

CONFUCIUS SAW NANCY
AND
ESSAYS ABOUT NOTHING

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THANKS

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THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE

This play was written in Chinese in October, 1928 and published in "P'unliu Monthly," Vol. 1, No. 6. On June the 8th, 1929, it was enacted at the birthplace of Confucius by students of the Second Normal College of Shantung. Domestic politics, subsequent investigations revealed, caused the descendants of Confucius' Clan to lodge a protest with the Ministry of Education, thus precipitating a national sensation. The charges were that "a student played the role of Confucius, a lady teacher played the role of Nancia, fascinating in her charms, and that the one who played the part of Tselu had the air of a forest robber." The whole play was interpreted as an insult to their great ancestor. A ministerial investigation on the spot freed the school authorities of the charge, and vindicated the defence of the President of the College that the play was enacted because it showed the conflict between Confucianism and art, between the carcass of forms and man's inner artistic life. Subsequently, the play has been acted at various cities in China.

The present English translation was done by the author in response to the request of the Chinese students at Columbia University who enacted it at the International House in December, 1931.

The play was based on a verse in the Confucian "Analects," where it was recorded that "Confucius saw Nancia and Tselu was displeased, whereupon Confucius swore an oath, 'If I have a dishonourable thought, may Heaven strike me! May Heaven strike me!'" The background and all the characters of the play are historical, and the sayings of Confucius are based on early sources.

CONFUCIUS SAW NANCY

A ONE-ACT TRAGICOMEDY

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CONFUCIUS, well-known philosopher of Lu
JUPOYU, former premier of Wei
TSELU, disciple of Confucius
MICIUS, court favourite of the King and Queen
and brother-in-law of Tselu
YUNG, eunuch attendant on the Queen
NANCIA, Queen of Wei
Four dancing girls

Time: 497 B.C.

Place: In the Kingdom of Wei

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CONFUCIUS SAW NANCY

[In the parlour of the King of Wei, richly but austere-ly furnished with chairs and tea-tables, placed against the walls on both sides of the room. Back of the sets of tables and chairs are latticed windows with curtains. In the middle of the wall is a door, with bead curtains. The scene opens with two old persons sipping tea and engaged in talking, seated on the left side of the room. One of these gentlemen looks over fifty years old, with a high forehead, a pair of big, penetrating eyes, kindly, good-humoured lips and a respectable beard. Sitting opposite him across the tea-table is a white-haired old gentleman, looking considerably older, gentle in appearance, smaller in stature, but out of his grey eyes shines a forceful, energetic personality, still youthful in spirit. This impression is strengthened by the upward curve of his lips, which wear the habitual smile of an old, confounded cynic. The former is Confucius, while the latter is Jupoyu, Confucius' old friend and former premier of Wei. Although the room looks warm and cozy, it seems from the rather constrained attitude of the two gentlemen that an air of rigidity and heaviness hangs over the place. Confucius sits erect and attentive, with an air of suspension, as if anticipating a

dreadful calamity or a fateful interview, while the attitude of Jupoyu is considerably easier and more natural. Behind the cold exterior of Confucius' appearance, however, one discerns in him a man of great wisdom, natural dignity, but above all, an exceptionally keen practical sense.]

JUPOYU: [*Feeling annoyed by waiting*] Oh, well . . . why doesn't Tselu turn up yet?

CONFUCIUS: Oh, Tselu? He is always late. That's just like him. But he always apologizes, too. He's a good fellow. Don't blame him.

JUPOYU: I am not blaming him. [*Turning to the serious topic*] I believe the affair will turn out a success. You see, with your great prestige and Tselu pulling the wires through Micius, you cannot but succeed.

CONFUCIUS: [*very formally*] Thank you. Of course my ambition and sole purpose is just to put my political doctrines into practice. The other arrangements do not concern me

JUPOYU: [*as if not hearing him*] I understand your salary will be forty thousand—no, sixty thousand bushels of rice, the same as you received in your country.

CONFUCIUS: [*very polished*] Oh, that's all right. You see the salary is—eh—what d'you call a certain indication of courtesy and respect—merely. Nevertheless, [*quizzically, showing his practical turn of mind*] it will do. It's always all right with me.

JUPOYU: [*warmly responding*] Of course, of course. But one has to live on something. Remember what you said once. We can't go without food like a dried gourd that you hang on the wall. [CONFUCIUS *steals a glance at him, and they both laugh.*] You see I like plain speaking. And besides [*sipping his tea*—eh, I've been thinking. Here's a wonderful chance. We have at present in this country as good a group of scholars as you could gather together anywhere, although I do say it of my own country. You see, there's Minister Kung, an excellent scholar, always so courteous and so broad-minded, and there's Shihyu, and there are Tselu and Tsekung both counted among your best disciples. The King himself is a nice fellow and the country is rich. You could do wonders here.

