

Three Representations of Madness in the Crazed

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ABSTRACT. *The Crazed, centering on the June Fourth incident in 1989, is one of the most controversial novels written by Ha Jin, in which the author successfully reproduces a distorted and depressive world with individuals of contorted souls. This paper aims to probe into the relationship between individual and authority through analyzing three major kinds of madness depicted in the novel, and researches how madness reveals, sustains and challenges the political rationality (or power relationship) of the society.*

KEYWORDS: *Madness; Power; Foucault; Ha Jin; Modern China*

1. Introduction

The Crazed, Ha Jin's another masterpiece after the award-winning Waiting, is supposed to take him more than ten years to finish, while the publishing of which finally pays off and once again indicates his exceptional talent in novel-writing[1]. Though well received by the western readers and critics, the work turns out to invoke controversial responses in the mainland of China, possibly for the politically sensitive incidents involved in it. However, this does not belittle the virtues of the novel in depicting the individual's struggles under a certain oppressive background [2].

The novel centers around the crazed professor Yang who constantly betrays "forbidden" truths and Beijing's "6·4" incident in 1989, ingeniously married by the gradually awakening protagonist Jian Wan. With a fluid, vivid and exciting narration, Ha Jin successfully reproduces a distorted and depressive world with individuals of contorted souls. Under this context, it becomes inclined to provoke our rethinking over the relationship between individual and authority, or in Michel Foucault's word, subject and power. Honestly, to uncover and interpret the core issues of the novel, it will inevitably encounter the power relation concealed in the social activities. What is really intelligent and impressive about The Crazed just consists in its reveal of this power relation through the contrast of madness and rationality. For this concern, the paper will probe into three representations of madness related to power, that is madness that reveals, sustains and challenges the political rationality (or power relationship). But before conducting the analysis, I'd like to expound the relations between madness and power, concerning it a necessity to justify the further researches[3].

2. Madness as a product of power

Madness is not a natural phenomenon. For a rather long time, however, it has been pathologically treated as a common disease, a disorder of the human body to be cured, until Michel Foucault poses his opinion from the perspective of power who concluded that the rise of madness means “reason's subjugation of non-reason, wresting from it its truth as madness, crime, or disease.”(Madness ix) Tracing back to the original “narrenschiff” (the ship of fools) to means of confinement that varies from the hospital general and workhouse to asylum, Foucault, in his *Madness and Civilization*, researches deep into the evolution of power over individuals represented by so called “reason”. In fact, madness since its birth has been put in the same category along with poor vagabonds, criminals, and "deranged minds", all in a way whether conflicting or failing to accord with the reason of the majority. While this kind of reason, in other terms, actually refers to the “order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity.”(Foucault, *Madness* x) Succumbing to the authority of reason, madness eventually is distinguished from the normal and in the meantime constantly prompted to restorations of rationality[4]. That just sheds light upon madness's inferior status in the world, where the crazed are always treated as juvenile whereas the doctors or the normal people sustain the fatherhood to them. (Foucault, *Madness* 254) Foremost, the complex and sophisticated power network behind the phenomenon, in some way should deserve our examination.

In regard to the Crazed, the behaviors and discourses of the insane characters are also with some distinctions, for which they cannot easily be boiled down to disorders of the mind. To be exact, the madness in the novel is endowed with more socially implied meanings by Ha Jin. A lot of questions can be raised around the madness, like are the words of professor Yang of total absurdity or of profound truth? What does make professor Yang insane? Then what is the cause of Little Owl's madness? Why does the hero Jian Wan at last become “crazed”? And above all, are the average persons and their ordinary life really normal? One cannot steer clear of these issues in order to fully interpret the implications of madness.

3. Madness that reveals the power relationship

In any sense, Professor Yang should be granted the priority when it comes to madness in the *Crazed*. Professor Yang, the backbone of the literature department, always seems upright and respectable, enjoying high prestige in academia, who is also in charge of the college's journal. Starting with Yang's collapse of mind, the novel develops with truths exposed in succession by his delirious ravings, thus forming a stark and shocking contrast to the image when he is not bereft of “reason”. Some natural traits of Young long hidden by power are thus revealed:

Wish for power. “When Mr. Yang was in his right mind, he had never appeared keen about any official position. Many times he told me to be detached and disinterested, which he believed was the only proper way of pursuing scholarship.”(Jin 104) However, the madness anyway betrays his inner true attitude

toward power. Clues can be found early in Yang's own creation of *Genesis*, in which the donkeys prefer a shorter life for less torment in contrast to humans who prays for a longer one so as to enjoy. A clear and in-depth knowledge of the social reality honestly is revealed by this fancy, that is, the seeming obedience and contentment of the donkeys is merely a mirage created by humans who have the absolute edge in power over them. It to some extent indicates Yang's soberness of power's effect and the harsh reality: people in the lower class are always subject to the ones in the higher class, like the fish and meat to the cleaver and knife. Professor Yang's eager for power also finds expression in his fondness of ancient classic poems. Digging into it, Yang actually is more obsessed with "the traditional ideal—the union of the official life and scholarly life"(Jin 125) than the poems themselves. As the protagonist Jian Wan remarks his feudalistic mind-set, "many people want the power to rule others; Mr. Yang was no exception." (Jin 126) Moreover, Yang's eager for power is also corroborated by his frequent old red songs that advocate the class struggle, to which he has been the victim and maltreated as the class enemy—"Oppressed for decades, now he dreamed of ruling others." (Jin 101)

