DEATH AS A DESPERATE MEDIUM OF EXPRESSION IN LU XUN'S "MADMAN'S DIARY" AND VIRGINIA WOOLF'S "MRS. DALLOWAY"

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Abstract: "Death" has been used as a crucial tool in literature for creating a sense of existential reality in a plot; it has also been used as a literary expression to unravel social and political dogmas. Apart from the causative realities surrounding death, the fear of death acts as an important medium in bringing forth deep-seated socio-political and economic realities of a society. While the innate inevitability of death justifies its use as an unapologetic literary device, the irreversibility of death renders it a potent resource for the writer to communicate with the reader. This paper compares how "death" is manifested in Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary" and Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" by examining how thoughts of death and oppression lurk in the daily lives of the protagonists. It further discusses how "Madness," which was seen as the death of all things human and above all the 'death of the mind', helps unravel oppression and death in the backdrop of social evils in Lu and Woolf's work.

Though 'death' is an inevitable reality, one who is born is bound to die; the fear of death has been one of the most persistent forms of anxiety among human beings from time immemorial. The anxiety around 'death' also leads to the anxiety around 'life' and its myriad injustices. The unknown nature of 'death' has always instilled fear and fascination in human beings; it transcends all imagined boundaries and often finds expression in language and literature. Thoughts on life and death have long occupied and preoccupied people; they speak and write a lot about them. The emergence of language as a main tool of expression was based on human beings' connection to the world. Language helps articulate and give concrete form to thoughts. Literature served as a means of recording and fictionalizing verbal expressions about death. "Literature articulates and elaborates the thoughts and feelings that enter into the awareness of death." (Carroll, 2019, p. 137). Thus, 'death' is one of the most commonly used literary devices in literature in almost all languages of the world.

Writers have often used their own fear of death, imaginations of their own death, or experiencing the death of their loved ones as a crucial tool to weave their stories and create a sense of existential reality in their plot. Apart from the fact that the causal realities surrounding death can create anxiety and captivate the reader's interest in the plot, 'death' also serves as an important medium for bringing to light deep-seated socio-political and economic realities of a society. 'Death' is used as a "symbolic expression of the decay of society" (Skelton, 2003, p. 211). While the innate inevitability of death justifies its use as an unapologetic literary device, the irreversibility of death renders it a potent resource for the writer to communicate with the reader. A few writers have used 'death' as a literary device to unravel social and political dogmas, thereby making their work more captivating and deeply influential. It can be strongly argued that several literary classics, including Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, would not have had the same impact had the protagonists not met the fate of death. However, it is the profound thoughts and actions surrounding dying and death in the plot that bring the issues of life itself to life. Death caused by oppression, and the unjust and unfair circumstances of that oppression, dominated the literature of the

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early twentieth-century world. Oppression was seen as an integral and root cause of madness. Advancement in clinical psychology proves that prolonged oppression in the hands of the oppressor, which could emerge from the positions of power, gender, generation, class, or race, is the root cause of mental illness. However, madness itself was often misdiagnosed as a behavioral abnormality and was governed by so-called unacceptable codes of conduct.

Nonetheless, in time, "death' also came to be closely associated with "madness." As Foucault (1965, p. 15) points out, until the mid 15th Century, "the theme of death reigns alone"; however, by the end of the century, the "mockery of madness replaces death and its solemnity."[1]. Madness was seen as the death of all things human and above all the 'death of the mind', "when the madman laughs, he already laughs with the laugh of death" (Foucault, 1965, p. 16). As a result, literature started using "madness" and 'death' as a critical literary discourse, which equally inspired both fear and fascination. Human understanding on "madness" was represented in literature from initially viewing it as a deliberate act of "hysterical" behavior and later as an incurable disease, As the doctor says about Lady MacBeth, "Madness, in its vain words, is not vanity; the void that fills it is a disease beyond my practice,"; it is already the plenitude of death; a madness that has no need of a physician, but only of divine mercy" (McBeth, Shakespeare).

As Klambauer (2024, p. 2) points out, "Whether a mental ailment is real or imagined, it is inevitably accompanied by a loss of voice and personal agency". In the context of imagined madness, women's voice in particular is most often dismissed for being overtly emotional, angry, or 'hysterical' owing to hormonal fluctuations. Thus, women with such symptoms are doubly silenced and invisibilized.[2] As Foucault (1965, 71) observes,

> Coguel describes La Salpetriere at the end of the eighteenth century: "Madwomen seized with fits of violence are chained like dogs at their cell doors, and separated from keepers and visitors alike by a long corridor protected by an iron grille; through this grille is passed their food and the straw on which they sleep; by means of rakes, part of the filth that surrounds them is cleaned out.

Men, on the other hand, are targeted for their unmanly conduct, namely dishonor; a man should not fail to uphold his own as well as his family, society, and country's image. Therefore, several writers have taken it upon themselves to either write about mad people and their miseries or to get into the mind of a mad person, giving them a voice or even personal agency in some cases. "This survival of the mad voice in

[1] In the *Narrturmer* in Germany, barred windows had been installed which permitted those outside to observe the madmen chained within. They thus constituted a spectacle at the city gates. As late as 1815, if a report presented in the House of Commons is to be believed, the hospital of Bethlehem exhibited lunatics for a penny, every Sunday. Now the annual revenue from these exhibitions amounted to almost four hundred pounds; which suggests the astonishingly high number of 96,000 visits a year. The insane who attended these theatricals were the object of the attention and curiosity of a frivolous, irresponsible, and often vicious public. The bizarre attitudes of these unfortunates and their condition provoked the mocking laughter and the insulting pity of the spectators. Madness became pure spectacle, (Foucault 1965, 69)

[2] Foucault writes, "this disease (madness) attacks women more than men, because they have a more delicate, less firm constitution, because they lead a softer life, and because they are accustomed to the luxuries and commodities of life and not to suffering" (149)

literary texts can be attributed to the special position of literature as compared to other discourses" (Klambauer, 2024, p. 3)**.** Madness has also been used in literature to bring the truth into the open without risking prosecution, owing to its nature as a work of fiction. "Thereby, madness and mad characters can become critical mouthpieces of inherent cultural conflicts of the time, for instance, questions of gender or race" (Klambauer, 2024, p. 3).