CONFUCIUS: That's exactly it. When a gentleman receives the pay of a country, he always wants to accomplish something worthwhile. Before King Wen and King Wu founded the present great dynasty, they started out with only a very small city, not bigger than thirty square miles and now . . .

JUPOYU: [*not heeding him*] But the most important person is the Queen, Her Royal Highness, Nancia. But you see we have got Micius [*showing contempt*] on our side. His wife and Tselu's wife are sisters. You know women always rule the world, don't they?—Here comes Tselu!

[*Enters TSELU, looking over forty years old, his face quite flushed and panting, rushing in almost backwards.*]

TSELU: Damn the gate-keeper! He pretended not to know me, and would not let me in, until I put my hand on my sword. . . . Then he apologized. [*Then, remembering himself, he made a low bow to the old gentleman.*] I am awfully sorry. Did I keep you waiting very long?

JUPOYU: Oh, no!

CONFUCIUS: [*simultaneously, but absent-mindedly*] Oh, fairly. [TSELU *somewhat offended, looked straight at CONFUCIUS. CONFUCIUS correcting himself*] No, not so very long.

TSELU: Micius has agreed to come here to meet us. He will be here in a minute. He says he has something to speak to you about. [CONFUCIUS *pulls a long face, somewhat embarrassed.*] Yes, I think he has arranged everything already. But he has something to tell you. The salary is sixty thousand bushels of rice, the same as what you received in Lu.

CONFUCIUS: [*still more embarrassed*] Now, now, Tselu. You should always think before you talk. A gentleman does not always have to secure an official job. Of course it was foolish of Poyi and Shuchi to insist on leaving politics, but one does not have to insist on becoming an official. You see it is my cardinal principle of conduct, never to insist on anything. All depends on the courtesy and respect you receive. It's always all right with me, either way.

TSELU: I am sorry, I didn't mean it. Of course all depends on the courtesy and respect a gentleman receives. But sixty thousand bushels—that's plenty of respect. I have been thinking, Master, you must stay in Wei. As to securing official jobs, why not? You said once that a good scholar must be an official. If he does not become an official, what's the use of all his scholarship? Why, what will become of the king, if there are no officials? If there are no officials, there will be no king, and what will become of your whole theory of benevolent monarchy? And if the scholars should not become officials, who else should? So my way of looking at it is, to become an official is the divine duty of a gentleman.

JUPOYU: Now, now, Tselu, you are running loose with your tongue again.

CONFUCIUS: Not at all. On the other hand, I think his views extremely interesting. I have been thinking of this question, too. And I was hesitating whether I should go or stay. He is convincing me. Perhaps I should stay. But it's not all so simple to hold on to an official job,

as you might think in your simple-hearted way, Tselu.

JUPOYU: [*records an understanding smile*] Oh yes, Tselu, you still could learn a lot from your master.

CONFUCIUS: [*suddenly becoming familiar*] How old is the Queen, I mean Her Royal Highness Nancia?

TSELU: About thirty, I think. Why?

CONFUCIUS: Hm! [*Knitting his brow*] I hear the King always listens to her. Is it true?

TSELU: It's absolutely and entirely true.

CONFUCIUS: Then, she is more powerful than the King himself?

TSELU: Certainly.

CONFUCIUS: Is she—I mean, Her Royal Highness, very talkative?

TSELU: [*smiling*] That's an interesting question. Well, they say she is very talkative. What has that to do with our business?

CONFUCIUS: [*smiling understandingly*] Does she really see the men officials herself? [*TSELU'S face becomes serious. JUPOYU breaks out into a laughter, which embarrasses TSELU still more. CONFUCIUS tries to look unperturbed.*]

JUPOYU: [*smiling gently, and speaking as if to himself*] Well, well, the

one who believes in the divine duty of becoming an official does not understand how to be an official. And the one who does not insist on becoming an official understands the art of being an official. Oh, well, this is a funny world. [CONFUCIUS *throws a side glance at JUPOYU. Both understand one another.*]

CONFUCIUS: Tselu, come here. I want to talk to you. You said that the King obeys the Queen in everything?

TSELU: Everything.

CONFUCIUS: And she is more powerful than the King himself?

TSELU: Decidedly.

CONFUCIUS: Then the whole government of the Kingdom is in the hands of Nancia —[*correcting himself*]—I mean of Her Royal Highness?

TSELU: Yes. Why even your own appointment is arranged with her, and decided by her, through Micius. Of course she is only the power behind the throne, the Kingdom is governed by the King.

CONFUCIUS: [*contemptuously, but affectionately*] Oh, you green-horn of a politician! [*Rising leisurely and thoughtfully, pacing the room. He loses his*