



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

## “Madness in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese Literature”

Dr. Birgit Linder

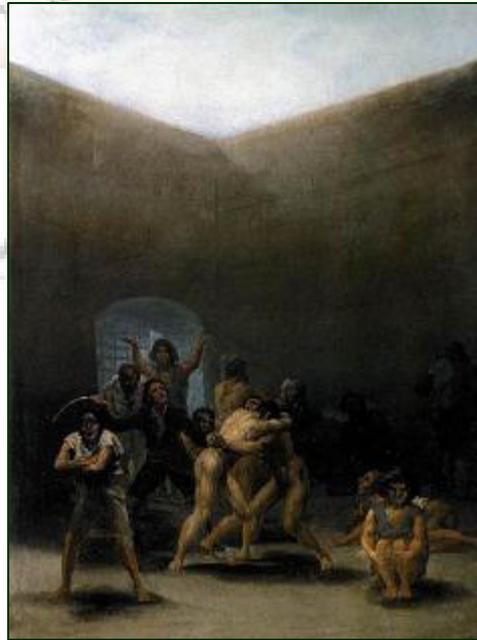
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Francisco Goya, “Yard of Madhouse,” 1794



“Story-telling is always after the fact, and it is always constructed over a loss.” (J. Hillis-Miller)

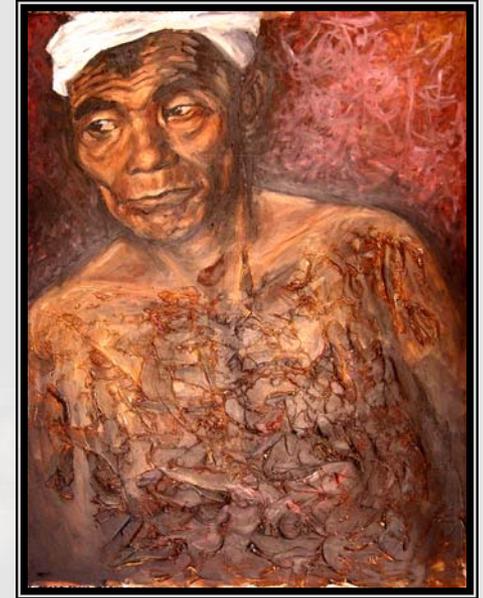
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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

## OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction to topic
  - 1. Theoretical framework
  - 2. Research questions
- II. History of “madness” in China
  - 1. Early madmen
- III. Madness” in 20<sup>th</sup> century China
  - 1. **Historical trauma and truth**
    - Lu Xun 鲁迅, “Diary of a Madman” 《狂人日记》**
    - Yu Hua 余华, “1986”**
  - 2. **Mental illness**
    - Guo Lusheng 郭路生 (“Indexfinger” 食指)**
    - Wen Jie 温解**
- IV. Conclusion
- V. References



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A few years back, the contemporary Chinese artist Li Zhen suggested,

[[http://www.chinanews.com.cn/shidian/200009/new/\(20\)%201.html](http://www.chinanews.com.cn/shidian/200009/new/(20)%201.html)]



“The Return of Dionysus” Elsie Russel, 1987  
Courtesy of parnasse.com

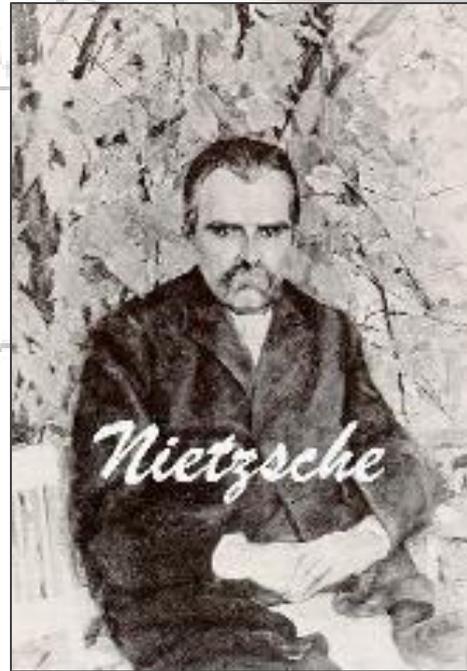
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The massive **history of Chinese culture** has forced the Chinese to bear far too many burdens of practicality and rationality. Even if they approach the margins of the mind, they are unable to enter into the realm of irrational spirituality—madness; at best they use an even more rational manner—suicide—to reinforce the fortress of the sane.



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

## Heaven-bound versus Earth-bound



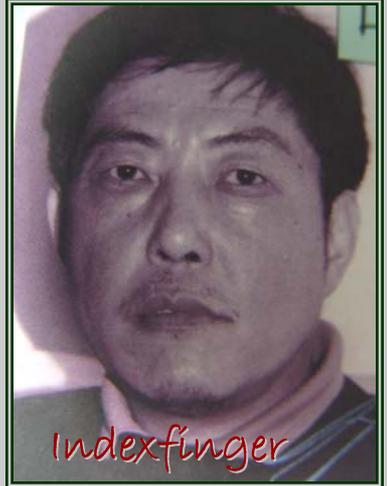
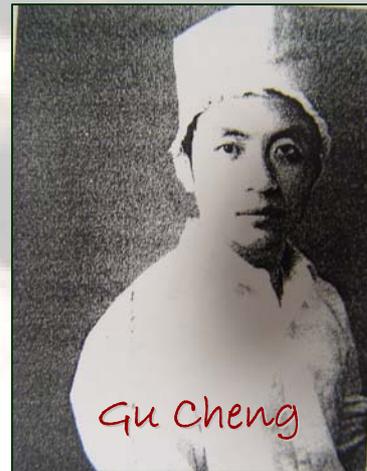
The author then compares Nietzsche's and van Gogh's madness with what he perceives as the failure of great Chinese minds to break out of the confines of rationality.

