

Diary of a Madman and Other Stories Study Guide

Diary of a Madman and Other Stories by Lu Xun

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Plot Summary

Diary of a Madman and Other Stories is a book of Xun Lu's short stories. Although some locations and characters cross over from one story to another, each story's plot is unique. What these stories do have in common is that they all take place in China in the early twentieth century and reflect Chinese culture and the norms of the day. The various plots show the relationships between various characters and how they deal with daily struggles and the politics of the day.

Through these plots, Lu Xun reveals his own beliefs and the beliefs of his friends regarding Chinese tradition, politics, and Chinese history. Through humor and the actions of his characters, Lu Xun shows himself to be a man that once fought for his strong beliefs and has now chosen to take to the sidelines, as the title of one of the sections and the introduction clearly reveal. He still has views regarding his country and the events that take place around him, but he is no longer interested in taking a strong stand for these beliefs. Instead, he chooses to write prose and often satire that show how he feels about his culture's past, present, and future. This suggestion by Lu Xun that he no longer has the will to fight for his beliefs may or may not be believed, for he was known to write in a pessimistic manner to make sure his readers did not become complacent. His writings also show how those with whom Lu Xun is close feel about their homeland.

Through these stories, it is revealed that Lu Xun and his friends scoff at much of Chinese culture and do not see beyond past and current Chinese leaders. He frequently pokes fun at these Chinese leaders as well as Chinese literature and culture as a whole. The traditionalists in this story are frequently portrayed as fools, while non-traditionalists are viewed as loners who are misunderstood and mocked. It is clear which type of person Lu Xun was or at least wanted to be. This also makes it clear why he tired of fighting for a new China, one whose natives loved one another and lived honest lives. His own personal struggles are clearly seen in the lives of many of the characters in these short stories.



Preface, Introduction, Remembrances of the Past

Preface, Introduction, Remembrances of the Past Summary

Diary of a Madman and Other Stories is a book of Xun Lu's short stories. These stories take place in China in the early twentieth century and reflect Chinese culture and the norms of the day. The various plots show the relationships between various characters and how they deal with daily struggles and the politics of the day.

The Preface describes what Shaoxing looks like now and how different it was in Lu Xun's time, with so much political and social upheaval. This world helped to form Lu Xun's abilities and interests into powerful forces for change. The translator thanks those who have guided and encouraged him in the translating of Lu Xun's work.

The Introduction describes China's need to modernize like her neighbor Japan. Japan had recently won a war between Japan and China, and China needed to find ways to strengthen again. Lu Xun was one of the many students sent to Japan to learn about modernization and changes taking place all around the world, with a focus on medicine. He wanted to find a cure for China, and, when seeing propaganda photos in a class in which Chinese people were watching their own be decapitated for spying for the Russians, he realized that the cure his people needed was psychological and emotional rather than physical. In the summer of 1906, Lu Xun did something out of character by agreeing to an arranged marriage. Although he provided for this wife, he never loved her. He soon joined his brother, Zhou Zhuoren, back in Tokyo. They, along with a small group of other like-minded youth, attempted and failed to start a controversial literary movement. Lu Xun at this point now blamed the elite for China's failings more so than the backwards attitudes of the peasants. For many years the two things that Lu Xun noticed were plaguing China were Japanese imperialism and feudalism, or traditional Chinese society. When a revolution took place in October of 1911, Lu Xun showed himself to be a natural leader. Although he had high hopes for this new republic, it soon led to corruption. All of Lu Xun's stories were written between 1918 and 1926 and were highly influenced by political and cultural strife that was taking place around him. By 1918 Lu Xun could not get over his negative views of the revolutions and attempts to improve China that had taken place. This negativity shows in his writings, although how serious it should be taken is up for debate, since he often wrote with a negative viewpoint to keep his readers from becoming complacent. Later in life Lu Xun finally found love in a fellow civil rights leader, Xu Guangping. They later lived together as man and wife and had a son. Lu Xun spent the last nine years of his life with his family in Shanghai devoting his time to writing, teaching, translating, and encouraging others. He cared for all people and wished that equality for all could become a reality. The translator goes on to discuss Lu Xun's stories, which focus on China's two main



deficiencies: 1) lack of love and compassion and 2) lack of honesty and integrity. Through the examination of his culture, events, people, and himself, Lu Xun brings attention to these deficiencies. The translator then discusses the difficulties in translating Chinese, especially the exquisite work of Lu Xun, into American English. He explains the tactics he used to make the work both accurate and effective.

Preface, Introduction, Remembrances of the Past Analysis

The Preface is a love letter from the translator to Lu Xun. The translator greatly admires this man and his work and this is easily seen in the Preface.

The Introduction's purpose is to introduce Lu Xun to the reader and to give some background information for Chinese history, especially during Lu Xun's life. This introduction shows the correlations between Lu Xun's work and his life and the world around him. The Introduction also reveals how much the translator respects Lu Xun. An explanation of this translation shows how the translator went to great lengths to give readers a translations that is both accurate and engaging.



Cheering from the Sidelines: Preface, Diary of a Madman

Cheering from the Sidelines: Preface, Diary of a Madman Summary

In the Preface, the author explains his reason for creating these stories and this book. The stories compiled in *Cheering from the Sidelines* are memories and dreams that the author has been unable to forget. The author tells the reader a bit about his life beginning in his early childhood when he was in charge of caring for his ailing father. With the death of his father and the failure of traditional Chinese medicine, Lu Xun dreamed of growing up and healing those in unfortunate circumstances like his father. During his education toward this goal, he realized that the sickness of many Chinese was not necessarily physical but spiritual, and, if one is not spiritually and emotionally healthy, what is the point in being physically healthy? So, he changed paths and decided to promote a literary movement that would raise the spirits of his people. His first attempt at organizing a group of like-minded individuals was an utter failure, and Lu Xun fell into a period of depression and loneliness. He tried anything and everything that could take him out of this depression, and although he witnessed and experienced worse events and situations than he had in his youth, this "drugging of his soul" must have worked, for he never felt the pain and sorrow of those first encounters with failure and loneliness (p. 25). For many years Lu Xun made a living by copying other's manuscripts. Only when his friend Jin Xinyi encouraged him to write his own work. Although he had first was skeptical, he felt hope for his future and the future of his people through the creation of literature. His first work was for this friend entitled "Diary of a Madman." Once this was written, he could not stop writing. He frequently wrote other short stories for other friends. Although he did not have the passion to create change in his world as he had in his youth, he did want to encourage the views and ideas of his friends.

Diary of a Madman is said to be a true tale of the madness of one of the author's friends. The madman in this story believes that everyone is out to get him. He sees everyone as cannibals who are trying to cover up their true intentions. When he tells them he knows what they are up to, they give him strange looks and try to calm him down; he sees this as evidence of their guilt. By the end, he has convinced himself that he may have even eaten human flesh, the flesh of his now dead little sister. The story ends with him hoping some of the children can be saved from this cannibalistic lifestyle.



Cheering from the Sidelines: Preface, Diary of a Madman Analysis

The Preface lets the reader into the life of the author so that the reader may understand why the stories in this book were created and how they are connected to the author's life. The Preface also gives the reader some background knowledge into the author's life and culture, as well as the world at the time in which he lived. It shows the author to be quite humble and, in his mind, unsophisticated and lacking the artistic gifts of many others. He seems to not quite understand his good fortune in having this book of stories published. The Preface also shows how the author changed over time due to the environment in which he lived. He says he somehow lost his desire to fight for the causes he had once believed in so strongly. His only connection to these and other causes are these stories that he says are the views of his friends. Although he may have lost much of his fighting spirit, the fact that he wrote these short stories not only shows the desire he has to support his friends but his interest in supporting their views through his writing. He may not be the man of change he once dreamed for himself, but he does make a stand by writing these stories for his comrades.

Diary of a Madman interweaves the ravings of a mad man with gruesome classical Chinese literature themes. Like stories of werewolves and other creatures, there is a connection with the moon and this man's insanity; the darker the night, the crazier he becomes. This story can be viewed as simply the story of a man's mental illness, but it can also be interpreted as one's view of his or her own culture through new eyes. Through his illness, this man was able to see the wrongs that his people committed simply because it was part of their cultural tradition. Like this culture, many cultures do certain things simply because it is how it has always been. Through this madman, the author could be expressing his distaste for this sort of attitude, that things should not take place simply because they have always taken place. One should be a "madman" at times to view his or her culture through critical eyes.



