
Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism

by Frederic Jameson

Judging from recent conversations among third-world intellectuals, there is now an obsessive return of the national situation itself, the name of the country that returns again and again like a gong, the collective attention to "us" and what we have to do and how we do it, to what we can't do and what we do better than this or that nationality, our unique characteristics, in short, to the level of the "people." This is not the way American intellectuals have been discussing "America," and indeed one might feel that the whole matter is nothing but that old thing called "nationalism," long since liquidated here and rightly so. Yet a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world (and also in the most vital areas of the second world), thus making it legitimate to ask whether it is all that bad in the end.' Does in fact the message of some disabused and more experienced first-world wisdom (that of Europe even more than of the United States) consist in urging these nation states to outgrow it as fast as possible? The predictable reminders of Kampuchea and of Iraq and Iran do not really seem to me to settle anything or suggest by what these nationalisms might be replaced except perhaps some global American postmodernist culture.

Many arguments can be made for the importance and interest of noncanonical forms of literature such as that of the third world,² but one is peculiarly self-defeating because it borrows the weapons of the adversary: the strategy of trying to prove that these texts are as "great" as those of the canon itself. The object is then to show that, to take an example from another non-canonical form, Dashiell Hammett is really as great as Dostoyevsky, and therefore can be admitted. This is to attempt dutifully to wish away all traces of that "pulp" format which is constitutive of sub-genres, and it invites immediate failure insofar as any passionate reader of Dostoyevsky will know at once, after a few pages, that those kinds of satisfactions are not present. Nothing is to be gained by passing over in silence the radical difference of non-canonical texts. The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce; what is more damaging than that, perhaps, is its tendency to remind us of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development and to cause us to conclude that "they are still writing novels like Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson."

A case could be built on this kind of discouragement, with its deep existential commitment to a rhythm of modernist innovation if not fashion-changes; but it would not be a moralizing one—a historicist one, rather, which challenges our imprisonment in the present of postmodernism and calls for a reinvention of the radical difference of our own cultural past and its now seemingly old-fashioned situations and novelties.

But I would rather argue all this a different way, at least for now³: these reactions to third-world texts are at one and the same time perfectly natural, perfectly comprehensible, *and* terribly parochial. If the purpose of the canon is to restrict our aesthetic sympathies, to develop a range of rich and subtle perceptions which can be exercised only on the occasion of a small but choice body of texts, to discourage us from reading anything else or from reading those things in different ways, then it is humanly impoverishing. Indeed our want of sympathy for these often unmodern third-world texts is itself frequently but a disguise for some deeper fear of the affluent about the way people actually live in other parts of the world—a way of life

that still has little in common with daily life in the American suburb. There is nothing particularly disgraceful in having lived a sheltered life, in never having had to confront the difficulties, the complications and the frustrations of urban living, but it is nothing to be particularly proud of either. Moreover, a limited experience of life normally does not make for a wide range of sympathies with very different kinds of people (I'm thinking of differences that range from gender and race all the way to those of social class and culture).

The way in which all this affects the reading process seems to be as follows: as western readers whose tastes (and much else) have been formed by our own modernisms, a popular or socially realistic third-world novel tends to come before us, not immediately, but as though already-read. We sense, between ourselves and this alien text, the presence of another reader, of the Other reader, for whom a narrative, which strikes us as conventional or naive, has a freshness of information and a social interest that we cannot share. The fear and the resistance I'm evoking has to do, then, with the sense of our own non-coincidence with that Other reader, so different from ourselves; our sense that to coincide in any adequate way with that Other "ideal reader"-that is to say, to read this text adequately-we would have to give up a great deal that is individually precious to us and acknowledge an existence and a situation unfamiliar and therefore frightening-one that we do not know and prefer not to know.

Why, returning to the question of the canon, *should* we only read certain kinds of books? No one is suggesting *we should not* read those, but why should we not also read other ones? We are not, after all, being shipped to that "desert island" beloved of the devisers of great books lists. And as a matter of fact-and this is to me the conclusive nail in the argument-we all do "read" many different kinds of texts in this life of ours, since, whether we are willing to admit it not, we spend much of our existence in the force field of a mass culture that is radically different from our "great books" and live at least a double life in the various compartments of our unavoidably fragmented society. We need to be aware that we are even more fundamentally fragmented than that; rather than clinging to this particular mirage of the "centered subject" and the unified personal identity, we would do better to confront honestly the fact of fragmentation on a global scale; it is a confrontation with which we can here at least make a cultural beginning.