In this endeavor, some of these works have crossed forbidden boundaries to question the so-called accepted ideas of sanity as well as the danger of misdiagnosis, leading to the unravelling of a range of socio-political and even economic factors which cause unusual, unsound, or unaccepted behavior as a means of expression rather than a pathological symptom of mental illness. This paper compares two such classics from around the same period but from different parts of the world, thousands of miles apart: Lu Xun's *A Madman's Diary* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Both these works are amongst the few creations on which one cannot have a single, simple analysis and hold on to them for long. Ever since these two works of fiction were published[3]There have been several analyses of their subtle and deeply realistic nature. So much so that they have even been labelled two of the most important works to analyze how ideas of modernity question the traditional in both societies. Nonetheless, it has been a never-ending engagement, since every new interpretation tends to challenge or defy the earlier one. Even as new realms and realities have unfolded over the past 100-odd years, in hindsight, the importance of such stories in highlighting the transitional juncture between tradition and modernity remains intact.

Both Lu Xun's man in *A Madman's Diary* and Woolf's woman in *Mrs. Dalloway* are claimed to be mad. As Lu Xun's "madman," who realizes that he is surrounded by man-eaters, Woolf's 'madwoman' also woke up to the fact that the people around her have invisibilized her. Is this invisibilizing of a woman in Mrs. Dalloway any different from the man-eating in A Madman's Diary? Some of the dilemmas expressed by Lu Xun's madman are addressed by Woolf's madwoman. This paper intends to discuss how, in both stories, the thoughts of death and oppression lurk in the daily life of the characters and how one is both the oppressor and the oppressed; the thin line between them gets blurred, and their sheer helplessness in this transformation gets highlighted in both stories through the "madness" of the characters. The paper will examine Lu Xun and Woolf's use of literature to reveal oppression, madness, and death against the backdrop of social evils. The threats of oppression get mingled with the threats of death, and 'death' becomes an inevitable escape and comfort against oppression. This paper is not an attempt to compare these two works as a whole; its sole intention is to examine the similarities in how the authors view oppression and use 'death' as an ultimate and desperate medium of expression through the protagonists and their madness.

Lu Xun was a unique storyteller; his stories were of the most intimate types, in which his narration flows as he chronicles his thoughts, feelings, and impressions in a free-flowing manner, unrestrained by convention or rule. It is said that Lu Xun's essays are not the easiest of readings since they are a mix of vernacular language and classical Chinese techniques, which means nothing is straightforward; they simply were the flow of his thoughts. Though at many places it seemed to lack a clear direction to guide the reader, it did not lack satire and carried key messages — one that comes from awareness and the ability to see through the realities of society. He did not subscribe to any political affiliation and remained stubbornly independent throughout his life, which made his writings widely read. If it were not for Lu Xun's moving eulogy on the death of prominent revolutionaries from Shaoxing—Xu Xilin and Qiu Jin, as well

[3] *A Madman's Diary,* was published in 1918, Beijing, *Mrs Dalloway* was published in *1*925, London

as his poem on the national political climate which led to the demise of Fan Ainong,[4] they would have languished in obscurity as the forgotten and unrecognized revolutionaries.

Virginia Woolf is credited with introducing a style of expressing multiple layers of thought that unfold simultaneously in the human mind in her writing. This was later popularly known as the "stream-of-consciousness" prose style. This literary style involves a "character's uninterrupted, flowing thoughts, reactions and feelings by objective description or conventional dialogue" (Lohnes). In her work, she evokes the protagonist's memories as she formulates and establishes the character's identity; in the process, she attempts to capture the flight of the mind and render it in free-flowing words. Thus, both Woolf and Lu, through their writing, take the reader on a voyage beyond the conventions of realism. While Lu Xun through his narrative expresses his indignant fury over the shutting out of the poor i.e. the have-nots from the world of have-s, in the Confucian-traditional Chinese society which believes in ignoring and oppressing the poor, Woolf through her narrative brings out her pain and anger against patriarchy for shutting out of women and weaker men from the overtly male dominated society of the Victorian era. Like Lu Xun, Woolf also identifies poverty as the origin of oppression. Woolf blames women's absence from history "not on their lack of brains and talent but on their poverty" (Woolf, 1925b).

I. Death: Personal Life Experiences and Their Influence on Their Writings

Both Lu Xun and Virginia Woolf have seen death very closely early in their life. Lu Xun saw the death of his father and faced the struggles of survival that followed (Gao & Ge, 2011). Though Lu Xun was born into a wealthy and well-educated family, the episode of his grandfather being accused and nearly executed for bribery when Lu Xun was still a child surely left a deep impact on his young mind. Following this, his family went tumbling down the social ladder. This fall from grace and the way once-friendly neighbors treated his family after they had lost their status had a profound effect on young Lu Xun. It is famously known that his father's death, following the failure of the traditional Chinese remedies, affected him greatly, to the extent that he vowed to study Western medicine and become a doctor (Custer, 2019). While he was in Japan as a medical student, the oppression, humiliation, and murder at the hands of the Japanese changed his mind, and he came back to China in a quest to provide a psychological cure to his race, so as to help the Chinese people awaken to the social dogma of superstitions as well as the Confucian and feudal structure. Following this, he worked for several years as a teacher in his hometown and then as a low-level government official in Beijing. He came to be associated with the nascent Chinese literary movement in 1918. Later, he served as a visiting university professor, translator, and literary critic.