Cheering from the Sidelines: Kong Yiji, Medicine

Cheering from the Sidelines: Kong Yiji, Medicine Summary

In Kong Yiji, the narrator gets a job at a wine shop. He does not do many of his tasks well and so he ends up with the boring job of warming the wine. The only excitement that ever cheered him during this monotonous work was when Kong Yiji, a learned yet uncertified elderly man, came for a drink. He wore the clothing of the gentry, yet it was tattered and torn. He spoke like that of a well-educated man, yet he had failed his civil service examinations. So, he was taunted and teased at this local wineshop. The only person he felt he could talk to was the young narrator of this story, who did not seem to care for him any more than the rest of the patrons. What money he made copying books and manuscripts was often not enough to cover his bill at the wine shop. Several times during this story, Kong Yiji was caught stealing. His punishments were severe and often brutal. The last time he came into the wine shop, he dragged himself in using his hands, for his legs had been broken. He never returned and so it was assumed he had died.

In Medicine, Big-bolt leaves to purchase the precious medicine that is needed to save his ailing son, Little-bolt. He comes across a group of soldiers and an ever-growing crowd. He purchases a dripping mantou from a man in the now dispersing crowd. Upon returning home, he feeds his son the smelly mantou. Soon it is learned that this medicine is a roll dipped in human blood that is supposedly a cure for tuberculosis, and the human blood was that of a rebel, Mother Xia's son, who was executed on the street in front of the crowd where Big-bolt had purchased the mantou. The story ends as Mother Xia and Little-bolt's mother leave gifts for their dead sons across the road from each other. Mother Xia's son is buried in a plot for prisoners, while Little-bolt is buried in the pauper's graveyard. Mother Xia hopes that her son's spirit will see her and give her a sign that he knows those who have wronged him will receive their just reward in heaven. No sign appears. Little-bolt's mother feels a sense of relief. She and Mother Xia head home with Little-bolt's mother Hua's urgings.

Cheering from the Sidelines: Kong Yiji, Medicine Analysis

The story of Kong Yiji begins the theme of getting enjoyment from the misery of others. The narrator in this story finds pleasure in the suffering of Kong Yiji. When Kong Yiji came into the wine shop, the narrator was no longer the one being taunted by his boss and the patrons. He also saw that his life could be worse; it could be like Kong Yiji's. This story is told in a very matter-of-fact way, although what is described is often very shocking and sad. This reflects that author's view of the events in his own life. In his



youth, he would have been shocked and dismayed by all that he witnessed and experienced in adulthood. As an adult, he is surprisingly not strongly affected by the atrocities that take place around him.

Medicine tells of the misconception that human blood could cure tuberculosis. This also ties in with the obsession with cannibalism in *Diary of a Madman*. This story is filled with despair, as well as ill-placed hope and faith. This is reminiscent of the author's own feelings toward traditional Chinese medicine, which was unable to cure his father.



Cheering from the Sidelines: Tomorrow, An Unimportant Affair, The Story of Hair, A Passing Storm, Hometown

Cheering from the Sidelines: Tomorrow, An Unimportant Affair, The Story of Hair, A Passing Storm, Hometown Summary

In Tomorrow, Rednose Everbow, and Blueskin Ah-five are drinking bowls of wine in a wineshop in Lu Town located next to the widow Sister Shan's home. She supported herself and her son through the sale of the woven cloth she made, but her loom had been silent for few days. Her three-year-old son, Bao'er, was very ill. His mother spent a great deal of money on the medicine prescribed by Dr. He, but the boy soon died. She sold her jewelry to purchase a coffin for her little boy, yet was still unable to believe this was more than an awful nightmare. The night after her son was buried was a very lonely one for Sister Shan. All she wished for was to sleep and see her son in her dreams. As she drifts off to sleep, Rednose Everbow and Blueskin Ah-five stumble out of the wineshop next door.

In An Unimportant Affair, the speaker has lived six years in the capital after coming from the countryside. He has known of many "so-called important affairs of state," which have only led him to dislike people (p. 67). One seemingly unimportant affair seemed to stand out in his memory more than the other important affairs combined. The speaker had hired a rickshaw to take him to work. On the way, they accidentally hit an old beggar woman. The speaker wants to ignore what has just happened, but the poor rickshaw driver cannot leave her. He takes her to the police substation, where, due to his low status, is bound to get abused. He risks this to help the woman. The speaker feels his pettiness slip away at this act of kindness and gives the police money for the puller. As time has passed, this story remains clear in the speaker's mind. It is a reminder of the shame he felt that night and encourages him to change his petty and heartless ways. This memory brings him hope and courage.

In The Story of Hair, a man in the generation above the narrator, Mr. N, tells of how disappointing the results of the first Double Ten have been. The first Double Ten means Oct 10 and marks the anniversary of the Republican Revolution of 1911. This leads him to discuss the importance of a man's hair, or lack there of, in Chinese culture. When it was made popular to wear one's hair in a long queue, cutting it off was either a punishment or a sign of revolution. When the revolutionaries took over power, if you did not cut your hair, they would often cut it without your permission and assume you were a government sympathizer. Some people began to wear artificial queues when they felt it was necessary to have long hair. But, this artificial hair would also lead to sneers. So, Mr. N decided to forgo the artificial queue and started dressing like a Westerner, which



also led to teasing and cursing. He then returned to his Chinese gown but carried a large walking stick. This seemed to stop the taunting. In later years, when Mr. N was a professor, it became popular for the students to go against by cutting off their queues. But, after the first Double Ten, it was no longer a crime to cut one's queue, and those who had taunted him for wearing a queue had their's cut off by the police. Mr. N sees no reason for women now to be going around bobbing their hair, because cutting one's hair only leads to needless trouble. They would be much better off focusing on getting married and being a good wife. He continued on regarding his opinion of the behavior of idealists like the narrator. When he realized the narrator did not care to hear what he had to say. He apologized for disturbing the narrator and left.

A Passing Storm begins at dinnertime as a boat of the elite floated down the river, admiring what they saw as the carefree, simple life of the peasants. Their views of this simple life may have changed greatly, if they knew what was actually going on in this small village. Mrs. Ninepounder's family was "going to pot," according to her (p. 77). Each generation's worse than the last" (p. 78). She supported this view with the fact that everyone in the family was named for his or her birth weight, and each name was growing less and less in weight. As the father, Sevenpounder, returned home from poling the wealthy along the river, he told the family that the Emperor's on the Dragon Throne again. Sister Sevenpounder, at first, saw this as a good thing. But, this was soon seen as a problem, since the Emperor wore a queue and his followers wore queues; Sevenpounder did not have a queue. When a friend, Seventh Master Zhao, a well-respected, learned man, approached with his once tied-up queue hanging down his back, Sister Sevenpounder knew it must be true regarding the ascending of the Emperor on the Dragon Throne. Sevenpounder was now in danger. The family was very upset that his choices in the past might now be a death sentence to the entire family. Most of the villagers and his family avoided Sevenpounder. Fortunately for him, he was convinced that the Emperor had not been able to take the Throne, because he saw Seventh Master Zhao with his queue once again coiled on top of his head. The family agreed, and Sevenpounder's respect and status among his family and fellow villagers was restored.

In Hometown, the speaker, Elder Brother Xun, is returning home after twenty years of being away. Upon returning he realizes that his memories of home may not have been accurate, or his mood was affecting his view of his home; this bleak world that he was encountering was not the home he remembered. He was returning home to collect his family now that the family compound had been sold to another family. One happy thought of returning home was to see his childhood friend Runtu. Runtu had shown him a world that he had never known, the life of a peasant farmer. As the family prepared to leave, Elder Brother Xun met with many relatives and acquaintances. One day he received a surprise; Runtu had returned to see him before he left. He looked nothing like the Runtu he had known and, although he had much to say, he was speechless. These two former friends were now in completely different social classes and were struggling with breaching social etiquette. Elder Brother Xun's nephew and Runtu's son ran off to play together and seemed to begin a similar friendship to the relationship that had once existed between Xun and Runtu. Soon it was time for Runtu to leave. He returned only briefly to help Xun and the family leave. As the family left and his



homeland receded in the distance, Elder Brother Xun felt that there was a wall that surrounded him that isolated him from others, and the memory of Runtu that once comforted him now only made him feel melancholy. He began to feel hopeful that his nephew and Runtu's son would have better lives than either of them had led. As he began to nod off, he thought of what hope was and how it came into being. "It's like a path across the land - it's not there to begin with, but when lots of people go the same way, it comes into being" (p. 100).

