4. What is madness?

The Oxford Dictionaries defines madness as "a state of mind which prevents normal perception, behaviour or social interaction" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d), and in today's society madness is often viewed as some kind of chemical imbalance (Scull, 2015). Through history however, madness has been explained by very different means. If one looks through the sacred books of Judaism and Christianity one can find multiple stories of people going mad from possession by the devil or other divine creatures. For example, the Israelites first king, Saul, who went mad because he could not follow through on the command of killing every woman, child, man and animal of the Amalekite tribe. There is also the story of Nebuchadnezzar who went mad with power after he successfully managed to incarcerate all the Jews in Jerusalem and destroy their Temple. Both Saul and Nebuchadnezzar were made mad by God. These are just two central depictions of madness in the sacred books, but you can also find multiple stories of people with lower social status going mad, often then because of temptations by the devil.

Religious interpretations of madness continued long through history, well in to the 18th century. But this is also the time when medical and physical explanations for madness became the dominating theory in society. The theory was now that the centre for emotions, actions and intellect was located in the brain and not up to higher powers or in the heart, as Aristotle had earlier stated (Scull, 2015). Scull further more states that this theory became very popular, especially in England, and the people that practiced it was referred to as "Mad-doctors". They marketed their madhouses and services to wealthy families that needed to make the disgrace that was a mad person in the family disappear. These "Mad-doctors" even went as far as to say that they could not only cure the madness, but make people immune to it. The next big step in the history of madness happened during the Industrial Revolution. The technological advances made its way in to the treatments in the form of electroshock therapy and the experimentation of curing madness through simulated drowning. By the end of the 19th century most people in this field of study were convinced that the source for madness was the brain and the nervous system, and not the divine.

Today madness is, in my opinion, viewed differently. It is often an unexplainable event, like a mass shooting in a school, a random killing, attacks on children or the use of chemical

weapons. Then you might hear the expression "He/she/they must be crazy!" Madness has also been used to explain bigger events, such as the Nazi movement in Germany, apartheid in South Africa, and more presently, to explain the racist quotes and actions of the president of the USA, Donald Trump. What they have in common is that these are all actions that we as a society categorise as ill meaning or evil. So, are we then saying that madness is the same as evil? This naturally brings up the question, has madness become a term we use because it is convenient?

Just as in the 17th century, madness is today a common theme in entertainment. "The Shining", "Fight Club", "Shutter Island", "A Beautiful mind", "Black Swan" and "The Silence of the Lambs" are all movies that in various ways deal with different kinds of madness, and this is a very small selection of the movies out there. I feel that the difference between madness shown today and madness of Purcell and d'Urfeys time is that more people can relate to the madness shown on TV today. Madness was, in the 17th century, something you would hide away and be ashamed of. If it was represented on stage or in literature, it was often brief and without an explanation to the reason why the character had become mad. Now a day, with movies such as the once previously mentioned, you get the whole story of a character. You develop sympathy for the mad person, and you want to understand why the character would act the way he or she did. This is also something you can see in the society as a whole. People speak up about mental problems, to shine a light on it and perhaps help someone else at the same time. An example of this are all the celebrities speaking openly about mental health. In 2017 this was such a regular occurrence that the popular website BuzzFeed made a list of all the celebrities that spoke out about mental illness (Borges, 2017). I would not say that madness is something with no shame or secrecy attached to it even today, but the openness around it has made it easier for people not considered mad or mentally ill to understand, sympathise and relate.