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Schizophrenia in "Diary of a Madman"

Seeing things that others do not? Believing that there is something or someone out there that is life threatening? Both of these are symptoms of schizophrenia. There is no absolute cure for schizophrenia modern day. However, compared to the past, the treatment options have become much better. In "Diary of a Madman" by Nikolai Gogol is one of the oldest recorded cases of schizophrenia. Talking dogs exchanging letters to one another with impeccable grammar. How they could've represented upper class women from how the dogs behaved. Or even they could symbolize loyalty from the madman's unconscious on how he desperately wanted attention in his lonely meaningless life. Was the madman truly mad? Or was it all an act? The dates as they go by in the diary became more and more chaotic, was it intentional? Or was it really just madness? The possibilities are endless, trying to bypass something by putting on an antic disposition. All of these are possibilities of what was going on when Gogol was writing the diary. Sadly, however, the treatments in the 19th century were not very humane either. Bloodletting through leeches and self harm were known to release ones "bad" energy out of ones system. The treatment alone can lead one to madness.

Notably, Nikolai Gogol lived under the rule of Nicholas I in 19th century Russia. At that time censorship was extremely strict to the point where the Russian government monitored writer's works even if they were not involved in politics. Gogol, may have put on an antic

disposition as the “towns fool” to get past the censorship. If no one took him serious and saw his works as comedy, Gogol could bypass the strict censorship in the cost of being labeled as mentally ill. However, just like Hamlet, the narrator of “Diary of a Madman” played an antic disposition and both got too into their made up character that led them both to become their own made up character (Shakespeare).

For instance, the dogs Medji and Fidele were both extremely pampered. They were dogs yet they could read and write to each other. As the narrator describes the letter he intercepted as “impeccably written” (Gogol 183). The letter contained of the gossip the dogs would share to each other such as how they do not understand men’s affairs in politics and even what kind of bone they prefer to chew on (Gogol 183). However the dogs could be symbolism for upper class women. As of the 19th century Russia when Gogol wrote this short story, many know in the past women did not have as many rights as compared to men. Therefore women did not even getting proper education to even read or write. Yet these dogs wrote with perfect grammar to the point where they surpass the head of the department that the narrator works for (Gogol 183). Gogol could’ve put this into the short story as a hidden idea, or his unconcious view on women in the 19th century. Gogol giving women the ability to have perfect grammar in his short story to the point where they surpassed men may cause chaos in his time period. Or he intentionally placed it there knowing that only men could read and to them, women being better than men was such a comedy. The other interpretation of the dogs could be how Gogol unconsciously looks down on women. He is mocking how women cannot read and write. Simply the idea of women reading and writing is as bizarre as dogs reading and writing. The topics that the dogs wrote about were not important topics either. As men were involved in politics, women were gossiping and having

small talk. This could be a way Gogol was looking down on women, how women could not understand what men were involved in but only able to gossip about others.

On the other hand, the dogs the narrator encounter in the short story are motifs of loyalty. Throughout the short story, loyalty to the narrator was a big thing. The narrator was rather living a lonely life and treated without kindness which resulted in him unconsciously seeking for loyalty. Gogol used the animal that represents loyalty, dogs, as the narrators unconscious saying he is desperate for it. Even when the narrator is experiencing one of his schizophrenia episodes, he still unconsciously wants loyalty. Gogol could have chosen any animal, but instead he chose dog. The dogs described in the short story did not have such a loyal vibe around them. The dogs seemed to be too good for the people they interacted with. The narrator wanted information on Sophia, from one of the dogs. Wanting a dog to spy on her which breaks the loyal aspect of the dogs. Another example of loyalty that appears in the short story was when the narrator was sent to the asylum. There the narrator convinced people that he was the king of Spain and soon after the narrator believed people there with shaved heads all were his soldiers (Gogol 193).

