

Much Madness is divinest Sense - (620)

BY EMILY DICKINSON

Much Madness is divinest Sense -

To a discerning Eye -

Much Sense - the starkest Madness -

'Tis the Majority

In this, as all, prevail -

Assent - and you are sane -

Demur - you're straightway dangerous -

And handled with a Chain -

1. Explain Dickinson's central paradox that "much madness" is "divinest sense" and "sense" the "starkest madness." Why does she make this assertion? Do you agree? Explain.
2. Where does the poem appear to deviate from the normal rhythm (which line)? How does this moment of defiance help Dickinson reinforce her statement about madness?
3. What does she mean by "this the majority/in this, as all, prevail"?
4. Why is it that if you assent, you are sane – and if you "demur" you are dangerous? Is this statement particularly true for women at this time? Is Dickinson arguing that women's sanity is judged proportionately to her obedience? Explain.
5. How does the view of madness in this poem compare to "The Yellow Wallpaper"?

