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Madness and Modernity: Satire, Allegory, and Revolution in Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary"

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Abstract:

Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary" (1918), a pioneering work of modern Chinese literature, uses the lens of madness to diagnose the ideological illnesses plaguing Chinese society at the turn of the 20th century. Published amid the New Culture Movement, the story employs satire and allegory to interrogate Confucian orthodoxy, feudal morality, and the broader cultural structures sustaining systemic oppression. This paper explores how Lu Xun's narrative strategy transforms madness into a vehicle for modern consciousness,

revolutionizing literary form through the use of vernacular language and subjectivity. Drawing on close readings of the text and critical perspectives from scholars such as William Lyell, Leo Ou-fan Lee, and Xiaobing Tang, this research investigates the interplay between madness and modernity, positioning Lu Xun's work as a manifesto for intellectual and cultural renewal.

Keywords: Lu Xun, "A Madman's Diary", Confucianism, New Culture Movement, satire, allegory, vernacular Chinese, modernity, madness, Chinese literature



Introduction

In 1918, Lu Xun published “A Madman’s Diary”, a short story that would come to symbolize the birth of modern Chinese literature. Set during a time of intense social and political transformation, the work reflects Lu Xun’s deep disillusionment with China’s feudal traditions and moral structures. His portrayal of madness through a protagonist convinced that his society is engaged in cannibalism, acts as a vehicle for a profound critique of Confucian values, exposing their complicity in violence, oppression, and the erosion of individual autonomy. The diary structure, combined with the use of baihua (vernacular Chinese), marks a radical departure from classical literature and signifies the advent of modern literary consciousness in China. Lu Xun’s choice of form and content situates the work within the larger cultural currents of the New Culture Movement. By critiquing Confucianism, deploying modernist techniques, and utilizing accessible language, Lu Xun’s story calls for a fundamental transformation of Chinese identity. The protagonist's descent into madness parallels the nation's own existential crisis, signaling both the breakdown of old systems and the necessity of radical renewal.

Historical Context and the New Culture Movement

To understand the radicalism embedded in Lu Xun’s “A Madman’s Diary”, it is essential to situate the work within the historical and intellectual upheaval of early twentieth-century China. The fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 marked the end of over two millennia of imperial rule and ushered in the Republican era a period characterized by political fragmentation, warlordism, and a crisis of national identity. Amid this chaos, a group of progressive intellectuals initiated what came to be known as the “New Culture Movement” (1915–1925), a cultural and ideological revolution that sought to dismantle the old Confucian order and promote new ideals of science, democracy, individual rights, and social reform. Lu Xun (born Zhou Shuren) emerged as a central figure in this movement, though his path to literature was not linear. Initially trained as a doctor in Japan, Lu Xun abandoned medicine after concluding that China’s most urgent need was not physical healing but spiritual and ideological awakening. As he famously stated, “What China most needs is the medicine for the soul.” He turned



to literature as a means of diagnosing and treating the spiritual ailments of the Chinese people. “A Madman’s Diary”, published in 1918 in the influential journal “New Youth” (新青年), was his first vernacular story and a foundational text for modern Chinese literature (Lee 121).

The “New Culture Movement” represented a revolt against the conservative orthodoxy that had long governed Chinese thought and behavior. Traditional Confucianism, with its emphasis on filial piety, social harmony, and hierarchical relationships, was increasingly viewed by reformers as a major impediment to modernization. The movement’s proponents including Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun advocated for the replacement of classical Chinese (文言文) with “baihua” (白话文), or vernacular Chinese, to make literature more accessible and expressive of contemporary realities. Xiaobing Tang notes that this shift in language was not merely stylistic but ideological: “Lu Xun constructed a new symbolic order through vernacular language to critique the classical world” (Tang 1228).

In this context, “A Madman’s Diary” was revolutionary in both form and content. Its critique of Confucianism was not subtle; the story presents a dystopian society in which centuries of ritual and tradition culminate in cannibalism a grotesque but apt metaphor for the systemic exploitation and dehumanization inherent in feudal structures. By couching this critique within a fragmented diary of a supposedly insane man, Lu Xun was able to dramatize the psychological toll of living under such a regime, while also hinting at the broader societal madness of clinging to outdated moral codes. Thus, Lu Xun’s story operates not just as a narrative but as a “manifesto”. It aligns perfectly with the goals of the New Culture Movement: to expose the ideological rot at the heart of Chinese tradition and to awaken a critical, modern consciousness among its readers. The diary’s publication marked the beginning of a new chapter in Chinese literature one in which language, identity, and morality would be contested and reshaped.



