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Lu Xun's Heteromodal Realism

Keru Cai

In the early twentieth century, Chinese writers were enthusiastically intertextual, hungrily translating and absorbing ideas from abroad while continuing to draw upon premodern Chinese precedents. Modern Chinese realism is, as a result, necessarily informed by a broad spectrum of mimetic and nonmimetic, indigenous and foreign, highbrow and lowbrow approaches to writing. It is, we might say, *heteromodal*, capable of encompassing different modes of narration from a plurality of literary movements.¹ I offer this term partly as a formal and historical analogue to Mikhail Bakhtin's principle of the heteroglossic nature of the novel, which omnivorously incorporates a multitude of language registers and styles. But the particular heteromodality that I designate for Chinese realism results from the unique temporality of the Chinese importation of Western literary history: the simultaneous reception of what were originally successive historical periods, translated "isms" (*zhuyi*), from romanticism to naturalism to modernism to symbolism to futurism, and so on (Y. Tang 1993: 50).

The fountainhead of heteromodal Chinese realism is Lu Xun's 1918 *Kuangren riji* ("Diary of a Madman"), one of the first modern vernacular stories in China. "Diary of a Madman" relates in the first person the eponymous character's increasingly horrified conviction that the people around him are plotting to eat him; that Chinese culture—undergirded by Confucian teachings—has been defined for thousands of years by cannibalism; and that he himself, by unwittingly consuming the flesh of his own sister, has been a perpetrator of this

¹ In calling realism a "mode," I follow the usage of scholars such as Jameson 2013: 4-5; S. Andrade 2012: 295; Cleary 2012: 267; Esty and Lye 2012: 272; and Levine 2007: 14-5. Stern (1973: 52) articulates that realism is not a style, genre, or "*Weltanschauung*, but rather a disposition of mind and pen...in brief, *a mode of writing*. As a mode it makes its appearance in all kinds of cultural situations yet is identical with none." The realist mode is in this account most fully at home in Europe during the nineteenth century, but it arises in other periods. Brunson (2016: 2-3) discusses realism as both a historical movement in Western cultures, and as a "transhistorical mode."

heinous crime. The story's preface, written by a family friend of the madman in a classical Chinese that contrasts with the free-wheeling vernacular language of the diary, diagnoses the protagonist with a persecution complex from which he has since reportedly recovered. A central irony of the work is that the madman may have been the only one who could recognize the mercenary, self-serving rapaciousness encouraged by the classical Chinese inheritance. That he has "recovered" and presumably renounced his realizations is a chilling indictment of the hopelessness of literary or social reform.

Given the radical nature of Lu Xun's use of vernacular language and imported literary form in "Diary of a Madman," it is little wonder that so much ink has been spilled attempting to define the work's "ism". Though Lu Xun has long been considered a foundational writer of realism in modern China, critics have pointed out modernist, avant-garde, or symbolist proclivities in "Diary" and elsewhere (see, e.g., Liu 1982; S. Wang 1984: 100-1; Wang Yao 1982; Wang Yougui 304; X. Tang 1992; Y. Tang 1993; Gu 2008, 2021: 77-84; Cui 2016: 140; Lee 1987: 58-61, 65; D. Wang 1992: 3, 10; Yan 2011: 26-37; and Shih 2001: 88-91). I seek here to enlarge the scope of the definitional inquiry beyond the text by considering the main Russian intertexts from which Lu Xun appropriated themes, images, and narrative techniques: Nikolai Gogol's 1835 *Zapiski sumasshedshego* ("Diary of a Madman") and Leonid Andreev's 1904 *Krasnyi smekh* (*Red Laugh*). Both of these texts have historically defied any easy label of realism, and their formally slippery character in this regard is, I argue, part of what Lu Xun picks up on in his work. Russian literature was in many respects the most important foreign intertextual interlocutor for early twentieth-century Chinese writers (Gamsa 2010: 4), including Lu Xun. So a discussion of innovations in Lu Xun's "Diary"—which unmistakably gestures toward Russian intertexts, even in its very title—is incomplete without reference to those

Russian intertexts. And realism, even as a vexed borrowing, carried “the profoundest burden of hope for cultural transformation” in Lu Xun’s era, and as such became the most influential term in modern Chinese literature (Anderson 1990: 3). Though Lu Xun’s realism has been called into question, as Anderson (1993: 5) counsels, “Particularly in a case like China, where debate about realism has played such a crucial role in the development of a major literary genre, we are not served by suppressing the term but rather by confronting and critically examining the complex of associations surrounding it.” For Lu Xun, these associations were often drawn from Russian examples.

Realism has always been hard to pin down, but it is especially so in the context of the peripheral realisms of the modernist era.² Simon Gikandi (2012: 312) observes of terms such as realism and modernism that “the phenomena they designate emerged in specific moments and places and not all colonized writers had access to them. The situation becomes even more complicated when one considers how the terminologies themselves became available or inaccessible to nationalist writers.” The realism of a writer like Lu Xun is just such a complicated mode. His fiction is anchored in central principles of Western realism, with what Joe Cleary (2012: 260) calls “its receptivity to subaltern communities hitherto ignored or merely ridiculed in high literature; its capacity for capturing intensive totality; its openness to temporalities of becoming and to the dereifying laughter of the folk.” But in a story like “Diary of a Madman,” realism also behaves in ways that are figured as madness—deviation from mental and formal sanity. In large part due to the main character’s mental state, the narrative often deviates from the parameters of Western realism. In her discussion of the West African context, Susan Andrade (2012: 304) notes that realism is not a monolithic form, so that “To capture new

² As Roman Jakobson (1987) has observed, the relativity of the concept of realism means that it appears in many guises. See also Esty 2016: 316; Goodlad 2016: 184-6, 189-90; Gikandi 2012: 323, and Deckard 2012: 351.

realities, writers invent or produce new aesthetic devices or strategies.” Lu Xun’s peripheral realism, in his context of reform, makes formal innovations upon conventions of Western European realism that Russian realism had already developed in new directions.

