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Schizophrenia Exhibition

Over the course of years, the depiction of mental illnesses has heavily shifted. Throughout time, society has deviated from a close minded perspective to a much rather unbiased observant understanding. Many individuals are genuinely unaware of the truism behind mental illnesses. So in efforts of bringing this cognizance, different medias have been published to further inform the public about its reality. The text “Diary Of a Madman” is one of many. It provides a first hand perspective on a very significant mental deformity, Schizophrenia. The author Gogol, uses multiple literary techniques such as literary motifs, characterizations and point of view, to further emphasize this journey of a patient (Aksenty Ivanovich) suffering from schizophrenia, allowing the reader to get a better insight and understanding of the horrendous disorder. Nonetheless, although it does not explicitly mention any specific treatment methods, it does include a general consensus on approaches taken towards patients suffering from such ailments.

Just as any other medical disability, mental illnesses have also always existed. The matter of whether it was perceived as a legitimate prostration or the devils work has evolved over the course of years. From as early as the 15th century, mental illnesses were looked upon as witchcraft. It was believed that the lunacy occurred due to negligence against religious beliefs and

the association with the devil. With that being said the public usually had no enthusiasm for treating people who gave off an impression of being harrowed. Rather, it was suspected that their demise would be the main thing that would save their spirits. In due course, large numbers surpassed this theological virtue but lamentably the stigma remained. Although the concept of mental illnesses is not frowned upon as compared to its antiquity, many still fail to realize the attainment it has over a victim. Consequently leading the individual to live in denial, exacerbating the situation.

The short story “Diary Of A Madman” was first published in 1835 by author Nikolai Gogol. Around this time period, mental illnesses were still not as heavily recognized and disregarded in a sense. When the text was first released, it was actually sub categorized under humorous/comedy. The general audience had found it to be so bizarre that it simply came off as a joke. Of course, in modern day the general public would rather sympathize for the protagonist rather than laugh merely because we are now more aware of how serious the issue (mental illnesses) at hand is.

On the whole, “Diary Of A Madman” presents schizophrenia and its vital symptoms phenomenally. From the beginning of the text the narrator, Aksenty Ivanovich, is immediately labeled as “a mad mad man .. the devil himself couldn't sort out” (Gogol, 174) foreshadowing the reader as to what's in store. Throughout the text, one can actually witness the growth of Ian (short for Ivanovich) and his unlabeled disorder. He uses very detailed language describing each and every scenario allowing readers to get a better understanding and grasp on what exactly it is that's going on in his head.

In doing so, Gogol makes use of multiple literary devices as stated earlier. All through the text, Gogol signifies numerous literary motifs. Of course, the overall theme would be madness but with a further decipher in the author's word choice, one can actually find many hidden meanings. The concept of being mad can be found all throughout the text but there are also many other connections to be exposed. There are many aspects that contribute to Askenty's madness, one being the illustrative impacts of an inflexible social structure and the effect it has on individuals living in St. Petersburg. The entity in the lower classes are simply rationally and profoundly unfulfilled. Ian's frenzy is an endeavor to raise his position – by his activity, his affection life, and his social class. This can be seen from the beginning of the story when Ian worries about his appearance compared to others:

“ I tried to muffle myself up the best I could, because the overcoat I had on was very dirty, and old-fashioned besides. Now everyone wears cloaks with tall collars, and mine is short, overlapping; and the broadcloth isn't waterproof at all.” (Gogol, 175)

One can clearly recognize Ian's immense desire to arise on the social ladder. It is evident to say this may have also further constrain on his mental instability. Towards the middle of the chronicle, it is show how this comes into play. Ian begins to not only question himself but also doubt his capabilities. “I wish I knew more about them and what goes on at that level of society”.(Gogol, 180)

This can perhaps be considered the main cause/rising action as well. After finding out the love of his life has found a partner Ian explicitly shouts out:

“It's always noblemen and generals. All the good things in this world go to gentlemen of the court or generals. People like me scrape up a few crumbs of happiness and just as your about to reach out to grasp them, along comes the nobleman or general to snatch them away. Hell! I'd like to be a general ...”(Gogol, 187)

Comprehensively, this in fact exemplifies how big of a role the environment in which an individual placed in affects his/her mental health. The ambiance and surroundings of an individual is a crucial factor to take into account in regards to the causes of mental illnesses, specifically in this scenario, Schizophrenia.

