 我冷笑着说, “您不要责备我, 我是在坟场受孕的孩子, 是魔鬼的化身!”)⁶⁷ Here Zhao Xiao’e uses a demonic identity to symbolically justify the stigma and slander imposed on her, to justify her behaviour and counter Jelena’s moral criticism. However, as discussed before, she also defends herself by asking “is it a crime to kill a demon?” If not, then becoming a demon by killing seems self-contradictory. Her retort that it was morally wrong for Jelena to poison her stepfather is acrid. After all, her stepfather was not her direct violator either. Jelena’s status as a murderer drains away the moral authority in her teaching. Yet her withering away and angst for Zhao Xiao’e stresses her genuine orientation towards atonement and the moral weight she opts to shoulder for the younger woman.

The narrative contrasts two types of female victims. The two women never achieve mutual understanding but only a brief moment of connection when Jelena reveals herself to be a rape victim and patricide. While the text takes pains to depict Jelena as an illuminator in terms of her religious beliefs and awareness of the possibility spiritual redemption, the character of Zhao Xiao’e comes across as an angry and stubborn pragmatist who does not aspire to moral elevation but is content

⁶⁶ Ibid.,142-3.

⁶⁷ Ibid.,144.

with accomplishing her vengeful mission although the agony that comes with murder remains unresolved. The text on the one hand attempts to offer a potential way out through religious ethics, but that path does not achieve a satisfactory result for Zhao Xiao'e. This character crystalises the tension between feminist revenge and its ethical consequences. Zhao Xiao'e describes herself as someone who does not believe in religion, but at the same time her invocation of demonological tropes suggests that like her fellow villagers, she cannot escape the influence of the Chinese folkloric traditions.

Jelena bequeaths her property to Zhao Xiao'e after her death, adding another dimension of equivocality to their relationship. Zhao Xiao'e and her friends and relatives react to Jelena's generosity with contentment but without showing a shred of gratitude. Obtaining an expensive piece of property in the city dramatically changes Zhao Xiao'e's economic status. This is not the first time in the novel Zhao shows her materialistic inclination. She squanders some of the money in the bank account her biological father has gifted to her before he jumps into the river. Later she readdresses her behaviour and uses the remaining money in the account for his tomb. Zhao Xiao'e's moral predicament and her materialistic inclination might symbolise or represent the predicament women in contemporary China face. In a society where both economic opportunities and social interactions are still structured around a patriarchal cultural system, it is more sensible for them to seek economic privileges first before they can find a way out of a vicious circle of abysses.

Heaven vs earth: a healing feminist community vs a place to return to

Whereas *Goodnight Rose* presents protagonists who become avengers in response to the violence perpetrated upon them, *The Lovely Bones* creates a literary

heaven and a supporter character who connects heaven and earth in order to facilitate Susie's sexual agency and growth. The novel's community of women crosses the border between the world and heaven.

Despite brief mention of committing the perfect murder as a game played in heaven and the icicle as the narrator's favourite tool because it melts away, Susie cannot help her family or the police locate the criminal, nor can she take direct action (revenge) to kill him herself. Susie's family members, especially her father, are smarting from their loss, but they never attempt extreme actions such as revenge. That would be read as vigilantism in the context of the novel. The contrast between what Susie wishes for and her father's non-interest in revenge shape the narrative's general disapproval of vengeance motivated by violent rage:

Part of me wished swift vengeance, wanted my father to turn into the man he could never have been—a man violent in rage. That's what you see in movies, that's what happens in the books people read. An everyman takes a gun or a knife and stalks the murderer of his family; he does a Bronson on them and everyone cheers. What it was like: Every day he got up. Before sleep wore off, he was who he used to be.⁶⁸

Susie's father's response rewrites the victim's response: the essential mission is not to destroy the criminal but to recover from the trauma and regain her adulthood and sexual agency. However, similarly to Sebold's *Lucky*, the critique in *The Lovely Bones* of patriarchal culture as detrimental to the wellbeing of rape victims and their loved ones is sustained by creating a literary heaven that embodies a kind of feminist idealism. Interestingly, this alternative feminist space is based on neither revenge nor reconciliation but on a fantasy of growth and maturity.

The observant but aloof heaven serves as a narrative site to ironise the wrongdoings in terms of the treatment of the victims and the lack of support for the victims in the "real world." In heaven, unlike on earth, Susie is well looked after.

⁶⁸ Sebold, *The Lovely Bones*, 58.

There are counsellors to help newcomers adjust and friends to room with. Whereas in the real world, victims can never speak out (about) their stories, in heaven the victims unite and tell one another their stories. By speaking out, the female victims achieve a sense of community and are empowered by such sharing. The victims' pain eases gradually as all the girls killed by Harvey are brought together and healed as a feminist storytelling collective: "as Flora twirled, other girls and women came through the field in all directions. Our heartache poured into one another like water from cup to cup. Each time I told my story, I lost a bit, the smallest drop of pain."⁶⁹ Narration is therapeutic.

This literary heaven, complete with a healing feminist community, is devoid of the reactionary attitudes towards rape victims prevalent in the real world, such as the inclination described in *Lucky* to sensationalise the victims. In heaven *The Lovely Bones* creates, the sensation of criminality and the ambiguous pleasures of vicariously participating in crime are not welcomed, at least from the narrator's perspective, because "each time my name was said by these strangers it felt like a pinprick. It was not the pleasant sensation that it could be when my father said it or when Ruth wrote it in her journal."⁷⁰

As opposed to *Lucky* in which the rape victim is treated as a celebrity, however unwillingly, in *The Lovely Bones* the support character Ruth, not the victim herself, receives public accolades in heaven for being a trustworthy witness for *all* the victims: "She [Ruth] was unaware that she was somewhat of a celebrity up in heaven. I had told people about her, what she did, how she observed moments of silence up and down the city and wrote small individual prayers in her journal, and the story had travelled so quickly that women lined up to know if she had found where they'd been

⁶⁹ Ibid.,186.

⁷⁰ Ibid.,224.

killed.”⁷¹

It is true that Ruth provides her body for Susie to return to Earth as an adult. As Laura-Marie von Czarnowsky analyses, “[i]n her few moments on Earth, Susie deliberately reclaims not only her sexuality, but her sexual agency, and thus leaves her rape trauma behind in order to move on to the second level of heaven. She thus sheds the constraints of being a victim and fully inhabits the mode of a survivor”.⁷² Via her body, Susie achieves the final fulfilment of survivorship. She is not taken advantage of as a vehicle for others' pleasure, pain, or imagination. In other words, the text constructs the body swapping as resulting from the affinity between the two young women.

Rather than offering indignant, vengeful personas, *The Lovely Bones* presents a key figure in the victim's supporter who boasts of subversiveness, talent, ambivalent sexual inclinations, and above all, a willingness to bring her talent into full play to witness and record women's sufferings. Her subversiveness is embodied in the way she likes to draw nude women and read feminist texts at a young age: “[t]hey were all early feminist texts, and she held them with their spines resting against her stomach so that no one could see what they were.”⁷³ As a young child, Ruth nurses a longing or desire for intimacy with females. Such longing or desire is not really sexual, but something more subtle and inexplicable, an inherent bond between women and the sense of intimacy and security with other women's bodies:

I could see back to an afternoon when Ruth watched her teenage cousin undress to take a bath while Ruth sat on the bathroom rug, locked in the bathroom so her cousin could babysit her as she'd been told. Ruth had longed to touch her cousin's skin and hair, longed to be held. I wondered if this longing in a three-year-old had sparked what came at eight. That fuzzy feeling of difference, that her crushes on female teachers or her

⁷¹ Ibid., 251.

⁷² Laura-Marie, Von Czarnowsky, "The Postmortal Rape Survivor and the Paradox of Female Agency Across Different Media: Alice Sebold's Novel *The Lovely Bones* and its 2009 Film Adaptation, " *Gender Forum*, no. 41 (2013):1, <http://ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1400449952?accountid=8424>.

⁷³ Sebold, *The Lovely Bones*, 39.

cousin were more real than the other girl's crushes. Hers contained a desire beyond sweetness and attention, it fed a longing, beginning to flower green and yellow into a crocus-like lust, the soft petals opening into her awkward adolescence. It was not so much, she would write in her journal, that she wanted to have sex with women, but that she wanted to disappear inside of them forever. To hide.⁷⁴

Ruth's longing or desire, deriving from a physical attraction and appreciation of the female body, does not necessarily imply female homosexuality. To be sure, in the relationship between Ray and Ruth, the ambivalence of Ruth's sexuality is evident. In the early phases of their kissing experiments, Ruth fits into a lesbian category by not feeling anything, but later, on the anniversary of Susie's death, after she sees Ray's muscles when he is changing clothes, in the process of their kissing, she tells Ray, "I think I feel something."⁷⁵ Ruth is far from a spokesperson or an avenger for the female victims. She is not powerful enough to stop crime or bring justice to the victims. She can only feel and thus record, bear witness to, misogyny and criminality against women: "Ruth would get an image and it would burn into her memory. Sometimes they were only bright flashes—a fall down the stairs, a scream, a shove, the tightening of hands around a neck—and at other times it was as if an entire scenario spun out in her head and in just the amount of time that it took the girl or the woman to die."⁷⁶ What Ruth establishes is a visceral connection with the other female victims.

The text underscores that it is this connection with and via Ruth that facilitates the completion of Susie's sexuality and sexual agency. The body swapping and the ensuing incidents are not accomplished by Susie's yearning *ex parte* for adulthood and sexual maturation. On her way out of Earth, Susie touches Ruth to whom she is ever close. Ruth is "chosen" as Susie's ally accidentally at first because she "was standing in the path."⁷⁷ But prior to this chance encounter on her way to Heaven,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 117-118.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 251.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 36.

Susie admires Ruth not because she is “subversive” for drawing nude women, but because she is “more talented” than her teachers. Once Ruth starts walking on the cornfield where the crime has taken place, they “met each morning in those first few months.” A sense of connection is created between the two: “I grew to love Ruth on those mornings, feeling that in some way we could never explain on our opposite sides of the Inbetween, we were born to keep each other company. Odd girls who had found each other in the strangest way—in the shiver she had felt when I passed.”⁷⁸

Their connection is not unidirectional, but mutually beneficial. Ruth’s journal at first serves as a conduit for her to be connected with Susie: “She [Ruth] told her journal about me passing by her in the parking lot, about how on that night I had touched her—literally, she felt, reached out. What I had looked like then. How she dreamed about me...When she was imagining me, she felt better, less alone, more connected to something out there.”⁷⁹ This deep bond between them provides Ruth company and mitigates her sense of isolation. What is more, Ruth’s charitable deed is not just for Susie, but for a collective group of female victims. Later, Ruth’s intuitive connection shifts to become a channel for a larger group of female victims of crimes. Ruth records the places where the women have been killed.

However, when Ruth writes down the places where women are killed or raped in her journal, she has no intention of putting that information to public use. The individual prayers she writes in her journal also are a private way of mourning the death of the victims, not part of a public protest. In contrast to Ruth’s quiet and personal way of advocating for the violated women, Susie’s request that Ray read Ruth’s journals reveals her desire to share women’s stories with men, to obtain support and alliance from men by welcoming men as allies. Only in this way can the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 117.

victims' voices and their supporter's recordings not remain completely singular and individual. Even in a feminist utopia, patriarchal culture demands at some point that even men must hear and understand women's stories.

The narrative consciousness of female victims and, more broadly, women as a collective group can be detected in the text. Susie in heaven does not stop at her personal anguish and trauma but meets other victims and shares their stories. The emphasis on Susie's affinity for Ruth communicates her appreciation and embrace of subversive, talented and creative women and their ability to take full advantage of their talent and creativity. Writing, or recording, or the effort to represent, is considered as an essential way of comforting the psychically wounded.

Opting out of the law

So far we have seen how disparate female characters in rape narratives are constructed as angry and unapologetic avengers or pious expiators (*Goodnight Rose*) or as involved but transcendent watchers from heaven or as special selfless supporters who connect with the victims across time and space (*The Lovely Bones*). Both narratives raise questions about the relations between women's security and agency and the law.

The various means of achieving female agency constructed in the texts reflect two different cultural contexts in terms of the status and role of the law in women's lives. In *Goodnight Rose*, the absence of the main character's involvement with the police signifies an outright distrust of the legal system. *The Lovely Bones* presents a partially more positive image of the law, yet its failure to bring justice constrains the people who are alive. Both novels offer an implicit critique of the law, which is inadequate, rigid and no comfort or help to the family.

As *Lucky* shows and as the novels by Sebold and Chi confirm, women's distrust of the legal system with respect to rape is not unidirectional. The law fails to protect women's security. For instance, in *Lucky*, when the narrator encounters her rapist on the street six months after the incident, the rapist laughs at her and even teases a policeman. As opposed to the narrator's fear and devastation, the rapist's reaction suggests the law's inability to protect her and other potential victims.

The law also plays a complicit role in imposing victimisation on women. The legal system and its operators often are sceptical towards the victim. The narrator in *Lucky* realised in hindsight that the detective Lorenz did not believe her case was completely "factual." "For Lorenz, virgins were not a part of his world. He was sceptical of many things I said. Later when the serology reports proved that what I had said was not a lie, that I had been a virgin, and that I was telling the truth, he could not respect me enough."⁸⁰ It is not too difficult to hypothesise that if her sexual history was relevant, the narrator would need to endure yet more scepticism and pressure in the process of seeking justice. More than mistrust, the US and Chinese legal systems work in a way that is more favourable to the rapist and more detrimental to the victim, however ethically flawed that might be. Throughout the whole legal process in *Lucky*, the rapist takes advantage of the legal system, including having the Rape Crisis Centre representative removed during the hearing, playing eye games at the police line-up and requiring a nonjury trial with a closed courtroom. In addition to the condemning tone of the defence lawyer, the victim has to bear the questioning of the jurors.

The narrator not only plays an essential role in securing her rapist's arrest and conviction due to the inefficiency of the police, but also has to bow down to this biased legal system by accepting the blame publicly in order to be judged innocent,

⁸⁰ Sebold, *Lucky*, 153.

which means to conform to the very dominant patriarchal language and attitudes towards rape victims temporarily to acquire justice:

What it was left up to me to figure out was that if you do that and nothing else, you lose. So I told them I was stupid, that I shouldn't have walked through the park. I said I intended to do something to warn girls at the university about the park. And I was so good, so willing to accept blame, that I hoped to be judged innocent by them.

.....
While still in court I thanked the jury. I drew on my resources: performing, placating, making my family smile. As I left that courtroom, I felt I had put on the best show of my life.⁸¹

As discussed earlier, *The Lovely Bones* constructs a healing feminist community that transcends heaven and earth, time and space. This alternative way of achieving justice for the victim opaquely suggests disapproval of the ineffectual legal system. Yet the tension between the irrational instinct represented by Susie's father Jack and the insufficient and more rational force—the police— manifests itself in the text. Jack strives to find out the murderer of his daughter whereas the representative of the police Detective Fenerman feeds him with disappointing news. The bravery and mettle embedded in the image of a tenacious victim in *Lucky* becomes in the novel transferred to the depiction of Susie's sister Lindsey's breaking into George Harvey's house once convinced by her father that George Harvey is the culprit. "[F]or a week Lindsey cased my killer's house. She was doing exactly what he did to everyone."⁸² By breaking into George Harvey's house, an illegal act, Lindsey manages to get hold of an important lead for the police to arrest him. If Detective Fenerman represents the law or justice, then Lindsey's behaviour can be read as ridiculing the incompetence and the failure of the law. According to the narrator, the fact that Fenerman cannot sustain his affair with Susie's mother confirms the collapse of such illusion: "He had tried to solve my murder and he had failed. He had tried to love my mother and he had failed."⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., 152.

⁸² Sebold, *The Lovely Bones*, 174.

⁸³ Ibid., 219.

Compared with Sebold's texts, Chi's female characters represent an even more radical view of women's relations with the law. *Morning Bell* features a fair amount of engagement with the legal system. Liu Tianyuan never engages with the law directly. The act of mailing the physical copy of the diary to Wang Xilin—the pro-feminist man—signifies a gesture of seeking support from men. Wang Xilin can be seen as Liu Tianyuan's proxy, condemning the atrocity of the rapists. From one perspective, the narrative reinforces a feminist ideal that men can work with women and act as their supporters. The detailed drama-like depiction of Wang Xilin and Dr Liu Shengqiu overcoming a series of obstacles delineates a less bleak scene than in *Goodnight Rose*. In the battle between the evildoers and the justice messenger, the law is violated and manipulated, but justice finally prevails. However, from a different perspective Wang Xilin's engagement with the legal system in the text implicitly reinforces the polar positions that men and women occupy in patriarchy: women are disempowered and devoid of voice and participation; men benefit from and are more adequately suited to deal with a male-dominated legal system.

Pineapple, the other rape victim in the novel, not only distrusts the law, but also challenges the legal system as a petty criminal. She can be read as an idiosyncratic character who challenges, albeit criminally, the social order of the patriarchal system. Her endeavours for revenge are not directed at those who create her misery, for example her rapist. In her letter to her lover Song Jiawen, she presents a list of her victims: a corrupt loan department bank manager, a rich man who frequents places of entertainment and infects her friend with an STD, and a dishonest chicken vendor. She denies her deeds are motivated by a sense of justice. Rather, she delights in doing them:

I had a friend who was infected with an STD after sleeping with him. I vowed to avenge her. The other night when he entered into the entertainment club at around 10, carrying his mobile phone, I quickly stole his money from his wallet. He didn't feel it. While he was stamping his feet over his empty wallet and unable to have fun without money, I was

sipping the nice wine I bought by using his money. It made me happy to watch him leave the club disappointed. How exciting! ...Wasn't it the funniest thing in the world? I have lost count of the number of such things I have done. I'm telling you this not to show off that I'm a person of justice. I just feel I have fun doing it.

(我有一个姐们，被他给睡出了毛病，我发誓要为她报仇。那天他手提大哥大，晚上十点多钟一进娱乐园，我就下快手偷了他的包，他浑然不觉。待他发现囊空如洗、无钱取乐而懊悔不已时，我正用他的钱买了瓶名酒悄悄饮着。看着他狼狈不堪离开娱乐园的表情，真让我快活极了，真够刺激！……你说这不是天底下最有趣的事吗？这样的事我干的数不胜数，我这样说并不是炫耀自己是个行侠仗义的人，我只是觉得快活。) ⁸⁴

With the “pleasure” she professes to derive from stealing from the corrupt, degrading and dishonest, Pineapple does not repent her misdeeds, in contrast with the sense of shame she feels in her rendition of her sexual assault. Whereas she disassociates herself from rebelling against a corrupt and morally degrading society, her selection of victims exhibits her defiance against the corrupt and unjust system.

In *Goodnight Rose*, meting out punishment to criminals has completely shifted to the personal domain outside the law. Female avengers are portrayed as smart murderers who evade suspicion and punishment by the legal system. Zhao Xiao'e uses a rational process, similar to that displayed by the detective heroes in classic stories by Conan Doyle and Poe, to punish her mother's rapist, but the way she avenges her mother displays her complete distrust of the supposedly “rational form” of punishment—the law.

Nonetheless, Zhao Xiao'e's choice not to spare the rapist's life demonstrates her resolution to vent hatred and condemnation at the rapist, thus creating a radical feminist politics and showing complete defiance of judicial order. Only by annihilating the rapist can she completely separate her agentive self from her shameful history which she shares with her mother. Her violent actions outside the law also assert her agency. Women's double bind.

The silencing of rape by a cold and indifferent patriarchal culture in *Goodnight*

⁸⁴ Chi, *Morning Bell*, 297.

Rose irrevocably determines that the revenge—Zhao Xiao’e’s planning and execution of the murder of her biological father, takes a “quiet” and “cunning” form too. This silencing mechanism has become internalised in the mind of the victim. When it comes to rape or other violation against women, the text reveals how the victims are disinclined to go to the police and reluctant to report rape. Her friend Huang Weina tries to persuade her to file a complaint to the police about her landlord’s sexual harassment against her, but Zhao Xiao’e does not agree because as a nondescript woman, she does not appear attractive to men. She fears that “the police investigation will draw attention to my life and assault charge, and if it is publicised as a rape case, I will be like a filthy rag, even less appealing to men.” (如果警方来调查，万一事情张扬出去，猥亵被渲染成强奸，我就成了一团糟烂的抹布，更没人搭理了。)⁸⁵ After resisting his advances vigorously, she vacates her abode immediately. The manner in which Zhao Xiao’e deals with such direct harassment epitomises a common approach among ordinary Chinese women.

Without publicizing it, this incident becomes silenced and a secret for both the victim and patriarchal society. That is why it does not cast a shadow in her life and affect her psychologically. The publicity over her mother’s rape seems to be the source of her attendant victimisation. As long as she can leave that behind in her hometown, she can be rid of it: “I never mention my background since I left Keshan for college in the city. My brother enjoins me not to mention it to my future boyfriends, saying that all men would feel offended. It is as if a daughter of a rapist automatically loses her virginity. (我的身世，自我离开克山上大学起，没跟任何人讲过。哥哥嘱咐我找男友的时候，千万不能把这事告诉对方，说男人都会忌讳。仿佛一

⁸⁵ Chi, *Goodnight Rose*, 3.

个强奸犯的女儿就天生失去了贞洁。) ⁸⁶

If the Chinese law fails to protect women's security, it seems that violating the law becomes the only available means for Chinese women to achieve agency. A successful vigilante who circumvents lawful punishment, Zhao Xiao'e epitomises an ideal of implementing outright and enraged feminist agency in the form of cunning and resolute revenge.

This strong political gesture seems to be inevitably in conflict with the constraints of institutional interpretation. Jelena's comments that encourage the reader to ponder the severity of Mu's punishment when the right of punishment passes over to the individual victim of the crime. In this sense, Jelena's point of view challenges the justification of Zhao Xiao'e's criminality and provides a different point of reference that transcends the singularity of the first-person victim perspective and adds another level of narrative complexity to the text. It is unjust for rapists to avoid punishment for their crimes, but it is problematic as to whether they deserve the death penalty. Nonetheless, Jelena's point of view has its own ambiguous moral implications. After all, Jelena herself resorts to ultimate vengeance against her rapist's accomplice.

The way the justice is done in *Goodnight Rose* undoubtedly challenges the authority of the law and the complicity of patriarchal culture. It also reinforces the entrenched Chinese scepticism towards the legal system - the law cannot be trusted. A radical feminist politics does not necessarily reshape or improve law founded on the patriarchal order.

Even if they can successfully pursue justice via the law or by violating the law without being suspected and punished by it, those who employ radical means of agency still face moral agony. However, the moral agony Zhao Xiao'e feels about the

⁸⁶ Ibid., 60.

death of her biological father encourages the reader to contemplate whether her vengeance vaults her into another predicament. The inevitable irony suggests that justice can harm the victim all over again.

Her moral agony epitomises the tension between feminist rage and the aspiration of ethical justification. Moreover, Zhao Xiao'e's materialistic inclination almost reduces her to a stereotypic woman who settles for economic gains without pursuing spiritual or moral elevation. It remains unclear in the narrative whether her vengeful act erases or compounds the conflicts and hostility between men and women, between the criminal and the victim. In this sense, this text problematises the facile opposition between victimization and agency.

Conclusion: the efficacy of the recollection and literary representation of rape

In *Goodnight Rose*, at the end of the narrative, Zhao Xiao'e suffers a mental breakdown and is hospitalised. After being discharged from the hospital, her doctor suggests that writing her own story would be therapeutic for her to regain normalcy in her life. It is unclear whether the sudden death of her boyfriend or her crime leads to her insanity. The text shows it is the former which more directly leads to it. Living alone in the house Jelena bequeaths her, Zhao Xiao'e has to rely on her own resources to achieve full recuperation.

The text plays somewhat with the reader's sustained attention, hinting that its contents might be the recollection of what happened, as the narrator tells us: "If my recollection does not turn out to be disorderly and confusing, according to my doctor, I will regain my mental normalcy." (如果我的回忆没有颠三倒四, 按医生的说法,

我的精神将恢复正常了。)⁸⁷ On the face of it, this text, together with *Morning Bell*, *Lucky* and *The Lovely Bones*, feature writing acts as different kinds of reflections and exposition. They are intended as a means of self-recovery or witness of women's victimhood.

Comparing the role of the writing act as merely recollection, the efforts of the authors to represent rape in their work, when read through a feminist lens, offer rich insights into our understanding of rape.

