Lu Xun, Jameson, and Multiple Polysemia

Lu Xun (1881-1936), China's greatest modern writer, is perhaps the most internationally known of all modern Chinese writers. However, even Lu Xun's works have not received much attention in the mainstream literary studies of the West. Fredric Jameson calls this neglect "a matter of shame which no excuse based on ignorance can rectify" (1986, 69-70). With his broad theoretical vision and keen literary sensibility, Jameson sees in Lu Xun's literary works significance that goes beyond the Chinese context and insights that are conducive to the "reinvention of world literature" and the "reinvention of cultural studies." Ideologically, Jameson is opposed to the worldwide trend of globalization, which he views negatively as cultural standardization and Americanization, though he also sees opportunities for resistance (1998). Aesthetically, he argues against Western mode of canonization of literary works and the conventional ways of measuring the literary achievements of non-Western works in terms of the Western yardstick. He calls for new methodologies of reading that are not restricted by aesthetic predilections and literary perceptions cultivated by the Western canon.

In 1986, when discussions of globalization were still not as popular as they are now, Jameson wrote an influential article promoting the third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism. In this article, Jameson conducts a fairly detailed reading of Lu Xun's stories and other third world writers's fictional works, and formulated a strategy of reading out of a dominant trend that he observes in literary studies in China and the third world. It is what he calls the "inversion" of a contrasting literary methodology in the West in the sphere of political commitment. While in the West, "political commitment is recontained and psychologized or subjectivized by way of the public-private split," in China and third world countries, "psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms" (71-72). In his reading of Lu Xun's stories, Jameson advances the concept of "national allegories" as Chinese intellectuals' voluntary participation in politics and social revolution. In a chapter directly engaging Jameson's idea, Zhang Longxi's recent book grants Jameson's reading a relevance to Chinese literary studies and acknowledges its sophistication and insights in its use of Marxist and postmodern theories, but considers it to be ill-informed and limiting: "it serves only to build up a very limited and limiting

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framework, especially in the Chinese context, for understanding literary works, those of Lu Xun in particular" (123).

In his argument against Jameson's view of Lu Xun's literary works as national allegories, Zhang Longxi states his reason: "Not only would such a totalizing statement fail to do justice to the rich variety of heterogeneous texts worthy of the name of a literary tradition, but the very emphasis on the allegorical, that is, on the public and the political domain, is likely to prove, in the specific context of reading modern Chinese literature in general and reading Lu Xun in particular, self-defeatingly counterproductive" (123). To be fair to Jameson, we must, first of all, note that he admits that his methodology of reading is "speculative and very much subject to corrections by specialists" (1986, 72). We must also admit that he is not blind to the limitations of traditional allegory as a concept for literary studies. In fact, he cautions us against adopting the old allegorical way of reading for "some one-to-one table of equivalences" and proposes a new conception in terms of linguistic multiplicity: "If allegory has once again become somehow congenial for us today, as over against the massive and monumental unifications of an older modernist symbolism or even realism itself, it is because the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the *multiple polysemia of the dream* rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol" (73, italics mine).

From Allegory to Multiple Polysemia

Jameson does not discuss the differences between the multiple polysemia of the dream and the representation of the symbol. But by arguing against the one-to-one matching of allegory in the stereotypical model of John Bunyan's (1628-1688) *Pilgrims' Progress*, he is obviously proposing a concept of allegory based on the semiotic model of the sign that does not restrict itself to a transcendental signifier. In fact, he did mention in passing the possibility of reconceptualizing the notion of "allegory" in terms of "a linguistic structure," though he did not explore its rationale in any detail because his primary concern is with a theory of the cognitive aesthetics of third-world literature and because he is not a Lu Xun specialist. My objective in this essay is to start from where he left off and to attempt to overcome some of the limitations in his notion of allegory identified by his critics. Taking the hint from Jameson, I will reconceptualize the conventional notion of allegory in terms of multiple polysemia and explore it from the combined perspective of ideology, psychology and semiology.

"Allegory" is related to "symbol" and "symbolism." In semiotic theory, "symbol" is also related to "sign" though they belong to different categories. The word "symbol" derives from the Greek verb *symbollein*: "to throw together," and its noun *symbolon*: "mark," "emblem," "token," or "sign" (Cudden 671-73, Preminger *et al* 1250-59). Saussure states: "One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary, it is not empty; for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between signifier and signified" (68). For example, scale symbolizes justice; dove, peace; lion, strength and courage, etc.; they cannot be respectively replaced by any other objects, such as chariot, hawk,

rabbit, etc. For this reason, a symbol implies a sense of enclosure. The symbol has another feature, which is transcendental in nature: "concrete images are used as symbols to represent a general or universal ideal world of which the real world is a shadow." Still another characteristic of the symbol is that "the symbolized (the universals) is irreducible to the symbolizer (the markings)" (Kristeva 64). Peirce's idea of symbol is different from that of Saussure. He defines the symbol as a sign whose relation to its conceptual object is entirely arbitrary, "A Symbol is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object" (143-44). His idea of symbol comes close to the semiotic sign.

The semiotic sign stands in contrast to the symbol though it is endowed with some characteristic features of the latter. The sign retains the fundamental characteristic of the symbol: "irreducibility of terms, that is, in the case of the sign, of the referent to the signifier to the signified, of the signified to the signifier, and based on this, irreducibility of all the 'units' of the signifying structure itself" (Kristeva 70). Nevertheless, Julia Kristeva argues that while the symbol primarily signifies vertically, the sign has both vertical and horizontal functions. In its vertical function, the sign "refers back to entities of lesser dimensions that are more concretized than the symbol. These are reified universals, which have become objects in the strongest sense of the word.... The semiotic practice of the sign thus assimilates the metaphysical strategy of the symbol and projects it on to the 'immediate perceptible'." In its horizontal function, "the units of the sign's semiotic practice are articulated as a metonymic chain of deflections [écarts] that signifies a progressive creation of metaphors. Opposing terms, which are always exclusive, are caught up in a system of multiple and always possible deflections ... giving the illusion of an open structure that is impossible to terminate, and which has an arbitrary ending" (70-71). To sum up the differences between the symbol and sign, we may quote the semiotic distinction, "in the case of the symbol the signified object is represented by the signifying unit through a restrictive function-relation; while the sign, ... pretends not to assume this relation which in its case is weaker and therefore might be regarded as arbitrary" (64).

