

**HIDING FROM THE RAIN<sup>1</sup>**  
**BY**  
**GAO XINGJIAN**

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**Translator's Introduction:**

Gao Xingjian won the 2000 Nobel Prize for his novel, *Linshan (Soul Mountain)*, which was translated by Mabel Lee into English and published the same year. Although most of his literary works have been banned in China since 1989 for political reasons, the author was known as an avant-garde playwright of experimental theatre during the 1980s. His plays, such as *Jueduixinhao* (*Alarm Signal*, 1982), *Chezhan* (*Bus Station*, 1983), and *Yeren* (*Wild Man*, 1985), have been well received not only domestically but also internationally. Many Sinologists have done a great deal of research, made translations, and offered critiques of his contributions to world literature, including modern drama. Due to his unique theatrical theories and techniques, he is considered a creative and versatile artist who has transcended national and cultural boundaries.

As a short drama, *Duoyu* (1983) serves as an introduction to Gao's work and can help readers understand the evolution of the author's theoretical formation and creation during his early stage. During this time, Gao tried to integrate traditional Chinese theatricality into his modern experimental plays in *Xiandaizhezixi* (*Modern Shorts*). This lyric one-act play is the most popular of his four short dramas. Although it has no distinctive plot, the portrayal of the two young girls' subtle emotions and subjective views of life, with an experimental voice-over technique, is vividly aesthetic and impressive especially in contrast to the silent old man's "loud," judgmental body language.

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<sup>1</sup> This short play is one of *Xiandai zhezixi* (*Modern Shorts*) in Gilbert Fong's translation, 1999, and *Highlights of Modern Chinese Opera* in Kwok-kan Tam's, 2001). It was first published in *Zhongshan* (Nanjing), no. 4, 1984. The *Modern Shorts* include: *Mofang zhe* (*The imitator*), *Duoyu* (*Hiding from the rain*), *Xinglunan* (*Tough walk*), and *Habala shankou* (*The pass at Mount Habala*). The translations of the titles have been accepted by most critics in the book, *Soul of Chaos*. This translation is based on the Chinese edition selected in *Shensijie [Between Life and Death]* by Lianhe wenxue (Taipei) in 2001. The Swedish translation of this modern short drama is by Goran Malmqvist and performed at *Kungliga Dramatiska Theater* in Sweden, 1987. Directed by Peter Wahlqvist.

## Hiding from the Rain

### *Characters:*

*A retired old man, carrying an old suitcase, wearing a hat and a pair of canvas sneakers.*

**A Bright Voice**

**A Sweet Voice**

(At dusk, under a makeshift tent setup for road construction on a tree-lined path, only several sacks of cement on stage will suffice.)

A retired old man appears. He strolls, wipes his face, takes off his hat, stops, and looks up to the sky then down to the ground. The sound of raindrops on the leaves becomes gradually audible. The old man puts on his hat and quickly goes to take shelter from the rain under the makeshift tent beside the road. Then he takes off the hat again, shakes his shoes, puts his hands behind his back and looks up to the sky. The light on stage gradually fades out. There is a sound of rain pouring down. He sits down on one sack of cement to his right. Immediately, he stands up and puts his suitcase beneath his bottom, then sits down again with a sigh.

Two young girls run up on stage, giggling and goes into the makeshift tent to hide from the rain.

**Bright Voice:** Look, look, your eyelids, the tip of your nose...there is another raindrop right here!

**Sweet Voice:** It's running down my neck. It's all your fault; my hair is soaking wet.

**Bright Voice:** You look better this way.

**Sweet Voice:** Nonsense, you're bad!

(The retired old man turns away from them, sitting still. The two young girls giggle for a while.)

**Bright Voice:** Do you like rain?

**Sweet Voice:** Yes.

**Bright Voice:** Just don't get Sister Ning's hair wet.

**Sweet Voice:** It will be great to be completely soaked.

**Bright Voice:** Just like a soaked chicken!

**Sweet Voice:** Being a soaked chicken is not that bad, either.

**Bright Voice:** Oh, Sister *Ning*!

**Sweet Voice:** Are you jealous?

**Bright Voice:** I am!

(They giggle for a while again, not aware of a man on the other side of the cement bags. The old man turns around while sitting, and turns his face away.)