Desire for materials. Before the stroke, Professor Yang "tends" to disdain and keep aloof from material pursuit, and once advised Jian to be "rich in our hearts, content to be a Don Quixote" (Jin 67), as a response of scholar to the material mundanity. But the later madness once more gives his heart away, meanwhile revealing the academic truth long blanketed by the reason of state. After finishing Tu Fu's poem about poverty and patriotism, Yang blubbers, "I only have a one-bedroom apartment. Give me one of those mansions! Where are they? I shall be a professor of the first rank, absolutely qualified for such a residence."(Jin 135) The exclamation, truth to tell, is quite sarcastic and ironic, given the fact that the ancient great poets like Tu Fu possibly were well provided, with money and provisions donated by the powerful nobility. Hence what proposes the scholars to keep distance from police and material desires deserves further examination, behind which there might still exist a kind of reason or power exercising over the civilians. In a way, professor Yang gives an inspiring clue to it: "the belief that he (Tu Fu) lived in dire poverty could just be a sentimental invention, meant to comfort poor scholars and intellectuals like us." (Jin, 134) Discovering such a truth, it is no wonder that Yang asks for materials, someway as a sign of rebellion against the long term's "deception".

Lust. If dreams for power and materials can be after all accepted as the human nature that does not much hurt, Yang's release of erotic feelings and the illicit love could totally ruin his image. "Your nipples taste like coffee candy. Mmmm... ah, let me have them again." (Jin 48) The language he uses when he is out of reason is obscure yet instinct, an evident manifestation of the insane. To be more shocking, his mistress turns out to be his student Weiya who is so young that can be a daughter to him in terms of age. The teacher-student and extramarital love definitely exposes Yang to moral criticisms, indicating his responsibility for the broken marriage with Meimei's mother. Is professor Yang still of integrity and credit? Now it is in doubt.

Vanity. Professor Yang can never be more candid when he mentally collapses. However, it is through the very candidness that his vanity is manifested. For

example, “with youngsters around him, Mr. Yang changed altogether. He was no longer a crazed patient, but instead returned to his former self—a powerful, wise, fatherly teacher. It was as if there were a switch in his head which he could flip on and off to alter his personalities.” (Jin 198) It seems that Yang has become accustomed to brag of his attainments before the students, sometimes by addressing in a way beyond the reach of his audience to win their adorations. Even not knowing English at all, he still takes delight in monologue that carries his own understanding. In brief, Yang is addicted to wearing masks.

The list of what Yang’s madness uncovers may go on, but it is time to ponder over the cause to his normality and insanity. Or in other words, what is it that distinguishes the two conditions of the same person? Following Michel Foucault’s theory, the key to Yang’s madness will come down to the reason of state rather than individual’s rationality. In his opinion, we do all things “not only on the ground of universal rules of behavior but also on the specific ground of a historical rationality” (Political Tech 405), namely the “reason of state”. Then generated by this kind of reason, the “police”, as a technique to obtain individuals’ political rationality, comes into being, gradually extends and becomes more and more fine and invisible, along with the evolutions of the existence-mode of power. And the “police” has developed to a point to govern not by articles of law but by a permanent and positive intervention on the citizens. (Foucault, Political Tech 415) As a result, every one lives with yet not necessarily realizes the “police” and the “reason of state”, by virtue of which we make decisions and compose responses to the others and the world. Once some one’s behaviors conflict with the rules of this police, he or she will fall to “sentences”, criticism, and marginalization, labeled as whether criminals or the insane.

In terms of Yang, his madness at first means a set of performance that goes against the reason, including daydreaming, singing red songs, and talking nonsense. But on the other hand, his madness manifests the oppressive sides of the reason, revealing the power relationship not merely between the insane and the normal, but between the individual and state. Whatever desires for materials and power or vanity, they are all the other side coin of reason and power. The point one has to accord his attention here is that the power over Yang’s madness is the least exclusive, but instead common to each members in the society. The only difference lies in the fact that the insane sometimes and someday will expose it, as Foucault puts, “if folly leads each man into a blindness where he is lost, the madman, on the contrary, reminds each man of his truth.” (Madness 14)

4. Madness that sustains the power relationship

It has been mentioned that both the power relationship and the reason of state are ubiquitous and invisible, therefore any deeds that whether sustain or contradict them in most cases are likely to take place without awareness. Here I’d like to take the Little Owl, another madman in the *Crazed*, as an instance to probe into the cases of sustaining the power relationship by individuals.