“Many individuals with schizophrenia gradually develop isolated lives, punctuated by lengthy periods in psychiatric hospitals or in community residences...Moreover, skills mastered earlier in life may be lost because of disuse or lack of reinforcement by the environment.” (Bellack, 5)

Nonetheless another literary motif which can be seen throughout these quotes is Ian's rage and anger. His ambition to exceed his social class develops a form of soreness which is transparent in his writing.

Another literary technique Gogol incorporates into his writing would be characterization. One of the major, if not the most significant positive symptoms of Schizophrenia is hallucinations. Hallucinations “include a person hearing voices, seeing things, or smelling things others can’t perceive.”(Nami). So in order to give the audience a better perception on Ian’s personal hallucinations, Gogol uses multiple aspects of characterization. For instance, under Ian’s journal entry for November 11th, “I recalled the conversation I’d heard between the two dogs on Nevsky Prospekt” (Gogol, 181). Gogol further develop this mirage later in the text by elaborating on Ian’s exasperate attitude towards these dogs.

“I’d suspected for a longtime that dogs are cleverer than human beings. I was even convinced she could speak if she wanted to, but didn’t, merely out of sheer cussedness. Dogs are extraordinarily shrewd and notice everything, every step you take,”(Gogol, 181)

Undoubtedly, the whole concept of animals talking in human language is absurd, and Gogol was capable of using this to accentuate the protagonist’s mental disorder. Another example that demonstrates Gogol use of characterization can be found towards the end of the text. On page 189, Ian dates the entry “April 43rd, 2000”

“Today is a day of great triumph. There is a king of Spain. He has been found at last. That king is me. I only discovered this today”(Gogol, 189).

Simply by looking at the date of this entry, it is evident to say this would be the climax of Ian's disorder. At this point of the text, readers are aware that he had definitely lost it. Ian had believed that his purpose was indeed something much more with power, not just an ordinary low-class quill sharpener. He had deemed himself to be the king of Spain. Just as with hallucinations, Delusions are very similar and coincide with being an extensive positive symptom. They "are false beliefs that don't change even when the person who holds them is presented with new ideas or facts." (Nami). And so what better way for Gogol to emphasize Ian's delusion of being the King of Spain but with characterization.

"I didn't give any indication that I was the king of Spain. I considered it improper to reveal my true identity right there in the middle of the crowd, because, according to etiquette, I ought first be presented at court" (Gogol, 191)

Author Gogol continues to use characterize as he further develops this segment of the tale.

"So im in spain now, and it was all so quick I hardly knew what was happening. This morning and the Spanish deputation arrived and I got into a carriage with them .. He took me by the arm and pushed me into a small room, saying: 'Sit there, and if you call yourself king Ferdinand once more, I'll thrash that nonsense out of you'" (Gogol, 192)

Of course, he is not actually being taken to Spain but to some form of a psychiatric institute. Gogol uses this segment of the plot to enunciate Ian's odd trait. It is seen from the start of the

story but as his disorder fosters it begins to get quite out of hand, adding on to his character as a whole.

Nonetheless the leading literary technique implemented in this short story adding on to its other eccentric features would be its point of view. There is not much to discuss that has not already been written. The fact that this text offers a first person narrative, readers are capable of being more cordial with the protagonist, following him in his footsteps. It allows the audience to fully understand what it is that's going on Ian's head and why he acts the way he does. Being that predominantly the subject of this story is very far-out, the first person narrative aids readers to follow some form of guideline without getting lost.

Overall this short story provides readers with a general understanding of the mental disorder, Schizophrenia. One can actually correlate the different elements mentioned to future released studies and research. In the article "Value of Schizophrenia treatment I: The Patient journey" it provides a basic synopsis of the illness. One of the outlook it mentions is patients and their episodes.

"The course of illness is highly variable, typically episodic, with exacerbation and remission .. Exacerbation of illness might be triggered by drug withdrawal, non specific psychosocial stressful situations (e.g., stress in professional environment, academic, personal life [relational distress])."(Mohr, 108)

This is also presented in “Diary Of A Madman” as readers witness the protagonist, Ian, undergo multiples episodes. Such as hallucinations and also delusions from hearing talking dogs to thinking he was the King of Spain.