Cheering from the Sidelines: Tomorrow, An Unimportant Affair, The Story of Hair, A Passing Storm, Hometown Analysis

Tomorrow is yet another tale of the inability of traditional Chinese medicine to cure illness. It is a tale that continues a theme of melancholy and loneliness that is found throughout Lu Xun's work. Tomorrow juxtaposes the changed and sad life of Sister Shan to the jolly, drunken life found in the wineshop next door. Although these two may seem like very different ways of life, there may be more similarities than one might see at first glance. If more time was spent studying the drunks in the bar, one might learn about the loneliness and sadness that has led them to end up drunk in the town bar every night.

An Unimportant Affair shows how wealth and status are not necessarily tied to happiness. They often lead to a sense of disillusionment and disappointment. The main character is humbled by someone of a much lower social class, which is one event in his life that actually holds purpose and meaning for him. It shows that we can learn from each other, and the wealthiest and can learn from the poorest of us all. This story shows that life can have meaning and one can change his or her life with the simplest of acts.

The Story of Hair shows how important one's hairstyle has been throughout China's history and how that hairstyle is tied to one's political beliefs. The popularity of various hairstyles shows who has power over China. This issue with hair reflects the idea of "you're damned if you do and damned if you don't." It questions the worth of revolution and the steps one takes to make change, particularly in China. Mr. N sees China as being quite unchangeable, therefore all this suffering for the sake of revolution is unnecessary. It is unknown if this is the belief of the author, or if he is simply playing devil's advocate. Maybe it is a little bit of both.

A Passing Storm is a combination of Chinese fiction and true history seen through the eyes of the common man. Through fictional characters, it tells the story of the summer of 1917 in which General Zhang Xun tried to bring down the republic founded in 1912 to restore the Manchu Dynasty. He wore his hair in a queue. This story reveals the impact that political change has on even the simple peasant. This story, like The Story of Hair, shows the importance of hair in Chinese culture and politics. One's choices regarding cutting or keeping a queue could have lasting effects on his life and the lives of his family members, as it was a sign of his political beliefs. Although the control of the



country could change hands in an instant, a queue could not grow back so quickly. Fortunately for the character in this story, and most likely many others, the Emperor was unable to take the Throne.

Hometown is a mixture of melancholy and the universal theme of hope, as the speaker must deal with the changes that take place in his thoughts of home after returning from a twenty-year absence. By the end of the story, he has begun to accept the way his life has turned out but has hope for those whose lives have just begun. This story shows that no matter if one is rich or poor, life is difficult for all. But, the speaker's life is put into perspective when he sees his old playmate Runtu; he realizes how fortunate he has been. This story is one that is universal. Many people have romantic thoughts about their childhoods or other points in their lives. But, if one were to return to this place where only good memories exist, most likely it would not be quite the same as one had pictured it. Like Elder Brother Xun, this would most likely lead to bittersweet feelings and a sense of melancholy and nostalgia for the past.



Cheering from the Sidelines: Ah Q - The Real Story

Cheering from the Sidelines: Ah Q - The Real Story Summary

In Ah Q - The Real Story, the narrator first explains in Chapter 1 what this story is. He had wanted to do a biography on Ah Q but ran into many snags along the way. The title relates to a popular phrase among storytellers, in which they go off topic and say they will now get back to the real story. So, although he says this is a biography, he also says he does not have all of the information necessary for such a significant book. For this and all other flaws, he apologizes in advance.

In Chapter 2, the narrator gives Ah Q's victories. There was only one time that Ah Q was praised; for the most part he was seen as entertainment for the townspeople and was often the butt of their jokes. Ah Q, thinking so highly of himself, simply believed the townspeople were beneath him. Although Ah Q had once been a rich man, had seen a lot in his life, and was once called a hard worker, he had many flaws. His flaws included scabies scars and a hot temper; these two things frequently led Ah Q into fights. Once during a game of Pickaside, Ah Q was winning, but unfortunately a fight broke out and, when it was over, he realized his money was all gone. He was quite distraught over this, but after slapping himself around and imagining he was slapping some other Ah Q, he felt victorious.

In Chapter 3, Ah Q becomes famous for claiming he was part of the Zhao family. Even though Ah Q was slapped for this claim, he received a great deal of respect for the fact that he might actually be a part of the prestigious family. It was not long until Ah Q was back to arguing and fighting with others, even a man covered in lice angered him, because this man had more lice than Ah Q. This led to the first disgrace in Ah Q's life; this man, Bearded Wang, won the fight. His arguments, taunts, and fights continued with others, including a Buddhist nun. As his taunts continued, his spirit began to soar.

In Chapter 4, Ah Q began to wonder about finding a woman with whom to start a family after the nun he had verbally attacked cursed him, saying he should never have a son. Other couples and women became an obsession for him for time. This ended when he propositioned Old Master Zhao's maid. This led to a strong beating, which removed his thoughts about women and left him feeling like he had accomplished something. This lasted until the entire Zhao clan attacked him for his behavior and he paid greatly for his behavior. He lost many possessions so he could pay back the family.

In Chapter 5, Ah Q returns to his home at the Land-and-Grain Temple but things did not seem quite right. Due to his behavior at the Zhao's he was shunned by all in his community. When he realized that all the odd jobs were now going to Young Don, he found Young D he attacked him. The fight was equal but never ended in victory on



either side. So, Ah Q ended up being much as he was before this fight. After trying to steal from the convent's garden, he decided to head into town to find food.

In Chapter 6, Ah Q returns to his Wei Village with a great deal of wealth. He stunned the rest of the villagers of his tales of decapitations and revolutions in town. He was now held in higher esteem than even Old Master Zhao. His stolen goods were wanted by all, he was held in esteem because he was a real thief. But, when it was learned that he was a burglar who no longer wanted to burgle, he lost much of this respect.

In Chapter 7, a large black canopied boat was tied up at the Zhao wharf. It was Old Master Selectman hiding out away from the Revolutionary Party that had come to town. Ah Q was surprised that this gentleman was so afraid of the Revolutionary Party that Ah Q decided he would join the revolutionaries to have such power. He started calling for a revolution, and the townspeople were frightened of him; this was exhilarating to Ah Q. He now waited for the real revolutionaries to ask him to join them. He soon decides to go to the convent to spread news of the revolution, but he is told the revolution has already come and gone; he had slept through the revolution and was not invited to join the Revolutionary Party.

In Chapter 8, the Revolutionary Party took over, and the only major change was that people began wearing their queues coiled up on top of their heads. Ah Q was very disappointed in the outcome of the revolution. Ah Q decided he needed to get in touch with the revolutionaries to get the chance to be a part of any of the action; the revolutionaries wanted nothing to do with him. He was very disappointed and soon became angry when the Zhao compound was robbed by the revolutionaries; if he had only been a part of this group, he could have gotten some of the loot! Now he just hoped the revolutionaries would be caught and have their heads chopped off.

In Chapter 9, four days after the Zhao family compound was robbed, Ah Q was arrested. Ah Q was arrested because they believed he had been the thief. He thought he was being arrested because he wanted to start a revolution. Although Old Master Selectman disagreed, it was decided that an example was to be made of Ah Q. He was loaded into a cart and realized he was headed to an execution, his own execution! The results of his death were that the Zhao property was never recovered. Many took to wailing for what the revolutionaries had done and continued to do. As for Ah Q, most believed he must have been an evil man to get himself executed. It was also a very disappointing execution, because it had been a shooting rather than a beheading, and Ah Q had given a very miserable performance, not a single line of opera, which was typical of those about to be executed.

Cheering from the Sidelines: Ah Q - The Real Story Analysis

Ah Q - The Real Story pokes fun at revolutionaries and various political leaders. There is the connection between this story and others through the mention of the same characters, revolutions, and the reactions of people to various events, such as queue



cutting. This story tells a tale that represents what was taking place and had taken place in Lu Xun's culture and society. It reveals how many felt about the revolution taking place and how ordinary people were affected by this revolution.

Ah Q was constantly misunderstood and disliked. No matter what he did, he was never good enough and was even a disappointment in death. Ah Q represents the author's view of Chinese culture and its reaction to political changes and the influence of others. Like Ah Q, the Chinese people are more interested in spectacle than real change. In the end, the author sees Chinese culture being destroyed by all that is taking place, when the purpose of all this fighting was to protect and/or improve Chinese culture in the first place.