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The poet **Haizi** (b. 1967) committed suicide in 1989, a rational decision on his part, as his farewell note suggests; the poet **Gu Cheng** (b. 1956) supposedly committed suicide in fear of the punishment that awaited him for killing his wife. Li considers the killing of his wife madness, but says his fear of punishment shows that he was not mad. (Perhaps this case shows the importance of ‘labeling’ what constitutes madness).

The only notable exception the author mentions is the famous poet “**Indexfinger**”, who now resides in a mental hospital in Beijing.



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The author wonders what would have become of such poets had they **allowed themselves to ‘go crazy’** the way Nietzsche and van Gogh did. Did their rationality preempt their creative genius? Would **transcendental spirituality** (heaven-bound) have been more ‘useful’ to them than earth-bound Confucianism?

Putting aside this naïve concept of madness, the article does hint at two important points:

1. In general, madness is perceived as **having a voice of its own**.
2. The author rightly points out that the representation of madness in **China differs from its Western** counterpart.

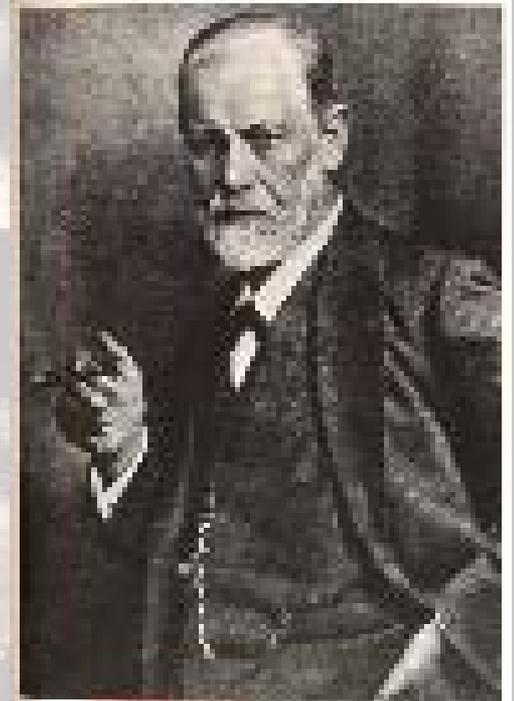


# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

In Western literature and criticism, the concept of literary madness has been employed in three ways:

- 1) the **mad writer**;
- 2) the “**mad**” **characters** of writers;
- 3) the **critical method** by which psychological terms from the field of medical madness are applied to literary madness (Rieger, 1994:5).

In general, the largest part of Western writing of madness is associated with creative genius, social insight, self-realization, and religious guilt, while the Chinese tradition is marked by **feigned madness** and madness as a **voice of truth**.



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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

## Lu Xun (1881-1936) and the Trauma of Tradition

Curiously, the whole of modern Chinese fiction and indeed the traumatic dawn of modernity in China begins with Lu Xun's short story **"Diary of a Madman."** (1918)



狂人日记

Courtesy of Stefan Landsberger, International Institute of Social History, Netherlands

Lu Xun is generally understood to be the father of modern Chinese literature, of the short story, and of literary *realism*.

This is the first modern short story with a first person narrator.

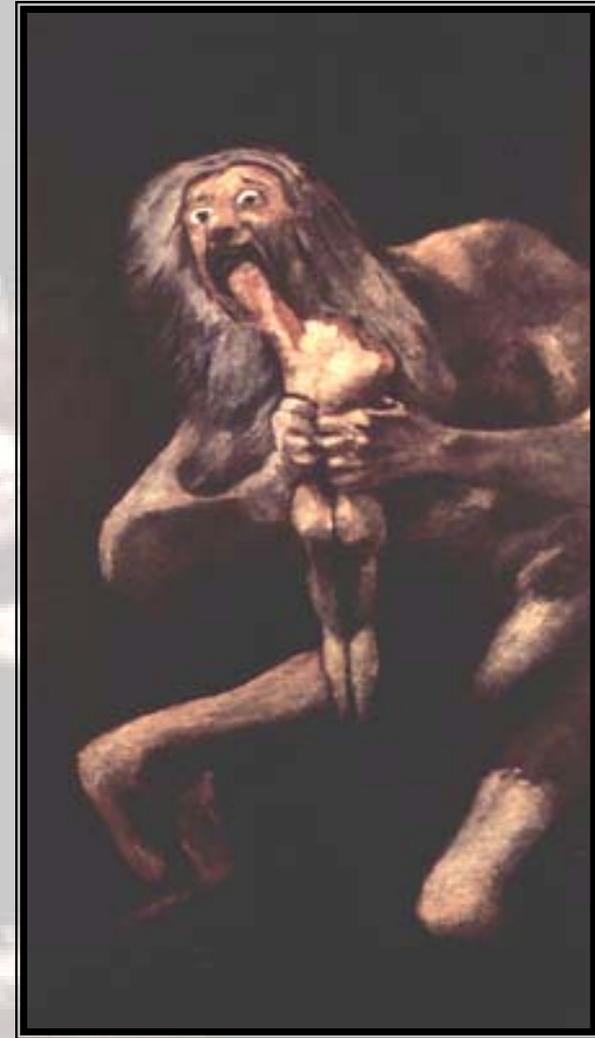
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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

The story line is as follows:

A youth friend visits and hears about the younger brother's madness and asks for his diary for medical research. In the diary, the younger brother is said to suffer from a form of persecution complex, feeling that the whole of Chinese history is a history of cannibalism. He is afraid that the people around him will eat him, too, as they have eaten other people. As his paranoia progresses, he wonders whether he himself has unknowingly also eaten other people.