**Sweet Voice:** You're acting silly!

**Bright Voice:** I'm silly! (She puts her arms around the other girl's neck.)

(The old man appears very uneasy. He coughs softly.)

**Sweet Voice:** Stop fooling around. You are tickling me. Look, how beautiful this rain is. (Outside the makeshift tent, sheets of rain are flashing and jumping in the twilight. The two young girls sit on the cement bags. The rain becomes heavier. The retired old man stands up, and sits down again slowly.)

**Bright Voice:** Sister *Ning*, you don't know that one time I was even criticized for watching rain.

**Sweet Voice:** Why were you even criticized for watching rain?

**Bright Voice:** That day it also rained. There were only few visitors in the exhibit hall. In the hall, we all gathered together for a meeting. I stood alone outside, watching the rain. The rain fell sideways on the steps and then the rain drops flowed down one step after another along the stairway like a small water fall, silvery white . . .

**Sweet Voice:** like mercury . . .

**Bright Voice:** Right. They were also sparkling and blinking one after another; it was so much fun. Ah, I watched closely. When I entered the hall, our team leader interrogated me about where I had been. I said I was outside, watching the rain!

(The two girls lean on each other, giggling. The retired old man gets out a pair of coke-bottle glasses from his suitcase, looking at them sneakily. He looks gloomy.)

**Bright Voice:** At that moment, everybody stopped the meeting, all looking at me like

that, amused. They said: "Why did you say you were watching the rain? Couldn't you say you went to the bathroom?"

**Sweet Voice:** How beautiful it is to watch the rain. They don't understand.

**Bright Voice:** That's right, yet our boss said: "Everyone was in the meeting while you were watching the rain during the office hours!" I thought to myself: you say what you like. Anyway, I have seen something beautiful.

(The sound of laughing again. The retired old man puts the pair of coke-bottle glasses inside his suitcase and hides himself in the twilight. The light on stage becomes dimmer.)

**Sweet Voice:** Speaking of rain, it also depends on the watcher's mood. Last time when I came back from a business trip...

**Bright Voice:** (Interrupting her.) Ai-yo<sup>2</sup>, I thought that when it was raining, the sky was gloomy, except for the small waterfall sparkling. I also found it funny that there was a man, covering his head with his clothing and running so hard in the rain.

**Sweet Voice:** That time when we came back from our business trip, it was also a rainy day. Our unit sent somebody to the station to pick us up by car. I was especially happy. Guming also came . . .

**Bright Voice:** Which Guming?

**Sweet Voice:** Last time when you came to see me, haven't you met each other? He was the one who stopped me at the front gate for a chat, wearing a pair of glasses with gold frames . . .

**Bright Voice:** Oh, I get it.

**Sweet Voice:** He told me: "I don't like rain at all; this gloomy sky makes me so depressed that I could die." I said: "Really? Don't you feel that your spirit can be refreshed on a rainy day?" He said he didn't feel comfortable at all on a rainy day. I said: "That's very strange."

**Bright Voice:** There is no way to communicate with this kind of people.

(The old man stands up and picks up his suitcase, thinking of leaving, yet hesitates again.)

**Sweet Voice:** Once I saw a movie. It was about an Italian painter whose name was Modigliani. He was a real artist. He didn't wear any raincoats either, walking in the rain alone while it was pouring. I thought that scene was very beautiful. Why did some people

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<sup>2</sup> Ai-yo is a Chinese exclamation similar to the English, "hey," for interruption.

say that rain was not beautiful? Why not beautiful? After the rain washes over, then everything dirty inside and outside will . . .

**Bright Voice:** will all be washed away!

**Sweet Voice:** How happy we will be when we become real and we are who we are!

(The old man puts down his suitcase, hesitant. After all, he sits down.)

**Bright Voice:** You listen to me; I really enjoy walking in the rain, listening to the sound of rain drops falling on an umbrella. You move away the umbrella, raise your head, and let the rain fall on your face and hair, one little drop after another, which is particularly interesting. I wish I could take off all my clothes and let the rain drench me, which is much more enjoyable than taking a shower . . .

(The old man immediately stands up and coughs. He is about to go, but stops again.)