In this chapter I have brought out the feminist critique embedded in the texts, including the way in which rape affects men and women pervasively, and that patriarchal culture perpetrates violence, thus engendering various levels and forms of victimisation. Communities of trauma are presented in both Chi and Sebold's texts. In terms of victimisation, both cultures tend to deny the existence of rape. In respect to victim blaming, Chi's text shows that Chinese social and cultural attitudes are characterised by questioning women's moral integrity, while Sebold's texts show the dominant attitude is that women cannot be raped because they have the power to resist.

In terms of the feminist strategies the authors explore to address victimisation, I focus on two major aspects: the construction of a female-first person narrative point of view, and the gaining of feminist agency through the construction of feminist revenge and solidarity. I argue that the female first-person narrative points of views in Chi and Sebold's texts are effective in both revealing the pervasive violence and victimisation both from a subjective personal angle and from a wide social and cultural perspective. Both *Goodnight Rose* and *The Lovely Bones* construct feminist solidarity. The former features a resolute sleuth and avenger to execute the feminist

⁸⁷ Ibid., 155.

mission; when dealing with the ethical consequences, she requires support from the supporter figure though it is ambiguous if their solidarity is established due to the avenger's ambivalent attitudes towards religion and its redemptive function. The feminist solidarity in the latter is mainly through the creation of heaven—a healing feminist community, with an omniscient first-person posthumous narrative voice enhancing the sense of survivorship. The agency is achieved via the resumption of interrupted sexual agency and growth.

Last but not least, I argue that the way the characters achieve agency and seek justice by opting out of the law implies a paradox, namely that the logic and working mechanisms of patriarchal culture act complicitly with the law to determine the strategies women adopt to achieve agency. The patriarchal culture, including the legal and judiciary system, fails to protect women's security; women have to mobilise their agency to protect or to seek revenge, whether the legal system is involved or ruled out. Feminist communities and solidarity seem to be powerful mechanisms which can counter the biases and prejudices, the inefficiency and rigidity. The tension between feminist politics and the law dominates women's lives and determines the opposition between victimization and agency. The law's regulative force and the ethical consequences of challenging the law can also potentially blur the boundary between the victim and the criminal.

In this chapter, the cross-textual and cross-cultural discussion of the representation of rape in Chi and Sebold's texts showcases how the two authors strive to break away from the parameters set out by the patriarchal cultural ethos in which they are situated. This is especially true with regard to the representation of the clashes between the rape survivors and the treatment they receive from society. Meanwhile, paradoxically, the means by which women seek agency exemplify the tension between the law, social attitudes towards rape and the feminist interpretation

of sexual violence. On the macro-level, the fact that Chi and Sebold's portrayal of pervasive sexual violence mirrors the dire circumstances facing women across cultures. The construction of supportive and protective mini-communities among women in the texts demonstrates how feminist solidarity has perpetuated itself as an effective textual and thematic strategy to resist sexual violence and the ensuing trauma imposed on women, despite the contrasting social and cultural backgrounds the two writers write against. This includes the role of the law as well as the heterogeneous nature of feminist thought.

On the micro-level, with respect to victimization, their texts showcase nuanced differences between Anglo-American and Chinese cultural attitudes towards victims of sexual violence. Chi's texts foreground attacks on the victim's moral integrity and ongoing stigmatization, whilst Sebold foregrounds stereotypical thinking and socially disadvantaging prejudices, for example, the belief that women cannot be raped because they have enough power to resist sexual violence. Intriguingly, Chi's representation of the internalised stigmatisation of women in *Goodnight Rose* expose how the malignity and backwardness of traditional Chinese beliefs play a complicit role in victimising women.

When constructing feminist solidarity, both Chi and Sebold construct female storytelling collectives. In the case of *Goodnight Rose*, the feminist avenger Zhao Xiao'e tracks down and punishes her mother's rapist by using a rational process, similar to that used by classic detective heroes, but the way she avenges her mother displays her complete distrust of the supposedly "rational form" of punishment—the law. In Sebold's texts, however, the tension between the individual and the law has softened, or at least been displaced. In *The Lovely Bones*, an unusual literary space, heaven, functions as a transcendental healing feminist community for treating and relieving the trauma of rape victims. The posthumous first-person narrative voice of

the rape and murder victim achieves a transformation from victimhood to agency. What is additionally unique about Chi's *Goodnight Rose* is the way it explores the potential to address the tension between feminist revenge and its ethical consequences through religious ethics.

Chapter Two: A Yi and Ian McEwan's murder narratives compared

This chapter discusses A Yi's novel *A Perfect Crime*¹ (下面, 我该干些什么) and his short story "An Accidental Killing" (意外杀人事件)² in comparison with Ian McEwan's novel *Amsterdam* (1998). A Yi's short story can be read as a mini-version of *A Perfect Crime*, but it is better understood as a short narrative which complements the novel. In this chapter, I examine the issue of the motives of the murderers: "Why did the perpetrators do it?". People's motives and intentions are not necessarily straightforward or transparent and this is all the more the case with motives for murder. Questions about why people murder relate not only to understanding violence but also raise ethical concerns about justice, equality and social cohesion.

This chapter first reviews the legal and crime literature contexts in China and the UK/USA, then discusses questions of motives for murder which, as mentioned above, are central to A Yi and McEwan's work. Finally, I compare how these psychological and ethical aspects of crime writing are interrelated in the narratives. These texts offer different murder motives and different moral dilemmas (choices) as constructed in narratives with different storytelling techniques.

Murder: legal, social and literary contexts in China and the UK and US

In my discussion of the texts, I use the term "murder" to refer to various kinds of killings as distinguished in Chinese, US, and British law. In strict legal terms, the killer in *A Perfect Crime* is a murderer and the two major characters in *Amsterdam* commit

¹ It was first published in 2012; the English version came out in 2015.

² A short story in his collection of short stories *The Bird Saw Me*, (鸟, 看见我了) published in 2011, Baihuazhou Art and Literature Publishing House(百花洲文艺出版社), 1-53.

murder, while the killer in “An Accidental Killing” commits involuntary manslaughter. Legally speaking, murder and manslaughter constitute two types of unlawful homicide. Murder is the most serious type of homicide, requiring an intention to kill or cause grievous bodily harm. Manslaughter includes cases of homicide where the intent to murder is lacking.³ In the Anglo-American context, prior to the surfacing of the concept of crime in the 16th century, homicide was often viewed as an act of honourable defence or vengeance due to the prevalence of feuding and vendettas. In other words, homicide evolved from a private matter, revenge or reconciliation, into a public crime, a breach of public order.⁴ The conceptualisation and criminalisation of general homicide have changed dramatically. Compared with manslaughter, murder features more prominently in Anglo-American culture, from scripted broadsheet confessions of the murderer on the scaffold in the 18th and early 19th centuries and the compendium of sensational trials in the Ordinary of Newgate’s accounts to contemporary television crime shows and shows featuring serial killers.⁵

However, the legal and social history of homicide aside, when studying murder, literary scholars do not strictly follow the legal terms. The term “murder” serves as a very broad term to designate all kinds of killing. Compared to “homicide”, murder is the more commonly used term among literary authors, readers and critics to describe these sorts of crime narratives. Murder is also the most common crime committed in crime narratives.

The rise of elaborate murder narratives is a post-medieval phenomenon, and murder has become one of the favourite literary themes for modern writers. The eighteenth-century oral genre of the execution sermon was succeeded by secular, printed, and sensational accounts of criminal biographies and murder trials.⁶ By the beginning of the

³ Jonathan Herring, *Criminal Law* (Basingstoke England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 141.

⁴ Petrus Spierenburg, *A History of Murder: Personal Violence in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 223.

⁵ Sara L. Knox, *Murder: A Tale of Modern American Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 16.

⁶ Joel Black, “Murder: The State of Art,” *American Literary History* 12, no.4 (2000), 781.

nineteenth-century, murder-related materials had become so popular that entire newspapers and magazines were dedicated to them.⁷ Fictional murder prose narratives emerged in the eighteenth century, although murder had been a staple of stage plots since ancient Greek times.⁸ By the mid-nineteenth century, literary and popular genres such as gothic thrillers and mystery narratives such as Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" established murder as the quintessential crime. This scenario continues to the present day. Along with the popularity of genre fiction, real life murder cases never cease to spur public interest.⁹

In the Chinese literary tradition, classical texts contain ample representations of murder.¹⁰ From the time of the Sung dynasty (A.D. 960-1279), and probably much earlier, the common people delighted in listening to the tales of storytellers who performed in bazaars or on the streets of cities and towns. One of the popular detective heroes of these storytellers was Judge Di, a Tang dynasty (618-907) local magistrate.¹¹ Another famed hero of the traditional Chinese detective novel is Magistrate Bao (999-1072), a Song dynasty figure, but who appeared in Shi Yukun's (石玉昆) oral narrative in the Qing dynasty (1644-1912).¹² One of the well-studied classical texts, *Outlaws of the Marsh* (水浒传), written in the fourteenth century, is rife with murders, both premediated and passion killings. By the 1890s, Western translations of detective stories became popular in China. In the 1920s, translations of Sherlock Holmes stories became especially popular,

⁷ Michelle Ann Abate, *Bloody Murder: The Homicide Tradition in Children's Literature* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press 2013), 2.

⁸ Such as Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* (1820), and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826).

⁹ For example, the Netflix documentary "Making a Murderer" (2015) featuring Steven Avery's murder case trials spurred large amount of public attention. A petition was staged and forwarded to the White House to free him. <https://www.change.org/p/president-of-the-united-states-free-steven-avery>.

¹⁰ John L. Bishop, "Some Limitations of Chinese Fiction", *Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, (1956): 239.

¹¹ See Donald Lach's introduction in Robert Van Gulik's *The Chinese Bell Murders*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 5-12.

¹² Susan Blader. *Tales of Magistrate Bao and His Valiant Lieutenants: Selections from Sanxia wuyi* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998), 2-8.

and Chinese writers produced many local imitations of Conan Doyle's work. Cheng Xiaoqing (程小青) (1893-1976) was an iconic writer in the 1920s, who was not only a translator of Western detective stories, but also produced the Eastern Sherlock Holmes, Huo Sang, based on the framework of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes cases. Modern Chinese fiction, for example, stories by Lu Xun (鲁迅) or Shen Congwen (沈从文), teem with depictions of murder.¹³ At present, detective fiction also enjoys popularity among Chinese readers and a wide range of works has been translated into English. A Yi is one author whose work has attracted increasing international attention.

Motives for murder, morality, and social order: central issues in A Yi and McEwan's murder narratives

Most previous scholarship on crime writing has been dedicated to the study of popular genres featuring murder: sensational crime stories, detective fiction, crime fiction, murder mystery, and the like.¹⁴ The focus of such studies is on the detection of the murderer. Within this narrative framework, the central issues are the rational process involved in the discovery of the perpetrator by the detective or investigator, or a private individual acting in that role, and the subsequent arrest, killing, or disappearance of the killer.

However, I argue that when considering crime narratives such as those by A Yi and Ian McEwan we must pay closer attention to the motives for the murder. The depiction of the motive is closely related to the depiction of the inner life and psyche of the murderer. In this context the genre most associated with the psychic mind is the psychothriller. It is

¹³ Andrew F. Jones, "The Violence of the Text: Reading Yu Hua and Shi Zhicun," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 2, no.3 (1994): 570.

¹⁴ Patricia D. Maida and Nicholas B. Spornick, *Murder She wrote: A Study of Agatha Christie's Detective Fiction* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1982); John Kennedy Melling, *Murder Done to Death: Parody and Pastiche in Detective Fiction* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996); Elena Past, *Methods of Murder: Beccarian Introspection and Lombrosian Vivisection in Italian Crime Fiction* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

normally defined as focussing on the individual criminal psyche and tends to be associated with 'noir,' given its pessimistic overtones such as personal and societal failure, urban paranoia, and the individual's disconnection from society and cynicism.¹⁵ However, Stephen Knight's definition of the psychothriller is broader and more applicable to my analysis. In his review of a series of leading writers in this genre, he highlights that over time, the detective figure falls out of favour, replaced by this genre which explores the mind of both criminal and victim, the psychotic personality, the criminality of ordinary people and its impact on ordinary people, and rejects the simplistic notion that murderers are essentially evil.¹⁶

A Yi and McEwan's texts are by no means psychothrillers but they do touch on the issues Knight summarises. It is impossible to ignore psychoanalysis when it comes to the motives for murder. Also, A Yi and McEwan's work address the most pressing social issues in their times, exemplifying how crime develops and its impact on ordinary people. Their texts do not only reject the notion that murderers are essentially evil but explore further the boundaries between criminal and victim, right and wrong by engaging with wider and broader social and cultural contexts.

Given the complexity of human actions, a single motive has never been easy to isolate. Over time, the image of the murderer has evolved from a common sinner, to a moral alien, and later to a pathological deviant and socially alienated figure.¹⁷ Previous scholarship has only provided generalised and scattered analysis as to the motives for murder in particular historical periods. For example, Stephen Kern argues that in the 19th century, the motives for murder were interpreted by a strong linear determinism, and shows how

¹⁵ Philip Simpson, "Noir and the Psychothriller" in *A Companion to Crime Fiction* edited by Charles J Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 188-193.

¹⁶ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 148-153.

¹⁷ Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: the Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 1-6.

poverty and revenge were the normal motives for the characters in the literary texts.¹⁸ A Yi and McEwan's texts, as I shall argue, adopt a different context for motives for murder, defying strict determinism and offering a complex, sometimes contradictory picture of human feelings, morality and social order. Rather than deviant or isolated individuals, the murderers in their narratives are more symptomatic of society in general.

Motives are related to aesthetics. The studies of the aesthetics of murder, i.e., the emphasis on the intellectualism and design of brilliant crime, have a strong presence in academia. The aesthetics approach probably started in the early nineteenth century with Thomas De Quincey, whose essays on murder are believed to aestheticise violence, transform it into liberating and intellectual entertainment and then present it in a variety of fictive, impassioned, and satiric guises, where it was rapidly consumed by a reading public interested in palatable versions of murder that disturbed in order to excite and seduce.¹⁹ According to Joel Black, murder, fictional and otherwise, very often contains an aesthetic component: "instances of violence are regularly presented to us artistically, and routinely experienced by us aesthetically. The very activity by which we represent or 'picture' violence to ourselves is an aesthetic operation whereby we habitually transform brutal actions into art."²⁰ Black shares the stance of De Quincey, who premises his theory of "aesthetic judgement liberated from moral contingencies" not only on depictions of murder, but on murder itself as an artistic act which is both amoral and aesthetically accessible.²¹

I concur that murder is, or at least can be, both amoral and aesthetically accessible.

¹⁸ Stephen Kern, *Cultural History of Causality: Science, Murder Novels, and Systems of Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4-5.

¹⁹ See Robert Morrison's introduction to Thomas De Quincey's *On Murder* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xxiv.

²⁰ Joel Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study of Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 5.

²¹ David McInnis, "All Beauty Must Die: The Aesthetics of Murder, from Thomas De Quincey to Nick Cave", *Traffic* no.8 (2006):119.

But murder also entails an undeniable moral dimension as well. When studying murder's artistic role, how the act itself or its representation can "excite" and "seduce" the reader, murder as violence already entails a moral connotation. The excitement and seduction involved in murder can be a good thing for the reader or can conceal darker forces. In other words, to study murder in a completely disinterested mode is not possible. In A Yi and McEwan's work, the motive of the murder has an intimate relationship with morality.

As for murder and social order, in the twenty-first century, the killing of one individual by another is considered the most serious crime across all cultures. Whether the homicide occurs intentionally or accidentally, it is routinely characterised as the worst transgression that can be committed against an individual and, by extension, against society.²² I argue that murder raises essential questions as to how we read the shared responsibilities of individuals and society for social cohesion as well as disorder. For example, murder has assumed a symptomatic function since Freud's psychoanalytic exploration of Oedipus's murder of his father. The act of "killing the father" has signified structurally and allegorically killing the state, the government, the existing social order, history, or established authority.²³ In this sense, narratives which explore the killer's psychological or moral state can also question the existing social order by probing the oppressive ideologies embedded in the "way things are."

A Yi and Ian McEwan's murder texts focus on the killers' minds and deeds rather than on typical detective procedural or mystery plots. In each text, the identity of the murderer or the killer is already known or strongly hinted at. Unlike most murder narratives, the elements of mystery and suspense are not central concerns in these texts.

²² Michelle Ann Abate, *Bloody Murder: The Homicide Tradition in Children's Literature*, 12.

²³ Ellen Nerenberg, *Murder Made in Italy: Homicide, Media, and Contemporary Italian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 17.

The killers' minds and behaviours are represented through strong character-based narratives. The analysis in this chapter therefore will revolve around the depiction of the major characters' inner thoughts, their interaction with other characters and their perception and judgment of other characters as represented through narrative diegesis and internal monologues. In both texts, the murderers are constructed as narcissistic and self-centred, with A Yi's text using a first-person narrative and McEwan's a third-person omniscient one.

Although the Chinese and British texts both feature premediated murder, the question "why they did it" is depicted differently. In *A Perfect Crime*, the disaffected and socially alienated nineteen-year-old protagonist kills his classmate for no apparent reason. Murder, the ultimate form of transgression, is committed to help him find meaning in life. Murder becomes his instrument, a means to an end to solve his existential crisis. In *Amsterdam* an assisted suicide pact transforms into mutual homicide. If murder in *A Perfect Crime* is motivated by the killer's extreme amorality, in *Amsterdam* it is a result of extreme perception of morality. The two principal characters' opposing moral positions and their unflinching stance towards their own moral standards produce an irreversible antagonism between the two friends and bring about their deaths.

The social positions of the characters in these texts affect the murders in many respects. In *Amsterdam*, the two major characters believe that they have the power and responsibility to shape society and to create brilliant art. They are undoubtedly shaped by society but they are not society's victims, as in A Yi's work. They morally justify their murderous motives. Killing is the right thing to do both for the society and for their friends personally when they find them morally repugnant.

Because my chosen texts for this chapter are not likely to be familiar to all readers, I will now summarise the plots for *A Perfect Crime* and "An Accidental Killing" by A Yi and *Amsterdam* by Ian McEwan.

In A Yi's *A Perfect Crime*, the nineteen-year-old high school student carefully plans to murder his classmate Kong Jie (孔洁) for no apparent reason. In the wake of his perfectly executed crime, he embarks on a journey of escape, playing hide-and-seek with the police, turning himself in to the police, being arrested and standing trial. The first-person narrator is also the protagonist. He later avows his existential crisis to the court: to provoke the police to pursue him so he can achieve his goal— psychological or spiritual relief (充实).

In A Yi's "An Accidental Killing," each section of the story is headed by the individual victims' names and the details of how they are involved in the so-called "October 8th incident". The killer Li Jixi (李继锡), whose story comes last in the text, is a terminator and destroyer who puts an end to each victim's personal struggles. Li Jixi, the killer who perpetrates all this mayhem in the town of Red Crow, is a migrant worker who takes the train home, falls out of the train accidentally and loses his money. He then kills six local people who come into his way when he runs amok with a fruit knife after being confronted by the owner of a convenience store for not paying his bill.

The novel *Amsterdam* begins with the funeral of artist Molly Lane. Guests at the funeral include Clive Linley, an eminent composer, Vernon Halliday, a newspaper editor, Julian Garmony, the British foreign secretary. They were each at some time Molly's lover, and each regards her husband George with contempt. Clive and Vernon make a pact to help the other to die if he goes insane or becomes terribly ill. Clive goes through artist's block when completing his millennium symphony commissioned by the cabinet. He goes on a trip to the Lake District to seek inspiration. In the Lake District, Clive faces a difficult moral decision himself. Instead of intervening in a dangerous situation which is later confirmed by the authorities as a sexual assault, he chooses to write down the crucial notes for his symphony that arise suddenly. Vernon's newspaper's circulation is diminishing. He resolves to publish photographs of Julian as a transvestite and Clive

argues furiously about the moral responsibility of the act. Vernon condemns Clive for failing to fulfil his moral duty by not becoming involved in the sexual assault. The two become mortal enemies. They go to Amsterdam and poison each other to death.

Impossibility of pure murder in A Yi's *A Perfect Crime*

Unusual motive, exceptional crime, shrewd killer

In *A Perfect Crime*, the killer/protagonist's motive is devoid of typical pathological traits and omits the universal motives for murder found in many crime plots, such as greed, lust, or passion. He intentionally seeks a fugitive life experience to counter his existential crisis. The English translation of the novel's title is slightly misleading in that the English phrase "perfect crime" suggests that the crime is successfully executed and the criminal evades trial and punishment by the law. Literally translated, the novel's original Chinese title "下面, 我该干些什么," is "Now, What Should I Do Next?" The indeterminacy yet purposefulness embedded in the title heralds its existential connotation.

An existential crisis is not the typical motive for violent crime in literary and media representations in contemporary China. One can see the conscious effort to appropriate the very concepts that the school of existentialism in philosophy explores, such as "meaning" and "time". In his speech at court the protagonist explains that he has come to the realisation that life is meaningless:

We're no better than animals... We're completely controlled by our primal sexual urges. We do it all, but feel ashamed. We invent meaning just like we invent underpants. But once we see through these fake meanings, it all slips away until the world no longer makes sense.²⁴

On another occasion, the narrator/protagonist says that he can relate to his neighbour Mr He's loneliness by saying that "[i]t wasn't death that scared him, rather the way time

²⁴ A Yi, *A Perfect Crime*, trans. Anna Holmwood (London: Oneworld, 2015), 207.

seemed to stretch out endlessly.”²⁵ In particular, the kind of motive portrayed in this text can be read as deriving from a sense of the absurd which is a concept expounded in Albert Camus’s *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. Camus believes that:

The sense of the absurd, when one first undertakes to deduce a rule of action from it, makes murder seem a matter of indifference, hence, permissible. If one believes in nothing, if nothing makes sense, if we can assert no value whatsoever, everything is permissible and nothing is important. There is no pro or con; the murderer is neither right nor wrong.²⁶

By portraying the protagonist as a killer who disregards morality and takes murder as a permissible means to address his existential crisis, A Yi’s narration assumes a metaphysical outlook. It is then not surprising that the first-person narrative tone seems detached and impassioned when relating the murder scene, although the picture is at the same time horrifying: “My hands, just like my soul, seemed empty. It didn’t feel like the knife was cutting through her, but rather that her squelchy, muddy flesh was swallowing it.”²⁷ By saying that his soul is “empty” and that he does not seem to be the agent committing an egregious crime, one can see that the killer’s crime is intended as being devoid of any connection to morality.

While depicting this murder as driven by a non-conventional and non-trivial motive, the text constructs an image of a sophisticated murderer. This murderer possesses knowledge about psychology and crime investigation. For example, leading up to his execution of the murder, he has imagined himself as the wanted man: “I went to buy glasses today...I chose a pair of normal ones...They’d think I was short-sighted, and short-sighted people seem trustworthy.”²⁸ The protagonist uses his knowledge of how the police locate a criminal’s possible hideout: “the Chief of Police would cut the map in two according to two fundamental possible choices: the first, places of emotional

²⁵ A Yi, *A Perfect Crime*, 19.

²⁶ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (London: Penguin books, 2000), 13.

²⁷ A Yi, *A Perfect Crime*, 52.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

resonance; the second, places with people known to the fugitive.”²⁹ He plans to go on the run by train, so he distracts the police by buying an airplane ticket which leaves one day after the murder and intentionally showing his ID to the surveillance camera to confuse the police and guarantee himself more time to escape.

To ensure the successful execution of his mission, the woman’s body, or women in general, must be constructed as vulnerable and powerless, although not necessarily raped. The life of an innocent girl becomes a tool to fulfil his purpose. This sophisticated murderer also understands well that society will react strongly to vicious and brutal crimes such as murder. The narrator explains himself to the court: “killing your perfect sweetheart was my best option. I went on the run, dropping clues, like an animal leaves a trail of scent, so that you might find me. I was happy; my time was filled. I could feel it in my body. I was living a fruitful life.”³⁰

The means the protagonist employs to carry out his act suggests he is a shrewd killer who capitalises on social institutions such as the police to publicly enhance his crime. Explaining his reason for killing Kong Jie, the protagonist claims “I did it for a reaction.”³¹ But for a full realisation of his act, he still needs the reaction from the police. The police response guarantees his fugitive life, as the narrator tells us “I just wanted to make sure I handed you enough motivation to come and catch me.”³² Similarly to the actions of the protagonist Meursault in Camus’s *The Outsider*, murder in A Yi’s text itself serves as a “flight” from senselessness. However, unlike Meursault’s immediate entrance into the enclosed and meaningful world of the penal system,³³ the protagonist in *A Perfect Crime* does not immediately subject himself to the judiciary system but uses the police

²⁹ Ibid., 28.