Francisco de Goya, "Saturn," 1823  
Courtesy of Artists Against the War,  
[www.onlinekunst.com](http://www.onlinekunst.com)

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## Trauma theory:

- ✓ Referencing
- ✓ Unreliable narrator
- ✓ Intertextuality

Although in this story the madman is suffering from a **persecution complex**, the author nevertheless represents us with a very ordered reality, framed by **historical and anthropological research**, which, though perhaps **incorrect** in detail, gives a truthful and comprehensive overview over **cannibalistic** tendencies in Chinese society.

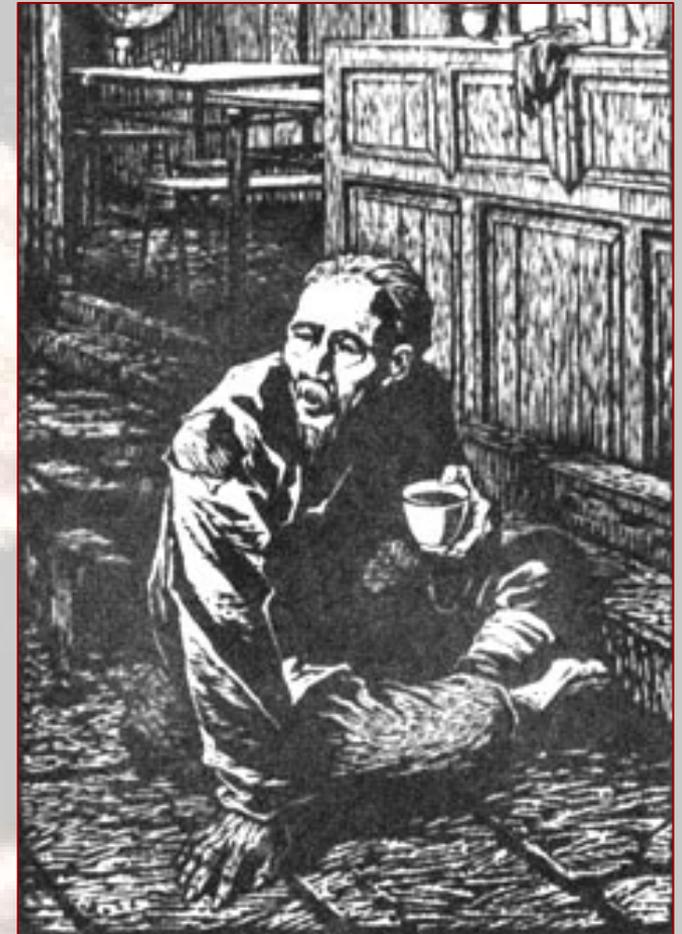


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The brother, the friend,  
the doctor, the other  
spectators, represent the  
modern Chinese **medical  
and social view of  
madness:**

It is partly a symptom of  
**physiological imbalance**  
that can only be regulated  
with **rest,**

and partly a manifestation  
of **uncontrolled  
imagination** that has to  
be contained with benign  
**pressure.**

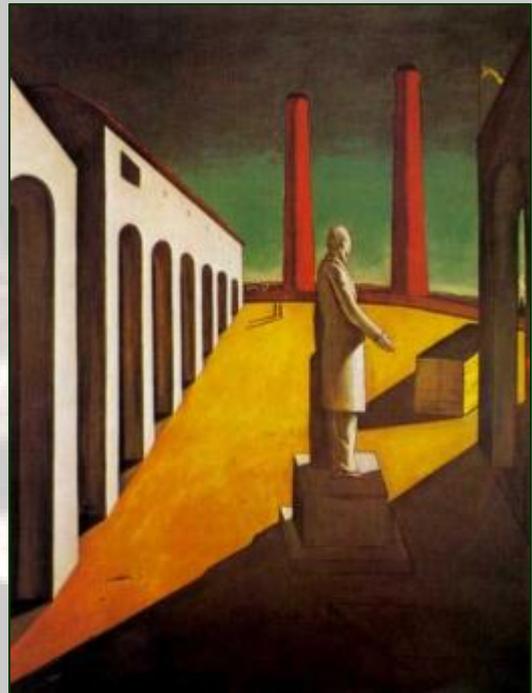




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His madness is classified in relation to the various ways in which it prevents the individual from **functioning in society.** Yet, it is exactly this madness that affords the madman a glimpse at **truth.**



Giorgio de Chirico, 1914: Alluding to a reality beyond recognizable appearance. Courtesy of [www.chron.com](http://www.chron.com)



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Confucianism and superstition have cannibalized the soul of China with its violent incorporation of the individual into the Confucian moral and ethical code and hierarchy.



Therefore, although his diary is an attempt to write a history, it is without chronology, without names or facts, and the Madman strips history of its frame and points to the essence of it: the consumption of its objects.