**Sweet Voice:** You listen to me. Before I left for the business trip, he gave me a letter and asked me to reply during the trip. But I didn't write a single word. So when he saw me, he felt very depressed. He didn't know that I enjoyed rain, the heavier the better, and then I could stay at home, not going to work.

(The old man shakes his head.)

**Bright Voice:** When it was raining, shining raindrops were all hanging on pine trees, like Christmas trees . . .

**Sweet Voice:** You listen to me; it will also be particularly interesting to walk around in a park on a rainy day. Nobody is in the park, so I can do whatever I want . . .

**Bright Voice:** Wild girl!

(They hug each other, giggling for a while. The old man quietly retreats, bends and sits down, his suitcase on the ground. His profile disappears in the darkness. The sound of rain in the deep darkness. Only a circle of dark yellow light illuminates the two girls.

**Bright Voice** sounds remote while **Sweet Voice** is easy and slow.)

**Bright Voice:** I always remember when I was little and took a nap on a rainy day; it was so comfortable with my eyes closed. When I woke up after a while, the rain stopped. Again I heard birds in the yard chirping, *jijijiujiu*, and also the rain dropping from the leaves one after another, *dida dida* . . .

**Sweet Voice:** While taking a nap under the cover of a blanket, I also heard frogs crying, *gua-gua*.

**Bright Voice:** When I went home from work, the rain had already stopped. There was a boy in our neighborhood. He rode his bike and gave me a ride home. When we passed by a small pond, the frogs there all croaked as loud as they could *gua gua gua* - They all must be that kind of frogs with big bellies –

**Sweet Voice:** Do you know? The more you provoke a frog, the bigger its belly gets bigger.

**Bright Voice:** Ay . . . it's so funny!

(Quiet on stage, nobody is laughing. The sound of a car driving from the back corner of the stage and passing by is followed by the sound of splashing when it runs through puddles, and then the sound of the passing car fades away.)

**Sweet Voice:** It's still raining.

**Bright Voice:** Let it rain, it's still early; even the streetlights are not on yet.

(In the darkness comes the sound of dripping somewhere under the makeshift tent. The old man looks around with his glasses, searching for the leak is. The sound of water dripping becomes louder.)

**Sweet Voice:** Unbelievable weird, when it rains, cicadas all stop buzzing.

**Bright Voice:** If they could buzz twice all of sudden, it would sound especially nice!

**Sweet Voice:** Of course, I also feel it would be especially nice to the ears. But as soon as the sky clears after the rain stops, those cicadas *jila jila* buzz. Ay, then I will feel it's very annoying. I think that you [cicadas] should not buzz; why are you buzzing at this moment? Normally I also quite like you. Aren't you annoying when you buzz at this moment? I really think that it has indeed ruined my impression [of cicada].

**Bright Voice:** I think I still can enjoy myself a lot. I particularly like this kind of misty rain, foggy and even floating in the air. I think if I stood on the top of a mountain. I would let the misty rain drench my clothing, tightly close to my body . . .

**Sweet Voice:** You let me talk –

**Bright Voice:** Ay, I won't let you, I want to talk!

**Sweet Voice:** I say: I saw *Modigliani* . . .

**Bright Voice:** Lunatic!

**Sweet Voice:** This artist is indeed a lunatic, walking alone to the beach in a heavy rain, stretching his arms and looking up to breathe . . .

(The sound of automobiles passing one after another after splashing through puddles; some are coming and some are going, which sounds almost like the ocean tide. The old man suddenly stands up, as if in pain.)

**Sweet Voice:** He intended to let the rain wash him. In his mind, there was too much depression to express in painting, yet he wanted to. It was when he was almost out of his mind that a girl he was particularly fond of ran toward him. Later she became his wife. At that time, I thought, if he were the man I loved, I would never put a raincoat on him. I would be drenched with him in the rain. I think that when you love a person, you should love the person's true feelings. You should be with him on the beach, and let the ocean tide and pouring rain . . .

(The sound of the ocean waves becomes louder and louder. The old man appears lost.)

**Sweet Voice:** Ah, so beautiful, so beautiful. But as soon as I thought of reality, I calmed down again, sitting and watching the movie in the darkness.