A final observation on my use of the term 'third world.' I take the point of criticisms of this expression, particularly those which stress the way in which it obliterates profound differences between a whole range of non-western countries and situations (indeed, one such fundamental opposition-between the traditions of the great eastern empires and those of the post-colonial African nation states is central in what follows). I don't, however, see *any* comparable expression that articulates, as this one does, the fundamental breaks between the capitalist first world, the socialist bloc of the second world, and a range of other countries which have suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism. One can only deplore the ideological implications of oppositions such as that between "developed" and "underdeveloped" or "developing" countries; while the more recent conception of northern and southern tiers, which has a very different ideological content and import than the rhetoric of development, and is used by very different people, nonetheless implies an unquestioning acceptance of "convergence theory"-namely the idea that the Soviet Union and the United

States are from this perspective largely the same thing. I am using the term "third world" in an essentially descriptive sense, and objections to it do not strike me as especially relevant to the argument I am making.

In these last years of the century, the old question of a properly world literature reasserts itself. This is due as much or more to the disintegration of our own conceptions of cultural study as to any very lucid awareness of the great outside world around us. We may therefore-as "humanists"-acknowledge the pertinence of the critique of present-day humanities by our titular leader, William Bennett, without finding any great satisfaction in his embarrassing solution: yet another impoverished and ethnocentric Graeco-Judaic "great books list" of the civilization of the West, "great texts, great minds, great ideas." One is tempted to turn back on Bennett himself the question he approvingly quotes from Maynard Mack: "How long can a democratic nation afford to support a narcissistic *minority* so transfixed by its own image?" Nevertheless, the present moment does offer a remarkable opportunity to rethink our humanities curriculum in a new way-to re-examine the shambles and ruins of all our older "great books," "humanities," "freshman-introductory" and "core course" type traditions.

Today the reinvention of cultural studies in the United States demands the reinvention, in a new situation, of what Goethe long ago theorized as "world literature." In our more immediate context, then, any conception of world literature necessarily demands some specific engagement. with the question of third world literature, and it is this not necessarily narrower subject about which I have something to say today.

It would be presumptuous to offer some general theory of what is often called third-world literature, given the enormous variety both of national cultures in the third world and of specific historical trajectories in each of those areas. All of this, then, is provisional and intended both to suggest specific perspectives for research and to convey a sense of the interest and value of these clearly neglected literatures for people formed by the values and stereotypes of a first-world culture. One important distinction would seem to impose itself at the outset, namely that none of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism-a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization. This, then, is some first sense in which the study of third-world culture necessarily entails a new view of ourselves, from the outside, insofar as we ourselves are (perhaps without fully knowing it) constitutive forces powerfully at work on the remains of older cultures in our general world capitalist system.

But if this is the case, the initial distinction that imposes itself has to do with the nature and development of older cultures at the moment of capitalist penetration, something it seems to me most enlightening to examine in terms of the marxian concept of modes of production. Contemporary historians seem to be in the process of reaching a consensus on the specificity of feudalism as a form which, issuing from the break-up of the Roman Empire or the Japanese Shogunate, is able to develop directly into capitalism.

This is not the case with the other modes of production, which in some sense must be disaggregated or destroyed by violence, before capitalism is able to implant its specific forms and displace the, 'older ones. In the gradual expansion of capitalism across the globe, then, our economic system confronts two very distinct modes of production that pose two very different types of social and cultural resistance to its influence. These are so-called primitive, or tribal society on the one hand, and the Asiatic mode of production--or the great bureaucratic imperial systems on the other. African societies and cultures, as they became the object of systematic colonization in the 1880s, provide the most striking examples of the symbiosis of capital and tribal societies; while China and India offer the principal examples of another and quite different sort of engagement of capitalism with the great empires of the so-called Asiatic mode. My examples below, then, will be primarily African and Chinese; however, the special case of Latin America must be noted to passing. Latin America offers yet a third kind of development--one involving an even earlier destruction of imperial systems now projected by collective memory back into the archaic or tribal. Thus the earlier nominal conquests of independence open them at once to a kind of indirect economic penetration and control--something Africa and Asia will come to experience only more recently with decolonization in the 1950s and 60s.