³⁰ Ibid., 208.

³¹ Ibid., 204.

³² Ibid., 205.

³³ Colin Davis, “The Cost of being Ethical: Fiction, Violence, and Altericide,” *Common Knowledge* 9, no.2 (2003), 246.

force in particular and its pursuit of him to remove himself from the sense of meaninglessness. As will be seen in the next section, the protagonist's response to his murder, similar to that of Meursault's, challenges the fundamental values of society. Yet the killer in A Yi's text knows how to manipulate the judiciary system and his choice of victim is better planned and has its specific purpose.

My crime vs your values: tensions between amorality (murder) and dominant ideology

The protagonist/narrator suffers from an existential crisis and his murder is intended as a pure murder. In this sense, he refuses to think about his killing in general moral terms. Yet in his judgments about other people he reveals the amoral world he lives in and experiences, his *Lebenwelt*. What is striking and unique about A Yi's representation of murder lies in the construction of tensions between a killer driven by a usual motive to murder and dominant moral values. These moral values are particularly represented by the people working in the law enforcement and judiciary systems and their affiliated institutions.

A Yi's protagonist's motive for murder is characterised by a complete lack of morality, but that does not stop him from making moral judgments regarding the legal and judiciary system. From the protagonist's narration, we learn that he is highly cognizant of the dominant ideology, and knows how to manipulate it. He sees that all the existing institutions which defend these values are cold, incompetent and corrupt. The narrator's depiction of the clichéd interpretations of the crime from the judiciary system, the psychiatrist and the media and their failure to apprehend his true motivation showcases his disapproval of, disappointment with and defiance against the dominant legal, psychological and ethical discourses in contemporary China.

The killer's first-person narration effectively guarantees the interpretive validity of

the narrative, especially his motive for killing. The police, the expert, the media and the judiciary system all fail in their attempts to explain his motivation. They fail to extract an answer from him because they are inept at establishing emotional connections with him. The social institutions and their representatives lack the necessary empathy. The cat and mouse dynamic which informs the implicit narrative presents itself not only in the execution of the crime by the protagonist and his capture, but also in his reluctance to confess his motive in the face of the overwhelming desire for an explanation on the part of social and legal groups. The protagonist's position in this context is ambiguous. On the one hand he seeks to preserve his interpretative authority, holding a superior position while sparring with these groups: "I was holding the cards, after all, so why not play for a bit."³⁴ On the other hand, he yearns for emotional connections with the people following him, but given the murder, only negative emotional connections can be made.

The psychiatrist and the media try to produce texts to explain the killer's crime. But these embedded texts within the text are refused or refuted by the protagonist as part of the dialogic first-person narration. The novel problematises the interpretation of crime by juxtaposing insider and public or external explanations and putting the official social institutions responsible for social order and social interpretation in doubt.

When asked by the investigator why he killed Kong Jie, he offers only perfunctory answers: "Because I hate my aunt," "I couldn't kill my aunt, but I wanted her to know I'm not a pushover."³⁵ Providing misleading answers to the investigator, the killer appropriates in a subversive way the usual concepts for motives such as "hatred" and "revenge" commonly used in the discourse of the investigatory system. "Sexual desire" is another clichéd term, and the protagonist appropriates this cliché by fabricating his rape intention towards Kong Jie. He has only contempt for the old servile lapdog psychiatrist

³⁴ A Yi, *A Perfect Crime*, 133.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

and vice president of the city education association, who he thinks is a “running dog.”³⁶ The psychiatrist’s attempt at reassuring words “I’m not a policeman and I don’t work for the judiciary. I have no legal right to punish or incarcerate you and I’m not here to pass judgement. ...we are equals,”³⁷ only serves to entice the protagonist to let down his guard and start talking rather than establish a way of talking as equals. When the old man lights a cigarette for the protagonist, the latter has a vague intention to share with him his thoughts: “I was starting to like him. Maybe I could tell him some personal things. I needed the right person to listen. I just wanted him to listen.”³⁸ The protagonist continues to imagine having some kind of emotional connection with the wider social public.

By depicting the old man in terms such as “controlling himself, he feigned a pained expression,”³⁹ the text shows the psychiatrist to be dispassionate about the protagonist’s encounters and lacking any interest in truly understanding him. His preposterous conclusion that the protagonist is “a typical case of a fallen prince”⁴⁰ and his public interpretation in the morning paper the following day seem all the more nonsensical and nothing but superficial categorisation. The narrator's later critique of the psychiatrist's interpretation presents a narrative dialogue and focuses on the clichéd, impersonal nature of the psychiatric evaluation:

There were three contributing factors as to why I had committed murder:
 1. A failure in my upbringing
 2. Pressure resulting from the college entrance exams
 3. Negative societal influence.
 The measures to be taken to prevent future incidents are clichéd and vague:
 1. Understanding and comprehension
 2. Attention and patience
 3. Equality and reciprocity.⁴¹

Similarly, the TV media, represented by a female journalist sent to interview the

³⁶ Ibid., 137.

³⁷ Ibid., 138.

³⁸ Ibid., 139.

³⁹ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 142-3

protagonist, do not show empathy. The station only produces distorted accounts of the protagonist and misrepresents his motives. The media are not interested in listening to him, so they have prepared a script, a cliché, written beforehand in the form of a slapstick poem for the journalist to read. The prosecutor also falls into clichéd psychological categorisation, ascribing the killing to the protagonist's bitter hatred towards Kong Jie after she had supposedly rejected him. The prosecutor draws on “the theories of Freud, Jung, inferiority complexes, princesses and plain, ugly desire”⁴² to account for the murderer's motives.

In the first trial, the court charges the protagonist with attempted rape based on his confession rather than on evidence gleaned by the medical examiner. The rape charge reflects the violation of procedural justice on the part of the judicial system.

In court the killer testifies that Kong Jie is an ideal victim because she is “beautiful, kind, and clever. She had a future, but she had a difficult childhood, lost her father young. She’s your sweetheart, all of you.”⁴³ His claim that “plain or ugly girls become precious beauties, kind and loved, and if they are murdered, the murder of a beautiful, talented and almost perfect girl will get unparalleled anger and emotion”⁴⁴ reflects the gendered prejudices and exploitive practices prevalent in media representations of murder and its victims. The pronoun “you” and the possessive pronoun “your” before the word “sweetheart” refer to not only the people who attend the trial but also to the whole of society.

Addressing the public this way, the killer immediately places himself in opposition to both to those at the trial and the society which Kong Jie metonymises. She can be read first of all as the emblem of physical and social femininity: beautiful and kind, automatically inviting appreciation and admiration. She is clever and her intellectual

⁴² Ibid., 192.

⁴³ Ibid., 204.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

ability and positive future represent hope and promise, while her difficult childhood guarantees society's protection and sympathy. Although the text tells us that she represents "lofty ideals" (她活在你们的内心最高处), she is in fact an object of desire for them. Rather than attacking these people or society directly, the killer erases Kong Jie's life in a bid to irritate and inflict uneasiness and pain on society. The protagonist acts as a destroyer, smashing the illusions of social and moral beauty; he is a terminator of an idealism which celebrates kindness and credulity. The original Chinese is "她既轻信别人, 又不懂得反抗."⁴⁵ The English version translates this sentence as "She trusted others easily, was a good girl." But a more appropriate translation for the second part is "she didn't know how to fight back." Although the protagonist's distinction between "ugly" girls and "beautiful" girls shows his sexist understanding of women, the first-person narration also implies disapproval of the girl's innocence and obedience, and the cultural attitude that approves and celebrates obedience in front of unfairness and even atrocity.

The tension between the killer's amorality and the dominant ideology is crystallised in the prosecutor's speech. In this speech, the normal motives for murder, such as money and desire, are easier for the system and culture to assimilate, but pure evil represented by a vicious murder driven by an existential crisis are more provocative and capable of shaking the fundamental beliefs supporting the dominant way of thinking. The prosecutor proclaims:

You are pure evil! Suddenly I can understand why people kill for money or desire. Compared to you, they are worthy of our respect. They still operate according to society's norms and our normal ways of thinking. But you! You are an attack on our very way of life, our traditions and the beliefs we rely on to live.⁴⁶

As the executioner of an abnormal crime that defies conventional categorisation, the

⁴⁵ See the Chinese version of the novel: 下面, 我该干些什么 (*Now, What Should I Do Next?*). (Hangzhou (杭州): Zhejiangwenyichubanshe (浙江文艺出版社), 2012), 177.

⁴⁶ 208-9

killer's annihilation called for by the prosecutor represents society's panic and fear that the underlying existential crisis might spread and multiply: "he will only serve as an inspiration to other helpless young people. He is a danger to our society. He will terrorise the whole world. I beg you! For all of us, for humankind, kill him at once!"⁴⁷ However, the prosecutor's emphasis on the extreme nature of the crime and its grave consequences for the wider society once again conforms to what the killer anticipates. When the legal system and society at large condemn the criminal and his crime at a superficial level without truly understanding the gravity of his personal existential crisis and its potential relation to the wrongs of their own system and the wrongs of society at large, the efficacy of the retribution and punishment they mete out is unwittingly undermined.

Social and legal critique, moral ambiguity

The protagonist's exceptional crime is designed to be lethal, threatening and dangerous to the extant social system and belief. Filtered through the brutal regime of the protagonist's plans, the narration develops an explicit social critique but also suggests that, despite the existential crisis and moral decision, the social problems and inequities named are too strong to overcome.

The narrative depicts in tandem the killer as a calculating murderer and as an outcast. As Edward Sagarin and Robert J. Kelly note, "society prepares the crime; the individual commits it,"⁴⁸ and the protagonist states later in the narrative that society's all-encompassing and overwhelming discrimination make him feel that he was "already a criminal and stripped naked every day."⁴⁹ Therefore, the discrimination directed towards him partly dilutes the performative and ritualistic nature of his crime. The socially-shaped

⁴⁷ 209

⁴⁸ Edward Sagarin and Robert J. Kelly, "Responsibility and Crime in Literature" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 477, (1985): 19.

⁴⁹ A Yi, *A Perfect Crime*, 190.

aspects of A Yi's protagonist's criminal behaviour validate Terry Eagleton's claim that "none of our distinctively human behaviour is free in the sense of being absolved from social determinants."⁵⁰

The protagonist is devised as an archetypal marginal figure in society, as the killer's lawyer declares: "You look down on him because of where he's from. You roll your eyes, you ignore him, you treat him like an outsider, call him a peasant. To you, he is a slave. You make him part of an underclass...In fact, you think he is an imposition on your safe little world."⁵¹ Portraying him as belonging to an "underclass" illustrates the regional discrimination present in people's daily lives and social interactions.⁵²

The text shows a morally flawed society in which no party can claim to be innocent, except the victim. This generalised responsibility, even guilt, is foregrounded by the defence lawyer's declaration to the court "you are all guilty."⁵³ The money the protagonist uses to buy his tools is obtained by selling a jade Buddha, one of the many gifts his uncle and aunt took as bribes over the years.⁵⁴ His elderly neighbour Mr He beats him up. The prosecutor is depicted as corrupt and incompetent. According to the protagonist, Kong Jie's mother is ruled by greed because she puts forward a civil indictment, asking for money in damages, which is "hypocritical, like she was trying to make money out of her daughter's death. It muddied her calls for justice."⁵⁵ When the court declines her civil indictment, the protagonist says that "in this instance the court has judged her rather than me."⁵⁶ The lawyer his mother hires to appeal for leniency goes so far as to fake the protagonist's medical records to say he suffered from the after-effects of

⁵⁰ Terry Eagleton *On Evil* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2010), 11.

⁵¹ A Yi, *A Perfect Crime*, 191.

⁵² For example, in one of his short stories "Two Lives", the protagonist Zhou Lingtong responds to his father-in-law (who is from Beijing and powerful)'s query about his provenance with embarrassment by saying that he is from a mountainous and backward area.

⁵³ A Yi, *A Perfect Crime*, 191.

⁵⁴ The text later reveals from the narrator that his uncle is the dean of the military academy.

⁵⁵ A Yi, *A Perfect Crime*, 165.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

a wound sustained to the head. The lawyer manages to fake signatures to support the case for leniency.

In the section of the novel describing the protagonist “on the run”, the depiction of the policemen’s incompetence satirises the negligence of the police force in China. When the protagonist’s father dies of lung cancer after working in a mine, the text hints at the insecure working environment for miners. The text depicts the killer’s disdainful and disparaging attitudes towards the police force and judiciary system, caricaturing and critiquing the social and moral realities prevalent in Chinese society today.

Meanwhile, the killer’s lawyer’s testimony does partially expose the discrimination and oppression the protagonist endures, defining him as an outsider, part of the lower class and an eye sore:

You give him pressure to do well in his exams. You look down on him because of where he’s from. You roll your eyes, you ignore him, you treat him like an outsider, call him a peasant. To you, he is a slave. You make him part of an underclass. You don’t give two hoots about him. In fact, you think he is an imposition on your safe little world. You think he deserves this life. And you feel no guilt about it, am I right?⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the lawyer’s view turns out to be only partly true, because in the protagonist’s last words, he reveals that he does not suffer pressure over his college entrance exams as he had already been secretly enrolled in a military academy by his uncle.

One of the novel’s layers of regional and class discrimination is the discrimination the nameless protagonist feels when he lives in the city with his uncle’s family. His aunt mistreats him because she “always thought of herself as better than us just because she was born in the capital of our province.”⁵⁸ The protagonist in *A Perfect Crime* relates how his aunt would “turn off the gas when I showered. Sometimes she would promenade up and down in her high heels while I was watching television. She didn’t say I couldn’t

⁵⁷ Ibid.,191.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 8.

sit on the sofa exactly, but as soon as I got up she would be there, wiping it down.” He sums up by saying that “that’s exactly what I was to her: a pile of shit.”⁵⁹ From the perspective of his aunt, people from small towns have lower living standards, cannot afford proper living facilities and entertainment, and are unhygienic and smelly. Class and social differentiation between the city and the rural hinterland is more about social than economic difference; the text tells us that the financial situation of the protagonist’s family is not necessarily worse than that of his uncle and aunt. The protagonist sometimes wanted to shout at his aunt, “My Ma’s got more money than you!”⁶⁰

A Yi as a writer seems to be fully aware of the ethical stakes of creating such a pure villain (纯粹的恶棍). In the Chinese preface to the novel, which is not included in the English translation, he writes,

I never extol or agree with such behaviour, but I didn’t rush to judge it from a biased point of view. Once an author designates himself as incarnation of justice, his stance is likely to be partial, his thinking hollow and his preaching shallow, and what he wants to reveal is met with numbness.

(我从来不赞美也不认同这种行为, 但也没有急不可耐或先入为主地对它进行审判。因为一个作者一旦将自己设置为正义的化身, 他的立场便可能偏颇, 思想便可能空洞, 说教便可能肤浅, 所揭示的也可能为人们所麻木。)⁶¹

He adds, “I want you to see my work, and I also want you to forget my work.” (我既想你们看见作品, 又想你们忘记它。)⁶² A Yi also reiterates his aspiration to be an *artist* (艺术家), not a *homilist* (说教者).⁶³ As a writer, he aspires to achieve what Sara Knox proposes: a “fitting way of writing about murder...that testifies rather than explains, and that witnesses rather than judges.”⁶⁴

The ethical ambiguity of A Yi’s first-person narrative of a brutal and unapologetic

⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See the Chinese version of the novel: 下面, 我该干什么 (*Now, What Should I Do Next*), 6.

⁶² Ibid., 7.

⁶³ A Yi, and Zhou Mingqua, (阿乙, 周明全), “A Writer is not a Homilist but a Creator of Artwork,” “作家不是说教者, 而是艺术品的制造者”, *Creation and Criticism* ((创作与评论), no.2 (2014): 123-128.

⁶⁴ Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*, 213.

killer is challenging and provocative. As Joyce Carol Oates writes, “it is ‘wrong’ to be violent. But it is even more wrong and more reprehensible to put human beings into the position—psychologically and morally—where their life’s energies can be expressed only in destruction, in killing.”⁶⁵ The narrative centrality of the killer’s actions and psychology is congruent with the modern trend in which the attention has turned away from the victim to the murderer, and the “metaphysics of modern murder makes the victim a sign of the murderer.”⁶⁶

The reader’s possible identification with the protagonist is disturbing. Wendy Lesser suggests that “murder literature forces us, or lures us, or invites us to identify with the murderer. It is an invitation we readily accept.”⁶⁷ Although A Yi’s text presents a social critique of the corruption of the Chinese legal system and the alienation society imposes on the protagonist, the killer’s use of murder to solve his problems has ambiguous and unsettling implications. First of all, the exceptional nature of the killing almost automatically implies a celebratory connotation to the strong and powerful even if criminal. In this sense, monstrosity can become synonymous with privilege. But Michel Foucault warns us:

The condemned man found himself transformed into a hero by the sheer extent of his widely advertised crimes, and sometimes the affirmation of his belated repentance. Against the law, against the rich, the powerful, the magistrates, the constabulary or the watch, against taxes and their collectors, he appeared to have waged a struggle with which one all too easily identified. The proclamation of these crimes blew up to epic proportions the tiny struggle that passed unperceived in everyday life. ⁶⁸

The protagonist, through his egregious and well-planned crime, violates the law and directly challenges the legal system’s legitimacy and integrity single-handedly, imparting a heroic patina to his behaviour. In court, the protagonist declares that his crime enables

⁶⁵ Joyce Carol Oates, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates, 1973-1982* (New York: Ecco, 2007), 36.

⁶⁶ Sara L. Knox, *Murder: A Tale of Modern American Life*, 15.

⁶⁷ Wendy Lesser, *Pictures at an Execution: An Inquiry into the Subject of Murder* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993,) 55.

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 67.

him to fight against the boredom of life and the meaningless passage of time. However, the existential crisis does not exist all by itself. The protagonist as first-person narrator offers a certain point of view, but the narrative contextualises the crime and gives meaning to it as a social “fact.” From that contextualisation, the reader can detect a legal and social critique embedded in the text and not necessarily attributed directly to the narrator.

For a person on the social periphery, the protagonist suffers not only an existential crisis but a social one. He sadly determines that not many options are available to address his crises. Murder becomes his instrument to make himself an unpardonable criminal, to gain the attention from the police and to boost their motivation. That the means he deploys has to take advantage of the inefficiency of the police signifies a double destruction of social order.

Reading between the lines, we can infer that the text hints that Chinese society provides limited options for marginal people to speak their minds and share their stories about their perceived place in the social order. Even before Western influence, killing in classical Chinese literature is represented as an act of desperation, survival and/or premeditation. For example, in one of the classical texts, *Water Margin* (水浒传), the outlaws or the repressed resort to killing primarily because it is the only way to avoid being killed themselves. Corrupt officials tend to plot murder against good men. In contemporary Chinese literature and film, killing as a gesture to voice discontent continues to be a strong motif in the cultural landscape. As one of China’s most prominent movie directors, Jia Zhangke (贾樟柯) says: “violence is the way underprivileged people make their voice heard...the violent moment is cathartic in nature, aiming to get attention.”⁶⁹

The inevitable tension between murder and the dominant moral values as well as the

⁶⁹ Jia, Zhangke (贾樟柯). “Violence is the Way the Weak Make Their Voices Heard,” (暴力是弱者发出自己声音的方法), accessed October 24, 2013, <http://www.jintian.net/today/html/44/n-41944.html>.

social and legal critique of social discrimination and a stubbornly dominant and corrupt legal system suggest the impossibility of a pure murder that is driven by a singular motive. Even the existential crisis has its social roots. The means of executing a vicious and deliberate murder at the cost of another human life and a perfect crime, runs the risk of being interpreted as releasing the cathartic power of violence and being complicit with a culture that celebrates violent display.

Explosive violence exposing miserable individuals in a rapidly changing society: A Yi's "An Accidental Killing"

The underprivileged kill out of desperation

Compared to the metaphysical nature of the murder motive in *A Perfect Crime*, the accidental homicide in the short story "An Accidental Killing" seems to be more deceptively simple and materialistically motivated. The fact that the killer, Li Jixi, can never retrieve the money he accidentally left on the train leads to his severe sense of frustration and devastation. But the rationale behind a direct financial crisis (the loss of 3000 Yuan) is more profound. Elliott Leyton's comment on humanity's equilibrium is extremely relevant here: "in such a delicate state of balance that any crisis (financial, industrial, or social) in the larger system disorients the individuals in that system. It matters not whether they are crises of prosperity or of poverty: It merely matters that individuals' expectations are profoundly shaken."⁷⁰

As a migrant worker, he has to trick his boss in order to receive his 3000 yuan salary, which suggests an underprivileged economic status and the lack of protection from any

⁷⁰ Elliott Leyton, *Hunting Humans: The Rise of the Modern Multiple Murderer* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2003), 358.

organisation or the state. He intends to use his hard-earned money to cure his sexual impotence, which implies that he is governed by traditional filial values whereby it is the man's duty to produce a son for his family. Thus the money is his life. Fearing that his money might be stolen, he asks the train attendant to keep it safe for him. When the train goes through a tunnel, he accidentally falls from the train and finds himself in a strange place, Red Crow. But this life-and-death matter means nothing to the policemen, who follows the rules rigidly and refuses to help him. This profoundly shakes his expectations and causes destructive effects on his psyche.

After the killing spree, Li Jixi sings an aria (单刀赴会). The famous aria appears in various traditional Chinese operas.⁷¹ It is a story about the ancient heroic figure Guan Yu (关羽), who, alone and armed only with a knife, confronts the generals of the enemy camp. Li Jixi's context and rendition of the aria present an ironic contrast with that of the onstage or legendary heroic figure famous for his bravery and strategy. Li is by no means heroic, and his killing acts derive from desperation and devastation caused by social inequality and lack of support or help from the police. When the character sings the aria, the narrative may partly suggest that he is deluded about his situation. The aria episode also suggests a further ironic contrast between heroic action, represented by Guan Yu, whose witty strategy keeps him from being killed and creates a place for him in historical legend, and the acts of the underprivileged, helpless and desperate who are failed by an indifferent, uncaring and corrupt society.

Murder victims' trapped souls epitomizing contemporary China's social and moral crisis

Through Li Jixi's violent outburst, a break of his psychological equilibrium, the seemingly lifeless and eventless town of Red Crow reveals its lurking explosive aspects

⁷¹ It also appeared in another of China's classical texts, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国演义).

and deceptive equilibrium that has concealed inequity and moral corruption beneath the surface. Red Crow is an exemplum of Chinese society at large, regardless of geographical or cultural differences.

A Yi's short story offers a dark and bleak social and moral landscape of contemporary China. The text can be read as an elegy for the six grotesque victims as well as for the killer, each with their own heart-breaking story to tell. Their stories feature struggles between materialistic desires and human feelings such as love and respect.

At the beginning of the text, the killing is referred to as "the incident" and the killer as a monster: "At 7 that night, when the train was passing through Red Crow, the window discharged a monster like spitting out a date stone from a person's mouth" (那天傍晚 7 点多, 火车快要驶过红乌烟镇时, 车窗里吐出一只妖怪来, 随意得像吐一只枣核.)⁷² The text takes pains to measure and quantify the incident and highlight its significance for the town:

The date the monster visited is 8th October, 2000, the authorities called it the "10/8 incident"...this bizarre incident lasted 12 minutes. It began at 10 pm, and ended at 10:12pm. Right before 10 pm, a fierce gale sprang up, the leaves fluttering in the air. The sky was clouding over and there was occasional lightning; after 10:12pm, the sky cleared up, the people who heard about the news and rushed out carrying their umbrellas found themselves in a glow akin to daylight. Within those 12 minutes, six local people, walked up on Jianshe Zhong Road from the six alleys, to meet the monster sent by God. (妖怪到来的这天是 2000 年 10 月 8 日, 政府称之为"十八事件".....这诡异的事只发生了 12 分钟, 10 点开始, 10 点 12 分结束. 10 点 12 分结束. 10 点前, 红乌镇狂风大作, 落叶纷飞, 天空裹着黑云, 不时有闪电刺出; 10 点 12 分后, 天空大开, 闻讯而出的人们捏着没用的伞, 恍如堕身白昼.....在这 12 分钟内, 只有六个本地人像是约好的, 从六条巷子鱼贯进入建设中路, 迎接上帝派来的妖怪.)⁷³

The description of the incident and the killer is tainted with an atmosphere of mysticism and surrealism. But with the unfolding of the description of the history and current condition of the town and its people, one learns of the social and cultural conditions.

