



Lu Xun

## *A Madman's Diary*

**Link to the text:** <http://www.coldbacon.com/writing/luxun-calltoarms.html#Madman>

### **Author Biography:**

Lu Xun was born in 1881 in Shaoxing, China. He is considered a founding writer of the Chinese modernist movement. As a student, he briefly studied medicine in Japan before returning to China to pursue writing and political activism. His writing engages both with China's long literary tradition and the social turmoil of his period, when China was facing both imperial invasions and internal political collapse. His short story, *A Madman's Diary*, is known as the first modern Chinese short story written in vernacular language (the language spoken by ordinary citizens, instead of the refined and elaborate literary language adopted by traditional Chinese literature).

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### **Questions:**

- What did you enjoy or find interesting about the story?
- Why is it significant that most of the story is told through the medium of the main character's personal diary? How does that shape our understanding of the story?
- In the original version of the story, the opening two paragraphs are written in traditional Chinese. The numbered sections (the diary entries) were then written in vernacular (oral) Chinese. How does the language difference, which was lost in translation, change our understanding of the story?
- In what ways can we understand the story's central idea of "man-eaters"?

### **Discuss section I and the beginning of section II:**

Tonight the moon is very bright.

I have not seen it for over thirty years, so today when I saw it I felt in unusually high spirits. I begin to realize that during the past thirty-odd years I have been in the dark; but now I must be extremely careful. Otherwise why should that dog at the Chao house have looked at me twice?

I have reason for my fear.

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Tonight there is no moon at all, I know that this bodes ill. This morning when I went out cautiously, Mr. Chao had a strange look in his eyes, as if he were afraid of me, as if he wanted to murder me. There were seven or eight others, who discussed me in a whisper. And they were afraid of my seeing them. All the people I passed were like that. The fiercest among them grinned at me; whereupon I shivered from head to foot, knowing that their preparations were complete.

- In what ways has the main character attained a level of social insight that has escaped his neighbours?
- How does the story complicate our understanding of madness and the stigmatization associated with it?