Kristeva argues that in the West, starting from the late Middle Ages, there began a fundamental change in the perception of the sign which shifts from the conception of the sign as a symbol of transcendental closure to a linguistic practice which is an open-ended structure (63-73). After studying the transformation of symbol into sign in relation to Peirce's and Saussure's linguistic theories, she defines the semiotic sign as having these basic characteristics: 1) "It does not refer to a single unique reality, but evokes a collection of associated images and ideas"; 2) "It is part of a specific structure of meaning [combinatoir] and in that sense it is correlative: its meaning is the result of an interaction with other signs"; 3) "It harbours a principle of transformation: within its field, new structures are forever generated and transformed" (72).

Kristeva's understanding of the semiotic sign has supplied enough insight into what Jameson has left unsaid in his proposed conception of allegory or multiple polysemia. On this insight, we can construct a paradigm of allegorical reading, which rejects the old idea of allegory based on the symbol and advance a new conception of allegory based on the semiotic sign with the power of transformation but without transcendental closure. If we are to read Lu Xun's stories in an allegorical way, we should not treat them solely as "national allegory"; instead we ought to read them as multiple allegories rooted in multiple dimensions, public and private, political and libidinal, historical and immediate, collective and personal, universal and particular, etc. Moreover, multiple polysemia is made possible by the interaction among linguistic signification, psychological transformation, and ideological interventions. In the following space, I will undertake an analysis of Lu Xun's two stories, "A Madman's Diary" and "Medicine," both of which have been studied by Jameson, to illustrate the new conception of allegorical reading and to demonstrate the cross-cultural significance of Lu Xun's works.

Multiple Allegories in "Medicine"

Since its publication, "Medicine" has aroused a good deal of controversy over its central themes. The existent themes sometimes complement each other, sometimes contradict each other. But all critics concur on one point, i.e. the story is build upon a complex system of symbolism that is amenable to allegorical readings. In this section, I will first conduct a brief survey of the existent allegorical interpretations and then try to invent some other possible allegorical interpretations. By so doing, I will demonstrate the new conception of allegory and the multiplicity of Lu Xun's allegorical vision.

First and foremost, the story may be read as a political allegory. This is a dominant reading. Some scholars argue that the story is an allegory of the political situation in China right before the fall of the last dynasty. A revolutionary who attempts to overthrow the Manchu dynasty in order to save China is caught and executed, but his sacrifice is not appreciated by the common people. His tragedy is an allegory of the martyrdom of many similar revolutionaries like the female martyr Qiu Jin (1879-1907) who plotted to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and was executed. In fact, one opinion holds that Xia Yu is a hidden reference to Qiu Jin (Lu Xun zuopin shouce 61 and 65). "Yu" and "jin" refer to beautiful jades in Chinese and xia (summer) is parallel to qiu (autumn). Second, it is a national allegory. The two families in the story are respectively named Hua and Xia. The combination of the two family names is the ancient name of China. Thus, the two sons of the two families stand for all sons of China and their respective tragic ends symbolize the tragedy of all Chinese families, hence the whole Chinese nation.

Third, it may be read as familial allegory. This means that the story has an allegorical dimension related to Lu Xun himself and to his family. This way of reading makes sense if we recall his own account of why he first chose Western medicine as his subject of study in Japan. In the Preface to *Call to Arms*, Lu Xun recounts how his father suffered and died from consumption (the same disease that takes away Hua Xiaoshuan's life) and how his family's fortune rapidly dwindled due to the purchase of expensive, difficult-to-get and sometimes impossible-to-procure medicines. For Lu Xun, the steamed bun soaked in the blood of an executed criminal is the ultimate example of

charlatanry that he perceived in traditional Chinese medicine. Thus, the cause of Xiaoshuan's incurable disease and the failed cure obliquely allude to Lu Xun's family history, thereby allowing the story to have a relevance as familial allegory.

Fourth, it may be read as an allegory of failure in human understanding. This sense of allegory has several strands bound together. One strand is the revolutionary's inability to make known his revolutionary aim. The other is the complete lack of understanding on the part of the townspeople for whom the hero sacrifices his own life. Still another strand is the failure of understanding among family members, even between mother and son. In the case of the revolutionary, not only is he not understood by his uncle who turned him in to the government, he is also not understood by his own mother. The old mother, despite her love for her son, still adopts the same attitude towards her son's revolutionary activity. Although she thinks her son has been wronged, she still unwittingly concurs with the mob and feels ashamed of him. This is to be found in her visiting her son's grave: "When she saw Old Shuan's wife sitting on the ground watching her, she hesitated, and a flush of shame spread over her pale face" (Lu Xun 1977, 31). Her murmuring to her dead son is symbolic of insurmountable barriers not only between the living and the dead but also between the living: "Son, they all wronged you, and you do not forget. Is your grief still so great that today you worked this wonder to let me know?" (32). She does not understand what her son has done for society nor what the society has done to her son.