Lu Xun’s discussions of realism in his writings about Gogol and Andreev indicate how capaciously he regarded the mode. As he claims in a prefatory note to a translation of Andreev’s *V tumane* (“In the Fog”), the latter’s writing is “serious” in its realist quality (*xianshi xing*), which harmonizes with its symbolism: “Among Russian writers, no one can dissolve the difference between interior world and external expression, and reveal the state of unity between spirit and body, as his work does. Even though his works have a very symbolist flavor, nevertheless they do not lose their realist quality” (Lu 2005, 10:201). A text can stray from the tenets of Western realism and still maintain a realist essence. Andreev thus blends symbolist impressionism (*xiangzheng yinxiang zhuyi*) and realism (*xieshi zhuyi*) (Lu 2005, 10:201). Lu Xun (2005, 10:515) calls Gogol the founding father of Russian realism (*Eguo xieshi pai de kaishan zushi*), for even when Gogol writes about strange things (*guai shiqing*), he still “uses realist techniques” (*xieshi shoufa*).³ Andreev and Gogol deploy their realist techniques flexibly, to tackle strange objects of description or fold in non-realist descriptive methods. Lu Xun was drawn to these Russian models above others precisely for their porousness.

By placing modern Chinese realism in conversation with the global proliferations of realism in the twentieth century, I align with Cleary (2012: 267) when he writes that “the rise of Third World nationalist movements lent new impetus to various forms of anticolonial realism, many of these still hugely underappreciated not just in the Western academy generally but also in postcolonial studies.” Scholarship on modern Chinese realism has tended to focus on its

³ He states this in “‘Bizi’ yizhe fuji 1.” In a later piece, “Shenme shi ‘fengci’?”, he writes that the satirical irony of a writer like Gogol is grounded in the real (*zhenshi*) (Lu 2005, 6:340-2).

moments of epistemic crisis or its limitations.⁴ By contrast, I show how writers wielded the fecund resources newly within their reach to invent provocative mimetic ways of depicting unprecedented objects of representation. Lu Xun parlays a position of supposed disadvantage (as a writer on the periphery or semiperiphery of hegemonic national cultures) into one of innovation because his “belatedness” as a realist writer gives him simultaneous access to an array of models to select from and combine.

Fraught Encounters with the Foreign

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Chinese luminaries avidly translated and studied Western philosophical, scientific, and literary writing, Russian texts occupied a privileged position. Lu Xun (2005, 4:473) himself designated Russian literature as “our guide and friend” in an oft-quoted essay about Chinese-Russian literary exchange: Russian texts taught Chinese readers “the important lesson that there are two sorts of men in the world: the oppressors and the oppressed.” Yet Lu Xun in the same breath also acknowledges the history of Russian incursions on Chinese soil. Russia’s dual role as both an affiliate of the West (the agent of imperialism) and as an intermediary between China and the West (and thereby a role model for China) is implicit in the background of Lu Xun’s own trajectory as a writer. Lu Xun’s famous explanation for why he gave up the study of medicine hinges on yet obfuscates the role of Russia as an imperialist aggressor. In the preface to *A Call to Arms (Nahan)*, the collection of stories which includes “Diary,” he recounts the story of viewing a lantern slide in a Japanese classroom featuring the execution of an alleged Chinese spy, who was working for the Russians,

⁴ See Anderson 1990: 5-8; Hutters 1993: 157, 165; and Anagnost 1997: 26. I take my cue from Chan (2017: 32), who prefers not to view the realist “text as a finished, completed entity that either succeeds as ‘realist’ or not,” but instead stresses “how such texts in fact involve dynamic, open-ended, and tactical management of competing narrative desires and imperatives.”

by Japanese soldiers in Manchuria, historically Chinese territory that was contested by Russia and Japan in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5). In the image, the kneeling execution victim is surrounded by a crowd of Chinese spectators, who all seem perfectly sound of body, yet can only look on with deadened facial expressions. According to his account, it was after this moment, when he was both humiliated and rendered complicit as the only Chinese student among a class of cheering Japanese peers, that Lu Xun formed the determination to write literature rather than continue studying medicine: for to cure the flesh of a nation of people sick in spirit, he opined, would be futile. The anecdote foregrounds Japanese expansionism while downplaying Russian military culpability. Russia's imperialist ambitions were one implied cause for Lu Xun's keen awareness of the sickness of Chinese spirit, and in much of his subsequent fiction Lu Xun depicts alleged Chinese backwardness by means of Russian narratological methods: an encapsulation of the complexity of China's attitude toward its northern neighbor at this fraught historical moment.

"I have found more in Russia than in any foreign culture," Lu Xun is reported to have said in 1926; "There is a certain sympathetic relation between China and Russia, a common bond in culture and experience..." (Kowallis 2013: 13). Among his favorite writers he lists Chekhov, Gogol, Andreev, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, all affiliated (though not unambiguously) with the lineage of literary realism in Russia. Gogol and Andreev held a particular draw for him, as his translations of several of their works testify. His encounters with Russian writers were mediated by other languages, namely Japanese and German (and less frequently English) (see, e.g., Findeisen 2009). Xiaolu Ma (2014) has demonstrated that Lu Xun first encountered Gogol's "Diary of a Madman" by reading Futabatei Shimei's translation in the Japanese magazine *Kyōmi*. His first encounter with Andreev's *Red Laugh* was also likely via Futabatei Shimei's 1908

translation.⁵ In 1917 a Chinese translation by Zhou Shoujuan appeared, which Lu Xun praised.⁶ Lu Xun had in 1909 translated parts of *Red Laugh*, a novella consisting of the fragmented diary entries of a soldier driven insane by the horrors of the Russo-Japanese war, and diary entries of his brother who is in turn driven mad by the repercussions of war on the home front.