Having made these initial distinctions, let me now, by way of a sweeping hypothesis, try to say what all third-world cultural productions seem to have in common and what distinguishes them radically from analogous cultural forms in the first world. All-third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national *allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly Western machineries of representation, such as the novel. Let me try to state this distinction in a grossly oversimplified way: one of the determinants of capitalist culture, that is, the culture of the western realist and modernist novel, is a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx. Our numerous theoretical attempts to overcome this great split only reconfirm its existence and its shaping power over our individual and collective lives. We have been trained in a deep cultural conviction that the lived experience of our private existences is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and political dynamics. Politics in our novels therefore is, according to Stendhal's canonical formulation, a "pistol shot in the middle of a concert."

I will argue that, although we may retain for convenience and for analysis such categories as the subjective and the public or political, the relations between them are wholly different in third-world culture. Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic--necessarily project of a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society. Need I add that it is precisely this very different ratio of the political to the personal which makes such texts alien to us at first approach, and consequently, resistant to our conventional western habits of reading?

I will offer, as something like the supreme example of this process of allegorization, the first masterwork of China's greatest writer, Lu Xun, whose neglect in western cultural studies is a matter of shame which no excuses based on ignorance can rectify. "Diary of a Madman" (1918) must at first be read by any western reader as the protocol of what our essentially psychological language terms a "nervous breakdown." It offers the notes and perceptions of a subject in intensifying prey to a terrifying psychic delusion, the conviction that the people around him are concealing a dreadful secret, and that that secret can be none other than the increasingly obvious fact that *they* are cannibals. At the climax of the development of the delusion, which threatens his own physical safety and his very life itself as a potential victim, the narrator understands that his own brother is himself a cannibal and that the death of their little sister, a number of years earlier, far from being the result of childhood illness, as he had thought, was in reality a murder. As befits the protocol of a psychosis, these perceptions are objective ones, which can be rendered without any introspective machinery: the paranoid subject observes sinister glances around him in the real world, he overhears tell-tale conversations between his brother and an alleged physician (obviously in reality another cannibal) which carry all the conviction of the real, and can be objectively (or "realistically" represented. This is not the place to demonstrate in any detail the absolute pertinence, to Lu Xun's case history, of the pre-eminent western or first-world reading of such phenomena, namely Freud's interpretation of the paranoid delusions of Senatspräsident Schreber: an emptying of the world, a radical withdrawal of libido (what Schreber describes as "world-catastrophe"), followed by the attempt to recathect by the obviously imperfect mechanisms of paranoia. "The delusion-formation," Freud explains, "which we take to be a pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction."

What is reconstructed, however, is a grisly and terrifying objective real world beneath the appearances of our own world: an unveiling or deconcealment of the nightmarish reality of things, a stripping away of our conventional illusions or rationalizations about daily life and existence. It is a process comparable, as a literary effect, only to some of the processes of western modernism, and in particular of existentialism, in which narrative is employed as a powerful instrument for the experimental exploration of reality and illusion, an exploration which, however, unlike some of the older realisms, presupposes a certain prior "personal knowledge." The reader must, in other words, have had some analogous experience, whether in physical illness or psychic crisis, of a lived and balefully transformed real world from which we cannot even mentally escape, for the full horror of Lu Xun's nightmare to be appreciated. Terms like "depression" deform such experience by psychologizing it and projecting it back into the pathological Other; while the analogous western literary approaches to this same experience—I'm thinking of the archetypal deathbed murmur of Kurtz, in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," "The horror! the horror!"—recontains precisely that horror by transforming it into a rigorously private and subjective "mood." which can only be designated by recourse to an aesthetic of expression—the unspeakable, unnameable inner feeling, whose external formulation can only designate it from without, like a symptom.

But this representational power of Lu Xun's text cannot be appreciated properly without some sense of what I have called its allegorical resonance. For it should be clear that the cannibalism literally apprehended by the sufferer in the attitudes and bearing of his

family and neighbors is at one and the same time being attributed by Lu Xun himself to Chinese society as a whole: and if this attribution is to be called "figural," it is indeed a figure more powerful and "literal" than the "literal" level of the text. Lu Xun's proposition is that the people of this great maimed and retarded, disintegrating China of the late and post-imperial period, his fellow citizens, are "literally" cannibals: in their desperation, disguised and indeed intensified by the most traditional forms and procedures of Chinese culture, they must devour one another ruthlessly to stay alive. This occurs at all levels of that exceedingly hierarchical society, from lumpens and peasants all the way to the most privileged elite positions in the mandarin bureaucracy. It is, I want to stress, a social and historical nightmare, a vision of the horror of life specifically grasped through History itself, whose consequences go far beyond the more local western realistic or naturalistic representation of cut-throat capitalist or market competition, and it exhibits a specifically political resonance absent from its natural or mythological western equivalent in the nightmare of Darwinian natural selection.

