



Analyzing Lu Xun's complex position using "A Madman's Diary" as a guide

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Abstract. Influenced by the special times, Lu Xun's literature has been excessively influenced by the May Fourth Movement, revolution, and politics, thus partially ignoring the profound thinking about life and humanity. This article attempts to distance itself from political and ideological factors and explore the will and stance hidden beneath the critical color in Lu Xun's literary works. Lu Xun's literary works show a complexity because they maintain a certain distance from politics, that is, the recognition and uncertainty of self-worth and belief of small individuals in turbulent times and the deep powerlessness of individuals in the transition between the old and the new, unable to escape the shackles of the old system both socially and personally. However, its value lies in Lu Xun's guidance of the flaws in reality through this profound literary exploration. This article will use "A Madman's Diary" as an introduction to provide a more detailed discussion of the complexity of Lu Xun's texts.

Keywords: Lu Xun, politics and literature, complex stance.

1 Introduction

Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary" was published in 1918 and is regarded by academia as the opening work of modern Chinese vernacular fiction with tremendous influence. It is able to bear the label of an opening work not only because of its literary form but also because of its critical and alerting value to society, possessing a political revolutionary nature. Countless studies have been conducted surrounding the topic of "national character". May fourth, as a patriotic political uprising, may have been endowed with too much significance and, to a certain extent, has been simplified, typified, and deified. A political movement represented by university faculty and students gradually evolved into a literary revolution and reform movement initiated by intellectuals. As the concept of politics began to permeate into literature, May Fourth became a symbol not only of politics but also of culture and literature. This, in turn, led to writers, especially representative writers, being labeled with a revolutionary ideological tendency. Lu Xun was chosen by later generations and molded into a revolutionary banner firmly planted at the beginning of modern literature, seemingly symbolizing a new era. However, in 1933, Lu Xun clarified his motives for publishing novels and essays in "New Youth" in the preface to his selected collection of works. He said, "At that time, I did

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Z. Zhan et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2024 10th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2024)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 858,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-277-4_2

not have much enthusiasm for 'literary revolution'... In retrospect, most of it was out of solidarity with the enthusiasts. I thought that although these warriors were in solitude, their ideas were not bad, so I would cheer them on a few times." [1]

Just as political revolution cannot be achieved overnight, literary reform also requires a lengthy process. The simplification of ideologies and recurring ideas in literature has oversimplified and overlooked many aspects. Literature and thought cannot be defined solely by the characteristics of the times, nor will they experience drastic changes and fluctuations to cater to political movements. The more mature the writer's thinking, the more they can maintain a sense of complexity and depth amidst turmoil, as is the case with Lu Xun. His works have withstood the test of time for a century, and the most important reason may not lie solely in their critical nature but in the complexity of their texts and the profound contemplation of life and humanity. The purpose of the argument has never been to negate the critical nature of Lu Xun's works but to emphasize the enduring complexity within his works. In 1985, the second issue of the American Journal of Intellectuals published a paper by Sun Longji of the University of Kansas, "Whether or Not to Be "Eaten"-The Difficulties of Lu Xun's Involvement in Politics". An important aspect of this thesis is to analysing the multiple contradictions in Lu Xun's thought: "Lu Xun is a Nietzschean elitist, but sympathetic to the weak and oppressed; he is a male who fights for women's suffering; he is a mocker of the world, but fond of the lost innocence of childhood; as a fighter of the new culture, he is extremely displeased with the superficiality of the May Fourth style and new characters; he put his hopes on the young people, but he himself was already past middle age. As for Lu Xun himself, his greatest contradiction is that he is determined to be the mortal enemy of traditional Chinese culture, but in this aspect of his personal interest, he takes refuge in the entire inherited cultural heritage. Although he often used the imagery of "cannibalism" to describe the "masses", this imagery was also turned back on him to lash out at the privileged upper classes." [2] From the perspective of literary creation, Lu Xun did indeed hold utilitarian goals inspired by "enlightenment," but he always emphasized that "good literary works are often things that naturally flow from the heart, not something commanded by others or concerned with gains and losses" [3]. He consistently pursued intellectual independence and depth, striving to be true to reality in his writing. Although his literature still possesses "political revolutionary" characteristics, it will never speak out solely to cater to politics.