In composing a daringly iconoclastic story like “Diary,” Lu Xun drew heavily upon Gogol and Andreev, for they provided models of first-person narration written by madmen. Gogol’s “Diary” and Andreev’s *Red Laugh* stage madness as the result of a humiliating national confrontation: in Gogol’s story, the madman Poprishchin is a lowly clerk who feels degraded not just within the Russian social hierarchy but also in the face of rarefied echelons of Western European culture to which he has no access; Andreev’s novella documents the first war that Russia (or any modern Western nation) lost to an Asian military power. Lu Xun’s “Diary” similarly grows out of the clash between China and hegemonic world powers, and the central theme of cannibalism comes to express a sense of China’s degradation as a result of these transnational encounters. The trope has roots in Lu Xun’s Russian intertexts, which are concerned with the similarity between humans and animals. Gogol’s madman Poprishchin becomes obsessed with animals when he stalks the lapdog of his boss’s daughter Sophie, with whom he is hopelessly in love. In his ravings, Poprishchin records overhearing that this dog Medji writes letters to a fellow pup mocking the madman himself. Medji compares Poprishchin to an animal: “Ah *ma chère*, if only you knew how ugly he is. A perfect turtle in a sack... [*sovershennaia cherepakha v meshke* (Gogol 1938, 3:204)]” (Gogol 1999: 284). The madman

⁵ Ma (2014: 335) has observed that Futabatei Shimei’s preference for certain writers, particularly Andreev, may well have guided Lu Xun’s enthusiasm. Lu Xun and his brother Zhou Zuoren were clearly familiar with Futabatei Shimei’s translations (Ma 2014: 335; Gamsa 2008: 340). In “Guanyu ‘Guanyu *Hong xiao*,’” Lu Xun (2005, 7:125-30) documented that he corrected a 1929 Chinese translation of *Red Laugh* by consulting Futabatei Shimei’s 1908 translation.

⁶ Gamsa (2008: 292-301, 332-3, 339) offers an overview of Chinese translations of *Red Laugh*.

concedes that “our fellow clerks—like pups,” live “one on top of the other” in unconscionably cramped conditions (Gogol 1999: 275). He and his fellows have been reduced to the status of turtles and “pigs” (Gogol 1999: 285), but his boss’s daughter is a soaring “canary” (Gogol 1999: 276) in her refinement and elegance. In his madness, Poprishchin conjectures that even animals have linguistic ability, that dogs are perhaps “much smarter than people” (Gogol 1999: 279)—if the pecking order of the natural world can be overturned, then perhaps he, too, can suddenly swap his status of an impoverished clerk for that of the most powerful man in the social order: the monarch. Soon Poprishchin begins to announce that he himself is nothing less than the king of Spain.

The pecking order of animals symbolizes oppressive social hierarchy in Gogol’s story. But in Lu Xun’s “Diary,” written in a cultural context saturated with the language of evolutionary science, the trope becomes one of flesh-eating, dog-eat-dog cannibalism. Like Poprishchin, Lu Xun’s madman is fixated on a dog, that of the Zhao family. The dog eyes him in the same alarming way as its owner does. Human cruelty to one another is part of the savagery inherent in the natural world; hence the famine-stricken village where starving people are reportedly eating human flesh—rumors of which plant the notion of cannibalism into the madman’s head—is named Wolf Cub Village: “a notorious character in their village had been beaten to death; then some people had taken out his heart and liver, fried them in oil, and eaten them as a means of increasing their courage (Lu 2003: 9).” For Lu Xun’s madman, animals exist in a hierarchy, as they do for Poprishchin, but his is a hierarchy that obtains diachronically, over eons of evolution. He lectures his brother: “...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” (Lu 2003: 15). What used to be natural is now an atavistic leftover that disrupts the supposed moral hierarchy of humans and animals. Mr. Zhao and his dog behave similarly because humans are as savage as the lowest orders of beasts.

Whereas in Gogol’s story the motif of animals implies the indignity of humans within stifling hierarchies of the Petrine table of ranks, in Lu Xun’s story it tropes the bestial cruelty of humans in a society governed by Confucian teachings. Lu Xun thus takes the trope from Gogol’s story and invests it with the scientific discourses saturating his own *Zeitgeist*, tying the motif of animals to the themes of moral poverty and the backwardness of the nation by means of the idea of cannibalism. The ultimate danger of cannibalism, according to Lu Xun’s madman, is that if Chinese people do not reform themselves, then the “real humans” (*zhende ren*) at the top of the evolutionary food chain will come and destroy them all, “as a hunter kills off wolves” (Lu 2005, 1:453): the implication is that Chinese society will go extinct from the imperialist invasion of these fearsome specimens of advanced humanity. As in Gogol’s story, here the abjection of the semi-peripheral subject is highlighted or rendered insupportable by contact with foreign nations.