Cheering from the Sidelines: Dragonboat Festival, The White Light, Some Rabbits and a Cat, A Comedy of Ducks, Village Opera

Cheering from the Sidelines: Dragonboat Festival, The White Light, Some Rabbits and a Cat, A Comedy of Ducks, Village Opera Summary

In Dragonboat Festival, Fang Xuanchuo had grown accustomed to respond that "there's not much difference" as a way to make himself feel better regarding troubling circumstances. At times he wondered if he was just deceiving himself by saying this, because he was now too afraid to stand up to the problems in society. He told himself that there was very little difference between the new leaders and the old and that people should just mind their own business and not cause trouble. Many of his fellow faculty members demonstrated when their pay was kept from them; Fang Xuanchuo did not get involved. Through these demonstrations, he was able to get some of his salary without getting beat up in the process like many of the other professors. When other state officials like himself demonstrated he, once again, stayed far away. Even with the money he had finally received from his salary, it was not enough to cover his debts. His wife grew more and more upset with him and encouraged him to go ask for his money. The day before the Dragonboat Festival when he thought he would finally get paid, he did not. He tried to borrow money from friends and relatives. No one offered their assistance. He had acted in a similar way the year before when someone had come into town asking for money. The story ends without any sort of reconciliation between husband and wife and they still have not received any more money.

In The White Light, Chen Shicheng had obtained his Budding-Talent, an important award after a difficult examination. He had then gone on to take a higher level exam but was unable to pass it. In this story he had failed yet again and felt he had let himself and his family down. With this failed attempt he worried he would be unable to care for his family. Upon seeing the moon, he remembered a tale his grandmother had told him about a hidden treasure. He had, after other failures, attempted to dig up this treasure. Now, after this failure, guided by the light of the moon, he believed the treasure could be found under the desk by the east wall. After digging up several objects including a skull, he thought he heard a voice telling him that the treasure was in the mountains. The moon had hidden itself behind Highpeak West, so that is where Chen Shicheng decided to go treasure hunting. The next day a body was found in the Wanliu Lake; it was believed to be Chen Shicheng, although no one would look at it to identify it. It was clear that the man had fallen in alive and fought for his life, because the mud from the riverbottom was under every fingernail.



In *Some Rabbits and a Cat*, Third Missus bought her children a pair of white bunnies. These rabbits were kept penned up in the yard and had to be protected from the black cat that stalked them. Soon one of the rabbits was pregnant and began digging a burrow for a nest. When Third Missus did not see the rabbits for a long time, she assumed the litter had perished. Yet, soon a baby bunny was seen bounding out in the yard. Once again, all the rabbits disappeared and Third Missus believed the black cat had gotten them. While everyone else forgot about the rabbits, Third Missus continued to wonder about what had happened to them. She found another hole that she thought might be a rabbit hole, but saw that there were large paws outside of it. She dug up the old burrow and found rabbit fur. She was very disappointed and thought she might as well dig up the new hole. Two large rabbits hopped out of the new hole. The first pair of rabbits had met the fate she had feared, so as a precautionary measure, she took all of the new rabbits and made sure each was fed by the mother equally. They all thrived. The narrator of the story, Third Missus' son, thinks back about times he had seen animals who had been killed and how most people hardly noticed. He, in part, blamed the Creator for the creation of life and then its easy destruction. He saw the Creator as too reckless. The narrator now hates cats because of what the black cat had done to the bunnies; he planned to kill cats for what the cat had done to the bunnies. He realized he would probably be helping the Creator by doing this.

In *A Comedy of Ducks*, both the famous Russian poet Eroshenko and the narrator of this story do not think too highly of Beijing. During a visit between the narrator and Eroshenko, Eroshenko tells him about a trip he once took to Burma and the sounds of nature that could be heard. Here in Beijing, you cannot even hear frogs! So, a few days later Eroshenko bought tadpoles and put them in the lotus pond. Eroshenko, believing one should live self-sufficiently, was drawn to a peasant selling ducklings. He bought four of them. Before fish were purchased to feed the ducklings, they had eaten all the tadpoles out of the pond! Soon Eroshenko missed "Mother Russia" and returned home. The ducklings he left behind are now full-grown ducks, "quacking for all their worth." (p. 201)

In *Village Opera*, the narrator has seen few Chinese operas, for he does not care for them. They are deafening and crowded and not how he would like to spend his time. This view of opera is very different to his view of it as a child. Going to a small village opera near his grandmother's home in the summer was something to which he always looked forward. During one such trip, he thought he would be unable to see the opera and was miserable. His friends surprised him by taking him that evening. They boarded a friend's boat and could hear the sounds and see the actors of the opera as they drew closer. After seeing both good and bad scenes, the children grew tired and decided to head home. They stopped by to pick some beans to eat from a relative's bean field, which they found to be delicious. The narrator returned home and slept until nearly noon. The boys had been discovered for stealing beans, but the owner of the field did not seem to mind much; he brought some of the delicious beans to the narrator's home. The beans were not nearly as good as they had been the night before. He says that he has never had beans or opera so good as that night.



Cheering from the Sidelines: Dragonboat Festival, The White Light, Some Rabbits and a Cat, A Comedy of Ducks, Village Opera Analysis

Dragonboat Festival reflects the author's real life and shows how Lu Xun must feel about himself and his actions to what is taking place in his society. He seems to not want to get involved in the revolutionary actions taking place around him, so he watches from the sidelines. Although he had opinions regarding the events taking place, his lack of courage keeps him from doing much more than watching. Like the character in this story, it seems that Lu Xun may not have ever found his courage and dealt with the problems in his culture or his own life in a way that he felt was satisfactory.

The White Light was inspired by the author's grand uncle who had suffered from the same academic disappointments. This story shows the importance that is put on academic achievement and being a public official. Without an education and an important place in society, a man in this culture could easily feel like a failure. This feeling failure and having no purpose in life pervades this entire story. And, these feelings led to feelings of desperation, which led to desperate acts. Although the authorities believed that Chen Shicheng had fought for his life, it is clear that he had died trying to find the hidden treasure he now believed was at the bottom of the lake. Only finding this treasure could redeem this man for all his failures.

Some Rabbits and a Cat reveals the unfairness of life and death. It expresses Darwin's Theory of the survival of the fittest, first in the cat's killing of the bunnies, then in Third Missus' ability to protect the rabbits, and finally in the narrator's abilities to kill the cat. This story, on a deeper level, compares communism to capitalism. Third Missus wants fair treatment of all, similar to the beliefs of communism, while the examples of Survival of the Fittest represent capitalism. When trying to retaliate for the actions of the cat, he acts like a communist trying to get back at the capitalists by acting like a capitalist. Based on this story, it seems that life naturally follows the beliefs of capitalism, even when some oppose it. Those who are most capable and well-equipped succeed.

Comedy of Ducks is a farewell story to the author's friend Eroshenko. It is a humorous tribute to one of Lu Xun's quirky friends.

Village Opera tells of the fun and carefree life of the young. The narrator's love of opera and those beans that night had as much to do with the atmosphere and the company that night as it had to do with the opera and beans. This story tells of friendship and adventure and how that can influence one's views.



Wondering Where to Turn: New Year's Sacrifice, Upstairs in a Wineshop

Wondering Where to Turn: New Year's Sacrifice, Upstairs in a Wineshop Summary

In *New Year's Sacrifice*, the narrator describes the end of the lunar year and Chinese new year celebrations and traditions; candles were set forth, food was cooked, and gods were praised. During one of the days around this time of year, an old woman named Sister Xianglin approached the narrator. She had changed the most of anyone he knew, for she was now and old, gray, beggar woman. She asked him if there really was a soul; he had no response for her. He felt uneasy about being so educated, yet unable to answer her response with much more than "can't say for sure." (p. 223). When he learned she had died, he felt a little better, although he was in the company of his uncle who did not seem to want him there, possibly believing he was "bad stock." (p. 226). His thoughts turned to Sister Xianglin. He remembers how she, a widow, had been a very skilled servant in Fourth Uncle's home. Unfortunately, her mother-in-law wanted to make money off of her and sold her into marriage to another man, so she was removed kicking and screaming to her new home. Some years later she returned to Fourth Uncle's home; her second husband had died and her young son had been eaten by wolves. Sister Xianglin was never the same again. And, it did not help her that others saw her as cursed and would not let her assist with religious events. They let her go, and she soon became a beggar. The narrator returns to the present, feeling better after remembering Sister Xianglin's life and remembering that it was time to celebrate the new year.