To conclude, the dates were something that came up often throughout the short story. Beginning of the short story the dates seemed rather normal and nothing too unusual. However as time went by, time got more and more confusing. Such as the “86th of Martober” (Gogol 190). The first signs of this mix up of dates was April 43rd, 2000 when the narrator believed he was the king of Spain (Gogol 189). How did the narrator get the information on Spain and that the throne was empty? Possible from a Spain newspaper article. However at the time the calendar used in Russia and Europe were different. Has Russia used the Julian calendar which counted every single day of the year up to the 365th day of December (Rosenberg). As Spain

used the Gregorian calendar which is the most commonly used today. The Julian calendar back then was 13 days behind compared to Europe. Therefore the narrator has to constantly convert between Gregorian and Julian calendars that he lost his sense of time. This could have been intentionally placed in by Gogol to bypass censorship and farther trying to convince people that he is mentally unstable and there is no need to take him seriously. However in reality he was just switching calendars. Thus bringing up the question, was the narrator truly mad? Everything he wrote may have been intentional and he was simply putting up an antic disposition to fool someone, or something. Since he is in the asylum, there would not be a better reason to act mad as a writer. Everything was thoughtfully planned out by the narrator as seen in the last paragraph, the narrator sounded almost entirely sane (Gogol 196). It could be that last part, he no longer needed to act mad.

Furthermore, in the past treatment on schizophrenia was extremely cruel. It was believed that madness resulted from an imbalance of 4 bodily humors and could be cured with special diets, laxatives and even bloodletting. Bloodletting was a very common treatment for any illness. One of the tools used for bloodletting were leeches (Thomas 76). Bloodletting itself is such a bizarre idea for a treatment in the past. Mental illness is a problem with the mind and not the physical body. Leeches were the lesser of two evils since it does not seem as painful as the other tools used for treatment, such as blades. However leeches leave a visible scar even after it drops off a human body. Also a leech bite can bleed for 10 hours on average (Baggaley). This is just from one leech, in the past doctors often used multiple leeches for bloodletting at once. A man from Turkey once arrived in the ER from excessive bleeding from 130 leech bites which became life threatening (Baggaley). Even with the low success rate of bloodletting, with the lack of

knowledge on scientific research, it was all people had in the past. Even without knowing how much harm it can do compared to good, it was still the only ray of hope for people in the past. Compared to today, no one knows what is put into our medicine however we all take it because we expect a positive outcome from it. The hope of getting better.

Treatment for schizophrenia now is much more humane compared to the past. Treatments now include medication, exercise and therapy. Which is way better now compared to the past. However medication is still involved which should not be a way for treatment. Even though medication has been included in our lives so much now, it is still not a good behavior. Relying on medication for a physical disease such as the flu or the common cold is not something to be opposed of. However getting medication for something that cannot be completely cured is simply pointless. It is just as if someone took drugs for self pleasure to divert their consciousness. What's the difference between being prescribed by a doctor and buying drugs from a drug store if both would give a similar effect. Exercise, and yoga would be better treatment options for schizophrenia. Which benefits the physical body and mental peace at the same time.

Some of the best treatments for schizophrenia would be therapy. With no usage of drugs that would cause other side effects on the human body. Since schizophrenia is a mental illness, why would someone use drugs that impacts the physical body and the mental state of a person? Simply therapy alone is a mental treatment for schizophrenia.

As a final point, schizophrenia has been getting much better treatment options comparing now, and in the past. However the question still remains, was the narrator of “Diary of a madman” truly mad? Or was it all a diversion to bypass an obstacle. By pretending to be mad, no

one would take him seriously and disregards what he says. Everything he wrote may have been intentional, from the talking dogs to the dates he put into the short story. No one can truly say. As many people act mad in the face of justice, the narrator may have had to act mad in a similar way. Or simply we can just follow how society sees the narrator, as someone who just became mad and accept it as it is.

Works Cited

Gogol, Nikolai "Diary of a Madman"

Baggaley, Kate "So you've been bitten by a leech. What's the worst that could happen?"

December 13, 2017

Rosenberg, Jennifer "Soviets Change the Calendar" March 17, 2017

Shakespeare, William *Hamlet*

Thomas, DP "The demise of bloodletting" 2014

Schizophrenia has been around since ancient times. However it got its name recently in 1910 by Paul Eugen Bleuler. Who combined the Greek words 'schizo' (split) and 'phren' (mind)(Burton NA).

Thesis include Literacy Motif, metaphors, characteristics, POV, and treatments

Starting off with some background on the author Nikolai Gogol, he was born on March 31, 1809 in the Russian Empire or modern Ukraine and died March 4, 1852 at age 42 in Moscow. Near the end of Gogol's life he lived under the rule of Nicholas I in Russia. In that time frame of the 19th century, censorship was very strict in Russia. Writers who had nothing to do with politics were also under strict surveillance. Gogol was one of these writers who had to undergo surveillance. There is the possibility that Gogol himself wasn't mentally ill but instead he was putting on an antic disposition to get past the censorship. After getting the label of the "towns fool" he gained the ability to freely write whatever he wants. However all his work became works of comedy. This could relate to Hamlet, how Hamlet had to put up an antic disposition to avenge his father. Hamlet got too into character that he soon became the character he was pretending to be (Shakespeare). Gogol could have experienced something similar. He was too into his character that in the end he became the character.

