

Preface

As a young man I had my share of dreams too. Later on I forgot most of them but saw nothing in the least regrettable about that. To be sure, reminiscence can afford us pleasure, but it can occasionally make us lonely too, and keep the threads of our spirits attached to still other periods of loneliness that have long since gone by. In that case, what point can there possibly be in reminiscing? The trouble is that I have not been able to forget everything, and the part I *haven't* been able to forget is the source of this volume, *Cheering from the Sidelines*.

There was a four-year stretch of my life when you would find me, almost on a daily basis, going into a pawnshop and then to an herb store. I've forgotten exactly how old I was at the time, but at any rate the herbalist's counter was just my height while the pawnbroker's was twice as tall as I was. I would hand clothing and jewelry up to the one twice my height, and having received the money along with the contemptuous looks of the proprietor, would then proceed to the counter that was my own size and buy herbs for my long-ailing father. Even after I got home with the medicine I still had my work cut out for me. You see, the doctor who prescribed for him was one of the best known in the area, and therefore the ingredients he required were often extra-special too: roots of reeds (only those gathered in winter would do), sugarcane (it had to have seen three frosts), mated crickets (only an original pair would do),¹ ardisia (it had to have seeded)—in other words, things that took a great deal of hunting. The upshot was that my father grew worse with every passing day and finally died.

I think anyone who tumbles from affluence into poverty will, on the way down, come to see the true face of the world. In retrospect, I see that my going to N and entering the K Academy was

The Preface was published separately in the Ten-day Literary Supplement column of the Beijing *Morning Post* on August 21, 1923. The collection *Cheering from the Sidelines* appeared in the same month.

1. If either one of the pair had ever had another mate, the couple would be morally tainted and thus lack medicinal power.

prompted by a desire to escape, to take a different path, to seek out a different kind of people.² Since there was no way to prevent my departure, Mother scraped eight dollars together for traveling expenses and told me to spend the money as I saw fit. She wept. Given the times, those tears were quite understandable too. Back then, the only proper path for a young man to follow was to study the classics and sit for the civil service examinations. Most folks thought that anyone engaged in what was known as “studying foreign things”³ must be a down-and-outer at the end of his rope, with no choice but to sell his soul to the foreigners. Such a person was of course fair game for the most severe forms of ostracism and ridicule. And as if that weren’t enough, my mother wouldn’t get to see her son anymore either. But I couldn’t let such considerations hold me back, and when all was said and done, I proceeded to N and entered the K Academy.

For the first time in my life I learned about the existence of such things as natural science, geography, history, drawing, and even calisthenics. Physiology was not taught, but we did get to see books such as *A New Exposition of Physiology* and *Chemistry and Hygiene*.⁴

Recalling the diagnoses and prescriptions given by my father’s doctors and comparing them with this new knowledge, it gradually dawned on me that Chinese doctors were nothing more than quacks, whether intentional or unwitting. I began to conceive a great sympathy for all the sick people they had deceived, and for the relatives of those people as well. What was more, through reading translated histories, I had also come to know that by and large the modernization of Japan had had its beginnings in their study of Western medicine.

Such sophomoric bits and pieces of knowledge later caused me to register in a specialized school of medical studies, off in the

2. “N” is for Nanjing, “K” for Kiangnan (south China). Lu Xun entered the Kiangnan Naval Academy in 1898. The following year he transferred to the School of Mining and Railroads, which was attached to the Kiangnan Army Academy (also in Nanjing). Upon graduation in 1902 he was sent to study in Japan on a scholarship provided by the Manchu government.

3. The “things” were primarily foreign science and foreign languages.

4. These two works were translated into Chinese from English and published in 1851 and 1879 respectively.

countryside.⁵ My dream was a beautiful one: after graduation, I’d go home and alleviate the suffering of all those unfortunates who had been victimized like my father. In the event of war, I’d become a surgeon in the military; and in any case, I would strengthen my countrymen’s faith in modernization.

I don’t know what progress has been made in the method of teaching microbiology nowadays, but back then slides were used to familiarize us with the forms of the various microorganisms. Occasionally, when one section of the course outline had been completed and there was still some time before the class period was over, the instructor would show slides of scenery or current events. The Russo-Japanese War [1904–5] was being fought at the time and, understandably, a good number of slides were devoted to the military situation. And so it was that I often had to become part of the fun as my classmates clapped and cheered. At the time, I hadn’t seen any of my fellow Chinese in a long time, but one day some of them showed up in a slide. One, with his hands tied behind him, was in the middle of the picture; the others were gathered around him. Physically, they were as strong and healthy as anyone could ask, but their expressions revealed all too clearly that *spiritually* they were calloused and numb. According to the caption, the Chinese whose hands were bound had been spying on the Japanese military for the Russians. He was about to be decapitated as a “public example.”⁶ The other Chinese gathered around him had come to enjoy the spectacle.