Woolf saw the death of both her mother and father, and as she grew up, she saw a series of deaths: half-sister, brother, and sister. She also faced sexual abuse and the struggles of survival in a male-dominated society very early in her life[5]. By the age of

[4] Poems lamenting Fan Ainong's death, mentioned in Jon Eugene von Kowallis (1996), The Lyrical Lu Xun: A Study of His Classical-Style Verse, University of Hawaii Press, Hawaii. p-118

[5] In her essays titled "*A Sketch of the Past" and "22 Hyde Park Gate,*" Woolf wrote about being sexually abused by her half-brothers George and Gerald at a very young age.

thirteen, Woolf had lived through a series of extremely traumatizing, emotionally devastating events, and she drew upon these events to shape her work. Her experiences in early life, relationship with her parents, as well as their early death, played a huge role in why Woolf eventually turned to writing as a coping mechanism. Owing to her disturbed relationship with her parents, siblings, and other people in her life, writing gave her leeway to understand her problems (Nizami & Mitchell)

Memories, especially childhood memories, have influenced writers from time immemorial. Sometimes, it can link one's identity to the past, influence one's present, and even shape one's future. Writers submit to the desire to convert their memory or the fleeting moments of the past into something permanent, in some form or another. They firmly believe that since their memories continue to influence them, making a comfortable space in their own life, it will surely not miss influencing the readers. Therefore, in their work, they freely draw on their memories to bring out their own life experiences, the repetition of images and ideas they firmly believe in, and the expressions they want to convey. The reality is so closely mingled with fiction that soon there are no walls separating them. Both Lu Xun and Woolf are thought to have drawn on their personal experiences, which deeply influenced them throughout their lives, to engage with the social evils of the time. The use of 'death' to convey the message is an integral part of this expression.

Lu Xun's experiences with death and suffering are splashed all over his work of fiction as well as his essays. Sufferings of the oppressed dominate almost all of his work, and throughout the narrative, 'death' remains a hidden agenda waiting to ambush the characters and story at any time. What awaits is whether 'death' will be chosen or given, how it will depict the social evil, and whether it will pave the way for hope? As if taking a page from his memory, Lu Xun brings out his characters who are suffering from superstition and social dogma, as appearing to be real and reasonable, yet their madness and lack of reasonability sticks out for the reader, in the most contradictory ways. However, in some cases, he also looks at death as not limited to physical death. He metaphorizes death as being 'living dead', being unaware and innocent. One way to look at it is the way he puts it: "in the conundrum of the iron house: should one wake up those who are soundly asleep in an air-tight iron house because they soon will suffocate even when one cannot offer them any possibility of escape" (Idema, 2012).

In his essay, *What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?* He points out, "The most painful thing in life is to wake up from a dream and have nowhere to go. Dreamers are fortunate people. If no way out can be seen, the important thing is not to awaken the sleepers", "When it comes to women and other unaware lot", he satirically expresses that its "best to let them continue to sleep, rather than awakening them and leave no options for them to go" (Lu, 1923, p. 86). By juxtaposing the two contrasting scenarios of attempting to raise awareness while confronting the reality of society, Lu Xun seeks to evoke his own memories of sheer helplessness in the face of reality. Nonetheless, Lu Xun's real-life role as a teacher and a progressive writer takes center stage in his work. Therefore, within all of his realism and satire, one can feel an underlying flicker of hope. Therefore, "in spite of his affinity for darkness and death in most of his work, Lu Xun was seen (for a long period of time) as the 'soul of the nation,' and has often been appropriated as a symbol of light" (Cheng, 2013). However, some of the words, such as " as sharp as a sword, by this very soul of the nation," have also posed a threat to the establishment even in his afterlife. Therefore, Lu Xun, who is widely regarded

https://www.ajc.com/news/world/who-was-virginia-woolf-things-know-about-the-iconic-british-writer/Fprpz1hAraDqOUjKXGtRZP/, accessed on 29 Sep, 2018

as the greatest writer of the last century, is as untamed as ever, and his writings continue to prove true and unsettling.[6]

Virginia Woolf's close association with death is evident in both her work and her personal life. Many of the central characters in her work die. Woolf's characters do not indicate any certainty or offer any explanation for the reason behind their fate. As a result, Woolf's writing is suffused with many personal details gleaned from her own life, which gave her the excess to express her experiences and emotions that were not regarded as "acceptable" by Victorian standards. The uncertainty of her characters and their fate was in stark contrast to the then-existing certainties of the Victorian era. As Victor Brombert (2010, p. 429) points out,

> We do not normally associate the writings of Virginia Woolf with ferocity and gore, but rather with evanescent moments of consciousness, subtle fluctuations in emotional states, and complex networks of interpersonal relations. Yet fear of imminent calamities, unspeakable catastrophes, is rarely absent; the horrors of individual and collective destruction are never remote. Association of her work with her personal memories is so closely entangled that it is said she used many of her characters to bring out her own experiences, her multiple personalities and dilemmas, as well as the interpersonal relations she had with the people around her. She based many of the characters in her novels on real-life prototypes.

Both Lu Xun and Woolf have written down their near-death feelings. As experts in expressive writing, they have not missed this opportunity. Both Lu Xun and Woolf's feelings on 'death' are given away in their last work, which expresses their loss of desire and almost looking forward to dying. Woolf suffered a mental breakdown at the age of 34, and the recurrence of these symptoms at the age of 59 led her to take her own life by drowning herself in a river.[7] Her suicide notes, addressed to her husband (Woolf, 1941), read as, "I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So, I am doing what seems the best thing to do…."

On the other hand, Lu Xun wrote an essay titled 'Death' a month before he died. His essay, 'Death', on the whole, seems formless (Lu, 1936). It is as if he were writing whatever he was feeling; it also sounded like a "Will." He wrote a seven-point 'Will' in this essay. A careful observation of both these works shows that both were aware of death's coming and had completely submitted to it, though in different ways. It is said that since Woolf had taken refuge from the emotion of facing her loved ones' deaths, war, and depression by writing, when she realized she could no longer write, she decided to end her life. Lu Xun's prolonged illness left him helpless, and he awaited being taken away by death.