Now I want to offer four additional remarks about this text, which will touch, respectively, on the libidinal dimension of the story, on the structure of its allegory, on the role of the third-world cultural producer himself, and on the perspective of futurity rolected by the tale's double resolution. I will be concerned, in dealing with all four of these topics, to stress the radical structural difference between the dynamics of third-world culture and those of the first-world cultural tradition in which we have ourselves been formed.

I have suggested that in third-world texts such as this story by Lu Xun the relationship between the libidinal and the political components of individual and social experience is radically different from what obtains in the west and what shapes our own cultural forms. Let me try to characterize this difference, or if you like this radical reversah by way of the following generalization: in the west, conventionally, political commitment is recontained and psychologized or subjectivized by way of the public-private split I have already evoked. Interpretations, for example, of political movements of the 60s in terms of Oedipal revolts are familiar to everyone and need no further comment. That such interpretations are episodes in a much longer tradition, whereby political commitment is re-psychologized and accounted for in terms of the subjective dynamics of resentment or the authoritarian personality, is perhaps less well understood, but can be demonstrated by a careful reading of anti-political texts from Nietzsche and Conrad all the way to the latest cold-war propaganda.

What is relevant to our present context is not, however, the demonstration of that proposition, but rather of its inversion in third-world culture, where I want to suggest that psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms. (It is, I hope, unnecessary to add that what follows is speculative and *very* much subject to correction by specialists: it is offered as a methodological example rather than a "theory" of Chinese culture.) We are told, for one thing, that the great ancient imperial cosmologies identify by analogy what we in the west analytically separate: thus, the classical sex manuals are at one with the texts that reveal the dynamics of political forces, the charts of the heavens at one with the logic of medical lore, and so forth." Here already then, in an ancient past, western antinomies-and most particularly that between the

subjective and the public or political-are refused in advance. The libidinal center of Lu Xun's text is, however, not sexuality, but rather the oral stage, the whole bodily question of eating, of ingestion, decoration, incorporation, from which such fundamental categories as the pure and the impure spring. We must now recall, not merely the extraordinary symbolic complexity of Chinese cuisine, but also the central role this art and practice occupies in Chinese culture as a whole. When we find that centrality confirmed by the observation that the very rich Chinese vocabulary for sexual matters is extraordinarily intertwined with the language of eating; and when we observe the multiple uses to which the verb "to eat" is put in ordinary Chinese language (one "eats" a fear or a fright, for example), we may feel in a somewhat better position to sense the enormous sensitivity of this libidinal region, and of Lu Xun's mobilization of it for the dramatization of an essentially social nightmare-something which in a western writer would be consigned to the realm of the merely private obsession, the vertical dimension of the personal trauma.

A different alimentary transgression can be observed throughout Lu Xun's works, but nowhere quite so strikingly as in his terrible little story, "Medicine." The story portrays a dying child-the death of children is a constant in these works-whose parents have the good fortune to procure an "infallible" remedy. At this point we must recall both that traditional Chinese medicine is not "taken," as in the west, but "eaten," and that for Lu Xun traditional Chinese medicine was the supreme locus of the unspeakable and exploitative charlatanism of traditional Chinese culture in general. In his crucially important *Preface* to the first collection of his stories, he recounts the suffering and death of his own father from tuberculosis, while declining family reserves rapidly disappeared into the purchase of expensive and rare, exotic and ludicrous medicaments. We will not sense the symbolic significance of this indignation unless we remember that for all these reasons Lu Xun decided to study western medicine in Japan-the epitome of some new western science that promised collective regeneration-only later to decide that the production of culture-I am tempted to say, the elaboration of a political culture-was a more effective form of political medicine. As a writer, then, Lu Xun remains a diagnostician and a physician. Hence this terrible story, in which the cure for the male child, the father's only hope for survival in future generations, turns out to be one of those large doughy-white Chinese steamed rolls, soaked in the blood of a criminal who has just been executed. The child dies anyway, of course, but it is important to note that the hapless victim of a more properly state violence (the supposed criminal) was a political militant, whose grave is mysteriously covered in flowers by absent sympathizers of whom one knows nothing. In the analysis of a story like this, we must rethink our conventional conception of the symbolic levels of a narrative (where sexuality and politics might be in homology to each other, for instance) as a set of loops or circuits which intersect and overdetermine each other-the enormity of therapeutic cannibalism finally intersecting in a pauper's cemetery, with the more overt violence of family betrayal and political repression.

