

“The Professor and the Madman” starring Mel Gibson, Sean Penn, Eddie Marsan, 2019, NR, 124 minutes

Major themes:

- PTSD
- Insanity
- Words
- Philology
- Hope
- Friendship
- Healing
- Authenticity
- Beauty
- Forgiveness
- Repentance
- Redemption

Major characters:

- James Murray
- Dr. William Chester Minor
- Eliza Merrett
- Mr. Muncie
- Ada Murray

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Background info:

- This film is based on the 1998 book, *“The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary”* (entitled *“The Surgeon of Crowthorne”* in other parts of the world.) Mel Gibson worked on adapting the book for over 20 years before production began in 2016.
- Legal battles, budget overruns, and scheduling considerations delayed the production and release of this film for several years. This was Iranian-American director (and co-screenwriter) Farhad Safinia’s first major film, but he is credited only under a pseudonym P. B. Shemran because of legal disputes surrounding final production. Both he and Mel Gibson have distanced themselves from the film.
- Filming took place in Dublin, Ireland and Oxford, England.
- Broadmoor Hospital, founded in 1863, is a high-security psychiatric hospital at Crowthorne in Berkshire, England. William Chester Minor was incarcerated here from 1872 to 1910.
- Oxford University Press is the largest university press in the world. It is governed by a group of 15 academics (appointed by the vice-chancellor), known as the delegates of the press. Oxford University Press was founded in 1586 and became a major printer of Bibles, prayer books, and scholarly works.
- The Philological Society, or London Philological Society, founded in 1792, is the oldest learned society in Great Britain dedicated to the study of language. A learned society is an organization that exists to promote an academic discipline, profession or group of related disciplines.

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Scriptures:

John 1:1 (ESV) – *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

Ecclesiastes 12:10 (NLT) – *“The Teacher sought to find just the right words to express truths clearly.”*

Proverbs 13:17 (The Message) – *“Irresponsible talk makes a real mess of things, but a reliable reporter is a healing presence.”*

Psalms 139:13-18 (The Message) – *“Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother’s womb. I thank you, High God—you’re breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration—what a creation! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I’d even lived one day. Your thoughts—how rare, how beautiful! God, I’ll never comprehend them! I couldn’t even begin to count them—any more than I could count the sand of the sea. Oh, let me rise in the morning and live always with you!”*

Psalms 139:23-24 (The Message) – *“Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I’m about; see for yourself whether I’ve done anything wrong—then guide me on the road to eternal life.”*

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11a (ESV) – *“I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time.”*

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Discussion points:

1. One character says, *"Now that we've started, let's see it through, steadfast and resolved."* What comes to mind when you think of that?
2. In our world today, where do you see a need for more hope even for the most broken of souls?
3. Where in this film did you notice someone finding the strength or courage to persevere and not give up because of the presence or support of another?
4. If love . . . then what?
5. Have you felt that a calling has been given to you that is *"not yours to quit?"* How would you describe it?
6. How does this film help us to see, accept, and value our own life and the lives of others as they really are?
7. *"Every word, in action, becomes beautiful in the light of its own meaning."* Which word in the English language do you find to be particularly beautiful?