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[6] It is said that for these reasons, "Lu Xun, remains at large, the greatest dissident left unfettered in China. His denunciations of oppression in the days of the Kuomintang and the warlords are being turned against the Communists who acclaimed him, and the leadership is unsure how to react." Perhaps, out of this dilemma, come attempts to make the nation forget Lu Xun. Lu Xun's works are being systematically removed from textbooks and study materials in China. (Kristof, 1990),

[7] Woolf's maniac-depressive worries (that she was a failure as a writer and a woman, that she was despised by Vanessa (sister) and unloved by Leonard(husband)) provoked an early suicide attempt in September 1913. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Virginia-Woolf, accessed on 9th May 2019.

II. "A Madman's Diary" and "Mrs. Dalloway": The Stories at a Glance

Lu Xun's *A Madman's Diary* was published amidst the social reform movement in China, and the New Cultural Movement was one of its main weapons. The intellectual reformers advocated the study of Western philosophy and science to counter the conservative, superstitious Confucianism through the New Cultural Movement. Lu Xun began writing for the New Youth, which was considered one of the primary vehicles of the New Cultural Movement. Lu Xun was "one among a group of radical intellectuals who were actively dedicated to the remaking of Chinese society" (Uberoi, 61). Therefore, *A Madman's Diary*, Lu Xun's first work of fiction published in *New Youth* in 1918, is believed to have played an important role in creating awareness and encouraging the culture of questioning one's beliefs.

A Madman's Diary begins with the narrator's visit to his childhood friend, who was ill, on his way to his hometown. Upon his arrival, he learns from his brother that his friend has recovered and has taken a government job. The brother gives the narrator a diary he kept while ill; he tells him that reading it will give him a glimpse of what he felt during his illness. From this point on, the story is written as diary entries of the *Madman*, a name the protagonist had himself coined. It carried random thoughts, feelings, and fears, his obsessions and paranoia. He realizes that people around him are man-eaters, and he can see the words "Eat people!" everywhere around him, even in between the lines of history books. He reveals in his diary that he feels the villagers, his doctor, and even his own brother are conspiring to eat him. To prove this, he also brings out examples of incidents in which people were either threatening to or were actually eating parts of other people. One of them was a tenant from a neighboring village, who told his brother about the man who was killed, and a few people took out his heart and ate pieces of it to increase their courage. Clearly, the *Madman* seems to be the only one affected by the heinousness of these practices.

In his diary, the Madman establishes that the people around him are bound to eat people, and he seeks the reasons behind this in history and ancient books. He finds the traits of eating, hidden within the values of virtue and morality. One day, the madman asks a young man who is visiting him, "If it is right to eat human beings?" The visiting man denies in the beginning, but later confesses and says, 'it has been happening, and that one should not discuss these things, if you do discuss it, you are wrong' (Lu, 1918). The Madman realizes that all of them know it is wrong, but they still do it, just because it has been going on; however, they also forbid each other from talking about it. Put it this way: one can indulge in social evils, but talking about them is wrong and forbidden. He starts believing that his older brother ate his younger sister when she was a child, and with horror, he realizes that perhaps he himself unknowingly consumed pieces of her flesh as well. He says, "It is possible that I ate several pieces of my sister's flesh unwittingly, and now it is my turn . . ." and that his mother either did not know or would not speak of the cannibalism because it was inappropriate to speak of such things. He then lived in fear of being eaten himself. He wonders if there is any real man who has never eaten flesh; he yearns to see one. Finally, he hopes there are still children who have not eaten humans, and his last plea is that someone "Save the children…" (Lu, 1918).

Virginia Woolf's Mrs. *Dalloway* is often seen as a condemnation of militarism and war. The trauma of the First World War still hangs heavy in London, reinforcing how, for Woolf and her fellow Britons, the trauma of the conflict was ongoing, its unprecedented devastation still raw and ineradicable for the relatives, friends, and loved ones of the unreturned. Time and again, the novel reveals how the myriad anxieties and overwhelming grief of the war were etched into every aspect of post-war life (Bradshaw, 2016). *Mrs. Dalloway* is narrated in third-person omniscient, though its focus shifts throughout; it begins and ends with Clarissa as it leads the reader

through a day in her life. Clarissa is a seemingly disillusioned socialite who, at times, seems delighted, but at others, depressed. As the story is narrated both in dialogue and in a continuous stream of consciousness, very early in the story, it is clear that she is suffering from neglect and loss of purpose in her life, suggesting suppressed symptoms of depression. *Mrs. Dalloway* begins with Clarissa's preparatory errand to buy flowers for the party she is throwing that evening. As she is buying flowers and walking past the city, unexpected events occur, and perspectives switch from Mrs. Dalloway to Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran who was suffering from shell shock, and his Italian wife is trying to cope with his sudden hysterical behavior in public spaces. Soon after she returns home, her childhood friend Peter, with whom she was once in love, arrives. As the two converse, it becomes clear that they still harbor strong feelings for each other. In a moment of weakness, Peter asks Clarissa if she is happy. Before Clarissa can answer, her daughter, Elizabeth, interrupts them. The narrative shifts from past to present throughout the story. Through Clarissa's continuous thread of thoughts, the reader comes to know that she had once loved Peter, but she had refused his proposal, perhaps fearing the risks of the adventures he claimed to take up in life. She would instead choose the safe binding that Richard promised to give her. But now it seems she carries a sense of regret mixed with feelings of worthlessness about herself, even a loss of identity. By just being Mrs. Dalloway, a wife, a mother, and a person of no more use to anyone. The perspective shifts to Richard, Clarissa's husband. Knowing that Peter is back, in a fit of insecurity, Richard rushes back home to express his love for her; however, he could do nothing more than give her flowers. Clarissa finds the gulf between herself and Richard convenient, though she feels neglected, but it gives both of them freedom and rules out any need to be answerable to each other.