The story begins by setting the scene where this accidental killing will take place: a

⁷² A Yi, "An Accidental Killing," 2-3.

⁷³ Ibid, 3.

geographically fictionalised remote town called Red Crow (红乌). With the railway passing through and the establishment of a train station, the townspeople anticipated prosperity and importance for their hometown. But they are disappointed by the state policy of “nationwide train acceleration” (全国大提速). Red Crow is deemed too small a town for the train to stop at. The town epitomises all the places that fall victim to the unevenness or inequality spawned by the state’s modernisation projects. Red Crow is forsaken and forgotten. Nor does it have a glorious history: “our houses are low, and roads dilapidated, no decent history at all” (我们房子这么矮, 路面这么破, 什么像样的历史都没有).⁷⁴

The geographical remoteness of Red Crow should be read carefully and in multiple ways. Many argue that China has adopted uneven development since the inception of the policies of reform and opening-up in 1978. Uneven geographical development is one of the most manifest results of China’s developmental strategy.⁷⁵ Economic development always comes first among all the realms of development.⁷⁶ What is more, a policy from above may “decidedly change the situation of a region.”⁷⁷ Red Crow’s geographical remoteness makes it even more vulnerable to policy changes. The deserted train station, now a historical site, crystallises the awkwardness derived from an impulsive hunger for economic growth and the dire consequences of irresponsible and ever-changing policies which foster rather than diminish inequality.

The story’s characters represent the wide ranging social types and malaise of the town and even Chinese society in general: Wolfhound (狼狗) used to be the most powerful gangster in the town, yet his ungraceful downfall escalates down to his hypochondriac’s

⁷⁴ A Yi (阿乙), “An Accidental Killing” (意外杀人事件) in *The Bird Saw Me*, (鸟, 看见我了) (Shanghai: Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe (百花洲文艺出版社), 2010), 2.

⁷⁵ Gong Haomin, *Uneven Modernity: Literature, Film, and Intellectual Discourse in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press 2012), 20.

⁷⁶ China has been divided into several economic zones, and each zone carries differentiated state policies.

⁷⁷ Gong, *Uneven Modernity: Literature, Film, and Intellectual Discourse in Postsocialist China*, 25.

fear of dying all alone one day in his house. After a visit to a friend in hospital and hearing a story about a man who has a paralysed right hand after taking a shower, he fears that the same will happen to him. Since his wife has left him and taken away their children, he worries that he will die all alone one day in his own house. He becomes the first person to exercise regularly in the town to stay healthy. On the day of the incident, Wolfhound goes about his routine despite the hostile weather.

Ai Guozhu (艾国柱) is a small town misfit who idles away his time during work and dreams of hitting the jackpot in the big city. He works as a civil servant. However, when he announces his intention of leaving, everyone in Red Crow he knows tries to dissuade him, including his friend He Shuiqing and his family. He finally resolves to leave just before the incident takes place.

Yu Xueyi (于学毅) never gets over his first love and becomes despondent. He attacks his friend ferociously when he teases him about recent developments in the woman's life. He has hallucinations, seeing his first love in the form of an ape living in the building where she used to live, rejecting his advances. He begs others to kill him.

Little Qu (小瞿) is mentally handicapped, but he is feted as a hero for having saved three children from drowning. His old friend Lei Mengde (雷孟德) moves into Little Qu and his wife's place without invitation and insists on staying with them. Lei constantly harasses Qu's wife, yet for Little Qu brotherhood always takes precedence. His wife fights against Lei's harassment vehemently, only to find herself unsupported by her husband.

I will focus here on the stories of two of the six local people who are killed: Zhao Facai (赵法才) and Jin Qinhua (金琴花). These two characters best demonstrate the tensions, conflicts and perplexities the individuals in the narrative have to deal with in a market-driven society in the stubborn grip of traditional values and a corrupt legal enforcement system.

Zhao Facai represents a predicament faced by many in contemporary China. In a weakly regulated market economy, pursuing wealth becomes the foremost goal worth fighting for. The name Facai (法才) has the same sound as the phrase “发财”, which in Chinese means “to make a fortune”. Wealth used to be his sole purpose in life, but now Zhao Facai is trapped between wealth and family values and emotional needs, such as romantic love. As the owner of a supermarket, Zhao has had an affair with the cashier in his shop. He realises that “there is such a thing called love in the world” (世界上还有爱情这回事)⁷⁸ yet suspects that his lover actually covets his shop and money. Ultimately, he refuses to leave his family, which upsets his lover, and she threatens to quit her job and never come back. While he is trying to persuade her to stay, Zhao Facai’s three brothers and wife show up and confront them red-handed. Under his brother’s duress, Zhao chooses to surrender and slaps his lover to show his remorse. Humiliated and heart-broken, she leaves him.

Although he chooses his family and wife over his lover, he is not the same person anymore: “since that day, something has affected Zhao Facai’s mental state. His eyes are full of dullness. He loses his appetite. Touching his money is like touching rotten leaves, making him feel the worthlessness in the one thing he has always delighted in all his life. People say he has perhaps lost his soul.” (那天后, 赵法才的精神状态出了问题, 眼睛直勾勾, 不愿吃不愿喝, 抚摸钱就像抚摸枯叶, 让人感觉一生为止奋斗的东西之虚无. 人们说应该给他叫叫魂.)⁷⁹ Responding to the loss of his lover, he fritters away the remainder of his life with silent self-abandonment and self-destruction and becomes a suicidal hunchback, “coughing and breathing heavily, his hair turning grey at the age of 42.” (在 42 岁时驼背, 咳喘, 白发苍苍)⁸⁰ His wish to have it both ways, to keep his

⁷⁸ A Yi, “An Accidental Killing,” 6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 4.

family and enjoy a young woman's love, shows his lack of social self-consciousness and selfishness. His moral quandaries epitomise the conflicts between materialistic pursuits and human desire and feelings.

Although Red Crow fails to benefit from state policies, the market-oriented ethos has taken firm roots in ordinary people's lives, and Zhao Facai and his wife's successful business operation illustrates how the new economic environment in contemporary China has provided material progress for the survival and improvement of people like them. Yet new desires have also been awakened in the midst of urbanisation and economic restructuring and bring with them new anxieties.⁸¹ The "successful, urbane, contemporary man with one or more extramarital mistresses" character has become a stock figure in representations of contemporary China.⁸² A Yi's narrative extends this urban, elite image to the representation of more ordinary people living in more remote areas.

Zhao Facai's moral quandaries derive from his struggles between two sets of competing desires, each of which he aspires to fulfil. His sexless marriage to his permanently estranged wife, together with his brothers' intervention in his extramarital affair, represents the hollowness of traditional values such as family stability and integrity. Family values are irreconcilable with his private desire. He sinks into depression with no solution to resolve the conflicts. Instead of showing contrition or repairing his relationship with his wife,⁸³ he is trapped between two competing "good" values in contemporary society, his moral duty to his family and his private desire for romantic love. In this sense, A Yi's text's darker vision of the moral condition of ordinary people in China today implies the perplexities and inadequacies of traditional Confucian values.

⁸¹ Jason McGrath *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 95.

⁸² Ibid, 96.

⁸³ Ibid., 97. See McGrath's analysis of Chi Li's novel-adapted TV drama *Coming and Going* (来来往往) and Feng Xiaogang's Movie *Cell Phone* (手机).

On the day of the incident, Zhao Facai has been sitting on a rock drinking strong alcohol for 39 days from 7 to 10 o'clock every night. In his eyes, Li Jixi, the intruder is “an intense middle-aged man wearing scruffy clothes, running like a funny swordsman and being chased by the supermarket cashier” (是个衣着肮脏, 身躯紧缩的中年人, 他正像一个可笑的侠客夺路而行.) Zhao “seizes the man by the throat and realizing that he is not a local, says arrogantly ‘did you hear him? You should pay.’”(捉住对方的脖子, 在意识到对方不是本地人后, 傲慢地说: “听见没有, 人家让你付钱呢.)⁸⁴. Self-destructive as Zhao might be, the third-person narrator reminds us of the prevailing sense of superiority present in the mentality of local people protective of their “place.”

The persona of another victim, Jin Qinhua, symbolises the embarrassing relationship between private desire, consumerism and the legal enforcement system in contemporary China. With the rise of consumerism, sexual desire becomes commodity. Jin Qinhua’s profession as a prostitute caters to men’s desire in the town. Her role as a sex worker reveals how the police, as the law enforcing unit, are corrupt, profit-oriented abusers of power.

The text depicts the prostitute Jin Qinhua as physically unattractive— “ugly like a turkey” (火鸡一般明显的丑陋)⁸⁵ says the narrator, but also kind-hearted. She always stops in front of the beggars and gives them money. When the authorities fail to hire help to bury a body found in a ditch, Jin Qinhua donates the money for the help. Nonetheless, her participation in the town's street (public) community is limited. The narrator tells us that the people never know her as a person and that after she is killed many townspeople came to realise that they did not know Jin Qinhua at all: “They sounded so surprised, it was as if a spy had been among them over the years.” (事后红乌镇很多人反应过来, 他

⁸⁴ A Yi, “An Accidental Killing,” 9.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

们并不认识金琴花，其意外就好似发现了一个潜藏多年的敌特。)⁸⁶ She is primarily recognised by the community through her profession, her social role, as a prostitute—a “shamefully unspeakable”⁸⁷ one for other people.

Jin Qinhua lives a precarious life and has an ambiguous relationship with the police. She is never ashamed of her profession and feels free to talk about it. She constantly faces the danger of being arrested by the police, whom she sometimes trusts. The text does not reveal whether she chooses this profession out of poverty, but self-perception of her profession seems to draw her towards the woman who has a proper profession. She has friendly feelings towards a policewoman Luo Dan (罗丹), and calls her "Big Sister Dan" (丹姐). Luo Dan sometimes ignores her greetings but sometimes she responds with a smile like a "relative" (亲戚). However, her efforts to establish a stronger women's community with Dan are doomed because when the law comes in, Big Sister Dan condemns her using her social role as a policewoman and she even goes so far as to abuse her power.

When Jin Qinhua is arrested by the police for prostitution, what Luo Dan does hurts Jin Qinhua deeply. She orders the woman to kneel down. Jin Qinhua's slow reaction spurs her into fury. When Jin calls her “Big Sister Dan” (丹姐), she snaps: “who is your sister” “谁是你的丹姐!”⁸⁸ She then kicks Jin in the abdomen with her shoes: “the stilettos penetrate into her abdomen, where the intestines, enclosed in a small space, took a while to return to their former position.” (那鞋钉像是踩进脂肪，踩进肠子，踩进骨盆，像是踩进了很深的泥潭，许久才弹回来).⁸⁹ Once Jin falls onto the floor, Luo pulls Jin's hair and says “the reputation of us women has been ruined by you” (我们妇女的脸都被你丢

⁸⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 14-5.

尽了.)⁹⁰

Although Luo abuses her power by physically beating up Jin Qinhua, she speaks from a woman's perspective, betraying the awkward position between the law, the police and women. The abuse Jin receives from the only person who offered any sign of friendship and warmth deals her a heavy blow. Although Jin Qinhua had tried to establish a humane or less tense relationship with the police, the way Sister Dan treats her signifies that Jin's efforts are doomed. Sister Dan dominates Jin Qinhua in two ways: as the police who have the power to arrest her and abuse her and as a good woman who would never take up prostitution and who regards prostitutes as female traitors.

On the day of the incident, after Li Jixi kills Zhao Facai, he runs into Jin Qinhua who happens to be in his way and he stabs her in the abdomen while the latter, still crying, at first thinks she has just ran into a tree. The previous gangster Wolfhound is out on his routine run while someone calls to him to contain this dangerous killer. He sees this as an opportunity to restore his credibility as a gangster, and attempts to fight with this killer come from nowhere, yet eventually he falls under Li Jixi's knife and dies later in the hospital. Running for a while, Li Jixi throws up into a rubbish bin when Ai Guozhu walks by. Repulsed by his odor, Ai Guozhu covers his nose, which provokes Li Jixi and costs him his life without the knowledge of what wrong he has done. The next victim is Yu Xueyi, although he asks for his own demise by calmly saying "please kill me" to Li Jixi when they meet on the street. Li Jixi hesitates and randomly stabs him and continues his rampage. The last victim Little Qu does not manage to fire his air gun in his face-off with Li Jixi. He gets himself embroiled into wrestling with the killer whose stabbing is fatal.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 15.

Narrative efficacy and ambiguity and social allegory

The textual satire or irony is further enhanced by the footnotes which accompany the text. The notes serve as a meta-narrative to complement the information given in the main text. The reader learns from the notes that after reading over the whole text the supernarrator is the policeman, a Red Crow local and one of the witnesses to the incident. The supernarrator provides different information and different evaluations of the characters in the narrative. For example, the children Little Qu tried to save all died. He did not actually save their lives. Another footnote says, “Rumours said Luo Dan got her demotion due to her affair with her boss— the local prosecutor,”⁹¹ thus exposing her moral hypocrisy and lack of justification in condemning Jin Qinhua as a prostitute. The supernarrator's revelation of Luo Dan's extramarital affair suggests that she does not stand on a higher moral ground, even though her official role as a law enforcement officer grants her special authority over Jin Qinhua.

Although the identity of the narrator is ultimately known to the reader, the narration is ambiguous. In the introductory account of Red Crow and its people's stories, including the encounters of the killer and his psychological states, the narration seems omniscient. This is in conflict with the fact that the narrator –the policeman has no way of knowing all the details. It is possible that because of the sensational nature of the crime, each of the victim's stories receives media attention and he learns more information from journalism. On the other hand, it should be noted that the author A Yi's real name is Ai Guozhu (艾国柱), who is a character in the story. At the end of the story, the narrative voice suddenly changes from “we” to “I”. I the policeman sees the character Ai Guozhu's body in the hospital and the reader learns that Ai Guozhu and “I” used to be friends. The

⁹¹ Ibid.,15.

narrative point of view slips here such that the narrator and supernarrator almost merge by the end of the narrative.

“An Accidental Killing” can be read as a social critique and satirical allegory of the moral conditions and judgments of Chinese people in shifting social and cultural moments. It features a killing by an outsider, all of whose victims are also alienated members of society. The characters and voices the text creates illustrate Fredric Jameson’s claim that “third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic— necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.”⁹² Jameson’s theory of “national allegory” has attracted controversy and criticism, but the social and collective nature of Chinese texts such as *A Perfect Crime* and “An Accidental Killing” are compelling in this regard. The killers and the victims personify contemporary China. Collectively, they for the most part are displaced or disturbed by deepening social and economic reforms, and they struggle with moral dilemmas brought about by social and cultural changes.

Ian McEwan’s *Amsterdam*: murder as a consequence of clashing moral values

In contrast to the motives for murder in A Yi’s texts, in *Amsterdam* the major characters’ murder initially is an assisted suicide pact out of fear for illness, death and madness, for the good of both sides. Similar to “An Accidental Killing”, it is part psychological novel, part social satire, and part moral fable.⁹³

Amsterdam marks a departure from McEwan’s earlier novels, including *The Child in*

⁹² Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” *Social Text*, No. 15 (1986), 69.

⁹³ David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 193.

Time, *The Innocent*, *Black Dogs*, and *Enduring Love*, all of which grew out of a wish to explore certain ideas. For example, *The Child in Time* explores particularly the relativity and fluidity of time whereas *Enduring Love* features the portrayal of a literary figure who suffers from De Clérambault's Syndrome. Writing *Amsterdam*, said McEwan, felt irresponsible and free; he defines the text as “a form of farce”, but he “abandoned” himself to the possibilities of its characters.⁹⁴ According to the author, *Amsterdam* grew out of a long-running joke between McEwan and an old friend. As McEwan explains in an interview, he and his friend “speculated lightheartedly on an agreement we might have: if one of us began to go under with something like Alzheimer's, rather than let his friend succumb to a humiliating decline, the other would take him off to Amsterdam and have him legally put down.”⁹⁵ Despite McEwan's own labels and explanation of its provenance, and the fact that no previous studies have placed this text within the framework of murder, I argue that the text can be read as addressing serious questions about moral decisions, social status and criminality in contemporary British society by featuring clear motives of murder, though initially assisted suicide, the gradual development of a murderous impulse, and murder as a solution to or failure of clashing moral values.

The novel opens with Molly Lane's funeral in which the social, cultural and political elite gather together. The guests include Julian Garmony—British Foreign Secretary, who is right wing and aspires to be the leader of his party and even the whole nation; Vernon Halliday—newspaper editor, and Clive Linley—composer. Each of them was Molly's lover at some point in the past. They all despise Molly's husband George Lane. Clive is going through the crisis being unable to compose the most important melody for his

⁹⁴ “Journeys without Maps: An Interview with Ian McEwan” by Jon Cook, Sebastian Groes and Victor Sage in Sebastian Groes eds, *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 127.

⁹⁵ Ian McEwan and Adam Begley, “The art of fiction CLXXIII,” *Paris Review*, (2002), 53.

symphony which has been commissioned by the government. Vernon struggles to increase his newspaper's circulation numbers. Besides that, triggered by Molly's death, they both become hypochondriacal about their physical and mental decline. In the Lake District where Clive seeks to acquire inspiration for his symphony, he chooses to capture his moment of inspiration over intervening in a rape scene; Vernon decides to publish photographs taken by Molly of Julian as a transvestite; the two friends become moral enemies, fiercely attacking the other's moral choices. Each lures the other to Amsterdam with the intention of poisoning the other. Each believes that such an act is justified and can successfully fulfil the pact they had previously made.

Motive: to die with dignity

The motive of the murder is presented through the portrayal of the psychology of the two principal characters. The narrative follows traditional narrative convention. With an omniscient narrative technique which switches between points of view, the novel is structured linearly, logically, and chronologically.⁹⁶ Extensive sections of indirect speech, which at times get very close to free indirect speech, offer numerous close-ups of the principal characters' emotions, worries, jealousies, doubts, and grandiose plans. Such arrangements on the one hand guarantee the psychological depth of the novel as the emotions and inner thoughts of the two principal characters are followed closely; on the other hand, free indirect discourse has long been recognised as an effective vehicle for irony,⁹⁷ and it is no exception in *Amsterdam*. This narrative strategy foregrounds the satirical and ironic tones of the text.

Their mutual friend Molly's death triggers Clive's and Vernon's fear of illness, madness and death. This can be read as a particular personal crisis in contrast to A Yi's

⁹⁶ Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, 191.

⁹⁷ Vaheed K. Ramazani, *The Free Indirect Mode: Flaubert and the Poetics of Irony* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), x.

texts. The men's assisted suicide pact is initiated by their shock at Molly Lane's rapid onset of illness and eventual death: "The speed of her descent into madness and pain became a matter of common gossip: the loss of control of bodily function and with it all sense of humour, and the tailing off into vagueness interspersed with episodes of ineffectual violence and muffled shrieking."⁹⁸ The pair of friends agree on the indignity of living under those conditions; Clive says that was "a terrible way to go" and he would have smothered her with a pillow if he was the husband, Vernon echoes Clive's view by saying "she would have killed herself rather than end up like that."⁹⁹

Initially, when Clive suggests the assisted suicide, he only means it for himself:

Just supposing I did get ill in a major way, like Molly, and I started to go downhill and make terrible mistakes, you know, errors of judgment, not knowing the names of things or who I was, that kind of thing. I'd like to know there was someone who'd help me to finish it...I mean, help me to die. Especially if I got to the point where I couldn't make the decision for myself, or act on it. So, what I'm saying, is this—I'm asking you, as my oldest friend, to help me if it ever got to the point where you could see that it was the right thing. Just as we might have helped Molly if we'd been able...¹⁰⁰

Vernon's same fear of death and illness makes their mutual assisted suicide pact possible.

What differentiates their personal crisis from A Yi's killers is that they are closely related to the challenges in their professional lives: the deadline for the symphony is drawing dear and Clive finds himself going through a composer's block; Vernon's newspaper's circulation needs to be boosted. Physically, they are vulnerable. Clive has numbness in his left hand while Vernon has severe pain in the right side of his scalp. Vernon is also disturbed by the fear that "he might not exist," that is, that he will become an historical nonentity.¹⁰¹

These factors combine and drive Clive to raise the possibility of assisted suicide:

They could manage your descent, but they couldn't prevent it. Stay away then, monitor your own decline, then when it was no longer possible to work, or live with dignity, finish

⁹⁸ Ian McEwan, *Amsterdam* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 3-4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

it yourself. But how could he stop himself passing that point, the one Molly reached so quickly, when he would be too helpless, too disoriented, too stupid to kill himself?¹⁰²

The suicide pact the two agree upon is originally based on mutual trust as “true friends”, which means consigning the power of ending their lives to a person who has better judgment and is more morally solid. However, their mutual pact is only tested twice, with each one making one moral decision. The novel's title page alludes to this testing, citing W.H. Auden's poem “The Crossroads”: “The friends who met here and embraced are gone, / Each to his own mistakes.”

From assisted suicide to righteous mutual murder

The way Clive and Vernon react to their circumstances and the way they think about themselves and others constitute the way we come to understand and assess their social and moral positions, collectively and as individuals.

Bound together, Clive and Vernon act according to the pact and turn themselves into the cruel analyst of one another's moral depravity. Before the pact is made, the text depicts the crises in each man's life. At first, the two are allies. In addition to their long-standing friendship, they share mutual contempt for Molly's husband, George. But then they become adversaries because of different moral grounds and claims.

The characters in this text all belong to the social, political and cultural elite. Clive is an eminent composer who shoulders the mission of a millennium symphony assigned by a cabinet level committee; Vernon is the editor of *The Judge*, an influential broadsheet whose circulation is on the decline; Julian Garmony is the Foreign Secretary of the ruling government. Other important characters include Julian's wife, an eminent doctor, and George Lane, a rich publisher. Clive and Vernon, the friends, are in a sense producers,

¹⁰² Ibid.,25.

responsible for creating art and opinions that shape the public world. They belong to a generation that is “prosperous” and “influential.”¹⁰³ Clive and Vernon represent a generation who benefited from the state after World War Two, experienced the liberating 1960s in their youth, and had established their status and fortunes before the Thatcher government came to power. Dominic Head points out the similarity between the author McEwan himself and the characters in the texts: “McEwan’s generation, after all, witnessed the gradual erosion of the Welfare State and, since Margaret Thatcher’s era as Prime Minister, the adoption of a new language of individualism—of self-gain and personal advantage.”¹⁰⁴

In some respects the friendship between Clive and Vernon and its mutation into murderous acrimony embodies the dynamic relationship between individuals’ personal lives and their moral choices within the changing social and political contexts of the late twentieth century. Initially, their friendship guarantees their assisted suicide pact. As friends, they tend to share their experiences and thoughts with each other, which also means that they do not hesitate to make moral judgement of each other’s stances when the opportunities arise. The shift from amity to animosity in their relationship and the emergence of their murderous impulses crystallise the potentially dangerous undercurrents which underlie the confluence of incompatible moral values. Experiencing the same historical situations and contexts does not mean two people will necessarily share the same values.

The disagreement between Clive and Vernon is mainly whether or not the transvestite pictures of Julian, one of Molly’s former lovers, should be published. The antagonism between the two friends develops as a gradual process. First, Clive realises the imbalance existent in his friendship with Vernon. He questions the lop-sidedness of their relationship

¹⁰³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁰⁴ Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 11.

after Vernon informs him of his intention to publish the photographs. In his re-evaluation of their friendship, Clive comes to the conclusion that he is the one who gives but never receives: “put most crudely, what did he, Clive, really derive from this friendship? He had given, but what had he ever received? What bound them?”¹⁰⁵ What is more important, Clive thinks that Vernon betrays his lack of principle by deciding to publish Julian’s “scandalous” photos in order to boost the paper’s sales. It is at this point that their differing moral stances drive a wedge between them. For Clive, Julian had agreed to the photographs being taken because of his trust for Molly. Moreover, being a transvestite is a personal matter which has nothing to do with Julian’s moral integrity, especially as a government official. Vernon, however, believes the photos show Julian’s hypocrisy, and they present an ideal opportunity to force him to step down to save the whole country, because “it would be terrible for the country if he was prime minister.”¹⁰⁶

Later, when Clive goes to the Lake District to finish his symphony, he faces another moral crisis: a dilemma between capturing a critical moment of inspiration and intervening in a potential sexual assault. His inner thoughts presented in the narrative reveal his selfishness, cowardice and egotism as an eminent composer. For him intervention means to break his artistic concentration:

Was he really going to intervene? He imagined running down there. The point at which he reached them was when the possibility would branch: the man might run off; the woman would be grateful, and together they could descend to the main road by Seatoller. Even this least probable of outcomes would destroy his fragile inspiration. The man was more likely to redirect his aggression at Clive while the woman looked on, helpless. Or gratified, for that was possible too; they might be closely bound, they might both turn on him for presuming to interfere.¹⁰⁷

Clive may choose to commit a sin of commission and accept complicity in rape in order to maintain concentration on his work, or he may choose to suffer the artist’s version of *coitus interruptus*.¹⁰⁸ By prioritizing his creative inspiration and choosing his artistic

¹⁰⁵ McEwan, *Amsterdam*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ 73.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 86-7.