As an extension of the national allegory, the story may be read as an apocalyptic allegory: the portrayal of the death of Xia Yu and Xiaoshuan can be read as representing the author's apocalyptic vision about the future of China. Leo Lee makes this remark, "it is for the 'son' of the Chinese people that another son of China has sacrificed his life in vain" (Lee 66). Youth are the future of a country. In the story, Xiaoshuan who represents common young people dies of consumption; Xia Yu who represents the elite dies from execution. The author's fear for the demise of Chinese culture is tellingly brought home by the two different kinds of death. C.T. Hsia suggests that the two names of the two young men represent the two aspects of China: "the hopeful and the doomed mode of Chinese existence" (35). I wish to argue in a different way. There is no hope in the author's vision. Although Xia Yu may be represented as the hope of China, his death at his fellow countrymen's hands dashes any hope of China's salvation if we continue in the allegorical vein. This note of despair is reinforced by the portrayal of other characters in the story. They form two categories neither of which shows any sign of hope: 1) butchers of revolutionaries and collaborators with the reactionary government; 2) an ignorant mob that are either indifferent on-lookers who do not appreciate the revolutionary's sacrifice or superstitious ignoramuses who vainly seek to cure an incurable disease with the blood of the revolutionary. The only sign of hope and future salvation is the appearance of a wreath of flowers laid at the revolutionary's grave, but this sign of hope is also negated by the various hints of description. As Lu Xun told us about one detail in the story, he "made a wreath appear from nowhere at the son's grave" because he wanted to obey the order by the commanders of the revolutionary camp. His words, "appear from nowhere," echo the despairing tone in

the story. Xia Yu's mother, after examining the wreath, says to herself, "They have no roots.... They can't have grown here" (Lu Xun 1977, 32). These words do not carry implications of hope but just the opposite. For some time, Lu Xun believed that the salvation of China could only come from learning from the West. The act of laying a wreath at a dead person's grave is a Western practice. The implication of this detail seems to be that the revolution is still going on despite the death of the revolutionary, for his comrades-in-arms are still carrying on his unfinished task. But the rootlessness of the wreath and its Western origin seem to reveal the author's doubt about whether the revolution based on Western ideas can succeed in a country where the force of political reaction and cultural inertia is almost invincible. The wreath carries multiple negative implications. It is not just a question of whether the Chinese soil is fit for Western flowers. In a society where the idea of democracy and equality are totally alien, Western ideas are fittingly comparable to flowers that have no roots.

The story may also be interpreted as a personal allegory. One Lu Xun scholar points out that "the connotations of self and personality in Lu Xun's fiction are mainly reflected in the 'autobiographical' color of his fiction" (Wu Jun 112-23). To a certain extent, the revolutionary martyr is Lu Xun's alter ego who embodies, at least, his political unconscious. This allegorical dimension is clear when we relate the thematics of this story to Lu Xun's devotion to national salvation, his determination for self-sacrifice, and his disappointment at the political apathy of his countrymen, and their collaboration with reactionary forces. This dimension becomes more meaningful if we examine one of Lu Xun's poems, "Poem Inscribed on a Self-portrait":

My mind has no ploy to escape the divine arrow.

The homeland is darkened by a stone-like storm.

Sending a message via cold stars,

which was ignored by fragrant grass,

I'm to sacrifice my blood to the Yellow Emperor.

Scholars agree that this is Lu Xun's most important poem of self-expression. The poem was composed on the anniversary of his overseas study in Japan. It was written on the back of a photo taken right after he cut off his pigtail. The cutting off of his pigtail has so far been interpreted as Lu Xun's determination to break with the Manchu dynasty, or the old cultural tradition. I suggest that there is more than this. According to the ancient Chinese tradition, one's body including one's hair is given by one's parents and one should not harm it in any way. Through a metonymic transformation, one's hair often stands for one's head. In Chinese history, there are instances in which a person would cut off his hair as a symbolic act of beheading. Cao Cao's (155-220) cutting off his hair as a symbolic act of self-imposed death penalty in the historical novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is a well-known legend. In this connection, Lu Xun's hair cutting is not restricted to a break with the old culture and tradition; it is a symbolic act of saying farewell to his old self, and a symbolic act of self-beheading to show his determination at self-sacrifice for

China. Lu Xun gave his best friend Xu Shoushang (1883-1948) the picture and poem. Xu's commentary on the poem reads: "The first line speaks of how profoundly he felt about the humiliations that he experienced during his overseas study in a foreign land. The second line writes on his picturing from a distance the precarious conditions of his motherland. The third line describes the unawakened state of his fellow countrymen and his sense of solitary loneliness. The last line directly expresses what is on his mind. It is a motto he put into practice all his life" (39). I do not need to conduct a detailed comparison of the speaking subject in this poem with the image of Xia Yu in "Medicine" to prove the validity of my suggestion that the story is in a way a personal allegory. Suffice it to point out the motifs of national salvation, self-sacrifice, failure of understanding, and the imagery of blood.

From a comparative approach, I may read the story as a biblical allegory. Lu Xun's story is certainly a Chinese story with Chinese characters and Chinese settings. But it has an allegorical dimension that shows cross-cultural influence and has a universal significance. In addition to all the above allegorical readings, we may read the story as a biblical allegory in the sense of Jesus Christ's martyrdom for the salvation of human kind. Lu Xun was an avid reader of foreign books of different kinds. He was quite familiar with the story of Jesus Christ. His prose poem "Revenge II" (1981, 6: 478-80) is a reworking of the Crucifixion story in the two Gospels of Mark and Matthew in the New Testament. Consciously or otherwise, "Medicine" has a hidden dimension on the martyrdom of Jesus Christ, especially his crucifixion. The story of Jesus might have exerted an influence on Lu Xun's story in its overall conception. In conceiving the plot and details of the story, Lu Xun might have consciously added a quasi-biblical dimension to the already complex weaving of several allegorical strains. This quasi-biblical dimension is visible in a number of parallels to the life story of Jesus. First, both Xia Yu and Jesus were born and lived in a time of distress and in a country where people lived under alien domination and oppression and led an existence of ignorance. Both were revolutionaries in the sense that both wanted to bring great and far-reaching changes to the land which they inhabit. Both were prophets who saw the coming of a new world. The difference is that while Jesus started a religious revolution, preached his message of God's redeeming love for mankind, and spread the doctrine of salvation for mankind, Xia Yu initiated a social revolution, called on people to overthrow the Manchu government, and preached his idea of national salvation. Second, both became suspect to the authorities and were betrayed by someone close to them. While Jesus was betrayed by his disciple Judas, Xia Yu was betrayed by his own uncle Xia the Third. The uncle's name "Xiasan" (Xia the Third) might have been an oblique reference to "Shisan" (No. thirteen): Judas was the thirteenth person in the scene of the disciples' last supper with Jesus. Last and not least, both were arrested, tried, and put to death at a public execution. While Jesus was crucified Xia Yu was beheaded.