Satire and the Politics of Irony

One of the most potent narrative tools Lu Xun employs in “A Madman’s Diary” is “satire“, which he uses not for comedic effect but as a sharp weapon of ideological critique. Through the madman’s eyes, readers witness a world distorted by paranoia, where cannibalism becomes both a literal fear and a metaphor for social and moral decay. This grotesque vision allows Lu Xun to satirize the oppressive traditions and dehumanizing social hierarchies of Confucian feudalism, revealing their inner logic as inherently exploitative. In doing so, the story participates in a larger revolutionary project: undermining the authority of inherited values by exposing their absurdities. At the center of this satirical strategy is the protagonist’s growing conviction that everyone around him is complicit in a centuries-old conspiracy of cannibalism. Initially, the madman suspects only strangers and neighbors. As his fear intensifies, he comes to believe that his own family particularly his brother has participated in this horrific tradition. This progression highlights the “erosion of trust” that occurs when society is governed not by reason or empathy but by obedience to inhumane customs. The satire is most biting when it turns inward: the madman reads classical Chinese texts and claims to find veiled references to eating people. By reinterpreting canonical literature through his distorted lens, the madman mirrors the reformist project of rereading and reinterpreting tradition in order to reveal its latent violence.

William Lyell offers a compelling interpretation of this technique, stating that Lu Xun “equated Confucian morality with symbolic cannibalism, exposing the dehumanizing elements of social hierarchies” (Lyell 22). In this framework, filial piety often regarded as the cornerstone of Chinese ethical life is not a virtue but a system of “moral consumption”, where younger generations are symbolically sacrificed to uphold patriarchal authority. The satire here is brutal and relentless: in Lu Xun’s telling, to revere one’s elders uncritically is to participate in an intergenerational cycle of repression and self-annihilation. Irony permeates the entire structure of the story. It is evident not only in the content but also in the form. The narrative is framed by a brief note from an unnamed editor or doctor, who claims to have recovered the madman’s diary and presents it as a case of psychological



illness. This frame casts doubt on the narrator's credibility while also creating a critical distance between the reader and the madman's voice. Yet as the diary progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to dismiss the protagonist's insights as mere delusion. His perception of society as complicit in metaphorical cannibalism, while exaggerated, carries a "moral truth" that rational, "sane" characters fail to grasp. The irony lies in the question the story poses: Who is truly mad the individual who sees the cruelty in everyday social norms, or the society that normalizes that cruelty?

Leo Ou-fan Lee observes that "Lu Xun's satire does not offer comfort; it is intended to provoke unease and force reflection" (Lee 126). The discomfort created by "A Madman's Diary" is deliberate. It urges readers to question long-held beliefs and to recognize the violence lurking beneath the surface of social harmony. The story satirizes not only Confucianism but also the broader tendency of Chinese society to prioritize conformity over conscience.

Ultimately, satire in "A Madman's Diary" functions as a destabilizing force. It dismantles the authority of traditional values by exposing their grotesque consequences and challenges readers to confront their own complicity in systems of oppression. By placing this critique in the mouth of a supposed madman, Lu Xun leverages irony to deepen the story's impact. The reader is left to consider whether madness is, in fact, a form of clarity in a world built on delusion.

Allegory and Cultural Critique

At the heart of "A Madman's Diary" lies an unsettling yet powerful allegory: cannibalism as a symbol of cultural decay and systemic oppression. Lu Xun's story does not merely use the grotesque image of people eating one another for shock value. Instead, the metaphor functions as a profound and multifaceted cultural critique, targeting not just outdated social customs but the very ideological core of traditional Chinese civilization. Cannibalism, in this context, becomes a metaphor for the way Chinese society particularly under Confucianism has consumed individuality, critical thought, and moral autonomy for the sake of social harmony and hierarchical stability. The madman's central epiphany "People have been eating each other for thousands of years" is not a literal accusation but a figurative indictment of "institutionalized moral cannibalism". This revelation encapsulates Lu Xun's