Ma (2014) points out that cannibalism does not appear explicitly in Gogol’s “Diary” and shows that it is via Japanese intermediation that cannibalism was introduced into Lu Xun’s story.⁷ I propose an additional triangulated source: Andreev’s *Red Laugh*, in which animals become a trope for the savagery of humans brought out by, but not limited to, the context of war:

“Listen,” said the doctor, looking aside. “Yesterday I saw a mad soldier that came to us. An enemy’s soldier. He was stripped almost naked, beaten and scratched and hungry as an animal, his hair was unkempt, as ours is, and he resembled a

⁷ As Zhou and Li (1982: 239) have pointed out, Andreev’s “Stena” (“The Wall”), which they claim shows some resemblances to Lu Xun’s “Diary,” also features cannibalism.

savage, primitive man or monkey. . . . What do they eat? Probably nothing, or, maybe, they feed on the dead bodies [*trupami* (Andreev 1990: 43)] together with the beasts, together with those fat wild dogs, that fight on the hills and yelp the whole night long.” (Andreev 1989: 82)

The passage calls to mind the Zhao family’s hungry-looking dog, and the hyenas that elsewhere fascinate Lu Xun’s madman. Andreev’s story features many such passages that describe feasting upon human flesh. Lu Xun draws on Andreev’s thematization of cannibalism, but his madman does not need the backdrop of war to recognize what he takes to be the bestiality in Chinese people. Notably, in all three instances—Lu Xun, Andreev, and Gogol—it is contact with a foreign nation that seems to catalyze these descriptions of animality, prompting a realization that one’s countrymen are as deadly a threat as the foreigner-animal.

The cannibalism in Lu Xun’s story is literally about the eating of flesh, and figuratively about the rapaciousness of a society in which people prey mercilessly upon one another. But considered more widely in the context of Lu Xun’s oeuvre, cannibalism is what Lu Xun’s story does to his Russian intertexts. Lu Xun (2017a: 32) throughout his life would describe writing and textuality as a carnal business. Writing for him is self-dissection, the pen as scalpel revealing his “blood and flesh”; within his writing “there is buried a body that was once alive” (2017a: 35). Facts should be “written in blood” (Lu 2017e: 73), and the “blood on my pen” (Lu 1980b: 36) will splatter on certain targets of his critique. Many of these metaphors come from medical science, but they also hint at the violent butchery of the human body. The association is evoked in his 1930 essay “‘Hard Translation’ and the ‘Class Character of Literature,’” in which he defends his adherence to literal or “hard” translation at the sacrifice of fluency and sometimes comprehensibility:

Today we cannot avoid dissecting and devouring our enemies; but if we had books on anatomy and cookery and were guided by them, we should be clearer about the structure of the body and produce something tastier. Revolutionaries are often compared to the legendary Prometheus, because in spite of the torture to which Zeus exposed him he had so much love and fortitude that he never regretted stealing fire for mankind. But I stole fire from abroad to cook my own flesh, in the hope that if the taste proved agreeable those who tasted it would benefit more, and my sacrifice would not prove in vain. (Lu 1980a: 92)

Here anatomy, the medical discipline, overlaps with the alimentary. The bloodiness that characterizes the processes of translating, writing, and reading is taken to an extreme as autophagy.⁸ The process of doing hard translation is like cooking his own flesh; and the process of his readers and critics responding to his work is likened to cannibalism. These two types of bloodshed, in hard translation and in critics' flaying responses, are not the same as the "cannibalistic" intertextuality in a story like "Diary"; but the three processes are all tied to the effort of bringing foreign ideas into China. Elsewhere Lu Xun deploys alimentary figures to characterize the intertextual practice of borrowing from abroad: in a 1931 letter to Qu Qiubai, another translator of Russian literature, Lu Xun (2005, 4:392) declares that in creative writing one should "digest (*xiaohua*) and imbibe as much as possible, transmitting what is useful" from foreign languages. Transmitting what is useful from abroad, through translation or creative writing, and disseminating the resulting ideas to Chinese readers, are a bloody business for Lu

⁸ Lee (1987: 188-9) and P. Wang (2013: 324-38) have noted the relationship between the characterization of translation in Lu Xun's essay and the cannibalism in "Diary," as well as the theme of sacrifice throughout his works (Lee 1987: 188). Shen (2009: 107) describes Lu Xun's portrayal of the translator as both "life ('a parent') and death ('a martyr')."

Xun, from which he does not emerge unscathed.⁹

By characterizing Lu Xun's engagement with Russian literature as cannibalistic, I draw partly on the author's own metaphors, but I also foreground his active discrimination in joining disparate elements drawn from elsewhere. In a 1934 essay, Lu Xun (2017g: 281-33) himself advocates a kind of take-ism (*nalai zhuyi*), exhorting Chinese writers to appropriate, to select from foreign models; without take-ism, he concludes, the arts cannot be renewed. Shih (2001: 86) notes the confidence entailed in the magisterial act of take-ism, but the idea of cannibalism, emerging from Lu Xun's thinking, foregrounds the desperation and historical trauma inherent in translational and intertextual practices of a semi-peripheral writer, even while conveying his creative agency. Critics have interpreted the cannibalism in "Diary" pejoratively (see, e.g., Jameson 1986: 71; Gu 2001: 447, 2021: 82; Rojas 2011: 49; Yue 1999: 100), for it is the madman's diagnosis of China's problems; and if Lu Xun's solution is a cannibalistic intertextuality, the prescription is not perfect, but in desperate times it fills the literary stomachs of Chinese readers until domestic culture becomes enriched enough to sustain itself.¹⁰ The cannibalism that the madman perceives in Chinese social relations, or that Lu Xun perceives in his critics' approach to his translations, is a painful problem. Yet the characterization of intertextuality as cannibalistic suggests a way of reclaiming what is allegedly negative in China and turning it into something ambivalently creative.