¹⁰⁸ Earl G. Ingersoll, “City of Endings: Ian McEwan’s *Amsterdam*,” *Midwest Quarterly* 46, no.2 (2005):91.

career over saving a potentially raped woman, Clive's moral stance on behalf of the lives of others becomes compromised. For Vernon, it is unacceptable to witness a sexual assault without reporting it to the police and identifying the criminal. To go to the police means to fulfill one's moral duty. Clive disagrees, and at this point the pact, the driver of the suspense in the text, returns to the center of the narrative.

Vernon's inner thoughts throughout the whole text show his amplified perception of himself. His overestimation of his own power to "shape" the destiny of the country derives partly from his narcissism, partly from his desire to resolve his sense of not being important, and because he believes he has the higher moral ground:

He felt large and benign, a little ruthless perhaps but ultimately good, capable of standing alone, against the current, seeing over the heads of his contemporaries, knowing that he was about to shape the destiny of his country and that he could bear the responsibility. More than bear- he *needed* this weight that no one else could shoulder.¹⁰⁹

Underlying the rift between the two friends are the anxieties and tensions individuals face in an era where the excessive pursuit of self-interest and personal advantage are often glorified and more often rewarded. In both cases, Clive and Vernon seek to defend their careerism and professionalism. Clive puts his artistic inspiration ahead of his moral duty as a citizen. And the failure of his symphony implies the text's moral stance that moral anxieties powerfully disturb artistic creation. Vernon, by publishing Julian's photos, acts out of step with the more idealised ethos, whereby in a "more reasonable, compassionate and tolerant age [...] the private and harmless preferences of individuals"¹¹⁰ and the right to privacy should be respected. Vernon's decision to act out his media coup illustrates the mainstream media focus on publicizing the private, especially the private lives of celebrity or political figures and scandals, to boost newspaper circulation.

Vernon's situation is more complex than Clive's. Clive's moral decision stays within artistic pursuits and their conflicts with moral duties. Vernon's stance is concerned with

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.,101.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.,126.

the relationship between the private and the public and the codes of journalism and its tricky relationship with politics. Julian Garmony is depicted as a nasty piece of work who might well make the world worse if he were given a larger political stage. But the reader suspects that this is finally a secondary reason for Vernon's deciding to publish the pictures; Vernon's primary decision is based on his desire to save his own career by raising his newspaper's circulation.

Nonetheless, for all their differences and for all their shabbiness and worse, Vernon and Clive are both duly punished—fired, disgraced, ridiculed, ultimately the victims of each other's pique. Moral shabbiness rather than moral dilemma therefore becomes a significant index for the pair to measure each other's psychological state and the possibility of terminal mental illness. Initially, the assisted suicide is agreed by both parties to be a noble act. However, while they anticipate that the city of Amsterdam symbolises the principle of rationality by granting euthanasia, when the revengeful motive comes into being in their mind, they are seduced by doing evil¹¹¹ based on their own moral superiority and negligence of their own moral shabbiness.

In the novel, the troubling state of moral integrity is not limited to Clive and Vernon but is embedded across the social landscape. The conservative politician who stands for traditional family values and rigid social and penal codes is a closet cross-dresser. Newspapers are dumbed down to generate higher circulation figures. The aging, self-absorbed, slightly inert protagonists choose self-interest and careerism over decency and moral duty which acts on behalf of others. No character is morally decent in the text, except perhaps Garmony's surgeon wife, Ruth, but even she colludes with the Conservative Party media manipulators as her public service is used as a political weapon.

¹¹¹ Jack Katz, in his *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 1988) uses the term "righteous slaughter" to describe how some criminals commit violence because they think they are morally righteous.

The police fake their evidence; the critic who mocks Clive's music and Vernon's moral stature visits a paedophile brothel; Vernon's rival colleague Frank employs dirty tricks to oust him from government. A whole generation within an important and elite section of society is mocked along with the depiction of Clive's and Vernon's moral shabbiness and delusive self-esteem.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined murder as a means, as an explosive event, and as a solution in the three texts respectively to explore murder as a literary theme in the two authors' texts. The two authors' texts represent a range of murder motives, from existential alienation to financial distress, from personal antagonism to professional rivalry, from premeditation to chance. I have demonstrated that no murder motives are singular and static in the texts but have a dynamic relationship with the characters' perceptions of their places in the social and moral environment.

I highlight A Yi's attempt to explore the metaphysical or philosophical aspect of murder narratives by portraying a murderer with an uncommon motive. An examination of the way this malicious and brutal killer perceives the amoral world and the way he manipulates the legal system yet refutes its interpretation of his crime, reveals a deep social and legal critique that undermines the metaphysical undertone in the text. I therefore come to the conclusion that A Yi's text showcases that pure murder driven by a singular motive is impossible, and existential crisis cannot rid itself of its social roots.

I argue that the first-person narrative point of view guarantees the interpretive authority of the narrator and is effective in exploring the psyche of a murderer that defies conventional interpretation. Yet it can also generate ethical ambiguity in terms of adding a heroic patina to brutal violence and release the cathartic power of violence by being complicit with a culture that celebrates violent display.

In my examination of “An Accidental Killing,” I highlight the point that Red Crow, the town where the accidental homicide takes place, exemplifies contemporary China. I have shown that the killer’s explosive outburst of violence does not just derive from frustration of losing his money but from the coldness of the police and whole social structure in general. Text offers sketches of the way in which the ordinary people (represented by Zhao Facai) or even marginal people such as the prostitute Jin Qinhua are struggling to seek human feelings while facing pressure and even abuse from either traditional family values or a corrupt and abusive police force. These characters, including the killer, collectively personify contemporary China where people are displaced by deepening social and economic changes and trapped in moral dilemmas brought about by social and cultural changes.

I have also shown that the combination of a narrator and a supernarrator in “An Accidental Killing” helps achieve the satirical and allegorical undertones but is also confusing.

In my examination of McEwan’s *Amsterdam*, I trace the way in which an assisted suicide pact develops into mutual murderous impulses, and murder becomes a righteous solution or failure of opposing moral values and stances. McEwan’s text demonstrates an intriguing story in which personal crisis such as fear of death, illness and madness as well as professional crises in the two major characters’ careers become a touchstone of their moral integrity. What is striking about this text is that it uses friendship, which later becomes an adversarial relationship to embody the dynamic relationship between individuals, moral choices and the changing social and cultural climate. It critiques the excessive pursuit of professionalism, self-gain and personal advantage.

Unlike their counterparts in *Amsterdam*, A Yi’s murdering characters sadly leave themselves with very limited options for self-assertion or expression outside premeditated and accidental homicides; the principal characters in *Amsterdam* belong to the social and

cultural elite and aspire to shape the public world. But similarly to A Yi's texts, especially in "An Accidental Killing", the use of third-person omniscient narration highlights its undertones of satire and allegory. The two major characters, together with other minor characters, can also be said to personify British society where moral condition among the elite are in an era of flux and disintegration.

Both writers find their respective societies problematic, hypocritical, and selfish. To some extent, the murder narratives discussed in this chapter reveal the disastrous consequences of untested moral values or the intolerance of opposing and not well examined values. They may even replicate or represent society at large, even though some of the killers are marginal figures, some elite.

This examination of A Yi and Ian McEwan's murder narratives in the terms of murder motives and moral choices illuminate an array of homogenous and idiosyncratic cultural characteristics of Chinese and British societies. By portraying a complex comparative picture of possible personal crises in contemporary life, both A Yi and McEwan find their respective societies problematic, hypocritical, selfish, and ultimately detrimental to personal integrity. Their murder narratives feature archetypical personas that are symptomatic of their social contexts. The town of Red Crow in A Yi's "An Accidental Killing" is an exemplum of Chinese society at large. The characters he constructs collectively personify contemporary China. Ian McEwan's *Amsterdam* captures the social ethos at the turning of the 21st century.

Social critiques present themselves either explicitly or implicitly in both writers' works. Displaced or disturbed by deepening social and economic reforms, the Chinese characters struggle with moral dilemmas brought about by social and cultural changes. A Yi's texts offer an insider's critique of the corrupt legal enforcement and judiciary system. These unjust and unequal institutions are directly mocked and ridiculed and even used as a tool to achieve the killer's goal of spiritual relief. On the other hand, McEwan's text

does not touch upon the legal system itself. On the contrary, the protagonists are privileged enough to evade the punishment of the law. Yet it captures precisely the social and personal ethos of the era by depicting a group from cultural and political elite in British society. One can see that both writers devote themselves to social satire and allegory yet A Yi's is more bitter, bleak and caustic.

The variance of tones in their social critique on the one hand mirrors the two writers' different perceptions of the socio-economic, moral and cultural conditions in their societies. In A Yi's text, one can see social inequality, regional discrimination, people's obsession with wealth and power and their quandaries between materialistic pursuit and human feelings. The characters in *Amsterdam* are driven by an obsession with careerism and professionalism. But in both depicted societies, an excessive pursuit of self-interest and personal advantage are endorsed by the dominant ideology, against which the narrative trajectories move.

The ethical ambiguity generated in A Yi's texts, either by an unconventional murderer (*A Perfect Crime*) or by ambiguous narrative voices ("An Accidental Killing") crystallises the tension between the individuals who live in a moral vacuum and in an unequal, materialistic and repressive society, and between a rebellious sentiment prevalent among the marginal and the intellectual who are concerned about the current dire and stifling situation. The clear-cut moral stance presented in *Amsterdam* either by the major characters or hinted at by the author, seems to entail less ethical ambiguity, yet the demise of the two principal characters does remind us of the irreconcilable conflicts and divisions between different social, political and cultural attitudes even though McEwan only focuses on the most privileged and elite in his society.

Chapter Three: the ethics of writing and reading literature about violent crime

This chapter takes up questions of ethics and morality in the writing and reading of literature about violent crime. In the first section, drawing on the existing critical literature, I show that the literary imagination of murder and rape has hitherto unrecognised moral dimensions, and I use *The Lovely Bones*, *Lucky*, and *Atonement* as examples. I then demonstrate that reading narratives of murder and rape has numerous complexities for readers. Using examples from *Goodnight Rose* and *A Perfect Crime*, I show how these texts can encourage a wide spectrum of responses from readers, some intentional on the part of the authors, some not. In particular, I discuss how sympathy with the victim-turned perpetrator and the premeditating and unremorseful perpetrator as a result of narrative techniques for establishing points of view poses the greatest challenge for the reader. This reading formation is even more ethically challenging for the reader when the narrative focuses on a premeditated murder and makes the murderer's point of view central.

As writers, A Yi, Chi, McEwan and Sebald showcase in their narratives about murder and rape their sense of social responsibility and their belief in the socially transformative power of literature. Their texts serve as striking examples of the response by contemporary writers to respective moral crises in China and the West. Nonetheless, the ethical complexities of reading narratives in which such violent crimes occur complicate these social critiques in multiple ways, some of which we can anticipate but others less so.

In the next section, I elaborate on some of the moral complexities of reading violent crime fiction by analysing Chi Zijian's "Ducks Are Like Flowers" and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* to illustrate how the reader's sympathy for the violent murderers and the attempted rapist can be cultivated successfully or problematically for certain characters and not necessarily the victims. In contrast to Chapters One and Two, this chapter shifts

from examining the psychology, behaviours and moral implications of the perpetrators and victims to those of supporter characters, sympathisers who enact empathy for the violent murderers and who act as surrogates or possible surrogates for readers. Chi and McEwan's texts tap into the potentially social transformative value of literature by offering more hopeful social critiques than we have seen thus far in the comparative analyses. While the main concern in Chapters One and Two lies in showing the irreconcilable tension between the perpetrator and the victim and the irredeemable consequences of murder and rape, in this chapter, I argue that the reader is invited to feel sympathy for the murderers because he or she has been made to understand their social context. Part of that reading formation is determined by the sympathiser's perspective which is foregrounded to showcase the circumstances or contexts of the sympathising process. The sympathiser character in the narrative becomes a surrogate for the reader and is intended to invite the reader to follow their example as the caregiver of the murderer.

Telling polylogical and complex murder and rape stories: the ethical dimensions of the literary imagination of rape and murder from the authors' perspective

It may not seem surprising to say that the literary imagination of murder and rape has moral and ethical dimensions. As Jeremy Hawthorn and Jakob Lothe observe, "at almost every other time in the history of Western civilisation there has been a powerful consensus that the realms of art and morality are in some way or another intertwined."¹ Violent crime would seem to foreground that relationship. This observation certainly holds true for both Anglo-American and Chinese cultures. It might even be more the case in the Chinese context. When it comes to the literary imagination of murder and rape, serious crimes in both social and legal terms, the ethical dimension of such literary texts becomes

¹ Jakob Lothe and Jeremy Hawthorn, eds, *Narrative Ethics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 1.

contentious because murder and rape are the ones most likely to be morally and legally condemned. Whereas some literary fictions deal with more positive, if sometimes fraught topics such as love, trust, and hope, narratives about rape and murder deal with morally deplorable elements. These two forms of crime signify severe violation of an individual's body, bringing about devastating and far-reaching consequences to the relevant parties. Rape in particular raises the threshold by putting (for the most part) the treatment of women at the centre of the narrative. Murder annihilates another human being's life; rape produces serious physical harm and trauma and long-lasting personal and social depression and anxiety. From a sociological and legal point of view, these two violent crimes constitute two of the most heinous violations of social norms as well as challenges to the rule of law. Literary imaginings of murder and rape zero in on the darkest sides of human nature and the most unsettling undercurrents of society.

For example, although Sebold had direct experience of rape in real life and inscribed a strong personal point of view in her memoir *Lucky*, in her novel *The Lovely Bones*, she creates a separate fictional text with a distinctive and different point of view. That is, Sebold has written twice about rape but from very different points of view and with different kinds of narratives. If nothing else, Sebold's narratives indicate that rape as experience and narrative is polylogical rather than monological. It is true that she gained inspiration for her novel from news she heard from the policeman, that a young girl was killed and dismembered in the same amphitheatre where she was raped. However, through the power of literary imagination, especially the fictionalisation of a rape/murder victim/survivor and the unusual creation of a literary heaven as a feminist community, her narrative invites readers to sympathise with the fictional character Susie as a victim of rape and murder and also to empathise with the grief and struggles of her family members (who are also fictional) which are caused by Susie's disappearance and death. The narrative also presents the rapist/murderer's point of view or at least his attempt to

explain away his actions by giving a background story. Whether that mini narrative elicits readers' sympathy for the character is doubtful, given the brutality of the crimes, but the narrative at least acknowledges that there is a story there to be told.

McEwan states in more than one interview his belief in fictional writing's moral aspects. For example, he says that "fiction is a deeply moral form in that it is the perfect medium for entering the mind of another. I think it is at the level of empathy that moral questions begin in fiction."² Sebastian Groes considers McEwan a writer who "has resuscitated the link between morality and the novel for a whole generation."³ *Atonement* well illustrates this view. The thirteen-year-old girl Briony Tallis has a talent for writing. In the summer of 1935, after witnessing a moment of sexual tension and love-making between her sister Cecilia and Robbie Turner and reading the love letter Robbie writes to Cecilia, she comes to the conclusion that Robbie, the son of their family's housekeeper, is a maniac and has violated her sister. When two of Briony and Cecilia's cousins went missing at the dinner party and everyone is out searching for them, she witnesses her cousin Lola being raped from afar. She then falsely accuses the innocent Robbie of being the rapist.

After having spent years in prison, Robbie enlists in the army to fight the Second World War as the condition for his freedom. Cecilia cut off all contact with her family. The two are briefly reunited during the war. Briony refuses her place at Cambridge and becomes a trainee nurse in wartime London. She has fully realised her mistake and decided that it was Paul Marshall, her brother Leon's friend, who raped Lola.

In contrast to the novel proper wherein the story is unfolded in a linear and realistic manner, the postscript of this novel, entitled "London 1999," is narrated from the

² Liliane Louvel, Gilles Menegaldo and Anne-Laure Fortin, "An Interview with Ian McEwan", *Etudes Britanniques Contemporaines*, 8 (1995), 4.

³ Sebastian Groes, ed, *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 2.

perspective of Briony as a novelist at the age of 77. It reveals Briony as the author of the previous sections of the novel and also that, although Cecilia and Robbie are reunited in Briony's novel, they never do so in reality.

Briony as the narrator trying to atone for her crime, suggests that writing itself can be a moral project. Due to her false testimony, Briony indirectly caused the death of Robbie. Later she becomes a writer recounting the story. Although as a character, Briony takes up nursing and works in a hospital to help the wounded during the war, her actual writing of the novel as her act of atonement gains more focus than the depiction of the rape itself. Kathleen D'Angelo maintains that "fiction cannot absolve or undo transgressions that have taken place in the real world".⁴ But in the face of the impossibility of undoing the irreversible crime, confessing and retelling the story become the only means for the author and the reader to reflect and meditate on their own moral positions. In doing so, the writer and readers implicitly reaffirm literature's powerful role as a social voice. On the textual level, the elderly Briony is aware of the difficulty of atonement in an age characterised by the absence of ultimate truth or moral authority. However, she and the implied author regard writing as one of the valuable and available attempts to achieve ethical effects:

The problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, one entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all.⁵

The novelist Briony takes advantage of literary imagination to atone for her crime as the unfaithful witness Briony. Although the role the literary imagination plays in this novel has received mixed responses from literary critics,⁶ McEwan himself never ceases

⁴ Kathleen D'Angelo, "To Make a Novel": The Construction of a Critical Readership in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*," *Studies in the Novel* 41, no.1 (2009): 88.

⁵ Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), 371.

⁶ For example, Charles Pastoor asserts that art, or more specifically, the art of fiction, mainly referring to the meta-fictional narrative strategy, proves to be powerless and is unable to help achieve redemption.

to promote the power of literary imagination and his responsibility as a novelist to explore ethical issues in writing about rape and murder. He claims that “[i]magining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity,” and “[i]t is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.”⁷ Whether or not McEwan has been successful applying this belief to his literary production, as Haiyan Lee maintains, literary imagination alone “may not directly ameliorate the lot of the marginalised and the excluded, but any moral revolution or institutional reform has to start with a willingness and readiness to imagine other people and other creatures—their dignity, their pain, and their essential aliveness.”⁸ We should recognise and prize the willingness and daring consciousness of writers to take full advantage of literary imagination and to engage others not as monsters or aliens but as flawed human beings.

Readers’ complex ethical responses to murder and rape narratives

So far I have been focusing on the relationship between the literary imagination and its moral implications from the perspective of the writer’s intentions and consciousness. It is almost common sense in literary studies that the reader’s reception and moral engagement with a text are equally if not more important. The reader’s agentive role as critic of a literary work has been emphasised by a large number of scholars in numerous works, not only in reader response criticism.⁹ A Yi, Chi Zijian, McEwan and Sebald

Dominic points out that “[t]he novel form is used in *Atonement* to raise questions of morality and authorship in a highly self-conscious way, while simultaneously and paradoxically casting doubt on the novel as an inherently moral medium.” *Ian McEwan* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007): 162-3.

⁷ Ian McEwan, “Only Love and then Oblivion. Love was All They had to Set Against their Murders,” *The Guardian*, Accessed March 30, 2015.
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/15/september11.politicsphilosophyandsociety2>.

⁸ Haiyan Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 302.

⁹ Representative works include Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982); Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London etc.: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1978); and Stanley Fish *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

commit themselves to a project that challenges and tests the boundaries between crime and victimisation, moral and immoral, self and other. The fluidity or contingency pervasive in these oppositions constitute the complexity and contradictions on the level of both writing and reading.

In terms of readers' responses, when reading literary representations of murder and rape, the reader's ethical responses are complex. The diverse work of A Yi, Chi Zijian, Alice Sebold, and Ian McEwan encompasses all the parties that could possibly be involved in murder and rape: the criminal, the victim, the witness, the family, the friends, even total strangers. Nevertheless, none of their texts attempts to depict the rapists and murderers as brutal monsters. The crimes, however brutal, are not intended to horrify, nor do they provide voyeuristic pleasures for the reader. Rather, the narrative tone in each text portraying the criminals is a humanistic one. Even the most brutal murderer suffers from discrimination and alienation. With these texts challenging and testing the boundaries of identity of criminal and victim, the reader is given latitude or perhaps left to decide who and when and how to sympathise (with).

Susan Sontag's observation on photographs illuminates our understanding of the dynamics between writers' intentions and the reader's ethical reception: "[w]hat determines the possibility of being affected morally ... is the existence of a relevant political consciousness. Without a politics, photographs ... will mostly be experienced as, simply, unreal or as a demoralizing emotional blow."¹⁰ If the political, social, and ethical messages implied in the narrative texts discussed here concern humanistic understandings of every party affected by rape and murder, then these messages are not automatically recognised and absorbed by the readers. Rather, the reader is regularly forced to reflect on or become more self-conscious about the particular affective responses he or she is having to victim and criminal alike. The fictional characters "make decisions regarding

¹⁰ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador USA: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2005), 19.

what they shall say or do, and the processes whereby such decisions are reached are described, implied, or hypothesised by writers.”¹¹ Readers, on the other hand, make decisions concerning how a narrative is to be engaged with. Leo Lowenthal teaches us that what the reader is looking for in literary communication and what the author delivers beyond the conscious awareness of the reader might diverge.¹² According to Stanley Fish’s interpretive community theory, readers from different interpretive communities tend to have different expectations and readings: “the identification of what was real and normative occurred within interpretive communities and what was normative for the members of one community would be seen as strange (if it could be seen at all) by the members of another.”¹³ The ideal situation on the reader’s part is that their sympathetic sensitivity is successfully cultivated towards both violators and victims and their friends and family. In other words, the implied (ideal) reader is invited to see all of them sympathetically, to one degree or another. However, it might be easier for the reader to identify with and empathise with the victims, the struggles of the victim’s family and friends and even the witness who falsely accuses rather than with brutal killers and rapists. Nevertheless, in revenge narratives where the victim turns murderer or in narratives where the murderer is socially alienated and discriminated against, the readers’ response could be potentially more contingent, even more complicated and polylogical. “Recognizing and then excluding or extruding evil,”¹⁴ as Wayne Booth has claimed, or casting off those we think are potentially harmful, dangerous or worthless, is no easy task when the murders and rapists are depicted as somewhat worthy, even partially, of our sympathy.

When readers make choices about how to read a text and how to relate positively or

¹¹ Lothe and Hawthorn, *Narrative Ethics*, 6.

¹² Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, 1985), 158.

¹³ Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), 15-6.

¹⁴ Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 485-88.

negatively to individual characters, their own social backgrounds and moral positions inevitably affect where they stand in relation to the narrative. The role of rape and murder in eliciting sympathy from the reader can be different too. For example, in Chi Zijian's *Goodnight Rose*, Chinese readers from different social backgrounds will most likely read and engage with the narrative differently. Some of them, the ones who hold feminist positions, might find Zhao Xiao'e's avenging act to kill her mother's rapist less condemnable and repellent than those who are staunch supporters of patriarchal assumptions. The ethically ideal situation would be that the text successfully invites the reader to sympathise and empathise with women's victimisation and so abandon at least temporarily their patriarchal assumptions. Thus the reader's response depends on the extent to which he or she advocates a feminist ethics. If they believe that under no circumstances should one commit murder, and that the principle of "it is wrong to kill" should outweigh personal ways of getting justice done, then the feminist ethics of justice would not be likely to be persuasive or attractive.

While sympathy for the victims is complex, imagining the violent acts of rape and murder, especially the latter, can elicit equally complex responses and emotions. Joyce Carol Oates observes that violators "excite our fear, our revulsion, and our desire to severely punish; simultaneously, they excite our fascination, and, in some, whether secretly or openly, our admiration."¹⁵ Particular narrative techniques further complicate the reading experience. According to Oates, the undefined nature of the individual character's spectacular violation of taboos tempts authors to project "extraordinary powers--romantic, dark, 'Satanic'—upon him."¹⁶ Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* has seduced readers for centuries.