Before that academic year was out I had already returned to Tokyo,⁷ for after this experience I felt that the practice of medicine was nothing urgent to begin with, since no matter *how* healthy or strong the bodies of a weak-spirited citizenry might be, they’d still be fit for nothing better than to serve as victims or onlookers at such ridiculous spectacles. There was no need to fret about how many of them might die of illness. The most important thing to be

5. In Japan, where Lu Xun entered the Sendai Specialized School of Medical Studies.

6. The phrase *shizhong* in the original text (a Chinese and Japanese phrase) literally means “to show the masses.” Before execution, criminals were paraded through the streets to “show the masses” what fate was in store for them if they committed similar crimes. This expression provides the title for the story “A Warning to the People”; the last chapter of “Ah Q—The Real Story” also depicts the same practice. Criminals are still paraded publicly as a deterrent to crime in China today.

7. In 1906.

done was to transform their *spirits*, and of course the best way to effect a spiritual transformation—or so I thought at the time—would be through literature and art.

All right then, I would promote a literary movement. There were droves of Chinese students in Tokyo studying everything from law, politics, physics, and chemistry on down to police administration and industrial planning, but not a single one was studying either literature or art. Even in such a cold and uncongenial atmosphere, however, I was fortunate enough to find a few like-minded comrades. We rounded up some other people who would be essential to our project and after some consultation, decided that the first order of business would be—what else?—to put out a magazine. The name of our publication was supposed to express the idea of “new life,” but since most of us were somewhat classically inclined at the time, we called it *Renascence*.⁸

As the publication date of *Renascence* drew near, some of those who had agreed to contribute dropped out of sight. Hard on the heels of that, the capital we had counted on took off for parts unknown, leaving us with only three people⁹ and no money. Since we had launched our venture against the tide of the times, of course we couldn't really complain all that much when it failed. Later on, even we three—each driven by the exigencies of his own individual fate—were no longer able to hang together and freely share our dreams for the future. Such was the end of our *Renascence*, which had actually never been born in the first place.

After that, I was assailed by a feeling of aimlessness, such as I had never known before. At first I was unable to identify the cause of this feeling, but later on I managed to think it out. When a man comes forward with an idea and others approve, that's enough to encourage him to go on; if they disapprove, that's enough to goad him into keeping up the struggle. But a *real* tragedy occurs when he cries out in the realm of the living and there's no response at all—no approval, and no opposition either. It was like finding myself

8. The distinction Lu Xun draws here is between classical or literary Chinese (*wenyan*) and the vernacular language (*baihua*). Although there is no “classical” English in exactly this sense, I have translated the title as “Renascence” to suggest the same distinction. This periodical (*Xin sheng*) is to be distinguished from *The Renaissance* (*Xin chao*), cited in n. 1 on p. 59.

9. The other two were Lu Xun's younger brother, Zhou Zuoren (1885–1966), and Xu Shoushang (1882–1948). A lifelong friend to the Zhou brothers, Xu was also a native of Shaoxing.

in the midst of a boundless and desolate plain where there were no reference points, nothing to lay one's hand to—an agonizing plight. At that point I began to realize that what I actually felt was loneliness, a loneliness that grew larger by the day and coiled round my soul like a giant poisonous snake.

And yet, though the experience brought me this gratuitous freight of sorrow, I didn't mind in the least, for it also forced me to examine myself, to see myself for what I really was. I recognized that I was *not* the kind of man who can heroically rally crowds to his side with the wave of an arm and the shout of a battle cry.

That feeling of loneliness, on the other hand, was far too painful to bear. I simply had to find some way of shaking it off. I tried everything I could find to drug my soul, to make myself sink back into the depths of my people, to retreat into the recesses of antiquity. In the following years, I personally experienced or was witness to things that carried an even greater freight of sorrow and loneliness, things I don't want to be reminded of, things whose very memory I would gladly have disappear into the earth together with my brain. And yet the drugging *was*, apparently, quite effective, for I no longer reacted to any of those things with the magnanimity and ardor of my youth.¹⁰

* * *

There is a three-room apartment in the S Club where, it is said, a woman once hanged herself from the locust tree in the court-

10. Among those “things” the abortive establishment of the new republic was no doubt foremost. Sun Yat-sen was sworn in as president of the Republic of China on January 1, 1912. Though he embodied the ideals of the young revolutionaries, Sun was forced in that same year to yield his office to Yuan Shikai, who had been a high-ranking military official under the Manchu dynasty. Sun had dedicated followers and ideals, but Yuan had troops and the outcome was never in doubt. Opposition to Yuan, however, mounted quickly and in 1913 Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) launched a punitive expedition against him. This “second revolution” failed and Sun fled to Japan. Thus the new republic was now firmly under the control of Yuan's military dictatorship.