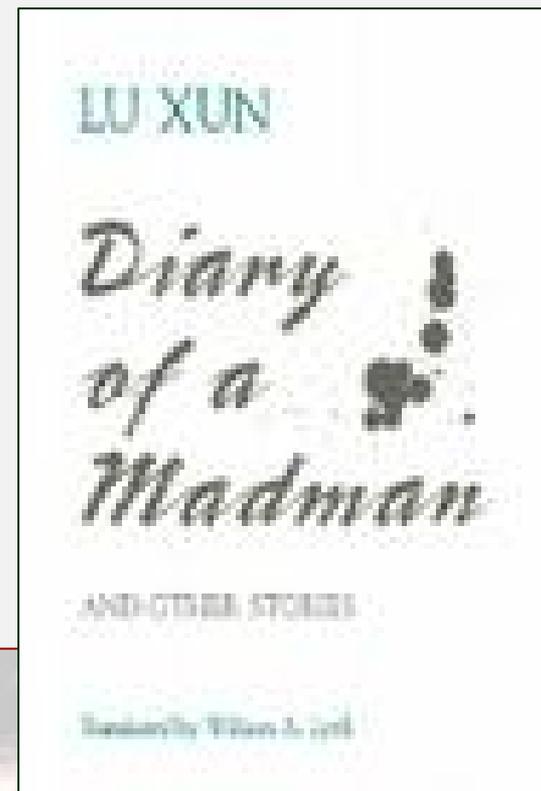
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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

In doing so he sums up a theory of history that is implicitly a theory of societal madness.

Lu Xun's aim is not to oppose reason, but to question if that which has been represented as reason so far truly is reason.



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The uneasiness of the madman when he realizes that perhaps he, too, has eaten human flesh reflects the ambiguous question of **being (sometimes an unknowing) participant in a system one rejects.**

And with that, the reader is challenged “to think carefully about degrees of responsibility for violence and **injustice.**” [Rieger, 1994: 199]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Yu Hua and the trauma of the Cultural Revolution: “1986”

**Yu Hua** (b. 1964) in particular has come to be known for his vivid descriptions of self-mutilation and torture in his early fiction.

He takes Lu Xun's indictment of the Chinese national character a step further as he traces defects of society back to defects of Human nature.



Madness is to him a symptom of a trauma that cannot be expressed otherwise.

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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

**“One Kind of Reality”** 现实一种 is a the story of a close-knit family that destructs itself for reasons of **revenge**. The particular horror derives from the fact that the brothers agree on an unwritten code of revenge.

**“The Past and the Punishments”** 往事与刑罚 is a story about the history and practice of torture and execution. Its philosophy is that “the essence of human wisdom is the art of punishment.” [119] Is it more painful to face the past of torture or to forget the past?

**“World Like Mist”** 事实如烟 The terror is derived by rendering the world as fallen – a realm in which death often presents the only refuge from a putrid environment.

**“On the Road at Eighteen”** 十八岁出门远行 represents the world as irrational and without frame of reference and therefore haphazardly violent.

**“1986” is the story of a teacher who ‘disappears’ during the CR, and, when he returns after 10 years, mutilates himself slowly. It reflects the agony of the past and the present.**

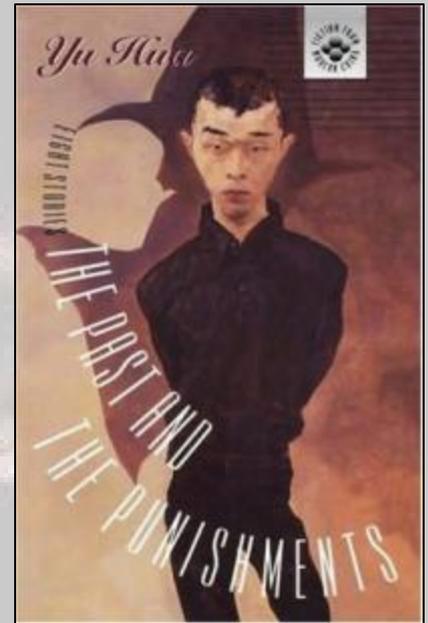
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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

The school teacher disappears after doing research on various forms of torture.

In 1986, he comes back to the town as a madman. Because of the nightmare of the recent past, he uses the torture he has studied and mutilates himself slowly in public places while life goes on as usual for the bystanders and his wife and daughter.



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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE



According to Jürgen Wertheimer “**in the literary and artistic stylization of violence elementary individual and societal needs are being expressed.**”

Violence itself **becomes the plot**. Rather than expressing social alienation, it symbolizes a deeply felt **fragmentation** of the self.

Madness n.

疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>

疯, 头病。——《集韵》

瘫痪 [paralysis]

癫狂 diānkūang

[manic depressive

psychosis]

[frivolous]

癫痫 diānxián

[epilepsy] “羊角风”

癫子 diānzi

[lunatic] [方]: 疯子

疯癫 fēngdiān

[insane]

疯狗 fēnggǒu

[mad dog; rabid dog]

疯狂 fēngkuáng

[insane]: 发疯

[desperate; frenzied;]:

疯人 fēngrén

[lunatic; madman;]

疯子 fēngzi

[madman]

[lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

✓ Some feel that descriptions of violence in these stories border on “language harassment” (Lyotard) (语言折磨)

However, the most inexorable aspect of it is not only the physical violation or its overt narrative detachment. The horror also lies in the way the characters in his fiction react to violence: with **inertness**, indifference, not even cynicism.