The narrative shifts back to Septimus Smith, who has been deeply suffering since he returned from the war. His doctor is unable to understand him, let alone treat him. He and his wife have been told that he has to be taken to a psychiatric hospital. Septimus Smith and his wife disagree with this; he would rather die than go away to such a place. Eventually, he commits suicide by throwing himself out of the window. The narration once again switches to Clarissa. At her party, while she is engaged with entertaining her guests, some of whom are very esteemed, Sir William Bradshaw, Septimus Smith's doctor, arrives with his wife and announces that Septimus has killed himself. Clarissa first gets annoyed that her party would be spoiled with bad news, such as death, but she soon retreats to her room to comprehend and contemplate Septimus Smith's situation, while her childhood friends Peter and Sally, who have been in her thoughts throughout the day, converse and wait for her to join them. It is also revealed that she has just recovered from sickness, most likely mental sickness, and thus the party, which was the first after she recovered, was important for her. Back in her room all alone, she identifies with the overwhelming situation Septimus Smith must have been in. She feels glad he chose death over compromising his soul by allowing them to confine him. With this realization, she suddenly feels ashamed of how she has compromised her own soul and lost herself in the process, just so she can go on living. She sees Septimus Smith's death as a defiance, as an attempt to express, to communicate, yet his death reminds her of the beauty and fun of life; she feels the need to assemble herself and return to the party.

These two literary works were chosen for this paper owing to the striking similarities in their narratives, which chronicle the protagonist's thoughts. How the protagonists are able to see through the hypocrisy of the people around them, how

society simply labels people who question the norm as mad, and forbids talking about it. The protagonists in both these stories were cured of their mental illness, indicating that they both realized the dangers of not being able to mend themselves. They describe how society gathers to mend or eliminate elements that disturb the "normal" functioning of the world, rather than accepting or addressing the issue.

III. Oppression: "To Eat, or to be Eaten"

While *A Madman's Diary is* literally a few pages taken out from the diary of a madman, *Mrs. Dalloway* covers a day in the life of Carissa Dalloway in post-war London. In both stories, the thoughts of oppression and death lurk in the daily lives of the characters. The hypocrisy of feudal society is highlighted through madness and cannibalism in Lu Xun's story, and the hypocrisy of a civilized society is highlighted through madness and suicide in Woolf's story. While Lu Xun uses cannibalism and oppression as a cause of death, Woolf uses suicide and oppression as a cause of death. Through the narrative, it becomes clear that one is both the oppressor and the oppressed; the thin line between them blurs at times. The protagonist's sheer helplessness during this transformation in both stories can be felt by readers, too.

Lu Xun has been ardently critical of the Confucian practice of filial piety and the deep-seated oppression practiced by the higher generation and gender. He believed in a society where people are oppressing and eating each other, women and children are most abused and vulnerable (Zhang, 1991, pp. 127-130). Lu Xun's madman learns that man-eating practices have been prevalent throughout history. To establish his theory of cannibalism and to find its origin in history, the madman reads the history books and tries to find some clue; he finally finds the two words hidden among the books, which say, "eat people."

> Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology, and scrawled all over each page are the words: "Virtue and Morality." Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night, until I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words — "Eat people." (Lu, 1918)

During the May Fourth Movement, progressives in China realized that Chinese society was caught in the clutches of Confucian conservatism. Superstition has completely exploited society and threatens to nibble away at and decompose it. Many of the literary pieces during this period focused on fleshing this out and spreading awareness against the evil practices. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, oppression is depicted at different levels. The dilemma of when and how one is being oppressed, and when and how one becomes an oppressor, manifests itself in pervasive ways. Mrs. Dalloway's views and feelings for Miss Kilman (a poor lady) give out the dilemmas of how to look at one's location of being one of the rich and being seen as the oppressor. She says, "She was never in the room five min without making you feel her superiority and your inferiority; how poor she was how rich you were, how she lived in a slum without a crushing…" (Woolf, 1925a). Despite being well aware of her status as an oppressor, Mrs. Dalloway cannot help but feel hatred towards the oppressed, since they make her aware of her position. Whereas with her husband, she herself is the oppressed one. Similarly, the madman, while accusing his elder brother of eating his sister, also realizes he might have also eaten parts of his sister when she died, but he feared that he too would meet the same fate, now that he is seen as a 'madman'. He writes,

> I have only just realized that I have been living all these years in a place where for four thousand years they have been eating human flesh. My brother had just taken over the charge of the house when our sister died, and he may well have used her flesh in our rice and dishes, making us eat it unwittingly. It is possible that I ate several pieces of my sister's flesh unwittingly, and now it is my turn.

He was no sure of what he was fed with,

> Old Chen brought in lunch: one bowl of vegetables, one bowl of steamed fish. The eyes of the fish were white and hard, and its mouth was open just like those people who want to eat human beings. After a few mouthfuls I could not tell whether the slippery morsels were fish or human flesh, so I brought it all up…(Lu, 1918).

Like Woolf, Lu Xun also attempts to show how one becomes an oppressor, whether aware or unaware, yet helpless because of one's inability to change things. He says, "Wanting to eat men, at the same time afraid of being eaten themselves, they all look at each other with the deepest suspicion. . ." (Lu, 1918). It is not known who will eat whom, and everyone eyes each other with suspicion. The moment you sympathize with the other, the other may eat you, indicating one has to make the choice whether to eat or to be eaten. In *Mrs. Dalloway,* Clarissa feels the urgent need to throw a party, perhaps to feel her own existence and to feel alive again. She no longer feels she is needed by the people around her, as if she has been invisibilized. In a way, she has been eaten slowly, bit by bit. Everyone around her ate those parts of her which could feed them, and finally, when there is nothing left of her, she suddenly starts feeling,

> …invisible, unseen, unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress…this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa (her maiden name) anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (Woolf 2025a).