view that the Confucian social order functions by feeding off the vitality and freedom of its people. It does so under the guise of virtue, tradition, and respectability. The metaphor of eating becomes an apt vehicle for illustrating how oppressive traditions disguise exploitation as morality. It is through this layered allegory that Lu Xun directs his most scathing critique against not just individual actors, but the “very cultural logic” that enables such violence. A particularly chilling dimension of the allegory emerges when the madman begins to suspect that “classical texts” contain secret messages about cannibalism. He reads between the lines of revered Confucian documents and believes they tacitly endorse the practice of eating human flesh. Although clearly paranoid, the madman’s readings mirror the deconstructive efforts of reformist intellectuals who, during the New Culture Movement, sought to reinterpret Confucian classics as instruments of ideological control. According to Vera Schwarcz, Lu Xun “used allegory to invert the revered texts, making them emblems of violence rather than virtue” (Schwarcz 61). This literary strategy serves not only as satire but as a method of cultural “iconoclasm” shattering the sacredness of tradition by exposing its capacity for harm.

The allegorical nature of the story also deepens when the madman suspects that his “own brother”, once trusted, is part of the cannibalistic conspiracy. This betrayal is not just personal but symbolic. It demonstrates the extent to which Confucian familial structures supposedly built on mutual obligation and respect can also enforce “obedience, silence, and submission”. The family, in this reading, becomes a microcosm of a society that feeds on the weak, particularly those who dare to think differently. As Xiaobing Tang explains, “The family is no longer a source of protection, but a site of ideological reproduction” (Tang 1232).

Another dimension of the allegory is its “timelessness”. The madman’s claim that people have been cannibalizing one another for thousands of years suggests that this is not a modern aberration but a long-standing cultural pathology. By framing this critique as a disease of history, Lu Xun indicts the entire civilizational arc that has culminated in the present moment. The past, far from being a source of moral wisdom, is revealed to be a repository of horror that must be confronted and overcome. In this sense, the story does not merely lament the present but calls for a radical break from the past a



revolutionary reimagining of what Chinese society could be. The use of allegory opens up a universal dimension to the story. While grounded in the specific sociopolitical context of early 20th century China, the metaphor of cannibalism transcends its immediate setting. It can be interpreted as a critique of all societies that consume their members whether through class exploitation, racial oppression, or ideological conformity. This broader applicability is part of what makes “A Madman’s Diary” so enduring in its relevance. As Yvonne Chang argues, “Lu Xun’s allegory of cannibalism functions both as a national allegory and as a universally intelligible critique of oppressive cultures” (Chang 48).

The allegorical framework of “A Madman’s Diary” is what transforms it from a story of individual madness into a political and philosophical statement. Through the lens of cannibalism, Lu Xun lays bare the mechanisms of cultural violence, revealing how societies justify exploitation in the name of virtue. His critique is not merely aimed at corrupt individuals but at the deep structures of tradition that sustain systemic injustice. By forcing readers to confront these uncomfortable truths, the story demands not just awareness, but transformation.

Madness as Modern Consciousness

In “A Madman’s Diary”, Lu Xun reconfigures madness not as a clinical disorder, but as a radical form of insight, a state of heightened awareness in a world built on denial, repression, and illusion. The madman is not simply a tragic figure; he is a modern subject, one who has begun to see through the ideological illusions that structure his society. His descent into madness is simultaneously a movement toward truth. In this way, Lu Xun aligns with a broader literary and philosophical tradition, seen in the works of “Dostoevsky, Gogol, and Nietzsche”, where madness functions as a rupture in consensus reality, offering a critical consciousness denied to the so-called sane.

Lu Xun’s protagonist is labeled mad by others in his community. He is marginalized, feared, and eventually isolated. Yet as the narrative unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that this man alone perceives the violent underpinnings of everyday life. His paranoid suspicion that everyone around him, including family, friends, and doctors, is involved in cannibalism can be read not as a delusion, but as a metaphorical truth. According to Leo Ou-fan Lee, the madman’s vision reveals “a newly



awakened sense of self-awareness, but at the price of social alienation” (Lee 130). In this sense, madness becomes a form of estrangement from a society built on repression a symptom of awakening rather than pathology.