Jack Tworikov, 1960

Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癫狂 diānkúang  
[manic depressive psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癫痫 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癫子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
疯癫 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
疯狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
疯狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]: 发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]:  
疯人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
疯子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

“1986”

Detailed description of self-mutilation in the public square: [Texts A & B](#)

Part of the horror of the story is the reaction of the townsfolk:

**Finally, somebody suggests that he should be tied up. He is left on the street like that while everybody else returns home to “cheerfully [eat] and talk. The dinner conversation was relaxed and happy. Everything made them laugh.”** [171-72]

Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癫狂 diānkuáng  
[manic depressive psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癫痫 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癫子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
疯癫 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
疯狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
疯狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]: 发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]:  
疯人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
疯子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]



Madness n.  
 疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
 疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
 瘫痪 [paralysis]  
 癡狂 diānkuáng  
 [manic depressive  
 psychosis]  
 [frivolous]  
 癡癩 diānxián  
 [epilepsy] “羊角风”  
 癡子 diānzi  
 [lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
 瘋癩 fēngdiān  
 [insane]  
 瘋狗 fēnggǒu  
 [mad dog; rabid dog]  
 瘋狂 fēngkuáng  
 [insane]: 发疯  
 [desperate; frenzied;]:  
 瘋人 fēngrén  
 [lunatic; madman;]  
 瘋子 fēngzi  
 [madman]  
 [lunatic]

If we believe that the enjoyment of such descriptions of violence is not the point of the story, something else that has not been linguistically expressed exist in these texts.



Here, we have speech as symptom rather than as communication.

What it wants to express is that “reality is either beyond our ken (看不见的现实) or beyond the possibilities of speech (说不出的现实).” (Seel, 920).



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Perhaps we can read Yu Hua's violence as an enactment of the **psychological space of society**, a split psyche of **victim and executor**, of actors and spectators, a space that affords the reader with very little compensation.

Like Lu Xun, his critique is not only aimed at a failing system or historical trauma, but also at those who enable it in their unawareness or **indifference as spectators.**

- Madness n.
- 疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>
- 疯, 头病。——《集韵》
- 瘫痪 [paralysis]
- 癫狂 diānkáng
- [manic depressive psychosis]
- [frivolous]
- 癫痫 diānxián
- [epilepsy] “羊角风”
- 癫子 diānzi
- [lunatic] [方]：疯子
- 疯癫 fēngdiān
- [insane]
- 疯狗 fēnggǒu
- [mad dog; rabid dog]
- 疯狂 fēngkuáng
- [insane]：发疯
- [desperate; frenzied;]：
- 疯人 fēngrén
- [lunatic; madman;]
- 疯子 fēngzi
- [madman]
- [lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Guo Lusheng (“Indexfinger”): Representation of Mental Illness

Guo, who writes under the telling pseudonym “Index finger,” has been celebrated as a foremost underground poet of the Cultural Revolution.

Guo’s poetry is not great, but together with his personal history and the historical context, his story is unusual.

Incidentally, Guo himself complains that people prefer his earlier poetry, while he himself prefers his later poetry (after he fell ill).

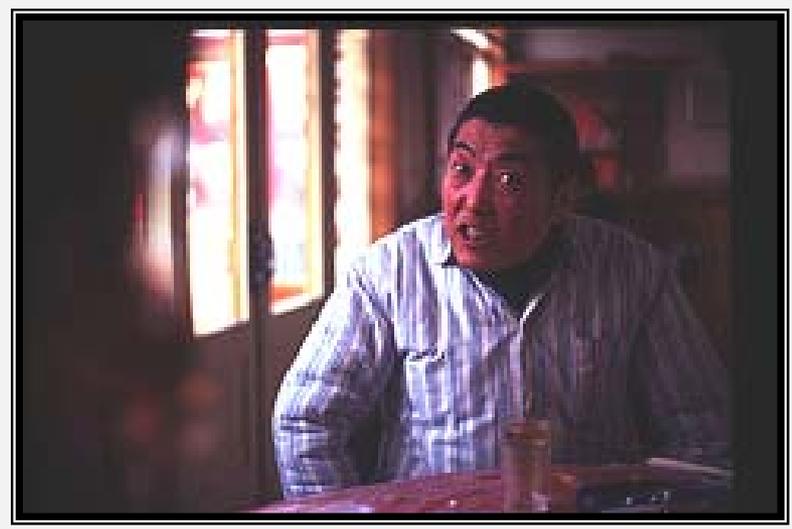


Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癫狂 diānkúang  
[manic depressive  
psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癫痫 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癫子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
疯癫 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
疯狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
疯狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]: 发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]:  
疯人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
疯子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Born in 1948, he was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution for helping someone under political pressure escape.



In 1970 Jiang Qing denounced his work as "unhealthy." Soon afterward, Guo became depressed and delusional; His family agreed to institutional care in a mental hospital in Beijing, where he resided until recently. Guo's breakdown, friends believe, was partly triggered by the chaos that consumed his youth. [*Newsweek*]

Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癡狂 diānkuáng  
[manic depressive psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癡癩 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癡子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
癡癩 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
癡狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
癡狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]: 发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]:  
癡人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
癡子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Guo abandoned his stubborn and famous optimism after the Cultural Revolution.

This time, in 1978, he compares himself to a mad dog that is kept behind a fence.