For a woman, getting married and having children brings forth new identities, and she may feel she is slowly being used part by part, finally leaving her battered and empty. As if she were a thing which could be eaten whenever required and when no one eats (needs) her anymore, she would rather feel invisible.

When her husband accepts a lunch invitation from Lady Bruton, leaving her behind, she once again felt invisible, old, like a fleshless, bony creature;

> …feeling herself suddenly shriveled, aged, breast-less, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain, which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extra ordinarily amusing, had not asked her (Woolf, 2025a).

Women have always been told that their relationship to the world is defined by the roles they play: as daughters, wives, and mothers. Thus, when these roles seem to cease, their own existence may also seem to cease. To the extent that it would make a woman feel aged and breastless, or rather invisible when she is not given attention by the man. She feels powerless and useless, as if she has been used up (eaten up) of all her utilities and now even her own existence has to be felt through other people's attention and validation. Does this kind of women-eating in *Mrs. Dalloway*, somewhere intersect with man-eating in *A Madman's Diary*?

IV. Madness: Sanity and Insanity

Similar to Lu Xun's *A Madman's Diary*, Woolf's woman, Clarissa, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, is also claimed to be suffering from some sickness. She recently "recovered from illness", though it is not specified what kind of illness, but it may indicate depression. However, unlike the 'madman', she does not question society openly; she nevertheless recognizes the problem and the compromises she has to make. Both Lu Xun and Woolf use "madness" to underline the reality of society. The madman urges people around him to change their ways,

> You should change, change from the bottom of your hearts! You most know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world. "If you don't change, you may all be eaten by each other. Although so many are born, they will be wiped out by the real men, just like wolves killed by hunters. Just like reptiles! (Lu, 1918).

He tries to tell them that they will be treated as wolves by the enlightened and civilized men and that they will be wiped out of society. Showing a glimpse of what will happen if the widespread insanity of cannibalism does not stop, while the people around him continue to act insane, Lu Xun's madman sounds as the sanest person in the story.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith, through his madness and hysteria, urges the people to question the madness of war; instead, the people choose to question his madness. The words echoed in him, "The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes?" (Woolf, 2025a). Smith's madness is directly linked to his guilt of not feeling any pain on Evan's (his officer in war) death. Thus, he felt it was his moral duty to kill himself for the sake of the world; perhaps to maintain the sanity of the world, it was important to show himself as the insane and receive punishment for the same. Similar to Septimus, who repeatedly hears the two words, "kill yourself", the madman hears the two words, "eat people". When he realizes that people eat each other, he exclaims with horror, "They eat human beings, so they may eat me...I too am a man, and they want to eat me!" (Lu, 1918)

In both these works, madness is used to depict the reality of society, with the thin line between sanity and insanity blurring in the narratives. Woolf, who is often described as a "mad genius," was declared mentally ill at an early stage in her life; her own intense and troubling lifestyle of erratic nervous breakdowns equipped her enough to inspire the creation of characters she understood so well. Whereas Lu Xun, a progressive male reformist writer, found the use of 'madness' to be the most effective way to draw attention and bring out the stark realities of life. In fact, "A Madman's Diary" is said to have been provoked by a real-life case of paranoia that Lu Xun had come into contact with shortly before penning the story (Quoted in Uberoi 1984, p. 74). Confirming with his style of sarcasm and wit, *A Madman's Diary,* Lu Xun's first work of fiction, turned into a powerful tool to bring out the message on societal conservatism and the insane actions it provokes. So much so that by the end of the story, one wonders if the madman was indeed the only sane person around, and perhaps his sanity and the likes of him are the only escape for society. The way the madman analyzes the issue of 'eating people', and his plea to change and become 'real men', seemed to be the sanest plea. Through the madman, Lu Xun conveys that the divide between barbarism and civilization lies in "choosing to eat or not eat people." Perhaps he believed that the Chinese society was at a stage of 'eating people', i.e., in a phase of barbarism (Yu, 2017).

The act of "eating" is also seen as a metaphor for oppression under feudal ethics. The implied meaning within the story was coming from Lu Xun, who merely used a madman's character to convey the ideas of enlightenment. Lu Xun was credited with

using Western theories in his work to create awareness. His early exposure to Western literature and philosophy deeply influenced his narrative. “By using the character’s ‘madness’, his language and his thoughts, and under the reflection and penetration of Western philosophical thoughts, Lu Xun’s *A Madman’s Diary* is a trans-work, and it reflects the author's awareness beyond reality, which leads the pioneer voice of personality emancipation and emphasizes the profound criticism and regret of the Chinese national character.” (Zhou, 2012). It is also believed that *A Madman’s Diary* was influenced by Gogol’s *Diary of a Madman* in its structure and Nietzsche in its thought (Gu, 1981). Thus, Lu Xun does not shy away from using the same storytelling pattern as Gogol to mercilessly expose the evils of Chinese society, which was plagued by the traditional Confucian order.

Madness, which results in confinement, is depicted with great horror and pain in both works. In *A Madman’s Diary,* the madman observed everything around him with suspicion because he was still in the process of establishing his theory that people around him are cannibalistic. Once he was outside his house, he came across another incident. He narrates,

> The most extraordinary thing was that woman on the street yesterday who spanked her son and said, "Little devil! I'd like to bite several mouthfuls out of you to work off my feelings!" Yet all the time she looked at me. I gave a start, unable to control myself; then all those green-faced, long-toothed people began to laugh derisively. Old Chen hurried forward and dragged me home.

For this so-called insane behavior of leaving the house and staring at the woman, he was confined to his room. He writes,

> He dragged me home. The folk at home all pretended not to know me; they had the same look in their eyes as the others. When I went into the study, they locked the door outside as if, cooping up a chicken or a duck. This incident left me even more bewildered. (Lu, 1918)

Everyone treated him as if he were mad, watching him with indignation and locking him away. To his family, he was an embarrassment; thus, they preferred to confine him. For the villagers, he was an amusement; thus, they preferred to flock around him and laugh at him. Beneath all these feelings lies a common fear: everyone is afraid of the madman. It is this fear that forces them to lock him up, so that everyone can feel safe and continue to live on and keep the status quo.