Before their death, both were ridiculed and tortured by those whom they tried to save. Thus both were martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the salvation of their people. In addition to these obvious parallels, there are quite a few allegorical references to the biblical story in "Medicine." One obvious reference is Xia Yu's compassion for his tormentor. In his study of "Medicine," Leo Lee rightly locates the source of inspiration for the revolutionary's

compassion for his tormentor: "Compassion at the height of physical torture is clearly inspired by the example of Jesus Christ — a motif Lu Xun later developed more fully in his prose poem 'Revenge II'" (66-67). Another allegorical reference is the idea of resurrection. In Jesus' story, his disciples believed that three days after his crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. In Lu Xun's story, the resurrection of Xia Yu is imparted through a hint at his undying spirit: the wreath laid at his grave, which comes from nowhere, is a symbolic resurrection of the revolutionary spirit. Still another quasi-biblical reference is found in the ending of the story. In the story of Jesus, Mary, Jesus' mother, was indignant at the persecution of her son and grieved over his death. In Lu Xun's story, Xia Yu's mother goes to her son's grave and mourns over his death. In a way, the steamed bun soaked in Xia Yu's blood may be viewed as another quasi-biblical reference to the Last Supper and the institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist. At the last meal shared by Jesus and his disciples, he gave his followers bread and wine and said to them that the bread is his body and the wine his blood. He also said that taking the bread and wine would ensure their redemption (Holy Bible 580). In Lu Xun's story, the steamed bun soaked in Xia Yu's blood is ironically used. Like the Eucharist, it should perform the function of saving Hua Xiaoshuan, who represents the youth of China, but the ineffectiveness of the bun seems to convey the author's pessimistic view. The parallels that I have established between Lu Xun's story and the story of Jesus warrant me to say that in the conception, Lu Xun might have meant it to be a quasi-biblical story. This new dimension endows the story with a universal significance reaching beyond the national boundary: the tragedies of prophet-martyrs the world over are the same.

Because of the multiple allegories, Lu Xun's story is endowed with a sense of open ending and open-endedness. Lu Xun never liked the happy dénouement in traditional Chinese story telling. In one of his essays, "On Looking Facts in the Face," he dismisses it as a reflection of the lack of courage to look life in the face and a literary ploy for deception and self-deception. After a brief comparison of the *Hongloumeng* with other sequels with happy endings, he considers the difference to be as great as that between men and apes (1956, 2: 190-91). He, however, expresses a note of dissatisfaction with the *Hongloumeng*, calling it a "little tragedy" because the novel ends somewhat happily: "As for the other characters, their fates are listed one by one in conclusion to wind up the story; so this is the end of a problem, not the beginning" (2: 188). Previous scholarship has noticed the discrepancy in Lu Xun's argument, but the explanations offered are not entirely satisfactory. In my opinion, the key to Lu Xun's dissatisfaction lies in his sense of open-endedness. By saying that "this is the end of a problem, not the beginning," he seems to suggest that Cao Xueqin's use of predestination for the characters leaves the story with a sense of hermeneutic closure. Thus, Lu Xun's argument against "Datuanyuan" (happy grand finale) is a formal as well as a thematic issue.

In "Medicine," the ending is typically an open one. This densely symbolic ending has given rise to a great deal of controversy concerning its implications. One interpretation is that since in the Chinese tradition, a crow is a bird of bad omen, the appearance of a crow perching on the rigid bough of a tree, immobile as iron, stands for the formidable power of reactionary forces. Its refusal to answer the mother's request further testifies to its antagonistic nature.

Another interpretation holds that the image of the crow has no implications beyond its face meaning; its presence is to create an atmosphere of sorrowful bleakness (Qin Kangzong 32). But most scholars offer an entirely opposite interpretation. They suggest that Lu Xun inverted the traditional symbolism of the crow and meant to use it as a hopeful sign of the revolution (Li Xifan 334). Another view attempts to reconcile the opposing views and argues that the crow with its movements in two different scenes is a "double-faced" symbol that represents a dynamic opposition: "In the first scene, the raven symbolizes superstition (darkness), whereas in the second scene, it symbolizes the opposing theme of revolution" (Dolezelová-Velingerová 230).

In a perceptive study of the ending, Leo Lee rejects the either/or reading on the ground that each "tends to simplify the artistry which creates the ambiguity of the story's ending" (Leo Lee 68). I think, we need to reject the dynamic opposition, too, for it is based on the structuralist paradigm of binary opposition which is equally incapable of doing full justice to the artistry of the story's ending. Lee offers a philosophical reading based on Lao Zi's Daoist idea: "the imagery of the crow elevates the perspective of the text to a certain cosmic height and imparts a sense of irony approaching the Taoist concept of the unfeeling cosmos — 'Tiandi buren.' Measured against such a scale, a human individual's suffering and sacrifice ultimately hold no meaning beyond this world." I agree fully with Lee that "The crow's message ... is ultimately indeterminate," but I hesitate to concur with him when he continues: "but it certainly cancels out the mundane optimism that the flower wreath has forced upon the ending" (Leo Lee 68). In my opinion, precisely because the message is indeterminate, it serves as the very message the author intended to convey. In other words, Lu Xun, through creating this indeterminate ending, attempted to make his story open and invites readers to approach it from many perspectives. My idea in fact finds support in a hint provided by the text. Unable to solicit an answer from the crow, Xia Yu's mother leaves the grave muttering to herself: "What does it mean?" This question is precisely the question that a reader will ask having come to the ending, particularly when he/she reads the ending paragraph in which the crow suddenly makes a loud caw, stretches its wings, and flies like an arrow towards the far horizon. The indeterminate ending serves as food for the reader's thought and forces him/her to come up with different possible interpretations. It is in this sense that I argue that "Medicine" and most of Lu Xun's other stories ought to be viewed as "writerly texts" in the Barthesian sense of the word. And for this reason, I propose that we treat Lu Xun's fictional writings as multiple allegories.