The madman’s condition unfolds gradually. His paranoia intensifies with each diary entry, but so does the depth of his introspection. He begins to question his own role in perpetuating the very system he condemns. At one point, he wonders whether he, too, has partaken in the metaphorical cannibalism of others. This self-doubt introduces a powerful moment of ethical clarity, marking a shift from merely diagnosing societal ills to interrogating his own complicity. As David Der-wei Wang argues, “Lu Xun’s madman becomes the prototype of the modern Chinese intellectual, who is not only a social critic but also a self-critic” (Wang 202). This inner transformation distinguishes the madman as a modern subject one who wrestles with both external injustice and internal guilt. The madman’s madness also reflects a “crisis of language and meaning”. He begins to reinterpret the words and actions of those around him, as well as ancient texts, through a lens of suspicion. This semiotic breakdown where familiar signs no longer signify comfort or moral clarity parallels the modernist experience of disorientation in the face of societal upheaval. Lu Xun thus captures a pivotal transition: from a culture based on collective harmony and fixed meanings to one marked by fragmentation, uncertainty, and individual consciousness. As Yichun Liu notes, “Madness in Lu Xun’s story is a metaphor for the collapse of shared linguistic and moral codes” (Liu 78).

At a deeper level, madness functions as a mode of dissent. The madman, by refusing to conform to the collective belief in tradition, exposes the dangers of uncritical consensus. He sees that the social order rests not on truth but on silence and obedience. His madness gives him the courage to name the unspeakable, to articulate a horror that others have learned to ignore or rationalize. In doing so, he becomes both a threat and a prophet an emblem of intellectual rebellion. As Vera Schwarcz writes, “The madman is not outside of culture but within it, representing the suppressed conscience of a civilization unwilling to confront its own violence” (Schwarcz 65). The story culminates in the madman’s desperate appeal: “Save the children.” This line, which has become iconic in modern



Chinese literature, encapsulates the ethical urgency of the text. It suggests that while the present may be corrupted beyond repair, the future still holds potential. The madman, despite his alienation, has not given up hope. He believes that the cycle of cannibalism can be broken that children might be spared the fate of ideological consumption if society dares to change. Xiaobing Tang sees this line as “an invocation of the revolutionary imperative an ethical call to reform, to education, and to emancipation” (Tang 1236).

Thus, madness in “A Madman’s Diary” is not a descent into incoherence but a metaphor for “modern awareness”. It represents the painful awakening of the self in a world built on inherited lies. Far from being a narrative of despair, the story uses madness as a tool of critique, insight, and ultimately, transformation. It asserts that to be sane in a sick society is itself a form of madness and that true healing can only begin when one dares to question the unquestionable.

Language, Form, and Literary Innovation

Lu Xun’s “A Madman’s Diary” is not only revolutionary in content but also in form. The story’s stylistic and linguistic innovations were as radical as its themes, helping to usher in a new era of Chinese literature. By choosing the “vernacular style” (baihua) and the “diary format”, Lu Xun broke decisively from classical Chinese literary tradition, aligning his work with the modernist impulse to center individual consciousness, psychological depth, and linguistic democratization. In the early 20th century, Chinese literature was still dominated by “classical Chinese (wenyan)” —a literary language inaccessible to most of the population and deeply tied to Confucian orthodoxy. By writing “A Madman’s Diary” in baihua, Lu Xun was doing more than just choosing a different register; he was engaging in a “linguistic revolution”. According to Leo Ou-fan Lee, this stylistic shift “symbolized the democratization of knowledge and the dismantling of the Confucian monopoly over culture” (Lee 124). The use of the vernacular made literature accessible to a broader audience and aligned with the goals of the “New Culture Movement”, which sought to reform Chinese society through education, science, and individualism.



The “diary form” provided Lu Xun with a powerful structural tool. Unlike classical narrative, which often relied on moral lessons and third-person omniscience, the diary allows for a deeply subjective, fragmented, and introspective mode of storytelling. The madman’s entries are not linear or coherent in the traditional sense; they mimic the disjointed nature of psychological distress and paranoia. This fragmentation mirrors not only the madman’s mental state but also the disintegration of the old social order. As Vera Schwarcz observes, “The broken style of the diary reflects the breakdown of both individual identity and cultural coherence” (Schwarcz 60).

In embracing this form, Lu Xun draws upon Western literary influences, particularly those of Dostoevsky and Gogol. The inner turmoil of the madman resembles the psychological complexity of characters such as Raskolnikov or the Underground Man figures who are similarly alienated, introspective, and tormented by moral contradictions. Lu Xun, who studied medicine and was deeply interested in psychology, infuses his writing with an awareness of the subconscious. The diary’s interior monologue allows for the exploration of thoughts that would otherwise remain unspeakable in public discourse. Furthermore, the diary format serves to create a layered narrative. The framing device where an unnamed editor or doctor introduces the text as a found document adds ambiguity and irony. This narrative distance reinforces the theme of unreliable truth: the madman’s words are both a cry for help and a warning, yet they are filtered through a voice that may not believe or understand them. This formal complexity challenges the reader to question the boundaries between sanity and madness, truth and delusion, narrative and reality.