The Little Owl was once a chemistry teacher but was arrested and sent away to the prison as a rightist in the late 1950s. To avoid the torment of the convicts, he managed to survive by feigning mad. However, for ages of feigning, he has finally lost control of himself by the release and become truly insane, who continues to curse and rave every day. His discourses in reality are nothing but a repetition of asserting his positive political affiliation, possibly for a shadow of the past. The songs he sings all belong to these red ones, and the remarks he makes all cater to the class struggles.

But people like Little Owl never appears to live a hard life, in Jian Wan's eyes, "who were well treated because they incurred no jealousy, posed no threat to anyone, and made no trouble for the authorities—they were model citizens through and through." (Jin 92) So what leads to this phenomenon? Put it in short, Little Owl is benefiting from his constant wielding of what Foucault calls "disciplinary power", which "imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility." (Discipline 187) The quotes from the government leader and other influential political publicity in his speech, to a degree, serve as an embodiment of the power of the authority, which not only offer protections but advantages. It is reflected in the canteen scene. When Jian Wan gets bored by Little Owl's entanglement and asks him to get away, Little Owl responds with Chairman Mao's lines to coerce Jian who at last has to share his eggs to resolve the argument. Besides, he also "remarks" on politics, such as the war between China and Russia, taking a steadfast stance with the authority by claiming the fall of the reactionaries. Every time Little Owl's ravings, despite seemingly absurd, provokes a sort of examination in the hearers who would like to inspect their own deeds, thus enhancing the community's reason of state as well as corroborating the specific power relationship.

Actually, Little Owl is not unique in playing such a role. Professor Yang, secretary Peng and even Jian Wan all function similarly in the network of power relationship, on the one hand as the oppressed, on the other hand as the guardian. The individuals of the community cooperate to build up a large net of "surveillance", namely a model of "panopticon" (originally referring to a prison made of purpose where one in the periphery is totally seen without seeing while the guardian in the central seeing everything without being seen), in which everyone is carefully fabricated in according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. Our actual situation is reduced to this: "we are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism." (Foucault, Discipline 217) As a consequence, it becomes less and less possible to challenge and shake the power system.

5. Madness that challenges the power relationship

There is a quote that has been world widely acknowledged, saying that where there is repression, there is resistance. The same is true of power, as Michel Foucault addresses, "every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle." (Subject 346) In regard to the Crazy, there is another representation of

madness in taking a head-on confrontation rather than merely uncovering or sustaining the power relationship, for the analysis of which the protagonist Jian Wan will be given more consideration who is gradually awakening and finally takes actions to revolt.

Jian Wan, a postgraduate in literature indifferent to politics, once determined to get the PhD in Beijing University which will offer him the reunion with his fiancée Meimei. In the beginning, he is innocently looking forward to a pure and lofty academic life, reflected in his arguing with Banping who chooses to be a clerk in the government. However, the madness of professor Yang, by unconsciously recovering the truth of academia, starts to destabilize his decision. “Nothing is serious in the academic game, just a play of words and sophistries”. (Jin 221) The scholars of this country in the nature are no different from the clerks and even inferior as the meat in the chopping board. That in a way spurs Jian to come back to the earth and ponder over his situation. A deeper knowledge of the world is then gained by his experience in the remote and poor village as well as in a new restaurant where it witnesses the oppressive and miserable life of individuals at the bottom of the society. To be worse, the doom eventually comes to roost on him. Meimei turns her back on Jian and chooses the nephew of Mrs. Peng who has a more promising background; and Jian’s dream to be an official also evaporates for his identity as a non-communist. He somehow feels the “indestructible cocoon” (a metaphorical image of the power relationship) that cages him, and therefore recklessly joins the parade to Beijing as a way to revolt. Hitherto, Jian Wan is going against the “reason of state” as he remarks, “I was crazed, unable to think logically, and was possessed by an intense desire to prove that I was a man capable of action and choice.”(Jin 295)

According to Foucault, there are basically three types of struggles: “against forms of domination”, “against forms of exploitation”, “against subjection” and “forms of subjectivity and submission”. (Subject 331) As to Jian Wan and other activists in the parade, their motives seem to be complex and multiple. But this confrontation against police, whatever type it may be, can never be “inscribed in history except by the effects that it induces on the entire network in which it is caught up.”(Foucault, Discipline 27) Ironically, the vigorous movement Jian participates, despite originally sensational, briefly “fades” away with the intervention of People’s Liberation Army, as if nothing has ever happened. The world once again sees the demonstration of its power and the restoration of “civilization” of its subjects. In a word, madness succumbs to the reason as ever.

In the end, I’d like to take a quote from Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* to conclude: “by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself. What is necessarily a profanation in the work of art returns to that point, and, in the time of that work swamped in madness, the world is made aware of its guilt.”(288) It may in a sense imply the intentions behind the three presentations of madness in Ha Jin’s work, i.e. a marginalized reflection on China’s status quo in the 1980s.

Reference

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