From Irony to Multiple Polysemia

In an article that defends Jameson's allegorical reading of Lu Xun's "Diary of A Madman" as "offer[ing] fresh insights," Xiaobing Tang reinterprets the story in terms of Jameson's postmodern conception of history, self-identity, and political unconscious and proclaims it to embody an "emerging critical attitude toward language" and represent "an archetypal text of deconstructive reading." He proposes to treat Lu Xun's story as "a modernist text, a disruptive

presence that challenges the given languages of meaning," and advances an interesting idea that the Madman "shows the disruptive force of language itself" and is engaged in a deconstructive reading (Xiaobing Tang 1225, 1229-30).

While Xiaobing Tang focuses his attention on the Madman as embodying the disruptive force of language, I wish to examine the story as a verbal construct and explore to what extent the signifying flux of language contributes to the multiple meanings of the story. "A Madman's Diary" employs two registers of language: vernacular narrative in the story proper and classical narrative in the preface. The use of two registers of language has recently aroused some interest among scholars who have raised a few thoughtful questions. Since "A Madman's Diary" is supposed to be a vernacular story and has been accepted as such, why did the author write the opening section in classical Chinese? One possible and interesting answer may be that: there is an opposition between the vernacular story proper and the classical opening, which in turn represents a disjunction between two narrators, two narratives, and two ideological views. The conclusion of this answer is that the opening section was intended not to lead the reader to identify with the story proper, but to split, subvert, negate its stated content (Wen and Kuang 31-34). Along this line of reading, some scholars suggest that though Lu Xun declared that he "sometimes called out, to encourage those fighters who are galloping on in loneliness, so that they do not lose heart," in the deep recess of his consciousness, he had already negated those forerunners and brave warriors because he was quite sure that they would eventually identify with the old society and old forces against which they had rigorously struggled (Qian and Wang 18).

This is certainly an intriguing reading. It, however, is less satisfying than it should be because it is built upon the structure of irony, a binary opposition predicated on the old idea of allegory. According to this reading, "The preface has its own narrative motive and force, which constitute a powerful pressure against and a negation of the diary and perform the function of overturning and canceling out the narration of the diary." I do not deny the power and validity of this reading. However, I wish to say that the story is so ingeniously conceived and constructed that its signifying flux is capable of deconstructing the binary opposition between the preface and diary central to the ironic reading. I might argue, for example, the two parts, the preface and the diary, do not form an opposition. On the contrary, they are closely related and cannot be separated. If there seems to be a split, that split is superficial. The close connection between them exists in a psychoanalytic and semiotic model of writing, which can be illustrated with the following schemata:

Preface	Consciousness	Signifier	
Diary	Unconscious	Signified	

These schemata illustrate the psychological and semiotic relationship between the preface and the diary. The preface is narrated in classical language and, as far as the content is concerned, represents the consciousness of sanity. The

diary is narrated through the mind of a madman. Since there is little difference between the mind of a madman and the unconscious state of the mind, as in dreams, small children, and artistic creativity, the diary may be said to embody an unconscious discourse. Although there seems to be an opposition between unconsciousness and consciousness, psychoanalytic theory informs us that consciousness and unconsciousness are a closely related psychic entity in the mind. Their relationship is like that between the tip of an iceberg and the bulk of the iceberg hidden under water. The unconscious always has the possibility of being made conscious. In a semiotic approach to the mind, Jacques Lacan links Saussure's linguistic theory with Freud's psychoanalytic theory and makes this famous saying, "The unconscious is structured like a language." He reverses the positions of the signified and signifier in Saussure's model of the sign and makes it conform to Freud's topographic model of the mind as an opposition between the conscious and unconscious (149-52). In his semiotic model of the sign, Saussure insists that "The two elements [concept and sound image, or signified and signifier] are intimately united, and each recalls the other" (66). Using an analogy, he compares the signifier and signified of a sign to the two sides of a sheet of paper. Theoretically, one can cut a sign into signifier and signified, but in reality one cannot split a sign any more than one can separate the two sides of a sheet of paper. The linkage is unbreakable. In a similar way, Lacan argues that the bar separating the consciousness/signifier and unconsciousness/signified is only a symbol of resistance to signification. Under certain circumstances the resistance can be overcome, and the difference between consciousness and unconsciousness, signifier and signified is canceled out. In terms of the semiotic model of the mind and the psycholinguistic model of the sign, I argue that just as consciousness is inseparable from unconsciousness, and the signifier from the signified, so the preface written in classical language is closely related to the diary written in vernacular. They form a topographic structure not unlike that between the conscious and unconscious, signifier and signified. And this topographic model may offer some new insights into "A Madman's Diary."

In "How I Came to Write Stories," Lu Xun tells us: "I must have relied entirely on the hundred or more foreign stories I had read and a smattering of medical knowledge. I had no other preparation" (1956, 3: 263). The foreign works included those by Shakespeare, Gogol, Dostoevski, Nietzsche, and others whom Freud credited with the discovery of the unconscious. The bit of medical knowledge included readings of psychological works, for Lu Xun at one time had been a medical student. His medical knowledge, especially knowledge about abnormal psychology, must have played a significant role in the conception of the story. In his letter to Xu Shoushang, Lu Xun wrote: "Afterwards, due to a casual reading of the *Tongjian* (Comprehensive Mirror), I came to realize that the Chinese are a cannibalistic people. Because of this, I wrote this story. My discovery has relatively great significance, but few people know of it" (1976, 1: 18). This intimation is related to his other sayings about the genesis of the story, but the profound implication of this notion has practically escaped the attention of scholars. Generally speaking, scholars take this notion to mean that Lu Xun's discovery of literal cannibalism in Chinese history provided him with the inspiration to write about metaphorical cannibalism in Chinese culture. But no one seems to have delved into the significance of

this saying for the conception of story in psychological terms. Here I venture to suggest that in dividing the story into two parts, the preface and the diary proper, Lu Xun was pioneering a model of writing that builds on the model of the opposition between the conscious and the unconscious. The preface stands for the conscious aspect of not just the normal mental state of the character but also for the conscious perception of Chinese culture and society in general. In contrast, the diary proper represents the abnormal psychology of the character and stands for the true conditions of Chinese culture and society repressed into the unconscious, consigned to oblivion. By writing the preface as well as the diary proper, Lu Xun was trying to show the interrelationship between literal and metaphorical cannibalism, normality and abnormality, the individual and the collective, the conscious and unconscious, etc. From the perspective of artistic representation, Lu Xun's story mimics both the content and form of the mind in its conscious and unconscious conditions.