**Bright Voice,** Ah, how disappointing!

(The rain pours torrentially. Depressed, the old man sits down, with his hands holding his head. The audience cannot see his face.)

**Bright Voice:** Hey, Sister Ning, I particularly like snow. I always associate snowing with magpies. As soon as it snows, I always feel as if I were about to hear magpies' chirping, isn't it weird?

(The light in a circle shining on the girls at this moment changes to blue and becomes brighter and brighter. Both voices become softer and softer. The old man disappears.)

**Sweet Voice:** I also like snow. When the snow is falling on the ground and not melting, it always looks so pure white that you feel it's unbearable to step on the snowy ground.

**Bright Voice:** (Standing up.) But I especially like to walk on snowy ground.

**Sweet Voice:** I would even want to roll over on the ground, not just step on the snowy ground. But I don't want others to think I'm a lunatic, either.

**Bright Voice:** (Stepping at the same place, as if she were walking.) I like to walk on the snowy ground. The footsteps you leave behind are like a string of ears of wheat.

**Sweet Voice:** (Also standing up and holding her.) Are you willing to roll over on the snowy ground? You tell me!

**Bright Voice:** (Stepping.) I am willing to walk, walk, and walk out strings of ears of wheat.

**Sweet Voice:** (Measuring steps little by little.) Then you need to walk with your toes pointing out so that you will leave footsteps like ears of wheat. The way I walk will never be like ears of wheat.

**Bright Voice:** Walking pigeon-toed will also work and my footsteps will also be like ears of wheat.

**Sweet Voice:** Nonsense! I don't walk pigeon-toed. My footprints are straight, never like ears of wheat. You tell me what they are?

**Bright Voice:** They are crickets' creeping.

**Sweet Voice:** You're disgusting!

(The sound of their softly laughing. The sound of rain, also like snow falling on the ground.)

**Bright Voice:** (Leaning on the other's shoulder.) Sister *Ning*.

**Sweet Voice:** Yes?

**Bright Voice:** What am I going to say?

**Sweet Voice:** If on a snowing day, a frog jumped out suddenly, would that be fun?

**Bright Voice:** Then I would have seen a snake on snowy ground.

**Sweet Voice:** I ask you whether it's possible for a frog to jump out.

**Bright Voice:** There must be a snake. I've seen one on snowy ground.

**Sweet Voice:** The snake would have been frozen. It wouldn't be possible at all!

**Bright Voice:** It's possible, stiff as a stick . . .

**Sweet Voice:** Hey, would you be like the farmer who tried to put a snake close to his chest to warm it up?<sup>3</sup>

**Bright Voice:** Oh, that would be too weird. Sister, would you like to have some fun making snowballs? When it snows, I will also feel younger and really want to roll all over in the snow –

**Sweet Voice:** Why do you copy me? I would like to roll, so would you.

**Bright Voice:** Who would like to roll together with you? Cheap! I pinch you.

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<sup>3</sup> She is referring to a Chinese story about a kind farmer who saved a snake by warming it in his arms.

**Sweet Voice:** I burn you!

**Bright Voice:** I burn you with a pair of fire tongs! Don't think that I am nice, so you can bully me! We'll see who is tougher. (She tickles her.)

(The girl with **Sweet Voice** has no mercy for her, either. The sound of their giggling and panting. The old man lights a match for a cigarette. The bright blue light from above suddenly goes out. The match lights up the old man's smile. After thinking for a moment, he decides not to smoke. So he quickly puts out the light. The yellow-light on the girls sitting on the cement sacks becomes even dimmer. The sound of steady rain.)

**Bright Voice:** Forgive me, Sister *Ning*! You listen to me; when my family still lived in the countryside, the river by the hill would overflow right after the rain . . .

**Sweet Voice:** Ah, do you like it when the ice starts melting? There was still some snow built up on ice blocks. After they cracked, they floated on the river.

**Bright Voice:** I've seen that before. It was a lot of fun watching the ice blocks split. They moved first along the flowing water way and then bumped into each other and were crushed before they flowed faster and faster down the river. The river was dark blue, very pleasing to see! How romantic it was!