This new mapping process brings me to the cautionary remark I wanted to make about allegory itself-a form long discredited in the west and the specific target of the Romantic revolution of Wordsworth and Coleridge, yet a linguistic structure which also seems to be experiencing a remarkable reawakening of interest in contemporary literary theory. If allegory has once again become somehow congenial for us today, as over against the

massive and monumental unifications of an older modernist symbolism or even realism itself, it is because the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol. Our traditional conception of allegory-based, for instance, on stereotypes of Bunyan-is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences: this is, so to speak, a one-dimensional view of this signifying process, which might only be set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text.

Here too Lu Xun has some lessons for us. This writer of short stories and sketches, which never evolved into the novel form as such, produced at least one approach to the longer form, in a much lengthier series of anecdotes about a hapless coolie named Ah Q, who comes to serve, as we might have suspected, as the allegory of a certain set of Chinese attitudes and modes of behavior. It is interesting to note that the enlargement of the form determines a shift in tone or generic discourse: now everything that had been stricken with the stillness and emptiness of death and suffering without hope-"the room was not only too silent, it was far too big as well, and the things in it were far too empty" it becomes material for a more properly Chaplinesque comedy. Ah Q's resiliency springs from an unusual-but we are to understand culturally very normal and familiar-technique for overcoming humiliation. When set upon by his persecutors, Ah Q, serene in his superiority over them, reflects: "It is as if I were beaten by my own son. What is the world coming to nowadays . . .' Thereupon he too would walk away, satisfied at having won." Admit that you are not even human. they insist, that you are nothing but an animal! On the contrary, he tells them, I'm worse than an animal, I'm an insect! There, does that satisfy you? "In less than ten seconds, however, Ah Q would walk away also satisfied that he had won, thinking that he was after all 'number one in self-belittlement,' and that after removing the 'self-belittlement' what remained was still the glory of remaining 'number one.' When one recalls the remarkable self-esteem of the Manchu dynasty in its final throes, and the serene contempt for foreign devils who had nothing but modern science, gunboats, armies, technology and power to their credit, one achieves a more precise sense of the historical and social topicality of Lu Xun's satire.

Ah Q is thus, allegorically, China itself. What I want to observe, however, what complicates the whole issue, is that his persecutors-the idlers and bullies who find their daily pleasures in getting a rise out of just such miserable victims as Ah Q-they too are China, in the allegorical sense. This very simple example, then, shows the capacity of allegory to generate a range of distinct meanings or messages, simultaneously, as the allegorical tenor and vehicle change places: Ah Q is China humiliated by the foreigners, a China so well versed in the spiritual techniques of self-justification that such humiliations are not even registered, let alone recalled. But the persecutors are also China, in a different sense, the terrible self-cannibalistic China of the "Diary of a Madman," whose response to powerlessness is the senseless persecution of the weaker and more inferior members of the hierarchy.

All of which slowly brings us to the question of the writer himself in the third world, and to what must be called the function of the intellectual, it being understood that in the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual. No third world lesson is more timely or more urgent for us today, among whom the very term "intellectual" has withered away, as though it were the name for an extinct species. Nowhere has the strangeness of this vacant position been brought home to me more strongly than on a recent trip to Cuba, when I had occasion to visit a remarkable college-preparatory school on the outskirts of Havana. It is a matter of some shame for an American to witness the cultural curriculum in a socialist setting which also very much identifies itself with the third world. Over some three or four years, Cuban teenagers study poems of Homer, Dante's *Inferno*, the Spanish theatrical classics, the great realistic novels of the 19th-century European tradition, and finally contemporary Cuban revolutionary novels, of which, incidentally, we desperately need English translations. But the semester's work I found most challenging was one explicitly devoted to the study of the role of the intellectual as such: the cultural intellectual who is also a political militant, the intellectual who produces both poetry and praxis. The Cuban illustrations of this process—Ho Chi Minh and Augustino Nieto—are obviously enough culturally determined: our own equivalents would probably be the more familiar figures of DuBois and C.L.R. James, of Sartre and Neruda or Brecht, of Kollontai or Louise Michel. But as this whole talk aims implicitly at suggesting a new conception of the humanities in American education today, it is appropriate to add that the study of the role of the intellectual as such ought to be a key component in any such proposals.