Part of the reason for the reader to sympathise with the murderer is that both murder

¹⁵ Joyce Carol Oates, "'I Had No Other Thrill or Happiness,'" *New York Review of Books*, March 24, 1994, XLI.6: 56.

¹⁶ Oates, "'I Had No Other Thrill or Happiness,'" 58.

and literature are individual projects that transcend normal social reality and go beyond ordinary social boundaries. Joel Black brings to our attention the connection between crime and literature since the 18th century when the Romantics explicitly celebrated literature as an autonomous art form. Setting aside the complicity shared between crime and literature, when it comes to one of the most outrageous crimes, murder, Josephine McDonagh rightly pinpoints the common features shared by murder and writing. She claims that writing and murder are both activities “perpetrated in the interest of power and pleasure; both are acts of transcendence offering passage beyond the social institutions in which men feel themselves to be trapped, affording the agent the power to act freely, unhampered by the structures of social life.”¹⁷ Even when the artistic role of the killer is given ample emphasis, the writings themselves attest to the fact that it is impossible to transcend the sociological aspect of crime: “murder is constituted not as an act of transcendence ... but rather as a desperate bid for empowerment in the face of the impossibility of transcendence.”¹⁸ The struggles of murderers and rapists to gain power become ambiguous sites for locating readers’ more positive responses to those criminal characters.

The chosen texts by the four authors discussed here are all consciously or unconsciously antagonistic to dominant social discourses, especially from the point of view of feminist politics. The foremost target of mockery is the law, the legal system as a social institution. The interrelation between crime and the law is obvious, since, as Jeffrey C. Kinkley succinctly states, “‘Crime fiction’ in plain English... is fiction about crime and the law.”¹⁹ Common to China and the West, crime is inextricably bound up with law

¹⁷ Josephine McDonagh, “Do or Die: Problems of Agency and Gender in the Aesthetics of Murder” in Isobel Armstrong ed, *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 222.

¹⁸ McDonagh, “Do or Die: Problems of Agency and Gender in the Aesthetics of Murder,” 228.

¹⁹ Jeffery Kinkley, *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 8.

and punishment; law creates crime and criminal identities. In the Chinese context, legal discourse has had a low status. According to Bakken Børge, “[i]t is one of the fundamental assumptions in the Chinese theory of learning that people are innately capable of learning from models. In addition, rule by morality is more widespread in traditional China than rule by law.”²⁰

It is worth noting that the image of the legal system in A Yi and Chi Zijian’s narratives is seldom positive. In Chi’s texts, the legal system is depicted as paternalistic, cold and remote from ordinary people’s lives. In “Ducks are Like Flowers”, the legally blind fugitive totally disregards the law as he abides by another moral code and fulfils his filial duties. In *Goodnight Rose*, Zhao Xiao’e strives to avoid involvement with the police and has to launch her own investigation to find her mother’s rapist. The legal system is portrayed as inept and untrustworthy, a system that guarantees that she will not be questioned by the police with respect to her biological father’s death. The text does not tell us how the distrust of law comes into being, but it shows the sceptical attitude prevailing among the characters and the culture. In *Amsterdam*, the two major characters attempt to evade the legal system to solve their disputes by travelling to another city and country where they can avoid punishment.

Although we might not find it ethical to identify with killers and rapists, the literary imagination’s transcendence of and challenge to established institutions such as the legal system can potentially entail complicity on the part of the reader. There may be fascination at extraordinary behaviour; often, by mastering the ultimate act of agency, the criminals are tainted with heroic characteristics. In “An Accidental Killing”, for example, the killer sings an aria in the aftermath of his passionate killing in a psychotic state. This grandiose gesture obliquely suggests the longstanding perception in Chinese culture that

²⁰ Bakken Børge, *The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control, and the Dangers of Modernity in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.

killings, especially multiple killing, symbolise exceptional strength and heroism. In other words, the killer adopts some of mainstream society's values even though he has been discriminated against and marginalised. The texts by A Yi and Chi Zijian somehow retain traces of, as Dennis Porter believes, ancient texts where the “criminal” protagonist commits crimes that are part of legend, myth, and “greatness.”²¹ Though the characters in these contemporary texts are average men and women, the narratives strive to depict their criminal behaviour as unusual, not mundane. In contrast to the banality of evil, these behaviours are portrayed as highly exceptional and/or intentionally empowering.

Moreover, it is more ethically challenging for the reader when the narrative protagonist is the killer, especially when the killer is not provoked but premeditates. In murderer-centred narratives, the centrality of the criminal's point of view determines that the ethically Other takes the centre stage. These narratives revolve around the inner psyche of the killer, and there is no other point of view or character with equal narrative force in the text. Lisa Rodensky tells us that although “[f]irst person narratives offer access to the inner self of the narrator and indirect access to the inner selves of the characters with whom the narrator comes into contact”, we are still tempted to ask such questions as “[i]s the character posturing? Is he concealing from his audience unappealing aspects of his intentions? Are all aspects of his own intentions accessible to him?” While I acknowledge the limitations in using a first-person narrator or foregrounding the criminal's perspective, first-person omniscient or near omniscient narrative is a powerful technique for creating a “project of self-expression and self-assertion: it is introspective and individualistic, involving deliberate mystification and myth-making.”²² Lisa Downing also claims that by “becoming an alternative sovereign subject who similarly triumphs by means of (a less symbolic) annihilation of the Other”, the killer achieves

²¹ Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 31.

²² Lisa Rodensky, *Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel* (Cary, NC, 2003), 12.

an “ultimate act of agency.”²³ First-person narratives are compelling and effective in keeping the force or momentum of the narratives and promoting the justification of murder as an end. Such characters challenge any easy or automatic sympathy for victims alone on the part of readers.

Social critiques compared cross-culturally

Speaking for the marginalised, speaking it loudly in the face of moral crisis, social inequality and state censorship—A Yi and Chi Zijian

The negative, ironic treatment of the legal system constitutes part of the social critique implied by the Anglo-American and Chinese texts I focus on. Along with the moral complexities and challenges present in writing and reading murder and rape, it is safe to say that A Yi and Chi Zijian’s work exhibits an unmistakable engagement with social critique. Their texts encourage active sociological reading. In the novels and short stories discussed earlier, this social critique is positioned against a perceived moral crisis. In A Yi and Chi Zijian’s texts, one can sense that murder and rape result from the conflicts between social ills and desperate and alienated individuals. Either through a cynical or a nihilistic tone, the function of social documentary in these texts figures prominently. The nature of murder and rape as an unsettling, unpredictable and destructive force resembles that of the ongoing social and cultural transformation in contemporary China. The social ethos prevailing in present day China is that Chinese society is at a particularly dramatic moment and feeling a moral crisis. This feeling may derive from each individual’s personal life and result from the media’s reportage of violations of traditional moral norms. What makes this feeling of moral crisis more disheartening is that no effective remedies have been framed either by the state or the party.

²³ Lisa Downing, “Beyond Reasonable Doubt: Aesthetic Violence and Motiveless Murder in French Decadent Fiction,” *French Studies* 58, no. 2 (2004): 191.

The concept of a “moral crisis” in contemporary China has become a consensus view among scholars and a lived experience among ordinary people. For example, Ci Jiwei believes that the perception of a moral crisis in contemporary China is appropriate and unexaggerated.²⁴ According to his view, a moral crisis means that elementary moral norms are easily breached on a massive scale. What further worsens the situation is that the state has failed to provide sufficient welfare and social security since the market reforms and thus further exposes people to risks and uncertainties. Individual self-responsibility takes the place of social solidarity, and everyone is for himself.²⁵ Anxiety breeds alienation.

A Yi’s short story “Two Lives” exemplifies and dramatises the way in which this moral crisis without remedy prevails in contemporary Chinese society. The story exposes underlying corruption which allows a rapist to ‘prosper’. Zhou Lingtong, a wanted rapist, who has survived by resorting to begging and robbery, makes a call to a different woman whose life he had saved when she was attacked. He discovers that the woman had been born into a rich and powerful family in Beijing. A marital relationship with the woman guarantees his connection with the powerful and rich.

The transformation of his life involves not only a change of social status but also the effacement of his crime. Failing in their attempt to arrest Zhou, the police, especially the captain of the criminal investigation unit, defer to Zhou’s newly gained social and political power. The law enforcement department connives with government officials and writes off a serious crime as a trade-off for their future benefits. The narrative represents

²⁴ Ci Jiwei, *Moral China in the Age of Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 15. These four phenomena include: first, everyday norms of coexistence and cooperation—be they moral, legal, or regulatory—are breached on a massive scale; second, every sector of society is unable to maintain a semblance of moral responsibility; third, very elementary norms are violated in every walk of life; fourth, the moral crisis has been normalized to a great extent.

²⁵ Jiong Tu, “On the moral void in Contemporary China,” *Kings Review*, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://kingsreview.co.uk/magazine/blog/2014/05/22/on-the-moral-void-in-contemporary-china/>.

Zhou's behaviour ironically. By portraying him as a figure who shows no shred of remorse and flaunts his new wealth and power unashamedly, the text critiques the privilege of the upper-middle class in contemporary China and its ability to manipulate and collaborate with the local government and social institutions such as the law enforcement department. When Zhou becomes accustomed to his new status, the character is constructed as astute enough to appreciate the opportunity to assert his patriarchal dominant position in their relationship. The narrative warns that the moral crisis has the danger of being internalised and integrated in the mentality of ordinary people, so that moral corruption and social inequality seem to be the “new normal.”

It is no easy task to account for the causes of the contemporary Chinese moral crisis. But Chi and A Yi take on a socially responsible role in their work and attempt to actively engage with that crisis and offer literary representations of both the crisis and its possible remedy. Their social critique is characterised by speaking for the weak and the less powerful. The Confucian ideal of “expressing the truth in writings” (文以載道) has inspired generations of literati to engage the world and work for political and social change through their social critique. This ideal has deep roots in Chinese culture. Chinese thought, especially the Confucian tradition, believes that ethical behaviour has an essentially aesthetic character. Accordingly, the practice of the arts is considered an important part of ethical cultivation.²⁶ In Confucian philosophy, art is a primary means of transmitting ethical values, and the correctness of the values conveyed is considered more important than artistic novelty. The Confucian tradition encourages didactic art, and the morally ideal situation is presented as already existing. Art is considered ethically valuable because it inspires emotion in the human heart/mind, which is moved to a moral response.²⁷ Chi and A Yi are no exception. Their sense of a grave moral crisis drives

²⁶ Stephen J. Goldberg, “Chinese Aesthetics” in E. Deutsch and R. Bontekoe eds, *A Companion to World Philosophies* (Madden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 225-34.

²⁷ Wu, Kuangming, “Chinese Aesthetics”, in Robert E. Allinson ed, *Understanding the Chinese Mind: the*

them to appeal to readers and address such a palpable and pressing social phenomenon in contemporary China. Some groups of literary critics believe that literature should respond to the current situation closely and play an active role in the cause to remedy it. From this point of view, writers deserve respect for their concern for and expression of the hardships of the subaltern.²⁸ Chi Zijian and A Yi represent a group of writers who dedicate themselves to actively responding to the moral and spiritual predicament faced by Chinese people today, especially the most underprivileged ones. And their texts offer a compelling response to such an appeal.

As a matter of fact, Chinese writers have been in the forefront of exploring crime and moral corruption in literature. Crime features prominently in literary texts by writers such as Wang Shuo, Liu Heng and others who write about contemporary society.²⁹ However, as discussed in previous chapters, the tone in A Yi and Chi Zijian's texts is more bitter and desperate. The social conditions their characters live in are bleak and the moral crisis stifling and irresolvable. Such textual aesthetics do not intend to console and teach, but rather aim to further dramatise and magnify the negative aspects of society and maybe provoke the reader to understand the current situation more thoroughly and deeply enough to demand change.

The pessimistic portrayal of how ordinary people fare in a corrupt society derives from the writer's perceptions of rising social inequality. It is true that living standards in China, especially in urban areas, have improved tremendously, and ordinary people are enjoying more opportunities for education, healthcare and mobility. However, along with the progress and achievements brought about by China's deepening market economy and

Philosophical Roots (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), 236-64.

²⁸ Yunlei Li, "Subaltern Literature: Theory and Practice (2004-2009)", trans by Adrian Thieret, in Ban Wang and Wang Hui eds, *Culture and Social Transformation: Ideas, History, and Modern China* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 60.

²⁹ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2003), 253.

increasing urbanisation, rising social inequality and the discrimination deriving from it are too palpable to be ignored.

In the meantime, as social interventionists, compared to their predecessors, the challenges Chi Zijian and A Yi are facing are all the more complex and disconcerting. As the role of literature has been on the wane and been overtaken by other emerging forms of media, their social leadership has met unprecedented challenge. McDougall's observation of the Chinese literary scene in the 1990s still holds true for the current situation. She argues that as the social mobility and free flow of ideas and information among the general public have reached an unprecedented level, elite intellectual writers still prefer to depict melancholy, corruption (moral and material) and decay. While the Chinese readership has become more socially diverse and less subject to domination by elite interests, readers have welcomed writers who make no pretence to social leadership.³⁰ What is more at present, state censorship on literature seems to be tightening. Exposing the underbelly of Chinese society to write about injustice, inequality and darkness is an undesirable activity in the eyes of the state.³¹

All the above factors seem to invoke a backlash from writers themselves, not always explicitly, which may also aggravate the moral crisis and contribute to a strident social critique. Like the writers who consider social responsibility as their major calling, A Yi and Chi Zijian's works exhibit their conscious positioning as literary spokespersons for the marginalised and downtrodden, even if some of those characters are criminals. As such, they present a complicated rebuke to the aesthetic ideology of social realism. Instead of singing the praises of the progress and achievements the country has garnered, their work highlights the unwelcome topics and literary figures, specifically criminal figures and

³⁰ McDougall, *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century*, 255-6.

³¹ Tom Philips, "Publishers Under Pressure as China's Censors Reach for Red Pen," *The Guardian*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/13/china-censorship-xi-jinping-authors-publishers>.

behaviours and victims of crime, and thus serves as a clarion call for social equality and the moral elevation of all people, not just the elites.

A Yi's texts provide snapshots of how social outcasts fare in a society where inequality is ubiquitous and corruption prevalent as well as the despairing conditions for the weak and underprivileged in society. His use of short, choppy sentences and a laconic and tough tone strengthens his satirical social critique.³² In "An Accidental Killing", the victims' and the killer's life experiences are all given negative treatment. Each character is jostled by various values brought about by social transformation. The psychological anguish and moral predicament each faces seem irresolvable. Each of the characters is morally flawed. The narratives do not give centrality to any single point of view, but let them interconnect within an airtight narrative space which offers no outlet. Therefore, rather than focussing on the repercussions or the aftermath of the criminal behaviour, "An Accidental Killing" displays the way tensions and conflicts irretrievably slip into criminal states of mind and behaviours.

Although the killer never meets his victims until the day the crime takes place in "An Accidental Killing", the premeditated and deliberate nature of the crime he commits and the narrative's commitment to a first-person point of view makes *A Perfect Crime* all the more chilling and disturbing as a narrative. The manifesto-like first person narrative implicates a complete distrust of the Chinese judiciary system and ridicules the complicity of the media, social organisations and even seemingly innocent individuals.

The text speaks powerfully to people's discontent with social inequality and moral vacuum and provides a fictional touchstone for readers' recognition. The author's personal experiences as a police officer potentially satisfy the reader's curiosity for the

³² Walker Gibson, *Tough, Sweet and Stuffy: An Essay on Modern American Prose Styles* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966). He believes that tough language is the language of fiction, of no pretensions, egocentric, subjective and written from the author participant or the author omniscient point of view.

backroom deals endemic to the police system. Kinkley remarks that “China’s world of trials, arrests, and prisons seem so professional and yet so inaccessible.”³³ The depiction of trials, arrests, and prisons in *A Perfect Crime* offers a picture under the pen of a former professional. More than parodying the incompetence, corruption and stupidity prevalent in the legal system, the novel allows the protagonist to take advantage of it to achieve his goal. While feeding the reader with a partly “insider,” partly literary view, the narrative presents the law, the judiciary system, and the police force as a part of a wider social context. Each reader needs to reflect on the extent to which they identify with the protagonist’s sentiments and whether they themselves might be complicit in a society troubled by corruption, morally empty and obsessed with greed, indifference and malice.

Similar to A Yi, Chi Zijian’s texts tend to revolve around the everyday experiences of the ordinary and even the down-trodden. As shown in Chapter One, women’s lives and the tensions of gender relations are foregrounded in her narrative. Her critique is characterised by painting a picture in which women face constant perils of sexual harassment and violation. In the age of Chinese reform and mobility, the conflicts between the country and the city have deepened and their differences widened. Chinese women have enjoyed more educational and labour rights, but they are still also exposed to a patriarchal culture in which the situation of gender inequality is dire. Her texts inform us how the effects of such inequality take a heavy toll on women’s lives, including making them criminals to address the wrongs they have endured under patriarchy.

Critiquing and prolematising “ourselves” in an age of moral ambiguity and neo-liberalism—an Anglo-American perspective

While A Yi and Chi Zijian’s texts focus on the marginal, underprivileged and unheard

³³ Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China*, 17.

as far as crime is concerned, Ian McEwan's work, especially his recent texts, seems to be more centred on society's privileged and elite, either as victims or criminals. His texts fictionalise the experience of the well-off encountering "the other" and partake less of a critique of existing social institutions. Whereas the Chinese writers I have discussed have depicted characters who are clearly socioeconomically disadvantaged and morally alienated, McEwan and Sebald's characters, especially McEwan's, are not the most poor and vulnerable members of society. On the contrary, they are white, middle or upper middle class, educated and frequently in positions of some power.

Compared to the consensus around the existence of a moral crisis in contemporary China, it is safer to say that in the broad Anglo-American context the prevailing ethos is more an age of moral ambiguity than one of moral crisis. Although the question of the West's moral decline or crisis has drawn much attention and debate globally, there is less agreement as to the prevalence or depth of that decline. For example, among the three ways Wayne Baker proposes to think about a crisis of values, one way is that in a crisis period secular-rational values take the place of traditional values. Secular-rational values include a lack of religious beliefs, relative rather than fixed standards of good and evil, gender equality, a lack of deference to established authority, and an acceptance of abortion, divorce, euthanasia, and suicide as social choices.³⁴ For Baker, the prevalence of secular-rational values are problematic partly because they promote relativism when it comes to questions of good and evil, right and wrong, and not a little selfish individualism. Some critics feel even more strongly about the dominance of secular-rational values. Gertrude Himmelfarb criticises them because they entail a denial of the language of morality and responsibility.³⁵ These views highlight the absence of absolute moral standards for

³⁴ Wayne Baker, *America's Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 2005), 7.

³⁵ Gertrude Himmelfarb, "A De-Moralized Society: the British/American experience," *The Public Interest* (1994):76.

individuals to adhere to and a reluctance to be engaged in judging which behaviours are better and why. However, Baker and Himmelfarb represent what Richard Stivers describes as conservative and liberal oppositions: “Conservative critics point to the high volume of street crime; ... liberal critics look at the lack of compassion for the poor, increased greed and selfishness.”³⁶ Himmelfarb’s warnings of unbridled self-realisation are cogent. She thinks that the “current notions of self-fulfillment, self-expression, and self-realisation derive from a self that does not have to prove itself by reference to any values, purposes, or persons outside itself—that simply is, and by reason of that alone deserves to be fulfilled and realised. This is truly a self divorced from others, narcissistic and solipsistic”.³⁷ Stivers shares Himmelfarb’s view. He claims that the so-called new morality “encourages, even promotes, cynical and self-serving behaviour”, and it “is both cynical and nihilistic—cynical in its total advocacy of power and nihilistic in its destruction of meaning.”³⁸

Studies on literature as a barometer of social realities have become a popular discipline, and some critics lament the loss of moral exemplar in literature. For example, Stuart Sim comments that in crime literature “America...appears a very violent, crime-ridden, and politically corrupt society, especially in terms of its major cities. There is a widespread perception in that society of a sharp decline in moral values in recent decades.”³⁹ Sim thinks that from the later twentieth century onwards, the notion of the detective as something of a moral exemplar begins to break down. The progressively darker tone in crime fiction in the US mirrors a culture in which moral values are in decline in both public and private life, that is, a society apparently sliding into a condition

³⁶ Richard Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1994), xii.

³⁷ Himmelfarb, “A De-Moralized Society: the British/American experience”, 80.

³⁸ Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline*, 169.

³⁹ Stuart Sim, *Justice and Revenge in Contemporary American Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2015), 32.

of moral crisis.

This sense of moral crisis in the West or at least in the US shares some characteristics with the perceived moral crisis in contemporary Chinese society. However, in the UK and US, the official states are less likely to censor writers' choice of literary themes and fear less the social impact of representing society's dark sides. But some critics have also voiced concern about the state's failure to promote social equality and thus the state's complicity in moral panic. They recognise the increasing tension between individuals and the state and the way that social and economic inequality largely comes from neo-liberalisation which encourages personal responsibility rather than social or state responsibility. According to David Pierson, at the heart of neo-liberalism's conception of subjectivity is

[t]he concept of self-care or the accepted premise that each person is responsible for him or herself. Individuals must assume responsibility for their well-being and personal development in a market-driven society...the state devises new strategies for leading and controlling individuals without being responsible for them. Neoliberal governments function to produce self-governing individuals while shifting the responsibility for such social risks as illness, unemployment, crime and poverty, and social life in general into the domain of personal self-care.⁴⁰

Pierson's argument is in line with the critique of responsibilisation, a discourse foreshadowed by Foucault in his 1978-79 Collège de France lectures on neoliberalism.⁴¹

Mark Amsler and Cris Shore believe that the responsibilisation discourse conflates positive and negative meanings of responsibility, thereby "conflating responsibility as free choice, personal initiative, innovation, meritorious conduct with responsibility as liability, blame, jurisdiction."⁴²

McEwan's *Amsterdam* assumes a socially transformative role because it offers a

⁴⁰ "Breaking Neoliberal? Contemporary Neoliberal Discourses and Policies in AMC's *Breaking Bad*" in *Breaking Bad: Critical Essays on the Contexts, Politics, Style, and Reception of the Television Series* Edited by David Pierson, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 38.

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008).

⁴² Mark Amsler, and Cris Shore. "Responsibilisation and Leadership in the Neoliberal University: a New Zealand Perspective," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* (2015):2.

prime example of the extreme consequences of unbridled self-interested behaviours, although the principal characters are ones who benefit most from the increasingly neoliberal society. This text, together with his previous ones, make McEwan in a sense “the latter-day humanist, concerned with the need for the human spirit to confront its own dangerous impulses, the ‘danger’ comprising a threat to the social order as well as to the individual.”⁴³ In a context where everyone is for himself and responsible for himself, *Amsterdam* highlights in its narrative focus a critique of the disastrous outcomes of unbridled neoliberalism and dangerous impulses in human nature.

Similar to their Chinese counterparts, McEwan and Sebold in terms of their literary engagements with murder and rape also dedicate themselves to representing “what is going wrong” in society and how it affects individuals’ lives. Their social critique may be more implicit than that of Chi and A Yi. Yet the level of critique is achieved by representing the disastrous consequences of class tension as in *Atonement*, and the dominance of patriarchy as in Sebold’s work. Their sense of “personal responsibility” does not come across as strident and as pessimistic a social critique as we have read in A Yi and Chi Zijian’s stories, but as more higher-minded, less gritty.

In McEwan’s work representing murder and rape, the reader learns the social position of the characters from their interior monologues and their encounter with the outside world. Matt Ridley thinks that in McEwan’s work, it is “the interior monologue of the characters, and that monologue’s encounter with the ‘truth’ in the outside world, that grips us.”⁴⁴ The interrelations between literature and society are thus difficult to ignore in McEwan. His fictional characters and their encounters work along with the changing social realities and the tensions they produce on the individuals.

In *Amsterdam*, Clive does not associate “real” crime with the elite social circle he

⁴³ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (London: Penguin, 2001), 438.

⁴⁴ Matt Ridley’s preface to *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Sebastian Groes, (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 1.

inhabits. When he visits the police station as a witness, he contemplates that “[i]n his world it was rare for someone to raise his voice, and he found himself all evening in a state of exhausted excitement. Practically every member of the public who came in, voluntarily or not, was down at heel, and it seemed to Clive that the main business of the police was to deal with the numerous and unpredictable consequences of poverty.”⁴⁵ However, the fact that Clive later murders his long-time friend shows that crime is not exclusive to the poor and underprivileged. As a person who enjoys a high social status and cultural privilege, he is also capable of committing lethal crimes, if only in a more cunning and sophisticated way. Both major characters evade the law inside their own country by going to Amsterdam and committing murder there under the guise of assisted suicide.