2 Implication and Concealment - The Will Contradiction in Reading Disabilities

Many studies have pointed out that "Yu" is both a first-person witness of the madman's return to sanity and a third-person traditional storyteller's perspective [4]. However, the author believes that the "narrator" does not completely represent the voice of the author. "He" can also be a "role" deliberately set by the author to confuse, conceal, imply, or satirize in order to achieve the desired textual effect. "The classical preface rewrites the narrative and attitude of 'The Diary of a Madman,' making this novel a textual presen-

tation of multiple voices and multiple narrations" [5]. The "Yu" in Lu Xun's work narrates with traditional ideas and forms, but its reference is not clear, and it is unclear whether the intention is to confuse or obstruct readers during reading and make it difficult to determine whether "Yu" is the second personality of the patient or a real person. However, perhaps a clear reference is not important, and "confusion" is the real effect that the mixed first-person narrative aims to achieve, even to the extent that the entire text is a mixture of classical and vernacular Chinese. The recorder has a feudal standpoint but vaguely reveals understanding and open-mindedness. The act of visiting the patient also excludes the possibility of being consistent with the "madman." However, the "madman" eventually recovers from his illness and even goes to take the civil servant examinations, suggesting a possible coincidence between him and the recorder. Therefore, "Yu" gives rise to the three characters: the "madman" in illness, the "madman" after recovery, and the recorder. Behind this apparent confusion, there is actually a person hidden at the intersection, that is, a contradictory Lu Xun, a Lu Xun with original criticality. While outwardly criticizing, he also inwardly reflects and doubts himself, believing that he also has "eaten" people. This "eating" includes the oppression of people at a deeper level, but for Lu Xun, this meaning of "eating" may not be the most lingering. Just like the phrase "eating people" on a piece of paper, it not only refers to the "eater" but also inevitably carries the pain of the "eaten". The remnants of feudalism in Lu Xun's heart may point to the shadow left behind by being "eaten" and his potential recognition of the power and institutional systems that emerged from his deep understanding of feudal society or the rules of society. Prominent scholar Xu Zidong mentioned: "Of course, Lu Xun's creation is related to his decline in family background, youth experience, studying in Japan, and later working as a government official in the Ministry of Education. The keywords in these experiences are humiliation" [6]. Lu Xun dissects others but also dissects himself, but this hidden darkness cannot be spoken of, and it is also unspeakable. He hints at his inner compromise with social reality, including feudal society, with ambiguous self-positioning and narrative identity, as well as the tone of the "madman". The most obvious example is that he lets the "madman" recover from his illness and chooses to become an official instead of being destroyed in madness. It can be said that Lu Xun's pen uses the most absurd form to narrate the most naked reality.

3 Resistance and Compromise - The Realistic Choice After a Lone Battle

The madman wrote two diaries, describing them as "not indicating the date, only the ink color and font are different, showing that they were not written at the same time" [7]. The diaries were not completed by him in one go, which suggests that the "madness" of the madman is not closely associated with "illness". "Because the text does not mention the madman frequently falling ill, but his diary is constantly being recorded. From this perspective, the clever use of the text is that the diary, as a private genre, though presented with words of terror and absurdity, the world in the madman's eyes may be more contained within his inner world, becoming a secret that is not worthy of