**Sweet Voice:** Life is wonderful. This is life!

**Bright Voice:** I have also seen a huge avalanche crushing . . .

**Sweet Voice:** But I don't like avalanches. I know they can be very destructive, and bury human beings, cars, and roads all together. I don't like avalanches at all because they ruin my impression of the beauty of Nature.

**Bright Voice:** But you have to understand that life is like this: sometimes it's beautiful, sometimes it's also ugly . . .

(The sound of wind and rain. Pulling together his clothing and burying his head between his two knees, the old man curls up into a ball. The sound of howling wind and pouring rain. Under a dim sidelight, only the profile of the standing girl with **Sweet Voice** is visible.)

**Sweet Voice:** I also like a very vast wild land . . . where I can cry out loud, cry as long as I want, and mess up as much as I want. Then I feel this moment is also quite beautiful, surrounded by the wild weeds, so desolate... I am so lonesome . . . without any one . . . nobody can hear my shouting. (Fading.)

**Bright Voice:** (The dim sidelight reveals this girl's shadow.) I have seen the sun rise just above my big hill. Somebody said people were executed on that hill. But I think that the

hill was particularly beautiful because every time, the sun first revealed one corner of it from behind the hill, like a moon cake with one slice cut out, and then gradually more than a half was revealed . . . , (A red sidelight illuminates her.) very, very bright red, like a huge crimson persimmon. Every time I carried the sun on my back to go to school.

**Sweet Voice:** Do you like the moon or the sun?

**Bright Voice:** I always carried my book bag and walked sideways.

**Sweet Voice:** What I asked is whether you like the sun or the moon?

**Bright Voice:** Both.

(The red light gradually disappears. A cold light gradually emerges from the front, illuminating the face of the girl with **Sweet Voice**.)

**Sweet Voice:** But I like the moon, it is not as hot as the sun. It's unbearable under the bright sun. But the moon is beautiful any time, so pure.

**Bright Voice:** (The cold light illuminates the two girls' faces.) You know that one time I went to my grandma's house by train, and I saw the moon like a crushed mirror! (The cold light flashes on both their faces while they talk about their individual stories simultaneously.)

**Sweet Voice:** Every time I take a train, even my destination is very clear.

**Bright Voice:** Because there are always branches outside the window in the winter, when all the leaves are gone . . .

**Sweet Voice:** but as soon as the train moves, I always have a feeling that I don't know

**Bright Voice:** they're completely bare, and some long, some short. The moon is always blinking, but

**Sweet Voice:** where I am going. I was fascinated by the scenes I saw. I saw

**Bright Voice:** through the train window, it appears like a ceaselessly

**Sweet Voice:** mountains, bamboo forests, and tea trees pass one after another, I

**Bright Voice:** broken mirrors, prettier than the moon intact.

**Sweet Voice:** don't know where my future is.

**Bright Voice:** (Blank)

**Sweet Voice:** Where is he?

**Bright Voice:** Who?

(Soft music arises, like a tangible thread. The shadow of the girl with **Bright Voice** arises against a beam of light.)

**Bright Voice:** (As if an inner voice.) But I've never thought that anybody could bring me happiness. It seems that I feel only I myself can obtain happiness. To this very day I still don't know if any one else can give me happiness . . .

**Sweet Voice:** (As if sighing.) Go with the flow. As long as it's natural, it is beautiful.

**Bright Voice:** But the more beautiful a thing is, the more it seems unreal sometimes. Take a flower for example. Some say how beautiful this flower is, as if it were made. But when you see a plastic flower, you will say how beautiful this plastic flower is, just like a real one. How contradictory it is, not logical at all. Don't you think that when a person is very nice to you, you will think: is this feeling unreal?

**Sweet Voice:** Don't compare feelings; you cannot talk about both as though they were the same thing.

**Bright Voice:** I want to apply the same logic to see whether it's universal!

**Sweet Voice:** Then you will think that the one you love . . .

**Bright Voice:** Even his lie would also sound real.

**Sweet Voice:** People always like hypocrisy, as long as it's pleasing to the ears.

**Bright Voice:** But you don't hope that it is unreal!

(The sound of a small car quickly passing by, the music and the light from the back disappears. A streetlight changing from green to blue comes up from back stage, revealing the profiles of the two girls who sit back to back on the sacks of cement. The "puso puso" sound of leaking. The old man moves away, but cannot find a place that is not leaking. So he moves farther away. It's still not working. Looking at the water drops in the darkness, he is very miserable.)