⁹ In his 1931 letter to Qu Qiubai, Lu Xun (2005, 4:391) acknowledges the difficulty of improving the Chinese language through incorporating indigenous and foreign elements. Lu Xun was always aware of the risk of importing ideas from other cultures, and the implied danger in the cannibalism metaphor reflects this. See Hutters (2005: 258) and Cheng (2006, 2014: 590-1).

¹⁰ Consider, for instance, his injunction toward critics to tend the Chinese literary soil so that "geniuses" can sprout (Lu 2017b: 141). Lu Xun recognizes that readers are sick of translations of Russian literature, but "when Chinese writers do emerge, the good ones among them cannot help but borrow a little technique and expression from foreign works. However fine the writing style, their thoughts often can't match those of translated works...." These are imperfect measures in an allegedly barren aesthetic environment.

Realism and Metonymy

The elements that Lu Xun appropriates from Gogol's story are too numerous and complex to discuss in full here,¹¹ but a list of the most prominent examples would include the fixation on children, which Lu Xun redeploys with an ironic twist; the use of temporality in diary dates (or lack thereof); the symbolism of the moon and its association with lunacy. Lu Xun's longstanding admiration for Gogol's work has been well documented (see Sun 2015: 118-40; Kowallis 2002; Hanan 2004: 218). As early as 1906 Lu Xun began reading and studying Gogol, and mentions him in the 1908 essay "Moluo shili shuo" ("On the Power of Mara Poetry"). Gogol, he claims, "inspired his countrymen with imperceptible tear-stained grief" (Lu 1996: 98). Lu Xun here notes that Gogol's audience was an entire nation of people (*bangren*); this would become Lu Xun's (2017c: 54) own aspiration in writing fiction. Many of the elements of Gogol's writing that he admired are realist (*xieshi*), as Lu Xun (2005, 6:460) states in a preface to *Illustrations of Dead Souls*. In another essay about *Dead Souls*, *Jihu wushi de beiju* ("An Almost Plotless Tragedy"), Lu Xun (2005, 6:382) mentions Gogol's penchant for using character types (*dianxing*) and for depicting the everyday, the banal.¹² Gogol's attentiveness to the grim reality of Russian life had led the contemporary critic Vissarion Belinsky (1953: 284) to praise him for being a poet of "real life" (*poet zhizni deistvitel'noi*). In developing his own method for literary mimesis, Lu Xun seems to have been drawn to Gogol's engagement of quotidian details, and in particular to the pervasiveness of metonymy in his work, a device which theorists have long articulated as central to the realist mode.¹³

¹¹ See Feng (2010: 620-1), B. Song (2014), and Sun (2015: 125-7), who largely focus on differences between the two stories.

¹² This has been considered a hallmark of realism since Lukács (1964: 6, 8). Fokkema (1977: 92) has asserted that Lu Xun favored the "typicality of character" in Russian realism.

¹³ See, e.g., Jakobson 1990: 111; Freedgood 2006: 12-3.

The narrative centrality of metonymy is so prevalent in Lu Xun's fiction that a few examples must suffice: see the usage of hair and clothing in *The True Story of Ah Q* (*Ah Q Zhengzhuan*), "A Story about Hair" ("Toufa de gushi"), as well as "Storm in a Teacup" ("Fengbo"). Through Gogol, Lu Xun adopted metonymy as his master trope. As Michael Holquist (1977: 23) has observed, Gogol's madman thinks metonymically. He transfers his attention from Sophie to her dog, for example, because the truth of Sophie's lack of interest is too much for him to bear. By substituting an "attribute" for "the thing meant" (Holquist 1977: 23), the metonymy makes an otherwise agonizing reality apprehensible. In Lu Xun's story, cannibalism serves similarly as a metonym for the larger concerns of material and moral poverty; it is the concrete attribute for national problems that makes the overwhelming complexity of the latter digestible and comprehensible. Metonymy also provides other narrative scaffolding in these two works. Gogol's madman is profoundly agitated about his state of dress, convinced that it is a primary reason for his failure to attract the attention of the wealthy Sophie: "She didn't recognize me, and I tried to wrap myself up the best I could, because the overcoat I had on was very dirty, and old-fashioned besides. Now everyone wears cloaks with tall collars, and mine is short, overlapping...." (Gogol 1999: 274). When he later begins to fantasize about an elevation in social rank, he muses, "Suddenly, for instance, I walk in wearing a general's uniform: an epaulette on my right shoulder, and an epaulette on my left shoulder, a blue ribbon over my shoulder—what then?... But can't I be promoted this minute to governor general, or intendant, or something else like that? I'd like to know, what makes me a titular councilor?" (Gogol 1999: 286) The answer is, of course, his clothes. The clothes make the man, Poprishchin believes, so that when he discovers that he is the king of Spain, "[t]he only thing holding me up is that I still don't have royal attire. If only I could get some sort of mantle" (Gogol 1999: 289). Metonymy

defines this narrative because people have been emptied of intrinsic ontological qualities that might define them and render social relationships meaningful; as Andrei Bely (2009: 21) puts it, “Gogol substitutes an empty covering for the human personality.” The degradation of social hierarchy dehumanizes people until they are empty husks, no more than the sum of what they wear, of their contiguous possessions.

Because Gogol’s characters are dehumanized, they are defined by their metonymic possessions; similarly, when Lu Xun’s characters become degraded, like Ah Q, they are closely associated with their metonymic possessions; and when they become bestial in a dehumanizing social hierarchy, as in “Diary,” they resemble their metonymic animals. This is why the Zhao family’s dog looks at the madman in the same way as Zhao looks at the madman: dog and human owner are virtually indistinguishable. In fact, Lu Xun’s madman takes the logic of metonymy—the association “based on contiguity” (Jakobson 1990: 105)—to its logical extreme: the story proposes that when two entities adjacent to one another come, in their state of essential moral hollowness, to define one another, they start to incorporate the contiguous other into themselves. In other words, they cannibalize each other. By this logic, moreover, those who are most metonymically close to one another (friends, neighbors, family members) are most at risk of rubbing off on one another, passing on this moral disease to one another, and consuming one another. This is metonymy turned bloody.