In content, the creative impulse follows the logic of free association. It starts with the eyes of a dog. The dog's eyes lead the narrative to the eyes of a conservative old man, the children of the neighbors, and a woman who beats her son and curses that "I'd like to bite several mouthfuls out of you to work off my feelings!" Then the woman's curse leads to a series of incidents of cannibalism, real or imaginary. By this time, the look of the eye and eating become connected: looking for possible victims and then eating them. In the whole narrative, the nodal point is the image of eating: eating fish, eating medicine, eating human flesh as medicine, eating a baby's flesh as delicacy, eating a bad man's flesh as revenge, cannibalism in times of famine, historical references to cannibalism, the eating habits of a hyena, the eating of a revolutionary's heart and liver, etc. All these references to eating finally are tied to the one word, "eating people." The nodal point is the key passage in the story:

Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology, and scrawled all over each page are the words: "Virtue and Morality." Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night, until I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words — "Eat people." (1977, 10)

This passage is the most important passage in the whole story. It contains a miniature structure of the story itself: the opposition between the conscious and the unconscious. It not only shows the opposition but moreover reveals the overcoming of the resistance of repression. The working mechanism of this passage can be illustrated with another schema:

consciousness	virtue and morality
unconsciousness	eating people

Scholars generally agree on the basic theme of the story. Through a madman's mouth, the author voices his opinion of Chinese history and society. Under the disguise of Confucian virtue and morality, China's history is an account of cannibalism, and Chinese society one inhabited by man-eating inhabitants. But as to how this theme is imparted, there has been no study which probes the signifying mechanism. The passage in question literally demonstrates a way of reading: to read beneath the lines in order to get what is hidden. In my opinion, the psychological and semiotic model that I have worked out is a signifying mechanism that imparts Lu Xun's profound message.

The form of the story mimics the psychological and semiotic model too. The narrative thrust reveals a deepening of the narrated consciousness that keeps regressing to an ever deeper layer of the mind in the way a signifier leads to its signified, which in turn becomes another signifier, and so on to infinity. If we read the story as a process of revelation and discovery, we will find that the central message deepens. The madman's discovery of cannibalism around him, in his neighborhood, in history, in his family, and finally his own unwitting participation in cannibalism gives the message a more profound twist: everyone wants to eat others but cannot escape the fate of being eaten by others. In other words, everyone is both a victim and a victimizer.

Since "A Madman's Diary" marks the birth of modern Chinese fiction, I suggest that the modernity of this story lies in the author's conscious use of the unconscious not only as the thematic concern but also as its mode of narration. Because it follows the signifying and representing mechanism of the unconscious, it is endowed with an indeterminacy and openness that are amenable to different interpretations. The ironical approach to the story is fascinating, but as I have argued, it is limited and limiting because it erects an enclosure around the hermeneutic space of the story. I suggest that the use of different registers of language and narrative techniques was intended not to effect one negation but to bring about what I wish to call "multiple negations": the negation of negation's negation. In other words, the central ideas of the story are subverted and deconstructed by the formal structure and narrative elements not just once but many times so that it is impossible to tell what the story seeks to affirm or negate. In other words, the thematics are open to the readers' individualized readings.

For example, the choice of a madman as the narrator of the diary contains within itself a negation. It is a commonsense proposition that a madman's words are not to be taken seriously. In the diary proper, there are many instances in which the mad narrator confuses one historical event with another, one historical person with another. Thus when the preface states that the narrator suffers from "a form of persecution complex," "the writing was most confused and incoherent, and he had made many wild statements," and the narrator entitles the story "A Madman's Diary" himself, we cannot see any subversion or overturning but a confirmation. For this reason, I would say that there is irony in the story, but it is brought about not simply by the disjunction between the preface and the diary proper but by a shifting ambivalence between normal perception and abnormal perception, affirmation and negation, reality and fiction. The madman's message is that Chinese society is a cannibalistic society. This is what he considers the truth. But the irony is that when he is sane, he cannot see the truth. Or we may read it slightly differently: one

cannot expose this truth. If he does, he will be considered insane. This point will become clearer when we relate the madman's narrated account with the opening section. We are told that when the madman recovers from his illness, he goes away to take up an official post. In other words, he becomes normalized and joins the ranks of normal people who are man-eaters. The irony is that: when he is insane, he was able to discover the truth and speak out the truth. When he regains sanity, he loses sight of the truth and becomes a collaborator. What is so poignant is that the protagonist considers himself as holding the truth when he is insane, but he dismisses his insight into the true nature of Chinese culture and society as a madman's crazy words in the preface: "As for the title, it was chosen by the diarist himself after his recovery." This is the biggest irony. Thus, the preface serves to deepen the message of the diary, which is one of the profound messages from the author: In a society of metaphorical cannibalism, people are so accustomed to it that they would regard as insane anyone who still retains sufficient sanity to see the truth. This reminds one of Stalinist Russia: when one speaks the truth, he is put in a lunatic asylum. The price of sanity is collaboration with authorities.