**Sweet Voice:** One time, I put an orchid in my hair to go to the office. Everybody said it was beautiful and smelt good. But, behind my back, somebody criticized me afterwards. When I heard that, I was very mad.

**Bright Voice:** As a matter of fact, what's the big deal?

(The old man dares not disturb the two girls, looking for a place in the tent that isn't leaking.)

**Sweet Voice:** Don't you also want to put one in your hair? Why did you criticize others, didn't you feel ashamed? I have not learned hypocrisy.

**Bright Voice:** I think anything natural is beautiful. I hate most whatever suppresses nature.

**Sweet Voice:** But when an environment will not allow you to, you must also learn to pretend. After that time, I no longer put on any flowers.

**Bright Voice:** No choice. We have to live and adapt to the environment.

(Walking with light steps, the old man tries to find a place that isn't leaking but cannot find one. The sound of raindrops continues ceaselessly.)

**Sweet Voice:** In order to survive, we have to learn how to talk sweetly. It's disgusting.

**Bright Voice:** Because you love life, you must learn how to live.

**Sweet Voice:** But I feel if people are smart, they should create a new life; only a fool will be content with what she or he has.

**Bright Voice:** How do you create a new life?

(At this moment, the sound of raindrops is everywhere. Walking with light steps in the leaking area, the old man can not help but take off his hat and hold it above his head. Eventually he stands still, dropping his head down.)

**Sweet Voice:** Use both hands and the power of spirit to create.

**Bright Voice:** But sometimes you have no choice but hide your true self. Besides, catering to others is also necessary sometimes.

(The sound of steady rain dropping louder and louder, spreading all around, and drifting. The streetlight from stage back turns into a circle of dim purple light, drifting behind the back of the girl with **Sweet Voice**.)

**Sweet Voice:** (With the drift of the dim purple light, the girl appears as if floating.) But I think that no matter how pretentious people try to be, they should always keep the most truthful and pure things in their souls intact. This is the main pillar of daily life. No one can live without it. Without this kind of support, I will not be able to live.

**Bright Voice:** (As if echoing.) Sometimes, you have no choice but to criticize others for this or that. Don't you think you're also acting in order to distinguish yourself?

**Sweet Voice:** But I really wish I could open myself up, take out my own beating heart to show you that it's red, and then you would forgive me.

**Bright Voice:** (As if echoing.) Ah, that's too silly. It's not necessary.

**Sweet Voice:** But, if you particularly trust . . .

**Bright Voice:** It would be best to search for some one trustworthy.

**Sweet Voice:** You know I can really do things like this!

**Bright Voice:** Doing this for some one who doesn't understand you is a waste.

**Sweet Voice:** Of course, to be in this life is not easy.

(The old man sighs. The dim light disappears. The two girls still sit on the cement sacks, and only their two shadows are visible. Shaking his hat, the old man turns to face the audience, twisting the completely soaked hat.)

**Bright Voice:** For those who don't understand me, they did not understand me in the first place. Neither do I hope for their understanding. They can say whatever they want; criticism is also fine. I don't need their understanding. They will not understand anyway.

**Sweet Voice:** Then, why did you insist that your grandpa understands you?

(The old man tilts his head in order to hear clearly.)

**Bright Voice:** He is my relative; he should understand.

**Sweet Voice:** But he belongs to that generation; he can't understand our generation!

(The old man appears irritated.)

**Bright Voice:** Of course.

**Sweet Voice:** But if all the people around you don't understand you, sometimes they may kill you . . .

(The sound of raining. The old man looks lost, and his hands drop.)

**Bright Voice:** But I'm not afraid because I have my own thoughts already. Yet, I still always hope that I can be understood. I think that what comforts people most in the world is mutual understanding between each other, a synchronized state of minds.

(The old man squats on the other side, contemplating with his eyes closed. The sound of roaring automobiles speeding by. The streetlights are lit up one after another from stage back. A kind of music like a mixture of everything in the urban night arises. Under the soft light the two girls appear sitting close together.)