being shared with outsiders. Therefore, under this interpretation, "madness" does not manifest as an external symptom. Since "illness" is not necessarily a characteristic of "madness", why did Lu Xun create a major illness in the story? In some extent, Lu Xun had an additional motive for incorporating this storyline; the madman ultimately opts to assume the role of an alternate official, underscoring that this life trajectory aligns more closely with the reality thrust upon intellectuals rather than being a deliberate selection by Lu Xun for the madman. Lu Xun made this choice and wrote this story simply because he saw through the reality. He did not allow the madman to become truly mentally ill in the contradictions of his thoughts or panic and die in the midst of an illness but instead allowed him to live in conformity and humility. From this point of view, Lu Xun is actually very different from typical social reformers. The characters in social problem novels are like flags inserted into literary history, either awakening or destroying. After awakening, writers can no longer write about what happens next, and they themselves have no way of knowing. The problems that are destroyed in literature but cannot be destroyed in reality have exceeded the scope of literature's jurisdiction. During the May Fourth Movement, the thoughts of intellectuals were the first to be liberated, and they were only able to be excited without considering the huge gap between ideals and reality. Why was Lu Xun so clear-headed, even to the point of being heavy and indifferent? Perhaps, as he said in the preface to "A Call to Arms," "I am going to the N-Jin K School, as if I want to take a different path, escape to a different place, and seek a different kind of people" [8]. From studying in Japan to abandoning medicine for literature, it is actually Lu Xun's continuous exploration of self-value with the goal of saving the nation. However, reality has transformed his ideals from perfection to narrowness and sharpness, so Lu Xun, who attempted to save the nation through literature, was once again disappointed. Where should he turn to this time? In fact, even before writing "The Diary of a Madman," he had realized that literature alone cannot save the Chinese people. The madman's choice is actually Lu Xun's awakening to romanticism after seeing the reality.

In fact, Lu Xun raised the issue of "Nora's departure" in "Diary of a Madman"[9]. Nora and the madman are the same, "Diary of a Madman" is Lu Xun's answer: go back, remarry, or, as indicated in "The Sorrow of Departure", there is no way to go after the ideal is shattered. This is Lu Xun's clarity and foresight, but also his pain, because he is a solitary warrior facing bloodshed. People admire the cries but intentionally ignore the loneliness. They only see awakening and hope in Lu Xun's writings or pretend not to understand, resolute in their actions. "Wandering" is just the sedimentation and brewing of "Cries", and "Wild Grass" is also the concentrated eruption of Lu Xun's self-emotions in literary works. Lu Xun's depression and despair have always existed. His "disease" is the final hesitation and procrastination that the madman cannot escape, as well as the thinking and recognition of enlightenment and awakening, the helplessness of having no way to go, and the disguise of attempting to compromise. The only thing that is not unclear is precisely the "pathological" rather than "mad" that constitutes the source of Lu Xun's emptiness and despair. From this perspective, "Diary of a Madman" may also conceal a deeper meaning in its narrative order - "madness" is only the first step, and "sickness" is the next step, gradually becoming clear after awakening. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that understanding the madman's serious illness as Lu Xun's

intention to transfer the mental pain and torment of the madman's spirit and thoughts to physical illness or to say that it has accumulated into a disease can be justified. Moreover, the madman's eventual recovery in the incurable society also coincides with his choice of going to the reserve because the individual fighting alone is too weak, and resistance is undoubtedly futile in the face of huge dark forces.

Regardless of whether from the perspective of literary works or real society, the madman's choice to become an alternate official cannot be considered a weakness. In many cases, the "weakness" at the literary level is a romantic prejudice of later generations or a synonym for the thin character of literary figures. In Lu Xun's case, "weakness" is profound and relative. As mentioned above, Lu Xun's works consistently depict the complexity of human nature, and all these explanations point to one direction, which is the recognition of the "realism" depicted in Lu Xun's literary works and the emphasis on the true embodiment of "realism" in his works. During the May Fourth Movement, many people considered themselves realist writers because they passionately criticized social issues in their works. However, criticism itself is also a form of romanticism because it gives people power and belief, allowing them to draw a line between right and wrong and fight for what they believe is correct. However, reality is flawed because anything or belief is at least two-sided, and when the other side is clear, doubt naturally arises. When Lu Xun realized that the flaws in the May Fourth literary enlightenment would pose risks to the future, he could not avoid discussing it. Because he understood that although literature cannot completely change the world, it can undoubtedly influence individuals, and writers are responsible for the lives of others. He could not shout for everyone to embark on a path of despair with no hope, nor could he call for destruction. Enlightenment and revolution will inevitably come with bloodshed and sacrifice, but as a writer and an enlightener of society as a whole, Lu Xun's conservatism is his compassion for humankind, and he opposes meaningless sacrifice. In terms of literary criticism, looking back at history is more important than looking back on history. When looking back at history, people always consider themselves wiser, but they actually see too little and conceptualize too much, whereas real life is always heavy and profound.