Similarly, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Mrs. Smith was told that, since Mr. Septimus Smith had declared that he wanted to kill himself, he needed to be confined;

> It was merely a question of rest, said Sir William; of rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed. There was a delightful home down in the country where her husband would be perfectly looked after. Away from her? she asked. Unfortunately, yes; the people we care for most are not good for us when we are ill. But he was not mad, was he? Sir William said he never spoke of “madness”; he called it not having a sense of proportion. But her husband did not like doctors. He would refuse to go there. Shortly and kindly Sir William explained to her the state of the case. He had threatened to kill himself. There was no alternative. It was a question of law. He would lie in bed in a beautiful house in the country. The nurses were admirable. Sir William would visit him once a week… (Woolf, 1925a)

The helplessness and determination of not giving up to such confinement, of getting locked away from his wife, led him to take his own life. He saw dying as the only way left for him. But when Clarissa came to know, she exclaimed in her thoughts,

> He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So, she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party! (Woolf, 1925a)

The horror of the suicide makes her think of her own situation and the subtle but intricate similarities, since Richard had also insisted that she confine herself in the attic, for the time she is ill.

> For the House sat so long that Richard insisted, after her illness, that she must sleep undisturbed. And really, she preferred to read of the retreat from Moscow. He knew it. So the room was an attic; the bed narrow; and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. (Woolf, 1925a)

With the realization that he chose to die rather than accept confinement, whereas she has been living in confinement and has so easily submitted to her fate of being confined, she comes to respect his act of suicide as an act of bravery.

In both stories, confinement permeates the plots as a central theme. It is a theme that applies not only to the main character but in many subtle ways to everyone in the story who has been affected by the changing times in which the novel is set. Throughout the novel, Clarissa and Septimus Smith's experiences are intertwined. The subtle interconnection is reflected through Clarissa's thoughts and Septimus Smith's actions. Woolf had said that this novel was "a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side" (Woolf, 1997). Their duality is emphasized at the close of the novel when Septimus Smith commits suicide, and Clarissa contemplates suicide but once again chooses to compromise and to live on.

In *A Madman's Diary*, "cannibalism" is central and dominating theme but suicide is also an important motif, "a deeper reading of the story in the light of the collective discourse suggests that "cannibalism" does not stand alone but properly belongs in a set of symbolic motifs, specifically those of "suicide" and "incest:" (Uberoi, 1984, p. 62). Madman realizes that he has to submit to his fate by accepting that the people have always been and will always be man-eaters, either literally or metaphorically. Meaning they will continue to eat or oppress the weak, and the only way out for him is to either let them oppress him or prepare to oppress others. Perhaps he chose the latter, since it was known through the elder brother that he recovered from the mental illness and took up an official post.

Lu Xun, a realist and revolutionary writer of his time, invariably incorporated themes of social evils in his writings. More than his contemporaries, he used the most satirical and ironical ways of expression by using cannibalism as the medium of oppression. In both stories, one can see the struggle to understand whether sanity and insanity can coexist. In *A Madman's Diary, the negation of the people around him was giving him affirmation of his suspicion that all of them are man-eaters, and in Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa Dalloway's affirmations meet* Smith's negations, and she starts wondering if suicide was a better choice. Mrs. Dalloway respected Mr. Smith for choosing death over compromising the integrity of his soul. The incident evoked her buried emotions, and she could see how similar her situation was to Smith's; she felt ashamed in the way she had compromised her own soul. Mrs. Dalloway never

questions her husband; perhaps she never thought she could, or he never allowed her to, and he insisted on her conduct. This not only confirms the attitude of a typical husband during the Victorian era, but also indicates how sanity was preserved between them. Instead of questioning, she chose to live with a false sense of sanity, whereas there was nothing sane in her life, either in her relationship with her husband or in herself. She still chose not to question, since it is understood that women are not supposed to question the ways of the world.

However, Lu Xun's 'man' questions a lot, and that earns him the name and fame of being a 'madman'. Be it a man or a woman, questioning is not desirable. Questioning will provoke thinking and the need to change the existing and the familiar, thus bringing in the unknown and the fear attached to it. Lu Xun breaks the false sense of sanity, using madness as a tool to question the century-old practices of cannibalism and oppression. Throughout his narration, he maintains the fear of the unknown; the fear of death. Death, despite being the inevitable truth of life, is feared because it is unknown to the living. This fear has engulfed the world from time immemorial, more so in contemporary times, since none of the scientific developments achieved by human beings have been able to conquer death. Death still remains unknown and thus fearful!

V. Death - A Desperate Medium of Expression and Escape

Both Lu Xun and Woolf use literature as an instrument for criticizing social evils and advocating social reforms. Lu Xun uses 'cannibalism and death' to express his protest against the social evil of oppression in China. Virginia Woolf uses 'suicide and death' to express her protest against the anonymity or invisibilization of women in Britain. She says, "I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work at its most intense (form)…." (Woolf, 1997). As we can see in both these narratives, 'death' is depicted as a desperate medium of expression, implying that if the cries for help and objections against oppression are not heard, then death is the only way to escape, which is also a form of expression. Both Lu Xun and Woolf have used 'death' as a desperate means of communicating with readers in many of their stories.