**Sweet Voice:** This is not enough. I think what comforts me most is true love.

**Bright Voice:** It's because you have already found your love. You've already had a man's true love for you and your hearts belong to each other.

**Sweet Voice:** Anyway, simply understanding is just not enough!

**Bright Voice:** You know how his heart beats and he knows how yours does. You have already found the most wonderful love in the world. I only hope that I can be understood, even though he does not approve the way you did this. As long as he can understand you, it would also be great.

**Sweet Voice:** I am much greedier than you. If my relatives and friends around me just understand me but don't love me, then I cannot bear it.

**Bright Voice:** But only when you understand first, then it is possible to love.

**Sweet Voice:** Yet, this is not enough. Without love, living in this world will be too miserable.

**Bright Voice:** My situation is different from yours. I just want understanding.

**Sweet Voice:** (Passionately hugging the other.) But I am not content. To love someone is to love with all my heart; only understanding is far from enough.

**Bright Voice:** There is no such consummate thing. Neither can love reach the consummate. If it did, it would begin to decline afterwards.

**Sweet Voice:** Why can one always climb up, searching and exploring forever?

**Bright Voice:** There's always an end; after the climax, then . . .

**Sweet Voice:** Why can one reach another climax again? This is also a philosophy! (Holding the other's face.) You answer me. You answer me!

**Bright Voice:** If I say, Sister *Ning*, I love you to the consummate extent and love you to death, my heart will still feel something is not quite enough.

**Sweet Voice:** (Shaming the other to her face.) If you say this some day, I will wish you were dead on the spot!

**Bright Voice:** (Caressing the other's face with her face. They embrace each other closely.) Ah, how cruel it is, but this is a human being, a real human being alive. Remember, Sister *Ning*, I will never say I love you to death.

**Sweet Voice:** (Releasing the other.) So, I will not let you die, either. Don't worry.

**Bright Voice:** Ah, dialectic, it's so much fun. Seriously, if there were a kind of love that would really make one love the other to death . . .

**Sweet Voice:** then I think that even death is worth it.

**Bright Voice:** Then, there would be no fun. The end of love is not death.

**Sweet Voice:** I know the end is not to die . . .

**Bright Voice:** But if love requires one to die for it, like Romeo and Juliet!

**Sweet Voice:** Like Othello! Even if it is tragic, isn't that also true love?

**Bright Voice:** But that is a kind of possession.

(The old man closes his eyes, as if he were about to get the raindrops off his head.)

**Sweet Voice:** You can not deny that his love was genuine; the way he loved was not the same.

**Bright Voice:** The times were different. At that time, people thought that possession was true love. Besides, it's precisely the desire to possess that makes love stronger and therefore more selfish. But, now people no longer view love as possession. I think that if you possess someone, the person will no longer be loveable. Therefore, in the future, even if I fall in love with a person, or a person falls in love with me, I certainly will not be with him any more if I begin to want to possess him. If that person also tries to possess me, then we will be finished.

**Sweet Voice:** People can never get rid of physical possession. It's frustrating.

(The old man shakes his head, stands up and frowns, as if some rain has dropped on his eyebrow.)

**Sweet Voice:** The physical possession of love should be transformed into the mutual communication of souls.

(The old man nods, as if to get the raindrop off his face.)

**Bright Voice:** To possess the soul is not possible either, because one cannot completely possess the soul.

**Sweet Voice:** It depends . . .

**Bright Voice:** No, why do elderly people become so practical, never promising anything when they fall in love?

(The old man's face becomes peaceful.)

**Bright Voice:** It's because they already know what it's about. But we young people always ask for an everlasting promise, which is already a kind of possession.

(The old man bends, coughs, and fumbles for his suitcase.)

**Sweet Voice:** Then, you can't deny it's pure, either.

**Bright Voice:** That is because you have not yet completely understood what it is about.

**Sweet Voice:** Not necessarily! It depends; it depends!

**Bright Voice:** That is the first love.

**Sweet Voice:** Purity is possible.

**Bright Voice:** I don't believe there is any absolutely pure thing. I think if I fall in love with a person, I will not promise eternal love.

(The old man stamps his feet in an attempt to let the girls hear it and drive them out.)

