

Madness is a Warm Blanket

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In society, no one is truly sane; everyone has some setback or tendency, minor or major, which prevents them from being normal. However, said setback could be something that could serve them for the better. Some people in this world require an escape from the ties that bind, and a bit of madness could do the trick. While madness is seen as something negative, it's necessary to undergo some form of a downward spiral to better understand the positive factors that outweigh the bad; once unlocking the vision necessary to see the bright side of things, one can truly be free. Hence, madness is a necessary evil because without it people wouldn't be able to appreciate the good in life; with it, freedom of expression can be found.

The downward spiral is the activation of madness. It can be from a certain situation, mainly one that is persistently tormenting someone in their daily life. Craig Gilner suffered from increasing stress that amounted from the expectations he placed upon himself when attending the Executive Pre-Professional high school for advanced students [Doc. C]. This school-oriented pressure pushed him so far as to contemplate jumping off a bridge, ultimately leading to self-checking himself into a mental ward [C]. A situation like this can pit someone like Craig over the brink of patience, truly submerging them into a state of madness. J. Alfred Prufrock finds himself trapped in a never-ending hell that consists of both a fear of what society thinks of him and an inability to exist in either reality nor fantasy; he frets over his appearance as it's "time to turn back and descend the stair, with a bald spot in the middle of [his] hair- [They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin']. My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, my necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin- [They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin']"[E]. A level of self-torture such as this, feeling as if being pinned to the wall like a bug,

being examined and analyzed by people, feeling so alienated from both reality and escape is a clear form of madness. On the note of people instigating others to the state of madness, even loved ones can produce feelings of tension. John, the physician/husband of the troubled narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper", constantly keeps his wife away from any form of activity, preventing her from any form of "work", as she puts it [D]. Like Prufrock, the narrator feels imprisoned, as she is kept in an abandoned mental ward and sentenced to rest for the duration of her stay; yet, unlike Prufrock, she tries to escape this prison through her journal, whereas he feels so compressed that he questions any possible action, from parting his hair to eating a peach, fearing the consequences that may rise from doing so [E]. Yet, even when the narrator tries to question her prison, John continually shoots her down (for her own good) and treats her as if she were crazy, therefore leading to actual mental illness. Clearly, madness can ensue from an array of sorts. Yet, who's to say that madness is automatically a bad thing.

While madness can be a tumultuous thing to experience, the downward spiral from one's sanity can serve as a pathway to a better life. Undergoing maddening circumstances can help in finding oneself or self-actualizing about something regarding one's life. For instance, Mrs. Mallard found a sudden joy from the alleged death of her husband; she experienced a life of imprisonment with a man whom which she did not truly love, but through her suffering came long-awaited happiness [F]. Mallard's situation provided her with the comparison of negatives to positives, in which the positive is the outweighing factor, in regards to her husband (while being a chore to live with him, his death ends any and all suffering). If her husband were still alive, she could not experience the happiness that she currently feels, therefore showing that the madness paid off in the end. Craig Gilner experienced happiness out of madness during his stay at the mental ward; while there, he befriended several patients, like Noelle and Bobby, and through them he was able to grow more appreciative of life as he found ways to connect with these people and make their lives better (like when he gave Bobby his father's dress shirt before

his interview with the nursing home, or when he played Egyptian music to help bring his roommate Muqtada out of their room) [C]. Craig's experiences allowed him to realize the positivity of life and that he was capable of improving other people's lives; however, this could not be met without reaching the downward spiral that brought him to the mental ward. This discovery of happiness is made possible by the madness that is brought on prior. Even if the downward spiral is so severe, like that of Holden Caulfield, who traveled all over the city finding only greed, theft, rejection and despair, happiness can still be found; Holden had lost so much from his journey to his home, but spending time with his sister, Phoebe, and seeing her enjoy her childhood made him "damn near [bawl], [he] felt so damn happy" [B]. Overall, madness can make people more appreciative of life, as well as provide more happiness in their lives.

Not only does the downward spiral provoke happiness, but it also alleviates people and makes them feel free from it all. From being a source of liberation to allowing one to express him/herself, madness is key for unlocking freedom. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" found herself obsessed with the "woman" behind the wallpaper, and when she tore down the wallpaper by the end of the story, she found herself both one with the woman and free from imprisonment; before suffering from the full effects of madness, she was under John's thumb and was forced to hide any and all writing from him, but after letting the madness take over she (as the imprisoned "woman") "can creep smoothly along the floor...[she] got out at last in spite of [John] and Jane. And [she's] pulled off most of the paper, so [they] can't put her back" [D]. From what is made out, the narrator now has complete control of the situation, liberating herself from the clutches of the room, John, and whatever else may have prevented her from freedom; however, this could not have been met had John not have pushed her to the edge of madness. Madness can't always be the path to freedom, however; as seen with Prufrock's case, some are just confined to their own prison and are left without any form of escape (with Prufrock, he is alone in his world and feels that he will never experience any positive feeling that life has to

offer; not even the sirens would sing to him, under his own belief, nor that he could be a “Prince Hamlet” and rather a slacked weakling) [E]. However, unlike the narrator, there is no one to push Prufrock, nor is there anyone to relate with him; essentially, he is in prison because he is alone and without anyone to share his madness with or receive inspiration to break away from. Combined with his constant negative outlook on life and his lack of self-esteem, J. Alfred Prufrock is unable to free himself in his current situation and his downward spiral has not reached its end yet. Madness is able to help express creativity, as well. Craig Gilman finds better expression of his thoughts through art, as he finds that drawing imaginary city maps is like describing “[his] own brain” [C]. He is also able to express his emotions more clearly after ending his downward spiral; his newfound love and friendships bolster his self-esteem and make him feel much better about his life, allowing him to maintain healthy relationships with school, friends, and family while still reaching high goals in his education [C]. Ultimately, Craig benefits tremendously from madness, as it has adjusted his life to a well-balanced medium and has allowed for him to undergo certain experiences that, in the end, helped him expel the stresses and pain that tormented him in the beginning of it all. Again, this is both an example of how madness can lead to freedom and expression and an example of how the people in one’s surroundings make all the difference with madness, as seen with the narrator and as not seen with Prufrock. Hence, madness makes all the difference when trying to break away and find a happy medium.

Madness is a necessary evil because without it people wouldn’t be able to appreciate the good in life; with it, freedom of expression can be found. From psychosis to stress, madness seems to serve a remedy to life, despite it having a negative connotation in a very conscious society. However, whether or not madness is accepted by the general public by tomorrow, next week, or 50 years from now, it will always serve as that one true reflection that is felt specifically with each and every person. Without it, society might have a harder time coping with the weight of the world.