McEwan’s *Atonement* works as social critique in that when read within the context of rape narratives, the novel represents socioeconomic tension between the upper-middle class and the working class. The false accusation from the witness, rather than the suffering of the rape victim and the nasty rapist, namely, the criminal act per se, comes to be the major concern of the text. Class is at the heart of this novel. The wrongful conviction of Robbie, the son of the Tallises’ cleaning lady, to a great extent derives from class bias and prejudices. The narrative focalisation on Briony’s consciousness runs the risk of being interpreted as a kind of sympathy with the rape witness who is upper middle class and a wrongdoer: “it is her consciousness that envelops us, and it is her pain that we are to feel.”⁴⁶ The central concern of the novel is thus not the system of exclusion that wrongly sentences Robbie to jail. The character Robbie never enjoys any chance to tell his story from within. McEwan’s inattention to this sociological perspective attracts criticism from class-oriented scholars such as Lawrence Driscoll, who thinks that texts

⁴⁵ McEwan, *Amsterdam*, 153.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Driscoll, *Evading Class in Contemporary British Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 24.

like *Atonement* articulate the author's

desire to position the characters within narratives that push the middle-class narrators/characters towards an open space of authority, growth, and development, while the working-class figures are moved closer toward isolation and restriction, or a space in which they can only signify in terms of their excessive surplus desire that prevents any empathy between them and the reader.⁴⁷

It is almost tautological that a text Driscoll labels as lacking social consciousness when read within a class-based framework must lead to the conclusion that it dismisses the working-class experiences. It seems that a social critique inevitably means that literary texts should position marginalised figures at the centre of the narrative. If not, the texts run the risk of lacking social consciousness and failing to change the reader. However, Thom Dancer cogently points out that

[t]he justification of the value of literature (and literary study) ...has been so thoroughly naturalised in literary studies that it seems self-evidently true. Scholarly "common sense" says that novels should critique society and culture; to merely describe them is at best to remain complicit with their inequalities and at worst to endorse the status quo.⁴⁸

I concur with his view. While the middle-class characters enjoy more treatment, McEwan has a clear social consciousness and his description challenges and critiques a society and culture that is dominated by middle, and upper class values.

Sweetness and light embodied by sympathiser figures: a comparative reading of "Ducks are Like Flowers" and *Saturday*

In this section, I will briefly compare Chi Zijian's short story "Ducks are Like Flowers" and Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday* to illustrate the way in which the two texts invite the reader to sympathise with violence-committing characters. In each narrative, the reader is given information to understand the violent characters' social context. Also, what I am calling the supporter characters come to understand and help the criminals, which implies an underlying value structure in the narratives that encourages the reader

⁴⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁸ Thom Dancer, "Toward a Modest Criticism: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 45, no.2 (2012), 204-5.

to think of the socially disadvantaged character, either due to socio-economic restructuring or some biological quirk, as our fellow human being who deserves care and sympathy. The narrative effort to elicit readers' sympathy in this way embodies a conscious commitment to the socially transformative value of literature, but not necessarily only on behalf of the victims. The texts show through the supporter characters that care and sympathy do not come easily, but that all human beings are deserving.

First published in 2001, Chi Zijian's short story "Ducks are Like Flowers" tells of a prison escapee who kills his father and later develops a special friendship with Old Mrs Xu (徐五婆), a widow living in a rural area who supports herself by raising ducks and performing funeral services. The fugitive breaks into her house and coerces old Mrs Xu to let him stay and not turn him in to the police. Gradually they both let down their guards and eventually form a mother-son-like relationship and work together to achieve the criminal's act of atonement. After the fugitive turns himself in to the police and has received the death penalty, Old Mrs Xu buries him and performs a funeral service for him.

The narrative focalises the action around the supporter Old Mrs Xu's inner thoughts and actions. Through the portrayal of her behaviours and observations, the reader learns both characters' backgrounds. The centrality of Old Mrs Xu's perceptions of the fugitive invites the reader to experience the gradual development of their human relationship and grasp the text's message of social responsibility and strong ethical stance, exemplified by the implication that we should treat the marginal and those excluded humanely and discover the human sides of the fugitive as Old Mrs Xu does.

Old Mrs Xu's rural background means that she does not enjoy care from the state as a senior citizen. Living on her own, Old Mrs Xu, similar to the fugitive, does not have the opportunity to enjoy the comfort and warmth provided by her family. She never feels care and love from her husband and puzzles over his sudden suicidal act. Her icy relationship with her children points to the rupture of family structures and values. The ducks are not

only her source of income, but more importantly, her emotional support. The text devotes ample space to depicting her bond with the ducks she raises. The ducks are so important to her that they have become her way of observing and perceiving the world. The ducks symbolise her connection with the beauty of nature and humanity as opposed to industrialisation and moral indecency in the human world:

When the ducks climb onto the dam for a rest, they spread like a mass of cloud from the grassland. They normally play around on the grassland in the mornings. Some of them like wild flowers, stroking them with their beaks. They look like blossoming lotuses when they swim in the water

(鸭子爬上堤坝，在坝顶喘息片刻，就像一片云似的漫下草滩。。。。。。鸭子们上午通常是在草滩上玩，它们有喜欢野花的，就用鸭嘴抚弄草滩上的花。。。。。。它们在水中优游的姿态，看上去就像一朵朵绽放的莲花。) ⁴⁹

Her commitment to animals and humans extends to the wider environment and stems from her life experience. Her own son has been a laid-off worker from a paper making factory, but she believes that the closure of the factory is commendable because she says “when the paper mill was operating, it dumped waste water into the river day and night. The river was not clear any more. It became black and smelled foul. The ducks would never swim in it.” (那个造纸厂没黄的时候，一天到晚往河里排污水，河水不是白的了，是黑的了，还有臭味，弄得鸭子都没法下河了。) ⁵⁰

The fugitive’s social background is revealed by his conversations with Old Mrs Xu. Like Old Mrs Xu, the fugitive comes from the lower stratum of society. Just as Old Mrs Xu does not receive any help from the state, the fugitive does not enjoy support from the state. Quite the opposite. He explains to Old Mrs Xu that he was laid off by his factory and that his mother died when he was young and his sister married far away. His status as a laid-off worker seems to be one of the major factors contributing to his miserable life circumstances, gambling addiction, and later his crime and imprisonment.

The fugitive’s situation encapsulates the most direct consequences of economic and

⁴⁹ Chi Zijian, “Ducks are Like Flowers” (鸭如花), *Renmin wenxue* (人民文学), no.2 (2001), 11.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

social restructuring initiated by the state in the early 1990s. China initiated reform of SOEs by dismantling through massive layoffs the lifetime employment system. In addition to losing their jobs and suffering lost income and uncertain futures, workers lacked an adequate welfare system and a healthy reemployment environment.⁵¹ He tells Old Mrs Xu, “Being laid off is like being diagnosed with cancer, it is so despairing.”(下岗的滋味就像医生说你得癌症, 太让人绝望了。)⁵² .

On the surface his killing of his father seems to be impulsive, but essentially the crime epitomises the explosion of tensions brought about by the change in his socio-economic status due to the economic reforms in 1990s China. These tensions present themselves at every level: the state deserts him ruthlessly; his father attempts to help but it hurts the son's masculine pride to run a small convenience store. This pride represents a negative consequence of the idea of masculinity cultivated in a patriarchal culture. After being made redundant from his job, the fugitive lazed around and developed an addiction to gambling. One day, he lost 500 yuan playing mahjong. He tried to ask his father for a loan, but his father criticised him. The son retaliated by calling his father “a maggot in the toilet and a rat in the dump pit.”(是茅房里的蛆, 是垃圾坑里的老鼠。)⁵³ Irritated, his father said that unless he could blow his brains out with a beer bottle, he will not get a penny. So, in frustration and in anger the son killed his father.

The text highlights the impulsiveness of the son's killing, yet when read carefully, the moral complexity of the son's act emerges. His father's offer to let him run the shop seems like a humiliation for him. For the son, it is not a proper job and he has no future in running the store. Working for state-owned enterprises used to be considered as a very desirable job among ordinary people because the workers enjoyed care from the state.

⁵¹ Cai Yongshun, *State and Laid-off Workers in Reform China: The Silence and Collective Action of the Retrenched* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 1-2.

⁵² Chi, “Ducks are Like Flowers”, 11.

⁵³ Ibid., 7.

Therefore, in his eyes, the prospect of running a small convenience store—a private-owned and not very profitable one— is humiliating : “I felt terrible when I entered the dark and damp convenience store...the unpleasant flavours of vinegar, pickles and fermented tofu made me feel nauseous.” (我一进了那昏暗潮湿的食杂店就不痛快。空气真是糟糕，他又买醋，又卖咸菜和臭豆腐的，熏得我直想吐。) ⁵⁴ What is more, in his view old people like his father and housewives tend to have such businesses, and the son wishes to distance himself from the influence of the older generation. He aspires to prove his masculinity and retain his pride.

Despite their differences, the two major characters are both firm believers in traditional familial values, although paradoxically the fugitive’s patricide is the ultimate violation of Confucian values. The humanity and vulnerability and limitations of the fugitive either come from the third-person omniscient narration, or his conversations with Old Mrs Xu, or through Old Mrs Xu’s perception. The developing relationship between the two and the way they establish mutual trust and understanding is rendered in the narrative through the portrayal of the interaction between the two. Like Old Mrs Xu, the reader learns that the fugitive has his commendable traits and also his limitations. Also, Old Mrs Xu’s agreement to assist his act of atonement is largely based on her recognition of his redemptive action to restore the social order he has broken.

The fugitive’s humanity is demonstrated in his recognition of the terrible power his criminal identity gives him. First of all, he does not hesitate to use his criminal identity to force old Mrs Xu to cooperate and comply. He is physically stronger and he is a dangerous murderer. Since Xu recognised him as a wanted man when she saw him in her duck-yard, he uses his identity as a weapon to intimidate her in order to ensure his freedom and get food and clothing. For example, he threatens “If you dare to call the police, I will kill you

⁵⁴ Ibid.,8.

and your ducks” (你要是敢去报案，我连你和你的鸭子全都宰了!)⁵⁵ Initially, the text adopts the stereotypical image of a ruthless murderer capable of atrocity and serious damage. However, in his interaction with Old Mrs Xu, some details of his actions observed and commented on by Old Mrs Xu indicate that the man still retains a childlike disposition. When burnt by the steam from the pot, he cried “ouch” just like a child. The Chinese modal particles he uses, such as “ya” (呀) “wa” (哇) suggest a childlike disposition which evokes in Old Mrs Xu a feeling of care and concern. (徐五婆因为逃犯说出个哇字，忽然对他产生一种怜爱之情。她听到“哇”字，多半是从那些奶声奶气的小孩子身上。逃犯能说出“哇”，使她觉得他童心未泯。) ⁵⁶

What is more, his sense of gratitude and justice also plays out in his interaction with old Mrs Xu. After realising she is genuinely helping him, he defends Mrs. Xu when she is defamed by Wang Ming, who pretended to have cancer and falsified a medical certificate for the insurance. When asked why he risked being exposed, the fugitive says, “how can he defame a good-hearted lady?” (他怎么能侮辱一个好心人呢) ⁵⁷ The text also portrays the fugitive's vulnerability and fear of death, which constitute another layer of his humanity. In contrast to the negative feeling he had for her when he saw her in the same position as his father, later the fugitive not only shows his sense of justice but also his most vulnerable masculine side to Old Mrs Xu. When the prostitute visited him in Old Mrs Xu's house, he was sexually incompetent and cried, saying “how beautiful her breasts are! But I was such a disappointment. Thinking that this is my first-time and last time, I just wanted to cry, no strength at all.” (她的乳房可真美啊。可我不争气，我想着这是自己的第一次也是最后一次，我就老是想哭，一点力气也没有了。) ⁵⁸ He asks old

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4 .

⁵⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid.,19.

⁵⁸ Ibid.,28.

Mrs Xu buy a toy pistol to rehearse the execution scene. The prisoner practices his final words with passion in the safety of his room like an actor memorising his lines.” However, when he is on his way to his execution, under the control of this system, he is awed by its power and fails to do what he planned: “Nothing came out of his mouth when the car passed the crowd. The fugitive is pale, looking straight ahead, motionless and frozen.”(逃犯对沿途围观他的人群什么话也没喊出来,他脸色惨白,目光直直地盯着前方,已然凝固似的一动不动。)⁵⁹

The motivation behind the two characters’ cooperation and growing collusion lies in their mutual belief in the importance of fulfilling filial duties. Unlike his prison escape partners who aim to avoid retribution, the fugitive flees prison to restore a higher familial justice. He wants to pay a visit to his father’s grave to honour the memory of the dead and to repent his crime. With regard to the crime he committed, the murderer’s stance is that “committing suicide is not the right way to atone for his crime”, since his father died because of the son’s “immorality and unfilialty,” and so the son “must be judged by the justice system and reviled by the masses in order to be forgiven”. (他觉得如果自杀的话是赎不了罪的,父亲因为他的不仁不孝而死在他手上,他必须接受来自正义一方光明正大的审判,遭万人唾骂去死,这样他会轻松一些。)⁶⁰ While atoning for his crime in a personal way, the fugitive has no intention to evade punishment by the law. He believes that being condemned by the masses in a public way might further ease his conscience. However, his respect for the law only exists at the level of respecting its power and authority. In fact his understanding of the judiciary system turns out to be naive, because prior to Xu’s explanation that the execution will be carried out by pistol shot, he thought he would be beheaded with a knife.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 29.

Old Mrs Xu is depicted as a helper and mentor, a supporter character, for the fugitive, even though she was coerced to help him in the first instance. Although initially afraid, she does not see him as a monster, and the fugitive's childish disposition evokes her motherly affection. Convinced by his explanation and touched by the friendship he offers to her, instead of turning him in, she acts as an assistant and witness and ensures that his filial duties to his father will be fulfilled. The fugitive's atonement is thus realised to some extent even before his punishment by the law because he manages to repent in front of his father's grave with Mrs Xu as witness. In contrast to the judiciary system, which goes through its own legitimating procedures and does not show any shred of humanity for the fugitive, old Mrs Xu shows her warmth and care toward him as a fellow human being. It becomes her responsibility to ensure that his wishes are satisfied, and she even goes so far as to hire a prostitute for him. As a supporter character, Mrs. Xu acts as a surrogate for the reader and demonstrates the way and the degree to which the reader might sympathise with the convicted murderer.

The main motivation for Old Mrs Xu's sympathy is that she recognises and appreciates the fugitive's attempt to perform the traditional ritual to repent his crime. Once she learns that such an attempt is sincere, her state responsibility to turn him in to the police has less significance than helping him fulfil his familial responsibility. In this sense, Old Mrs Xu is a purveyor of the traditional Chinese moral code. Before the grave, she asks for the father to forgive his son's crime, by saying "Why don't you forgive him? He is your son, after all." (你就谅解他吧。他毕竟是你的儿子啊。) ⁶¹ For her, the blood tie between the father and the son presupposes forgiveness, even though the latter commits a most serious crime. The text highlights how the fugitive shows sincere repentance and implies that the fugitive deserves sympathy because he is in a way a lost

⁶¹ Ibid., 28.

child: “the fugitive started crying. He cried so hard that he couldn’t stop trembling violently, like a helpless child who walks at night alone but finds himself unable to find the way home.” (逃犯就哭了起来，他哭得直抽搐，仿佛一个小孩子独自走夜路，因找不到回家的路而惊恐地哭叫一样。) ⁶²

The “duck” in this text serves in a peculiar and intriguing way to illustrate the relationship between humanity, morality and beauty. Similar to the human relationship accomplished between the fugitive and Old Mrs Xu, the duck spends some time with the fugitive and develops a sense of loyalty to him. At the end of the narrative, Old Mrs Xu not only buries the body of the fugitive. She also brings the duck which used to accompany the fugitive. She places the duck on the top of his grave and speaks to the duck: “if you want to go home with me, tag along; otherwise, you could also be his flower.” (走前她把鸭子放在坟头，对它说：“你要是想跟我回家，你就跟着走；不然你就当他的花开给他看吧。)⁶³ The duck seems to understand human language and fulfil Old Mrs Xu’s wish to be the fugitive’s flower: “The duck stood still on the top of his grave and would not leave. In the dusk, this white and brown duck seemed extremely bright, like a beautiful flower.” (鸭子依然站在坟头，一动不动的！在一派萧瑟的晚景中，这只白褐色的鸭子看上去异常明亮，却如一朵美极了的花。)⁶⁴ Both Old Mrs Xu and the duck’s ethical behaviour and sympathy for the murderer seeking atonement symbolise the beauty of human nature and the innate kindness existent in humans and humanised objects such as the ducks. An enactor of sympathy, Old Mrs Xu is portrayed as having the ability to discover the human goodness in the fugitive and murderer. And her ability to detect good qualities transcends the scope of human world and human beings.

Chi’s text presents a pragmatic and ethical sympathiser who performs a moral

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.,29.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

mission—to sympathise with the marginalised. Being informed through Mrs. Xu of the social background of the marginalised, the reader is encouraged to follow her example. The text proposes a motivated version of their human relationship and an ethical valuing of their adherence across generations to Confucian values as perhaps the only solution to an increasingly divided and corrupt society. "Family values" correct the course of a society drifting into corruption and chaos.

Chi's "Ducks are like Flowers" celebrates the discovery of human goodness, especially in the seemingly dangerous and unknown, and the possibility of meaningful human relationships across different levels of society. McEwan's *Saturday* takes a different approach to narrative and ethics and focuses on how the more privileged members of society ultimately realise their responsibility for the strange, the underprivileged and the marginalised.

McEwan's novel *Saturday* (2005) centres on the thoughts of Henry Perowne, a successful neurosurgeon and devoted husband of Rosalind, a newspaper lawyer, and proud father of their two grown children, Daisy a promising poet and Theo a talented blues musician. On the day of a mass protest by Britons against the Anglo-American assault on Iraq in 2003, the protagonist's car collides with another man's car. After a brief confrontation with this man, named Baxter, Henry manages to make his getaway when he realises Baxter has Huntington syndrome. Later, Baxter breaks into Henry's house and nearly rapes Daisy. Baxter gives up his rape attempt after listening to Daisy reciting Matthew Arnold's poem "On Dover Beach" upon Baxter's request. Henry and Theo foil his break-in and push him down a flight of stairs, gravely injuring Baxter's brain. Henry then volunteers to operate on Baxter's damaged brain and saves his life without pressing charges.

Similar to Chi's "Ducks are Like Flowers" where the major characters are emblematic of certain landmark social and cultural phenomena such as the massive-scale

economic restructuring and the large numbers of workers made redundant at the end of twentieth century in China, *Saturday* is situated at a particular historical moment when the 9/11 incident, the fear of terrorism and the impending war against Iraq overshadow people's lives. The novel is even defined as "the Condition of England novel," because it manifests a compassionate concern with the lives not only of the most privileged but also of the most oppressed members of British society.⁶⁵ In addition to the foregrounding of larger and wider social contexts, what "Ducks are Like Flowers" and *Saturday* also share is a focus on how individuals are forced to confront violence when the opportunity for mercy is close to home.⁶⁶ The break-ins by the violent figures serve as the major driving force of the plot to initiate the interactions between the sympathisers and the violence-committing figures.

Focalizing the protagonist Henry Perowne's inner thoughts and consciousness in one day, the text foregrounds a sympathizing process embodied by Perowne's personal development in the course of this eventful day. The centrality of his coming to understand the importance of empathy between individual human beings is powerful in encouraging the reader to affirm a positive ethics that an authentic moral empathy can be possible across society. What is more, the scene where Baxter stops short of rape upon hearing Daisy's recital of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" foregrounds the positive affective effect literature can produce.

Unlike Old Mrs Xu and the fugitive in "Ducks are Like Flowers" who are both from the lower stratum of society, Baxter and Henry's social backgrounds differ greatly. They are almost class opposites: the lower-class tough, whose angry intention is all fists and kicks, and the upper-class professional, whose family members are all professionals in their own fields. Although the text portrays Henry as disinclined to think in "class" terms,

⁶⁵ Michael L Ross, "On a Darkling Planet: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and the Condition of England." *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 54, no.1 (2008): 75.

⁶⁶ Peter Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 146.

when it comes to the depiction of the confrontation between the two, it unwittingly emphasises their social differences. With Henry Perowne as the sole controlling voice in the narrative, readers, whatever their class positions, are invited to apprehend the narrative through Henry Perowne's consciousness and make judgements on thought and behaviour based at least partially on his values or his class-based perceptions.

As Heidi Butler observes, the protagonist Henry Perowne, may initially seem more likely to uphold rather than resist class stereotypes.⁶⁷ Henry's understanding of social differences at first seems to rest more on two stereotypes: that lower class people are more inclined to commit violence and that underclass people are products of social inequality and stigmatisation by the dominant culture. In his first confrontation with Baxter on the street, the text highlights his inability to commit violence: "But when Henry imagines himself about to act, and sees a ghostly warrior version of himself leap out of his body at Baxter, his heart rate accelerates so swiftly that he feels giddy, weak, unreliable. Never in his life has he hit someone in the face, even as a child."⁶⁸ On the contrary, Henry's impression of Baxter is that "they deal with quarrels in their own ways."⁶⁹

The contrast between Henry and Baxter's tendencies toward violence partly shows through stereotyping the class division between the two. Henry thinks that "[w]ork is one outward sign. It can't be class or opportunities-- the drunks and junkies come from all kinds of backgrounds, as do the office people. Some of the worst wrecks have been privately educated."⁷⁰ However, in his encounter with Baxter, Henry swiftly grasps his social background and immediately feels that Baxter is a threat and dangerous. Given their different social backgrounds and expectations, the narrative implies that their relationship will be conflictual rather than reconciliatory and harmonious.

⁶⁷ Heidi Butler, "The Mater's Narrative: Resisting the Essentializing Gaze in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *Critique*, no. 52 (2011):102.

⁶⁸ Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 213.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

Henry also questions whether Baxter's biological defect might potentially have led to his current social situation. Henry muses: "he is an intelligent man, and gives the impression that, illness apart, he's missed his chances, made some big mistakes and ended up in wrong company. Probably dropped out of school long ago and regrets it. No parents around."⁷¹ If the biological defect, making mistakes and ending up with the wrong company and lack of parental guidance are all "bad luck" and should not be used to indict society for its negligence, then it is not surprising that Henry thinks social intervention will be ineffective as a remedy for social problems. However, the description of an opposing stance represented by Henry's daughter Daisy that "madness was a social construct, a wheeze by means of which the rich - he may have got this wrong- squeezed the poor"⁷² seems to betray an ambivalent and wavering attitude toward social and class differences.

Henry's musings thus are stuck on a contradiction or at least a paradox: on the one hand, the biological reason for Baxter's unstable moods and violent propensities, and on the other, the rejection of the possible effectiveness of social intervention. Henry's biological reductionism inhibits his human sympathy: "And who will ever find a morality, an ethics down among the enzymes and amino acids when the general taste is for looking in the other direction?"⁷³ Before Baxter's break-in, Henry's professional knowledge serves as the dominant measure for him to explicate Baxter's violent inclinations.

As mentioned before, what sets McEwan's text apart is that it showcases the protagonist's transformation from being contented, disengaged and emotionally removed from the troubles and dangers prevailing in the world,⁷⁴ including personal violence, and a lack of empathy for those less fortunate than himself to the realisation of the importance

⁷¹ Ibid., 98.

⁷² Ibid., 92.

⁷³ Ibid., 92.

⁷⁴ Andrew Foley, "Liberalism in the New Millennium: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *JLS/TLW* 26, no.1 (2010): 149.

of empathy between individual human beings. Near the end of the text, although Henry still denies that society is responsible for Baxter's situation and dismisses the class factor in his explanation of Baxter's behaviour, attributing addiction and violent inclinations to "bad luck", Henry has developed an upgraded moral stance by realising that "making them comfortable" and "minimis[ing] their miseries" are an imperative:

Perowne, the professional reductionist, can't help thinking it's down to invisible folds and kinks of characters, written in code, at the level of molecules. It's a dim fate, to be the sort of person who can't earn a living, or resist another drink, or remember today what he resolved to do yesterday. No amount of social justice will cure or disperse this enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town... You have to recognise bad luck when you see it, you have to look out for these people. Some you can prise from their addictions, others - all you can do is make them comfortable somehow, minimise their miseries.⁷⁵

This process is possible because the consciousness of Henry is not fixed and static, but boasts the capability of self-reflexivity. For example, after Baxter breaks in, Henry thinks to himself that he has taken advantage of his professional authority by observing Baxter's physiological symptoms. He exposes Baxter's weakness by spelling out the name of his disease to his friends and manages to escape from a potentially severe attack by him. Later, the protagonist's self-examination displays his awareness of his limitations. Henry chastises himself: "[h]e used or misused his authority to avoid one crisis, and his actions have steered him into another, far worse. The responsibility is his."⁷⁶ The text shows that only when professionalism is put to proper use can the sense of responsibility for other human beings be elevated to a moral position rather than simply a matter of expediency.