The preface, then, does not simply perform the function of irony. It serves multiple purposes. Ostensibly, it serves as a narrative frame within which the story of the madman is to be retold. Actually, it acts as more than a narrative frame. It embodies a number of the author's concerns. First, it may serve the author's purpose of promoting the vernacular language as a medium for narration. Lu Xun's story is supposed to be the landmark of modern vernacular fiction. The use of wenyan or the classical language in the opening preface could not be an accident. I may continue the semiotic model of analysis and draw the following schemata:

conscious		preface		signifier	wenyan
unconscious	diary		signified	baihua	

Just as the preface represents consciousness and the diary the unconscious, so *wenyan* represents the present signifier, the seen, and the privileged, while *baihua* stands for the absent signified, the unseen, the repressed. By telling a story with an opening in the literary language and the story proper in the vernacular language, the author seems to hint that the vernacular has consistently been repressed but it is the basis of the literary language, for as the absent, unseen, and repressed other, it is the anchorage. In so doing, he shows in a symbolic way the emancipation of the vernacular from the oppression by the literary language. Second, the opposition between the preface and the diary serves to make the story open. While the opening confirms partly what is narrated in the diary, it also plays a negating function which makes the story open. Because of the negation in the opening, we are not so sure of these questions: Is the madman an iconoclast or a conformist? Is he a revolutionary or a possible reactionary? All these roles are possible. As for the ending, is it an optimistic one or a pessimistic one? Was the author optimistic or pessimistic about the future of

China? Third, the opening inscribes a narrative double which makes the narrative voice indeterminate. Who is the real narrator? the "I" in the opening or the "I" in the story proper. The split in the role of the narrator may be viewed as a reflection of the split in the human psyche. Fourth, the preface opens up the human psyche to reveal what is hidden in the unconscious.

In existent scholarship, the significance of Lu Xun's story is confined to its relevance to Chinese culture and society. I think, this fails to do justice to its universal—significance. The story has a world significance. The madman is not simply a typical character under typical Chinese circumstances, but a character with universal significance against the universal background of civilization. He may be variously understood to stand for the human psyche, the unconscious, every man, Chinese history, and human civilization. At one place in the story, the madman considers himself the embodiment of Chinese history and civilization: "I have only just realized that I have been living all these years in a place where for four thousand years they have been eating human flesh.... How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-eating history — even though I knew nothing about it at first — ever hope to face real men?" (1977, 18). In portraying this character, Lu Xun not only has Chinese culture and history in mind but also world history and civilization in mind: "... probably all primitive people ate a little human flesh to begin with. Later, because their outlook changed, some of them stopped, and because they tried to be good they changed into men, changed into real men. But some are still eating — just like reptiles. Some have changed into fish, birds, monkeys and finally men; but some do not try to be good and remain reptiles still" (15). Here, we see a scarcely veiled reference to the evolution of human kind.

In formal presentation, the story is constructed on the model of the human mind, which stores both the conscious and unconscious: the preface as the conscious part of the mind; the diary proper as the unconscious part. The conscious nature of the preface lies in the fact that the character is able to repudiate what he had said and done as a madman's folly. The unconscious nature of the story is shown through the irrational, illogical and disjointed impressions and narration of the plot. Psychological theories inform us that the unconscious mind works very much like the mechanism of dreams and the dominant mode of presentation is that of free association. The narrative of the story follows precisely such a mode of presentation and logic. In the eyes of the madman narrator, human beings, dogs, hyenas, and other animals are related because they are all cannibalistic. Human flesh and fish meat are indistin-guishable because they are flesh for food; hence eating fish and eating men are not any different. The doctor who treats his sickness is the same as a butcher. His exhortation to eat the medicine as early as possible is taken to mean eating the madman as quickly as possible. In general, as the preface puts it, "The writing was most confused and incoherent, and he had made many wild statements." The narrative mode follows exactly that of a deranged mind. Precisely because it is illogical and irrational, it is endowed with a capacity that is alien to logical and rational language. It is succinct and pregnant, suggestive of "meaning beyond meanings." It is disjointed and associative, relating one subject to another subject and giving the story a large hermeneutic space.

The deranged mind is mimicked by another eye-catching formal feature of the story: its fragmentation into various sections. One may offer several reasons for this fragmentation: 1) it may be attributed to the diary form; 2) it results from an attempt to replicate the fragmented consciousness of a madman. Apart from these explanations, I see another rationale for this fragmentation. In my opinion, it comes close Barthes' segmentation of the text so that different segments may clash and conflict with each other to produce different and conflicting meanings. In Barthes' notion of the writerly text, he fragments a text into sections called *lexias*. Lu Xun, taking advantage of the madman's consciousness, creates a story with formally fragmented but thematically interrelated *lexias*. The formal fragmentation endows the text with the capacity to generate different and conflicting interpretations, depending upon an individual's reading. For example, the story's ending has always been considered to have an optimistic tone: the author seems to believe that there are still children who have not eaten people; therefore the hope of a better future lies with future generations. But some formal elements either leave this conviction in doubt or hint at its opposite. The penultimate sentence reads: "Perhaps there are still children who have not eaten people?" The doubt in the unsure tone is reinforced by the question mark at the end of the sentence. Moreover, in Section 8, we are told that the young man who considers it wrong to discuss cannibalism has been taught by his parents. What is even worse, "And I am afraid he has already taught his son: that is why even the children look at me so fiercely" (1977, 14).

About motivation for the genesis of the story, we can come up with several different and sometimes opposite understandings. Lu Xun himself provides us with one version that I have already mentioned. One scholar, however, finds a different version of the genesis from internal evidence in the story in relation to Lu Xun's words in other places. In his opinion, the story came into being as a result of the author's idea of the regression of civilized humanity to its savage state of existence. Taking literally Lu Xun's words "The Chinese are still a cannibalistic nation," this scholar arrives at a motivation for this story: "Mr. Lu Xun has discovered the degeneracy among the Chinese, past and present. Among the populace is hidden the animal instinct or the loss of humanity. On the basis of this understanding, Lu Xun conceived and wrote 'A Madman's Diary'" (Chen 6-7). There is still another version of its genesis. The story came into being as a result of the author's subconscious fear of being eaten and the metaphorical fear of being engulfed by outmoded Chinese culture. The story is an artistic outburst of his subconscious and metaphorical fear. All three versions of the genesis can find support in the story itself and in Lu Xun's other writings. That the story is amenable to different understandings of its genesis is because it was conceived as a multiple polysemia.