In *Upstairs in a Wineshop*, the narrator stops at a hotel he had not stayed at since being a college student on his way from north China to the southeast. Being in this town again brought him a sense of nostalgia, but when he began looking up old acquaintances and places that had been a part of his life years before, he was disappointed to learn that these friends had long ago moved on and these places had changed drastically. He headed off to the Gallon, a wineshop he had frequently patronized in the past. He felt a sense of loneliness, realizing he did not really belong in either north or south China. An old school mate, Weifu, surprised him and joined him for a few drinks. This friend was also back in town; he had come to bring his long-dead brother's body back home and to bring a flower to a girl he had once known. This girl was now dead. Like the narrator, this friend also seemed lonely and disappointed with the way his trip home was turning out. He also had no hope for the way the rest of his life would turn out. By the time the two friends parted, the narrator was feeling refreshed.



Wondering Where to Turn: New Year's Sacrifice, Upstairs in a Wineshop Analysis

New Year's Sacrifice tells of Chinese marriage traditions and the lack of power and bad luck a widow has. The people of this culture were very superstitious and fearful of the gods, therefore women such as Sister Xianglin were practically shunned, for fear the gods would punish a family who had supported such a woman. Not only was this woman a widow, she was a widow twice! Therefore she was even worse off. The power that feelings of acceptance have on others is strongly expressed. How lack of respect and love can significantly affect one's mental and physical well-being, as seen in Sister Xianglin's demise. This story honors Sister Xianglin and others like her. It also serves to make others feel better about their own lives.

Upstairs in a Wineshop continues this on-going theme that one's life can always be worse. In this story the narrator felt much better after hearing about how his friend's life had not turned out nearly the way he had hoped it would. This story, like many of the others conveys a feeling of melancholy and disappointment in one's life. The characters in this story, like the characters in many of Lu Xun's other stories, feel that many of their hopes and dreams did not pan out as they had hoped. This may reveal a sentiment that Lu Xun shares with his characters.



Wondering Where to Turn: A Happy Family, Soap, The Eternal Lamp

Wondering Where to Turn: A Happy Family, Soap, The Eternal Lamp Summary

A Happy Family begins with a writer giving a description of what an artist is; he does not feel he has the capabilities to write works of art but hopes he can come close enough to at least make ends meet. He decides he needs to first come up with a good theme and decides on the theme of A Happy Family. He contemplates what this type of family would be like and ending in creating a very well-educated, high-class couple. As he is working, he is frequently interrupted by the comings and goings of his wife. Her movements about the home and the sounds of the real world the writer hears cause him some aggravation as he tries to focus on his writing. Before long, his young daughter appears. She is upset after having been punished by her mother. Her father comforts her. He uses his writing as a tissue to wipe his daughter's nose and throws it away in the garbage. He never is able to return to his work before this story ends.

Soap begins when Siming returns with a bar of soap for his wife; she blushes in embarrassment, realizing how dirty she must be using only soap pods rather than something as nice as what her husband had purchased. She hardly gives him a response and goes back to what she is doing. Siming acts as if her reaction did not bother him and calls in his, Xuecheng. He asks his son to tell him the definition of an English expression he had heard three bratty students saying, as they were laughing and winking at each other. His son did not know what it meant, so Siming became very angry and wondering why he bothered giving his son such a fine education. This led into him ranting and raving about the young people and their beliefs about a new culture. Unlike these uncouth young people, the beggars that he came upon were very different. The older woman seemed to be the younger one's grandmother. He saw the young beggar as a filial girl and a girl who showed respect for her elders, because she gave what she had to her grandmother. He saw her, although a beggar, as a good example of how a child should behave. Although he praised this beggar woman, he gave her no money. The wife becomes upset, because she sees her husband's interest in this young beggar woman. She gets angry because he curses out young female students but sings the praises of a young female beggar. Their argument is interrupted by the arrival of one of Siming's colleagues. They are having literature printed that supports traditional ways of thinking and argues against new ideas. The beggar girl is Siming's inspiration. The next morning his wife uses the soap and continues to bathe herself in fragrant soap.

In The Eternal Lamp, a group of men plot how to stop what they consider a madman from trying to blow out the Eternal Lamp in their village's Buddhist temple. Lucky Light Village was known for this lamp's unflinching flame, and they worried what would become



of them if he was able to put it out. The madman claims that all problems will end when the flame is put out; these men and the rest of the town feel just the opposite. It is finally decided that he should be locked up in one of the spare rooms in the temple. From this room's window, he begins to rant and rave but is finally silenced by a peasant boy a his reed shooter.

Wondering Where to Turn: A Happy Family, Soap, The Eternal Lamp Analysis

This is a humorous tale of the absurdity of finding a perfect mate and creating A Happy Family. Family life is often full of chaos and daily nuisances and the dynamics in a home are not always ideal. In this case, the narrator describes his wife's often heartless and controlling behavior regarding him, their home, and their child. This may reflect Lu Xun's own marriage and family at times. It may also reveal his opinion of the typical Chinese wife, as this type of forceful and demanding wife is frequently seen throughout his stories.

Soap displays an argument that is common throughout many cultures and time periods. According to older generations, the young are unruly and disobedient, and they are in need of more discipline. Their behavior and ideas go against all things that are good and traditional. There is a focus on the filial girl, in which the role of children is to be always obedient to elders. Although Siming puts this young beggar woman on a pedestal, he treats her no better than anyone else treats her. He, like everyone else he observes, gives her no money. All of these people have excuses as to why they could not help these two women. The author seems to mock individuals like Siming who have strong beliefs about how tradition can improve the country by giving him a wife who openly criticizes him for his thoughts and actions and having him write a piece of literature that is absurd and humorous. The translation compares Siming's beliefs about how the country can be saved from disaster and immorality to one's beliefs that by doing something as absurd and useless as worshiping George Washington's mother would save the good ol' Red, White, and Blue. The repetition of the purchase and use of this soap may be interpreted as Siming continuing to believe and act in ridiculous ways.

In The Eternal Lamp, the lamp could represent the norm in Chinese society and this man represents those who try to go against this norm. In this case, tradition wins. The author, once a young man with big dreams for his country, no longer seems to feel strongly about these idealistic pursuits. Maybe, like this madman, he has been locked away, or denied too often. He is now silenced.



Wondering Where to Turn: A Warning to the People, The Venerable Schoolmaster Gao, The Loner

Wondering Where to Turn: A Warning to the People, The Venerable Schoolmaster Gao, The Loner Summary

In *A Warning to the People*, a crowd gathers around to watch a condemned man be brought through the streets. A crowd gathers but is only entertained for a short while. Soon they are looking about for other forms of entertainment.

In *The Venerable Schoolmaster Gao*, Gao has been hired to teach Chinese history at a girls' school. He is very proud about this appointment, but as the time draws nearer to when he must teach, he grows very nervous. He becomes so anxiety-ridden during the lesson that he cannot manage to teach the entire class period. He ends the class early and leaves. He resigns from the position, telling himself that the new schools were destroying the general morality and it would be better to close the schools, especially the girls' schools. The story ends as he arrives at a gathering of his friends to drink and play mahjong tiles.

In *The Loner*, the narrator, Shenfei, tells of his relationship with Wei Lianshu. They both had their first and last meetings at funerals. Lianshu was known to be an oddball, even sobbing uncontrollably at his grandmother's funeral. When asked by the narrator why he did this, he said both he and his grandmother, who was his step-grandmother, were loners, and he was crying for all those in the world who were lonely. The narrator and Lianshu's relationship developed for awhile but began to decline when the narrator moved away. The last time the narrator saw Lianshu was when he returned to S-Town, where they had once both lived, to look for work. He decided to visit his old friend. When he arrived at his home, he learned that his friend had died from an illness. As he left the funeral, he cried uncontrollably. Just as soon as the crying started, it stopped. He felt much more at ease.

Wondering Where to Turn: A Warning to the People, The Venerable Schoolmaster Gao, The Loner Analysis

In *A Warning to the People*, the prisoner seems to be meant as a warning to others, so they may avoid his fate. To the crowd that has gathered he is a form of entertainment. When nothing is learned about the prisoner and nothing is done with him, the crowd grows bored. This parading of the prisoner in the street does not seem to be much of a warning.



In *The Venerable Schoolmaster* Gao, Gao was not prepared to be a teacher. He even went so far as to blame the girls for his discomfort in teaching them. Many times during and after his lecture he believed the girls were laughing at him. Was this real or imagined? It seems he enjoyed the status he received from this position more than the position itself. It may reflect the author's opinion of some school teachers in his country. Their appointment as teachers may have been more about social status than about teaching ability.

