



SELECTED STORIES
OF
Lu Hsun

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LU HSUN

(This photo was taken in Shanghai on September 24, 1930, when he was fifty years of age)

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This selection presents eighteen stories by Lu Hsun as well as his preface to *Call to Arms*. The first nine stories, from *A Madman's Diary* to *Village Opera*, were written between 1918 and 1922 and come from his earliest collection of stories *Call to Arms*. The next seven, from *The New Year's Sacrifice* to *The Divorce*, come from his second collection *Wandering*, written in 1924 and 1925. *The Flight to the Moon* and *Forging the Sword*, both written in 1926, come from his third collection of stories *Old Tales Retold*.

The preface to *Call to Arms* is included in this book because it throws light on why Lu Hsun chose literature as his weapon in the struggle, and how he came to write short stories. The article "Lu Hsun's Life and His Short Stories" by Yeh Yi-chun, with its account of Lu Hsun and the historical background of his writing, should help readers to understand these stories.

CONTENTS

LU HSUN'S LIFE AND HIS SHORT STORIES <i>Yeh Yi-chun</i>	1
PREFACE TO THE FIRST COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES, "CALL TO ARMS"	20
A MADMAN'S DIARY	26
KUNG I-CHI	39
MEDICINE	46
TOMORROW	56
AN INCIDENT	65
STORM IN A TEACUP	68
MY OLD HOME	79
THE TRUE STORY OF AH Q	91
VILLAGE OPERA	145
THE NEW YEAR'S SACRIFICE	158
IN THE WINE SHOP	180
A HAPPY FAMILY	193
SOAP	202
THE MISANTHROPE	216
REGRET FOR THE PAST	240
THE DIVORCE	262
THE FLIGHT TO THE MOON	273
FORGING THE SWORDS	286

LU HSUN'S LIFE AND HIS SHORT STORIES

Yeh Yi-chun*

Lu Hsun was the founder of China's new realist literature, the writer who did the most to prepare the way for socialist realist literature in China.

Lu Hsun's whole life, from start to finish, was bound up with the Chinese revolution. Deeply affected throughout by the ebb and flow of the revolutionary movement, he gave powerful expression in his works to all his experience. That is why his writings are a truthful reflection of the Chinese revolution; for different stages of this revolution, which Lu Hsun understood so well, form the main subject matter of his works.

Lu Hsun was born on September 25, 1881 in Shaohsing, a little town south of the Yangtse. About forty years had passed since the European imperialists began to encroach on China, and the old feudal society was gradually becoming semi-feudal and semi-colonial. Shaohsing was the administrative centre of a prefecture during the Ching dynasty. To its north lay the sea, to its south the famous Kuaichi Mountains, and intersected by a network of streams and lakes the region was celebrated for its natural beauty.

Lu Hsun's father, Chou Po-yi, was an old-style scholar. His mother, Lu Jui, had been a village girl,

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and as a child Lu Hsun loved to stay with his maternal grandmother, in whose home he made friends with many peasant boys. In that semi-feudal, semi-colonial society the peasants groaned under heavy oppression, and their miserable conditions made a deep and lasting impression on Lu Hsun.

By the time Lu Hsun's father died after a protracted illness, the family was so impoverished that there was not even enough money for the sons' schooling. Lu Hsun left home at the age of eighteen to enter a state-subsidized college in Nanking, where he studied the sciences brought to China from the West.

That was shortly after the failure of the Reform Movement of 1898, which aimed at setting up a constitutional monarchy; and not long before the suppression, by the allied armies of eight powers in 1900, of the Yi Ho Tuan Movement—a mass movement to oppose foreign aggression. In 1901 the Ching government signed a protocol to appease the imperialists, surrendering even more sovereign rights to foreign powers.

In his student days, Lu Hsun was stirred by a deep sense of patriotism and an earnest desire to find a way to save the country. During this period he began to study various modern schools of thought, including the theory of evolution of Darwin and Huxley, as well as works dealing with democracy.

In 1902 Lu Hsun went to study in Japan. He first enrolled in a medical college, meaning to equip himself with scientific knowledge to cure the diseases of his countrymen. But in 1905 during the Russo-Japanese War, he saw a film of a strong healthy Chinese being tied up by Japanese troops for decapitation while other Chinese watched, utterly apathetic, powerless to save him. . . . This convinced Lu Hsun that medicine was not the most urgent need for a weak and oppressed people; the main thing was to change their outlook, and to his mind this could best be done by literature. He there-

fore gave up his medical studies to devote himself to letters. In 1908, in Tokyo, he joined the Kuang Fu League, which was working for a democratic revolution.