In 1915 Yuan went so far as to declare himself emperor of a new dynasty. Disaffection in the provinces and his own death one year later put an end to his imperial ambitions but left the republic fragmented into several independent fiefdoms controlled by local warlords. During the summer of 1917 one of them, Zhang Xun, occupied Beijing. Both Zhang and his men still wore the queue as a token of allegiance to the now-defunct Manchu dynasty, and Zhang proclaimed its restoration. A coalition of other warlords, however, soon drove him out of the capital. They, in turn, forced the resignation of the president, Li Yuanhong, and replaced him with a puppet of their own.

yard.¹¹ Although by the time I arrived the tree had already grown so tall you couldn't reach the lowest branch, there was still no one staying there. For a period of several years I lived in those rooms, devoting whatever spare time I had to making copies of ancient inscriptions.¹² Very few guests came by to shake me from my lethargy and of course I encountered nothing in the inscriptions—no social problems, plans for reform, and so on—to pull me out of it either. And yet the span of my years was in fact silently slipping away. But that was exactly the way I wanted it.

On summer nights when there were lots of mosquitoes I would sit under the locust tree, cooling myself with a rush fan. When I looked up at the patches of blue black sky visible through cracks in the dense foliage, ice-cold caterpillars would often plop down on my neck. An old friend, Jin Xinyi,¹³ would sometimes drop by for a chat. He would place his large briefcase on my rickety old table, throw off his long gown, and sit across from me. Because he was afraid of dogs, his heart would often still be pounding hard.¹⁴

On one such night he leafed through a volume of inscriptions I had collated and asked, "What's the point in copying these?"

"None."

"Then why do it?"

"No reason."

"I think you might write a little something."

11. The S Club, or Shaoxing Club, was a hostel in Beijing where Shaoxing hometowners could rent rooms and take their meals. There were many such clubs in the capital for people from various parts of China. Lu Xun, who was working in the Ministry of Education during this period, lived at the Shaoxing Club from May 1912 until November 1919.

12. According to Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun took up this hobby in earnest in 1915, the year Yuan Shikai attempted to restore the former dynasty. Yuan's agents were everywhere, on the lookout for potential opposition. Having a time-consuming hobby (copying inscriptions, gambling, or even visiting prostitutes would do equally well) was an effective way of demonstrating that one was politically harmless.

13. A name used by Qian Xuantong (1887–1939). Like Lu Xun, Qian was a native of Zhejiang Province. He and Lu Xun had come to know each other well in Tokyo. A professor at Beijing University at the time of his visits to Lu Xun, Qian was a vigorous advocate of replacing classical Chinese with the vernacular language. Qian was a competent philologist and made many contributions to the standardization of pronunciations, the creation of a phonetic system to represent the sounds of Chinese in writing, and the simplification of the Chinese characters.

14. The gatekeeper at the S Club kept a dog.

I knew what he was getting at. They were in the midst of publishing *New Youth* at the time.¹⁵ However, not only had no one come forward to approve of what they were doing, but no one had yet bothered to mount an opposition to it either. I knew that he must be feeling very lonely. Nonetheless, I gave this reply: "Suppose there were an iron room with no windows or doors, a room it would be virtually impossible to break out of. And suppose you had some people inside that room who were sound asleep. Before long they would all suffocate. In other words, they would slip peacefully from a deep slumber into oblivion, spared the anguish of being conscious of their impending doom. Now let's say that *you* came along and stirred up a big racket that awakened some of the lighter sleepers. In that case, they would go to a certain death fully conscious of what was going to happen to them. Would you say that you had done those people a favor?"

"But since I'd awakened *some* of them, you can't say that they would have absolutely no hope of finding some way to break out."

Yes, he had his point. Though I was convinced to my own satisfaction that it wouldn't be possible to break out, I still couldn't dismiss *hope* entirely, for hope belongs to the future. My conviction that such a thing would never happen wasn't sufficient grounds for entirely dismissing his hope that it *might*.