Lu Xun may have seized and improvised upon Gogolian tricks of realist narrative such as metonymy, but Gogol’s oeuvre also defies generic categorizations in ways that complicate this picture, and that perhaps make his work liable to mimetic improvisation at the hands of other authors. Gogol has been read as a realist since the 1830s, but also as a romanticist (or an

equivocal version of either).¹⁴ Just as Gogol's madman is anxious about temporality, registering the Russian anxiety about entering a Western historical episteme, so too is it difficult to impose Western aesthetic periodizations upon Russian (and for that matter, Chinese) writers. Brunson (2017: 375) makes such a claim about Gogol:

Gogol leverages Russia's precarious position, both in and out of sync with the West, to advance a literature that is rife with productive incongruities....And he also, despite this connection to realism, pioneers a visual aesthetic so unique that it is sometimes considered commensurate with a twentieth-century modernist sensibility. What we discern in these aesthetic and critical distinctions is not a writer caught between modes, between histories, between cultures, but rather a writer who fully inhabits a space of simultaneity.

Early twentieth-century Chinese literature was another space of aesthetic simultaneity, in which a writer could experiment with multiple modes at once. Brunson (2017: 387) insists that Gogol's use of perspective in *Dead Souls* demonstrates how to bring the world into view and how easy it is to distort this view. Similarly I think Gogol's use of metonymy showcases what realist narrative can do with seemingly trivial details (that is, gesture at the fabric of social totality) while at the same time indicating how distorted that sense of social totality can be. After all, the madman who thinks with the logic of metonymy takes it to such an extreme that he goes mad with the explosion of associations he can discern among things and persons adjacent to one another. The same might be said of Lu Xun's madman. So both Gogol's and Lu Xun's usages of metonymy traffic in a realist technique while at the same time taking it to such an extreme that

¹⁴ See Maguire 1974: 6, 16-20, 37, 42; Kopper 1992: 60-1; Fanger 1965: 101-126; he was read as a "civic-realist" but also a "visionary-symbolist" (Fanger 1979: 8). See also Nabokov 1944: 119-120; Gippius 1981: 30-8, 48, 51-3, 114, 165-8; and Bely 2009: 356, 366 for suggestions that Gogolian artistry defies realism or is evocative of other narrative modes.

realism distorts. If metonymy in realism relates to the narrative possibility of proliferating outward from a single point and capturing more and more social connections and phenomena, then Gogol and Lu Xun's metonymy is in some ways the opposite: exaggerated fixation upon contiguous objects or persons suggests an inability to think rationally about wider social reality or totality, signaling the collapse of logical causal connections and the breakdown of the body politic.

Realism Becomes Unhomely

If Gogol is one of Lu Xun's models then we would expect the latter's realism to be capacious. The expectation is stronger still when we consider Lu Xun's relationship to Andreev's fiction.¹⁵ Critics have teased out Andreev's affinities to realism, decadence, romanticism, impressionism, existentialist and absurdist drama and prose, symbolism, and neorealism.¹⁶ Hanan (2004: 224) declares Andreev's *Red Laugh* to represent the "closest parallel" to Lu Xun's method in "Diary." The resemblances between these texts are legion, and include formal aspects such as their approach to narrative framing as well as thematic aspects such as the confusion of temporality, writing as a means of working through the problem of the nation and its moral bankruptcy, the hazards of kinship and brotherhood, and the dangers of and to children.

Andreev's novella is about the very war whose image, in the form of a lantern slide, first purportedly catalyzed Lu Xun's decision to write stories like "Diary." Nowhere in *Red Laugh* is the Russo-Japanese War explicitly named, though it is everywhere obvious. Correspondingly,

¹⁵ According to Gamsa (2008: 236), "Andreev was one of the sources of influence (alongside Gogol and, possibly, Chekhov) on the style and mood of his early stories." For evaluations of why Andreev appealed to Lu Xun, see Shneider 1977: 153-4, 170.

¹⁶ White 2006: 185-93; Bezzubov 1984: 9-11, 73-5, 333-4; Arsent'eva 2000: 176, 193; Hutchings 1990: 107, 118; Iezuitova 2010: 166; and Woodward 1969: 121-2. Clowes (2015: 235-6) characterizes Andreev as an "abject" realist.

nowhere in Lu Xun's story is this war mentioned, though the condition of Chinese citizens during a war in which two foreign powers jostled over Chinese territory is part of the implied historical context of alleged national backwardness that "Diary" deplures. This war and the traumatic historical trajectory of China that it emblemizes are repressed in the story, and in the consciousness of the madman. In this sense, in addition to the array of themes and images that Lu Xun appropriated from Andreev's novella, above all his intertextual engagement with *The Red Laugh* is characterized by the return of the repressed, which emerges in increasingly non-realist details.

The Freudian sense of the uncanny, *unheimlich*, or unhomely, refers to "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar..." (Freud 2003: 124). In *Red Laugh*, the comfort of home is in the opening pages an object of the narrator's fixation, its ordinariness providing a mental solace to the soldier embroiled in the war front:

And then—I suddenly remembered my home: a corner of my room, a scrap of light-blue wall-paper, and a dusty untouched water-bottle on my table—on my table, which has one leg shorter than the others, and had a small piece of paper folded under it. While in the next room—and I cannot see them—are my wife and little son....so wonderful was this simple and peaceful picture...(Andreev 1989: 10).