In his own assessment, though, the mad dog is better off than he, because it can escape:

**If I became a mad dog  
I would break loose these merciless chains  
Then I would abandon without delay  
Those so-called divine human rights.**

Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癫狂 diānkuáng  
[manic depressive psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癫痫 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癫子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]：疯子  
疯癫 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
疯狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
疯狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]：发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]  
疯人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
疯子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

The themes of his later poetry center around his mental illness and his views of life.

They reflect an **identity crisis** that might be surprising to those who look at him as a cultural icon.

In 1991, he published a poem entitled “**In the Mental Hospital,**” in which he more directly expresses his dismay about being in a mental institution, especially as a poet whose creative impulses are very much alive:

Madness n.

疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>

疯, 头病。——《集韵》

瘫痪 [paralysis]

癫狂 diānkáng

[manic depressive

psychosis]

[frivolous]

癫痫 diānxián

[epilepsy] “羊角风”

癫子 diānzi

[lunatic] [方]: 疯子

疯癫 fēngdiān

[insane]

疯狗 fēnggǒu

[mad dog; rabid dog]

疯狂 fēngkuáng

[insane]: 发疯

[desperate; frenzied;]:

疯人 fēngrén

[lunatic; madman;]

疯子 fēngzi

[madman]

[lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

To write poetry I am willing to seek out distress  
 But in this sickroom full of noise, how can I weigh a  
 thought?  
 Ordinary jokes and witty remarks drop like beads,  
 My raised brush unable to finish but one lyrical verse.

At times I cannot help wanting to vent my anger,  
 But the outcome I cannot bear foresee,  
 Heaven, what is it that year after year  
 Makes me idle away my life in a mental ward?

When the perils retreat from the mind,  
 The bottom of the heart only harbors emptiness and  
 desolation. . .

Afraid to let others notice the tears lingering in my eyes,  
 I wander with my head bent, as though at ease. . .

Madness n.  
 疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
 疯, 头病。 — 《集韵》  
 瘫痪 [paralysis]  
 癫狂 diānkúang  
 [manic depressive  
 psychosis]  
 [frivolous]  
 癫痫 diānxián  
 [epilepsy] “羊角风”  
 癫子 diānzi  
 [lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
 疯癫 fēngdiān  
 [insane]  
 疯狗 fēnggǒu  
 [mad dog; rabid dog]  
 疯狂 fēngkuáng  
 [insane]: 发疯  
 [desperate; frenzied;]:  
 疯人 fēngrén  
 [lunatic; madman;]  
 疯子 fēngzi  
 [madman]  
 [lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

As far as I know, Indexfinger is the only poet who writes about his mental illness.

His poetry points to two issues:

**1. His identity crisis as a poet.**

**2. His need for an audience.**

In interviews, he often complained about the hospital. On one hand, he felt fine doing daily chores and going by routines. On the other hand, he cannot relate to other patients, is never alone, and the treatment hasn't necessarily changed much for him.

As a poet, he suffers from the perspectives others have of his illness. Some ignore the "later Guo" and only see him as the underground poet. Others even envy him for his illness.

Madness n.

疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>

疯, 头病。——《集韵》

瘫痪 [paralysis]

癫狂 diānkūáng

[manic depressive

psychosis]

[frivolous]

癫痫 diānxián

[epilepsy] “羊角风”

疯子 diānzi

[lunatic] [方]: 疯子

疯癫 fēngdiān

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疯狗 fēnggǒu

[mad dog; rabid dog]

疯狂 fēngkuáng

[insane]: 发疯

[desperate; frenzied;]:

疯人 fēngrén

[lunatic; madman;]

疯子 fēngzi

[madman]

[lunatic]



Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癫狂 diānkúang  
[manic depressive  
psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癫痫 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癫子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
疯癫 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
疯狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
疯狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]: 发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]:  
疯人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
疯子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]

## 诗人的桂冠 **Laurel Poets (In the hospital)**

Poets laurel and I do not share the same lot.

I am a flicker remembering happiness and pain.

**Even though I have penned so many poems already,  
they don't recognize it as literature.**

I am a trace of spit on the ground,  
being stepped on by this girl.

I know this is not to touch me;  
it is just because she decided to be careless.

I am the wall of the holy palace of my heart.  
The lousy characters children have chiseled out,  
years, even when prolonged, can't erase.  
But to this proud heart it is not an iota of harm.

**People will ask “Who are you?”  
To be whoever is okay, just not a poet.  
Only during those unrighteous times ,  
I was a smalltime sacrificial lamb.**



Madness n.  
 疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
 疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
 瘫痪 [paralysis]  
 癫狂 diānkúang  
 [manic depressive  
 psychosis]  
 [frivolous]  
 癫痫 diānxián  
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 癫子 diānzi  
 [lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
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 [insane]  
 疯狗 fēnggǒu  
 [mad dog; rabid dog]  
 疯狂 fēngkuáng  
 [insane]: 发疯  
 [desperate; frenzied;]:  
 疯人 fēngrén  
 [lunatic; madman;]  
 疯子 fēngzi  
 [madman]  
 [lunatic]

在精神病福利院的八年 **Eight Years in the Mental Hospital**

**Sweat drops like midsummer rain, cleansing the corridors.  
 I wash bowls in the piercing cold winter water.  
 Only in the long nights of sleepy languishment,  
 Ghosts of spring awakening dispatch to the tip of the brush.**

**Lazy, selfish, brute and unhygienic habits.....,  
 all the weaknesses of the Chinese are gathered here.  
 This is like bitter stitches, a hammer  
 striking and spattering the sparks of my spirit.**

**Once it hits, my whole body is ablaze.  
 Then my vigorous energy is like a  
 burning flame sounding “pi pa,”  
 and my thoughts like a thread of mist.....**

It is not because I have not turned into a tree trunk  
 that I find what even might be regret  
 in the winter night with human desires like an endless storm,  
 my feelings and desires are piled into a confusion of brushwood,  
 lighting it, will give those hurrying on their way some brightness,  
 and it will let those hungry and cold come and fetch some warmth.  
 And I will turn into ashes.  
 I will be scattered away by a mad wind.