4 Clarity and Numbness - Floating in the Darkness of the World

The "madman" is so clear-minded that he is also realistic. This constant contradiction and compromise in human nature, when viewed in the context of the grand proposition of revolution, actually reflects the hesitation that people often have when choosing their path in real life. Being clear-minded does not necessarily mean choosing the right path, as the right path requires difficult exploration. Conversely, compliance does not mean acceptance but rather indicates that there is no correct path in reality. Those who live in history will not self-destruct because of a lack of values. The reality of the "madman" and the reality of Lu Xun allow people to have a deeper understanding of the May Fourth Movement and a more authentic experience of the 1920s, a level that most May Fourth writers and literary works cannot achieve. Just as individuals cannot truly betray reality or escape it, the so-called compromise and weakness in literature should not be

objects solely for ridicule and criticism. Analyzing the complex shadows of human nature speaking the truth regardless of consequences, may undermine the benefits of enlightenment, but it is what revolution truly needs. Because saving the nation is not child's play, since literature has taken on the responsibility of propaganda, it must consider the consequences associated with politics and society. While the mistakes in words can be revised and turned over, the mistakes in reality cannot be reversed. Lu Xun is conservative, but he is also clear-minded and cautious. In his almost pessimistic clarity, there is a stubborn force that is willing to face death and hope to bloom in the midst of bloodshed. Lu Xun sees through the essence of darkness, but he vows to find a glimmer of light within it. He himself is this "madman," and every awakened intellectual carries the shadow of the "madman." However, Lu Xun, as a pioneer, acknowledges the limitations and objectively informs the world about the limitations of revolution, literature, and even time and space.

In addition, it is worth discussing the multi-level issues of enlightenment mentioned by Lu Xun. Regarding the "inferior qualities" of the people, ignorance and numbness are often mentioned together, but in reality, they have distinct differences. Numbness is more of a choice, knowing but not opposing, knowing but pretending not to know. In "A Madman's Diary," Lu Xun wrote, "They are fathers, sons, brothers, husbands, friends, teachers, students, enemies, and strangers who have formed a group, encouraging and restraining each other, unwilling to take the next step even in death." People are not unaware of "cannibalism," but compared to the risk of being "eaten" in return, most people choose to maintain the deadlock, even indulging in it and taking pleasure from it. Lu Xun criticizes numbness, but he does not deny the restlessness beneath the submissive surface. In "The True Story of Ah Q," Lu Xun uses Ah Q as a tool to illustrate the drawbacks of the feudal social system and the revolution from the perspective of the lowest class in society. Numbness is the logical consistency of the feudal social system, and Lu Xun "mourns their misfortune and is angry at their lack of resistance," but he is helpless. Because he knows that even with awakening it may not necessarily bring about change, just like the madman who, other than becoming an official, has no other way out under the oppression of survival, society, and family. If he does not become an official, the madman will be the next Kong Yiji.