The pseudo-psychotic mode of narrative is central to the multiple polysemia. Because of its schizophrenic structure and the fragmented consciousness of the protagonist, the author's stance and commitment are ambiguous and ambivalent. Promoters of the New Culture at that time found in the story the author's fervent call for change and revolution. But we find evidence to argue in the opposite direction. We may say that the fact that the preface written in the classical language narrates a normal state of mind and the diary written in the vernacular tells of the

insanity of a madman is itself an implied castigation of promoters of the vernacular language. Conservative people can find enough ammunition in the story to attack the writer as a hater of Chinese culture and a misanthrope. At one place in the story, the madman says: "If you don't change, you may all be eaten by each other. However many of you there are, you will be wiped out by the real men, just as wolves are killed by hunters — just like reptiles!" At another place he compares his fellow countrymen to "hyenas." The images of dogs, reptiles, wolves, hyenas, and other cannibalist animals may of course be construed to be objective correlatives for the fear of being eaten. But on the other hand, one may consider them to be expressions of the author's misanthropic attitude towards Chinese culture, and even the Chinese people. From still another perspective, one may say that Lu Xun is such a great lover of Chinese culture that he hates its seamy side to the guts. The abominable images of animals are but an expression of his loathing for the drawbacks of Chinese culture. In this sense, one may say that starting from the first story that made him famous, Lu Xun was concerned with how to capture the ambivalence, paradoxes, and complexities of culture, society, politics, and the individual. "A Madman's Diary" has been consistently viewed as the first story that launched a fierce attack on the feudal system of Confucian morality and human relations. Lu Xun himself provides such an interpretation on several occasions (1980, 2: 806). But the story itself shows that it also features a deep soul-searching on the part of the protagonist. Therefore it also exposes the seamy side of the individual in Chinese society.

My integrated approach has opened up the text to the signifying flux made possible by language. In terms of the signifying model I have employed, the preface using the literary language may be meant to conceal while the diary using the vernacular language is meant to reveal. For Lu Xun who wrote this story to promote the Literary Revolution which was both a language revolution (the replacement of the classical language by the vernacular) and a cultural revolution (the replacement of traditional culture by a new culture), the opposition between the preface and the diary may be read in a number of ways. From one direction favorable to the Literary Revolution, one may say that it suggests that the classical language is fuzzy and prone to conceal the truth while the vernacular is clear and disposed to reveal the truth. From the opposite direction, one may derive a view inimical to the Literary Revolution: the classical language stands for reason, reality, health, and sanity, while the vernacular embodies illusion, insanity, sickness, and irrational thinking. From a neutral point of view, one may say that there is no rigid demarcation line between sanity and insanity, health and sickness, rational and irrational behavior, illusion and reality. The signifying flux of the story leaves more room for other readings. I might say that the opposition between the classical preface and the vernacular diary reveals the author's unconscious attitude towards the classical language and the vernacular: on the conscious level, he is against the former and for the latter, but on the unconscious level, his stand might be the opposite. In a slightly different light, the opposition may reveal the author's unconscious attachment to the classical language and even the old order of things. After all, Lu Xun himself admitted that he had been poisoned by the old culture and his writings frequently regressed to the use of classical language in his writing career. His poetic opus consists largely of traditional style poems written in the classical language. But in this reading, the opposition between

the conscious and the unconscious that I have worked out is reversed. Now, the classical preface represents the unconscious, the past, and the root. In yet another way, I might read the classical opening as a hint at the indebtedness of Lu Xun's story to the traditional fiction, especially classical tales. The opening certainly echoes the beginnings of some classical tales: the narrator hears of such-and-such a story about so-and-so. All these readings are possible readings. It is up to the reader to pick and choose.

Finally, Lu Xun seemed to have been motivated to create a story that is concerned with not only the immediate situation in China but also the situation of humanity in general. In other words, the creative aim of Lu Xun at the time of writing the story was not simply to expose the seamy side of the society he lived in; he had a much larger aim: to reveal the true nature of all societies and all cultures, ancient and modern, past and present, Chinese and foreign, and to reveal what lies beneath the civilized surface of human nature, individual and collective. In his study of this story, one Chinese scholar expresses the idea that this story represents an aspect of Lu Xun's efforts at self-introspection and penitence. In his opinion, through the madman's discovery that he himself unwittingly participated in man-eating, the author touches upon an aspect in his mentality, a sense of original sin (Wu Jun 117). This scholar's notion of "original sin," despite its religiosity, is not in the Christian sense of the word. In Christian theology, the original sin refers to the sin of all at birth, a belief that all human beings are born with the taint of sin that came from the primal disobedience by Adam and Eve in eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. In several of his psychoanalytic studies of original sin, Freud traces it from the feeling of guiltiness to the primal murder of the father by the primal people at the dawn of civilization. He also explains why Jesus Christ must sacrifice himself as atonement of original sin: the guilt of the world — the murder of the father — must be atoned by the sacrifice of a son (1967, 109-10; 1990, 508).

The doctrine of original sin and the redemption through Christ's sacrificing his life further confirm the validity of my view of "Medicine" as having a quasi-biblical dimension. It is impossible to ascertain whether Lu Xun had in mind the Christian doctrine of original sin at the time of writing "A Madman's Diary," but the notion of an inborn murderous instinct is explicitly and implicitly expressed in this story. This idea is in keeping with the psychoanalytic discovery that aggressivity is inherent in human nature and only the laws and morality of civilizations manage to contain the aggressiveness, which nevertheless explodes out of control from time to time in the form of torture, murder, killing, and war. From this point of view, the story is an introspective examination of Chinese as well as all human cultures.

Jameson observes in the culture of the Western realist and modernist fiction "a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power" (69). He simplifies this split into one between Freud and Marx. He also notes that the more theorists hope to overcome this split, the more it is confirmed and the more power it exercises over the individual and collective lives of

the West. In my study of Lu Xun's stories, I have tried to patch up the split with a redefined notion of allegory or multiple polysemia. My analysis of Lu Xun's stories suggests that in the writing practice informed by multiple polysemia, the split between Freud and Marx, or between psychology and ideology is joined together by linguistic signification. Multiple polysemia reconceptualizes the symbolic dimensions of a fictional work into "a set of loops or circuits which intersect and overdetermine each other," as is envisioned by Jameson (73). It may have some new insights to contribute to "the reinvention of cultural studies" and "the reinvention of world literature," which have gained a great deal of momentum in the present era of globalization.

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