The uneven table legs prefigure the loss of his own legs: the image of home thus contains within it a premonition. The cool blue tones of his memory of home act as a low-temperature contrast to the fiery reds saturating the landscape around him: the red of the pitiless sun, the dismembered bodies of the wounded and dead, and above all the hideous red laugh that begins to symbolize

the insanity and horror of warfare. The narrator remains fixated upon fantasies of home, and when he finally does return, details of his fantasy are realized (Andreev 1989: 89-90). Yet though the markers of domesticity are the same, nothing provides comfort: his wife and child are still “in the next room, and I could not see them” (Andreev 1989: 93), just as they were invisible in his reveries on the war front. Coming home has not brought them closer to him, for they weep, and his family members behave strangely around him (Andreev 1989: 95).

It may seem at first that home has not changed, whereas he has; yet it soon becomes clear that nothing is the same at home. Home begins to resemble war in the last fragment of the novella, when the elder brother encounters a riot during an anti-war demonstration. To escape the violence, he “rushed about the unfamiliar (*neznakomym*) streets” (Andreev 1989: 181) toward home, and when he finally arrives, “the house in which I had lived for so many years seemed to me unfamiliar (*chuzhim*) in that strange dead street” (Andreev 1989: 183-4). At this point his description of home is invaded by red color and light, as opposed to the cool blues that used to symbolize its comfort and security (Andreev 1989: 179). In his unstable mind, even the children’s nursery, the precincts of calm, innocence, and regeneration, is piled with corpses (Andreev 1989: 191). For Clowes (2015: 111, 117), this blurring of opposites makes *Red Laugh* a prime example of Andreev’s “fantastic.”

Details like the light-blue wallpaper and the dusty water bottle function as Barthesian reality effects for the homesick soldier; they evoke the safe home space and provide a mental anchor for him in the chaos of war. But the homeliness they signify no longer exists. When home is made unhomely, the madman’s narrative departs from the reality effect. Details like the dead bodies in the nursery cease to signify “we are the real” (Barthes 2006: 234) and instead signify something beyond everyday, logically organized reality. The unhomely in this text marks

departures from the homeliness of realism in the mind of the madman.

Lu Xun subjects his madman to the same sense that the safety and familiarity of home have become threatening, and these points in the story are also where the diary departs from the sanity of the reality effect. The madman becomes frightened of the hostile look in his neighbors' eyes, and suddenly, "The folk at home all pretended not to know me; they had the same look in their eyes as all the others. When I went into the study, they locked the door outside as if cooping up a chicken or a duck. This incident left me even more bewildered" (Lu 2003: 9). The unhomeliness of this space takes on a different menacing edge, we shortly find out, as the madman has uncovered the secret history of cannibalism: the long-repressed memory of having eaten his sister, within the purported safety of his own home, has returned to his consciousness.

The repressed often rears its head, in *Red Laugh* as in Lu Xun's "Diary," in images of uncannily dismembered body parts.¹⁷ These are also moments when the narrative explodes the referentiality of realist detail. In *Red Laugh*, the mouth (associated with speech and laughter, but also eating and devouring) and the eyes are the dismembered body parts that, among the mutilated corpses littering the battlefields and the madman's consciousness, appear most frequently. Eyes represent the "abyss of horror and insanity": "in those black, bottomless pupils, surrounded by a narrow orange-coloured rim, like a bird's eye, there was more than death, more than the horror of death" (Andreev 1989: 15-6). What more there might be other than death is unclear (lunacy? existential void?)—this is when the signified is no longer identifiable, when the signifier has surpassed its role in producing a reality effect with an excess of meaning implied by the image.

In Lu Xun's deployment of these body parts, the eyes and mouth, affectively

¹⁷ Freud cites severed limbs as a primary example of the uncanny (2003: 150).

overdetermined symbolism overtakes realism as well. Because the madman is terrified of being surveilled and eaten, he spots staring eyes everywhere, accompanied by gaping wide mouths with bared fangs, laughing frenziedly:

“Yet all the time she looked at me. I gave a start, unable to control myself; then all those green-faced, long-toothed people began to laugh derisively” (Lu 2003: 9).

“I realize all the poison in their speech, all the daggers in their laughter. Their teeth are white and glistening: they are all man-eaters” (Lu 2003: 10).

“...not only was their human fat on the corner of his lips, but his whole heart was set on eating men” (Lu 2003: 12).

Textually speaking, Lu Xun’s madman is not a good realist: he reads surplus symbolism into details, and that is the root of his madness. The body parts signify not literal reality but a lurid affective excess: cunning, bloodthirstiness, mendacity, suspicion, predation, and so on. Like those in Andreev’s text, these symbols depart from the reality effect and stray from the purview of realist description. Yet they are not necessarily beyond the pale of realist narrative: they indicate moments when the madmen express paranoid departures from objective description of concrete details, reading inarticulable meanings in them because the horror of their lived reality can only be understood in this way. It is strategic that Lu Xun’s story, like those of his two Russian intertexts, is about madness and is said to depart from realist convention, for leaving reality behind is precisely the definition of insanity. Hsia (1999:33) comments upon Lu Xun’s “failure to provide a realistic plot for the madman’s fantasies,” but narratives about madness set themselves up to depart from the real in order to maintain verisimilitude. The heteromodality of Lu Xun’s realism allows for these ambiguities.