**Sweet Voice:** That is not necessary, either.

**Bright Voice:** However, if I meet a person like that . . .

**Sweet Voice:** You will not promise eternal love?

**Bright Voice:** No, I will not get married.

**Sweet Voice:** Single for your whole life?

**Bright Voice:** That's right!

**Sweet Voice:** You cannot remain single forever, do you believe it?

**Bright Voice:** I will spend my whole life with Sister *Ning*.

**Sweet Voice:** You will meet someone you love.

**Bright Voice:** I will not.

**Sweet Voice:** You will, my dear sister. You will.

**Bright Voice:** But I will not know whether or not he will love me forever. Then I will suffer more . . .

**Sweet Voice:** If that's the case, I will leave him alone quietly to live with you . . .

**Bright Voice:** Sister *Ning*, are you crying?

**Sweet Voice:** No . . .

(The old man stops, listening more attentively, a surprise on his face.)

**Bright Voice:** (Putting her arms around the other.) How silly we are!

(The old man puts on his eyeglasses.)

**Sweet Voice:** Because we're girls.

**Bright Voice:** Girls are silly?

**Sweet Voice:** (Pushing her away.) Get out of here! (She smiles herself, wiping out her tears.)

(The old man sighs.)

**Bright Voice:** All the streetlights are on -- It's still raining.

(The two girls stand up and walk outside the tent. The sound of rain. They both turn away from the audience and raise their heads to receive the rain. Under the streetlight, it is raining steadily. They look at each other, giggling. Soft music. With two beams of headlights from the opposite direction and the music, they run toward the back of the stage, giggling and off stage. Then they vanish. The old man walks out of the tent. The sounds of the automobile and the music disappear. The old man puts on his hat, slowly walking toward the back of the stage and off stage. Under the streetlight, there are ceaseless sheets of rain and the *sha sha* sound of rain.)

### **A synopsis of the author's stage directions:**

Gao Xingjian adapted his short story, *Yuxuejiqu* (Rain, Snow, and others, 1982),<sup>4</sup> to this one-act play, *Duoyu* (Hiding from the rain, 1984), as an experiment to incorporate traditional Chinese theatricality to modern drama. It is one of his *Xiandai zhezixi* (*Modern Short dramas*) which also include: *Mofang zhe* (*The imitator*), *Xinglunan* (*Tough walk*), and *Habala shankou* (*The Pass at Mount Habala*). The *zhezixi*, translated as short drama, is the essence of a play in traditional Chinese theatre. According to the playwright, whether or not a play can attract the audience depends precisely on this so-called "eye of a play" or "the soul of a play" that is the play's most dramatic part. Every short drama focuses on a distinctive feature of singing, narrative, acting, or instrumental performances in order to achieve the highest states of various theatrical arts. As a whole, these modern short dramas aim at to study one crucial Chinese theatrical technique at a time so as to provide an opportunity to cultivate and train actors to excel in all techniques and incorporate them into their future performances on stage.

*Duoyu* highlights the inner emotions through narration. It focuses on an inner duet of two girls and a parallel contrast between the inner feelings of the girls and that of an old man, who does not speak. The play is thus acted out in a process of multi-faceted contrasts basically through the two girls' narrations and the old man's subtle body language. In contrast to a play of action, it is considered a play of language. In an action drama, physical actions carry the ideas of the drama while the script simply functions as a prompt for action. But in a drama where inner emotions are most important, action is limited in order to reflect emotions or inner feelings.

In this performance, the playwright suggests that the changes of scene and movements on stage should be minimized while body and facial movements naturally emerge to reflect the characters' inner states during the narration. Actresses should focus on listening and feeling, instead of reciting so that the subtle physical reaction can be dramatized. Their facial movements are basically natural. In other words, they do not rely on facial expressions but on their body postures, hand gestures, foot steps, and eye movements to convey their messages, inner landscapes, and moods. The lighting and sound effects are not only for environment and atmosphere but also for the tempo and rhythm. Lighting should create a natural flow without any abrupt interruption.

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<sup>4</sup> The short story is originally published in Beijing 1982, and later is selected in *Gao Xingjian Duanpian Xiashuoji* (*A Collection of Gao Xingjian's Short Stories*) and published by Lianhewenxue in 2001, pp.65-84.

