



AP[®] English Literature and Composition 2001 Sample Student Responses

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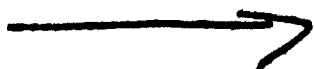
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Emily Dickinson wrote, "Much madness is divinest Sense - / to a discerning Eye -." ~~It~~ Madness can both be "eccentric behavior" or "a discerning Eye," or, simply, failure to conform to the norm and the struggle to be different. In James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen's "eccentric behavior" is his own alienation from his peers and, ultimately, from the rest of Ireland. Throughout the book, as the development of the artist is traced, the "eccentric behavior" that Stephen strives to ~~be~~ curb ~~the~~ ^{under} the paralyzing forces of the Church, his family, his sexuality, and the whole society of Ireland matures into the "discerning Eye" of his artistic genius.

In his early childhood, Stephen hears an impassioned argument between John Casey and his Aunt Dante, Casey making a case for Parnell and the whole concept of ~~the~~ nationalistic freedom for Ireland and his failure through the betrayal of the Church and Dante, for the righteousness of the Church. After all, "the power of the Church is absolute." Thus, from his very introduction into the world, Stephen must face the constant struggle between the desire for freedom of he-knows-not-what and the paralyzing effects of the Church. This is Stephen's madness, not knowing the purpose or the role he must play in the world.

As he is forced to move to Dublin with his family, Stephen must come to terms with his father's



drinking. This is debilitating to Stephen who, at this age, needs a father figure, not a drunkard. Stephen's madness here, again, plays an important role because Stephen is driven by sexual desire and desire for beauty in the world, restricted by the rigid Catholic Church and by the ineptness of his own family. Thus, Eileen's hands ~~become~~ become "a tower of ivory," and the early play-on-words with "belt" and Stephen's contemplation of the poet's nature and the colors of a rose during math class show the conflict between the sexual and the beautiful in his life. Furthermore, we here see the developing "discerning Eye" of Stephen's madness, although he does not realize it.

Stephen goes to the red-light district of Dublin. Here is the prime example of his struggle with himself, for as he cries at his first sexual experience, he doubts if this is what he really wants. Throughout the future book, the ultimate quest for Stephen and for his madness is to discover the essence of his existence. Thus, Stephen begins to ardently pray after the three-day retreat, in which the graphic images of the physical pains of hell and its vast eternity seem to be made especially for him. Feverish, Stephen dreams of all the monsters of hell roaming the place; the vividness of the dream again shows his developing madness.

Yet is this madness truly madness? While Stephen strives to find who he really is, is it not just his personality? His own consciousness of the fact that he is different from others confirms that it actually



might be judged reasonable. Through all the means and the means for Stephen to attain peace with himself, Stephen finds that none of them work. In a seemingly mad search to find the answer for himself, Stephen is only reasonably going through the trial-and-error of life, which is, essentially, what life is.

Ultimately, when asked by the prefect at Belvedere whether he has felt the vocation to become one himself, Stephen begins to doubt his fitness for the job. In fact, he now faces the fact that he has doubted the Catholic Church for long and that all of his praying was just an attempt to belong. No, he needs not to conform. In a key, epiphanic moment in the book, Stephen hears his friends call him, "Dedalus! Dedalus!" (lying beside the river, contemplating his last name, Stephen thinks of the old Daedalus, that soared on wings towards the sun. Finally, Stephen's artistic genius opens its wings and soars; Stephen realizes that his madness was actually reasonable, as he watches the beautiful girl wading in the water.

In the end, Stephen's madness, indeed becomes "the discerning eye" of his artistic genius. It is, in fact, so discerning that Stephen develops his own esthetic theory and of the role of the artist in the world, his own role. It is, essentially, that beauty is perfection in stasis, or static art, as opposed to the kinetic art, or art that moves one physically. This realization liberates Stephen from the paralyzing

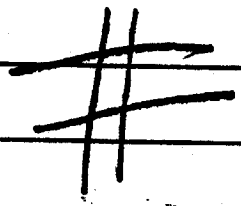


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influences of the church, of the family, etc. He affirms it in "I will not serve" (in allusion to the independence of Lucifer to Carly) and "old artifices, stand me in good stead" (in allusion to the Greek Daedalus).

