

Lu Xun – Selected Works – Volume One
Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang
Foreign Languages Press, Beijing

Excerpts

As to why I wrote [stories], I still felt...that I should write in the hope of enlightening my people, for humanity, and of the need to better it.... My aim was to expose the disease and draw attention to it so that it might be cured.

I did my best to avoid all wordiness. If I felt I had made my meaning sufficiently clear, I was glad to dispense with frills. The old Chinese theatre has no scenery, and the New Year pictures sold to children show a few main pictures only.... Convinced that such methods suit my purpose, I did not indulge in irrelevant details and kept the dialogue down to a minimum.

I forget who it was that said that the best way to convey a man's character with a minimum of strokes is to draw his eyes. This is absolutely correct. If you draw all the hairs of his head, no matter how accurately, it will not be of much use.

After finishing something, I always read it through twice, and where a passage grated on my ears I would add or cut a few words to make it read smoothly. When I could not find suitable vernacular expressions I used classical ones, hoping some readers would understand. And I seldom used phrases out of my own head which I alone -- or not even I -- could comprehend.