Imprisoned at home, Lu Xun's (2003: 17) madman frets, "The room was pitch dark. The beams and rafters shook above my head. After shaking for some time they grew larger. They piled on top of me. The weight was so great, I could not move. They meant that I should die. I knew that the weight was false, so I struggled out, covered in perspiration." Here, home is made unhomely and dangerous because of the madman's horror-stricken state, so fundamentally incommunicable that only painful bodily affect can asymptotically hint at it. This brings us to the largest-scale sensation of the uncanny in both Andreev and Lu Xun's texts, which is teased out by one of the examples of *Unheimlich* that Freud (2003: 127) lists: "To destroy the tranquility of the homeland." If the nation is the extension of the home, then it makes sense that a wounded soldier in *Red Laugh* tells the narrator that he cannot bring himself to telegraph his mother at home because he can no longer make any sense of his country: "Now, she is waiting for me. But I cannot. My country [*otechestvo* or fatherland (Andreev 1990: 30)]—is it possible to make her understand, what my country means..." (Andreev 1989: 36). A violent encounter with a different nation has engendered this sense of estrangement from both home and homeland. Lu Xun was supposedly motivated by just such an encounter in viewing the lantern slide. In "Diary," not only the family home but also by extension the homeland has been made uncanny.

Let us recall again Freud's (2003: 127) definition for *Heimlich*: "intimately, cosily homely; arousing a pleasant feeling of quiet contentment, etc., of comfortable repose and secure protection, like the enclosed, comfortable house." Lu Xun's (2017d: 23) iron house, his famous allegory for the Chinese homeland as described in the Preface to *A Call to Arms*, is such an enclosed space, but one that is rendered no longer comfortable or safe:

Suppose there is an iron house: without a single window or door and virtually indestructible. Inside are many inhabitants sleeping soundly, all about to suffocate

to death. Since they would die in their sleep, they wouldn't feel the agony of death. Now if you were to call out, awakening those few who are dozing lightly, leading these unfortunate few to suffer the agony of facing a sure death, do you think you would be doing them any good?

Inviting foreign literary elements into the iron house, textually cannibalizing a heterogeneous and unstable realism, is one way to try to open wide the doors of the national literary home. Lu Xun is always aware, though, that the result can be unhomely, uncanny, like his story about madness that self-consciously experiments with the conventions of literary representation.

Conclusion

In his 1928 essay *Bian* ("Tablet"), Lu Xun (2017f: 176) mocks the importation of Western "isms" into Chinese literature: "So people interpret them as they please. A work mostly about oneself is referred to as 'expressionism'; a work mostly about others is 'realism'; writing poetry after seeing a woman's bare calf is 'romanticism'; banning poems written after seeing a woman's bare calf is 'classicism'...." The trouble, he decries, is that people do not really know what these terms mean. To illustrate, Lu Xun (2017f: 177) tells a joke about two myopic country bumpkins who compete to see who can make out more characters on a tablet hung some distance away at the temple. After a tussle, they realize that "the tablet hasn't been hung yet." Under conditions of ignorance and myopia about foreign literary developments, as well as the purported underdevelopment of a new Chinese literature, to adopt or discriminate between various "isms" would be premature. The same is true of the heteromodality of Lu Xun's own fiction, which cannot be tidily demarcated from other recently imported "isms." Though drawn to Russian realism, he was not in the business of carelessly transplanting Western genres directly into

Chinese soil, for he recognized that a historical categorization obtaining in one literary context may not be meaningfully applicable in his own. The heteromodal quality of Lu Xun's stories is indebted to the modal ambiguities of the Russian intertexts that his stories cannibalize. The same heteromodality characterizes the realism of other early twentieth century writers following Lu Xun, such as Mao Dun, Ding Ling, Xiao Hong, and Ba Jin.

In some ways Lu Xun's intertextual approach anticipates the 1928 "Manifesto Antropófago" ("Cannibalist Manifesto") published by Brazilian modernist poet Oswald de Andrade. The Manifesto reclaims cannibalism (regarded by Western imperialists as symptomatic of the native savagery allegedly in need of "civilizing" colonial influences) as the means by which the Brazilian subject can create an original, rather than derivative, national culture: "Cannibalism. Absorption of the sacred enemy. To transform him into a totem" (de Andrade 1991: 43). Leslie Bary (1991: 35-6) writes, "Oswald's anthropophagist...neither apes nor rejects European culture, but 'devours' it, adapting its strengths and incorporating them into the native self."¹⁸ Lu Xun's cannibalism takes what he needs from the shifting realisms of Gogol and Andreev, along with elements from other Chinese and Western texts. However Lu Xun is, as always, not fully confident in its efficacy in saving China. The visceral carnality of the trope of cannibalism evokes the pain and trauma these literary encounters entailed.

Pu Wang (n.d.) argues incisively that in the famous essay "On the Power of Mara Poetry," Lu Xun "demarcates a literary world space whose logic is anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic," and whose ideal poet is committed to "revolt"; as a result, Lu Xun professes solidarity with poetic voices from other oppressed nations. In writing "Diary," Lu Xun (2005, 1:453) may not be drawing upon world poetry, but he resists the food chain of the imperialist

¹⁸ P. Wang (2013: 333-5) comments that Lu Xun's "sodomasochistic and sacrificial" scenario of cannibalistic translation is even more violent than analogous practices arising in Brazil.

world system, to which he alludes when the madman fears that Chinese society will go extinct from the invasion of fearsome specimens of highly evolved humanity. Rather than accept the status of Chinese civilization as prey in the world system, Lu Xun's story turns the tables on Chinese society's alleged savagery and turns to his Russian intertexts in revolt. He uses his peripherality to his own advantage, not merely repeating forms originating elsewhere, but making those forms his.

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