The article then continues off regarding the treatment methods offered and the low statistics of patients actually receiving them. “Data indicate that more than 50% of people with schizophrenia do not receive appropriate , timely, and adequate treatment”(Mohr, 108) Just as with the episodes, this can also be correlated with our protagonist, Ian. It is very patent that many were aware of his unusual behavior all throughout, but no one including himself thought more of it.

Towards the end of the text, Ian is brought to some form of psychiatric housing but being that this had taken place in the early 1800’s it was well admitted the treatment methods were far from conducive. As discussed earlier, mental illnesses at this time were still not viewed earnestly. Ideally since many would believe the derangements were all caused by none other but the devil, the only treatments that were presupposed would be extremely distraught and simply ludicrous. This is also shown in the text when Ian believed he was being “tested” as the king of Spain when in reality he was in a psychiatric institute receiving “treatment”.

“The chancellor hit me with his stick and drove me back into my room ...
They’re pouring cold water over my head!They don’t heed me, see me or listen to me...Why do
they torture me so?”(Gogol, 195)

Merely from this small excerpt one can get a sense of understanding on the so called “treatment” methods that were offered. Providentially, these courses of actions no longer exist and researchers were able to adapt to more advanced and humane treatment options. In the article, “Schizophrenia or Possession?” researcher M. Kemal Irmak discusses these more modern approaches:

“The primary treatment of schizophrenia is antipsychotic medications, but about 25 % of people with schizophrenia are resistant to this type of treatment”(Irmak, 774)

Furthermore present-day patients are offered other forms of assistance such as common Psychotherapy which is essentially “cognitive behavioral therapy and assertive community treatment and supportive therapy”.

In conclusion, the short story “Diary Of A Madman” does an exemplary job at portraying the horrific mental disorder, Schizophrenia. Author Nikolai Gogol use of literary motifs, characterizations and point of view had further articulated the different aspects of the disorder in regards to its perception from the public, the actual disorder itself and its symptoms along with its current treatment methods. Moreover, the ideas presented in this tale can be connected to present day research which only exemplifies why this this piece of text was so substantial.

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Discussion Section

Just as many other mental deformities, throughout the course of time many Schizophrenic treatment methods and approaches have been discovered. As previously stated it is definitely evidential to say these methods have vastly improved and of course progressed. This being the case, unlike past time there are now multiple options for patients undergoing such illnesses - such that those briefly discussed, antipsychotic medications and psychotherapy.

In my personal point of view, I feel as if there is actually something more that has to be considered in regards to these treatment methods. Yes, scientifically these antipsychotic medications may aid patients to refrain from such symptoms and therapy may asses them to express his/her own thoughts, but one must also understand the emotional aspect of these victims.

The ongoing stigma in regards to mental illness awareness is one of the main aspects to the treatment of these patients. This concept is further explained throughout the article "The effect of hope on the treatment adherence of schizophrenia patients" by Funda Kavak1 And Emine Yilmaz.

stigmatization of patients by society, psychological, and social problems cause them to experience (6,7). Psychological problems cause the self esteem to diminish and despair over time

(Kavak,,416)

Many patients suffering from such illnesses, particularly schizophrenia in this exhibition tend to feel like an outcast from society and this stigma around mental illnesses only worsen their maladjustment. Hence, the best treatment approach in my opinion would simply be to be there for the person in need. Everyone needs love and support to pick them back up and motivate themselves whenever things get rough, so imagine what these victims must go through, to have horrific episodes and then the judgments of others around them.

Hope is a positive feeling that makes the individual acts and feels good. Hope increases the motivation of individuals, prevents feelings of despair and pessimism, and provides positive energy to achieve goals related to the future. Being hopeful in patients with schizophrenia allows the patient to improve quality of life and maintain his/her life better. (Kavak,,416)

I believe it is our responsibility to not only sympathize but also motivate these victims. By providing and expressing hope, it will shift the mentality of said victims from a less negative connotation to a much rather positive one, further improving their overall conditions.

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