I've already said something about Lu Xun's own conception of his vocation, and its extrapolation from the practice of medicine. But there is a great deal more to be said specifically about the Preface. Not only is it one of the fundamental documents for understanding the situation of the third world artist, it is also a dense text in its own right, fully as much a work of art as any of the greatest stories. And in Lu Xun's own work it is the supreme example of the very unusual ratio of subjective investment and a deliberately depersonalized objective narration. We have no time to do justice to those relationships, which would demand a line-by-line commentary. Yet I will quote the little fable by which Lu Xun, responding to requests for publication by his friends and future collaborators, dramatizes his dilemma:

Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will shortly die of suffocation. But you know that since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel the pain of death. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?"

The seemingly hopeless situation of the third-world intellectual in this historical period (shortly after the founding of the Chinese communist party, but also after the bankruptcy of the middle-class revolution had become apparent)—in which no solutions, no forms of praxis or change, seem conceivable—this situation will find its parallel, as we shall see shortly, in the situation of African intellectuals after the achievement of independence, when once again no political solutions seem present or visible on the historical

horizon. The formal or literary manifestation of this political problem is the possibility of narrative closure, something we will return to more specifically.

In a more general theoretical context-and it is this theoretical form of the problem I should now like at least to thematize and set in place on the agenda-we must recover a sense of what "cultural revolution" means, in its strongest form, in the marxist tradition. The reference is not to the immediate events of that violent and tumultuous interruption of the "eleven years" in recent Chinese history, although some reference to Maoism as a doctrine is necessarily implicit. The term, we are told, was Lenin's own, and in that form explicitly designated the literacy campaign and the new problems of universal scholarship and education: something of which Cuba, again, remains the most stunning and successful example in recent history. We must, however, enlarge the conception still further, to include a range of seemingly very different preoccupations, of which the names of Gramsci and Wilhelm Reich, Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse, Rudolph Bahro, and Paolo Freire, may give an indication of their scope and focus. Overhastily, I will suggest that "cultural revolution" as it is projected in such works turns on the phenomenon of what Gramsci called "subalternity," namely the feelings of mental inferiority and habits of subservience and obedience which necessarily and structurally develop in situations of domination-most dramatically in the experience of colonized peoples. But here, as so often, the subjectivizing and psychologizing habits of first-world peoples such as ourselves can play us false and lead us into misunderstandings. Subalternity is not in that sense a psychological matter, although it governs psychologies; and I suppose that the strategic choice of the term "cultural" aims precisely at restructuring that view of the problem and projecting it outwards into the realm of objective or collective spirit in some non-psychological, but also non-reductionist or non-economistic, materialistic fashion. When a psychic structure is objectively determined by economic and political relationships, it cannot be dealt with by means of purely psychological therapies; yet it equally cannot be dealt with by means of purely objective transformations of the economic and political situation itself, since the habits remain and exercise a baleful and crippling residual effect." This is a more dramatic form of that old mystery, the unity of theory and practice; and it is specifically in the context of this problem of cultural revolution (now so strange and alien to us) that the achievements and failures of third-world intellectuals, writers and artists must be replaced if their concrete historical meaning is to be grasped. We have allowed ourselves, as first-world cultural intellectuals, to restrict our consciousness of our life's work to the narrowest professional or bureaucratic terms, thereby encouraging in ourselves a special sense of subalternity and guilt, which only reinforces the vicious circle. That a literary article could be a political act, with real consequences, is for most of us little more than a curiosity of the literary history of Czarist Russia or of modern China itself. But we perhaps should also consider the possibility that as intellectuals we ourselves are at present soundly sleeping in that indestructable iron room, of which Lu Xun spoke, on the point of suffocation.

The matter of narrative closure, then, and of the relationship of a narrative text to futurity and to some collective project yet to come, is not, merely a formal or literary-critical issue. "Diary of a Madman" has in fact two distinct and incompatible endings, which prove instructive to examine in light of the writer's own hesitations and anxieties about his social role. One ending, that of the deluded subject himself, is very much a call to the future, in the

impossible situation of a well-nigh universal cannibalism: the last desperate lines launched into the void are the words, "Save the children . . ." But the tale has a second ending as well, which is disclosed on the opening page, when the older (supposedly cannibalistic) brother greets the narrator with the following cheerful remark: "I appreciate your coming such a long way to see us, but my brother recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post." So, in advance, the nightmare is annulled; the paranoid visionary, his brief and terrible glimpse of the grisly reality beneath the appearance now vouchsafed, gratefully returns to the realm of illusion and oblivion therein again to take up his place in the space of bureaucratic power and privilege. I want to suggest that it is only at this price, by way of a complex play of simultaneous and antithetical messages, that the narrative text is able to open up a concrete perspective on the real future.