The innovation of form also functions as an act of resistance. By refusing the constraints of classical structure, Lu Xun refuses the ideological constraints of tradition. His embrace of modern form becomes part of the story’s larger revolutionary project. As Xiaobing Tang argues, “Lu Xun’s formal choices enact a symbolic rebellion against the aesthetic and ethical norms of the past” (Tang 1229). This rebellion is not merely stylistic; it is political. It asserts that to tell new truths, literature must find new forms.



Moreover, language in “A Madman’s Diary” is not neutral; it is a site of conflict. The madman’s reinterpretation of classical texts his paranoid belief that they contain hidden cannibalistic messages highlights the power of language to conceal violence beneath layers of moral authority. His reading strategy, while exaggerated, mimics the very methods used by reformers and intellectuals of the May Fourth period to deconstruct Confucian ideology. Through the madman’s eyes, readers see how even the most revered texts can be implicated in systems of oppression. In this way, the story becomes a meta-commentary on literary interpretation itself. It challenges readers to consider how meaning is constructed, who has the authority to interpret texts, and how language can both illuminate and obscure truth. This reflexive quality situates “A Madman’s Diary” firmly within the tradition of modernist literature, which frequently questions its own methods and assumptions.

Lu Xun’s innovations in language and form were instrumental in transforming Chinese literature. By writing in the vernacular and adopting a psychologically rich diary format, he made literature both accessible and subversive. His stylistic choices mirror the thematic content of his work, the breakdown of tradition, the rise of individual consciousness, and the urgent need for cultural renewal. Through these innovations, “A Madman’s Diary” not only critiques the past but also models a new way of seeing, thinking, and writing a literary revolution that continues to resonate in contemporary Chinese letters.

Legacy and Contemporary Relevance

More than a century after its publication, Lu Xun’s “A Madman’s Diary” remains a foundational and deeply resonant text in Chinese literature and global literary studies. It has endured not simply because of its historical importance or stylistic innovation, but because of its continuing relevance to questions of morality, authority, identity, and dissent in both Chinese and global contexts. As a work of literary modernism, political allegory, and cultural critique, the story continues to speak to readers in societies struggling with the legacy of authoritarianism, ideological conformity, and the suppression of individual conscience. In terms of literary legacy, “A Madman’s Diary” is widely regarded as the first work of modern Chinese literature, and its impact on subsequent generations of writers cannot be



overstated. It helped establish the vernacular style (baihua) as the dominant literary form, enabling a democratization of language and literature that had profound effects on Chinese culture. Writers such as Ba Jin, Lao She, and Ding Ling have cited Lu Xun as a formative influence, not only in terms of language but also in their commitment to using literature as a tool of social critique. As literary scholar David Der-wei Wang writes, “Lu Xun’s madman became a model for the modern Chinese intellectual isolated, morally awake, and tragically burdened by the knowledge of systemic corruption” (Wang 213).

Beyond its literary impact, the story’s metaphor of cannibalism continues to be interpreted in new ways. Originally conceived as a critique of feudalism and Confucian values, the allegory has proven adaptable to other historical and political contexts. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), for instance, readers reinterpreted the story as a critique of Maoist fanaticism and ideological purges, in which revolutionary zeal devoured the very people it claimed to liberate. In more recent decades, critics have seen the cannibalism metaphor as reflective of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism, consumerism, or state surveillance, depending on the interpretive framework. In mainland China today, Lu Xun is still officially revered as a cultural icon, but the radical potential of his work is sometimes sanitized. His image is used in textbooks, museums, and state narratives as a symbol of national awakening and resistance to imperialism. Yet the subversive edge of “A Madman’s Diary”, its questioning of tradition, authority, and societal sanity often sits uncomfortably with official ideology. As literary critic Gloria Davies notes, “Lu Xun’s texts continue to haunt the Chinese political imagination precisely because they expose the psychic costs of conformity and obedience” (Davies 98). His work resists easy co-optation, and this resistance is part of its enduring power.

