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Having decided not to repeat myself, I thought that the style of *The Wilderness* should be different from my previous two plays. I wanted to create an artistic image: an ugly man does not have to be ugly-hearted. ... However, there was no way for him to survive. He committed suicide.

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- Cao Yu,
interviewed by Tian Benxiang, 1981

This three-act play is the only work written by Cao Yu that is set in the countryside of northern China. Superficially a story of a peasant's revenge, it interweaves darkness, nightmare, fear and mystery in the style of expressionist theatre. The heart of the play remains the playwright's philosophical obsession with fate and cosmic cruelty. While the plot relates the protagonist's deliberation, preparation and execution of his vengeance, and his consequent feelings of guilt and eventual suicide, dramatic colour is added through the rivalry for exclusive affection between a possessive old mother and a beautiful but jealous wife, as well as the primitive passions, sexual deprivation and defiant courage of life in this remote environment. *The Wilderness* has thus afforded rich opportunities for adaptations into film, Western opera, Beijing Opera and other regional theatres.



The Wilderness (1937)



Controversial production including centre-stage toilet, 2000



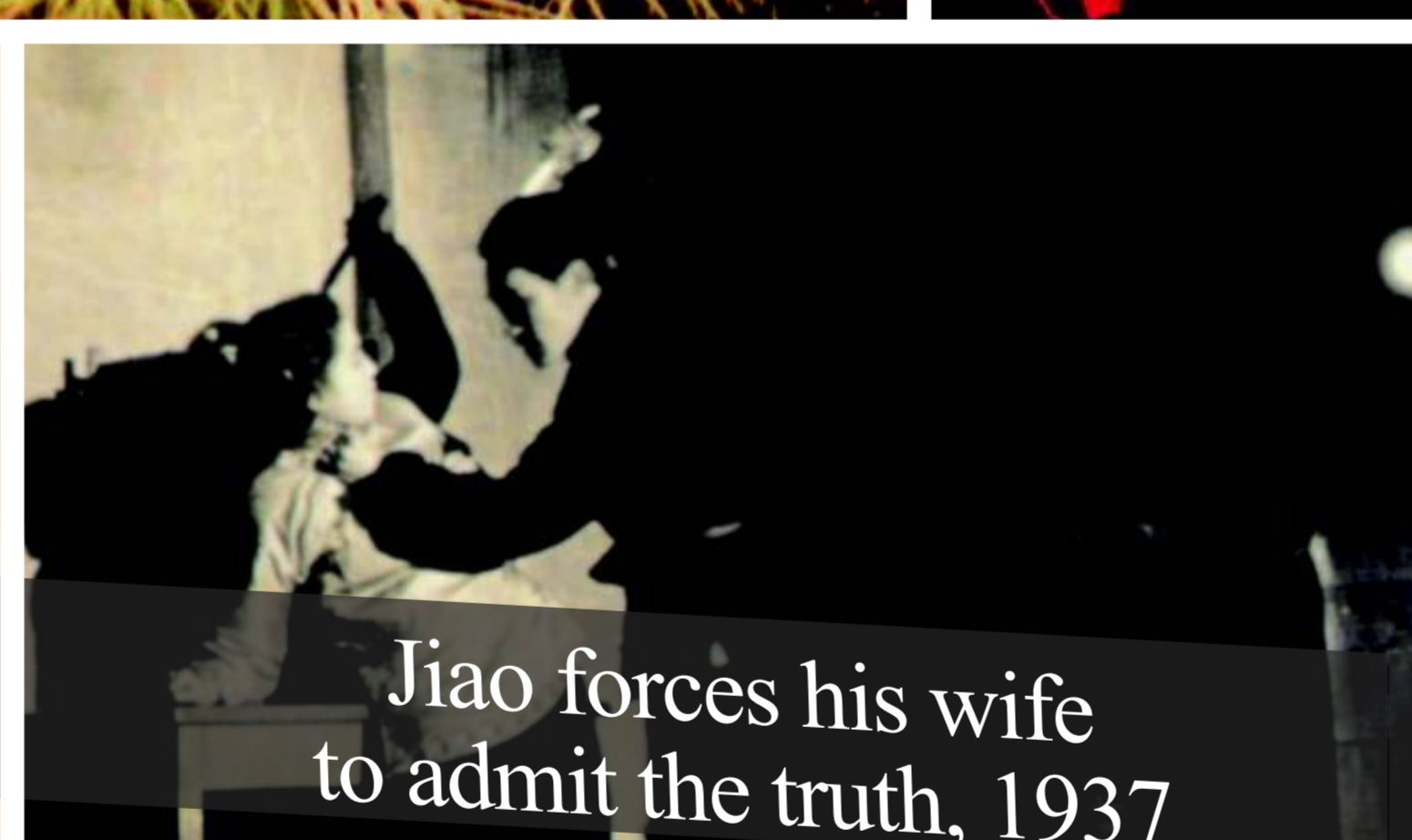
The lovers hide in a dark forest, 2005



The childhood friends are now rivals in love, 2010



The lovers flee - Beijing Opera adaptation, 2007



Jiao forces his wife to admit the truth, 1937



English production in Leeds, 1998