In the end, I did agree to write something for him. This was my first piece, "Diary of A Madman." Once started, I couldn't stop. And so I continued, from time to time, to do these short-story-like

15. Published monthly in Shanghai, *New Youth* was devoted to cultural, literary, and political themes. Between 1915 (when it was founded by Chen Duxiu) and 1921, it was the most influential publication associated with the New Culture movement. In 1918, the year of Qian's visits to Lu Xun, the magazine was placed under the rotating editorship of a six-man committee consisting of the founder Chen, Hu Shi, Qian Xuantong, Li Dazhao, Liu Bannong, and Shen Yinmo. Five of them were professors at Beijing University (usually abbreviated in Chinese as Beida, the *-da* being short for *daxue* or "university"), while Li Dazhao was a librarian there.

Cai Yuanpei (1888–1940), a respected elder to Lu Xun as well as his fellow hometownsman, became chancellor of Beida in 1916, following the death of Yuan Shikai, and remained in that position until 1926. Beida had previously been contemptuously referred to as the "Brothel Brigade," recalling one of the many nonacademic pursuits of its well-to-do students. Cai Yuanpei single-handedly transformed it into China's most prestigious center of higher learning and made it the fountainhead of the New Culture movement. Lu Xun's "they" most probably refers to Cai and the editors of *New Youth*.

pieces to satisfy the requests of my friends. As time wore on, I found I had accumulated more than ten of them.

For my part, I thought I had long since ceased being the kind of person who is bursting to share his message. And yet—perhaps because I had not yet succeeded in entirely purging my heart of the sorrow and loneliness I too had once experienced in bygone days—I couldn't resist cheering now and then from the sidelines so as to console those bold warriors still charging through the fields of loneliness, and to encourage them to ride on. As to whether the sound of my cheers was heroic, woebegone, detestable, or even downright ridiculous—I couldn't really be bothered about that. Since I *was* cheering, however, I had to obey the orders of the bold warriors still out on the field. Therefore it often happened that I did not balk at twisting things a bit on their command: in "Medicine" I have a wreath appear out of nowhere on Yu Er's grave, and in "Tomorrow" I don't go so far as to say that Sister Shan never did see her son in her dreams. At the time our frontline officers were in no mood to tolerate negativity. And for my own part, I had no desire to take the loneliness that still afflicted me and infect young people with it, young people who were still dreaming the same sweet dreams that I had dreamed when I was their age.

Since this was the way these stories came into being, the distance that lies between them and real art can readily be imagined. And yet to have the opportunity to gather them into a collection and have them graced with the title "stories" is an unexpected piece of good luck. Though such luck makes me uneasy, it is also gratifying to think that, for the time being at least, I still have readers.

And so I have gathered them together and handed them over to the printer. Finally, for the reasons set out above, I have entitled the collection *Cheering from the Sidelines*.

DECEMBER 3, 1922
LU XUN IN BEIJING

Diary of a Madman

There was once a pair of male siblings whose actual names I beg your indulgence to withhold. Suffice it to say that we three were boon companions during our school years. Subsequently, circumstances contrived to rend us asunder so that we were gradually bereft of knowledge regarding each other's activities.

Not too long ago, however, I chanced to hear that one of them had been hard afflicted with a dread disease. I obtained this intelligence at a time when I happened to be returning to my native haunts and, hence, made so bold as to detour somewhat from my normal course in order to visit them. I encountered but one of the siblings. He apprised me that it had been his younger brother who had suffered the dire illness. By now, however, he had long since become sound and fit again; in fact he had already repaired to other parts to await a substantive official appointment.¹

The elder brother apologized for having needlessly put me to the inconvenience of this visitation, and concluding his disquisition with a hearty smile, showed me two volumes of diaries which, he assured me, would reveal the nature of his brother's disorder during those fearful days.

As to the lapsus calami that occur in the course of the diaries, I have altered not a word. Nonetheless, I have changed all the names, despite the fact that their publication would be of no great consequence since they are all humble villagers unknown to the world at large.

Recorded this 2nd day in the 7th year of the Republic.²

I

Moonlight's really nice tonight. Haven't seen it in over thirty years. Seeing it today, I feel like a new man. I know now that I've been completely out of things for the last three decades or more.

First published in *New Youth*, volume 4, no. 5 (May 1918). This was the first time Zhou Shuren used the pen name Lu Xun.

1. When there were too many officials for the number of offices to be filled, a man might well be appointed to an office that already had an incumbent. The new appointee would proceed to his post and wait until said office was vacated. Sometimes there would be a number of such appointees waiting their turns.

2. April 2, 1918. This introduction is written in classical Chinese, while the diary entries that follow are all in the colloquial language.