In "Ducks are Like Flowers" the fugitive's humanity is gradually discovered through the eyes of the old lady. In *Saturday*, however, Baxter never has the opportunity for self-explanation, but he reveals his humanness and humanity by his positive response to the poem and the appeal expressed in Daisy's recital of this poem. Tammy Amiel-Houser reminds us that "the introduction of literature into the events [of the break-in and possible

⁷⁵ McEwan, *Saturday*, 272.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

rape] is the result of a request by the supposed brute, Baxter, who surprisingly asks to engage in the arts. It is Baxter who initiates the literary moment, which becomes an unexpected break from the otherwise violent scene.”⁷⁷ Before this moment, Baxter seems to be “fixed, static, unlike all of the other characters in the novel...Everyone in the novel is an artist, or a creator of some sort.”⁷⁸ Yet the ethical and magic effects of Daisy’s performance highlight that the beauty of the art can surpass class division and social hostility. No matter how inexplicable and miraculous their actions may be, any individual, despite their social background, has the capability to be affected, possibly even redeemed, by art.

It is interesting to note that both Chi’s and McEwan’s texts highlight the “childlike” in the criminal. Being childlike might indicate not only the fugitive’s young age, but also the child as an essential, perhaps the essential part of humanity. And the narrative attention to being childlike implies a possible friendly and later parent-child relationship between Old Mrs Xu and the fugitive. From Henry’s perspective, seeing Baxter as an “excited child”⁷⁹ and recalling that Baxter’s “trust is childlike” emphasises that a childlike state is transformative but requires guidance and care.

Henry witnesses the whole event in which Baxter stops short of rape upon hearing Daisy’s poem recital. If such an experience does not redress his reductionist belief in biology as the determination of social and cultural forms, it at least opens him up to a new possibility as to what art and literature can do to reshape society. Before the break-in, Henry is ruled by pessimism about Baxter’s condition, believing that his moods and behaviours cannot be controlled and influenced: “*It is written*. No amount of love, drugs, Bible classes or prison sentencing can cure Baxter or shift him from his course. It’s spelled

77 Tammy Amiel- Houser, “The Ethics of Otherness in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*,” *Connotations* 21, no.1 (2011-2012): 140.

78 Driscoll, *Evading Class in British Literature*, 49.

79 McEwan, *Saturday*, 223.

out in fragile proteins, but it could be carved in stone, or tempered steel.”⁸⁰ But the miraculous power of literature and its effects on Baxter make Henry realise that Baxter is a unique person, with complexities and an individualism that cannot be explained entirely in biological terms. What is more, witnessing that the message of love powerfully affects Baxter and change his mind forces Henry to rethink the meanings of love. The closing lines of Arnold’s “Dover Beach” go:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.⁸¹

Although Henry still does not understand how Baxter’s mind works and he still has no way of achieving empathy for the man, his views of poetry have altered. He continues to muse:

Daisy recited a poem that cast a spell on one man. Perhaps any poem would have done the trick, and thrown the switch on a sudden mood change. Still, Baxter fell for the magic, he was transfixed by it, and he was reminded how much he wanted to live. No one can forgive him the use of the knife. But Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will, despite Daisy’s attempts to educate him.⁸²

Depicted as unliterary, but forced to witness the affective power poetry exerts on Baxter’s mind, the protagonist invites the reader to join him in reaffirming the power of art and love in an age of ignorance and violence.

Accordingly, Henry’s scientific professionalism now includes a humanistic element but nonetheless has its own limitations. For example, when Henry is operating on Baxter’s brain, he meditates that “ the limits of the art of neurosurgery as it stands today, are plain enough: faced with these unknown codes, this dense and brilliant circuitry, he and his

⁸⁰ Ibid., 210.

⁸¹ Ibid., 279.

⁸² Ibid., 278.

colleagues offer only brilliant plumbing.”⁸³ The text hints that the kind of professional ethics Henry as a surgeon has pledged to uphold are limited. His inner thoughts in the wake of the operation tell the reader that “this is the stage at which the patient’s identity is restored, when a small area of violently revealed brain is returned to the possession of the entire person. This unwrapping of the patient marks a return to life, and if he hadn’t seen it many hundred times before, Henry feels he could almost mistake it for tenderness.”⁸⁴ The value of his medical professionalism lies in its power to calm and sooth even when it cannot heal.⁸⁵ To some extent, Henry’s professional ethics are redefined by the events consequent on Baxter’s break-in, with more precision and greater ties of understanding and connectedness than marital or familial affection. He is no longer doing his job with cold rationality, but doing his job with a sense of sympathy and a feeling of love. Eventually, while watching Baxter after the operation with a “closer, more brotherly interest”, Henry begins to feel that “[h]e is responsible, after all.”⁸⁶

Henry’s ethical behaviour encompasses both performing the operation to the best of his medical ability and realising his closer, more brotherly feeling towards Baxter, resulting in a heightened sense of responsibility and a deeper sympathy with human beings across society. As we have seen, “his accidental encounter with Baxter points toward the basic ethical duty of the subject to the Other.”⁸⁷ The problem in the novel is that the reader does not have access to the mind and thoughts of that Other, Baxter, but can only perceive Baxter through the more privileged consciousness of Henry. However, Henry’s consciousness and new sympathetic attitude send a powerful message for readers who for the most part are likely themselves to be enjoying many of the privileges of

⁸³ Ibid., 255.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 256.

⁸⁵ Frances Ferguson, “The Way We Love Now: Ian McEwan, *Saturday*, and Personal Affection in the Information Age,” *Representations*, no. 100 (2007): 50- 1.

⁸⁶ McEwan, *Saturday*, 278.

⁸⁷ Houser, “The Ethics of Otherness in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*,” 151.

middle- and upper-middle class life and have been educated in the humanistic arts. The narrative representation focused on Henry's inner thoughts and changing consciousness urges the reader to recognise sympathetically the quality of "humanness" and care in human beings themselves, and the possibility of understanding our moral responsibility to respond to and take care of the Other "who seems the most strange, threatening, incomprehensible, illogical."⁸⁸

Conclusion

This chapter takes up questions of ethics and morality in the writing and reading of literature about violent crime. It reiterates and expands the discussion of the dynamic relationship between the author, the cultural background, the text and the reader. Using Alice Sebold and Ian McEwan and their works as examples, I first illustrate that from the writers' perspective, they have a clear consciousness to construct polylogical rape and murder narratives and tap into the moral and ethical dimensions in their stories.

I then demonstrate that reading narratives of murder and rape has numerous complexities for readers. Because the writers present humanistic and sometimes sympathetic renditions of violent, often alienated criminals, the positions the reader can take become even more fluid, contingent and complicated.

I then compared the various kinds of social critiques in the four writers' work. Their texts serve as striking examples of contemporary writers' responding to moral crises and social inequality in China and the UK and US. I argued that A Yi and Chi Zijian's social critiques are more strident, offering rape and murder narratives that centre on the experiences of the marginalised and downtrodden characters. Sebold's and McEwan's murder and rape narratives, however, are higher-minded and less gritty. The portrayal of

⁸⁸ Ibid., 150.

the white, middle-class, educated and privileged encounters with the violent and inscrutable Other, also exhibit a sense of responsibility to engage with the social and moral problems in present times and a critique of the values shared by the people from the centre.

In the comparison between “Ducks are Like Flowers” and *Saturday*, I have foregrounded the way that McEwan’s and Chi’s texts construct narratives of growing sympathy and empathy between characters from across society. Sometimes supporter sympathising figures manage to develop a more positive, caring human relationship with otherwise violence-committing figures (fugitive, Baxter). Unlike the texts discussed in the first two chapters, which leave the reader with a pessimistic view of social decay and corruption, “Ducks are like Flowers” and *Saturday* elicit the reader’s sympathy for otherwise criminal characters and for characters such as Henry Perowne, whose unexamined privilege has ironically prevented them from acting with more psychological care and social responsibility for the marginalised and less powerful in society. The ethics of literature as enacted in McEwan’s novel and Chi’s short story counters the pessimism about social corruption with hope and the possibility for positive change and transformation. We might conclude with Richard Rorty’s remarks about sympathy, knowing, and otherness: “The process of coming to see other human beings as “one of us” rather than “them” is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like.”⁸⁹ In the field of literary production, we need both detailed descriptions of others and redescriptions of “us”. These two aspects complement each other and can potentially paint a richer, more

⁸⁹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xvi.

comprehensive picture of what is going on in the world across social strata and cultures and how we collectively might be better and different.

The invitation from the texts in this chapter is not only to appreciate the beauty of human nature and realise the possibility of human kindness and love. The narratives also encourage readers to join with the texts and follow the example of the caring acts and sympathy which can eventually make our society a better place.

Conclusion

My thesis brings together four writers from three cultures to examine two of the most recurrent literary themes, rape and murder, in contemporary Anglo-American and Chinese literature. The case studies of A Yi, Chi Zijian, Ian McEwan and Alice Sebold cover a variety of writers whose work has never or seldom been placed within the framework of rape and murder. The original contribution and value of my project lies in its attempt to bring contemporary crime writing by Chinese writers under scrutiny and into comparison with that of their Anglo-American counterparts.

The comparative methodology includes close textual analysis across cultures, critical and comparative analysis of the cultural backgrounds and previous scholarship. A wide range of critical discourses are applied, including feminist criticism, psychoanalysis, ethical criticism, and reader-response theory.

The literary representations of rape and murder I have discussed go beyond the narrow scope of conventional motifs such as the detection of the killer and the victim. In a cross-cultural comparative analysis I have argued that the striking characters and complex narratives produced by the four writers speak to some of today's most pressing social and moral problems and encourage the reader to contemplate and perhaps rethink answers to some big time-honoured questions, such as how the dark undercurrents of human nature are "human," what role one's social position plays in the interpretation and commission of crime, to what extent can or should one sympathise and empathise with the criminals and victims, and what we can do as individuals and as a society to respond to the unequal and unmoored moral conditions of the present time?

My close comparisons of Chi Zijian and Alice Sebold in terms of rape narratives, A Yi and Ian McEwan in terms of murder narratives; and Chi Zijian and Ian McEwan with regard to the ethical complexities of writing and reading rape and murder narratives have

tried to elicit a hopeful message of new or renewed possibilities for caring, productive human relationships across society. My readings highlight the striking and distinctive characteristics and perspectives each individual author offers to the representation of rape and murder as well as foregrounding how we can glean through comparative analysis a better, recontextualised and expanded understanding of complex literary representations of rape and murder.

In the comparison of Chi Zijian and Alice Sebold's rape narratives in Chapter One, my position is that rape cultures prevail in both cultures and that both Chi and Sebold consciously portray the pervasiveness of sexual violence, especially against women. They both seek to construct supportive and protective mini-communities among women in their narratives. In terms of victimisation, their texts showcase nuanced differences between Anglo-American and Chinese cultural attitudes toward victims of sexual violence. Chi's texts exemplify the forms of attack on the victims' moral integrity and their ongoing stigmatisation; in Sebold's writing, stereotypical thinking and socially disadvantaging prejudices, for example, the belief that women cannot be raped because they have enough power to resist sexual violence, are subjected to dialogic narrative scrutiny and critique. It is interesting in Chi's representation of the internalised stigmatisation of women in *Goodnight Rose* that the malignity and backwardness of traditional Chinese beliefs are shown to play a complicit role in victimising women.

In terms of female and feminist agency, both Sebold and Chi construct feminist solidarity but in different ways. They both construct female storytelling collectives. In the case of *Goodnight Rose*, the feminist avenger Zhao Xiao'e tracks down and punishes her mother's rapist by using a rational process, similar to that used by detective heroes in classic stories by Conan Doyle and Poe, but the way she avenges her mother displays her complete distrust of the supposedly "rational form" of punishment—the law. In Sebold's texts, however, the tension between the individual and the law has softened, or at least

been displaced. In *The Lovely Bones*, an unusual literary space, heaven, functions as a transcendental healing feminist community for treating and relieving the trauma of rape victims. The posthumous first-person narrative voice of the rape and murder victim achieves a transformation from victimhood to agency. Female agency in the novel returns the violated young woman to normal sexual agency and young adult growth which were interrupted by the rapist and murderer.

What is additionally unique about Chi's *Goodnight Rose* is the way it explores the potential to address the tension between feminist revenge and its ethical consequences through religious ethics. Nonetheless, the moral agony the victim-turned-perpetrator suffers and her materialistic, pragmatic thinking suggest that there is no easy solution to the predicament of the protagonist and perhaps even for all Chinese women in a modernised yet highly patriarchal society.

My thesis highlights the importance of bringing forward the feminist critiques implicit and explicit in Chi's texts. Our awareness of her work's value in directly engaging with the issue of rape and explicitly constructing strong representations of rape can only emerge when we read the texts through a feminist critical lens. Informed by an understanding of the anti-rape movement in the Anglo-American context, especially in second-wave feminism, one can realise how in *Goodnight Rose* the use of a female first-person narrative point of view betrays a seditious and provocative gesture when portraying women's rape experiences and a clear feminist stance. Against the trend of absorbing feminism into other social movements, my reading of Sebold's feminist texts reaffirms the currency of the legacies second-wave feminists have given to us.

In Chapter Two, I defined McEwan's *Amsterdam* as a murder narrative in a new and different way to discover the novel's value and currency for today's reader. A Yi and Ian McEwan's murder narratives use different storytelling techniques to offer different takes on the motives for murder and on different moral dilemmas (choices). What is striking

about A Yi's *A Perfect Crime* and "An Accidental Killing" is how his texts feature an almost insider critique of the corrupt legal enforcement and judiciary system. These unjust and unequal institutions are directly mocked and ridiculed and even used as a tool to achieve the killer's goal of spiritual relief.

The comparison of motives in the three texts showcases how murder motives are never singular, unambiguous, or static. A Yi's *A Perfect Crime* features a senseless murder to address existential crisis, while the killer in "An Accidental Killing" kills as a result of his frustration with losing money and the police's refusal to help. In *Amsterdam*, the murder motive is initially an assisted suicidal pact to die with dignity, but then things begin to unravel between the two former friends. These different forms of murder motives and their representation provide a complex comparative picture of the possible personal crises in contemporary life. While the protagonist's murder in *A Perfect Crime* derives from a sense of amorality, the two major characters in *Amsterdam* kill each other because of their narrowly uncompromising views on what comprises moral behaviour and the consequences that should follow immoral behaviour.

What differs between the two writers' texts is the socioeconomic and class perspectives of the protagonists. In A Yi's text, one can see social inequality, regional discrimination, people's obsession with wealth and power and their quandaries between materialistic pursuit and human feelings. The characters in *Amsterdam* are driven by an obsession with careerism and professionalism. But in both depicted societies, excessive pursuit of self-interest and personal advantage are endorsed by the dominant ideology, against which the narrative trajectories move.

In terms of narrative techniques, A Yi's first-person narrative in *A Perfect Crime* is effective in exploring the psyche of a murderer that defies the conventional interpretation, but it also generates ethical ambiguity because of the brutal violence. The combination of a narrator and a supernarrator in "An Accidental Killing" helps achieve a satirical

undertone, but the narrative's point of view is also confusing. The third-person omniscient narration in *Amsterdam* efficiently covers the psychological and moral states of the two principal characters, while the narrating voice highlights the situation with undertones of satire and allegory.

My comparative analysis shows that both A Yi and McEwan find their respective societies problematic, hypocritical, selfish, and ultimately detrimental to personal integrity. As I have argued, the town of Red Crow in A Yi's "An Accidental Killing" is an exemplum of Chinese society at large. The six local people—victims of an accidental homicide—together with the killer, collectively personify contemporary China. Displaced or disturbed by deepening social and economic reforms, they struggle with moral dilemmas brought about by social and cultural changes in China. In *Amsterdam* a whole generation within an elite and powerful section of British society is mocked in Clive's and Vernon's moral shabbiness and delusory narcissism.

When discussing the moral and ethical complexities of the writing and reading of literature about violent crime, I have reiterated the dynamic relationship between the author, the text, cultural background/context and the reader. All the writers discussed in this thesis show daring consciousness by presenting humanistic and sometimes sympathetic renditions of violent, often alienated criminals. Reading narratives of murder and rape poses a number of complicated problems or situations for readers. Narratives with feminist perspectives pose an extra challenge for the reader when engaging with narratives featuring a victim-turned perpetrator or a premediated and unremorseful perpetrator, as we find in A Yi and Chi Zijian's texts. Their narratives as discussed in the first two chapters tend to make the murderer's point of view central.

What underlies the unapologetic and desperate tones implied in A Yi and Chi Zijian's work is partly the Chinese writers' deep concerns regarding social inequality and moral crisis facing their country today. Similarly, the prevalent social inequality and the state's

failure to look after the poor and underprivileged are under attack in Anglo-American culture. The comparison between the chosen authors shows that they all have a sense of responsibility to society, and they all are responding to and engaging with the social problems and moral conditions of contemporary society. What is different between the Chinese authors and the Anglo-American authors is that the former position themselves as literary spokespersons for the marginalised and downtrodden, thus presenting a complicated rebuke to the aesthetic ideology of social realism, whereas the Anglo-American authors' characters are usually white, middle or upper middle class, thus altering the context within which the murder and rape narratives critique society. The Anglo-American writers' sense of personal responsibility and social critique does not come across as stridently or as pessimistically as in A Yi and Chi Zijian's stories. The Anglo-American narratives, even from the perspective of rape victims, are higher-minded, less gritty.

The comparison between Chi Zijian's "Ducks are Like Flowers" and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* serves as a variation exercise and expands on some of the themes and narrative strategies discussed in other chapters. In spite of their different critiques of society, Chi Zijian and McEwan attempt to take advantage of the potentially socially transformative role literature can play. In contrast to the focus on victims, criminals, victim-turned murderers, premeditated and unremorseful murderers, the interrogation of the sympathiser figures in Chi and McEwan's texts illustrate that foregrounding the perspective of the sympathiser figure makes the reader understand the significance of the social backgrounds of the violent characters, and then encourages readers to reflect on or become more self-conscious about the particular affective responses he or she is experiencing in relation to the violence-committing characters. What is different between the two texts is that in Chi's text, the supporter figure embraces traditional filial duties and rituals, whereas the protagonist in *Saturday* comes to a more universally humanistic

understanding of each person's responsibility to the other.

The four authors share some common views. One can see in their texts how the law, along with its affiliated institutions, is consistently represented with unfavourable and unwelcome images. In Chi's texts, as far as the rape narratives go, the female rape victims/survivors violate the law to achieve either feminist revenge (as in *Goodnight Rose*) or commit petty crime and delight in challenging corrupt society. Even the supporter figure in "Ducks are Like Flowers" puts filial duties before the law. In Sebold's texts, the law is side-lined in *The Lovely Bones* whereas the law and legal procedures are subjected to a detailed critique in her memoir *Lucky*. The two major characters in *Amsterdam* take advantage of the law to poison each other; the sympathiser in *Saturday* chooses not to be involved with the police and drops charges on the attempted rapist. The inescapable acrimony between crime and the law demonstrates Mary Evans's observation:

We can,... observe in the second half of the twentieth century the emergence of a perception, ...that there is a growing and considerable moral space between the legal views of 'crime' and crime itself and that those crimes against both the person and the social world, which are truly important, are often outside the formal remit of the law.¹

Yet on the other hand, it is also this moral space that is used by the chosen authors to test the boundaries between criminal/ victim, individual/society, self and other.

Rape and murder are well known and well-worn literary themes, but each author discussed in this thesis provides a unique perspective and contextually informed insights into violent crimes and social meanings. The first-person narrator's words in James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" also apply to the rape victim/survivors, victim-turned murderer, premeditated murderer, rape witness, and sympathisers: "For while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in

¹ Mary Evans, *The Imagination of Evil: Detective Fiction and the Modern World* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 2.

all this darkness.”²

I have outlined an ethics of literary crime writing and celebrate the writers’ conscious efforts to engage with social realities by writing about rape and murder, but this project is not straightforward or simple. Some scholars such as Tony E. Afejuku believe that “[w]e shall ever need literature for our public or private moral, social, political, psychological or philosophical edification.”³ I agree with Haiyan Lee’s warning about reducing literature’s use to only one thing, “be it exemplary, affective, cognitive, or pragmatic.”⁴ The potential social transformative force of literature cannot displace or directly translate into equality, moral elevation or justice. What the reader needs to do is carry over the messages and engage with the social realities that they inhabit so they can forge social solidarity and human and humane relationships with fellow human beings in real life. Literature can point the way, but it cannot achieve the end.

It should be emphasised that it is not my task in this thesis to make sweeping generalisations about the overall literary landscape of representations of murder and rape. What I have done is an author-based case study using comparative critical analysis and literary-social history to try and capture the Anglo-American and Chinese texts’ distinctive features and thereby expand and reframe current scholarship on literary representations of murder and rape. In doing so, I aspire to open up dialogues and connections across cultures, texts, and critical analysis. In this small sampling, I offer a glimpse of the contours, dynamics, and multiplicity of literary representations of rape and murder. Through comparative literary analysis we can begin to understand the dialogic relationship between literary texts and cultural contexts and subtexts when it comes to

² James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues,” In Ilan Stavans, ed, *The Urban Muse. Stories on the American city* (New York: Random House, 1998), 31.

³ Tony E. Afejuku, “Accusation, Betrayal and Murder in Literature” in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka ed, *The Enigma of Good and Evil: The Moral Sentiment in Literature* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 281.

⁴ Lee Haiyan, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 297.

rape and murder.

We know that murder and rape are social problems and that to some extent violent crime is encouraged or at least enabled in patriarchal culture. Literary texts that foreground or contextualise these problems are cultural productions which both reflect on and critique that cultural context and those acts. This thesis covers a small group of Chinese and Anglo-American authors, but I am well aware that there are many other writers in other countries and areas equally committed to these two themes and to literature as social critique.⁵ What is more, there has been in contemporary China a notable surge of literary, television and filmic narratives featuring crime. For example, Tian Er (田耳) imbues his texts with elements of crime fiction and uses mysterious murder cases to develop his stories of ordinary people including figures of policemen. In contrast to the conventional belief in the West that Chinese crime stories have to be “crime-free” due to the strict censorship of State General Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SGAPPRFT)⁶, some recent Chinese movies addressing the subject of violent crimes in a straightforward manner and portraying complex pictures of humanity and society were permitted to be screened and have won popularity and acclaim among audiences.⁷ In China today we also see the expansion of popular crime fiction, partly as a result of people's perception of a moral crisis and corruption in Chinese society and institutions. Popular authors such as Lei Mi (雷米), Zhou Haohui (周浩辉) and He Jiahong (何家宏), have produced many books featuring crime cases. Some have been translated into English.⁸ All these literary and media

⁵ For example, the Swedish writer Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

⁶ Nury Vittachi, “China's Crime-free Crime Films,” *The New York Times*, accessed January 26, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/opinion/sunday/chinas-crime-free-crime-films.html?_r=0.

⁷ Recent examples include *The Coffin in the Mountain* (心迷宫), 2014, directed by Xin Yukun (忻钰坤); and *The Dead End* (烈日灼心), 2015, adopted from Xu Yigua's novel *Sunspot* (太阳黑子), directed by Cao Baoping (曹保平).

⁸ He Jiahong (何家弘)'s novel *Hanging Devils* was published in English translation in 2012. He is a professor of criminal law at Renmin University, China. Sun Yisheng (孙一圣) whose pen name William

narrative representations join forces to break the taboos and push the boundaries revolving around such a particularly sensitive and provocative topic as violent crime, especially against women, and will offer promising possibilities for future research. My thesis makes a beginning to that larger and longer project.

Edward (威廉爱德华) has had at least two short stories translated into English, the first in *Chutzpah!* magazine and the second, entitled *The Shades who Periscope Through Flowers to the Sky*, in the online literary journal *Words Without Borders*.

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