In conclusion, in Portrait, one can see that what is considered madness by others is actually the "discerning eye" of the artistic genius; one is not mad if one is different and does not conform; one's ~~per~~ purpose in life may be just that, to be different, and, therefore, the madness might be judged reasonable.

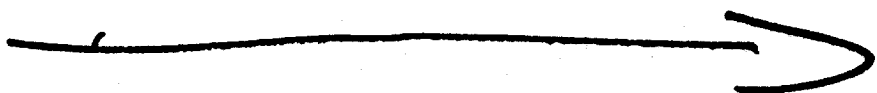


In J. Conrad's short novel 'Heart of Darkness' the character of Kurtz is used to symbolize the dark core that can be found underneath the veneer of civilization.

Through Kurtz Although Kurtz was sent to Africa to essentially help the 'savages' natives, instead he is consumed by madness and assumes ^{their} the savage customs. The degenerative mental state of Kurtz is used by Conrad to reveal the truth concerning human nature. In this manner, Kurtz's 'madness' can be interpreted as the ^{genuine} authentic state of mankind that is only hidden by society to preserve order.

Kurtz's actions clearly reveal that from a traditional perspective he can be considered insane. Once a cultured man, he is corrupted by the chaotic state of Africa and becomes consumed by his lust for ivory so much so that he would murder to obtain it. He presents himself as a god to a native African tribe and warns against treachery by decorating the village with the skulls of 'rebels.' A good illustration of Kurtz's descent into madness is an essay he writes with the intentions of solving the problem of civilizing the native Africans. Although his essay begins eloquently, it deteriorates to the point that by its closure he is calling for the death of all Africans.

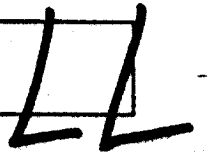
Although Kurtz's actions appear irrational, considering the context of Conrad's novel they ~~become~~ can be viewed as reasonable. His ~~the~~ final words before death 'The horror, the horror!' reveal ~~are~~ his conclusion that mankind possesses a 'heart of Darkness.' This at first appears as the ravings of a mad man, but his interpretation ^{is} ~~is~~ later confirmed



by Conrad who concludes his novel with the view that mankind is essentially corrupt. Although the character of Kurtz is chaotic and he is motivated only by his greed for ivory, according to Conrad's interpretation this is the natural state of man. If in fact Kurtz is only acting motivated by his unavoidable "heart of darkness," it becomes impossible to condemn him as insane.

The significance of Kurtz's madness to the novel is that it reveals the various themes present in Heart of Darkness. He stands as a specific example that no man despite his intentions or cultured background can prevent his savage nature from bubbling to the surface when separated from society. While in Africa, a land ruled by nature and deficient of societal influences, Kurtz found it impossible not to revert to his own natural state of being. This illustrates the essential theme of Heart of Darkness. Kurtz's main characteristics that were exposed by his madness such as chaos, greed, and irrational behavior are thought of by Conrad to be the distinguishing aspects of all men.

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"Don Quixote" by Cervantes is the story of a "madman" and his imagined adventures. In reality, this man was an old, disillusioned, and misled person. In his mind, however, he believed that he was the knight errand Don Quixote, whose mission was to rid the world of all evil. His "madness" is what drives the plot. He goes travels the countryside in search of peril, and meets people who think he should be put in jail for his insanity. This madness of his can be justified if closely looked upon. Firstly, Quixote believed that he was a valiant knight. He never hurt anyone on his journey (except himself), and only wanted to do well. His benevolence was a truly valiant attribute, whether he was sane or mad. Another reasonable point, that was part of his madness was that he had a good effect on people. For example, he constantly declared his love for the beautiful Dulcinea, who was just a common "lady of the night". At first, she just called him crazy, but the more he treated her like a lady, the more she realized that she was one. Whether or not Quixote was mad is a heavy influence on the entire work's significance. Quixote behaved in an apparently irrational manner, but it was often the morally right way to act. While everyone else around him was fighting, soliciting, and being unjust, Quixote was ridding the world of evil. Who, exactly, was the mad person? If thought as "eccentric," then Quixote was indeed mad. However, Quixote was quite sane in the moral sense, for he was doing what no one else had dared to do. He was being just. ^{Ironically,} it is through this that Quixote's "madness" was ^{actually} one of the few sane things in the world.

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