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Zhou Shouren, better known by his pen name Lu Xun, was a revolutionary writer often associated with the New Culture Movement. The writers of this movement sought to denounce aspects of traditional Chinese culture and use a vernacular more accessible to the public. Therefore, we will see Lu Xun's writing is marked by his self-criticism, detachment, retrospect, and irony. Lu Xun occupies an almost God-like satirical presence in his stories to further drive his social commentary using the experiences of impoverished and disadvantaged individuals. And yet his objectives for China and especially the youth of China ring true in his work. Lu Xun's professed objectives for writing fiction were to criticise classical Chinese traditions, express his hope for the youth of China, give impoverished people a voice through his use of the vernacular, and ultimately allow people to heed his call to arms. However, his writing is also full of irony and inner conflict. In his fictional short stories, we will see, he demonstrates an ambivalence about his own ability to convey these objectives.

“假如一間鐵屋子，是絕無窗戶而萬難破毀的，裏面有許多熟睡的人們，不久都要悶死了，然而從昏睡入死滅，並不感到就死的悲哀。”(魯迅,《吶喊》自序). In Lu Xun's Preface, he tells the story of his call to arms. He writes of an 'iron house' which represents China. Inside are the people who are unaware of their impending doom if they are to stay asleep. And yet if at least one person wakes there is hope of escape (Lu Xun, Selected Short Stories, 9). Lu Xun's once well-off family was thrown into financial turmoil after his father became ill (Lu Xun 4). As a child, he bore the weight of his family's humiliation being sent to sell their possessions to buy medicine (Lu Xun 5). While studying medicine in Tokyo, he writes that he learned of Western medicinal advancements and the inferiority of Chinese traditional medicine (Luu Xun 6). In his classes, he was shown images of the Russo-Japan War where a crowd of Chinese people were disturbingly fascinated with their fellow

countryman's dismemberment (Lu Xun 6). It was then he realized the futility of healing the sick of a morally 'backward country' when physical wounds were not the killer (Lu Xun 6).

Yet, because of his past, he did not feel that he was the kind of person who could unite the people to a call or be seen as a hero (Lu Xun 9). However, his family's impoverishment would expose him to the suffering he felt was experienced by much of the nation. His father, Lu Xun thought, was not just a victim of outdated medical practices but a country which firmly clung to the past. The residual anger of his father's death at the hands of unskilled physicians and sympathy for the sick appear repeatedly in his short stories. Through the fictional and yet strikingly existent experiences of impoverished and oppressed individuals, Lu Xun demonstrates what he perceived to be China's inevitable trajectory.

In his story 明天, Lu Xun tells the story of a widowed poverty-stricken woman, Fourth Shan's Wife, through the voice of a privileged and unforgiving narrator. The narrator continuously belittles the woman, saying: “單四嫂子是一個粗笨女人，不明白這”但”字的可怕” (魯迅, 明天). As if to imply she is so uneducated she cannot understand the magnitude of her situation, and that her fate is inescapable. In the story, Fourth Shan's Wife has made great efforts to support herself and her child despite her poverty. When her son becomes ill, she gives all her trust and her life savings to the local doctor (Lu Xun, Selected Short Stories, 38). She is deceived by the physician's long fingernails she must assume implies a higher-class status and, therefore, traditional education (Lu Xun 39). Lu Xun uses the character of a destitute woman as the ultimate victim inside the iron house. Not only is Fourth Shan's Wife oppressed by her status and financial situation but also her gender. This presents an opportunity for the narrator to look down on her further, intensifying the reader's disgust toward the narrator. And therefore, the traditional ideas associated with the class of the storyteller. While trying to save her son with traditional medicine, Fourth Shan's Wife is

assaulted by her neighbour (Lu Xun 39). Much like the slides Lu Xun saw, her countrymen turn against her in her time of need even after the death of her son (Lu Xun 39). And even the narrator does not take pity on her, further assaulting her with the language of the upper class which she herself would not understand. Lu Xun ends the story with the hope of tomorrow which is all Fourth Shan's Wife has left. Fourth Shan's Wife is among the ultimate victims of the iron house and in trusting the old ways, she remains asleep unable to escape and indeed unaware of her situation.

Lu Xun is especially concerned for the youth of China. In his story Kong Yiji, the narrator is a young man who works in a local tavern (Lu Xun 42). The young man serves Kong Yiji, a customer who wears a long gown and has long fingernails (Lu Xun 43). He shows the visible signs of someone with elevated status and yet will not work to earn money as he thinks it is beneath him (Lu Xun 44). The narrator looks back to the events that unfolded: “對呀對呀！……回字有四樣寫法，你知道麼？”我愈不耐煩了，努着嘴走遠” (魯迅, 孔乙己). Kong Yiji, representing the traditional backward ways of China, tries to teach the young narrator how to write characters (Lu Xun, Selected Short Stories, 46). The narrator does not think these characters are important, nor why he should try to elevate his position, and that impoverished Kong Yiji could teach him (Lu Xun 46). Lu Xun uses retrospect to make the youth of China more self-critical just as the narrator remembers his past behaviour. But even though Kong Yiji still behaves as a respectable scholar, he steals books, owes money to the tavern, and is beaten until his legs break (Lu Xun 47). His long fingernails and long robe become dirty (Lu Xun 47). Eventually, Kong Yiji stops coming to the tavern and the narrator assumes him to be dead (Lu Xun 48). It is possible that Lu Xun means to imply that the part of China that Kong Yiji must also die for a better future.

Lu Xun's ambivalence towards accomplishing his literary objectives can be seen in his short stories. Ironically, in *Mingtian*, he uses the voice of a privileged educated person whose background he must have related to. Yet at the same time, he offers these traditional views and language up for critique by the reader. And he uses his narrative voice for the reader to critique. While he critiques aspects of traditional Chinese culture, he also uses classical Chinese in his work. Lu Xun comes from the same background as Kong Yiji and if his family had not become impoverished, he would not have woken up. Perhaps this is why he is so self-critical in his writing style because he does not feel he can tell others what they must do. Not before completely understanding his own part in the stories he tells. By using everyday characters and attempting to write in vernacular, Lu Xun attempts to give impoverished people a voice. Yet, he is hyper-aware of his own voice and strives to detach himself from the narrators of his stories. Perhaps he did not feel that he could save the people trapped in the iron house, because he had failed his father and the patients he may have treated. In Lu Xun's *Call to Arms*, he does not extend to his young self the same pity that he does his fictional characters. As he did not see himself as the hero of his own story, he sought to create them. Perhaps they were the heroes who could rally the people to heed his call to arms.

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