In a rare interview, Guo expressed wonder at his work's revival in the early 2000s. "After all," he joked, "I'm just a madman."

Intellectuals who feel alienated and pushed into an inner exile look at Guo as **liberated in his madness**.

"Guo's been in an asylum for 20 years," literary critic Bei Ling comments, "So he has no enemies." (*Newsweek* 2001)

Many writers feel Guo is free at last. In other poets, too, one senses a subtle desire for madness, but those who envy Guo for his status also know

“what for some is a healthy and insightful release from constricting givens is viewed by others as a pathological and self-deluded breaking out of reality.” [Robert de Beaugrande, *Dionysus in Literature*, 25]

Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癫狂 diānkuáng  
[manic depressive  
psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癫痫 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癫子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]：疯子  
疯癫 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
疯狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
疯狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]：发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]  
疯人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
疯子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

## Wen Jie: Depression (2001)



The female poet **Wen Jie** gives a bleaker image of her depression in a series of poems entitled “My Psychotherapist,” expressing her fear of losing herself to medication.

Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癫狂 diānkūang  
[manic depressive  
psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癫痫 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癫子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
疯癫 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
疯狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
疯狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]: 发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]:  
疯人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
疯子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]



Madness n.  
疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
瘫痪 [paralysis]  
癡狂 diānkuáng  
[manic depressive  
psychosis]  
[frivolous]  
癡癩 diānxián  
[epilepsy] “羊角风”  
癡子 diānzi  
[lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
癡癩 fēngdiān  
[insane]  
癡狗 fēnggǒu  
[mad dog; rabid dog]  
癡狂 fēngkuáng  
[insane]: 发疯  
[desperate; frenzied;]:  
癡人 fēngrén  
[lunatic; madman;]  
癡子 fēngzi  
[madman]  
[lunatic]

## Prescription Pad

-- "I still remember that white tablet . . .  
I had to take it three times a day . . .  
and I got fat"

You want me to eat such a large sheet of paper.

You cover it with medications.

Every day I eat and sleep, sleep and eat, after I finish eating  
noonday,

I swallow up the sunset, too.

That's how I take medication every day, and I take day  
and eat it into night, and I take night and eat it until  
I stick out my hand and can't see my fingers. The drugs are  
accumulating in my body

day after day. **Beyond expectation they develop  
a will of their own. In place of my  
running amuck in the world, a medicated body  
has become my body.**

**Oh, doctor, you who sets pen to paper like a knife,  
crazed champion of drugs, star subjugator of disease,  
I sincerely hope you will meet adversity,  
and wish you bad luck.**



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Her reception is very different from Indexfinger. In recent conversations, readers have commented on the alienating **darkness and violence** of her poems, and the way in which she pushes boundaries.

It is not well-received, partly because of aesthetic expectations, and partly because being able to speak one's mind like this is rare in China.

The important point here is not artistic excellence, but the question whether this type of writing can slowly gain a **representational space**.

It is perhaps a gross generalization, but most Chinese do not express themselves on a deep and personal level.

Therefore, this kind of writing **could** serve as a catharsis for others suffering from depression.

Madness n.

疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>

疯, 头病。——《集韵》

瘫痪 [paralysis]

癫狂 diānkuáng

[manic depressive

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[epilepsy] “羊角风”

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疯狂 fēngkuáng

[insane]: 发疯

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疯人 fēngrén

[lunatic; madman;]

疯子 fēngzi

[madman]

[lunatic]



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

One can sense her deep helplessness and anger at doctors and medication. She is an example of what has been growing in therapy in other countries, too: the cry “**please know me as a person!**”

Wen Jie is a courageous poet. Depression is not often spoken about, and for her to lay bare her innermost feelings is instructive and unusual.

But she makes herself vulnerable, and the rejection of readers is hurtful. She also expresses her disappointment with doctors, and in the end, she herself echoes Macbeth: “I need the divine more than the physician.”

Madness n.

疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>

疯, 头病。——《集韵》

瘫痪 [paralysis]

癫狂 diānkuáng

[manic depressive

psychosis]

[frivolous]

癫痫 diānxián

[epilepsy] “羊角风”

癫子 diānzi

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疯癫 fēngdiān

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[mad dog; rabid dog]

疯狂 fēngkuáng

[insane]: 发疯

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疯人 fēngrén

[lunatic; madman;]

疯子 fēngzi

[madman]

[lunatic]



Madness n.  
 疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
 疯, 头病。 — 《集韵》  
 瘫痪 [paralysis]  
 癫狂 diānkúang  
 [manic depressive  
 psychosis]  
 [frivolous]  
 癫痫 diānxián  
 [epilepsy] “羊角风”  
 癫子 diānzi  
 [lunatic] [方]：疯子  
 疯癫 fēngdiān  
 [insane]  
 疯狗 fēnggǒu  
 [mad dog; rabid dog]  
 疯狂 fēngkuáng  
 [insane]：发疯  
 [desperate; frenzied;]  
 疯人 fēngrén  
 [lunatic; madman;]  
 疯子 fēngzi  
 [madman]  
 [lunatic]

**Mental Health Center**

I know that on this earth, some people  
 are doctors, others are patients,  
 and some are the enemies of others.  
 They are like good and evil, mutually

serving as each other's raison d'être, just like  
 two sides of a coin, of the same material,  
 yet showing people a different appearance. Do you  
 have iron bones of everlasting rebar?