Lu Hsun returned to China in 1909. In October 1911, the first armed democratic revolution broke out and the Ching government was overthrown. Lu Hsun, then dean of studies in Shaohsing Middle School, organized armed corps of students to go through the streets explaining the significance of the revolution.

Soon after the 1911 Revolution, Lu Hsun joined the ministry of education. In 1912 he moved with the government from Nanking to Peking. He was in Peking when Yuan Shih-kai proclaimed himself emperor in 1915 and during Chang Hsun's attempt in 1916 to revive the monarchy. The failure of the bourgeois democratic revolution distressed and disgusted him.

The victory of the October Revolution in 1917 was a great inspiration to the oppressed people of China, and progressive Chinese intellectuals began to make known the experience of this revolution and to study Marxism. By showing Lu Hsun the first glimmer of a new age, these early Chinese Marxists swept away his depression. *A Madman's Diary*, which appeared in May 1918, was a thoroughgoing challenge to feudalism and laid a firm foundation for China's new literature. He followed this with *Kung I-chi*, *Medicine* and other stories, as well as a number of militant essays later collected in *Hot Air*.

On May 4, 1919, under the leadership of the early Marxists, young intellectuals launched a mass movement to oppose imperialism and feudalism. This patriotic movement rapidly spread from Peking to Shanghai and other parts of China, and on June 3 nearly 70,000 Shanghai workers went on strike in support of the patriotic movement in Peking and in protest against the persecution of students by the warlord government. These nationwide patriotic movements not only succeeded in building up a powerful united front against

imperialism, but also inspired a great anti-feudal cultural revolution and a literary revolution. The slogans of this time were "Down with the old morality! Up with a new morality!" "Down with the old literature! Up with a new literature!" Lu Hsun stood throughout by the Marxists in the vanguard of the cultural movement, raising high the banner of revolt against imperialism and feudalism, advocating a revolution in culture and literature. Guided by Marxism, he became a revolutionary democrat and a fighter.

During the May the Fourth period, Lu Hsun served on the editorial board of *New Youth*, which was conducting a vigorous campaign for a revolution in culture and literature. This work brought him into close touch with Li Ta-chao, one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, and the two men together opposed the bourgeois liberalism, reformist trends and tendency to compromise of the bourgeois intellectual Hu Shih. At the end of 1920, Hu Shih wrote to the *New Youth* editorial board proposing that the journal should revert to its earlier policy of refraining from any discussion of politics and publish a declaration to this effect. Lu Hsun and Li Ta-chao firmly opposed this proposal, which would have meant surrender to the forces of reaction, and so there came a split. Lu Hsun said: "It seems to me that the present trend of *New Youth* is towards a split, but we should not insist on bridging the gap. . . . Let us split. . . . As for publishing a new announcement to the effect that we intend to keep off politics, I see no need for that." Lu Hsun's political attitude was clear.

Between the May 4 Movement of 1919 and the May 30 Movement of 1925,* Lu Hsun wrote *Tomorrow, Storm in a Teacup, My Old Home, The True Story of Ah Q*,

*To protest against the massacre of Chinese by British police in Shanghai.

Village Opera, The New Year's Sacrifice, In the Wine Shop, A Happy Family, Soap, The Misanthrope, Regret for the Past and The Divorce, as well as many essays. These works, later collected in *Call to Arms, Wandering, Hot Air, Bad Luck and Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, were the chief glory of China's new realist literature.

After the May 30 Movement of 1925, the nationwide opposition to imperialism gathered momentum. On March 18, 1926, there was a demonstration of over 30,000 people in Peking against imperialist intervention in China inciting civil war. The demonstrators were fired on in front of Government House, and over two hundred were killed or wounded. From first to last, Lu Hsun stood in the forefront of this fight to oppose the cruel massacre carried out by the warlords who were betraying China, and the persecution of patriotic students by time-serving "men of letters." Hence he was so hounded by the warlord government that in August 1926 he was forced to leave Peking and take refuge in Amoy. In January 1927 he went to Canton. Some of his writings in *Wild Grass* and *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk* date from this time, as do the two stories based on legends, *The Flight to the Moon* and *Forging the Sword*.

This was the time of the Northern Expedition organized jointly by the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang. The revolutionary army had already taken Wuhan, Changsha, Kiukiang, Nanchang and Hangchow. On March 21, 1927, 800,000 workers in Shanghai, led by the Communist Party, rose in armed revolt to drive out the troops of the warlords and welcome in the Northern Expeditionary Army. Three days later the revolutionary army occupied Nanking. But on April 12, 1927, the right-wing of the Kuomintang, led by Chiang Kai-shek and supported by the imperialists, staged a counter-revolutionary coup d'état in Shanghai. So the 1925-1927 revolution ended in defeat. Lu Hsun,

upon his arrival in Canton, received a warm welcome from the students. While teaching in the Sun Yat-sen University, he kept in touch with many young revolutionaries. But on April 15, 1927, after Chiang Kai-shek's betrayal of the revolution, there was a massacre of young revolutionaries in Canton too.