Author;

- Born 1809 Modern Ukraine Russia and died 1852 in Moscow Russian Empire
- Died when the Russian King was Nicholas I
- Censorship was huge in Russia when Gogol was alive. Writers not even involved with politics were still censored. Possible that Gogol played an antic disposition to get past the censorship so he has the freedom to write whatever he wants. In the price of being seen as

the “towns fool.” Which ties with Hamlet, could they both have played their role so much that they actually became that character they wanted people to believe they are?

Summary;

- **First person diary of 42 year old clerk with meaningless job in mid-19th century Russia.**
- **Unmarried, bored and treated without kindness “They don’t listen to me, they don’t hear me, they don’t see me.” “I cannot bear this suffering.”**
- He intercepted a letter from her dog to another. “Women are in love with the Devil.” The dogs “Dogginess” and “canine nature” convinces him of the letters’ authenticity.
- Became the king of Spain, “Spain and China are one and the same country.”
- Insanity becomes more and more persuasive. Last entry Poprishchin (Russian word for “pimple”) longs for escape.
- He had a crush on his boss’ daughter Sophie. As Sophie is unaware of him.
- Year 2000, 43rd of April he lost sense of time and believes he is heir to throne of Spain. Believe he is in Spain.

Treatments for schizophrenia

- Present: Medication, psychotherapy and coordinated specialty care services
 - Medication such as Antipsychotic and Anti-Tremor
 - Neuroleptics
 - yoga/exercise
 - Treatment helps but cannot be cured

Treatments for schizophrenia in the past

- Treatment in the past:
 - People thought madness resulted from an imbalance of 4 bodily humors and could be cured by rebalancing these humors with Special diets, purgatives/laxatives and blood-letting.
 - Mental illness was a punishment of God.
 - Locked away, physical abuse such as beating and pouring of cold water
 - Exorcism, religious intervention
 - Medication such as Chlorpromazine, risperidone and SGA.
 - Relate to Yellow Wallpaper, they thought she was mentally ill and provided her with medication. Can be reason why she went crazy

A motif in the short story is the dogs that were exchanging letters. As described by the narrator, the dogs were extremely pampered and had excellent grammar talking about their favorite dishes, talk trash about lower classes, gossip about suitors and even talk about men's affairs in politics and how they don't understand them. The dogs could relate this into feminism in Russia in the 19th century. The dogs represented upper class women. How they were talking about how they did not understand men's affairs confirmed they were women. As in the past women did not have many rights and the only jobs that they were allowed to do was staying at home and taking care of children. It really brings up a question, women back then did not receive proper education and many didn't know how to even read or write. However these dogs wrote well and exchanged letters to each other. Letters back then took a long time to receive. Yet they wrote letters on

conversations that seemed like something someone would shoot a quick text to and receive an immediate reply.

Dogs represent loyalty which could also

- Symbolism/modif (link to schizophrenia)
 - Dates (time), seem normal at first until he starts to go mad and loses sense of time. Ex. “The 86th of Martober”
 - Obsession, clothing, cleanliness, devil, social hierarchy, hallucinations, rage, anger
 - Dogs, guidance, protection, loyalty, watchfulness, love, faithfulness
 - The dogs are pampered, sit within confines of their homes and write letters about their favorite dishes, talk trash about lower classes, talk about men's affairs in politics and how they don't understand (confirms they are women), gossip about suitors.
 - Medji and Fidele Symbolize upper class Russian Women?
 - Link into feminism, how women were treated back then, seen as housewives and no other job suits them. Stereotypical view on women. Misogyny (fancy word for women-hating)
 - Also women didn't have as much education as men during this time. That female dogs can actually write as well as men.
 - Look up info on women's rights during this time in Russia. They gained a lot of criticism

- POV

- Intimacy, first POV makes people have a better connection with the narrator. In order to understand a mental disorder they need to know what goes on inside their heads.

- Metaphors

- Cleaning woman
- Cleanliness->Diary->Illness
- **His** job was a proofreader, editor
- He thinks he go to Spain but really he is going to the Asylum
 - Everyone with shaved heads support his idea of king of Spain. Yet he thinks of them as his soldiers. Loyalty