5 Radicalism and Doubt - The Complex Position in the Critique of Origins

In fact, the complex position in this creation is consistent with Lu Xun's reaction during the revolutionary debate. There is no doubt that Lu Xun was a pioneer in social revolution and literary reform. However, based on a large number of literary historical facts, Lu Xun always maintained his independent personality and insisted on the writer's independent consciousness in the debate. Lu Xun neither supported literature serving politics nor did he support literature detached from politics [10]. "Essentially, Lu Xun is a thinker, and the reason for his involvement in literary movements is that literature is most capable of transforming the national spirit; Lu Xun is a revolutionary, a cultural

and intellectual revolutionary rather than a political revolutionary"[11]. Lu Xun opposed to treating literature as a "tool" and exaggerating the political and religious role of literature. He deeply realized that literature cannot completely save this society, nor can individuals. Social reform requires a long process and the progress of the entire society, and literature is just one department. It can awaken people, but it is not a savior. Lu Xun soberly recognized that the awakening of ideas often does not bring about immediate and dramatic changes in practice.

Lu Xun's "Farewell to the Shadow" was written on September 24, 1924, during the period of the decline of the May Fourth Movement and the rupture in the May Fourth cultural camp. Another failure in literature caused Lu Xun, who had once again abandoned his medical career for literature, to fall into a meaningless spiritual dilemma: "However, I finally wander between light and darkness, not knowing whether it is dusk or dawn..." [12], and "Lonely new literary field, peaceful old battlefield, two rooms left with one soldier, the lotus leaf sword wanders alone" [13]. According to the American scholar Hertes, there have always been two dominant ideas in modern Chinese literature, one conservative and pessimistic, the other rashly optimistic. Although Lu Xun stands above both with his sobriety and maturity, his works are still in a troubled position between the two: if Lu Xun dislikes the excessive and unfounded optimism of the young intelligentsia of modern China, then, at the same time, he cannot rest on the conservative idea of a return to the utopia of the past. This makes him independent of the middle ground, neither in empty pretence nor in unnecessary despair [14]. Therefore, the 1928 revolution literature debate had significance and value beyond literary criticism and argumentation for many intellectuals, including Lu Xun. The excitement and impulsiveness in it perhaps precisely reflected a carnival of awakening after a long drought. During this process, Lu Xun read and translated many communist books, which laid a solid foundation for his subsequent turn towards rural literature, revolutionary realism literature, and a clear understanding of his own value and purpose in literary creation, eventually transforming into a "left-wing" revolutionary. In the midst of the debate, Lu Xun's calm thinking undoubtedly reflected a more mature and objective cognition and stance.

6 Conclusion

Lu Xun and his literary works undoubtedly had a great influence on China's revolutionary movement and the modernization of cultural thought. However, with the infiltration of politics into literature, most of the literary works of the May Fourth generation of writers were imbued with strong political colors. Lu Xun was shaped into a revolutionary flag that was both political and literary, firmly planted at the beginning of modern times, seemingly symbolizing a new era. However, just as political revolution cannot be achieved overnight, literary reform also requires a long process. Planting flags has oversimplified the repeated oscillation of ideology and ideas. Literature and thought cannot be defined solely by the characteristics of the times, nor will they undergo sudden changes and fluctuations to cater to political movements. Writers whose thoughts are more mature are better able to maintain complexity and profundity in the midst of

turmoil, and Lu Xun is such a writer. His works have endured the test of time not primarily because of their critical nature, but because of the complexity of their texts and the profound contemplation of life and human nature. Lu Xun leaned more towards being a revolutionary in cultural thought rather than a pioneer in political revolution. He always pursued intellectual independence and depth, and strived for realism in his creations. Although his literature still has a "political revolutionary" nature, he will never speak out just to cater to politics. Lu Xun's literary stance maintains a certain distance from politics due to his clarity and caution, which often gives his works multiple interpretations. Realism and idealism, disappointment and enthusiasm often intertwine, constituting representations of repressed texts. Lu Xun's works reflect the recognition and uncertainty of individual worth and beliefs in a tumultuous era, as well as the difficulties individuals face in breaking free from the shackles of the old system while transitioning between the old and the new. They also reflect a deep sense of powerlessness with no way out. Lu Xun's criticism is sharp, but he also makes realistic choices and pursues truth, rather than getting caught up in revolutionary romanticism. He guides the flaws of reality through profound literary exploration, and in both literary and political terms, Lu Xun is worthy of being a leader for the Chinese people and intellectuals.

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