The Loner shows how wealth and status affect one's view of others. For most of the story, Lianshu was seen as an outcast and an object of ridicule. Once he gained status in the military, other's opinions of him changed greatly. This change in status in a community also changes the person who was once seen as a fool; like Lianshu, many people would become full of themselves and cocky. They would take advantage of their popularity and new friends. But, this story shows how popularity, wealth, and importance in the community do not save one from loneliness and death. The narrator and Lianshu were very similar. They were both loners who were frequently looking for work and acceptance. These similarities are reinforced when they both react the same way to the death of a loved one.



Wondering Where to Turn: Mourning the Dead, Brothers, Divorce

Wondering Where to Turn: Mourning the Dead, Brothers, Divorce Summary

Mourning the Dead is the story of the relationship between the narrator and Zijun. Because they chose to be romantically involved without the acceptance of their families and, it seems, without a marriage, they are shunned by much of their community. They struggle for about a year, with a gradual decline in their relationship. By the time a year is up, the narrator has been thinking about Zijun's death and finally tells her that their relationship is over. He returns home to find that she has returned to her father's home. He is upset that she was not able to go out on her own with the ending of their relationship; instead, she returned to the restricted environment of her youth. He, at times, misses her, but feels he made the right decision. When he learns that she has died, he is devastated. She was the reason that he had returned to her father's unhappy home. The narrator feels that the only way to move on is through falsehood and forgetfulness (p. 362).

In Brothers, a group of colleagues are discussing problems within families. Very few family members have relationships with each other like Zhang Peijun and his brother Jingfu; Peijun's colleagues want to know how to have a relationship like the one these brothers have. It is learned that an epidemic of Scarlet Fever has broken out in the city, and Jingfu is ill. Peijun goes home to care for him. It takes a great deal of effort and time for an expert in Western medicine to come to his house. By this time Peijun is frantic with worry. His worry is a waste, because Jingfu only has measles and not the deadly Scarlet Fever. During his period of distress, Peijun had thought about all the responsibilities he would be left with if his brother died. He was overwhelmed by this potential responsibility and was somewhat put out by all this responsibility his brother would leave him with. When he returned to the office, his friends praised him for all he had done for his brother. He did not seem so thrilled to receive this praise.

Divorce is about a woman, Ai-girl, who is trying to get revenge on her husband, who had left her for a young widow. She and her father travel to his hometown to try to strike a good deal after three years of bickering. It is not known exactly what she wants to get out of her husband; she just wants revenge. In the end she agrees to take the money that she is offered to divorce her husband. It is not what she wants, but she does not want to end up with nothing. She is praised for finally giving in.



Wondering Where to Turn: Mourning the Dead, Brothers, Divorce Analysis

Mourning the Dead is a story of mourning and grief. It is doubly sad because Zijun died alone and disliked; for this the narrator is partially to blame. This story shows the appropriate behavior that is expected of men and women at this time and how those who did not follow these rules were treated. The shunning of this couple is partially to blame for the deterioration of their relationship. This story shows that a relationship built on love can not be sustained without a great deal of effort on the part of both people in the relationship. Because the author shows both of these characters in a sympathetic light, I do not believe that he is condemning the freedom of choosing one's partner, but he is showing the realities of being in any relationship, whether it is arranged or not. Relationships take daily effort; without this effort they will surely die.

Brothers is based on Lu Xun's own experiences and relationship with his brother, Zhou Zouren. It shows the main character's, and possibly Lu Xun's, true feelings that came out regarding his brother. He loved his brother but had no desire to take care of his family, finances, or burial. His love for his brother was not as strong as many, including himself, had thought. With the addition of stress and conflict, these two loving brothers could easily become as petty as the two arguing brothers first discussed in the story. This story makes the reader wonder how he or she would react in a similar situation. Would you be as worried about your increased responsibility in the case of a death in the family as you were about the fact your loved one could die?

Divorce reveals details about Chinese culture related to marriage and divorce. Unlike in previous stories where who you marry and how you go about marrying him or her is a big deal, getting a divorce is not seen in a similar light. Divorce, at least in this instance where the man has found a new lover and no longer wants to be with his wife, seem to be no big deal. It seems that all the trouble Ai-girl went through to get revenge on her husband was a waste of time. In the end she backed down and accepted her husband's family's deal. With her fight to get back at her husband, it makes one wonder how she will be treated as a divorcee. Widows were often seen as man-hungry husband stealers. The question remains if whether a divorcee will be seen the same way.



Characters

Narrator/Young Boy/Madman/Important Politician/Elder Brother

Each story is told from the perspective of a narrator who is sometimes named and sometimes not. The reader views his experiences through the narrator's eyes but also can see the narrator's flaws and understand opposing views. Based on the background information given prior to the stories, each narrator's voice sounds like the voice of Lu Xun. It is clear that each narrator is based on Lu Xun or those with whom Lu Xun has come into close contact. These narrators are frequently the main characters in the stories but not always. In some stories the narrator is a bystander watching and having some or no interaction with the character that is the protagonist in the story. First person is used throughout the book as the narrator describes his surroundings and the events that unfold. At times other characters also speak in first person. When it is someone other than the narrator speaking, quotation marks are used. There are a few stories such as "A Happy Family" in which the third-person perspective is used. For the most part, the narrator describes the actions of the main character in the story.

Master Baldy/Master Yangsheng

He is the tutor of the young narrator in Remembrances of the Past.

Old Wang

He is the family gatekeeper in Remembrances of the Past.

Amah Li

She is an old woman and friend to Old Wang in Remembrances of the Past.

Venerable Old Zhao

He is head of the Zhao family in Diary of a Madman.

Old Fifth Chen

He takes care of the madman.



Elder Brother

He is the older brother to the madman.

Dr. He

He comes to check on the madman.

Kong Yiji

He is an elderly, educated man who is now poor due to his drinking habit. He wears shabby robes and is the butt of many of the jokes at the Prosperity for All wineshop.

Little-bolt

He is a little boy with tuberculosis.

Big-bolt

He is the little boy with T.B.'s father. He hopes the bloody mantou will be a cure for his son.

Mother Hua

She is the mother of the little boy with T.B.

Xia Kid

He is the criminal whose blood is soaked into the mantou.

Mother Xia

She is the mother of the criminal.

Hunch-backed Fifth Young Master

He is the enthusiastic friend of Big-bolt who believes the bloody mantou is a cure for T.B.



Rednose Everbow and Blueskin Ah-Five

They are wineshop patrons next door to Sister Shan's home.

Sister Shan

She is the widow weaver whose son dies during "Tomorrow."

He Xiaoxian

He is the doctor who tries to cure Bao'er.

Bao'er

He is Sister Shan's son who dies during "Tomorrow."

Rickshaw Puller

He is the man who helps the injured beggar woman to the police substation.

Policeman

The narrator gives this man money for the puller.

Mr. N

He comes to speak to the narrator and complains about the outcome of the first Double Ten.

Mrs. Ninepounder

She is a constant complainer.

Sister Sevenpounder

She is Mrs. Ninepounder's granddaughter-in-law.



Sevenpounder

He becomes the disgrace of the family because he had cut his queue, and the new regime that has supposedly taken over wears queues. When this regime is unsuccessful in taking the throne, peace is restored to his home.

Emperor

This man supposedly retook the throne but in the end fails to do so.

Seventh Master Zhao

He gives the news about the taking of the Dragon Throne.

Sevenpounder's Family

They change their behavior towards Sevenpounder based on the political changes taking place in China.

Mother

She moves with her son, Elder Brother Xun, from the family's compound to her son's home in the city.

Hong'er

He is Elder Brother Xun's nephew who moves to the city with his uncle.

Runtu

He is Elder Brother Xun's childhood friend. Their reunion is quite awkward due to their class differences.

Ah Q

He is a quick-tempered delusional man who is executed at the end of the story.

Old Master Zhao

Ah Q believes he is a part of this man's family. This leads to friction between Ah Q and this family.



Son of Old Master Qian/Fake Foreign Devil/Foreign Sellout

This is a man who wears a fake queue and studied in Japan. He is part of the Revolutionary Party.

Buddhist Nuns

Ah Q starts trouble with these women.

Amah Wu

She is the maid that Ah Q propositions.

Master Selectman

He tries to save Ah Q's life but is unsuccessful.

Revolution Party

Ah Q wanted to create his own version of this. Later he learns one has already been started by Budding Talent and the Fake Foreign Devil.

The Budding Talent

He is Zhao's son who starts a revolution in town with the Fake Foreign Devil.

Fang Xuanchuo

He is fond of saying "There's not much difference." He is indifferent to much going on around him, and this character reflects Lu Xun.