And I, at all times and places  
 need mending. Doctor! Please tell me  
 this unreliable secret: what skill is required  
 to be able to maintain an invincible heart? What

amount of strength is needed to harbor havoc in my heart  
 and yet appear unsullied? **I see most peoples'  
 faces, like your face, perfectly at ease.  
 They are this world's proper part,**

**the most common, and also the most powerful.  
 My face, however, is the reverse of yours.  
 It caves in on its own flesh and blood, and in its  
 corruption and decay emits a reeking odor,**

**an odor rejected by this world.**



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Moreover, in this poet's struggle for identity, this is the first representation of mental illness that tries to assign value to the condition, and she wants to identify with her illness as part of her valuable self.

Madness n.  
 疯狂, 疯, 瘋 <名>  
 疯, 头病。——《集韵》  
 瘫痪 [paralysis]  
 癫狂 diānkúang  
 [manic depressive psychosis]  
 [frivolous]  
 癫痫 diānxián  
 [epilepsy] “羊角风”  
 癫子 diānzi  
 [lunatic] [方]: 疯子  
 疯癫 fēngdiān  
 [insane]  
 疯狗 fēnggǒu  
 [mad dog; rabid dog]  
 疯狂 fēngkuáng  
 [insane]: 发疯  
 [desperate; frenzied;]:  
 疯人 fēngrén  
 [lunatic; madman;]  
 疯子 fēngzi  
 [madman]  
 [lunatic]





## Psychoanalytical Therapy

-- If our misfortune  
fades away,  
we, too, will fade away.

Doctor, I want to abandon you, I want to let  
my illness take its course. Like a plague it shall infiltrate  
the sound tissues of your body. I want to stand courageously  
in opposition to you, because my existence serves as a foil to

this world's beauty and barbarity. Let me turn off  
all lamps, all illumination.

"I travel by night, backwards,  
with complete silence all around." Why

does the world of splendid sunshine belong to you, and I only belong to  
an endless void? One as filthy and dirty as I is not fit to be seen,  
excited and miserable, like a lamp slowly fading,  
like a flame nearly consumed. Pure and simple,

**I am a specimen eagerly awaiting cure. But who can  
cure me? Who can from this world  
take away pain, and only leave behind happiness?  
Take me away, and leave behind**

**the likes of you?**

Madness n.  
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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

## Reception of the writers:

- **Lu Xun** and **Indexfinger** are cultural icons.
- Their writing appeals to the collective consciousness, but it has to stay there.
- The realism of their writing appeals to Chinese readers.
- It might enlighten, but not challenge.
- Their writing does not advance our understanding of illness, but it does teach us about cultural concepts.

- **Yu Hua** and **Wen Jie** are not well received.
- Their writing challenges readers to contemplate personal responsibilities, and to face psychic conflict.
- The avant-garde style and directness does not appeal to readers. (language harassment)
- It is believable because it is ambiguous and complex (Yu Hua's *Nachtraeglichkeit* and Wen Jie's conflict about identity)

Social truth is more acceptable than self-knowledge.  
(Dostoevsky)

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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

If we look at some cross-cultural psychology aspects, we can see that:

## 1. Perceptions are informed by shame culture:

1. Do not tell of your inner ugliness
2. The problem is not what one does or suffers from, but how others see it
3. Say it indirectly, so that there is no loss of face

## 2. Master narratives are important:

1. Mentioning Lu Xun or other writers are a psychological “bait” (Xi Xi)

3. The “**record of human consciousness**” is not rich in China. Is it because of a lack of interest, or is there a different voice? Do they not have a **representation compulsion**?

4. Pain is **cultural and subjective**, and therefore Western concepts and theories are not absolute.

5. There is a great **complexity** regarding this theme, and to accept that it is complex is perhaps all that can be said for sure.

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# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

Bernard Shaw once said, „If you can't get rid of the skeleton in your closet, you'd best teach it to dance.“



With regard to the writing of madness in China, and for those who write from their own painful experience, there are no dancing skeletons yet, and there is no „lyric glow of illness“ (Foucault).

And that has as much to do with how writers feel about themselves as with how they are perceived.

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The great German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) is "struck by Apollo" while walking in the piercing sunlight of southern France in May, 1802.

Painting by Elsie Russell, 1995. Courtesy of [parnasse.com](http://parnasse.com)

However, in his article “**How Bodies Remember,**” Arthur Kleinman talks about literary madness as social insight:

“Perhaps transformations that begin in reveries, painful bodies, and alienating trances, that protect the inner world and keep social memory alive (...), that resist the oppression of persons, ultimately do expand through cultural-political processes into world transformations.” (721)



# MADNESS AND LITERATURE

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[manic depressive

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疯子 fēngzi

[madman]

[lunatic]

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