Before the May 4 Movement, Lu Hsun believed in the theory of evolution and the emancipation of the individual. After the May 4 Movement, he came under the influence of Marxism and this, combined with his own experience of political struggles, helped him to carry forward the idea of development in the theory of evolution and to use it in his observation of society. He resolutely opposed all that was outworn and rotten in the old feudal system, convinced that what was new would triumph in the end. He lashed out at the feudal hierarchy, at imperialism, the reactionary bureaucrats and their various henchmen. He was sure that the future would prove better than the past, the young better than the old. Thus he began to have a materialist conception of social development. After the 1927 coup d'état he realized that among the young there were both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. The young counter-revolutionaries, who acted as informers or helped the authorities to make arrests, were just as cruel and contemptible as their elders. This undermined Lu Hsun's belief in the theory of evolution and in its place he gradually adopted a class standpoint, coming to believe that "the future belongs solely to the rising proletariat." In other words, he was becoming a historical-materialist.

In October 1927 Lu Hsun moved to Shanghai. Since the tide of revolution was at a low ebb, this was a difficult and dangerous period for revolutionaries. Lu Hsun at this time made a careful study of Marxist theories of art. He also joined forces with progressive young writers like Jou Shih and Yin Fu to use litera-

ture as a weapon against reactionary bourgeois writers and reactionary literature.

In the spring of 1930, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, Lu Hsun and other revolutionary writers organized a united front of revolutionary literature — the China League of Left-Wing Writers. Lu Hsun became the standard-bearer of this league. Between 1930 and 1936, guided by the Party and assisted by many young revolutionary writers, Lu Hsun fought the repressive measures of the Kuomintang government. He and his associates launched a widespread movement for revolutionary literature, worked hard to bring literature to the people and promoted the woodcut as a popular form of graphic art. They also waged battle after battle against the Crescent Moon Society, a right-wing bourgeois literary clique, the “nationalist” writers who were working for the Kuomintang reactionaries, those who advocated “freedom in writing,” who while professing to be revolutionaries denied the class nature of literature, and the so-called “third category.” Lu Hsun was the protagonist in all these struggles. Thanks to the thorough defeat he inflicted on those reactionaries who attacked revolutionary literature, the revolutionary literature of the proletariat became the dominant trend in literature in China at that time.

Between 1931 and 1933 Lu Hsun became a close friend of Chu Chiu-pai, one of the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. Together they fought against the “third category” and those bourgeois men of letters who advocated “freedom in writing.” Together they introduced and advocated the Marxist theory of art. Chu Chiu-pai also made a study of Lu Hsun's essays, compiled a selection and wrote a preface which not only gave a systematic and penetrating analysis of the development of Lu Hsun's thought, but pointed out his important role in the battle of ideas in China. This served as a great encouragement and inspiration to Lu Hsun, helping him to

see more clearly his role in the struggle, the errors in his outlook, and the goal towards which he must strive. The support given to Lu Hsun by Chu Chiu-pai was an expression of the Party's high regard and concern for him. Constantly encouraged by the Party and steeled in the course of most arduous and complex struggles, Lu Hsun developed into a fighter for communism. He became the most correct, the bravest, most resolute and most loyal standard-bearer of the Chinese cultural revolution, and one of the greatest thinkers and writers of modern China.

During this time, Lu Hsun worked tirelessly using essays as his weapon, to bring about a new high tide in the cultural revolution. He carried on a sharp ideological struggle, exposing the crimes of the Kuomintang reactionaries and arousing the revolutionary enthusiasm of the people. The essays of these years may be found in *The Essays of Chieh-chieh-ting* and other collections.

Early in October 1935, the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, under the correct leadership of the Central Committee of the Party headed by Mao Tse-tung, victoriously concluded the Long March and established a new revolutionary base in North Shensi. As soon as this news reached Shanghai, Lu Hsun and Mao Tun jointly despatched a telegram of congratulations in which they declared: "The hope of the entire people of China is centred in you."

