Summary of Girl, Interrupted by Susanna Kaysen

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Sanity, Insanity, and the Social Meaning of Mental Health

This world is a funny place, more so because of its inhabitants. While some people love to hunt wild animals, others launch movements to protect those same animals. Our history is full of such cases. If common sense were inserted in the history of humanity, half of the past would have no means or basis for ever happening. Throughout history, man has made systems for himself, with rules and regulations that ensure that he stays put within that system, while other men have tried to convince him that his regime has no logic and basis for a sane person (GradeSaver). Sanity is one thing that has played a governing role in this drama. This paper discusses the difference between sanity and insanity and how far it plays a role in defining a person. The book Girl, Interrupted has been cited in this paper as well.

Sanity refers to the state of a person whose mind is healthy and who thinks soundly and rationally. Hence, a person who does not think rationally is not considered sane. However, in the present era, insanity can also be used to refer to a person who has troubled thoughts, both because of emotional and physical aspects (*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest – Gold – 2003 – Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry – Wiley Online Library*).

Literary Representations of Psychiatric Experience

The girl, Susanna, from Girl, Interrupted was admitted into a psychiatric ward because, according to her, she agreed to be treated for some issues. She believes that she is not crazy, though she has some problems. Throughout the book, she discusses her ideas of sanity and insanity and who, according to her, seems sane or insane. The book can be an excellent guide for people who have been diagnosed with any mental disorder, like schizophrenia, because people who suffer from psychiatric disorders usually question their sanity. Additionally, to the rest of the world, they seem quite reasonable, but they know the truth about their mixed and confusing thoughts.

Just like Girl, Interrupted was written regarding the issue of sanity and insanity, another book was written a long time ago, which covers the same problem. The novel One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

includes the same issue in a more dramatic sense (*Detailed Review Summary of Girl, Interrupted by Susanna Kaysen*). The main character in the book is admitted into a mental care facility, where he learns that the practices conducted by the staff and the treatment given by them to the patients are hurtful to the patients. He decides to lead the patients to escape the facility. The question here lies: when he decided to escape the mental hospital, what was he thinking? Did he think that he and the rest of the patients could deal with the outside world on their own? If so, it is apparent that our ideas about who we consider sane or insane may not be true. If reasonable people can lead a better life, then our definition of sanity will be marred by our assumptions (*Read Free Girl, Interrupted by Susanna Kaysen Online*).

In history, it is known that there were customs among the Spartans, which allowed them to abuse and rape young boys. They did so because they believed this would help the boys become strong warriors. However, today, we think that this activity is barbaric and does not resemble the behavior of respectable people. Similarly, in the Philippines, it is known that if someone takes over a piece of land, the law requires that the landlord offers money to the culprit and asks him politely to leave the property.

Social Norms and the Judgment of Sanity

The circumstances given above resemble a society's values and norms. Apparently, these values and standards are what define right and wrong for a person. For a person living in the jungles of Africa, it might be a norm not to wear any clothes and eat raw food, but if the same person did the same in a developed and civilized society, he would be considered insane. On the other hand, if an educated person goes to an African jungle, amongst the uncivilized tribal people, and eats with a fork and knife, he would be considered insane by the natives. As Tim Burton said, "One person's craziness is another person's reality."

Reading the two works of literature, I believe Susanna was never insane because, according to my ideas of sanity, she was quite reasonable. Having questions regarding the meaning of life, the reason why things are the way they are, and whether she is insane or not are not signs of insanity. They are symptoms of a healthy mind that notices things that happen in the surroundings and seeks answers.

Considering that Susanna wrote the book 25 years after the events occurred, it is clear that she is now of sound mind and can balance her thoughts. It should also be noted that she mentions that she noticed other people, especially the girls who used to be with her in the psychiatric facility. It shows that she remembers the events now. However, she did not have a mental disorder.

Borderline Personality Disorder and the

Medicalization of Mental Illness

She was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. Borderline Personality Disorder is a mental state that refers to a person's inability to manage his / her emotions. It is the result of someone overthinking. Usually, people who are very intelligent and use their brains a lot end up with such diseases. However, I think this still does not mean the person diagnosed is insane. This is because intelligent people with more active brains tend to have some issues. In the same way, Maria Sharapova, a famous tennis player, is prone to muscle strain due to exerting too much pressure.

I would like to make one thing clear here: if we consider mental disorders as diseases instead of insanity, we would be able to look at the patient better. The patient is still human, and whatever he or she does might be because he or she has some issues. However, sanity and insanity are concepts that differ from society to society. These ideas value the society's values and norms, not the person's mental health. Hence, we should consider one a medical problem and the other a social issue.

This sounds totally relevant in the current scenario when there are a lot of people coming forward as suffering from a mental disorder like schizophrenia and depression. These people are patients because they have a disease that does not allow them to think properly and subsequently causes them to have trouble channeling their emotions and thoughts correctly. Susanna had a disease, though she cannot be labeled insane because her overall actions were in accordance with the norms and values of her country. She did manage to get married later and live a normal life, just like the rest of us, though she might need medications to help her with her mental disease for the rest of her life.

References

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