Globally, “A Madman’s Diary” has been embraced as part of the world canon of modernist literature. The story’s experimental form, psychological depth, and thematic ambiguity resonate with the works of Kafka, Joyce, and Beckett. Its engagement with the question of madness as both a condition and a metaphor parallels global literary trends that explore the alienation of modern life. The madman’s perspective, which oscillates between paranoia and prophecy, invites readers to reflect on how



societies define sanity, and who has the authority to make that definition. In today's world, where dissent is often pathologized, "A Madman's Diary" offers a timeless meditation on power and perception. The madman is not just a symbol of alienation, but also of ethical awakening. His desperate call to Save the children, the final plea of the story is both an indictment of the present and a fragile hope for the future. As Vera Schwarcz writes, "This line, so simple yet so haunting, contains Lu Xun's ultimate message that consciousness, once awakened, carries with it both despair and the possibility of redemption" (Schwarcz 67).

The story's enduring relevance can be seen in its adaptability across media. "A Madman's Diary" has been adapted into stage plays, films, and graphic novels, demonstrating its capacity to speak across generations and formats. Each reinterpretation brings new nuances to the story, highlighting aspects that earlier readers might have overlooked. Whether used as a critique of authoritarianism, a meditation on psychological trauma, or a commentary on collective complicity, the story continues to spark debate, inspire reflection, and provoke discomfort just as Lu Xun intended.

In academic and intellectual circles, Lu Xun's madman has become a universal archetype, the truth-teller who is dismissed as insane, the moral outsider who sees what others refuse to acknowledge. This figure appears in literature, film, and even political discourse around the world, wherever individuals speak out against dominant ideologies at great personal cost. The madman's dilemma whether to conform and be "sane," or to dissent and be labeled "mad" remains deeply relevant in our era of disinformation, political polarization, and cultural repression.

Conclusion

Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary" stands as a foundational text in the canon of modern Chinese literature not merely for its chronological place in history, but because of its searing moral vision, stylistic innovation, and unrelenting cultural critique. As a piece of fiction, it is short and stark, yet its intellectual and political implications are vast and enduring. Published in 1918 at the height of the New Culture Movement, the story uses satire, allegory, and psychological realism to challenge centuries of entrenched values and call for a total rethinking of Chinese society. The madman's



descent into paranoia and isolation becomes not a sign of his individual madness, but a representation of the systemic moral disorder of the world around him. Through this unsettling reversal, Lu Xun offers a radical redefinition of sanity, ethics, and societal health. Lu Xun's stylistic choices deepen the story's critical force. His use of the diary format a personal, introspective narrative mode enables a modern psychological realism unprecedented in traditional Chinese literature. This technique, influenced by European writers such as Gogol and Dostoevsky, allows Lu Xun to explore interiority, trauma, and the fragmentation of the self. Simultaneously, the choice to write in "baihua" (vernacular Chinese) signaled a decisive break from classical literary norms, aligning form with content in a revolutionary aesthetic. As a result, "A Madman's Diary" did not merely critique the old order; it embodied a new one.

In contemporary terms, the story remains painfully relevant. Across the globe, individuals and institutions continue to face moral crises rooted in tradition, nationalism, ideology, or systemic injustice. The questions raised by Lu Xun about conformity, dissent, sanity, and moral clarity have not lost their urgency. In a world where oppressive systems are often cloaked in the language of heritage, honor, or necessity, "A Madman's Diary" urges readers to look beneath appearances and to recognize the quiet violence that traditions can inflict. Moreover, in the age of surveillance, censorship, and mass misinformation, the story's themes resonate anew. The fear of speaking out, the ease with which dissent is labeled as madness, and the psychological toll of moral awareness all feel eerily familiar. As such, Lu Xun's madman continues to speak not only to Chinese readers, but to anyone grappling with the cost of critical consciousness in a conformist world.

"A Madman's Diary" is not simply a historical artifact or a product of its time. It is a living text that continues to challenge, disturb, and provoke. Through its use of satire, allegory, and vernacular realism, it achieves a kind of moral lucidity rarely found in literature. Lu Xun's genius lies not in offering easy solutions, but in forcing readers to ask the most difficult questions about themselves, their society, and their future. By turning madness into a metaphor for ethical awakening, Lu Xun invites us all to reconsider the cost of our sanity and the price of our silence. As long as people



continue to consume one another in the name of tradition, order, or progress, “A Madman’s Diary” will remain tragically and powerfully relevant. And as long as there are voices willing to cry out, “Save the children,” the spirit of Lu Xun’s revolution will endure.

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