Chen Shicheng

He is a depressed scholar who never succeeded in passing the civil service examination. This story is based on one of Lu Xun's granduncles.

Third Missus

She raises rabbits and worries about their safety.



Rabbits

These are often the center of attention. A couple are killed by a cat.

A Cat

This creature kills some of the rabbits and is disliked by Third Missus and her son.

Eroshenko

He is a blind poet who stays with Lu Xun's family while in Beijing.

Frogs

These are put into a pond by Eroshenko.

Ducks

These are purchased by Eroshenko and eat the frogs.

Fourth Old Master Lu/Fourth Uncle

The narrator of "New Year's Sacrifice" stays with this man.

Sister Xianglin

She is an old beggar woman whose story is told by the narrator of "New Year's Sacrifice."

Lu Weifu

He is the narrator's old friend who joins him at the Gallon wineshop.

Ah-shun

She is the girl who Lu Weifu hopes to bring a velvet flower. He learns she has recently died.



Siming

He buys soap for his wife and is attracted to the young beggar girl.

Siming's Wife

She is upset that her husband is so drawn to the beggar girl.

Criminal

He is made an example in front of the people in "A Warning to the People."

The Venerable Schoolmaster Gao

This man becomes a teacher at a girls' school but becomes so nervous during his lecture, believing the girls are all laughing at him, that he decides to quit his job.

Wei Lianshu

He is the loner and an oddball in "The Loner."

Zijun

She is the narrator's ex-girlfriend who has died.

Ai-girl

She is the wife whose husband has left her for a young widow.

Young Pig

This is Ai-girl's nickname for her husband.

Bigman Seven

This man convinces Ai-girl to take her husband's family's compensation.

Old Master Wei

He tried to end the troubles between Ai-girl's family and her husband's family.



Zhang Peijun

While taking care of his ill brother, he became worried about the responsibilities his brother would leave him with if he died.

Jingfu

He is Peijun's sick brother.

Dr. Putisi

He is the German doctor that tells Peijun that his brother has the measles.



Objects/Places

Wu Market/He Market

The people flee to or from these places when they believe the Long Hairs are coming.

Wolf Cub Village

This is a nearby village in Diary of a Madman.

Lu Town

This is the town in which many stories, including "Kong Yiji," take place.

Prosperity For All Wineshop

This is where the little boy of twelve works when he meets Kong Yiji.

Old Pavilion Road Intersection

This is where Big-bolt gets the blood-soaked mantou.

Teashop

This is where Big-bolt and his family live.

Loom Shop

This is the setting for much of "Tomorrow."

Police Substation

This is where the puller takes the injured beggar woman.

Beijing

This is the setting for many stories including "The Story of Hair."



October 10th/Double Ten

This is the day on which "The Story of Hair" takes place.

Dragon Throne

This is what the Emperor tries unsuccessfully to take back.

Family Compound on the River

This is where "A Passing Storm" takes place.

Elder Brother Xun's Home Town

This is where much of "Hometown" takes place. He moves his family from here to the city.

Land-and-Grain Temple

This is the home of Ah Q.

Convent of Silent Cultivation

This is the home of the Buddhist nuns.

Wei Village

This is where "Ah Q - The Real Story" takes place.

Dragonboat Festival

Also known as Poet's Day, it is a day in which boats are raced and debts are paid.

White Light

The main character believes this points to buried treasure.

The Lake by High Peak West

This is where the main character in "White Light" drowns.



Grandma Lu's

This is where the narrator of "Village Opera" and his mother visit in the summer.

Zhao Village

This is the town in which the opera takes place in "Village Opera."

Luosi

This is a hotel in S-Town.

Gallon

This is a wineshop in S-Town.

Happiness Monthly

This is a magazine in which the narrator of "A Happy Family" would like to publish an article about a happy family.

Siming's Home

This is the setting for "Soap."

Luckylight Village

This is the setting for "The Eternal Lamp."

City Temple

This is where the townspeople lock up the man who wants to blow out the eternal lamp.

Girls' Academy

This is where the Venerable Schoolmaster Gao teaches one lesson and quickly leaves.



Hometowners' Club

This is where the narrator of "Mourning the Dead" and his girlfriend Zijun first live together. The narrator returns here after he learns she has died.

Goodmen Lane

This is where the narrator of "Mourning the Dead" and Zijun live as a couple.

Tongxing Apartments

This is the home of the brothers in "Brothers."

Chong Village

This is where Ai-girl and her father go to meet with her husband's family to discuss divorce proceedings.



Themes

Melancholy

A sense of melancholy is prevalent throughout much of this book. The hardships of daily life guide the characters in many of Lu Xun's stories. Along with daily strife, the characters are influenced by a culture in which education and image play important roles in one's livelihood and relationships. The politics of the day greatly influence the lives of the general populace and even designate whether a man should have long or short hair.

All of these factors tend to lead the characters to feelings of gloom and loneliness, lending a melancholy to these stories. This sense of melancholy also has a tendency to continue throughout the stories with only moments of reprieve, only to return back to this sense of sadness and loss.

This is a universal theme because people of all races, cultures, and social classes can relate to feelings of hopelessness and loneliness. Daily life and social or cultural demands put pressure to some extent on all people, so all can relate to the characters of these stories and their emotional struggles.

Misery Loves Company

Misery Loves Company is a theme frequently found in this book. This is connected to another theme of melancholy because many characters in this book suffer from loneliness, depression, and loss. Those who have lost or feel lost are frequently attracted to those who have also suffered.

The reason for this theme is because those who are miserable want to know not only that others suffer like them, but that they suffer more than them. This leads to feelings of relief and even happiness on the part of the one who suffers less. The characters are comforted by knowing that they are not alone in their suffering and that their suffering could always be worse. Several of Lu Xun's stories end when the main character of the story is comforted by the knowledge of the misfortunes of others.

Like these characters, many of us have thought to ourselves that "at least I don't have it as bad as him," or "it could be worse." Although we do not wish bad things to happen to others, we do get a sense of relief and perspective when we hear of others with worse problems and struggles. We do not feel nearly as alone in our struggles when we are able to vent about them with others in similar situations or hear about horrible disasters that occur daily around the world. When we know that our lives could always be worse, it makes it easier to cope with the problems and challenges that currently weigh on us.



Strong, Opinionated Women

Another theme is that of strong and opinionated women. Many of the women in Lu Xun's stories are loud-mouthed, bossy, and commanding. They are not afraid to speak their minds and are quick to reveal their feelings regarding various events to those around them.

At times this is seen in a negative light, as the women bully their husbands and other family members. The husband or other family member is portrayed as misunderstood and misguided, while the women in the stories see them as fools and ignoramuses. This makes the reader question Lu Xun's view of the women in his own life. Did he suffer from abuse by women in his own family? Was he trapped in an unhappy marriage? Was he simply revealing the behaviors of women in a society that tried to keep them as unequal to men?

At other times these strong women are seen as leaders. They, often with a somewhat rough hand, guide their families through their daily struggles. It is very clear who keeps these households running. Without these commanding women, these families could simply fall apart. Their intelligence and knowledge of their worlds is revealed through their conversations with those around them. Lu Xun's openness of the understanding of politics and Chinese culture of many of these women comes as a bit surprising for the time period. It most likely was surprising to many of those who read these stories in the early part of the twentieth century.

The use of opinionated women reinforces Lu Xun's own strong opinions and the opinions of Lu Xun's friends. These women reveal how cultures were changing all over the world. Everywhere views of race, status, and sex were changing.

Style

Point of View

Each story is told from the perspective of a narrator who is sometimes named and sometimes not. The reader views his experiences through the narrator's eyes but also can see the narrator's flaws and understand opposing views. Based on the background information given prior to the stories, each narrator's voice sounds like the voice of Lu Xun. It is clear that each narrator is based on Lu Xun or those with whom Lu Xun has come into close contact. These narrators are frequently the main characters in the stories but not always. In some stories the narrator is a bystander watching and having some or no interaction with the character that is the protagonist in the story. The first-person perspective is used throughout the book as the narrator describes his surroundings and the events that unfold. At times other characters also speak in first person. When it is someone other than the narrator speaking, quotation marks are used. There are a few stories such as "A Happy Family" in which third person perspective is used. For the most part, the narrator describes the actions of the main character in the story.

