



**VOICES FROM  
THE IRON HOUSE:  
A Study of Lu Xun**  
by Leo Ou-fan Lee  
Univ. of Ind., 1987  
254 pp. \$32.50

chester University's Stannard chronicles the formative years of a bright, self-centered brat. Born into a middle-class professional family, Waugh—under the spell of Oxford aesthetes and aristocrats—came to despise his origins even as he dunned his father for money. An undistinguished sojourn at Oxford, concluded without a degree, led to a suicide attempt (which was thwarted by jellyfish), years of drifting, and dismal teaching stints at second-rate schools. Yearning to be a craftsman-artist in the manner of the pre-Raphaelites, he turned reluctantly to writing. In 1929 Waugh's ill-starred marriage to Evelyn Gardner (dubbed "She-Evelyn") collapsed following her venture into adultery. His ensuing anguish may have marred his second novel, *Vile Bodies*; it certainly propelled him toward the Catholic Church.

"From the time he became a Catholic," notes Stannard, "Waugh no longer felt the intellectual burden of humanism." If anything, he became more aggressively snobbish, more sharply disdainful of humanity. A happy marriage—to Laura Herbert in 1937—failed to temper his misanthropy. For that, literature can only be grateful. Without his finely-honed malice, Waugh might never have penned such comic masterpieces as *Black Mischief* (1932) and *Scoop* (1938).

Today's visitor to China inevitably comes home with a book of Lu Xun's stories—or, at the very least, a Lu Xun pin. Fifty years after the death of China's greatest modern writer, Lee, a University of Chicago Sinologist, seeks to free the man's life and work from the distortions of Communist hagiographers.

In 1911, when Lu Xun (1881–1936) was 29, China's old imperial order collapsed, followed by the chaos of warlord politics and an even bloodier showdown between Communists and the Guomindang (Nationalists). When the Guomindang massacred Shanghai's Communists in 1927, Lu Xun's moodiness darkened into serious mental depression. He did not recover until the early 1930s, when the writer vowed as an artist to become politically engaged.

Until the early 20th century, literature, judged entirely according to traditional forms, had been the leisure-time activity of China's governing elite.

Lu Xun, the intellectual and political loner, was a new phenomenon.

He created the uninvolved narrator, who refused to pass judgment no matter what he saw, in order to underscore the passivity of the masses. From Western-style short stories, he moved to prose poetry (in a form he invented), then to satire dealing with current events.

During the late 1920s, when China was on the brink of self-destruction, Lu Xun began to look to Leon Trotsky, Aleksandr Fadeyev, and other Soviet thinkers for inspiration. Lee portrays Lu Xun as a protean writer, a cautious revolutionary with a dark side, far more complex than the portraits by Chinese propagandists have conceded.

**THE RANDOM HOUSE  
DICTIONARY  
OF THE ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE,  
Second Edition Unabridged**  
edited by Stuart Berg Flexner  
and Leonore Crary Hauck  
2478 pp. plus supplements  
\$79.95

Poor Penthesilea. The Amazon queen was inexplicably abridged from this new, ostensibly unabridged, *Random House Dictionary II (RHD II)*. So don't throw away the first edition, *RHD I*, and by all means hold on to your *WEB III (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Merriam, 1966)*, *RHD II*'s closest competitor.

*RHD II* is a useful jack-of-all-trades. It includes not only an up-to-date vocabulary (e.g., *green-mail*, *wimp*, *AZT*) but also many features from *RHD I*: concise dictionaries in French, Spanish, Italian, and German; a table of signs and symbols; a directory of colleges and universities; the Declaration of Independence; the U.S. Constitution; a manual of style; a so-so atlas; and a quirky list of words commonly misspelled. (How come *initial* is here but not *squirrel*?) New in this edition is a helpful list of words commonly confused (*militate/mitigate*). And like the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it tells when words entered the language (*normalcy*, 1855–60). Gone from *RHD II* are a list of major reference works, a table of major dates in history, and the full text of the United Nations Charter.

But, sadly, this jack-of-all-trades is master of none. *WEB III* is much more complete in vocabulary: *Cuban eight* (an aerobatic maneuver), *tsamba* (Tibetan flour). Etymologies, while vastly improved in this edition, cannot compare with the Indo-European root list of *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1978); for example, the *RHD II* reader won't find such unexpected hereditary