Almost all of Lu Xun's most famous works encompass 'death' in the end, either by suicide, execution, or disease. Lu Xun foreshadows a fate of 'death' for most of his protagonists to convey his message in his typical satirical style. Sometimes it is caused by social evil, and sometimes, in the case of women.[8] It is also the choice of sacrifice (suicide), a fate more socially acceptable as well as more suitable to the attributes of a chaste Chinese woman. He makes his character believe that death is the only path to liberation because he did not have much faith that Chinese society would change its conservatism in the near future. Thus, in *A Madman's Diary,* he uses "mockery of madness" (Foucault, 1965), madness which is considered as the 'death of the mind' or death of sanity, to question the insane traditional ideas. Throughout the narrative, he

[8] In Lu Xun's *Regrets for the Past, Zi Jun,* the female protagonist dies in the end, however it is not clearly known how, but seems like a suicide and the reason seems to be her non-acceptance by the society after being abandoned by her husband.

uses satire to present death and the eating of human flesh as a commonly accepted and widespread practice, with only the madman being horrified by it, so as to jostle the readers with fear. He lays bare the absurdity in normalizing cannibalism, long prevalent in different forms among the Chinese people, so as to awaken them to its ludicrousness and horror. He narrates the incident when a tenant from a neighboring village visits,

> A few days ago a tenant of ours from Wolf Cub Village came to report the failure of the crops, and told my elder brother that a notorious character in their village had been beaten to death; then some people had taken out his heart and liver, fried them in oil and eaten them, as a means of increasing their courage. When I interrupted, the tenant and my brother both stared at me. Only today have I realized that they had exactly the same look in their eyes as those people outside. Just to think of it sets me shivering from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. They eat human beings, so they may eat me.

Through his narrative, he urges people to stop living in denial of society's harsh realities and to refuse to accept or change old cannibalistic manners rather than harbor them. Nonetheless, despite his extremely pessimistic approach to laying bare the truth of Chinese society, he uses optimism for both the present and future generations. The madman talks to his elder brother and attempts to persuade him that it is indeed possible for human beings to aspire for a life without cannibalism, but his brother is simply evasive and embarrassed. Within the horrors of death and cannibalism, Lu Xun also offers hope for the future. At the fag end of the story, he expresses hope that at least the children who are not yet cannibalistic can be saved; "Save the Children!" This was seen as an appeal for the liberation of the whole society, to create a future generation free from the Confucian traditional order (Zhang, 1991, p. 133).

Lu Xun was particularly concerned about children and youth; throughout his life, he aspired to be a teacher in all his endeavours, especially writing. Lu Xun's concerns regarding children were not only closely linked to his idea of transforming the Chinese society and nation, which he took as a high social responsibility and historical mission, but also closely linked to his own childhood experience of suffering in a feudal family order (Zhang, 1991, pp. 116-17). Therefore, he made efforts to raise awareness among future generations, so they could revolutionize society. He has himself admitted that he was convinced to write this story out of hope, "In spite of my own conviction", wrote Lu Xun, "I could not blot out hope, for hope belongs to the future…" (quoted in Uberoi, 1984, p. 75).

As for Woolf, the underlying reality in all her stories was that men do not understand, regard, or value women. Women find themselves subjugated and disregarded by their partners. She says, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction"; "As a woman I have no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."; when she was not permitted to enter the Cambridge University library, when she was invited to deliver lectures, she wrote, "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind." (Woolf, 1925b). Therefore, Woolf was regarded as a feminist icon. Woolf advocated that women must strive for their own emancipation. The reality of discrimination against women appears in most of Woolf's work. Moreover, just like her own decision to kill herself, "death" has also been discussed as a source of liberation or escape for women. *Mrs. Dalloway* who awakens to the reality of being invisibilized as a woman, is fascinated by the boldness with which Septimus Smith choses to die, rather than accepting a fate which would turn him to a living dead, he decides to give it all away, while she has to go on living, she thinks, "But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded;

people kept on coming).” (Woolf, 1925a) She thinks of how he (Smith) manages to preserve his soul and chooses to die, even as she has to still confront the irony of life and death. She feels, rather by dying, by embracing death, he has communicated his defiance to the world,

> This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death. But this young man who had killed himself—had he plunged holding his treasure? "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy," she had said to herself once, coming down in white. (Woolf, 1925a)

Her fascination is not with death itself, but with the fact that it leads to a door to liberation, escape, and a new, unknown reality far from this painful one. All of a sudden, she feels the power of choosing death over life as a means to express herself, a way to communicate her defiance. To choose death before it chooses you to go back to where one came from, may give the sense of power and authority as against life, which is surrounded by compromises and oppression.

Ironically, she also realizes that, as with the moment of death, the moment of happiness is waiting to be chosen. She goes on to remember how she had thought of the terror and pain of living till the end, till death conquers you,

> Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the *Times,* so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. But that young man had killed himself.

She feels the agony of living on, after all, what does life hold for her? Merely old age, disease, and depression. After being fascinated with the embrace of death, the terror of living on engulfs her with fear, she realizes that ‘nothing lasts too long’, and she wonders ‘what makes us go on’? Is it the fear of death? Perhaps the fear of death is greater than the fear of living with all its compromises and pain, for the very reason that death is unknown and life is somewhat known and familiar. Thus, death is denied; it is talked about in a hushed-up manner, as if it were the most unpleasant thing in the otherwise pleasant lives of people. Therefore, even though she contemplates and imagines herself close to committing suicide when she watches over from her own window. But decides against it, with the realization of the beauty of life and the fun of the company that awaits her.

Conclusion

Both Lu Xun and Woolf wrote with the flow of their thoughts; their impressions, memories, and consciousness are put to words to bring forth the underlying feelings of fear experienced by the protagonists, which are closely interwoven with the socio-economic and political scenarios of those eras. Somewhere, the threats of oppression get mingled with the threats of dying. As in their own life experiences, both authors brought fleeting moments of consciousness into their work, making the protagonist

and the reader self-conscious and self-pondering. 'Death' has been viewed as an inevitable escape and comfort against oppression. Since 'death' evokes both sympathy and fear in the reader, it becomes a powerful medium for eliciting the reader's emotions and reactions, as well as conveying a crucial message. Thus, "death" becomes, for Lu Xun, an ultimate and desperate medium of expressing hope, and, for Virginia Woolf, a call for freedom.

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