Meanwhile the Japanese imperialists were continuing their encroachments on Chinese territory. On December 9, 1935 more than 6,000 students in Peking under Party leadership launched a new patriotic movement to demand that the Kuomintang government cease the civil war against the Communists and unite all forces to resist Japan. When the Kuomintang authorities massacred and arrested these unarmed patriots, intense indignation was aroused throughout the country. There fol-

lowed a mass movement to resist Japan and save China. Then writers and cultural workers in Shanghai, responding to the Party's call, disbanded such revolutionary organizations as the League of Left-Wing Writers to form a united front against Japan and support the mass movement. Although Lu Hsun was already seriously ill, he took an active part in this work and recruited many other supporters.

On October 19, 1936, Lu Hsun died after a long illness. More than 10,000 people from all walks of life flocked to his funeral, turning their grief over his death into a patriotic demonstration against Japanese aggression.

Lu Hsun was a militant realist writer. Firmly opposed to the view of stories as "pure entertainment," he required them to reflect "real life . . . the actual, dynamic struggle . . . galloping pulses, passion and ideas." (*On Our Present Literary Movement*.) He believed: "A writer's job is to give sensitive descriptions of society. If this is forcefully done, it will in turn influence society and bring about changes."

Most of his stories were written between 1918 and 1925. This was the initial period of the modern Chinese revolution, the time of the May 4 Movement led by the early Marxists, the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party and the mass movement against imperialism — the patriotic May 30 Movement in which the working class played the main part. It was also a period in which many other important historical events were taking place, and the eve of the outbreak of the first revolutionary civil war. During this period Lu Hsun became tempered in revolutionary struggles and began to be influenced by socialist ideas. He adopted a militant, uncompromising attitude towards the semi-feudal, semi-colonial society of his day. Most of his stories deal with life from the time of the 1911 Revolution

to the May 4 Movement. He said: "My themes were usually the unfortunates in this morbid society and were intended to expose its sickness and draw attention to the remedy." (*How I Came to Write Stories*.) His first story, *A Madman's Diary*, was a declaration of war on feudalism. He put these words into the "madman's" mouth:

"I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology. . . . I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words — 'Eat people!' "

The history he meant was the long history of feudalism in China. In this rotten feudal society thousands of years old, so-called "virtue and morality" were nothing but deceptive, gilded signboards upon the doors of the ruling class, weapons with which the oppressed could be killed without bloodshed. In this society "eating human beings" had "been going on since time immemorial." Convinced that such a society had to be reformed, in this story Lu Hsun declared clearly and forcefully: "You must know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world."

Lu Hsun had a profound love and sympathy for the "unfortunates" of semi-feudal and semi-colonial China. Among these "unfortunates," naturally and inevitably, downtrodden peasant women held the chief place. For in feudal China the poor peasants were the most heavily exploited class, and women were the lowest and most wretched in this class. Ah Q is a poor, landless peasant. Jun-tu in *My Old Home* is a hard-working, simple, long-suffering peasant with "never enough to eat." Hsiang Lin's Wife in *The New Year's Sacrifice*, whose husband and son are snatched away by a cruel fate, is left with a sense of guilt till finally she becomes a beggar and is cast out to perish unknown. Brave, lively Ai-ku in *The Divorce*, who is willing to risk her life, finally has to submit to the sinister and fearful weight of feudal authority. . . . These vivid figures live in the memories

of Chinese readers, for they reflect the conditions of the Chinese villagers from the time of the 1911 Revolution to the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. Lu Hsun had a revolutionary humanitarian sympathy for these characters. His pen overflows with feeling, for he was deeply touched by their unhappy lot. He did, it is true, express stringent criticism of the stupidity and apathy of some of these people and the way in which they were crushed and stupefied by the millstones of ruling-class morality — as in the case of Ah Q and Young D. He did not sneer at their expense, however, but was angry because they lacked the courage to fight back. Pity for their cruel fate and anger over their inertia were Lu Hsun's basic reactions towards poor peasants who had not yet become politically conscious. He also often expressed the confident hope that a better future awaited them. Thus in *My Old Home* he said: "They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced. . . . For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made." He looked forward eagerly to the awakening of these unfortunates, to the time when they would rally their forces to trample out a road where none had previously existed, to create a new life for themselves.

Another group of "unfortunates" described by Lu Hsun were the downtrodden townsfolk in humble circumstances, like widowed Fourth Shan's Wife in *To-morrow* who supports herself and her small son by spinning, or Old Chuan and his wife who keep a small tea-house. These are kindly, hard-working, honest folk who love their children and sympathize with the troubles of others. But in that cruel society in which men preyed on each other, they are powerless to protect their children. When a child falls ill, they have no medical knowledge or skill in nursing; their wits are befuddled by the obscurantism of feudalism. Taken in by the lies of the rulers and their flunkies, they part with all their