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Loyalty and Betrayal

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Panel: Loyalty and Betrayal

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Loyalty and Betrayal

By Chi Li (China)

Without a specific "subject," loyalty and betrayal for me is only a pair of concepts that float in an abstract space of literature. For instance, a language instructor might use them in class as an example of a pair of antonyms. But if I'm going to find a subject to apply these two words to, then that subject should be a military man. Because the responsibility of a military man is simple: he has his own absolute master to serve. For this master, loyalty is this military man's virtue, while betrayal is his sin. For a military man, moral standards are regimented.

But literature has no place within the sphere of war. This is exactly why literature is invaluable. Military conflicts are one kind of war, but politics or economy can be other kinds. As long as national boundaries continue to be demarcated and there are resources and profits to scramble for, war will go on existing in various forms. If you look carefully, you would notice that there are lots of wars in our lives. For example, the endless war between smokers and non-smokers. Smokers infringe the right of non-smokers to a smoke-free environment. By instituting the laws, non-smokers, in turn, deprive the right of smokers to smoke. Obviously, this antagonism will never end. Maybe these wars without arms don't threaten our lives, but somehow they are more common and more serious; they happen all around us. Children can't choose their parents. A person can't choose their ethnicity. Marriage can be seen as a war between two people. Society at large does not judge people on a case by case basis. There are only necessary, inevitable laws and regulations to enforce. At times, they seem to be more authoritarian than democratic. Moreover, in any configuration of society or in any group of people, there are innumerable ethical norms and social mores waiting to pounce. Sometimes you're asked to be loyal; sometimes you're forced to betray. In some cases, loyalty is a virtue but in other cases betrayal is a virtue. Sometimes lying is smart; sometimes it is foolish. This indeterminacy causes anxiety, depression and insomnia. It makes you break down, or forces you to make a decision. So let me quote Chang Eileen, "Life is short but the struggle is long."

Because of these uncertainties, literature is born in the lives of people. In literary works, the only protagonist is life itself-- the fleeting and suffering life is the sole sovereign. The only value of literature is to understand the aesthetic depth of life. Is there any other framework? No! Literature and reality don't belong to the same symbolic system. The magical, dream-like pen of literature is born to sneak into souls, to respect various desires, to get rid of restrictions, to help people survive. It surpasses all kinds of wars and tries to probe into the deepest reaches of humanity, to liberate the basest ideas, to comfort the ugliest wounds, to understand the strangest actions, and to show the value of equality. Only in literature can the most degraded man be the noblest, shining forth everlastingly.

Literature is the free kingdom of a person's thoughts. When we write and read, we only need to follow our hearts to create or appreciate a work. When we study a work, what we need to focus on is what the writer's thoughts are, what his insights are, or how he writes. For example, Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was translated and published in China in 1987. I don't know whether it is the publisher that gives this book many moral tags or if it is Kundera's writing that caters to them. Since it isn't written in my mother tongue, I can't tell. But the emotional entanglement of Thomas, his wife Theresa and his mistress Sabina is

labeled with many moral tags and one of them is "loyalty and betrayal". Strangely, most of the textual analyses only focus on the themes of nationalistic politics, social ideologies, and concepts of marriage in the novel. If there is any merit to approach a work in this way, I would say that it is easier for critics to comment on a work or to give a lecture about it. But my personal intuition told me that the problem comes from there being too many labels on Kundera's work, labels with which I cannot really identify. I prefer the other Czech writer, Bohumil Hrabal, for his works are hard to be dissected into any binary concepts. This is more in line with my understanding of literature and with my philosophy of writing.

说说“忠诚与背叛”

池莉

如果在主语缺席的情况之下，“忠诚于背叛”，仅仅只是一对概念。一对停留在文字空间的概念。比如语文老师会在课堂上讲授：它们是一对反义词。如果说我们需要运用这对反义词了，那么最恰如其分的主语，应该就是军人。因为军人的职责最单纯，军人拥有自己绝对的效忠者，对于这个效忠者来说：忠诚是军人的德，背叛是军人的罪。道德标准在军人身上，就是这么黑白分明。

而文学，不是战争。这正是文学的可贵之处。打仗固然是战争，政治或者经济何尝又不是战争呢？在这个地球上，只要有国家和领土的划分，有资源和利益的获得与失去，战争就会以各种形式存在。其实各种形式的战争时刻发生在我们身边，比如抽烟者与非抽烟者的战争，从来就没有停止过。主动吸烟者剥夺了被动吸烟者不愿意吸烟的人身自由，被动吸烟者剥夺了主动吸烟者愿意吸烟的人身自由，显而易见，这场敌对，将永无止境。也许没有硝烟的战争对人类生命的戕害，更为严重和普遍，它们就发生在我们身边乃至我们自己身上。婴儿无法选择父母、个人无法选择种族、婚姻在很大程度上可以说是两个人的战争、社会对于个人来说不管合情合理，只有必须，必须充满强行的管理制度，甚至显然是很不好的专制制度。更有甚者，在任何社会形态里、在任何人群中，都会产生多如牛毛的道德标准，对每一个人都虎视眈眈：你可以这样，你不可以那样。你应该忠诚，或者，你应该背叛。有时候，忠诚是美德；有时候，背叛是美德。有时候，说谎是机智；有时候，说谎是愚蠢。于是，焦虑来了，不安来了，抑郁来了，紧张失眠来了，痛哭流涕来了，难以抉择的抉择来了。的确，人啊人，“长的是磨难，短的是生命”！

那么，可贵的文学也就与人类生命如影随形地来了。在文学里，我们短暂而多难的生命，成为唯一的自我主宰。文学唯一的价值和关注，除了对个体生命的深度审美还有别的什么条条框框和评价标准吗？没有！应该没有！当然没有！文学与现实社会，根本就不是同一个话语体系。文学这支梦幻般的魔术之笔，就是用来挣脱锁链、尊重欲望、消除禁锢，超度苦难的。文学以它超越所有战争的形式，用它柔软绵长的触角，探索个人灵魂的最深处、释放最卑贱的念头、抚慰最丑陋的疮疤、理解最怪异的举动，昭示最平等的生命价值-----只有在文学里，最低贱的人也可以成为最高贵的，并光芒永恒。

文学是个人精神世界的自由王国，我们写作与阅读，往往只用心领神会。我们评判一部文学作品，更应该是研究和探讨这个作家他具有怎样的思想能力？怎样的洞察力？以及怎样的运用文字能力？例如米兰昆德拉的小说《不能承受的生命之轻》，1987年在中国翻译出版，我不知道是被推介者贴上了很多道德标签，还是昆德拉的写作暗暗迎合了某些道德标签，因为不是我的母语，我无法判断。总之小说描写的托马斯与妻子特丽莎和情人萨宾娜的一段情感纠葛，被贴上的却是俗世行为的道德标签，标签之一就是“忠诚与背叛”，小说的文本分析奇怪地在国家政治、社会意识形态以及婚姻概念中展开。如果说这样面对文学有优点的话，那么唯一的优点就是：小说更加易于文学评论者以他们熟悉的话语方式写评论文章或者在课堂上授课。至少我个人的阅读直觉告诉我，我正是因此而不喜欢昆德拉。同样是捷克作家的翻译小说，我当然更喜欢另一位小说家赫拉巴尔。正是因为赫拉巴尔的小说绝无简单的“忠诚于背叛”之类标签，我感觉这就对了。这就更加符合我对文学的理解，以及我个人的写作宗旨。

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