Setting

The setting of all of the stories in this book are China early in the 20th century. Beijing, a large urban city, is frequently viewed in a negative light. There is very little of it that is natural and many characters in this book move from their quaint hometowns to this bustling city to find work or keep the jobs they have to support themselves and their families. Many of the stories take place in small villages throughout China. S-Town, which stands for Lu Xun's hometown Shouxing, is frequently a town found in this book. Many of the stories' plots focus around this small town. Several of these towns are located on water. Life on the water is important in these communities. Life in these towns is also very difficult and so poverty is common among these village people. With poverty being so prevalent, so are wineshops. Several stories take place in or near wineshops.

Along with details of the towns or villages in which the stories take place, the author also describes the time of day and the time of year in which each story takes place. Many of the stories take place before, during, or after important Chinese holidays that reflect Chinese culture, history, and religious beliefs. These important times of the year influence the characters in the story and therefore, the plot by forcing the characters to reflect on their lives and the course their lives are currently on.

No matter the location of the story, life in China at the beginning of the 20th century is a significant part of each story. These stories reveal to Western readers all the peculiarities of life in China at this time such as the use of rickshaws as a common form of transportation, the debate on whether or not to wear a queue, bound feet, the



decision to wear traditional clothing or western apparel, and the settling of immediate and extended families in one large compound. Lu Xun paints a detailed picture of the lives of his characters, which also reflect his own life.

Language and Meaning

For the most part, Lu Xun's works were written in colloquial Chinese with an educated classical voice. This was unique for the time because most works of literary significance were written in classical Chinese. By writing it in colloquial Chinese, the spoken language, he was showing the importance of the language of the people. By including classical references and language, he reveals how the colloquial language is not the language of the ignorant, simply because it is the language of the common people.

The translator very successfully reflects this language when translating it into American English. Through the use of American catch phrases, regional American dialects, italics, and quotations, Lyell is able to convey the backgrounds, education, and knowledge of each character. Through these various tactics, he easily distinguishes one character and character type from another.

Structure

The book begins with a preface by the translator, William A. Lyell. It reveals how much the translator loves the work of and respects Lu Xun. The preface also thanks those who have helped and encouraged the translator as he translated Lu Xun's work into American English. The Introduction is a brief glance into Chinese history and Chinese culture and politics during the early part of the 20th century. It also describes Lu Xun's life and work and what influenced him, as well as how he and his work influenced others. There is then a Note on Pronunciation to help the reader correctly pronounce names of characters and places.

The first story is Remembrances of the Past. It gives the reader a first glimpse into Chinese culture at the beginning of the 20th century from the perspective of a small boy. The next group of stories is called Cheering from the Sidelines. These were stories written between 1918 and 1922. The last group of stories are found in Wondering Where to Turn and were written between 1924 and 1925. These stories focus around the politics at the time and its influences on the general populace, as well as other aspects of people in Lu Xun's life. These stories reflect Lu Xun's political beliefs, life experiences, the beliefs of others, and the deficiencies from which China suffered, according to Lu Xun.



Quotes

"You have to really go into something before you can understand." (Diary of a Madman, p. 32).

"Old Kong was a delight to have around, but when he wasn't there, we managed to get along just as well without him too." (Kong Yiji, p. 46).

"Guaranteed cure! Guaranteed! When you eat it while it's still warm like that, a mantou soaked in human blood is a guaranteed cure for any kind of T.B. there ever was." (Medicine, p. 54).

"Bao'er, I think your spirit is probably still here. Please, please let me see you in my dreams, if only for a little while." (Tomorrow, p. 66).

"To tell the truth, these 'important affairs of state' have merely taught me to despise people more and more with every passing day." (An Unimportant Affair, p. 67).

"The faces of so many old friends float before my eyes. Some of those youngsters worked themselves to the bone for a decade or more just to bring about that day, only to have their lives taken away by a bullet fired in the secret recesses of some jail." (The Story of Hair, pp. 71).

"Each generation's worse than the last." (A Passing Storm, p. 78).

"Hope...it's like a path across the land - it's not there to begin with, but when lot's of people go the same way, it comes into being." (Hometown, p. 100).

"...in his role as condemned criminal Ah Q had given a miserable performance - paraded through the streets all that time and not a single line of opera!" (Ah Q - The Real Story, p. 172).

"...things that had in the past stirred his deepest emotions continued to occur, but he no longer felt them as keenly, for now he had his new way of thinking to comfort him." (Dragonboat Festival, p. 173).

"...the male in question had been alive when he fell into the lake. There was riverbottom mud embedded under ever fingernail, clear evidence that he had fought for his life after falling in." (The White Light, pp. 190).

"...The family of white rabbits was thriving more than ever and everyone was happy again." (Some Rabbits and a Cat, p. 195).



"Although he is gone, four ducks are still quacking away for all they are worth in the midst of this 'lonely desert.'" (A Comedy of Ducks, p. 201).

"I have never really eaten beans as good as those I had that night, nor have I ever seen such fine opera either." (Village Opera, p. 215).

"At this point I began to see that, for all the good it did me, I might just as well have remained uneducated, for despite all my stalling, despite all my brainwracking, I had been unable to stand up to three questions posed by this simple woman." (New Year's Sacrifice, p. 223).

"It occurred to me that while it was true the north wasn't my home, the south wasn't my home anymore either." (Upstairs in a Wineshop, p. 244).

"He angrily snatched up the gree-lined draft paper bearing the the title of his story, the same paper that was covered with his calculations. He scrunched it up several times to make it soft and then used it to wipe his daughter's eyes and nose." (A Happy Family, p. 262).

"'Being girls, Xiu'er and her sister don't have to worry about going to any 'academy,' or whatever they want to call them. What business do girls have going to school anyway?'" (Soap, p. 267).

"If the lamp is blown out, we won't be plagued by locusts anymore, and we won't have any more epidemics of trench mouth either." (The Eternal Lamp, p. 283).

"Everyone is one the verge of disappointment. Fortunately, however, when they make a visual inventory of their immediate environs, they discover a rickshaw man who has just taken a hard fall about ten doors down the way." (A Warning to the People, p. 296).

"Flowerheart Pearl doesn't think too much of girls' schools either, says they blur the distinction between the sexes." (The Venerable Schoolmaster Gao, p. 304).

"'Someone who's depressed really does make others feel uncomfortable. After all, no one goes to a park in the winter.'" (The Loner, p. 322).

"I must take the first step and make my way silently down that new road, hiding the truth within my heart's deepest wound and taking falsehood and forgetfulness as my guides." (Mourning the Dead, p. 362).

"...now his own head, on the other hand, felt a bit dizzy, and dream fragments began to flicker and glitter once again as they bobbed up to the surface of his consciousness." (Brothers, p. 372).

"'I'm fightin' because I'm flat-out mad, that's all. Just think of it, that young pig shackin' up with that pretty widow, and then thinkin' he could dump me. I'd just like to see him try and get away with that.'" (Divorce, p. 378).



Topics for Discussion

Chinese culture was in a frequent state of upheaval in the early twentieth century. Describe this upheaval based on information given in this book. How did Lu Xun handle all that was going on in his country and around the world? How was he influenced by all these changes?

Lu Xun's own opinions and personality can be seen in this book. Name and describe four characters that strongly reflect Lu Xun. How do they resemble him?

Describe the introduction and preface. How do the introduction and preface prepare you for the stories throughout the rest of the book? How do you benefit from this knowledge?

A man's hair was an important feature in early twentieth century China. How was it important? Why was it important? What led to this importance? To what might it be compared in our own culture? Why?

A wineshop frequents this book. Describe a Chinese wineshop. How are these wineshops important to the stories? What do they reveal about China at the time? To what are they similar in our own culture? Why?

Beijing is the setting of several stories. Describe Beijing at this time. Why might the author choose Beijing to be the setting of several of his stories? What seems to be the author's opinion of Beijing? Why? How might this Beijing compare to Beijing today? Why?

Many of the women in this book are strong-willed. Describe two of these women. How do their personalities affect the story and those around them? Why might Lu Xun have made these women so outgoing and commanding?

Lu Xun seems to poke fun at the traditionalists in this book. How does he go about doing this? What message is he trying to send to his readers? What does this reveal about Lu Xun's beliefs and personality? How do you react to those whose beliefs differ from your own? Why?

At times, Lu Xun creates characters that represent or outrightly names real people from Chinese history. Describe two of these people and how they are mentioned in this book. Why does Lu Xun find it important to name these people or create characters based on them?

Lu Xun was a Communist. What is your opinion of Communism? Why? Might Lu Xun be a Communist today? Why or why not? What might Lu Xun think about the results of Communism thus far? Why? What might he think about China today? Why?